

# **FROM DAVID TO EXILE**

## **1 & 2 Kings**

by

Daniel J. Lewis

© copyright 2009 by Diakonos, Inc.  
Troy, Michigan  
United States of America

## Contents

Introduction .....	4
Composition and Authorship .....	5
Structure .....	6
Theological Motifs .....	7
The Kingship of Solomon (1 Kings 1-11) .....	13
Solomon Succeeds David as King (1:1—2:12) .....	13
The Purge (2:13-46) .....	16
Solomon’s Wisdom (3-4) .....	17
Building the Temple and the Palace (5-7) .....	20
The Dedication of the Temple (8) .....	26
The Divine Warning (9:1-9) .....	30
The Grandeur and Dissolution of Solomon (9:10—11:43) .....	31
The Division of the Kingdom (1 Kings 12-16) .....	36
Rehoboam’s Folly (12:1-19) .....	36
Two Kingdoms (12:20-24) .....	37
The Alternative Worship Centers at Bethel and Dan (12:25-33) .....	37
The Denunciation of the Bethel Shrine (13) .....	39
The Prophetic Oracle About Jeroboam’s Downfall (14:1-18) .....	41
Summary of Jeroboam’s Reign and the Issue of Chronology and Dating (14:19-20) .....	42
The Reign of Rehoboam (14:21-31) .....	45
The Early Kings of Judah (15:1-24) .....	46
The Early Kings of Israel (15:25—16:34) .....	47
The Contest Between Yahweh and Ba’al (1 Kings 17—2 Kings 13) .....	50
The Elijah Cycle (1 Kings 17—2 Kings 2) .....	51
The Drought (17-18) .....	51
The death threats, Jezebel toward Elijah and Ahab toward Ahab (1 Kg. 19-20) .....	56
The Naboth incident and Ahab’s death (1 Kg. 21-22) .....	63
The Transition to 2 Kings .....	70
The Death of Ahaziah, Ahab’s Son (2 Kg. 1) .....	70
Elijah’s Assumption into Heaven (2 Kg. 2:1-18) .....	72
The Elisha Cycle (2 Kings 2:19—13:25) .....	73
Jehoram ben Ahab’s Campaign Against Mesha of Moab (2 Kg. 3) .....	74
Elisha, the Prophet of Miracles (4:1—8:15) .....	76
Notations on Judah’s Next Kings (8:16-29) .....	84
Jehu’s Coup d’etat and Purge (9:1—10:36) .....	85
Athaliah Seizes Judah’s Throne (11:1-21) .....	88
The Reign of Joash in Judah (12:1-21) .....	91
Jehoahaz of Israel (13:1-9) .....	92
Jehoash of Israel (13:10-25) .....	93
The Kings of Israel and Judah Until the End of the Northern Nation (2 Kings 14-17) .....	94
Amaziah of Judah (14:1-22) .....	94
Jeroboam II of Israel (14:23-29) .....	95
Azariah (Uzziah) of Judah (15:1-7) .....	96
Two Assassinations in Israel (15:8-16) .....	97
Menahem, Pekahiah and Pekah of Israel (15:17-31) .....	97
Jotham and Ahaz of Judah (15:32—16:20) .....	99

The Collapse of the Northern Kingdom (17:1-6) .....	102
The Deuteronomic Assessment of the Northern Kingdom's Fall (17:7-23).....	103
The Immigrants into Northern Israel (17:24-41) .....	105
Judah Alone: From Hezekiah to the Fall of Jerusalem (2 Kings 18-25).....	106
Hezekiah and Sennacherib (18-19).....	107
The Last Years of Hezekiah (20).....	113
The Darkest Period: The Reigns of Manasseh and Amon (21) .....	115
Josiah and the Second Reform (22:1—23:30).....	117
The Death of the Kingdom of Judah (23:31—25:30).....	121

## **FROM DAVID TO EXILE**

### **1 and 2 Kings**

At the outset, it should be recognized that 1 & 2 Kings are part of a larger corpus in the Hebrew Bible, the section called “The Former Prophets”. The Former Prophets (to be distinguished from the Latter Prophets) consisted of four scrolls, Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. These four scrolls detailed the history of Israel in the land. While the Torah describes the origin of the nation in the stories of the patriarchs, the sojourn in Egypt, and the exodus, Joshua’s narratives begin with the crossing of the Jordan into the heartland of Canaan proper. Israel in the land occupies a history of about six centuries, and it ranges from the initial invasion and the period of the judges to the early united monarchy and its subsequent division into two nations—all the way to the Assyrian and Babylonian exiles. The fourth scroll in the Latter Prophets, 1 & 2 Kings, provides the history from the construction of the temple during Solomon’s reign to its destruction by the Babylonians. Indeed, the two institutions initially anticipated in Deuteronomy, temple and kingship (Dt. 12, 17), form the skeleton upon which the tissues of Israel’s history in the land are stretched. Both came to an abrupt end at the close of this history (2 Kg. 25).

The scrolls of Samuel and Kings in the Hebrew Bible were subdivided in the Septuagint into 1, 2, 3 and 4 Kingdoms (corresponding to 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings). Later, the Latin Vulgate followed suite, and by 1448, printed editions of the Hebrew Bible also followed suite.<sup>1</sup> Hence, English Bibles have continued the tradition of dividing the books into 1 & 2 Samuel and 1 & 2 Kings. The turning points between these divisions is not inappropriate. The turning from 1 Samuel to 2 Samuel is the death of Saul, from 2 Samuel to 1 Kings the death of David, and from 1 Kings to 2 Kings the assumption of Elijah into heaven.

## **Introduction**

---

<sup>1</sup> O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1976), p. 268.

## Composition and Authorship

Two things are immediately apparent about the books of 1 & 2 Kings. First, the materials out of which they were composed came from a variety of sources that are directly referenced:

*Book of the Song (1 Kg. 8:12-13, LXX)*

*Book of the Acts of Solomon (1 Kg. 11:41)*

*Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel (1 Kg. 14:19, etc., mentioned 18 times)*

*Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah (1 Kg. 14:29, etc., mentioned 15 times)*

Perhaps there were other sources,<sup>2</sup> but at least these four are named. Second, there is sufficient unity and stylistic symmetry in the books to warrant the conclusion that a single guiding hand or school must have compiled the material. This is most easily seen in the framework within which the various kings are evaluated, a framework that follows a stereotypical pattern:

For the kings of Judah, it went like this:

- a) *In the \_\_\_\_ year of so-and-so, king of Israel, so-and-so, king of Judah, began to reign.*
- b) *Facts about his age, length of reign, name, and queen mother*
- c) *Evaluation with reference to his ancestor David*
- d) *Source listing for further information about his reign in the royal archives*
- e) *Concluding statement that he died, and so-and-so reigned in his place*

For the kings of Israel, the pattern was similar:

- a) *In the \_\_\_\_ year of so-and-so, king of Judah, so-and-so, king of Israel, began to reign.*
- b) *Facts about the length of his reign and the location of his capital*
- c) *Negative evaluation, because he “did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh, and walked in the ways of Jeroboam”*
- d) *Source listing for further information about his reign in the royal archives*
- e) *Concluding statement that he died, and so-and-so reigned in his place*

---

<sup>2</sup> It may be that the scroll of Jeremiah was a source, for instance, since the material in Je. 52 is largely reproduced in 2 Kg. 24:18—25:30, but the prevailing opinion is that both narratives may be abstractions from yet a third common source, cf. R. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969), p. 720.

Who this compiler may have been is unnamed and unknown, though Talmudic tradition cites Jeremiah.<sup>3</sup> Historical-critical scholars, at least early on, attempted to treat the Former Prophets (including 1 & 2 Kings) to the same sort of source and redaction criticism as had been done with the Pentateuch (i.e., dividing it into literary strands that were repeatedly revised), but the suggestion of Martin Noth, who argued for a single compiler who wrote during the exile in order to explain how Israel's disobedience finally led to exile,<sup>4</sup> has generally carried the day.<sup>5</sup> In the end, it has been widely accepted that 1 & 2 Kings are part of the larger corpus that corresponds to the Former Prophets in the Hebrew Bible, though today the scholarly designation is usually the "Deuteronomistic History", because it is Israel's history judged in the light of the Book of Deuteronomy.<sup>6</sup>

Even if this theory is accepted, and there is considerable support for it, it does not follow that the writer of 1 & 2 Kings fabricated this history. Some have suggested as much, especially with regard to the earlier narratives that would have occurred long before the writer himself lived. Rather, his sources were themselves composed much earlier, and the negativism found in much contemporary scholarship about the legitimacy or accuracy of this history says more about the mood of the times than the integrity of the material.<sup>7</sup>

## Structure

Determining structure for an ancient document is not always a straightforward task. It is quite easy to impose a western, modern pattern on the ancient material, a pattern that may or may not have been in the mind of the original author or compiler. The larger structure of 1 & 2 Kings falls easily into three main blocks of material:

### *Kingship of Solomon (1 Kings 1-11)*

---

<sup>3</sup> *Baba Bathra* 15a. The objection to this view is that Jeremiah was taken to Egypt (Je. 43:1-8), while Jehoiachin was deported to Babylon, and the account of his deportation and subsequent release seems to have been composed in Babylon (2 Kg. 25:27ff.), cf. E. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964), p. 188.

<sup>4</sup> M. Noth, *The Deuteronomistic History* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1981).

<sup>5</sup> B. Childs, *Introduction to the Old Testament as Scripture* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), p. 286.

<sup>6</sup> Incidentally, because there exists a clear thematic and theological link between Deuteronomy and 1 & 2 Kings, it does not necessarily follow that Deuteronomy was composed in the 7<sup>th</sup> century, even though many scholars think so. The affinities between Deuteronomy and 1 & 2 Kings is quite recognizable even if one assumes the traditional view that Deuteronomy is largely to be credited to Moses.

<sup>7</sup> For a sustained argument in favor of the integrity of the traditions, see K. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge, UK: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 1-64.

*Kings of the Divided Monarchy (1 Kings 12—2 Kings 17)*  
*Last Kings of Judah (2 Kings 18-25)*

The first two sections conclude with appropriate summaries (1 Kg. 11:41-43; 2 Kg. 17:7-23). The final section concludes with the fall of Jerusalem and the subsequent release of Jehoiachin by Evil-Merodach (2 Kg. 25).

However, some scholars have pointed out the possibility of a chiasmic structure to the whole, and given the fondness of the ancient Hebrews for chiasm, this structural approach is certainly plausible. It assumes the central importance of Solomon for setting in motion those elements that tended toward disintegration, and especially, it underscores the centrality of the Omride Dynasty for the history of the north. As such, a chiasmic structure for the whole would be:

- A Solomon and the United Monarchy (1 Kg. 1-11)*
- B The separation of the northern kingdom (1 Kg. 12)*
- C Kings of Israel and Judah (1 Kg. 13-16)*
- D The Omride Dynasty (1 Kg. 17—2 Kg. 11)*
- C' Kings of Israel and Judah (2 Kg. 12-16)*
- B' The fall of the northern kingdom (2 Kg. 17)*
- A' The kingdom of Judah alone and its fall (2 Kg. 18-25)*

Such an approach shows a balanced interest in the two kingdoms. Still, while there are two kingdoms, there is only one Israel and only one covenant. Both kingdoms ultimately fall because they are unfaithful to the covenant of Moses. However, though the dynasty of David fails to maintain its political supremacy, Jehoiachin, the son of David in exile, does not die but lives on to provide a glimpse of hope for the future (2 Kg. 25:27-30).

### **Theological Motifs**

Already, the theological relationship between Deuteronomy and 1 & 2 Kings has been mentioned. This relationship is especially apparent in the motif of blessings and curses that accompanied the covenant, rewards for covenant obedience and disasters for covenant violation (Dt. 28). The historical fulfillment of both becomes the primary motive for assembling the 1 & 2 Kings material. Solomon began his reign in obedience and blessing. He ended his reign in disobedience and dissolution. After the united kingdom split, the various kings of both Judah and Israel are evaluated precisely in terms of their

covenant faithfulness or covenant violation. To a man, the kings of the northern kingdom were judged as evil. In Judah, only two kings were given unqualified approval (Hezekiah and Josiah), though several others were commended, even though they retained some religious weaknesses. Most, however, went from bad to worse, and the ramifications of their waywardness led directly to the exile of the north to Assyria and, eventually, the exile of the south to Babylon.

Alongside this mixed history there appear the powerful voices of the prophets to call the Israelites and their kings back to the covenant. Hence, the narratives are punctuated with the oracles and actions of:

*Nathan (1 Kg. 1:8, 22-27, 32-40, 44-45)*

*Ahijah (1 Kg. 11:29-40; 14:1-18)*

*Shemaiah (1 Kg. 12:21-24)*

*Unnamed Prophet from Judah (1 Kg. 13:1-10; 2 Kg. 23:18)*

*Jehu ben Hanani (1 Kg. 16:7, 12)*

*Elijah (1 Kg. 17-19, 21; 2 Kg. 1-2)*

*Unnamed Prophet from Israel (1 Kg. 20:13-28)*

*One of the sons of the prophets from Israel (1 Kg. 20:35-42)*

*Micaiah (1 Kg. 22:8-28)*

*Elisha (2 Kg. 2-9)*

*Jonah (2 Kg. 14:25)*

*Isaiah (2 Kg. 19-20)*

*Unnamed prophets to King Manasseh (2 Kg. 21:10-15)*

*Huldah (2 Kg. 22:14-20)*

*Others (1 Kg. 13:11ff.; 18:4; 2 Kg. 2:3, 5, 7, 15-18; 5:22; 6:1; 9:1; 17:13, 23; 23:2; 24:2)*

The appearance of so many prophetic voices alone justifies the inclusion of 1 & 2 Kings under the category of The Former Prophets in the Hebrew Bible. Indeed, the history of 1 & 2 Kings is a prophetic history—a history repeatedly assessed by the prophetic voices calling God’s people back to covenant. Further, it is not only prophetic social comment that is important, but the power of the prophetic word to essentially “create” history. In repeated cases, the prophetic word was given and the fulfillment picked up at a later date as having been fulfilled “according to the word of Yahweh” (1 Sa. 2:27-36//1 Kg. 2:27; 2 Sa. 7:13//1 Kg. 8:15, 20, 24; 2 Sa. 7:14-16//1 Kg. 6:12-13; 1 Kg. 11:29ff.//1 Kg. 12:15; 1 Kg. 13:3//1 Kg. 13:5; 1 Kg. 14:10-11//1 Kg. 15:29; 1

Kg. 16:3-4//1 Kg. 16:12; Jos. 6:26//1 Kg. 16:34; 2 Kg. 1:16//2 Kg. 1:17; 2 Kg. 2:21//2 Kg. 2:22; 2 Kg. 4:43//2 Kg. 4:44; 1 Kg. 21:19, 24//2 Kg. 9:24-26; 1 Kg. 21:20-24, 29//2 Kg. 10:17; 2 Kg. 14:25; 2 Kg. 10:30//2 Kg. 15:12; 1 Kg. 13:1-2//2 Kg. 23:16-18; 2 Kg. 24:22).

Beyond these devastating oracles of judgment in 1 & 2 Kings, one should not miss the words of hope, especially mediated through the promises of Yahweh to David (1 Kg. 2:24, 33b; 3:6-7, 14; 5:5; 6:12-13; 8:15-21, 24-26, 66; 9:4-5; 11:12-13, 32, 36; 13:2; 2 Kg. 8:19; 19:34; 20:6). The Deuteronomic curses notwithstanding, the blessings of covenant obedience are especially underscored in David, the ideal king, who was “fully devoted to Yahweh” (1 Kg. 3:14; 9:4; 11:4, 6, 33-34, 38; 14:8; 15:3, 5). Those who followed Yahweh “as David had done”, even if not as thoroughly as David, were commended (1 Kg. 3:3; 15:11, 14; 2 Kg. 14:3). Two kings of Judah actually were said to do “just as David had done” (2 Kg. 18:3; 22:2). Any who rebelled against Yahweh were “unlike David” (1 Kg. 14:8; 2 Kg. 16:2). David, then, is the benchmark for what a godly king should be, particularly as stipulated in the Deuteronomistic code (Dt. 16:14-20), and he was faithful to the covenant in all matters with only a single failure (1 Kg. 15:5). Von Rad is quite correct to say, “Therefore the anointed [David] who stands as a standard and type behind the Deuteronomist’s melancholy picture of the monarchical period is the completely righteous man who keeps all the commandments with his whole heart.”<sup>8</sup>

1 & 2 Kings shows a marked preoccupation with the role of the temple, yet another Deuteronomic element. The recurring phrase in Deuteronomy about “the place Yahweh your God will choose as a dwelling for his name” (cf. Dt. 12:5, 11, 14, 18, 26; 14:23-25; 15:20; 16:2, 6-7, 11, 15-16; 17:8, 10; 18:6; 26:2; 31:11) presupposes a single worship location. Worship at multiple sites was associated with Canaanite religious practices, and while the patriarchs worshiped at various places and the tabernacle itself was moveable, the ideal was clearly set forth that when they entered Canaan and had been given rest from their Canaanite enemies, a single geographical location of Yahweh’s choice would become the permanent worship site. Deuteronomy never specifies this site,<sup>9</sup> but David’s purchase of Araunah’s threshing floor marked the location (2 Sa. 24:18-25; 1 Chr. 22:1; 1 Kg. 3:2; 5:3; 8:14-21; 9:3).

<sup>8</sup> G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. Stalker (New York: Harper & Row, 1962) 1.345.

<sup>9</sup> The Samaritan Pentateuch, of course, is more specific. In some 19 passages in Deuteronomy, the reference to Shechem is clear, and after Ex. 20:17 a command appears that indicates a sanctuary should be built on Mt. Gerizim. These passages, however, are quite tendentious and almost certainly reflect editing in the interest of the Samaritan religion, cf. E. Würthwein, *The Text of the Old Testament*, trans. E. Rhodes (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), p. 43.

Repeatedly, the Psalms testify to this site as the “place God chose for a dwellingplace for his name” (Ps. 78:66-69; 132:13-16; cf. 9:11; 48:1-3, 8-14; 50:2; 65:1; 74:2; 76:1-2; 84:1-2, 7; 87:1-2; 99:1-3; 125:1-2; 133:3; 146:10).

When the temple was finished, Solomon anticipated a clear shift in worship practice, the Israelite clans abandoning their worship at the various ancient sites (1 Kg. 8:14-16). Unfortunately, it was Solomon himself who first violated this very expectation (1 Kg. 3:3; 11:7-8). Later, when the nation split after his death, Jeroboam I led the northern clans in rejecting outright the new temple on Mt. Zion (1 Kg. 12:16, 26-33). This shift back to alternative worship shrines was unforgivable (1 Kg. 12:30; 13:1-5, 32-34). The rejection of the temple by the northern clans and their kings who “walked in the ways of Jeroboam” was denounced repeatedly (1 Kg. 15:26, 30, 34; 16:2, 7, 13, 19, 25-26, 30-33; 22:52-53; 2 Kg. 3:2-3; 10:28-29, 31 13:2, 6, 11; 14:24; 15:9, 18, 24, 28). In the end, the composer of 1 & 2 Kings concluded that the exile of the northern tribes to Assyria was the direct result of abandoning the temple and adopting the Canaanite worship practices (2 Kg. 17:7-23). While ostensibly the southern nation of Judah remained faithful to the temple, her leaders did not eliminate the Canaanite high places in the south and were condemned repeatedly for this lapse (1 Kg. 14:22-24; 15:14; 22:43; 2 Kg. 12:3; 14:4; 15:4, 35; 16:3-4; 21:3-9). Only two southern kings, Hezekiah and Josiah, were commended without reservation, and they were the only ones who removed the alternative worship shrines so that the people would worship exclusively in the Jerusalem temple (2 Kg. 18:4, 22; 23:4-15, 19-20). In both cases, their reforms were short-lived. Hence, the southern nation also went into exile because it rejected the place Yahweh had chosen (2 Kg. 23:27; 25:8-9, 13-17).

A final major motif in 1 & 2 Kings is the concept of Israel as the people of God and the survival of a righteous remnant. In the exodus, Israel became the covenant people of Yahweh. The twelve clans, which were rescued out of Egyptian slavery, were molded into a cohesive group on the basis of their common family ties and their experience of Yahweh's mighty redemptive acts. "I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God," Yahweh had declared in the exodus (Ex. 6:7). The Deuteronomic expression grounds this concept of peoplehood in Yahweh's sovereign, loving choice (Dt. 4:37; 7:6-8). This ideal of a single people with a single God becomes the pervasive norm for the history of the Former Prophets.

Essential to Israel's concept of peoplehood was the number twelve, going all the way back to the twelve sons of Jacob. The sacrosanct character of this number is evident in that even though the Joseph clan became two tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh, making a total of thirteen tribes, the inclusive number

is still always given as twelve. The number twelve as the number-symbol representing the people of Israel continues throughout the Former Prophets. Israel always remains the twelve tribes, regardless of constituency. When Solomon reorganized his inherited mini-empire into new tax districts, even disregarding old tribal boundary lines, he nevertheless was wise enough to maintain the sacred number twelve (1 Kg. 4:7-19).<sup>10</sup> The division of the kingdom was predicted by the prophet Ahijah in an acted-out symbol of tearing into twelve pieces a new cloak and separating it into sections of ten and two (1 Kg. 11:29-32). Even after the division of the kingdom, however, Elijah in the north erected an altar of twelve stones on Mt. Carmel, after the ancient fashion, thus representing the ideal of a united people (1 Kg. 18:31-32). Indeed, the very fact that 1 & 2 Kings recounts the history of both the southern and northern kingdoms presupposes the sacredness of the full number of twelve tribes, even though by that time some of the tribes (e.g., Simeon and Reuben) has lost their distinctiveness.<sup>11</sup>

Laws forbidding intermarriage and Canaanite treaties were part of a protection system toward preserving Israel's peoplehood (Dt. 7:3-4), and dire warnings were issued about the dangers inherent in such intermingling (Jos. 23:12-13). Nevertheless, intermarriages occurred, and these in turn became significant threats, as vividly illustrated in the celebrated examples of Solomon (1 Kg. 11:1-6) and Ahab (1 Kg. 16:31). Such intermarriages served to elevate the *goyim* (= nations) to a theological level of acceptance, and this in turn threatened the very definition of Israel as the chosen people of God. To become allies of the Canaanites would be to make the nation vulnerable to the destructive forces residing in the character of foreign gods.

For Israel, the idea of a remnant took on religious proportions. As the notion of the remnant developed, the idea often was directly correlated with the concept of a true people of God. Ethnic Israel could not simply define itself as the remnant without qualification, for God's judgment in the Deuteronomic code clearly spelled out disaster for disobedience. Some among the Israelites would not survive. During times when there was a national loss of faith, a faithful remnant still could be identified who had not succumbed.

---

<sup>10</sup> See discussion in J. Bright, *A History of Israel*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), p. 217.

<sup>11</sup> That the Simeon tribe was diminishing is clear from the tallies made in the desert (Nu. 1:22-23; 2:12; 26:14). In the settlement, the Simeonites settled within the borders of Judah (Jos. 19:1, 9) and were allied with Judah in conquest (Jg. 1:3, 17). The very cities allotted to Simeon (Jos. 19:2-8) also were allotted to Judah (Jos. 15:21ff.). Why the Simeonites later were identified with the northern ten tribes, even though there is no recorded history of Simeon in the north, is never explained. It is not unlikely that the Simeon tribe was gradually absorbed into the Judah tribe, cf. E. Masterman and A. Saarrisalo, "Simeon," *ISBE* (1988) IV.513-514. The Reuben tribe in the Transjordan has an obscure history and seems to have sunk into comparative insignificance.

During the Elijah cycle, the prophet bemoaned his belief that he, alone, was the righteous remnant, though Yahweh informed him that the righteous remnant numbered some 7000 in the northern nation (1 Kg. 19:10-11, 14-18), not to mention those in the south. Eventually, when the northern kingdom fell to Assyria, it still could be said that Judah to the south survived as "a remnant" (2 Kg. 19:4, 30-31; 21:14). Thus the idea of a remnant and the idea of divine judgment stand side by side. God's covenantal warnings in the Deuteronomic code were not idle, yet his promises regarding the perpetuity of the Israelites would not fail, either. Earlier, in response to Solomon's covenant violations, Yahweh determined to tear from his hand the tribes of Israel, but he left Judah and Benjamin to continue under Solomon's son for the sake of his covenant to David (1 Kg. 11:29-39). Here, the tension between the Deuteronomic code and the Davidic covenant is clear. The former called for judgment, the latter for perpetuity. It is the remnant concept which made possible Yahweh's faithfulness to both covenants.

In no place is this tension more evident than in the exile of the northern and southern kingdoms. The grant of an unending dynasty for David (2 Sa. 7:11b-16) as well as the security of the land (2 Sa. 7:10-11a; 22:51b; 23:5a) violently collided with the exile of Jehoiachin (2 Kg. 24:12), the exile of Zedekiah (2 Kg. 25:1-7), and finally, the fall of the southern kingdom (2 Kg. 25). What was never supposed to happen, in fact, happened! It is the remnant concept that reconciled the seemingly unconditional promises to David with the very conditional terms of the covenant with Moses. The loss of the land was not forever, nor was the fall of the dynasty of David without hope.

When Sennacherib invaded Judah in 701 BC, Hezekiah sent word to Isaiah to "pray for the remnant that still survives" (2 Kg. 19:4). Only two decades earlier, the Assyrians had carried into exile the northern nation (2 Kg. 17). Now they advanced upon Jerusalem, the southern nation's capital. Isaiah's response to his king was a promise for the future that a remnant of the house of Judah would survive to live in Jerusalem and Mt. Zion (2 Kg. 19:29-31). His oracle about a remnant, in light of the coming exile of Judah only a quarter century away, suggested a future after exile. Because of the sins of Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, the "remnant of Yahweh's inheritance" would be handed over to their enemies (2 Kg. 21:14-15). However, exile was not Yahweh's final word. It would be the task of the prophets to explain that in spite of the exile, a remnant of Judah would survive to uphold the promises given to David.

## The Kingship of Solomon (1 Kings 1-11)

### Solomon Succeeds David as King (1:1—2:12)

The lack of a long-standing precedent for the transition of leadership left a political ambiguity at the end of David's life. The typical law of primogeniture in the ancient Near East was for the eldest son to inherit the larger share of his father's estate, and with respect to kings, it usually included the right of throne succession. However, this had not been true for Saul (though his son Esh-Baal attempted it). Nonetheless, Adonijah assumed this privilege outright, since he was likely the oldest living son in David's declining years.<sup>12</sup> David, for his part, was near death. Even the extreme measure of providing him with a young virgin for nursing and body warmth was not sufficient to arouse the aging monarch, who by this time was about 70 (1:1-4; cf. 2 Sa. 5:4).<sup>13</sup> Though she would have been considered a late addition to the royal harem (at least this is what both Adonijah and Solomon seemed to assume, cf. 2:22), David had no intercourse with her. Adonijah took the impotence of his father to be a sign that a co-regency should begin.<sup>14</sup>

To put into effect his proposed co-regency, Adonijah prepared a royal entourage (1:5-6) and enlisted the support of Joab, head of the army (2 Sa. 8:16), and Abiathar, a priest from the family line of Eli who had taken office during David's reign and remained loyal during difficult times (1 Sa. 14:3; 22:20; 23:9; 2 Sa. 8:17; 15:24, 27-29, 35-36; 17:15; 19:11; 20:25). At the same time, support for Adonijah was considerably less than complete (1:7-8), since Zadok, the other major priest, Benaiah, the captain of David's private guard (2 Sa. 8:18; 20:23; 23:23), Nathan, the prophet, and some other friends were conspicuously absent. In fact, when Adonijah staged his co-regency coronation ceremony, he pointedly did not invite those who might object, though he certainly invited almost everyone else he considered important (1:9-10)!

---

<sup>12</sup> Adonijah was David's fourth son (2 Sa. 3:2-4), but his older brothers were all deceased by this time. Amnon, the oldest, was murdered by Absalom after raping his sister (2 Sa. 13:1-14, 23-29, 32-33). Kileab, David's second son, might have been living at the time of David's death, but his name is conspicuous by its absence, and it is usually assumed that he, too, was deceased. Absalom, the third son, was killed by Joab after he rebelled against his father (2 Sa. 15, 18).

<sup>13</sup> Some have suggested that the designation Shunammite is a variant of the designation Shulamite in the Song of Songs (6:13), which in turn leads to the corollary that Abishag is the woman featured in the Song as Solomon's lover, but there is no compelling reason to accept this speculation. A substitution of *l* for *n* is unattested in biblical times, cf. *ABD* (1992) V.1227. Better to simply leave it that Abishag was a young woman from Shunem, a town in Issachar (Jos. 19:18).

<sup>14</sup> In the ancient Near East, a king who was sexually impotent was not trusted to lead his people, cf. C. Pfeiffer, *Old Testament History* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973), p. 270.

It remained for Nathan and Bathsheba to take immediate action, not only to save the kingdom for Solomon (whom David had earlier appointed, cf. 1 Chr. 22:5-19), but to save their very lives, since a purge of the opposition was almost certainly to be expected (1:11-14). The fact that they were not invited to share Adonijah's meal meant that they were excluded from his table of friendship—and accordingly, they might be treated as political criminals. Hence, Bathsheba, supported by Nathan, approached the aged David, reminding him of his oath to Solomon and revealing the Adonijah conspiracy (1:15-27). Though confined to his bed, David acted with energy!<sup>15</sup> He instructed that Solomon should be crowned king, supported by Zadok, the priest, Nathan, the prophet, and Benaiah, the captain of David's professional guard. They would parade Solomon on David's own mule, anoint him with oil from the sacred tent that held the ark, and install him at the Gihon Spring, announcing the co-regency with trumpet blasts (1:28-40).

The irony of the two coronations—both being celebrated at the same time—is that they were only geographically separated by a short distance. Adonijah's celebration, already in progress, was staged at the En Rogel spring, somewhat south of the City of David near the confluence of the Hinnom and Kidron Valleys. The Gihon Spring was at the foot of the east slope of the City of David, less than half a mile from the other site. Though neither site was visible to the other, the noise of the one clearly carried over to the other, and when the celebration attending Solomon's coronation at the Gihon was heard by Adonijah's group at En Rogel, the Adonijah conspiracy quickly collapsed. In terror, Adonijah fled to the great altar and clung to it for sanctuary, pleading for his life (1:41-53).<sup>16</sup> Solomon granted him immunity, but on the contingency that he “shows himself worthy”—otherwise he still would be liable to execution!<sup>17</sup> The modern reader might wonder why Adonijah, with

<sup>15</sup> Presumably, David was in a room within his “palace of cedar” (2 Sa. 7:2), a royal structure built by Phoenician craftsmen, and presumably, after a Phoenician design (2 Sa. 5:11). That the craftsmen were both carpenters and masons indicates that it was a combination of both wood and stone. Remnants may have been discovered in excavations in the ancient City of David by Kathleen Kenyon of the British Museum. She discovered proto-Aeolic capitals adjacent to the area that held a monumental structure, and while she dated them to the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC, archaeologist Eilat Mazar, who has excavated further in the late 1990s and the early years of the new millennium, suggested that they might be from the 10<sup>th</sup> century, cf. E. Mazar, “King David's Palace,” *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1997), pp. 50-57, 74 and “Did I Find King David's Palace?” *BAR* (Jan/Feb 2006), pp. 16-27, 70.

<sup>16</sup> While the great altar of Solomon's temple was presumably destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC, the “horns” of the altar to which Adonijah clung (1:50; cf. 2:28; Ex. 27:2; 30:2) are representative of what has been found on several other altars from ancient Israel, cf. Y. Elitzur and D. Nir-Zevi, “Four-Horned Altar Discovered in Judean Hills,” *BAR* (May/June 2004), pp. 34-39 and D. Cole, *Archaeology and Religion [CD-Rom]* (Washington DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2006), slide #45.

<sup>17</sup> There remains an anomaly between the Kings record and the Chronicles record. In the Chronicles record, a coronation for Solomon is described in which David is physically present and leads the ceremony (1 Chr. 29:1ff.). Later, the Chronicler will say that this was the acknowledgement of Solomon “a second time” (1

the support of Joab who commanded the entire Israelite army, would so quickly abdicate, but it must be remembered that the Israelite army was not a standing army in the capital available for immediate summons. It had to be mustered from the various clans (cf. 2 Sa. 17:11-13). David's private guard under Benaiah, by contrast, were in the city and ready to be deployed immediately!

With Solomon now firmly established as his successor, David determined to deliver to him his dying testament (2:1). Clearly, covenant faithfulness was paramount, as David urged in the opening charge (2:2-4). The fact that David puts Yahweh's dynastic promises in conditional terms in light of the larger issue of covenant faithfulness ("if...then") anticipates the eventual exile and loss of the throne in the Babylonian exile. The original dynastic promises as originally stated seemed inviolable (2 Sa. 7:11b-16), but the conditional language used here opens the door for a messianic interpretation—that even though the promises might fail in the political history of Israel and Judah, they would not ultimately fail in the larger redemptive purposes of God that stretched beyond the exile. While the Kings record does not dwell on this subtle distinction, the writing prophets certainly address it more directly.

David gave two other final instructions. For his loyalty during the Absalom rebellion, David instructed Solomon to provide a royal pension for the family of Barzillai of the Transjordan (2:7; cf. 2 Sa. 17:27-29; 19:31-39). For their disloyalty, David warned Solomon against Joab and Shimei. Joab, the incurable opportunist, had murdered two men to secure his position as commander of the army (2 Sa. 3:22-27; 20:8-10), and he had supported the Adonijah conspiracy as well. Shimei had cursed and humiliated David during the Absalom revolt (2 Sa. 16:5-12), and though David gave him immunity to preserve peace (2 Sa. 19:16-23), he never forgave this disloyalty. The words "do not let his gray head go down to the grave in peace" and "bring his gray head down to the grave in blood" left little doubt that David felt the national security was at risk and justified a purge (2:5-6, 8-9). So, at the age of 70, David died and Solomon succeeded him (2:10-12).<sup>18</sup> The fact that the

---

Chr.29:22b). However, in the Kings record David is bedfast and could not personally attend the coronation of Solomon. The Adonijah conspiracy described in the Kings record is absent altogether from the Chronicles record. Was Solomon crowned king twice? If so, what is the chronology between the two coronations, and where does the Adonijah conspiracy fall? It may be, as Williamson has suggested, that the Chronicles account was written precisely with the Kings record in mind, and the language of the "second time" refers to a more formal event than the hurried and semi-private anointing described in 1 Kings 1, cf. H. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982), p. 187. If so, however, then David must have revived considerably in order to have personally superintended this second inauguration.

<sup>18</sup> While the burial site of David seems to have been known as late as the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD (cf. Ac. 2:29), it is less clear that we know where it is today. The kings of Judah beginning with David were buried "within the

responsibility for the judicial purge of Adonijah, Joab and Shimei come at the initiative of David effectively distances Solomon from their deaths, even though he was the one to carry out the purge after David's demise. This, in turn, serves partially to protect Solomon as the "man of peace" who was to build God's house (cf. 1 Chr. 22:7-10).

### **The Purge (2:13-46)**

Solomon did not hesitate to carry out David's dying wishes. When Adonijah requested the hand of Abishag in marriage, using Bathsheba, the queen mother, as his intermediary, Solomon perceived the darkest possible motives (2:13-21). To take over the harem of a former king was an overt claim to the throne as clearly attested in the Absalom rebellion (2 Sa. 12:8; 16:20-22; cf. 3:6-7). Why Bathsheba did not perceive this subtlety is unknown (or perhaps she was equally subtle and knew how Solomon would react), but Solomon certainly understood the implications. Already he had granted Adonijah immunity only so long as no "wickedness" was attributed to him (1:52), but this request was clearly over the line, especially since he was older than Solomon and had both Joab and Abiathar to support him. He immediately gave Benaiah the order for Adonijah's execution (2:22-25). Though he spared Abiathar because of his long-standing loyalty to David, Solomon could only assume that he still supported Adonijah. He removed him from priestly office, consigning him to Anathoth north of Jerusalem as a long-range fulfillment of an oracle by an unnamed prophet to Eli many years earlier (2:26-27; 1 Sa. 2:27-36).

News of the execution of Adonijah and the banishment of Abiathar reached Joab, who quickly fled to the tent housing the ark of the covenant and claimed sanctuary at the altar. Earlier Adonijah had been spared temporarily in just such a way, so this was Joab's last hope. This time, however, the claim of sanctuary was to no avail. Solomon ordered his summary execution on the basis of his past intentional homicides, and Benaiah carried it out, assuming Joab's office as head of the Israelite army (2:28-35). Zadok, meanwhile, became the high priest in the place of Abiathar.

The last remaining dissident was Shimei, who as a member of Saul's family had supported the Absalom rebellion during David's reign and whom Solomon now confined to the city, presumably to keep him isolated from any

---

City of David" (2:10; 11:43; 14:31; 15:8, 24; 22:50, etc.), apparently in the southern part (Ne. 3:16). A reasonable case can be made for the location of these tombs, but the site is debated, cf. H. Shanks, "Is This King David's Tomb?" *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1995), pp. 62-67.

Benjamite faction that may have remained from the days of Saul. However, when Shimei broke his parole in order to reclaim some runaway slaves, Solomon did not hesitate to give the order for his execution (2:36-46a). At last, the threat of political rupture was quenched; the kingdom was secure (2:46b).

### **Solomon's Wisdom (3-4)**

Wisdom in the ancient Near East was essentially practical expertise, not necessarily intellectual acumen or even spiritual maturity. Such wisdom was expressed in the ability to understand one's surroundings, to foresee the reactions of one's fellows, and to apply one's own resources at the critical point. It is what Gerhard von Rad calls "the essentials for coping with reality".<sup>19</sup> This nuance must be appreciated if one is to make sense of Solomon, the man of wisdom. During David's reign, a class of wise persons arose who served as counselors in the court (2 Sa. 14:2ff.; 16:20-23), and later, they would stand as a third force alongside prophets and priests (Je. 18:18; Eze. 7:26). Solomon, of course, was no mere advisor but a king. Nonetheless, this same sort of practical wisdom attended his reign, and indeed, the biblical testimony is very much along these same lines (cf. 3:28; 4:29-34). To attempt to read Solomon's wisdom through the lens of New Testament spiritual wisdom would be anachronistic.

The first example of Solomon's prudence comes in the form of a political marriage with a princess from Egypt (3:1) for whom he later built a palace (7:8b; 9:24). The Pharaoh is unnamed but probably was Siamun (978-959 BC) or possibly Psusennes II (959-945 BC) near the end of the 21<sup>st</sup> dynasty.<sup>20</sup> As part of the dowry for his daughter, Pharaoh presented Solomon with the city of Gezer in the foothills of Ephraim along the northern Philistine border after he had exterminated its Canaanite inhabitants (1 Kg. 9:16), a city that had resisted all previous Israelite efforts to capture it (cf. Jos. 16:10; Jg. 1:29). Such a marriage was above all diplomatic, and this was no ordinary

<sup>19</sup> G. Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1972), pp. 3, 113.

<sup>20</sup> Solomon's reign can be fixed at about 970-930 BC based on Egyptian and Assyrian records, cf. K. Kitchen, "How We Know When Solomon Ruled," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 2001), pp. 32-37, 58. Siamun is the best choice, since he came to power earlier than Solomon, and the marriage of his daughter to Solomon seems to have occurred early in Solomon's reign. Siamun conducted a campaign into Philistia during these early years, and a relief at Tanis shows him smiting an enemy that seems to have been one of the Sea Peoples from which the Philistines descended. A scarab of Siamun was found in the excavations at Tell el-Farah located in the western Negev on the primary road from Egypt to Philistia, cf. A. Malamat, "The First Peace Treaty Between Israel and Egypt," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1979), pp. 58-61. At Ashdod, a 10<sup>th</sup> century BC destruction level was excavated that also probably dates to this campaign, cf. M. Dothan, "Ashdod", *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. E. Stern (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993) 1.98.

event but a reflection of the status of Solomon as ruler of a mini-empire.<sup>21</sup> Later, of course, his marriage to a foreign princess will be condemned as a breach of the Deuteronomic code (cf. 11:1-2), but from the standpoint of practical wisdom in the ancient Near East, it was an admirable foreign policy.

The second example features Yahweh's promise to give Solomon wisdom. The preface to this promise contains the information that at this early date the new temple had not yet been constructed and Solomon was faithfully keeping Yahweh's covenant other than his worship at the various high places.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, he went to Gibeon, the most important ancient high place,<sup>23</sup> where he sacrificed more than a thousand burnt offerings (3:2-4). Here, Yahweh appeared to him in a dream, offering to give him whatever he asked (3:5). Citing Yahweh's promises to David, now fulfilled in the ascension of his son, Solomon asked for wisdom to govern and to discern between good and evil (3:6-9).<sup>24</sup> Yahweh was pleased at this response, and in turn he promised Solomon abundant wisdom, adding that if Solomon continued to keep the covenant, he would have a long life (3:10-15; cf. 5:12a).

The third example describes an actual ruling made by Solomon, a ruling given where there were no witnesses (3:16-28). It may strike the reader as nearly incredible that the suggestion be made to divide the infant with a sword, but almost certainly this was a ruse, and what Solomon really wanted was to see the immediate and visceral reaction of the real mother, which would be

---

<sup>21</sup> Typically, the Egyptians *took* foreign daughters for their royal sons in diplomatic marriages, but in this case, the Pharaoh *gave* one of his daughters to Solomon. This is the one period in Egyptian history when the Pharaoh's daughters are found marrying foreigners. While it is popular among minimalists to assume that Solomon's kingdom was relatively small and unsophisticated (if they believe in it at all), in fact the period of 1200-900 BC featured several such mini-empires after the collapse of the great Egyptian and Hittite empires but before the rise of the Neo-Assyrian empire, cf. K. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), pp. 98-112.

<sup>22</sup> The word **בָּמָה** appears more than 100 times in the Hebrew Bible, and the Kings record contains a number of significant citations. Traditionally, it has been translated as "high place" following Jerome's Latin Vulgate, which was natural enough, since apparently the *bamah* included open-air installations on natural hilltops, sometimes with altars or standing stones. However, Deuteronomy and the Former Prophets took a rather dim view of high places, since they were sacred sites associated with Canaanite worship. Though high places seemed to have been tolerated early on (cf. 1 Sa. 9:12-14, 19, 25; 10:5, 13), after the construction of the temple they were forbidden altogether, and the continued use of high places earned stern warnings and denunciations (1 Kg. 11:4-8 and throughout the Kings record), cf. B. Nakhai, "What's a *Bamah*? How Sacred Space Functioned in Ancient Israel," *BAR* (May/June 1994), pp. 18-29, 77-78.

<sup>23</sup> The Chronicles record indicates that after the dismantling of Shiloh during the priesthood of Eli, the Tent of Meeting had been moved to Gibeon (2 Chr. 1:3). Gibeon has been positively identified as *el-Jib*, since some 31 jar handles were excavated there with the name *gb'n*, cf. J. Pritchard, "Gibeon," *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. E. Stern (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993) 2.511.

<sup>24</sup> The expression "good and evil" sometimes appears in a juridical sense in the Old Testament (cf. Ge. 31:24, 29; 2 Sa. 13:22), and it may possibly have that nuance here. In any case, the larger context seems to suggest that Solomon's request was for wisdom to govern.

spontaneous and uncalculated. The ruse worked, and the anguished outcry of the real mother marked her as genuine. Solomon as a perceptive and shrewd ruler was now publicly established (3:28).

The fourth example of Solomon's wisdom is a description of his court, apparently a demonstration of his administrative skills. It includes a listing of his staff, eleven officers in all (4:1-6). A comparative reading with David's officials show that there were some who served both David and Solomon, namely Jehoshaphat, Zadok, Benaiah and Adoniram (2 Sa. 8:16-18; 20:24).<sup>25</sup> Favor was shown to Nathan (presumably Nathan, the prophet, though this is not certain) in that two of his sons served as officers. There is also the anomaly that Abiathar, the priest, is mentioned, and if this is the one deposed (cf. 2:27), his inclusion as an officer must have been temporary. The earliest mention of a corvee officer (forced labor) came in David's reign (2 Sa. 20:24), but while forced labor presumably was drawn from conquered peoples outside the land in David's time (2 Sa. 12:31), Solomon would expand it to include those within the borders as well (9:15, 20-21). Gray well may be correct in concluding that there were two types of forced labor, one of permanent serfdom (imposed on non-Israelites within the borders, cf. 9:22) and another of temporary conscription for special projects (imposed on the Israelites themselves, cf. 5:13-14).<sup>26</sup>

Solomon also reorganized the land into 12 administrative tax districts, each with a governor accountable directly to the crown, in order to gain more state revenue (4:7-19). This was quite a daring move since, though he retained the sacrosanct number 12, he also did not always follow the older tribal territorial divisions.<sup>27</sup> Each district was required to support the royal court one month each year (4:27-28). The governors were Solomon's own appointees (indeed, two of them were his sons-in-law, cf. 4:11, 15). Such a system served to break down older tribal loyalties and reconstitute the clans into a national system with a stronger central government. Bright has cogently observed that instead of the old system of 12 tribes, each supporting the central shrine, there

---

<sup>25</sup> It is of interest that of Solomon's staff officers, two were secretaries and one was a recorder, the latter, Jehoshaphat ben Ahilud, serving both David and Solomon. Literacy was not widespread at this early date and would not be widespread until much later, cf. W. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2004), pp. 35-90. Nonetheless, even prior to widespread literacy, the use of writing as a court function was highly important for ancient Near Eastern governments, and the discovery of an inscription from the period of David (Iron Age IIa) in proto-Canaanite script in a Judahite town demonstrates that the Hebrews in the earliest years of the monarchy were writing, cf. H. Shanks, "A Fortified City from King David's Time," *BAR* (Jan/Feb 2009), pp. 38-43.

<sup>26</sup> J. Gray, *I & II Kings [OTL]*, rev. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), pp. 155-156.

<sup>27</sup> For a map showing these districts, see Y. Aharoni and M. Avi-Yonah, *The Macmillan Bible Atlas*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1993), p. 113.

now were 12 tax districts, each supporting Solomon's court.<sup>28</sup> In the larger picture, it may well be questioned whether this reorganization was all that wise, but in terms of garnering support for Solomon's projects, it was a practical expedient.

The mini-empire brought prosperity! The tenuous existence that plagued the Israelites from the death of Joshua through the early years of David were now gone, and between the revenues from within the borders of the 12 tribes themselves along with added revenues from tributaries, the national coffers began to bulge (4:20-21). Daily provisions for the bureaucracy were huge, but the newly realized peace and prosperity were welcome (4:22-26). As yet, there is no word of censure for such extravagance (though this would come soon). Rather, all these expedients were indications of Solomon's wisdom—his practical administrative skills for marshalling many resources into a cohesive and well-run government.

Solomon was a true "renaissance man", gifted in many ways beyond his state administrative skills. He had a passion for learning, surpassing even the most celebrated intellectuals of his day (4:29-31). As a writer, he composed both proverbs and songs (4:32; cf. Pro. 1:1; 10:1; 25:1). As a botanist, he described and classified plants (4:33a). As a zoologist he described and classified animals (4:33b). While the statement that "all the kings of the world" sent representatives to hear him expound may be hyperbole, there is no doubt that the compiler of the material in 1 Kings wants the reader to be impressed by the breadth of Solomon's research and knowledge.

### **Building the Temple and the Palace (5-7)**

The building of the temple figures prominently in 1 Kings, since its construction was the climax of an anticipation that stretched all the way back to Deuteronomy as the place Yahweh would choose for his name (cf. Dt. 12). David, of course, had wanted to build such a temple when his wars were at an end, but Yahweh had postponed its construction until the reign of his son (2 Sa. 7). Nonetheless, David did all that was possible for him to do in preparation. He purchased the land (2 Sa. 24:18-25//1 Chr. 21:18), and the Chronicles record specifically indicates that the former threshing-floor of Araunah would be the temple site (1 Chr. 22:1).<sup>29</sup> He stockpiled materials (1

<sup>28</sup> J. Bright, p. 217.

<sup>29</sup> While the general location of the 1<sup>st</sup> temple is not in doubt, its precise placement is unknown. Indeed, there is considerable debate about the precise placement of the 2<sup>nd</sup> temple, cf. D. Jacobson, "Sacred Geometry: Unlocking the Secret of the Temple Mount", *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1999), pp. 42-53, 62-63 and *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1999), pp. 54-63, 74; L. Ritmeyer, "Where Was the Temple?" *BAR* (Mar/Apr 2000), pp. 52-59, 72 and A. Kaufman, pp. 60-61, 69. If the precise placement of the 2<sup>nd</sup> temple is unclear, the precise placement of the 1<sup>st</sup> temple is even more tenuous.

Chr. 22:2-5, 14-16), produced architectural renderings inspired by the Spirit (1 Chr. 28:11-19) and solicited gifts for construction (1 Chr. 29:1-9). Solomon, no doubt, added to these preparations in his negotiations with Hiram of Tyre.<sup>30</sup> Hiram already had contributed to Jerusalem by building David's palace (cf. 2 Sa. 5:11), and now he offered his assistance to Solomon to continue their relationship to mutual advantage (5:1-9). Hiram would supply cedar and pine logs, which would be floated down the Mediterranean coastline, probably from Byblos to Joppa (cf. 2 Chr. 2:16),<sup>31</sup> and then hauled overland to Jerusalem. In return, Solomon paid Hiram with supplies of grain and oil (5:10-12).

For this preparatory work, Solomon instituted a levy of forced labor under Adoniram, here a temporary conscription of three months per year until the project was completed. Still, it was a substantial force and included carpenters, porters, quarrymen and their foremen (5:13-18).

Temple construction began in Solomon's fourth regnal year (6:1).<sup>32</sup> If the referents in the Chronicles record are taken seriously (and they should be), David was the mastermind behind the temple's architectural form (1 Chr. 28:11-19). The text says specifically that the plans were what "the Spirit had put in his mind" (1 Chr. 28:12), and David clearly indicated to Solomon that "the hand of Yahweh was upon me, and he gave me understanding in all the details of the plan" (1 Chr. 28:19). The form of the temple, of course, followed fairly closely the basic division of the tabernacle into an outer sanctuary and an inner sanctuary, and it was constructed on an east-west axis facing eastward. The dimensions are given in cubits.<sup>33</sup> Such statements notwithstanding, there are marked similarities between the plan of Solomon's temple and various other 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium BC Syrian temples, a fact not in itself surprising, since many of the craftsmen Solomon used were from Phoenicia.<sup>34</sup> Still, the temple

<sup>30</sup> Hiram (969-936 BC), a shortened form of the Phoenician name Ahiram, is also attested by Josephus (*Against Apion* 1.17; *Antiquities* 8.5.3), who in turn depended upon the ancient histories of Dius and Menander of Ephesus, histories no longer extant.

<sup>31</sup> Gebal (5:18) later was called Byblos by the Greeks.

<sup>32</sup> Much discussion has attended the reference to "480 years" after the exodus, not so much with respect to Solomon's temple project as to the date of the exodus itself. For the major points of the discussion, see *ISBE* (1982) 2.230-238.

<sup>33</sup> Fixing the precise equivalent of the biblical cubit has been attempted many times (in general, it is 24 fingers wide or the length from the elbow to the tip of the fingers—admittedly a rather general designation). Unfortunately, in the absence of written evidence of such standards, only approximations can be given. Conventionally, modern scholars suggest 50 cm for the Mesopotamian cubit and 52.5 cm for the Egyptian cubit, but these also must be given a 5-10% deviation. No archaeological evidence exists for substantiating the cubits of Solomon, so we are left with the scholarly approximation, which informs the tables and footnotes available in various translations of the English Bible, cf. *ABD* (1992) 6.899-900.

<sup>34</sup> To explore these similarities, see V. Fritz, "Temple Architecture: What Can Archaeology Tell Us About Solomon's Temple?" *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1987), pp. 38-49. In general, the temple was about 90' long, 30' wide and 45' high, and presumably these would be inside dimensions not accounting for the thickness of the various walls.

vocabulary in 1 Kings is not easy to decipher, and this ambiguity is underscored by the variants in English translation. Following are some of the major translation variants:

<b>Hebrew</b>	<b>English Versions</b>
<i>bayit Yahweh</i> (6:1)	“House of the LORD” (KJV, RSV, NKJV, NEB, ESV, NRSV, NASB) “Temple of the LORD” (NIV, NAB) “Temple of Yahweh” (JB)
<i>bayit</i> (6:2, 5)	“House” (KJV, RSV, NEB, ESV, NRSV, NASB) “House” and “Temple” (NKJV) “Temple” and “House” (JB, NAB) “Temple” and “Building” (NIV)
<i>debir</i> (6:5)	“Oracle” (KJV) “Inner sanctuary” (RSV, NKJV, ESV, NRSV, NASB, NIV) “Inner shrine” (NEB) “ <i>debir</i> ” (JB) “Sanctuary” (NAB)
<i>Kodesh</i> <i>Ha-Kodashim</i> (6:16)	“Most Holy Place” (KJV, RSV, NKJV, NEB, ESV, NRSV, NASB, NIV) “Holy of Holies (JB, NAB)
<i>hekhal</i> (6:5)	“Temple” (KJV) “Nave” (RSV, ESV, NRSV, NASB, NAB) “Sanctuary” (NKJV, NEB) “ <i>hekhal</i> ” (JB) “Main hall” (NIV)
<i>ulam</i> (6:3)	“Porch” (KJV, NASB, NAB) “Vestibule” (RSV, NKJV, NEB, ESV, NRSV) “ <i>ulam</i> ” (JB) “Portico” (NIV)
<i>yatsia</i> (6:5)	“Chambers” (KJV, NKJV) “Structure” (NIV, RSV, ESV, NRSV) “Terrace” (NEB) “Annex” (JB) “Stories” (NASB, NAB)

Given the construction of side rooms (6:5-6, 10), the complex was a tripartite building with the wings constructed of three stories, each a cubit wider than the one below it, and staircases for access (6:8). All quarried stones were cut

and dressed off-site (6:7). The ceiling was roofed with parallel beams and planking (6:9).

Inserted between the construction details is Yahweh's reaffirmation of the Davidic promises and the urgent contingency that their fulfillment depended strictly upon Solomon's covenant faithfulness (6:11-13; cf. 2:3-4). Clearly, the Deuteronomic code must be held central, and though Solomon at last was building the temple anticipated in Deuteronomy, its construction was not in itself some unqualified guarantee of political success.

The interior of the new temple was lined with cedar paneling decorated with gourds and open flowers, while the floor was planked with pine so that no stonework was visible from the inside (6:14-18). The Most Holy Place, which was a perfect cube,<sup>35</sup> was prepared as the place for the ark of the covenant (6:19-22). The inside walls were overlaid with gold, and golden chains separated the inner sanctuary from the outer room (possibly these chains may have been to draw a curtain, but this is unclear, since there were doors as well, cf. 6:31).

For the Most Holy Place, two huge identical cherubim were constructed of olive wood overlaid with gold (6:23-28). Their wings were to stretch out over the ark of the covenant (cf. 8:7), and together with the ark they formed a kind of divine throne (cf. Ps. 80:1-2; 2 Kg. 19:15; Is. 37:16).<sup>36</sup> Cherubim in the ancient world were protective, composite creatures that concretely (rather than abstractly) expressed concepts like omnipotence, omniscience and completeness— notions that were beyond ordinary human capacity to express.<sup>37</sup> Though there are more than 90 references to them in the Hebrew Bible, there is no precise description other than the visionary depiction by Ezekiel, who describes them as beings with wheels, four wings and four faces—human, lion, bull and eagle—with hands below their wings and hooves instead of feet (Eze. 1:5-11; 10:1ff.). That they formed a sort of chariot throne seems implied not only by Ezekiel's description of wheels but also by the Chronicler, who specifically calls them “the chariot” (1 Chr. 28:18; cf. Da. 7:9b). Cherubim reliefs further graced the inside walls along with palm trees and flowers (6:29-30), both common decorations in ancient Near Eastern relief work. Doors and jambs were constructed for both the outer and inner doors,

<sup>35</sup> There is the anomaly, of course, that the height of the room is 10 cubits less than the height of the building (cf. 6:2). Possibly there was attic space at the top (cf. 2 Chr. 3:9b, RSV) or else the Most Holy Place was on a raised level with steps up to it.

<sup>36</sup> All three of these passages used the identical expression **יְשֻׁב הַכְּרֻבִים** (= one-being-enthroned-of-the-cherubim). Some English translations take this construct form to mean “between” (KJV, NKJV, NIV), some “on” (NEB, NAB, JB, JPS), and others “above” (RSV, ESV, NRSV, NASB).

<sup>37</sup> For the iconography of cherubim (or sphinxes or griffins) in the ancient world, see E. Borowski, “Cherubim: God's Throne?” *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1995), pp. 36-41.

and these were decorated with the same motifs of cherubim, palm trees and flowers, all overlaid with gold (6:31-35). The walls of the forecourt, where the altar and sea were to be located, were constructed of dressed stones and cedar beams, each three courses of stone topped by a course of cedar.

The total construction time was seven years, from Solomon's fourth regnal year to his eleventh year (6:37-38).

The temple, while it was the most important structure of the royal complex, did not stand alone. Over a period of some thirteen years (7:1),<sup>38</sup> Solomon also constructed palace buildings (and the description appears here since the compiler of the material apparently wanted to describe the buildings before he described their furnishings).<sup>39</sup> Altogether, this complex consisted of the House of the Forest of Lebanon (7:2-5), the Hall of Pillars (7:6) and the Hall of Justice (7:7) along with residential palaces for himself and the princess of Egypt (7:8). It is unclear how these buildings related to the previous palace built for David, but there seems little reason to doubt that the structures described in 7:2-7 were state buildings, since they are distinguished from the private apartments (7:8). The House of the Forest of Lebanon presumably was so named because of the extensive use of cedar. From later references, it seems that this building functioned as an armory (1 Kg. 10:17; Is. 22:8). The Hall of Pillars, while described, has no stated function. Some have suggested that it may have served as a waiting area for those seeking audience with the king. The Hall of Justice (alternatively, Hall of the Throne), as the name implies, was for the royal judiciary. All these structures were built with quarried and dressed stones, and they were surrounded by a courtyard with a wall of stones and cedar beams (7:9-12).

The remaining descriptions are of the temple's furnishings. Solomon engaged a bronze craftsman, half-Israelite and half-Phoenician, to do the major casting work (7:13-14). These included the two bronze pillars and their capitals fronting the temple's porch (7:15-16).<sup>40</sup> The capitals, in turn, were decorated with a meshwork or trellises (NIV has "network of interwoven chains"), rows of pomegranates and lilies (7:17-20). The pillars were set up in the porch, and each was named, *Yakin* meaning "it is solid" and *Boaz* meaning "with strength" (7:21-22). Possibly the two names were incised in the pillars.

---

<sup>38</sup> The reference in 9:10 seems to suggest that the two structures, temple and palace complex, were built consecutively rather than simultaneously. If so, perhaps Solomon made use of David's existing palace for his own apartments until the projects were completed.

<sup>39</sup> The LXX actually reorders this material so that 7:1-12 is shifted and follows 7:13-51.

<sup>40</sup> While these capitals were cast in bronze, they may have been similar to the capital of stone that was excavated by Kathleen Kenyon on the east slope of the City of David, cf. Y. Shiloh, "Jerusalem," *The Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. E. Stern (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993) 2.703.

The priest's wash basin, called the "Sea", corresponded to the laver in the tabernacle (7:23-26; cf. 2 Chr. 4:6b). This, too, was cast in bronze and stood on a platform of a dozen bulls, three facing each direction. The arithmetic is not precise (i.e., a circumference of 30 cubits cannot yield a diameter of 10 cubits), so either the figures are rounded numbers or else the diameter was measured from the outside rim but the circumference from the inside rim. The rim itself was decorated with rows of cast gourds.

The next group of cast objects consisted of ten basins, each with an accompanying stand (7:27-38). The language here is fraught with difficulty and rare Hebrew words. The stands were movable, since they were constructed with wheels.<sup>41</sup> Panels on the stands were decorated with lions, bulls and cherubim as well as wreaths. Though the Kings record offers no explanation for their use, the Chronicler indicates that these basins were used for rinsing priestly utensils (2 Chr. 4:6). All these implements were positioned in the temple court (7:39-40a). The Sea was positioned on the south side of the temple at its southeast corner. The basins and stands were split, five on the south side and five on the north side. Finally, there were castings for the temple pots (for carrying ashes from the altar), shovels (for cleaning out the altar) and sprinkling basins (for applying sacrificial blood).

In summary, all the casting work was completed in burnished bronze using clay molds (7:40b-47). The casting work was done in the Transjordan, a center for metallurgy since the clay of the region was suitable for molds, wood for the fires was available, and the north wind of the region functioned like a natural bellows.<sup>42</sup> All these implements Solomon "left", which may mean "put in their places" (so NEB), though most English translations supply the meaning "unweighed" because of the succeeding statement (so RSV, NIV, etc.).

For the temple itself, the furnishings were essentially the same as for the tabernacle: the incense altar, the table for the bread, and the lamps along with an assortment of supplementary implements (7:48-50). However, it is clear that these pieces were not simply transferred from the tabernacle to the temple, for they were all "made" by Solomon. The incense altar was possibly made of wood and overlaid with gold, as was the original (cf. Ex. 30:1-5). The table for the Bread of the Face may have been the same (cf. Ex. 25:23-28). The lampstands, obviously, were somewhat different, since there were ten of them,

---

<sup>41</sup> However, given their size, it is unlikely that they were ever moved. When filled with water, along with the weight of the cast basins and stands, they would have weighed about 3.5 tons each, cf. T. Busink, *Der Temple von Jerusalem von Salomo bis Herodes* (Leiden: 1970), p. 349 as cited in G. Jones, *1 and 2 Kings [NCBC]*, ed. R. Clements (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 1.188.

<sup>42</sup> G. Jones, 1.189.

whereas the ancient lampstand seems to have been a single piece (cf. Ex. 25:31-37). There is no mention at all of “branches” in either the Kings or Chronicles record, such as one would see on the menorah depicted on the Arch of Titus in Rome from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Temple period. Rather, the style of lamps on cylindrical stands with floral designs in the Late Bronze Age seems more along the lines of what is described here.<sup>43</sup> One temple implement not mentioned but that likely dates to the 1<sup>st</sup> temple is the priestly scepter, which was inscribed with the words “Holy to the priests, belonging to the House of Yahweh”. It may be the only surviving relic from the 1<sup>st</sup> temple.<sup>44</sup> When Solomon had completed work on all the temple furnishings, he also brought into its treasury all the wealth David had stockpiled in advance for the anticipated temple (7:51).

### **The Dedication of the Temple (8)**

Upon completion of the temple, Solomon determined to bring into it the ark of the covenant. This was the single most important piece of furniture, and indeed, there would have been no cause for building a temple in the first place other than as a sanctuary to house the ark. Two generations earlier, the ark had been displaced at the destruction of Shiloh during the priesthood of Eli (cf. 1 Sa. 4). Though the Philistines captured it but soon gave it up (1 Sa. 5-6), for reasons that are unclear it remained separated from the Tabernacle. Instead, it was retained for about 70 years in a private residence, apparently staying there for the balance of Saul’s kingship and into the early kingship of David.<sup>45</sup> David brought the ark to Jerusalem soon after his early conquests, pitching a

<sup>43</sup> C. Meyers, “Was There a Seven-Branched Lampstand in Solomon’s Temple?” *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1979), pp. 46-57.

<sup>44</sup> H. Shanks, *In the Temple of Solomon and the Tomb of Caiaphas* (Washington D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1993), pp. 13-30; M. Artzy, “Pomegranate Scepters and Incense Stand with Pomegranates Found in Priest’s Grave,” *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1990), pp. 48-51; The authenticity of this relic that now resides in the Israel Museum has been questioned due to lack of provenance and differences in the reading of the engraved letters, cf. H. Shanks, “The Pomegranate Scepter Head—From the Temple of the Lord or from a Temple of Asherah?” *BAR* (May/June 1992), pp. 42-45; H. Shanks, “Is This Inscription Fake?” *BAR* (Sep/Oct 2007), pp. 67-69. The general consensus from the Jerusalem Forgery Conference (January 16-18, 2007) is that quite probably it is authentic, cf. H. Shanks, *Special Report: Jerusalem Forgery Conference* (Washington D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 2007). Andre Lemaire of the Sorbonne continues to support the authenticity of the artifact and inscription based on the discovery of ancient patina in the letter *he* in the inscription, cf. A. Lemaire, “Re-examination of the Inscribed Pomegranate: A Rejoinder,” *Israel Exploration Journal* 56 (2006), pp. 167-174 and *Israel Exploration Journal* 57 (2007), pp. 92-94 as cited in *BAR* (Jan/Feb 2009), pp. 10-11.

<sup>45</sup> A casual reading of 1 Sa. 7:1-2 might suggest that the ark was only at a private residence for 20 years, but this figure must only cover the time from its return by the Philistines until Samuel’s war at Ebenezer. Though dating is imprecise as far back as the priesthood of Eli, Saul’s reign was probably about 40 years (cf. Ac. 13:21, which probably is based on 1 Sa. 13:1, though there is a corruption in the Hebrew text that leaves the matter ambiguous). To this must be added the years of Samuel’s judgeship as well as the seven years of David’s reign over Judah before his reign over a united Israel (1 Sa. 5:4-5).

special tent for it there (2 Sa. 6; 1 Chr. 15-16). David's initial desire to build the temple was in order to house the ark in an appropriate place (2 Sa. 7:2).

With the new temple completed about eleven months previous (cf. 6:38), Solomon summoned representatives from the tribes and families to be present at the ark's installation during the Feast of Tabernacles (8:1-2).<sup>46</sup> The priests brought up the ark from its special tent in the City of David, along with the Tabernacle and all the other sacred furnishings, to install them in the new temple (8:3-5). The ark they placed beneath the huge cherubim Solomon had crafted (8:6-7).<sup>47</sup> Here, the tabernacle also was stored (cf. 2 Chr. 5:4-5; Ps. 61:4; Josephus, *Antiquities* 8.4.1). In compliance with the Torah, the carrying poles were not removed from the ark (8:8; cf. Ex. 25:15). That the ends of the poles were visible only if one were standing close to the doorway of the inner sanctuary must have been due to the narrowness of the doors (i.e., one would need to have been close enough to the doors to gain sufficient angle to see the ends).<sup>48</sup> The comment that only the tables of stone were in the ark is somewhat puzzling (8:9). One long-standing tradition was that the ark also included a pot of manna as well as Aaron's rod that budded (cf. He. 9:4), but if they once were in it, they were in it no longer.<sup>49</sup>

When the ark had been placed in the inner sanctuary, the priests withdrew. Just as had happened at the erection of the Tabernacle in the desert, the cloud of Yahweh's glory filled the temple (8:10-11; cf. Ex. 40:34-35). If there had been any question about the legitimacy of this new temple, the descent of the glory cloud should have settled it! Solomon immediately recognized God's approval in this phenomenon, for Yahweh was present in the

<sup>46</sup> While the Festival of Blowing Trumpets and the celebration of Yom Kippur also occur in the 7<sup>th</sup> month (cf. Lv. 23:23-24, 26-27), the festival envisioned here is almost certainly the third of the annual pilgrim festivals (Lv. 23:33-34), when many pilgrims from the outlying regions would be in attendance (cf. 8:65).

<sup>47</sup> Leen Ritmeyer believes he has located the exact placement of the ark on es-Sakhra (= the Rock) in a rectangular depression in the bedrock itself with the narrow side facing the front, cf. L. Ritmeyer, "The Ark of the Covenant: Where It Stood in Solomon's Temple," *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1996), pp. 46-55, 70-73. While his analysis is intriguing, it assumes that the boarded floor of the inner sanctuary did not cover a bedrock pedestal where the ark rested. Second, he assumes that when the ark was installed in Solomon's temple, the poles were removed, which accounts for it being positioned with the narrow side toward the front, but in fact, the poles seem not to have been removed, so the positioning of the ark is moot (Ex. 25:15; 1 Kg. 8:8).

<sup>48</sup> The KJV translates the text as though the priests actually drew out the poles so that they protruded into the outer room, which in turn suggests that the ark was placed so that the poles were parallel to the side walls. However, it seems better to translate the verb  $\text{קָרַח}$  (= to draw out, to be long) intransitively as does the NIV, RSV, ESV, NAB, etc.

<sup>49</sup> The texts in the Torah simply say that the pot of manna and Aaron's rod were placed in front of the ark (cf. Ex. 16:33-34; Nu. 17:10), and in fact, the Torah only clearly describes the tables of stone as being placed within it (cf. Ex. 25:21). Where the author of the Letter to the Hebrews derived the tradition that these other things, also, were in the ark is unclear, but the language of 1 Kg. 8:9 might be construed to suggest that by the time of Solomon some articles were missing that had been there previously. If so, one can only speculate about when or why they may have been removed.

dark cloud (8:12-13).<sup>50</sup> The idea of a “dark cloud” possibly should be linked to the fact that the inner sanctuary probably had no light. While Solomon created the temple with clerestory windows, it is unclear whether or not these windows also were in the inner sanctuary, though probably they were not. In the Tabernacle, the inner room was shrouded in total darkness, and this was likely the case for Solomon’s temple as well.

Solomon then addressed the people, reminding them of Yahweh’s promise to David and his divine choice of David as king. God chose David, and David chose the city (8:14-16).<sup>51</sup> Though David’s initial intent to build the temple himself was not granted, God’s promise that the temple would be built by his son was now clearly fulfilled (8:17-21; cf. 2 Sa. 7:4-17).<sup>52</sup>

This address to the people was followed by a public prayer before the great altar, where Solomon both stood and then knelt, lifting his hands toward heaven and praying (8:22, 54). His prayer began in the covenant the language of Deuteronomy, and while there were asides that reflected more recent events, unquestionably his prayer breathed with the expressions of the Torah.

*There is no God like you in heaven above or on earth below (8:23a; Dt. 4:39)*

*You who keep your covenant of love (8:23b; Dt. 7: 9, 12)*

Of course, while Deuteronomy anticipated a kingship (Dt. 17:14-20), it was David to whom this kingship rightfully belonged based on Yahweh’s promissory oath (8:24-26). However, it should be noted that even though the original language of the promise seemed inviolate (2 Sa. 7:4-16), there were implicit conditions, and these are frankly acknowledged by the “if” clause (cf. 2:4). That condition was covenant faithfulness. To be sure, the original covenant promise was that Yahweh’s faithful love would never be withdrawn from David’s dynasty as it was withdrawn from the house of Saul, and this assurance remained even if David’s sons broke covenant (2 Sa. 7:14-15). Still, though the curses of disobedience would result in severe punishments upon

---

<sup>50</sup> The fact that 1 Kg. 8:12-13 begins in the third person but concludes in a first person address to God seems awkward. This awkwardness is exacerbated by the fact that these verses appear only after 8:53 in the LXX. Further, the LXX contains an additional introductory phrase, “He manifested the sun in the heaven,” before it gives the phrase, “The Lord said he would dwell in darkness.” The LXX’s extra phrase may well be original, and if so, it sharply contrasts with the common world view in the ancient Near East that the sun was a deity. Yahweh created the sun, but he was not revealed there. Rather, he chose to reveal himself in the mystery of darkness (cf. Ps. 97:2).

<sup>51</sup> The LXX adds to Yahweh’s words in 8:16: “...but I chose Jerusalem that my name should be there.”

<sup>52</sup> No reason for this refusal to David’s wish is indicated in the Kings record; however, the Chronicler stated that it was because David was a warrior (1 Chr. 28:3). This, in turn, suggests that while Yahweh is a divine warrior, his primary character is not to be defined by war, but rather by peace.

them, the dynastic favor to David's line would never fail. In retrospect, of course, it is for this reason that the prophets eventually would single out David's line as the hope for the future in spite of the exile and the termination of political life for David's descendants.

In his prayer, Solomon now turned to a more theoretical question, "Will God really live in an earthly temple" (8:27). If Yahweh was omnipresent, how could it be said that he dwelled in a house? Though Solomon only suggested the answer to this question, centuries later the Christian Deacon Stephen would draw out those implications more precisely with respect to the 2<sup>nd</sup> temple (Ac. 7:44-50). Though the cloud of glory descended to this temple to make it a locus of worship and prayer, in no way was God tethered to it. Hence, though it was entirely proper that prayers be directed toward the temple, the God who saw and heard would answer from heaven, which was his true dwelling place (8:28-30).

Solomon had interceded that when prayers were offered toward the temple, Yahweh should forgive (8:30b). Now he offered seven specific instances of either covenant violation or special circumstances, each to be answered by prayers toward this temple. Perhaps Solomon used seven instances because the judgments for covenant disobedience were described as punishment for sins "seven times over" (cf. Lv. 26:18, 21, 24, 28). The first concerned offense to another person where there were no witnesses, cases that were to be adjudicated by an oath or an ordeal of innocence before Yahweh (cf. Ex. 22:7-11; Nu. 5:11-31). Yahweh himself would be the one to enforce the effects of the oath or ordeal, establishing innocence or guilt (8:31-32). The second concerned defeat in war, which the Torah specifically said was a consequence of covenant unfaithfulness (8:33-34; cf. Lv. 26:17; Dt. 28:25). The third envisioned a judgment of drought, again one of the Deuteronomic curses for covenant violation (8:35-36; cf. Lv. 26:18-20; Dt. 28:22-24). The fourth concerned disasters of various kinds (8:37-40; cf. Dt. 28:22-23, 38, 59-61; Lv. 26:16, 19-26). The fifth concerned non-Israelites, who also might pray toward the temple (8:41-43). The sixth concerned war efforts where the Israelite army was outside its boundaries and had no immediate access to the temple (8:44-45). The seventh concerned exile, the harshest of all the covenant curses (8:46-51; cf. Lv. 26:27-39; Dt. 28:45-68). In all these circumstances, Solomon prayed that Yahweh would hear, since the Israelites were his chosen nation (8:52-53; cf. Ex. 19:5-6; Dt. 7:6-8).

After the prayer was completed, Solomon arose to bless the people (8:54-55). The blessing, echoing the language of Joshua (cf. Jos. 21:45; 23:14), confirmed that the conquest of Canaan was now complete (8:56; cf.

Dt. 12:9). He urged the people toward heart-felt obedience to the covenant, both for their own well-being and continued blessing as well as for the sake of the surrounding nations, that they might also come to the faith of Yahweh (8:57-61).

The ceremony of dedication climaxed with *shelamim* (= peace) sacrifices (8:62-63) as well as *holocaust* (= burnt) and *minhah* (= cereal) offerings (8:64). The bronze altar Solomon constructed at the very front of the temple (cf. 9:25) was not large enough for the massive quantities of sacrifices. Hence, they consecrated the middle of the courtyard to accommodate all the animals to be sacrificed, and while a larger altar there is assumed, it is not described. Perhaps it was the one built by David earlier on the threshingfloor of Araunah (cf. 2 Sa. 24:25). The celebration lasted for two weeks, a full week longer than normal for the Feast of Booths (8:65; cf. Lv. 23:33-34). Finally, with the king's blessing, the people returned to their homes (8:66).

### **The Divine Warning (9:1-9)**

Earlier, Yahweh had spoken to Solomon in a dream at the high place at Gibeon before the temple was constructed (cf. 3:4-5). Now, he spoke to Solomon again (9:1-2). The substance of his message was articulated in classical covenant language. Initially, it confirmed the legitimacy of the temple as the place where Yahweh had chosen to put his name, the resolution to the long-standing anticipation from the Book of Deuteronomy (Dt. 12). More directly, it was a solemn warning to Solomon that covenant faithfulness was absolutely required. The promises to David are again framed in conditional language with striking "if" clauses (9:4-6; cf. 2:4; 8:25). The temple notwithstanding, if Solomon and his sons failed to keep covenant,<sup>53</sup> the people could be exiled from the land and even the temple would not escape divine rejection (9:7-9). The question posed in 9:8 parallels the same question posed in Deuteronomy 29:24.

This divine warning sets up the remainder of the account of Solomon's reign, for in fact, Solomon did violate the covenant in profound ways. Indeed, with its address to the dynastic sons of Solomon's line, this warning sets up the remainder of the record of the kings of Israel until the exile.

---

<sup>53</sup> There is a striking shift in the Hebrew text of 9:5-6 from an address in the second person singular (you) to an address in the second person plural (you all). Clearly, this warning was intended to Solomon and his descendants.

### **The Grandeur and Dissolution of Solomon (9:10—11:43)**

Solomon's reign was a strange mixture of splendor and covenant failure. The compiler of the Kings material summarizes both these aspects of his career, beginning with an accounting of his fiscal, labor and trading policies. Financially, the construction of the temple and the royal palaces, a twenty year project in which the costs outpaced the income, left him nearly bankrupt. He was forced to give up twenty northern Israelite towns to Hiram of Tyre just to pay his debts. How these northern Israelites reacted to being sold off to a pagan nation can only be imagined, but it could hardly have been received with anything but disillusionment (9:10-11). To make matters worse, Hiram was less than impressed with the payment, which he dubbed "good-for-nothing" (9:12-14).<sup>54</sup> Caught between his chronic financial predicament and the necessity of providing labor for his state projects, Solomon was forced to take drastic measures in the form of forced labor and taxation. His plans were grand, including not only what he was doing in the capital but also in outlying regions, but they outstripped his resources (9:15-19). In Jerusalem, of course, were the temple and the palace and their supporting structures, including a palace for his Egyptian royal wife (9:24).<sup>55</sup> Other cities, also, received considerable attention, including Hazor<sup>56</sup> and Megiddo in the north, where gate structures and a building believed by some to be stables were excavated that may date to Solomon's period.<sup>57</sup> Gezer in the *shephelah* was given to Solomon by the Pharaoh as part of his daughter's dowry, and in the south, Solomon apparently constructed other fortresses in the Negev to protect his southern border.<sup>58</sup> In addition, he built royal depots for storage as well as

<sup>54</sup> There was actually a town in Asher named Cabul (Jos. 19:27), but the use of the name here seems to be derogatory, not geographical. For a look at excavations in the area, see Z. Gal, "Cabul: A Royal Gift Found," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1993), pp. 38-44, 84.

<sup>55</sup> The location and nature of the *Millo* (NIV has "terraces" following the theoretical conclusions of Kathleen Kenyon) has been much debated (cf. 2 Sa. 5:9; 2 Chr. 32:5). Kenyon interpreted the *Millo* to refer to terraces and stone fills on the east slope of the City of David, cf. Y. Shiloh, "Jerusalem," *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. E. Stern (New York: Simon & Schuster) 2.704. Also on the eastern wall of the temple mount is the so-called "straight-joint". Though debated, some scholars believe that the stone courses of masonry north of the straight joint were constructed by Solomon, cf. E. Laperrousaz, "King Solomon's Wall Still Supports the Temple Mount," *BAR* (May/June 1987), pp. 34-44. A royal gateway excavated in this same area may well have been constructed by Solomon, cf. E. Mazar, "Royal Gateway to Ancient Jerusalem Uncovered," *BAR* (May/June 1989), pp. 38-51.

<sup>56</sup> Hazor, one of Solomon's fortress cities, featured a gateway similar to the ones found at Megiddo and Gezer and dates to ca. 950 BC, cf. A. Ben-Tor, "Solomon's City Rises from the Ashes," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1999), pp. 26-37, 60.

<sup>57</sup> For the debate about the gate at Megiddo and Solomon's so-called stables, see V. Fargo, "Is the Solomonic Gate at Megiddo Really Solomonic?" *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1983), pp. 8-13; I. Finkelstein and D. Ussishkin, "Back to Megiddo," *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1994), pp. 37-40 and G. Davies, "King Solomon's Stables: Still at Megiddo?" *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1994), pp. 44-49.

<sup>58</sup> R. Cohen, "The Fortresses King Solomon Built to Protect His Southern Border," *BAR* (May/June 1985), pp. 56-70; "Solomon's Negev Defense Line Contained Three Fewer Fortresses," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1986), pp.

chariot garrisons.

Slave labor for these projects were conscripted from indigenous Canaanites, a policy begun under the administration of David (9:20-21; cf. 2 Sa. 12:31), but while the Kings record states that Solomon did not extend state slavery into the ranks of the Israelites themselves (9:22-23), he did conscript Israelites for forced labor (5:13).

Annually, Solomon celebrated the three great pilgrim festivals, Unleavened Bread, Weeks and Booths (9:25; cf. Ex. 23:14-17), as specified in the Torah. The insertion of this comment here seems awkwardly placed. C. F. Keil linked 9:25 with 3:2 to suggest that its placement here was intended to show that the irregularity of worshipping at the high places now came to an end with the completion of the temple.<sup>59</sup> Be that as it may, the dislocation in the LXX (which jumps from 9:14 to 9:26 at this point) reflects upon the difficulty of the compilation

Drawing from the naval expertise of the Phoenicians, he also constructed a merchant navy at Ezion-Geber for trading southward via the Red Sea (9:26-28).<sup>60</sup> This venture brought in needed revenues of gold. The sheer quantity described, approximately 16 tons, may seem astronomical, not to mention Solomon's other resources for gold (cf. 9:14; 10:10, 16-17), but in fact, such descriptions are not out of context with other ancient Near Eastern references.<sup>61</sup> Ophir was so closely associated with gold that the name itself, with no other qualifier, could be understood as gold (cf. Job 22:24), and Ophir is attested as a source of gold in at least one extra-biblical inscription. Its location is unclear, though Africa and India are popular choices.<sup>62</sup>

Solomon's reputation for extraordinary wisdom was widely spread. A reigning monarch from as far south as Sheba<sup>63</sup> heard of him and traveled by

40-45 and Z Herzog, M. Aharoni and A. Rainey, "Arad: An Ancient Israelite Fortress with a Temple to Yahweh," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1987), pp. 20-21.

<sup>59</sup> C. Keil, *Commentaries on the Old Testament: The Books of the Kings* (rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), p. 146.

<sup>60</sup> Locating Ezion-Geber has been problematic, cf. G. Pratico, "Where is Ezion-Geber?" *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1986), pp. 24-35 and A. Flinder, "Is this Solomon's Seaport?" *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1989), pp. 30-43.

<sup>61</sup> A. Millard, "Does the Bible Exaggerate Solomon's Golden Wealth?" *BAR* (May/Jun 1989), pp. 20-31, 34. Though modern efforts have been made to locate this wealth, such as the 1911 Parker Mission that was shrouded in secrecy and masqueraded as an archaeological expedition, the most likely eventual destination of all this gold was Egypt through the invasions of Shoshenq I (Shishak), cf. N. Silberman, "In Search of Solomon's Lost Treasures," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1980), pp. 30-41 and K. Kitchen, "Where Did Solomon's Gold Go?" *BAR* (May/Jun 1989), pp. 30-31.

<sup>62</sup> *ABD* (1992) 5.26.

<sup>63</sup> Sheba was likely located in SW Arabia, though Josephus puts it in Ethiopia (*Antiquities* 8.6.5). The Ethiopian tradition holds that she converted to the faith of Yahweh and that Solomon had a son through her who was born after she returned home. Through this link, the ark of the covenant supposedly was moved to Ethiopia, cf. *ABD* (1992) 5.1171 and E. Isaac, "Is the Ark of the Covenant in Ethiopia?" *BAR* (Jul/Aug

caravan to see him and test him with difficult questions. Given her rich gifts to Solomon, presumably she also wished to secure trade agreements (10:1-3). All she had heard was true, for Solomon's court, his worship and the man himself left her breathless (10:4-9).<sup>64</sup> Her gifts of gold, spices and precious stones, which she had brought by caravan overland, were added to the treasures of gold and precious wood imported by ship that Solomon used both for the temple and musical instruments (10:10-12). The exchange was mutually beneficial (10:13).

Solomon's royal coffers swelled with revenues from trade, commerce and taxes (10:14-15). Much of the gold was hammered into ceremonial shields for the royal armory (10:16-17). Solomon's throne was of ivory and overlaid with gold, probably wood inlaid with ivory with gold covering the other surfaces, and the steps up to it were flanked by lions (10:18-21). His table service also was gold, and his court was decorated with live exotic animals, like peacocks and apes (10:22).<sup>65</sup> His foreign visitors brought him rich gifts, and all this splendor was the result of the wisdom with which God had endowed him (10:23-25). However, all this wealth, and especially the notation that he built a massive chariot corps, sounds an uneasy note (10:26-29; cf. 9:19), since these were direct violations of the Deuteronomic code for the king (cf. Dt. 17: 16-17). Though the ancient code stipulated that he was to have a Torah scroll right by his throne, no such scroll is described in association with Solomon's throne.

In addition to his other covenant failures, Solomon built an incredibly large harem, presumably by political marriages that secured his standing and his borders (11:1-3; Dt. 17:17a). These princesses were from all the surrounding pagan nations, and his marriages to pagans was yet another Torah violation besides just the size of his harem. The Deuteronomic code was specific: *Do not intermarry with them. Do not give your daughters to their sons or take their daughters for your sons, for they will turn yours sons away from following me to serve other gods...*(Dt. 7:3-4a). His thousand pagan wives led him to indulge in pagan worship (11:4-5, 7-8).<sup>66</sup> Hence, Solomon would be the first in a litany of Israelite kings about whom it will be said, "He did evil in the eyes of Yahweh" (11:6).

---

1993), pp. 60-63. By contrast, according to the Koran, the Queen of Sheba and Solomon both submitted to Allah (*Sura* 27:15-45). For a fuller account of these various traditions, see D. Hubbard, *ISBE* (1988) 4.8-11.

<sup>64</sup> The Hebrew reads quite literally, "Breath [was] no longer in her".

<sup>65</sup> The word **תְּנִינִים** has been variously translated as "peacocks" (ESV, RSV, NRSV, NASB), "baboons" (NIV) and "monkeys" (NKJV, NAB, NEB).

<sup>66</sup> The character of the worship of Chemosh and Molech, the patron deities of Moab and Ammon respectively, is not entirely clear, since most references to them in the Hebrew Bible are cursory. Both, however, seem to have involved human sacrifice (cf. 2 Kg. 3:36-27; Lv. 18:21; 20:2-5).

The Deuteronomic code warned that covenant violations would be met with stiff reprisals, and now Yahweh spoke to Solomon yet a third time, this time pronouncing a judgment in history upon him (11:9-13). The judgment would be the end of the united monarchy. The kingdom would rupture in the reign of Solomon's son who, in addition to Judah, would be left with only a single tribe (Benjamin). The temporary reprieve in which the rupture would not take place until after Solomon's death had nothing to do with Solomon himself, however. The postponement was in honor of David. That Judah would remain linked to the family of David indicated that the divine choice of Jerusalem and its temple would remain intact, Solomon's waywardness notwithstanding.

Additional judgments, also, fell upon Solomon, this time from Edomite neighbors to the south and Aramaen neighbors to the north. A lengthy narrative of the Israelite-Edomite relationship going back to an earlier time described how hostilities during the kingship of David had resulted in the annihilation of most Edomite males (11:14-16; cf. 2 Sa. 8:13-14; 1 Chr. 18:12-13; Ps. 60). Hadad had been evacuated from Edom to Egypt, where the young prince was treated royally and eventually married into Pharaoh's family (11:17-20). Later, after the deaths of David and Joab, he returned from Egypt to Edom, where apparently he waged guerilla war against Judah (11:21-22). To the north, Rezon ben Eliada escaped David's conquest of Zobah (cf. 2 Sa. 8:3-8; 1 Chr. 18:3-6), forming a band of guerillas who pillaged between Damascus and the northern border of Solomon's kingdom (11:23-25). Both these encroachments not only fulfilled the Deuteronomic curses attendant to covenant violation, but also, the warnings in the Davidic covenant (2 Sa. 7:14b).

Yet a further rebellion against Solomon came from Jeroboam ben Nebat, his Ephraimite corvee master (11:28). While Jeroboam was working at the Jerusalem projects, the prophet Ahijah confronted him.<sup>67</sup> Yahweh's prophetic word confirmed what he had told Solomon earlier—that because of Solomon's unfaithfulness to the covenant, the kingdom would rupture and the ten northern tribes would secede.<sup>68</sup> Jeroboam would become the king in the north. To be sure, Jerusalem would remain the capital in the south for David's sake, but apart from Judah, Solomon's son would have only a single additional

---

<sup>67</sup> It is of interest that, unlike Saul and David before him (or various kings after him), Solomon was never confronted directly by a prophet. The closest incident is this one, where Ahijah confronts Jeroboam who fled from Solomon to Egypt, cf. S. Fuchs, "Solomon—the King Without a Prophet," *BR* (Summer 1987), pp. 46-47.

<sup>68</sup> The ripping apart of Ahijah's new robe recalls the tearing of Saul's robe, when Samuel told him the kingdom had been "torn" from him and given to someone else (cf. 1 Sa. 15:27-29).

tribe (11:29-36). If Jeroboam kept the covenant, he, too, could have a secure dynasty (11:37-39).

Several phrases in this oracle are important in that they support the Davidic covenant in spite of Solomon's degeneracy. "For the sake of David and the city of Jerusalem, which I have chosen", a kingdom would left to David's descendents, a "lamp in Jerusalem, the city where I chose to put my Name" (11:32, 36; cf. 2 Sa. 7:13, 16). God had said to David that he would establish his kingdom "forever", and the temporal punishments to Solomon would not abrogate that promise. Later, of course, this eternal kingdom will necessarily become messianic, a hope for the future, when the exile brought David's political dynasty to an end. Still, the humbling of David's descendants would not be "forever" (11:39b).

The puzzling mathematics of the twelve pieces of robe symbolizing the twelve tribes of Israel alongside the description of "ten tribes" and "one tribe" has been much discussed by commentators (11:30-32, 35-36; cf. 11:13). Here, I have followed the line of thinking that the "one tribe" refers to Benjamin, while assuming Judah to already belong to the south. (Indeed, the LXX reads "two tribes" in 11:32 and 36, while Josephus says "one tribe with that which is next to it".)<sup>69</sup> There is also the problem of accounting for the Simeon clan, which originally was "within the territory of Judah" (cf. Jos. 19:1, 9b). Ostensibly, this would leave three tribes in the south, Judah, Benjamin and Simeon. Some have conjectured that Simeon, like Dan, may have migrated to the north at some point, but if so there is no biblical record of it. Others suggest that by this time Simeon had been absorbed into Judah and that the northern ten tribes were accounted for by treating the two half-tribes of Manasseh as separate or else counting the Levi tribe, which were allotted cities but no territorial inheritance. In any case, the number twelve was sacrosanct as symbolizing the totality of the clans, and this number is preserved in the twelve remnants of Ahijah's robe.

The Kings compiler notes that Solomon attempted to have Jeroboam executed, and the corvee leader fled to Sheshonq I in Egypt for asylum until Solomon's death (11:40). Presumably, Jeroboam's rebellion and flight happened after Ahijah had confronted him (cf. 11:26), though the details are not given. Still, there had long been a north-south mentality that dated back to the kingships of Saul and David (cf. 2 Sa. 2:4, 8-11; 20:1-2), so it is not unlikely that Jeroboam, taking advantage of his position as the corvee leader, had spread the seeds of dissatisfaction among northern members of the forced labor crews. Jeroboam would remain under the protection of Sheshonq until

---

<sup>69</sup> *Antiquities* 8.7.7

Solomon's death.

After a forty year reign, Solomon died (11:42). Additional records were preserved in the Annals of Solomon, which presumably became resource material for 1 Kings (11:41). At his death, his son Rehoboam ascended to the throne (11:43). Solomon's reign had been a strange mixture of the sublime and the disappointing. His kingship features both the early high water mark for the sons of David as well as the beginning of the decline that ultimately would lead to exile.

## **The Division of the Kingdom (1 Kings 12-16)**

### **Rehoboam's Folly (12:1-19)**

Upon the death of his father, Rehoboam journeyed northward to Shechem for his confirmation as the new king over a united Israel (12:1). Presumably, based on 11:43, he already had been accepted in Jerusalem. It should be remembered that the idea of dynastic succession still was not as firmly fixed for Israel as may have been typical elsewhere, and the fact that the northern tribes chose Shechem, the ancient holy site in Ephraim where the tribes had renewed the covenant under Joshua (cf. Jos. 24), suggests that a coronation in Jerusalem did not necessarily carry instant recognition in the north. Rehoboam could hardly do other than make the trip! Jeroboam, the former corvee leader who had rebelled against Solomon and fled to Egypt for asylum (cf. 11:26, 40), heard about Solomon's death. He immediately returned to Israel to attend the acclamation at Shechem, and there he was chosen as the people's representative to ask for a reprieve from Solomon's heavy-handed tax measures and forced labor for Israelite citizens (12:2-4).

Rehoboam took three days for counsel and deliberation before responding to the appeal (12:5). He consulted with the elders who had served with Solomon, who wisely advised him to take the pathway of true public service by granting the requested reprieve (12:6-7). Rehoboam rashly dismissed their counsel as beneath him (12:8a). Instead, he consulted with his own hand-picked advisors, young men who were already his friends from childhood and who shared his arrogant assumptions (12:8b-9). Their advice was to bear down even harder (12:10-11).<sup>70</sup>

---

<sup>70</sup> The literal Hebrew expression "my little one is more thick than my father's loins" has traditionally been understood to refer to his little "finger" or "thumb", following Origen, the Syriac and the Vulgate, but since the word "finger" is not in the text, the expression may have been more vulgar. The threat that the whips of

When at the end of three days Rehoboam publicly repeated these threats to the northern tribes, they abruptly seceded (12:12-17). In rejecting Rehoboam, they implicitly rejected David's family, Judah's preeminence, Solomon's temple, the Davidic covenant, and Jerusalem as the capital. The compiler of the Kings material offers the editorial comment that this outcome was "from Yahweh", a direct fulfillment of the Ahijah prophecy to Jeroboam. When Rehoboam sent out his newest forced labor overseer to placate them (possibly by urging that their temporary conscription to forced labor was not really the same as slavery), they stoned him!<sup>71</sup> Rehoboam fled the scene and escaped to Jerusalem (12:18). Hence, while Rehoboam still retained the loyalty of Judah, who initially had accepted him as king in Jerusalem (cf. 11:43), the northern clans remained adamant in their secession (12:19).

### **Two Kingdoms (12:20-24)**

The northern clans took immediate steps to instate Jeroboam as their northern king. They knew him, since he had been their corvee master earlier under Solomon, though there is a great irony in that while refusing the forced labor imposed by Rehoboam they resorted to a leader who had been an instrument of that very forced labor (12:20).

Rehoboam, for his part, could see clearly the dire implications of the secession. He immediately mustered a large army from the tribes of Judah and Benjamin to maintain the union by force (12:21). However, he was confronted by the prophet Shemaiah,<sup>72</sup> who bluntly told him that Yahweh's word was to withdraw (12:22-24). Rehoboam complied, but the later reference to continual border war (cf. 14:30), suggests that he did so sullenly.

### **The Alternative Worship Centers at Bethel and Dan (12:25-33)**

Apparently, the initial capital of the north was Shechem (12:25). Though not particularly defensible, since it lay on a rise at the bottom of a level valley, it was fortified by Jeroboam, who probably recognized its strategic weakness. However, he also built a retreat at Peniel (Peniel), east of

---

slavery were to be replaced by scorpions may have been a euphemistic reference to a many-tailed whip (1 Mac. 6:51). Such language was no more than reckless insolence.

<sup>71</sup> Some commentators suggest that Adoram was not sent out to placate the crowd, but to collect taxes, and if so, then Rehoboam surely was adding insult to injury, cf. R. Patterson and H. Austel, "1, 2 Kings," *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988) 4.115.

<sup>72</sup> Presumably, this is the same Shemaiah who, along with Iddo the Seer, compiled a prophetic record of Rehoboam's kingship (cf. 2 Chr. 12:15).

the Jordan, where he could escape if necessary (12:25). Shechem was the site of the major east-west pass cutting through the north-south mountains that formed the backbone of central Israel. The two immediate mountains, Ebal and Gerizim, were the site where many years earlier the tribes had confessed the blessings and curses of the covenant as stipulated by Moses (Dt. 11:26-30) and rehearsed by Joshua (Jos. 8:30-35). Of more immediate concern to Jeroboam, however, was the substantial risk of allowing the northern tribes to maintain their religious affiliation with the south (12:26-27). He feared that religious loyalties might eventually win out over political ones, and to offset this perceived threat, Jeroboam built new northern and southern worship centers at Dan and Bethel, each with a golden calf as the primary idol (12:28-30; cf. Ho. 8:5; 10:5; 13:2).<sup>73</sup> It may be remembered that Solomon had used the iconography of bulls in the temple (cf. 7:25, 29, 44), and these northern golden calves followed in kind. The implicit danger, of course, was that bulls and/or calves were part of the traditional Canaanite iconography as the transport of the gods. Ba'al, for instance, was often depicted as standing on the back of a bull or a calf. Even images of bulls or calves without a figure on them were assumed to be the pedestal of the invisible deity who rode them.<sup>74</sup> Even as far back as the wilderness sojourn, the Israelites had constructed a bull calf while Moses was on the mountain (cf. Ex. 32:1-6). Hence, small wonder that the compiler of the Kings material bluntly indicated that "this thing became a sin"! That Dan had been a cultic site for Canaanites and Israelites long before the time of Jeroboam only served to strengthen the link between the worship conducted there and the paganism of the past (cf. Jg. 18:30-31).

To support the new worship shrines, Jeroboam reinstated the worship at the ancient high places that had preceded Solomon's temple (12:31a; cf. 3:2) and reorganized the northern priesthood and liturgical calendar (12:31b-32a).

---

<sup>73</sup> While excavations at Bethel suggest that it escaped any significant invasion during the border wars between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, no remnants of Jeroboam's cultic center have yet been discovered. Under the direction of archaeologist Avraham Biran, however, Dan has produced a considerable array of artifacts that relate to its elevation as the cultic site in the north. These include the nearly square *bamah* (high place), which was about 60' x 62', a horned altar, iron incense shovels, a jar containing ashes, a bronze and silver scepter head, several seven-wicked oil lamps, a number of sacred standing stones (*massebot*), two incense altars, a bowl full of animal bones, clay figurines, and large jars decorated with depictions of snakes. Though the Bible does not describe the cultic activities at Bethel and Dan, the archaeological remains excavated at Dan suggest that there were sacrifices, incense offerings, votive offerings and libation rituals. The *leshakot* (sacred chambers) were equally sizeable, nearly 60' long. No golden calf was discovered, but then, such an artifact would be expected to have been looted in the intervening centuries because of its value, cf. J. Laughlin, "The Remarkable Discoveries at Tel Dan," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1981), pp. 30-34; H. Shanks, "Avraham Biran: Twenty Years of Digging at Tel Dan," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1987), pp. 18-21; A. Biran, "Tel Dan Scepter Head," *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1989), pp. 29-31; A. Biran, "Sacred Spaces," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1998), pp. 38-45, 70.

<sup>74</sup> O. Keel and C. Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses and Images of God in Ancient Israel* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998), pp. 52, 67, 115, 191-192.

He did not confine his reorganization to the levitical clan nor the calendar as specified in the Torah, but took priests from among non-Levites and changed the high festival to the 8<sup>th</sup> month (normally, the high Festival of Booths was held in the 7<sup>th</sup> month). The sacrifices before the golden calves was rife with potential for wholesale syncretism with the Ba'al cult, and the use of non-Levitical priests who, presumably, were not trained in the Torah,<sup>75</sup> only exacerbated the slide toward paganism (12:32b-33).

### **The Denunciation of the Bethel Shrine (13)**

As had happened with Saul and David, Yahweh's word came to a prophet to correct this waywardness, a "man of God from Judah". Bethel, of course, was near the border between Judah and Israel, and when Jeroboam was at his new shrine (presumably on the high festival in the 8<sup>th</sup> month, since there is a repetition of the phrase "[he went up] on the altar to make offering", cf. 12:33b; 13:1b),<sup>76</sup> this prophet denounced it. He predicted that the altar would be desecrated by a descendent of David named Josiah (13:1-2; cf. 2 Kg. 23:). As a sign to authenticate his message, the prophet predicted that the altar would split (13:3).

Jeroboam, naturally, was incensed at this reproof, but when he signaled for the prophet's arrest, his arm froze in position (13:4). At that moment, the altar split apart, spilling its ashes (13:5).

Now visibly shaken and with his arm still locked in position, Jeroboam pleaded that his arm be restored, which, in fact, happened (13:6). When the king invited the prophet back for a meal and a gift, possibly in an attempt to find a reverse for the curse, the unnamed man of God bluntly refused. A common meal in the ancient Near East would signify acceptance, and Yahweh had told him plainly that he was to participate in no such sign of approval (13:7-9). Hence, to avoid unnecessary attention (or reprisals!) the prophet began his homeward trip by an alternative route (13:10, 17b).

There was, however, another older prophet who lived in Bethel. He was not at the ceremony, but when his sons told him what had happened, he

---

<sup>75</sup> Since widespread literacy would not occur until the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, and since the Levites were specifically charged with a teaching mission, it can be assumed that taking priests from among "all the people" simply means using as priests those who were largely ignorant of the Torah traditions. Again, the slide toward popular Canaanite mythology and practice was virtually assured.

<sup>76</sup> To go "up on the altar", as the Hebrew text indicates, probably refers to the elevated high place Jeroboam had paved, similar to the one excavated at Tel Dan. Interestingly, the excavated high place at Tel Dan was constructed with steps, yet another feature that was a direct Torah violation (cf. Ex. 20:26). Presumably the Bethel shrine was the same.

hurriedly set out to overtake the man of God from Judah (13:11-14). He, too, offered an invitation for refreshment to which the man of God refused (13:15-17). But when the older prophet claimed an angelic visitation to authenticate his invitation, the man of God from Judah was convinced to stay (13:18-19). While at the meal, Yahweh's word came to the older prophet who had lied about the angel, and he spoke an oracle, reprimanding the disobedience of the man of God from Judah and announcing his premature death (13:20-22). It happened just that way: the man of God from Judah, when he set out to continue his journey home, was attacked and killed by a lion (13:23-25). When the older prophet heard about it, he reclaimed the corpse and buried it in Bethel in his own tomb (13:26-30). Many years later, when Josiah would desecrate Jeroboam's altar, the grave of this prophet would remain undisturbed (cf. 2 Kg. 23:16-18). The older prophet himself eventually would be buried beside the man of God from Judah (13:31-32).

This story, of course, raises two pointed questions, neither of which are answered in the biblical text, but both of which hardly can be avoided. Why did the man of God from Judah, who delivered an authentic word from Yahweh, later disobey God, and how was the older prophet, who lied, able to give an authentic word from Yahweh after he had lied? Both questions are probably intended to be linked to the Deuteronomic law of the prophet: if any prophet who is so-gifted speaks outside the oracle that comes from Yahweh, such words should be understood as a test of the hearer's loyal love and faithfulness to Yahweh (Dt. 13:1-5). The people resolutely are not to heed a false word, even if it comes from one who seems to be a true prophet! As Deuteronomy says, "God is testing you to find out whether you love him with all your heart and all your soul." Words from a prophet are not to be accepted without critical evaluation in light of the Torah, and in both the cases of the man of God from Judah and the older prophet, the potential for true and false prophecy, obedience and disobedience, stand side by side. If God can correct a king by a prophet, he can correct a prophet by his word! This, in turn, becomes an implicit warning about the entire leadership of both the north and the south. For both prophets and kings, the potential for both good and evil lie side by side. Jeroboam's kingship was authenticated by a prophetic oracle. David's dynasty, also, was authenticated by a prophetic oracle. Yet, the kings of both nations were liable to the same inconsistencies that characterized these two prophets, and the litmus test, in the end, was who would follow the word of Yahweh. This test was for everyone, prophets, kings and people alike!

The story about the two prophets is immediately followed by the blunt report that Jeroboam—even after the events at the Bethel shrine—did not back

down from his religious misdirection. The compiler reiterates that he continued to appoint priests who were not eligible, continued to perpetuate the high places (even though the temple in Jerusalem was where Yahweh had placed his name), and that this Torah rebellion would end in disaster for Jeroboam's dynasty (3:33-34).

### **The Prophetic Oracle about Jeroboam's Downfall (14:1-18)**

When Jeroboam's son and heir-apparent became ill, he determined to find out if the boy would live. Already, the unnamed prophet from Judah had cast a very negative light on Jeroboam's kingship by denouncing his Bethel shrine. Now, Jeroboam urged his wife to go in disguise and seek an oracle from Ahijah, the prophet who initially had predicted Jeroboam's kingship, as to their son's chances of survival (14:1-4a). Shiloh, the home of Ahijah, was near Jeroboam's new capital in Tirzah in the central hill country of Ephraim.<sup>77</sup>

Though blind, Ahijah was not fooled by this subterfuge, for Yahweh informed him that his visitor was Jeroboam's wife (14:4b-6). The prophet delivered a scorching oracle for Jeroboam, delineating both his privilege in ascension and his responsibility to keep covenant. Jeroboam's flagrant covenant violations spelled his doom (14:7-9). His dynasty would be cut short (cf. 15:28-30), the heir apparent would die, a new dynasty would rise, and the northern kingdom's history would follow a trajectory that would lead to exile (14:10-16). Only the innocent boy, after his death, would receive decent burial honors. All others in the family would succumb to a horrific purge.<sup>78</sup> Just as Samuel once rejected Saul, Ahijah rejected Jeroboam! As predicted, the boy died and was buried with honors (14:17-18).

The Ahijah oracle, like other Deuteronomistic speeches, was programmatic for the northern kingdom. The curses for covenant unfaithfulness would lead to deprivation, reprisals and ultimately exile. Jeroboam's sin in building the alternative worship shrines at Bethel and Dan, which in turn opened the door wide to wholesale syncretism and the Canaanite

---

<sup>77</sup> Though apparently Jeroboam initially fortified Shechem as his capital (cf. 13:25), by the time of this incident he already may have removed the seat of his government to Tirzah, about seven miles to the north (cf. 14:17; 15:21). Shechem was not ideally suited to be a capital, since it lacked an adequate defense, was missing local support, had no broad acceptance by the nation, and was not a burgeoning commercial location. By the time of Baasha, who would assassinate Jeroboam's son, the capital clearly was firmly fixed at Tirzah, but it may have been there earlier (cf. 15:33), cf. H. Brodsky, "Three Capitals in the Hills of Ephraim," *BR* (Feb. 1989), pp. 38-44.

<sup>78</sup> Only the older English versions translate the Hebrew directly in 14:10, i.e., "the one pissing against the wall" (KJV, Wycliffe Bible, Tyndale Bible). Modern versions usually opt for "male" or something comparable.

Ba'al cult, would be perpetuated by every king in the northern kingdom without exception. This, according to the Kings' compiler, was the primary reason behind the eventual exile of the north to Assyria (cf. 2 Kg. 17:7-18).

### **Summary of Jeroboam's Reign and the Issue of Chronology and Dating (14:19-20)**

Now follows the first of a long series of stereotypical summaries for the kings of Israel in the northern nation. The pattern will be as follows:

- a) *In the \_\_\_\_ year of so-and-so, king of Judah, so-and-so, king of Israel, began to reign.*
- b) *Facts about the length of his reign and the location of his capital*
- c) *Negative evaluation, because he "did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh, and walked in the ways of Jeroboam"*
- d) *Source listing for further information about his reign in the royal archives*
- e) *Concluding statement that he died, and so-and-so reigned in his place*

Here, also, begins a chronology of the divided kingdom about which there has been a long-standing discussion. Several data are offered in the Kings record. First, the ascension year of one king is synchronized with the regnal year of the contemporary king of the other kingdom, and *vice versa*. Second, the length of the reign is given. Third, the death of the king and his successor are provided. Sometimes, additional elements also are mentioned, such as, the king's age at succession, his mother's name, and so forth. Fourth, major historical events sometimes also are linked to regnal years of the kings (e.g., 14:25; 2 Kg. 15:19-20; 16:5-9; 17:6; 18:9-11; 23:29). Fifth, various contemporaries from other ancient Near Eastern countries are mentioned in the Kings record, many of which can be located in ancient texts outside the Bible.<sup>79</sup> Finally, extra-biblical texts mention Hebrew kings as well.<sup>80</sup>

---

<sup>79</sup> Such outside figures include Sheshonq I of Egypt (1 Kg. 14:25), Ben-Hadad I of Aram (1 Kg. 15:18), Ethbaal of Sidon (1 Kg. 16:31), Ben-Hadad II of Aram (1 Kg. 20), Mesha of Moab (2 Kg. 3:4), Hazael of Aram (1 Kg. 19:15, 17; 2 Kg. 8:8ff.; 10:32; 12:17-18; 13:22), Ben-Hadad III of Aram (2 Kg. 13:24-25), Rezin of Aram (2 Kg. 15:37; 16:5), Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria (2 Kg. 15:19, 29; 16:7, 10), Shalmaneser V of Assyria (2 Kg. 17:3; 18:9), So of Egypt (2 Kg. 17:4), Sennacherib of Assyria (2 Kg. 18:13), Taharqa of Egypt (2 Kg. 19:9), Merodach-Baladan of Babylon (2 Kg. 20:12; 25:27), Esarhaddon of Assyria (2 Kg. 19:37), Necho II of Egypt (2 Kg. 23:29, 33ff.), and Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon (2 Kg. 24:1).

<sup>80</sup> Records from Shalmaneser III name Ahab and Jehu of Israel. Records of Adad-nirari III name Jehoash of Israel. Tiglath-pileser III names Menahem and Pekah of Israel. Sennacherib names Hezekiah of Judah. Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal name Manasseh of Judah. Nebuchadnezzar II names Jehoiachin of Judah. These various citations will be documented in footnotes accompanying the biblical commentary of these Israelite and Judahite kings.

From this data, scholars have attempted to reconcile all the chronological information into a coherent scheme. This effort, quite frankly, has been plagued with enormous difficulties due to the use of different calendars, diversity in the ancient Near East about calculating regnal years, the practice of co-regencies between a king and his son, and divergent numbers between the Masoretic Text, the LXX and Josephus. The effort to coordinate this biblical data with Egyptian, Assyrian and Babylonian data has only added to the complexity. Some scholars, notably those not committed to the historical integrity of the Bible, have given up on the task of harmonization, either by concluding that the chronology is entirely theoretical and does not rest on reliable tradition, by modifying the biblical data in order to bring it into line with extra-biblical sources or by simply asserting that the biblical records rely on several traditions, some of which are mutually exclusive.<sup>81</sup> Significant progress was made by Edwin Thiele when he demonstrated that there were two systems of counting the first year of a king's reign. The Mesopotamian system began by counting the first full calendar year after the year of ascension (the post-ascension dating system). The Egyptian system counted the year in which the ascension took place as a full year (the antedating system). Hence, two kings crowned on the same day could be reckoned as having begun their reigns a year apart if one reckoning was by the Mesopotamian system and the other by the Egyptian system. Judah seems to have used the postdating system, while Israel used the antedating system but seems to have changed to the postdating system in about 800 BC.

Yet another factor in Thiele's research demonstrated the existence of two different calendars in the ancient Near East. In one, the new year began in the spring; in the other, it began in the fall. Israel seems to have used the former, while Judah used the latter. When a king of Judah's regnal date was written up by a scribe from Judah and coordinated with a regnal date for a king of Israel, the Israelite king's date was computed according to the Judean system, and *vice versa*.

Finally, co-regencies exacerbate the situation. Ascension years are sometimes given, not when the reigning king died, but when the ascending king was elevated to a co-regency before the death of his father—and sometimes such co-regencies were several years long.<sup>82</sup> In the end, a reasonable chronology can be produced, but some issues still remain unresolved. Using the death of Solomon as a fixed point (931 BC), the

---

<sup>81</sup> B. Childs, pp. 295-297.

<sup>82</sup> J. Oswalt, "Chronology of the OT," *ISBE* (1979) 1.681, which summarizes the key factors in the work of E. Thiele, *A Chronology of the Hebrew Kings* (rpt. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977).

following chronologies are representative.<sup>83</sup>

---

### THE UNITED MONARCHY

Saul (*ca.* 1030-1009 BC)

David (*ca.* 1009/1001-971/970 BC)

Solomon (*ca.* 971/970-931/930 BC)

### THE DIVIDED MONARCHY

#### Kingdom of Israel 931/930-722 BC

	BAR	Thiele
*Jerroboam I	931/930-908	930-909
Nadab	908-907	909-908
*Baasha	907-884	908-886
Elah	884-883	886-885
*Zimri	883	885
*Omri	883-872	885-874
Ahab	872-853	874-853
Ahaziah	853-852	853-852
Joram/Jehoram	852-841	852-841
*Jehu	841-818	841-814
Jehoahaz	818-802	814-798
Joash/Jehoash	802-787	798-782
Jerroboam II	787-748	793-753**
Zechariah	748-747	753
*Shallum	747	752
*Menahem	747-738	752-742
Pekahiah	738-737	742-740
*Pekah	737-732	752-732
*Hoshea	732-722	732-722

#### Kingdom of Judah 931/930-586 BC

	BAR	Thiele
Rehoboam	931/930-913	930-913
Abijah/Abijam	913-911	913-910
Asa	911-870	910-869
Jehoshaphat	870-846	872-848**
Joram/Jehoram	846-841	853-841**
Ahaziah	841	841
Athaliah	841-835	841-835
Joash/Jehoash	835-801	835-796
Amaziah	801-783	796-767
Azariah/Uzziah	783-732	792-740**
Jotham	750-735	750-732**
Ahaz	735-727	735-715**
Hezekiah	727-697	715-686
Manasseh	697-642	697-642**
Amon	642-640	642-640
Josiah	640-609	640-609

---

<sup>83</sup> Our knowledge of when Solomon ruled can be ascertained by linking biblical records with known historical events recorded in Egyptian and Assyrian records, such as triumphal reliefs recording the invasion of Sheshonq I and the Annals of Shalmaneser III that directly mention Ahab and Jehu, cf. K. Kitchen, "How We Know When Solomon Ruled," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 2001), pp. 32-37, 58. A detailed accounting of the chronology is beyond the scope of this commentary, and the chronologies listed above are only two among several available, but they offer approximations that would be generally if not fully accepted. The BAR chronology is the one listed in the above cited article by Kenneth Kitchen, and Thiele's chronology appears at the end of his work, cf. E. Thiele, *A Chronology of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), p. 75.

	Shallum/Jehoahaz	609	609
	Eliakim/Jehoiakim	609-598	609-598
* Dynastic Changes	Jehoiachin /Coniah	598-597	598-597
** Co-regencies	Mattaniah/Zedekiah	597-586	597-586

---

### The Reign of Rehoboam (14:21-31)

The stereotypical summaries for the kings in the north will be similar for the kings in the south.

- a) *In the \_\_\_\_ year of so-and-so, king of Israel, so-and-so, king of Judah, began to reign.*
- b) *Facts about his age, length of reign, name, and queen mother*
- c) *Evaluation with reference to his ancestor David*
- d) *Source listing for further information about his reign in the royal archives*
- e) *Concluding statement that he died, and so-and-so reigned in his place*

Rehoboam, the first king of Judah, reigned in Jerusalem as a half Israelite, half-Ammonite (14:21, 31). His mother, Naamah, was presumably one of the foreign wives of Solomon mentioned in 1 Kings 11:1, and the LXX adds that she was the daughter of Ana, son of Naash, king of the Ammonites (12:24 LXX). One might suppose that the son of Solomon would have been more sensitive to the importance of Torah faithfulness than Jeroboam, but, alas, he was not. The arrogance he displayed at his ascension was carried over into his administration, where he<sup>84</sup> led the southern nation into the fertility cult (14:22-24).<sup>85</sup>

In his fifth year, Rehoboam was invaded by the Egyptian Pharaoh

<sup>84</sup> The MT says that “Judah” did evil, whereas the LXX and 2 Chr. 12:14 makes Rehoboam the subject.

<sup>85</sup> The Canaanite fertility cult consisted of the worship of a divine pantheon of gods and goddesses. El, the nominal head, presided over the assembly of divine children, which he, along with his consort Asherah (Asherah), produced. The most important of these gods was Ba’al, celebrated as the lord of the gods and master of rain, storm and fertility. (His title, Ba’al, means “lord” in the Canaanite languages.) He is depicted in Canaanite art as riding upon the back of a bull. His consort sister was the warrior goddess Anath (Astarte or Ashtaroth), famous for sexual passion and sadistic brutality. In Canaanite mythology, Mot, the god of summer drought, killed Ba’al and carried him to the underworld. Anath engaged Mot in a terrific battle, finally killing him, after which she was reunited with her lover, who was enthroned again as lord of the earth. Canaanite worship involved imitative magic, in which the fertility of the land, herds and people was stimulated by sacred prostitution at the high places, thus imitating the reunion of Ba’al and Anath. Hence, Canaanite worship was little more than orgiastic ritual, featuring male and female prostitutes playing the part of the divine lovers. The entire natural sphere was believed to be governed by the vitalities of sex, cf. H. Ringgren, *Religions of the Ancient Near East*, trans. J. Sturdy (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), pp. 124ff.

Sheshonq I (the biblical Shishak). Almost certainly, the compiler of the Kings material intends the reader to understand this invasion as a Deuteronomic judgment (cf. Dt. 28:25, 49-52). Sheshonq's threat compelled Rehoboam to pay an indemnity at a ferocious price to preserve his capital, including temple artifacts and the gold shields from the armory (14:25-28; cf. 10:16-17).<sup>86</sup> This invasion generally can be fixed in year 925 BC, and it is corroborated by Sheshonq's triumphal relief at Karnak.<sup>87</sup> Though Sheshonq died within a year or so of this conquest, his son, Osorkon I, soon bequeathed to the gods and goddesses of Egypt an incredibly large amount of gold and silver (at least 383 tons of precious metal). It is likely that this gift largely was comprised of what had been stripped from Jerusalem by his father, Sheshonq I.<sup>88</sup>

A final notation indicates that hostilities continued between Rehoboam and Jeroboam for the balance of their respective reigns (14:29).

### **The Early Kings of Judah (15:1-24)**

At the death of Rehoboam, his son Abijam<sup>89</sup> ascended to the throne but reigned only three years (15:1-2). Like his father, Abijam strayed from careful Torah observance. Hence, his privilege as the king was the result of his grandfather David's faithfulness more than his own (15:3-5). He continued the hostilities with the northern kingdom (15:6), hostilities that were recorded in more detail in the Chronicler's record (2 Chr. 14:3-20). When he died after a short reign, his son Asa succeeded him (15:7-8).

Asa had a long and stable reign of some 41 years, and in contrast to his father, he received a partial commendation and was compared favorably with his great-grandfather David (15:9-11). He expelled the male fertility prostitutes and even deposed his grandmother as the queen mother because of her idolatry in maintaining a shrine to the Canaanite goddess Asherah (15:12-13).<sup>90</sup> Still, his commendation was not complete, since he did not remove the *bamot*, though he himself remained a worshipper of Yahweh (15:14). Other brief details of his reign include his installation of votive gifts in the temple (15:15) and continued hostilities with the northern kingdom (15:16). When the

---

<sup>86</sup> Though some, following an Ethiopian tradition, have suggested that the ark of the covenant may have disappeared from Jerusalem at this time, the Chronicles record (2 Chr. 35:3) and the oracles of Jeremiah (Je. 3:16) seem to discourage this theory.

<sup>87</sup> K. Kitchen, "Shishak's Military Campaign in Israel Confirmed," *BAR* (May/June 1989), pp. 32-33.

<sup>88</sup> K. Kitchen, "Where Did Solomon's Gold Go?" *BAR* (May/June 1989), p. 30.

<sup>89</sup> In the Chronicles record, his name is Abijah; in the Kings record, it is Abijam.

<sup>90</sup> Asherah is mentioned at least 40 times in the Hebrew Bible, usually in three different forms: 1) as an image, probably a statue or figurine representing the goddess, 2) as a green tree, and 3) as a tree trunk or pole, symbols of the goddess. As the goddess of love, Asherah's image usually was depicted as naked, cf. R. Hestrin, "Understanding Asherah," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1991), pp. 50-59.

northern kingdom fortified Ramah, a scant eight miles from Jerusalem, the threat of an invasion seemed imminent. Asa retaliated by convincing Aram, on Israel's far northern border, to enter an alliance with Judah, and he bought this treaty with a huge gift of gold from the temple treasury (15:17-19). Ben-Hadad of Aram immediately invaded Israel's northern border towns in Galilee, which in turn forced the Israelites to withdraw from Ramah in order to defend and protect the capital (15:20-21). This, in turn, enabled Asa to dismantle the threatening fortifications at Ramah, and he used the materials to build two other border outposts even farther to the north at Geba and Mizpah (15:22). That Asa summoned "all Judah" denotes how much an emergency he considered this project. Geba controlled the main route to Jerusalem from the north, and a new fortress at Mizpah, to the northeast of Ramah, meant that Asa's northern border was now extended, providing a better buffer to any encroachments by Israel.

Near the end of his lengthy reign, Asa contracted a disease in his feet, possibly gangrene or a vascular disease (15:23). Upon his death, Jehoshaphat ascended to the throne (15:24).<sup>91</sup>

### **The Early Kings of Israel (15:25—16:34)**

While the southern kingdom saw two kings between the death of Rehoboam and the first quarter of the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC, Israel in the north saw no less than five during the same period. The first was Jeroboam's son, Nadab, but unlike Asa in the south, whose reign lasted 41 years, Nadab's tenure ended abruptly in an assassination. No details of his reign are available other than that he continued the policies of his father (15:25-26). In fact, since the northern kingdom used the antedating system of reckoning regnal years, Nadab's tenure, which is listed as two years, may have been considerably less, perhaps only a few months.<sup>92</sup>

Baasha apparently took advantage of a war effort on the Philistine-Israelite border to get rid of Nadab,<sup>93</sup> possibly using a skirmish to cover the

<sup>91</sup> It may be observed that since the reigns in Judah and the reigns in Israel usually overlap, the account of one reign often extends chronologically beyond the ascension of a king in the other kingdom. The compiler of the material completes the story of one king before backtracking to pick up the story of the other. Essentially, then, he offers the stories in the order in which each king came to the throne, regardless of whether the king was in Judah or in Israel. The final effect is that this is a history of kings more than of kingdoms, cf. J. Walsh, *1 Kings [Berith Olam]* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996), p. 207.

<sup>92</sup> So, Jones, 1.289.

<sup>93</sup> After the time of David, the Philistine military edge was broken, but they did not vanish from southwestern Palestine. In addition to references such as this one in the Bible, Philistines also appear in Assyrian Annals (900-600 BC), and there is literary and numismatic evidence that their descendants continued right up into the Roman and Byzantine eras. An administrative tablet from Babylon (early 6<sup>th</sup>

assassination, and when he assumed power, he wiped out Jeroboam's entire family, just as Ahijah the prophet had predicted (15:27-30; cf. 14:10-11). Of course, as we already have seen, the border hostilities between Israel and Judah continued (15:31-32; cf. 15:16ff.). Still, Baasha did not reverse the policies of Jeroboam but continued in his predecessors' pagan trends (15:33-34). The northern capital now was clearly at Tirzah, though it probably had been moved there earlier (see footnote #77).

Just as Ahijah had condemned Jeroboam, so now another prophet, Jehu ben Hanani, condemned Baasha (16:1). The language of condemnation was nearly the same as before (16:2-4, 7; cf. 14:7, 10-11).<sup>94</sup> When Baasha died, his son Elah succeeded him, but only briefly (16:5-6).<sup>95</sup> He, too, fell to an assassin who was a commander of his chariot corps (16:8). Zimri killed Elah while the king was in a drunken stupor (16:9-10), and like Baasha had done to the family of Jeroboam, Zimri now exterminated all Baasha's remaining family, again fulfilling the prophetic word of Jehu ben Hanani (16:11-14; cf. 16:2-4, 7). This assassination, however, was unpopular. At the time, the Israelite army again was engaged at the Philistine border, and when the news from the capital reached them, they peremptorily acclaimed Omri, the commander of the army, as king (16:15-16). Withdrawing the army from the field, Omri marched his soldiers promptly back to Tirzah, where Zimri fled to the citadel, fired it, and burned himself to death (16:17-20). His reign lasted only a week—but it was long enough to get a full condemnation, because he had not reversed the sins of Jeroboam!

Omri now became the first northern king with any semblance of popular support since Jeroboam, and he would be the first king to father a dynasty that lasted more than two years beyond his own death. In fact, the narratives about Omri and his dynasty will occupy the next 17 chapters of 1 and 2 Kings. His ascension was not without some opposition, however, and another claimant, Tibni ben Ginath, also had a support base. However, Tibni's death (one wonders how?) ended that bid, and Omri emerged as the new king after a four year struggle (16:21-22).<sup>96</sup>

---

century BC) names Ashdod, Gaza and Ashkelon as Philistine cities, and Herodotus (5<sup>th</sup> century BC) also mentions Ashdod, cf. R. Stieglitz, "Philistines After David," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1982), p. 33.

<sup>94</sup> Indeed, some of this language of condemnation seems rhetorical, such as, being eaten by dogs and birds (14:11; 16:4; 21:19, 23-24; 22:38; 2 Kg. 9:10, 36). At the very least, such language presupposes that the corpses would be unburied, unhonored and left exposed. Of course, in the cases of Ahab and Jezebel, the language would be fulfilled quite literally.

<sup>95</sup> Like Nadab, his reign is given as two years, but also like Nadab, because of antedating the regnal years, his actual tenure may have been only a few months.

<sup>96</sup> Whether or not this struggle was outright civil war is unclear, but Omri's original acclamation as king in the army camp was in Asa's 27<sup>th</sup> regnal year (16:15), while his full recognition as king of all the northern tribes only began in Asa's 31<sup>st</sup> regnal year (16:23).

Omri was given the distinction of accelerating evil—he sinned more than all those before him (16:25-26). This same assessment was first made about Jeroboam (14:9), and later, it will be made about Omri’s son, Ahab (16:30, 33). It marks off Jeroboam, Omri and Ahab as the worst of a bad lot. No details are given of Omri’s kingship, other than that he moved the capital from Tirzah to Samaria, now the third capital of the north (16:23-24).<sup>97</sup> However, a later hint suggests that he may have been forced to cede to the king of Aram “streets” in Samaria for merchants to set up their bazaars (cf. 20:34). Also, Omri’s name appears on the famous Moabite stone, which indicates that Moab became an Israelite vassal during Omri’s kingship.<sup>98</sup> However successful he may have been from a cultural or secular viewpoint, the biblical historian had only negative things to say about Omri and his dynasty. When he died, his son Ahab ascended to the throne (16:27-28).

Ahab’s reign began near the end of Asa’s long rule in Judah (16:29). Like his father, he continued not only the policies of Jeroboam and Omri, he married a Phoenician princess<sup>99</sup> and began an aggressive policy to introduce the Ba’al cult into Israelite culture (16:30-33). No doubt, this fascination with the Ba’al cult was to a large degree due to the influence of his wife, whose father was Ethbaal (a Phoenician name meaning “Ba’al Exists”). Jezebel’s own name also was related to Ba’al, since the element *zbl* (= Prince) was one of the divine titles for Ba’al. No longer was Ba’al worship only a tendency arising from the golden calves in Bethel and Dan. Ahab was brazen enough to build a

---

<sup>97</sup> Two major excavations of Samaria have been conducted, 1908-1910 (Harvard University) and 1965-1967 (Jordan Department of Antiquities). The Harvard expedition unearthed the western part of the fortress and the royal residence dating back to the time of Omri, cf. N. Avigad, *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 4.1302. Two very important collections of artifacts also were discovered, both dating later than Omri. One was the Samaritan ostraca, a series of inscriptions on pottery shards (63 now published and 40 illegible) recording the delivery of wine and oil to Samaria. These are especially important for the light they shed on the development of the alphabet and the shapes of individual letters at this early period, cf. I. Kaufman, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East* (New York: Oxford University, 1997), p. 468. The other was the Samaritan ivories, a group of ivory objects comprising the single most important collection of miniature art from the Iron Age in Israel. The fragment of a jar containing the incised name of Pharaoh Osorkon II (914-874 BC) helps date the collection. It consists of ivory reliefs of various kinds, cf. Avigad, 4.1304-1306. One scholar believes she has found the tombs of Omri and Ahab in Samaria, cf. N. Franklin, “Lost Tombs of the Israelite Kings,” *BAR* (Jul/Aug 2007), pp. 26-35, but see Archaeologist David Ussishkin’s rebuttal, cf. “The Disappearance of Two Royal Burials,” *BAR* (Nov/Dec 2007), pp. 68-70.

<sup>98</sup> Discovered in 1868 by a Protestant missionary and now housed in The Louvre in Paris, the Moabite Stone (Stele of Mesha) contains a 35 line inscription, the longest known Iron Age royal inscription from Palestine. With respect to Omri, Mesha, the Moabite king, says, “As for Omri, king of Israel, he humbled Moab many years (lit., days), for Chemosh [the patron deity of Moab] was angry at his land.” Later, Mesha says, “Omri had occupied the land of Medeba, and (Israel) had dwelt there in his time and half the time of his son (Ahab), forty years,” cf. J. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1958), pp. 209-210.

<sup>99</sup> The seal of Jezebel, Ahab’s Phoenician queen, may well have been discovered, cf. M. Korpel, “Fit for a Queen: Jezebel’s Royal Seal,” *BAR* (Mar/Apr 2008), pp. 32-37, 80.

temple to Ba'al in his capital at Samaria, setting up an Asherah and an altar to Ba'al. Such actions earned him the most severe condemnation by the biblical historian. While Ahab doubtless was a great military leader, as later biblical narratives will indicate, he is assessed as the worst king of all because of his Torah violations.<sup>100</sup> During his reign and more than likely under his patronage, Jericho was rebuilt, which had lain unoccupied since the time of Joshua (16:34a).<sup>101</sup> When Joshua destroyed Jericho, the city was cursed (cf. Jos. 6:26). Anyone who undertook to rebuild it would do so at the cost of his firstborn son. Hiel, the Israelite who in Ahab's reign began to rebuild Jericho, did lose his firstborn son as well as another son according to the Kings record (16:34b).<sup>102</sup> Once again, Yahweh's prophetic word was fulfilled!

## The Contest Between Yahweh and Ba'al (1 Kings 17—2 Kings 13)

The next lengthy section in the Kings narrative concerns two prophets, Elijah and Elisha, and the kings during whose reigns their ministry occurred. If in the Hebrew Bible the scroll of the Kings belongs to the Former Prophets, the most prominent of those prophets were surely these two. Further, it is important to understand the unity of this whole section, which details the ideological war between two forms of religion, the faith of Yahweh and the Ba'al cult. Jeroboam had opened the door to Canaanite religion, but during the Omri dynasty, Ba'alism was imported into Israel wholesale under the influence of Jezebel, Ahab's Phoenician wife. The story unfolds in two dramatic series of narratives, the Elijah cycle and the Elisha cycle. Each is composed of four movements.<sup>103</sup>

<sup>100</sup> In addition to biblical references to Ahab's military strength, Assyrian records also indicate that Ahab joined a coalition of states that halted a major Assyrian advance into Syria in 853 BC at the famous Battle of Qarqar on the Orontes River. Shalmaneser III (858-824 BC) faced this allied coalition of a dozen Palestinian kings, and Ahab was one of the leaders. He supplied 2000 chariots (more than any other member of the coalition) and 10,000 infantry. None of this is mentioned in the Bible, but the information is recorded on Shalmaneser's Monolith Inscription, cf. *ANET* (1969), pp. 278-283.

<sup>101</sup> Archaeological evidence indicates that Jericho was destroyed in the Bronze Age, and afterwards, there is a lengthy break in occupation until the Iron Age, cf. K. Kenyon, *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 2.680.

<sup>102</sup> While there is no clear indication as to how the two sons died, the rather ambiguous Hebrew phrase **בְּאֵבִירָם בָּנוּ אֶת־בָּיְתוֹ** (= with Abiram his firstborn he founded it, and with Segub his youngest he set up its gates) leaves open the possibility that they could have died by human sacrifice, cf. Walsh, p. 219.

<sup>103</sup> T. Brodie, *The Crucial Bridge* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2000), pp. 6-27.

### THE ELIJAH CYCLE

- *The drought (1 Kg. 17-18)*
- *The death threats, Jezebel toward Elijah and Aram toward Ahab (1 Kg. 19-20)*
- *The Naboth incident and Ahab's death (1 Kg. 21-22)*
- *Fall and Assumption—Ahaziah and Elijah (2 Kg. 1-2)*

### THE ELISHA CYCLE

- *The death and life of sons: Mesha kills his son, two women save their sons (2 Kg. 3-4)*
- *Israel and Aram (2 Kg. 5-8)*
- *Jehu, the messenger of death (2 Kg. 9-10)*
- *Restoration (2 Kg. 11-13)*

In these prophetic cycles, the collision of the two religions results in a stark contrast. The Canaanite religion is a religion of death. The faith of Yahweh is a religion of life. Despite its claims, the gods of Canaanite religion do not control the elements of nature. Yahweh is supreme over all. At the same time, Yahweh exerts his sovereignty over the world in more than one way, sometimes in outright miracles and sometimes in historical movements. Either way, as the very name of Elijah implies, Yahweh is the true God!

## The Elijah Cycle (1 Kings 17—2 Kings 2)

### The Drought (17-18)

Elijah functions as the paradigm *par excellence* of a prophet with an oracle from heaven.<sup>104</sup> There is no information about his family, youth or age.<sup>105</sup> He arrives on the scene without introduction, empowered solely by Yahweh's word (17:1).<sup>106</sup> He is unrestricted by time and space, appearing and disappearing like a wisp of wind (18:12), finally ascending into heaven in a blaze of fire (2 Kg. 2). Some of his most significant actions take place on

<sup>104</sup> His name means "Yah[weh] is my God!"

<sup>105</sup> Even the Hebrew designation "Tishbite" is more ambiguous than it seems in most English translations, since it is unclear whether this refers to a geographical area or a class of people (see NIV footnote "settlers").

<sup>106</sup> The construction **אֲנִי עֹמֵד לְפָנָיו** (= before whom I stand) is used here and later (cf. 18:15), and it anticipates Jeremiah's later statement that all true prophets "stand" in the council of Yahweh (Je. 23:18, 22).

mountains: Carmel (18:19), Horeb (19:8) and an unnamed mountain (2 Kg. 1:9ff.). His career serves as a foil for the paganism of Ahab and Jezebel, who emerge not merely as evil, but as killers (18:4, 14; 19:2; 21:8-10).

Elijah's head-to-head confrontation with Ahab, in which he announced there would be no rain except at his word, was a full frontal attack upon the Ba'al cult. Jezebel's Ba'al was claimed as the lord of storm and rain, his title itself meaning "lord" (which obviously set him in opposition to Yahweh, who also is "the Lord") and his proper name Hadad meaning "thunderer". Well known from Ugaritic texts, he is depicted primarily as the great storm god upon which the fertility of the land depended. In the Canaanite Ba'al myths, he is depicted as wielding two clubs, one symbolizing lightning and the other thunder, and in a well-known stele from Ugarit, he is carved in bas-relief with a lance of stylized lightning. One of his most frequent descriptions in Ugaritic texts is "cloud-rider".<sup>107</sup> Hence, for Elijah to abruptly inform Ahab that his wife's favorite deity would be impotent for three years was nothing less than all-out ideological warfare (17:1)!<sup>108</sup> The fundamental question was, "Who held the power of the skies? Who was *really* God?" Drought, of course, was a clear feature of the Deuteronomic curse for covenant violation (cf. Dt. 28:17-18, 22-24).

With the coming drought, Elijah was instructed by Yahweh to hide and sustain himself at the Wadi-Kerith (= Cut-off Creek) in the Transjordan, where he would be fed by crows, much like the ancient Israelites who were miraculously fed in their desert sojourn. As unclean fowls (cf. Lv. 11:15; Dt. 14:14), crows were hardly the preferred carrier of food, but nonetheless Elijah survived through their assistance until the Wadi-Kerith went dry (17:2-7).

With the wadi dry, Elijah had little choice but to relocate his hiding place. At Yahweh's word, he went to Phoenicia, where ironically he was sustained by a widow in Zarephath, the very homeland of Jezebel and the Ba'al cult (17:8-9; cf. 16:31). That Phoenicia, also, was suffering from famine underscores that Yahweh was not provincial—he controlled rain in Ba'al's homeland, too, not just in Israel.<sup>109</sup> Just as Yahweh preserved his spokesman through the miraculous help of unclean fowl, he now preserved him in the shelter of an unclean nation. The clear suggestion is that Yahweh equally can preserve his own people in an unclean nation, for Israel had now become

<sup>107</sup> J. Day, *ABD* (1992) 1.545.

<sup>108</sup> Elijah's oath formula, "As Yahweh lives", is a standard form of oath-taking, cf. T. Lambdin, *Introduction to Biblical Hebrew* (New York: Scribners, 1971), p. 172. It meant that a curse was invoked if the truth were not spoken.

<sup>109</sup> Josephus indicates that Menander of Ephesus knew of such a drought and mentioned it in his history of Ethbaal, cf. *Antiquities* 8.13.2.

unclean because of its passion for the Ba'al cult (cf. 19:18). At the same time, while there was wholesale paganism spreading throughout Israel, at least one godly non-Israelite lived in Phoenicia, a point that centuries later would be recalled by Jesus of Nazareth (cf. Lk. 4:25-26). Elijah's stay at Zarephath was accompanied by a wonderful miracle in which the supplies of the widow were not depleted, even with the extra mouth to feed (17:10-16). While Elijah stayed there, yet a second miracle was performed for the woman, this time the resuscitation of her son who had died of an illness (17:17-24).<sup>110</sup>

The three year drought came to its climax when Yahweh's word sent Elijah back to confront Ahab via his palace administrator, Obadiah (18:1-3). During the drought, Jezebel had begun to wreak her vengeance upon Elijah vicariously by attempting to exterminate any of the prophets loyal to Yahweh (18:4a, 13). Though in service to Ahab, Obadiah was a faithful servant of Yahweh (his name, coincidentally, means "Servant of Yah[weh]"). When Jezebel embarked on her killing spree, Obadiah managed to hide many of the prophets in caves, seeing to their food and water (possibly from Ahab's own palace resources). Now, he had been sent by Ahab to scout out water sources for the royal horses and mule, which in turn confirms Ahab's continued covenant violation of building a chariot corps (18:4b-6; cf. Dt. 17:16).<sup>111</sup> While on this mission, Elijah suddenly appeared without warning to confront Obadiah, urging him to communicate to Ahab that Yahweh's spokesman was now back (18:7-8). Obadiah was less than eager, especially since Elijah's comings and goings were so elusive: Ahab had been searching for him high and low, both at home and in neighboring countries without success. If Elijah were not immediately available, Obadiah's own life would be forfeit to this killer (18:9-14)! Only on Elijah's oath in the name of Yahweh Tsabaoth was Obadiah content to carry the summons to Ahab (18:15).

At Elijah's summons, the king greeted him as the "troubler of Israel", which itself was an irony that Elijah was quick to point out. It was not Yahweh's prophet who was the troubler—it was Ahab and Jezebel who had imported the Ba'al cult (18:16-18)! Now they would see who was truly God,

---

<sup>110</sup> Elijah's action of stretching himself upon the corpse of the boy is nearly identical to Elisha's later action (cf. 2 Kg. 4:34), not to mention St. Paul's (Ac. 20:10). Historical-critical scholars are inclined to take this action as a demonstration of magic, but such a construction is completely unnecessary.

<sup>111</sup> Under Ahab, there was a public building boom with new construction at sites like Samaria, Dan and Hazor. At Megiddo, archaeologists discovered remains of structures that most believe to be stables of some 450 stalls, since they also feature stone troughs, tethering holes in stone pillars and halls and courtyards that seem consistent with stables (this identification has been contested by some), cf. Y. Shiloh, "Megiddo," *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993) 3.1020-1021. Though initially attributed to Solomon, these stables in Stratum IVA are now generally believed to date to Omri and Ahab, including the 19-stall stable at Hazor, cf. J. Holladay, Jr., *ABD* (1992) 6.180-181.

for Elijah summoned everyone—people, Ba'al devotees<sup>112</sup> and the king himself—to Mt. Carmel (18:19-20). Mt. Carmel was strategically chosen, since it was on the border of Israel and Phoenicia. Ba'al himself could hardly have chosen a better venue for a divine duel, since his devotees would be allowed to defend his claim on his own ground! That Elijah chose this mountain was nothing less than an “in your face” gauntlet dropped before Jezebel’s deity!

At Carmel, Elijah’s initial challenge was to the people of Israel themselves: “How long will you hobble on two crutches?”<sup>113</sup> The true God was either Yahweh or Ba'al, but it could never be both (18:21)! The audience remained silent while Elijah gave instructions for the preparation of two altars (18:22-24). The challenge to invite the respective deities to light the altar fires was particularly well-chosen, since Ba'al was claimed to be the deity of lightning. If Ba'al was truly God, he should have no problem with lighting his own altar fire, and to this challenge the people consented!

The Ba'al devotees were given the first opportunity, and they prepared their altar and its sacrifice, invoking the name of Ba'al until midday. The terse language is that there was “no voice and no answer” (18:25-26). Elijah then boldly began to mock the prophets of Ba'al. Perhaps their god was somewhat deaf, or perhaps he was mentally preoccupied or on the toilet<sup>114</sup> or traveling or

---

<sup>112</sup> The devotees to Jezebel’s religion are described as prophets of Ba'al and prophets of Asherah (18:19). Pagan prophets are well known in the literature of the ancient Near East from Mari, Emar, Ugarit, Hamath and Deir 'Alla, cf. R. Gordon, ed., *The Place is Too Small for Us: The Israelite Prophets in Recent Scholarship* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1995), pp. 29-73. Like Ba'al, Asherah, the Canaanite goddess, is known from various ancient Near Eastern texts. In fact, prior to the discovery of the texts at Ugarit (Ras Shamra), some scholars even denied that Asherah was a goddess name, while others (wrongly) equated her with Astarte (Ashteroth). Asherah in Canaanite religion was the mother of the gods and the consort of El, cf. *ABD* (1992) 1.483-487. In a syncretistic environment such as the one created by Jezebel, it is not too surprising to find that eventually some Israelites began to see Asherah as the consort of Yahweh himself. In particular, two inscriptions, one from a tomb and the other from a large pithos (storage jar), have the phrase “Yahweh and his Asherah”. The former was excavated near Hebron, the latter at Kuntillet Ajrud, cf. A. Lemaire, “Who or What was Yahweh’s Asherah?” *BAR* (Nov/Dec 1984), pp. 42-51. While these inscriptions are somewhat later than the time of Ahab (8<sup>th</sup> century rather than 9<sup>th</sup> century), still they suggest, as do various other indications more numerous than can be cited here, that between the raw paganism of the Ba'al cult and the pure monotheism of Yahwehism there developed a middle ground of pagan Yahwehism, cf. E. Stern, “Pagan Yahwehism: The Folk Religion of Ancient Israel,” *BAR* (May/June 2001), pp. 20-29. To a large degree, we have Ahab and Jezebel to thank for this mixing of religious thought.

<sup>113</sup> While the intent of this metaphor is clearly aimed at the vacillation between religious loyalties, the actual translation is somewhat varied, depending upon the version. The Hebrew term **עַל שְׁנֵי עֵצִים** derives from the word for tree branch, hence “crutches”. The LXX has the alternative reading “two knees”. The common rendering “two opinions” is a modest dynamic equivalency (so RSV, NRSV, ESV, NIV, NASB, KJV), and it surely captures the intent of the metaphor. The NAB’s “straddle the issue” is a more thorough dynamic equivalency, while the language of “two sides” (ASV) aims at the same thing.

<sup>114</sup> The expression **ל'ש'ע** (often translated as “busy”) was a euphemism for a bowel movement, cf. W. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971),

maybe even sleeping (18:27)! Such ribald jibes could hardly have done anything but goad the Ba'al prophets to more strenuous effort, and they became more and more frenzied, cutting themselves<sup>115</sup> and screaming for Ba'al to respond. Again, there appears the terse language: "No voice, no answerer, no attention" (18:28-29).

Finally, near the end of the day, Elijah addressed the people and prepared his altar. That he "repaired" the altar of Yahweh (as opposed to simply constructing it) speaks of a return to the worship of the one true God (18:30), and it suggests that previously an altar to Yahweh had existed on Mt. Carmel itself. That Elijah took his turn at "the time for the evening oblation" (18:29) links his sacrifice with what would have been happening many miles southward in the Jerusalem temple at the same time. The twelve stones of Elijah's altar clearly represented the unity of the Israelites as God's people, the political differences between the northern and southern kingdoms notwithstanding (18:31; cf. Ex. 24:4; Jos. 4). That he trenched the altar and flooded it with 12 jars of water, again underscoring the unity of the 12 tribes, only added insult to injury (18:32-35). Then, just at the time when in the south the priests would be offering the evening oblation in Solomon's temple, Elijah stepped to the altar he had reconstructed on Mt. Carmel and uttered a simple prayer, a mere 34 words in the Hebrew text. The prayer climaxed with the words, "You, O Yahweh, are God, and you will turn their hearts back" (18:36-37). Suddenly, fire fell out of the sky—probably lightning (since it is Yahweh, not Ba'al, who controls the lightning, cf. Job 1:16)—to light the altar, its wood, and its sacrifice. God's fire burned up the stones, the water and the soil, and when it did, the people fell on their faces, crying "Yahweh, he is God! Yahweh, he is God" (18:38-39)! It is poetic justice that their cries echoed the meaning of Elijah's name, "My God is Yah!"

Following up his advantage, Elijah immediately called for the slaughter of the prophets of Ba'al in accord with the Deuteronomic code (18:40; cf. Dt. 13).<sup>116</sup> To Ahab, Elijah said he should prepare to leave, for there was "a sound of heaviness of rain", in spite of a cloudless sky (18:41). While Ahab had a hurried meal, Elijah climbed to the peak of Carmel and crouched on the

---

p. 350. The Aramaic Targums follow this euphemistic rendering as does Rashi, cf. G. Jones, *1 and 2 Kings [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 2.319.

<sup>115</sup> Self mutilation in pagan devotees is well known. A text from Ugarit, for instance, speaks of ecstasies who "bathe in their own blood", cf. H. Huffmon, "Prophecy (ANE)," *ABD* (1992), 5.477-482.

<sup>116</sup> It seems odd that there is no mention here of the 400 prophets of Asherah, so it is possible that they escaped execution. In any case, while the prophets of Asherah are mentioned early on (18:19), thereafter only the prophets of Ba'al are mentioned (18:22, 25, 40). Edersheim suggests that the Ba'al prophets may have been executed by throwing them over the 1400' precipice to the Kishon River below, cf. A. Edersheim, *Bible History* (rpt. Wilmington, DL: Associated Publishers, n.d.), p. 412.

ground, his head between his knees. Repeatedly sending his servant to scan the sky, Elijah remained face downward until at last his servant reported a small cloud moving toward them from the sea (18:42-44a). At this, Elijah warned Ahab to ride his chariot to Jezreel—a trip of about 17 miles in which he would need to rapidly cross flooding wadis and accumulating mud (18:44b). With the sky growing blacker by the moment, Ahab rode off furiously (18:45). The power of Yahweh came upon Elijah, and gathering his cloak around him, he outran Ahab’s chariot all the way to Jezreel!<sup>117</sup> The drought was now ended. The two most prominent claims of Ba’al—that he controlled the lightning and the rain—were now shattered by the power of Yahweh.

### **The death threats, Jezebel toward Elijah and Aram toward Ahab (1 Kg. 19-20)**

#### *Elijah Flees to Mt. Horeb (19)*

One might have supposed that the news of Elijah thwarting the entire coterie of Ba’al devotees—indeed that he had executed 450 of them—would have intimidated Jezebel into withdrawal, but like lady Macbeth, she was nothing daunted. She immediately sent a death threat to Elijah, reinforcing it with an oath (19:1-2).<sup>118</sup> It is unclear why she notified Elijah of her intention, since this enabled him to escape. Perhaps, as some have suggested, she sought his departure rather than his life, which if true suggests that with the people’s conversion back to Yahweh she may have deemed it unwise to murder him outright. In any case, flee he did—all the way to the south of Judah to Beersheba, where he left his servant, while he himself traveled even farther southward into the desert (19:3-4a). Here, sitting under a desert shrub, he succumbed to despair, praying that God would allow him to die (19:4b). Of course, he did not really want to die. If that had been the case, he could have stayed home, since there was a woman who had sworn to kill him! Eventually falling asleep, he was awakened to be fed by an angel, who cooked bread for him (19:5-6). This happened yet a second time to strengthen him for his trip southward, a 40 day trip to Mt. Horeb (19:7-9).

The significance of the number 40 will become apparent as the narrative

<sup>117</sup> Jezreel appears to have been a winter capital for Ahab (cf. 21:1) in addition to his primary capital in Samaria.

<sup>118</sup> The translational meaning of the most basic Hebrew word for God, Elohim (which is a plural form), is determined by its verb. When used of Yahweh, the verbs are singular. When used of the Canaanite pantheon, the verbs are plural. Here, Jezebel uses the plural verb  $\text{יִשְׁעֲזְרוּ}$  (= may they [the gods] do), hence the plural translation of Elohim as “gods”.

progresses, for it is the first of several elements that recall the account of Moses at Mt. Horeb.

### **Moses**

*Moses was on the mountain for 40 days*  
(Ex. 24:18; 34:28)

*Israel was sustained by God with bread and water* (Ex. 16:4; 17:5-6)

*Mt. Horeb was the “mountain of God”*  
(Ex. 3:1; 4:27; 24:13)

*Moses was sheltered in a cleft of rock on the mountain* (Ex. 33:22)

*Moses stood on a rock*  
(Ex. 33:21)

*Yahweh passed by the mountain*  
(Ex. 33:19)

*There was cloud, earthquake and fire*  
(Ex. 19:16, 18; Dt. 4:11-12; 5:23-26)

*Moses is prevented from seeing God’s face*  
(Ex. 33:20, 22)

### **Elijah**

*Elijah’s trip to the mountain took 40 days*  
(1 Kg. 19:8a)

*Elijah was sustained by God with bread and water* (1 Kg. 19:6-8)

*Mt. Horeb was the “mountain of God”*  
(1 Kg. 19:8b)

*Elijah was sheltered in a cave on the mountain* (1 Kg. 19:9)

*Elijah stood at the mouth of the cave*  
(1 Kg. 9:11a, 13)

*Yahweh passed by the mountain*  
(1 Kg. 19:11a)

*There was wind, earthquake and fire*  
(1 Kg. 19:11b-12a)

*Elijah is prevented from seeing God’s face*  
(1 Kg. 19:13)

Yahweh’s question, “Why are you *here*?” (19:9b), and Elijah’s response about the Israelite rejection of the covenant (19:10) suggest that this entire sequence of parallelisms was intended to underscore the renewal of covenant faith. Twice, the Hebrew text has contained the word **אֵשׁ** (= there, cf. 19:9), speaking of the cave on Mt. Horeb, and now Yahweh asked the prophet why he is **הֵרָא** (= here). He has fled to the mountain where the covenant was first established, the very roots of his faith. Was that covenant still in effect? Would Jezebel succeed in her mad efforts to expunge the faith of Yahweh? Elijah, for his part, complained that he alone was left (19:10b; 18:22), which, of course, was not strictly true (cf. 18:4; 19:18). Hence, the reenactment of what had once happened to Moses on this same mountain now confirmed to Elijah that the covenant was still firmly in place. However, there also was a difference. The theophany of Yahweh that appeared to Moses *was* in the cloud, earthquake and fire (Ex. 19:18; Dt. 4:12; 5:23-24). The theophany that appeared to Elijah *was not* in the wind, earthquake and fire (19:11b-12a). Rather, instead of the divine presence being manifested in the pyrotechnics, it came as “a sound of sheer silence” (19:12b NRSV).

דָּקָה	דְּמָמָה	קוֹל
fine	silence	a voice
small	stillness	a sound
thin	cessation	

The mystery of the divine presence is profoundly emphasized in this oxymoron. Once more, Yahweh asked his servant, “What are you doing *here*” (19:13b)? Again, Elijah responded as before—the covenant was shattered and he alone remained faithful (19:14). One of the larger interpretative questions in this dialogue concerns what Elijah actually intended by this trip to Horeb. Was he on a pilgrimage to the roots of the covenant faith, intending to renew his mission (the more traditional view), or was he renouncing his calling as a prophet because of discouragement, in effect, succumbing to the overpowering threats of Jezebel (the alternative view)?<sup>119</sup> This latter reading seems to make the most sense of Yahweh’s double question, “What are you doing *here*?” (i.e., why are you not continuing your prophetic ministry?)

Whatever Elijah’s initial intent, Yahweh immediately commissioned his prophet to yet further ministry. He was to go back to the north—all the way to Aram—and anoint Hazael as the new king (19:15). This comes as a surprise, since Aram was a pagan nation. The significance of Aram’s new king would not become apparent until years later, when Hazael would become Yahweh’s instrument to discipline Israel for her unfaithfulness as well as participate in the wars with Israel that would culminate with the extermination of Ahab’s family (cf. 2 Kg. 8:12-15, 28-29; 9:14-15; 10:32-33). Second, Elijah was to anoint Jehu as the new king of Israel (19:16a). This anointing, also, would be a harbinger of judgment upon Ahab’s dynasty, for Jehu eventually would execute Ahab and Jezebel’s son, Joram (cf. 2 Kg. 9:21-26), not to mention Jezebel herself (cf. 2 Kg. 9:30-37). He would kill all their remaining heirs (cf. 2 Kg. 10:1-11, 17). Finally, Elijah was to anoint his own successor, Elisha ben Shaphat (19:16b). Elisha would figure significantly in the rise of both Hazael (cf. 2 Kg. 8:7-13) and Jehu (cf. 2 Kg. 9:1ff.). Between Hazael, Jehu and Elisha, the entire family of Ahab and Jezebel would be wiped out (19:17). Then Yahweh added one final word: in spite of Elijah’s pique that he was the last remaining Israelite faithful to the covenant, Yahweh informed his despondent prophet that there were no less than another 7000 in Israel who

<sup>119</sup> The strength of the first view is that in the end Elijah does, in fact, renew his covenant faith and continues his ministry. The strength of the second view is in the elements of the narrative, where Elijah flees the covenant land, dismisses his servant at Beersheba, and prays for death, finally ending up at Mt. Horeb in the cave, cf. S. DeVries, *1 Kings [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1985), p. 235.

also were faithful (19:18). None of them had bowed to Ba'al or kissed his image (cf. Ho. 13:2b). These faithful Israelites formed the nucleus of God's remnant.<sup>120</sup>

Elijah was obedient. He found Elisha, the son of a wealthy farmer,<sup>121</sup> plowing in the fields of Abel Meholah.<sup>122</sup> The gesture of throwing his garment of hair (cf. 2 Kg. 1:8; 2:8, 13) over Elisha suggests the prophetic vocation that soon would pass from Elijah to his younger protégé. The succeeding interchange served as a test of Elisha's willingness to accept his new calling, and his sacrifice of the animals and the burning of the farm equipment signaled his break with the past and his acceptance of his new vocation—the understudy of the great prophet (19:19-21).

### *The War of Aram and Israel (20)*

When Omri, Ahab's father, sealed an alliance with Ethba'al of Tyre by the marriage of Ahab to Jezebel, the alliance was mutually beneficial. Tyre became an outlet for Israelite agricultural and commercial products, while Tyre gained a counterbalance to the power of Damascus. Thus, Israel's northwestern border was secure. The dominance of Israel over Moab in the Transjordan, as attested in the famous Moabite Stone, secured the eastern border in the Transjordan. In the south, Ahab engineered yet another political marriage, this time between his daughter Athaliah to Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, the king of Judah (2 Kg. 8:18, 26). This secured his southern border. The primary remaining threat was to the northeast, where Damascus was an aggressive force to be faced.<sup>123</sup>

The aggression of Aram came to the fore when Ben-Hadad formed an alliance of northern city-state kings and put Samaria to siege (20:1).<sup>124</sup> This king of Aram had suffered some significant defeats, and no doubt he wished to regain his ascendancy.<sup>125</sup> His arrogant demands to Ahab were met with

<sup>120</sup> G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, trans. D. Stalker (San Francisco, Harper & Row, 1965) 2.21.

<sup>121</sup> The twelve yoke of oxen suggests wealth.

<sup>122</sup> The location of Abel Meholah (19:16) is disputed, but it was probably somewhere in the Jordan rift, either east or west of the river, though more likely on the western side (cf. 1 Kg. 4:12), cf. *ABD* (1992) 1.11.

<sup>123</sup> Bright, pp. 238-239.

<sup>124</sup> In the larger context of the Yahweh-Ba'al contest, Ben-Hadad's name is probably significant, since it means "Son of [the god] Hadad", and Hadad was one of the names for Ba'al. Likely this was a throne name as opposed to a given name. It seems obvious that there was more than one person called Ben-Hadad, and here we are assuming that the Ben-Hadad of 1 Kg. 15:18-19 would be Ben-Hadad I, while the king opposing Ahab would have been Ben-Hadad II. Still later, a third Ben-Hadad shows up (2 Kg. 13:24-25), and possibly a fourth (cf. Je. 49:27). Reconstruction of the history of the Ben-Hadads of Aram has been difficult, but for a summary, see Kitchen, pp. 11-12, 14.

<sup>125</sup> Two inscriptions, one from Zakkur, king of Hamath and Luash (early 8<sup>th</sup> century BC) and the other from Adad-nirari III of Assyria (ca. 810-783 BC), testify to Ben-Hadad's defeats, cf. *ABD* (1992) 1.664.

servility and acquiescence, suggesting that at the time Israel was already in a vassal relationship to Aram. However, when Ben-Hadad demanded to actually search Ahab's palace, such an action would have opened the door to unrestrained plunder, and Ahab, on the advice of his constituency, refused (20:2-9). Such demands were far beyond the protocol for suzerains to their vassals, especially if the vassal had paid his tribute, and Ahab must have realized that this was an intentional provocation. Ben-Hadad swore to decimate Israel, while Ahab prepared to defend his capital (20:10-12). Ahab's proverb (20:11), which may have been a stock saying at the time, indicated that the outcome of the siege was hardly settled as yet!

Two conflicts are now described, both linked with prophetic oracles. In the first, an unnamed prophet approached Ahab to announce that the Israelites would defeat the Arameans (20:13-14). It might seem surprising that the Kings record would predict such a victory for Ahab, since he is described in such negative terms in the preceding chapters. However, two factors must be remembered. Yahweh was still the God of Israel, Ahab notwithstanding, and in the end, despite what might seem to have been his positive qualities, Ahab would continue his violation of the covenant by ignoring the laws of Yahweh war.

In the first conflict, Ahab marshaled his forces for a preemptive strike before Ben-Hadad could organize his invasion. The Arameans largely were taken by surprise, and Ben-Hadad was fortunate to escape on horseback with his life (20:15-21). Ahab's "young officers", probably picked commandos, struck quickly and effectively, and with the Israelite army behind them, they routed Ben-Hadad's army. Immediately, however, the prophet once more confronted Ahab with the message that the war was hardly over (20:22). Though Ben-Hadad would take the winter to reorganize himself, when the rainy season was concluded he would be back (cf. 2 Sa. 11:1). Ben-Hadad's own advisors, as would have been typical in the ancient Near East, understood holy war in theological terms. Victories were the victories of the patron deities, while defeats were defeats of the patron deities. In this case, they concluded that the gods of the Israelites were mountain deities, but if the venue was changed to the plains, the Arameans would be successful. In addition, Ben-Hadad changed his leadership tactics by peremptorily removing the desert city-state kings as the heads of their volunteer forces and replacing them with his own officers (20:23-25). This suggests that in the initial conflict, the presence of the city-state kings were intended more for purposes of intimidation than actual fighting, but now, the army would be made up of picked troops under disciplined regional officers, fully as large as before, but

far better prepared for actual combat.<sup>126</sup>

The second conflict was staged at Aphek, and unlike the first, which was in the mountains of Samaria, this one was probably in a flatlands where chariotry could be used to good advantage (20:26).<sup>127</sup> The Arameans vastly outnumbered the Israelites (20:27), but the prophet reassured Ahab that the decisive factor would not be the size of the army but the active presence of Yahweh (20:27-28). After a week of squaring off against each other, the two armies collided. Once again, the Arameans were defeated, both in hand-to-hand combat as well as by the collapse of a city wall at Aphek (20:29-30a).<sup>128</sup>

At the defeat of his army, Ben-Hadad escaped to an inner room, possible in Aphek's citadel or in a wall casemate (20:30b).<sup>129</sup> At his officers advice, he sent representatives dressed in the rags of subjugation to plead for mercy (20:31-32a).<sup>130</sup> Ahab's response, much like that of King Saul in the period of Samuel, was to spare Ben-Hadad's life (20:32b). Also as with Saul, this mercy was an egregious violation of the *herem* in Yahweh war. In such wars, a ban was imposed so that persons such as Ben-Hadad were irrevocably given over to God by utter destruction (Dt. 7:1-6; Lv. 27:28-29). Saul had been denounced and rejected from kingship for just this violation (cf. 1 Sa. 15:8-26). Here, Ahab's leniency only resulted in reversing the suzerain-vassal relationship so that now Israel was the suzerain and Aram the vassal. The tribute was merely the reversal of commercial markets now to be set up in Damascus by the Israelites, where as before it had been in Samaria that the venders of Damascus had set up their booths (20:33-34). Ahab invited Ben-

<sup>126</sup> J. Gray, *I & II Kings [OTL]*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), p. 427.

<sup>127</sup> The location of Aphek (= fortress) has been problematic, since there seem to be several locations with this same name. However, the intent of the Arameans to engage Israel on the "plains" and the assumption that this would have been somewhere between Israel and Aram makes the plains near the Galilean lake a good possibility, cf. *ABD* (1992) 1.276.

<sup>128</sup> The number given—127,000 casualties—is enormous, especially considering that in the Battle of Qarqar on the Orontes River during the same era (Monolith Inscription of Shalmaneser III), the entire Aramean army consisted of only 1200 chariots, 1200 cavalry, and 20,000 infantry, cf. Pritchard, pp. 190. It seems possible that in the Hebrew vowel-pointing of the biblical text there was a misunderstanding between the word '*eleph*' (= 1000) and '*alluph*' (= chieftain, fully armed soldier). Both have the same consonants, but each have unique vowel points. In a number of instances in the Old Testament (this text being one of them), large numbers appear that, on the face of it, seem to be astronomical. However, if the Hebrew vowel pointing (which was not part of the original text, but was added in about the 9<sup>th</sup> century AD) is adjusted accordingly, then the outcome was 100 Aramean casualties and 27 soldiers crushed by the city wall, cf. J. Wenham, "The Large Numbers of the Old Testament," *Eerdmans Handbook to the Bible*, ed. D. and P. Alexander, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1973), pp. 191-192.

<sup>129</sup> The Hebrew text literally says, "a room within a room".

<sup>130</sup> The coarse material of sackcloth was a sign of calamity and penance, cf. R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Social Institutions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965), 1.59. The sign of ropes around the head is found only here in the Hebrew Bible, and presumably, it signified either the willingness to act as a porter (i.e., subjugation) or extreme poverty, cf. G. Jones, *1 and 2 Kings [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 2.346.

Hadad into his chariot as his equal to confirm this treaty rather than placing his foot upon Ben-Hadad's neck.<sup>131</sup>

In the tradition of Saul and Samuel, Ahab would be confronted by one of God's prophets. This time, the divine spokesman came from one of the "sons of the prophets", a phrase that appears here for the first time but will reappear several times in the Elisha narratives.<sup>132</sup> Intending to use an intentional wound as a symbol, this prophet invited one of his company to strike him. When the man refused, a death sentence was passed upon him, similar to the one in the days of Jeroboam I (20:35-36; cf. 13:20-25). Another of the company was urged to strike him, and when he complied, the prophet disguised himself and waited on the road for Ahab to pass (20:37-38).

When Ahab returned from the Battle of Aphek, the prophet presented himself as a soldier. His wound and disheveled clothing seemed to support his military claim, and Ahab was none the wiser. Any Israelite citizen and soldier had the right to ask the king for a judgment, and the case he presented was a story of guard duty imposed on him to watch a prisoner of war at the cost of his own life.<sup>133</sup> However, preoccupation with other concerns prevented him from a close watch, and the prisoner escaped. Without hesitation, Ahab sentenced him to military execution (20:39-40). Then, suddenly, the prophet stripped off his disguise. He pronounced upon Ahab the death sentence Ahab had just pronounced upon him. The parallel was exact! Ahab's leniency toward Ben-Hadad was in direct disobedience to Yahweh. He had done no differently than a guard allowing a prisoner of war to escape, and the sentence

---

<sup>131</sup> The sign of absolute subjugation was to place the foot on the neck of the enemy king (Annals of Tukulti-Ninurta I, Assyrian bas-reliefs, and Joshua 10:24), cf. R. Boling and G. Wright, *Joshua [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1982), p. 286.

<sup>132</sup> That the "sons of the prophets" were a sort of association or group seems clear enough, but exactly how they functioned is less than clear. Earlier in the Samuel narratives, there is a group called a "band of prophets" (1 Sa. 10:5, 10), and during the drought predicted by Elijah a group of a hundred called "Yahweh's prophets" were hidden by Obadiah (18:4). It usually is assumed that these references are to be linked to the "sons of the prophets" mentioned here and later (cf. 2 Kg. 2:3, 5, 7, 15; 4:1, 38; 5:22; 6:1; 9:1). Amos' statement a century or so later that he was not a "son of a prophet" may mean that he did not belong to such a group (Am. 7:14), though other interpretations of his statement are possible (i.e., that he was not part of the ancient Near Eastern coterie of court prophets). The "sons of the prophets" seem to be a northern phenomenon, since they are not mentioned with respect to the southern nation of Judah. It is not uncommon for historical-critical scholars to assume that such guilds were on a par with the court prophets of the surrounding pagan nations, and the notion that they engaged in ecstasy is frequently urged, though Abraham Heschel warns against the extreme of reducing Israelite prophecy to simply subjective personal phenomena, cf. A. Heschel, *The Prophets* (rpt. Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1999), p. vii. Ringgren, likewise, emphasizes that while there may be points of similarity between Israel's prophets and other prophetic expressions in the ancient Near East, one clear point of distinction must be recognized: ancient Near Eastern prophets who were believed to be possessed by a spirit to give oracles usually could not remember anything about their experience, while the Old Testament prophets of Israel were fully conscious of the message they received, cf. H. Ringgren, "Ecstasy," *ABD* (1992) 2.280.

<sup>133</sup> To avoid execution, the guard could have paid a talent of silver (about 100 times the price of a slave, cf. Ex. 21:32), but with the price exorbitant, it is likely he would have had to sell himself into debt slavery.

was life for life (20:41-42). Ben-Hadad was under the *herem* of Yahweh war, and like Saul before him, his offense was unforgiveable. Full of resentment and rage, Ahab continued on to Samaria (20:43). Jerry Walsh sums it up admirably: God and the king are at odds, and the ensuing narratives will carry this tension to its ultimate and tragic conclusion.<sup>134</sup>

### **The Naboth incident and Ahab's death (1 Kg. 21-22)**

#### *Ahab and Jezebel Murder a Free Israelite and Steal his Land (21)*

Israel's wars with Aram were not yet finished despite the victory over Ben-Hadad, but there was a three year respite (cf. 22:1). During that period, yet another egregious Torah violation by Ahab and Jezebel occurred. To appreciate its significance, the reader must understand that the promised land into which Yahweh brought his people was sacred space. Even though the land was to be theirs forever, their possession of it was on the order of tenants, not owners, for the land ultimately belonged to Yahweh (Lv. 25:23). Each Israelite tribe received the inheritance of land as allotted during the days of Joshua, and these larger tracts were divided up among the families of each tribe (Jos. 13-21). Hence, there were special laws to preserve these land entitlements within the family structure of the original allotments. Especially important were the laws governing the sale of land. If land was within a walled city, it could be sold permanently, though the seller retained the right of redemption for a full year after the sale (Lv. 25:29-30). Land that was outside walled cities, however, was considered "open [farming] country", and it could not be sold permanently. Though it could be leased temporarily on the basis of a land contract, such property reverted to the original family ownership either by redemption or at the Jubilee, that is, every 50 years (Lv. 25:25-28, 31).

Jezebel, the site of Ahab's winter resort (cf. 18:45-46), was also home to Naboth's vineyard, his ancestral inheritance. Naboth's property was adjacent to the palace,<sup>135</sup> and Ahab wanted to annex it to his royal properties. If Jezebel, like Samaria, had been built only recently (cf. 16:24), then the Omride dynasty's state policy of purchasing land from free Israelites in order to construct cities suggests an encroachment into ancient land traditions over two generations. Presumably because the vineyard was not

---

<sup>134</sup> Walsh, p. 313.

<sup>135</sup> This is the earliest usage of the Hebrew term *לְבַיִת הַגָּדוֹל* (= the great house) to refer to a royal palace. Elsewhere, it is used to refer to temples.

within city walls (vineyards usually weren't), Naboth could not conscientiously sell it to Ahab—nor was Ahab interested in a land contract lease until the Jubilee. He wanted the property outright (21:1-2). This is why Naboth responded to Ahab's offer, "Yahweh forbid that I should give you the inheritance of my fathers" (21:3). Perhaps those who sold the hill of Samaria to Omri had been less conscientious, but Naboth must have been one of the 7000 who had not bowed to Ba'al!

When Naboth refused, the narrator in 1 Kings uses the identical expression he used earlier to describe Ahab: the king when home "sullen and angry" (21:4; cf. 20:43).<sup>136</sup> When his Phoenician queen saw him sulking on his couch, because Naboth would not sell his vineyard, she determined to secure it by other means (21:5-7). For Jezebel, coming as she did from a pagan nation where the king was divine, the royal prerogative trumped all other considerations. Her question, "Are you or are you not king in Israel?" (NEB) certainly implies a different concept of kingship than one finds in Deuteronomy (cf. Dt. 17:14ff.). No doubt she found it galling that a commoner like Naboth could thwart the wishes of his king on the basis of some ancient law code like the Torah. Her aggressive promise, "I will get you the vineyard," also suggests that while Ahab was the king, Jezebel would act as the power behind the throne. Contacting some prominent elders and a couple of unnamed scoundrels<sup>137</sup> who were willing to perjure themselves, she arranged<sup>138</sup> for Naboth to be publicly denounced for blasphemy and treason,<sup>139</sup> both capital offenses, at a sacred assembly.<sup>140</sup> Naboth subsequently was stoned to death outside the city (21:8-14) along with his sons in the edge of his own property (2 Kg. 9:25-26). When Naboth's death was reported, Jezebel urged Ahab to annex the vineyard, so he went down to look over his treacherously acquired property (21:15-16).

Who should confront him there but the striking figure of Elijah clothed in his hairy garment (21:17-18; cf. 2 Kg. 1:8). At the word of

<sup>136</sup> While the text does not say to which "home" Ahab went, presumably he went to Samaria. Later, Jezebel would send letters to "the elders and nobles who lived in Naboth's city" (cf. 21:8).

<sup>137</sup> Lit., בְּנֵי־בְלִיַּעַל (= sons of Belial or sons of worthlessness)

<sup>138</sup> The arrangements were made by sealed documents written in Ahab's name and sealed with his signet seal (21:8). While currently we do not have any seal from Ahab himself, we very well may have the seal of Jezebel, which was discovered in the antiquities market in 1964 by Israeli archaeologist Nahman Avigad. More recently (late 2007), this seal has been identified as belonging to Jezebel by scholar Marjo Korpel of the University of Utrecht, see Footnote #99.

<sup>139</sup> In Israelite culture, the idea of cursing God was so heinous that it was not uncommon to use the euphemism "bless God" rather than "curse God" (cf. Job 1:5, 11; 2:5, 9). This same euphemism is used here in the Hebrew text.

<sup>140</sup> Other than that the sacred assembly was a "fast", we do not know any details. Perhaps Jezebel intended to convene the public sacred assembly on the pretense that there was some fault within the community that had caused the drought, cf. Gray, p. 440.

Yahweh, Elijah confronted Ahab with his two crimes: he had murdered and he had forcibly appropriated Naboth's property (21:19). By this time, Ahab and Jezebel had made a mockery of the ten commandments.

1<sup>st</sup> Commandment: they worshiped Ba'al and Asherah (1 Kg. 16:31)

2<sup>nd</sup> Commandment: they erected carved images (1 Kg. 16:32-33)

6<sup>th</sup> Commandment: they murdered Naboth, not to mention many of Yahweh's true prophets (1 Kg. 21:8-14; 18:4)

8<sup>th</sup> Commandment: they stole Naboth's vineyard (1 Kg. 21:15-16)

9<sup>th</sup> Commandment: they arranged for perjury in their plot (1 Kg. 21:10)

10<sup>th</sup> Commandment: they coveted what belonged to their neighbor (1 Kg. 21:1-2)

The judgment Elijah pronounced was grim: Ahab's blood would be licked up by scavenger dogs because of what he had stolen from Naboth (21:19b).<sup>141</sup> Jezebel's fate would be similar (21:23), and so would be the fate of their entire household (21:20-21, 24). The biblical historian offers the chilling summary that the level of Ahab and Jezebel's evil was unparalleled. Ahab had fully turned to the sins of the Amorites, the very people who were marked for divine judgment as far back as the time of Abraham (cf. Ge. 15:16).

Ahab's heart must have turned to stone. Hearing a sentence like this from a man who could pray fire out of the heavens was no laughing matter, and he abruptly humbled himself in sackcloth and ashes (21:27). Because of he did so, Yahweh promised Elijah that he would not bring about this judgment immediately. It would come, however, just as Elijah predicted. Ahab eventually would be wounded in battle, and dogs would lick the blood from his chariot (22:34-38). Ahab's oldest son, Ahaziah, also died according to Elijah's word (2 Kg. 1:16-17). His brother, who succeeded him on the throne, was shot in the back by Jehu, and his corpse was thrown out into the field of Naboth (2 Kg. 9:24-26). Jezebel lasted not much longer, for Jehu rode her down with his chariot, and as Elijah had predicted, the dogs ate her corpse (2 Kg. 9:30-37). Some seventy descendents of Ahab then were slaughtered by decapitation, their heads put in baskets and sent to Jezreel for proof of their death (2 Kg. 10:6-10), and all Ahab's relatives, friends and advisors were executed as well (2 Kg. 10:11, 17).

### *The Death of Ahab (22)*

While the primary internal conflict in the history of the Israelites, both in the united and divided monarchy, has been prophet against king, it must not

---

<sup>141</sup> The language Elijah uses echoes the language of his prophetic predecessors (cf. 14:10-11; 16:1-4).

be missed that a secondary conflict also emerges as prophet against prophet.

**Prophet Against King**

*Samuel against Saul*  
*Nathan against David*  
*Gad against David*  
*Ahijah against Jeroboam I*  
*A prophet from Judah against Jeroboam I*  
*Shemaiah against Rehoboam*  
*Jehu against Baasha*  
*Elijah against Ahab*  
*An unnamed prophet against Ahab*  
*Micaiah against Ahab*

**Prophet Against Prophet**

*Old prophet against the prophet from Judah*  
*Elijah against the Ba'al prophets*  
*Micaiah against Ahab's court prophets*

This secondary conflict will become more and more prominent as the history of the two kingdoms progresses toward eventual exile.<sup>142</sup> The Micaiah narrative, in particular, becomes the paradigm for prophet against prophet, because in this narrative the protagonist stands against a whole coterie of court prophets whose primary *raison d'être* was to support the king. If the deterioration of Israel and Judah was primarily caused by the theological waywardness of their kings, the support of those kings by court prophets were no less a cause for the downfall of the two nations.

The context of the Micaiah narrative is the resumption of hostilities between Israel and Aram after a three year respite (22:1). Conflict began again when Jehoshaphat of Judah (whose son married Ahab's daughter, cf. 2 Kg. 8:18, 26; 2 Chr. 18:1) visited Ahab<sup>143</sup> and heard his complaint that Ramoth-Gilead in the Transjordan was still under Syrian hegemony.<sup>144</sup> Ahab urged the king of Judah to join him in taking it back (22:2-4).<sup>145</sup> On the face of it, such an appeal would have been attractive to Jehoshaphat, since this was a city that had been allotted to Israel as part of the conquest of Canaan. Jehoshaphat, however, was determined not to initiate war without the approval of Yahweh (22:5). Hence, Ahab assembled his court prophets, who, sensing the king's intent, uniformly supported his goal by saying, "Adonai will give it into the king's hand" (22:6). There is a subtle distinction in the Hebrew text that should not be missed. Jehoshaphat has specifically asked for confirmation from

<sup>142</sup> S. DeVries, *Prophet Against Prophet* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978), pp. 141-142.

<sup>143</sup> That Jehoshaphat should "go down" to Ahab, whose kingdom was north of Judah, may sound strange to western minds, but such descriptions are concerned with elevation, not compass directions.

<sup>144</sup> Ramoth-Gilead was a northern city of refuge near the Israelite-Aram border (cf. Jos. 21:38) and one of Solomon's administrative cities (cf. 4:13). While its identification is not certain, it probably lay in the Transjordan between the Yarmuk and Jabbok rivers, cf. *ABD* (1962) 5.621.

<sup>145</sup> Perhaps Ramoth-Gilead was one of the cities Ben-Hadad promised to return to the Israelites (cf. 20:34a), but if he had not yet done so, military reprisals were in order.

Yahweh (the LORD), but Ahab's prophets speak of Adonai (the lord), which may or may not refer to Yahweh.<sup>146</sup> Their ambiguity left Jehoshaphat uneasy, who then specifically asked for a prophet of Yahweh (22:7). Ahab knew of Micaiah ben Imlah, though he complained that Micaiah's oracles always seemed to be negative, and he bluntly confessed, "I hate him" (22:8)! That he did not mention Elijah is hardly surprising, since he surely hated him even more.

While waiting for Micaiah, one of Ahab's court prophets, Zedekiah ben Kenaanah, took forged iron horns and used them in a visible metaphor to underscore the expected triumph (22:9-11). All the court prophets predicted the same, now claiming that Yahweh would give Ramoth-Gilead into Ahab's hands (22:12).<sup>147</sup> It is to the point, however, that they did not use the name Yahweh until after they already had heard that this was the confirmation Jehoshaphat wanted. True to form, they prophesied what they thought the king wanted to hear!

Micaiah, meanwhile, had been located, and on the way he was carefully coached about what he ought to say (22:13-14). Clearly, the royal expectation in Ahab's court was that his prophets support him without equivocation. When Micaiah arrived before Ahab and Jehoshaphat, he at first joined all the others in predicting total victory (22:15). His words notwithstanding, there was something about his manner that did not ring true, and Ahab was quick to observe it. There is a double irony in the situation. Micaiah, a true prophet who has declared that he cannot speak anything other than what Yahweh says (22:14), now offers a false prophecy that should have been more to Ahab's liking, since it was in lockstep with the oracles of the other court prophets. On the other hand, Ahab, who wanted his prophets to support him without question, now urges Micaiah to speak the truth (22:16).

Micaiah's true oracle now was spoken, a shepherding metaphor for looming disaster. If Israel would be as a flock with no shepherd, then Ahab's fate was sealed! Ahab immediately accepted, however ruefully, that this word was Micaiah's true sentiments (22:17-18). Micaiah continued by describing a heavenly court scene with Yahweh and his attendants.<sup>148</sup> This description forms a counterpoint to Ahab and his court, though it emphasizes that the true

---

<sup>146</sup> English translations of the Bible regularly use "LORD" to refer to Yahweh, while "Lord/lord" (Adonai) is more general and can refer to any superior, whether Yahweh, a pagan deity, the king or some other person of prominence.

<sup>147</sup> No details of the court prophets' activity is provided, but it is not unlikely that they were performing some type of ecstatic rituals, such as are known from other ancient Near Eastern texts.

<sup>148</sup> The idea of a heavenly court is not unique to this passage. In both the Torah and the Psalms, the profile of such a council appears (Dt. 33:2; Ps. 89:5-7; 82:1, 6). One also sees it in the Book of Job (1:6-7; 2:1-2), and later, Jeremiah will say that one of the signs of a true prophet was to have "stood in God's council" to hear his words (Je. 23:18, 22; cf. Is. 6:1ff; 2 Co. 12:2-4; Rv. 4:1ff.).

king is Yahweh himself. In attendance were various celestial beings (the Book of Job seems to suggest that Satan himself was called to account there). To them, Yahweh presented the question about how to lure Ahab to his death (22:19-20). Already, both an unnamed prophet as well as Elijah had pronounced a death sentence upon Ahab (cf. 20:42; 21:19). The third campaign against Aram would be the occasion, and the impetus for drawing Ahab into this conflict would be the lying spirit in Ahab's court prophets (22:21-23).<sup>149</sup> Bluntly, Micaiah indicted all Ahab's prophets as liars and false voices! Zedekiah ben Kenaanah, the one who had staged the demonstration with the forged horns, now slapped Micaiah sharply and shot back a sarcastic retort (22:24). Zedekiah, however, would not escape either, and while the details of his demise are not specified, there is little doubt from Micaiah's words that some personal disaster awaited him (22:25; cf. Je. 28:15-17).

Ahab's court scene ended with the order to clap Micaiah in prison with prison rations until the campaign was over. Micaiah, for his part, retorted that if Ahab ever came back, then he was not a true prophet (22:26-28).

Micaiah's oracle notwithstanding, Ahab and Jehoshaphat pressed ahead with their plans for war, though Ahab was willing to "hedge his bets" by entering the battle in disguise (22:29-30).<sup>150</sup> The king of Aram (presumably

---

<sup>149</sup> The presence of a "lying spirit" in Yahweh's heavenly court, not to mention Satan himself as described in the Book of Job (Job 1:6; 2:1) and "gods" who show partiality to the wicked and are therefore doomed (Ps. 82:1-2, 7), raises immediate questions about the nature of Yahweh's council. At the very least, such scenes presuppose that all spiritual entities, good, bad or otherwise, are subject to Yahweh's sovereignty, as also says St. Paul (cf. Col. 1:16; Phil. 2:10). Who are these entities? Some would suggest that they represent the patron deities of the nations, cf. G. Wright, *The Old Testament Against Its Environment* (London: SCM Press, 1950), pp. 32ff. Others conclude that Ahab's prophets were truly under the influence of Yahweh, but because they supported Ahab's policies, they were divinely deceived, cf. C. Seow, "The First and Second Books of Kings," *The New Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1999), 3.164-167. Traditional commentators have interpreted these references in several ways: 1) as merely humans described in the language of deity, especially in Psa. 82:1 (but the other passages describing the heavenly council are much more difficult to reconcile with such an approach); 2) that Micaiah's vision was parabolic or symbolic but did not represent any objective reality, cf. Edersheim, p. 431 along with Patterson and Austel, 4.165; 3) that the lying spirit was none other than Satan himself, who with permission from God deceived Ahab and his prophets, cf. M. Henry, *Matthew Henry's Commentary: Joshua to Esther* (McLean, VA: MacDonald, n.d.), 2.702-703; 4) that the lying spirit was the personified spirit of [false] prophecy as instigated by Satan, cf. C. Keil, *Keil and Delitzsch: the Books of Kings* (rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), pp. 276-277. Historical-critical scholars, as might be supposed, usually interpret the passage as "stages in the development of man's ideas about God", cf. N. Snaith, "I Kings," *The Interpreters Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1954), 3.182 or sometimes worse. J. Mauchline bluntly says that the passage is "evidence for immature theology and an unethical conception of prophecy," cf. *Peake's Commentary on the Bible*, ed. M. Black and H. Rowley (Hong Kong: Nelson, 1962), p. 347. Such negative constructions are hardly acceptable by anyone who takes the Bible seriously as God's Word, despite the difficulty introduced by Micaiah's strange vision.

<sup>150</sup> The reader may find it surprising that Jehoshaphat would continue to support Ahab's war effort after hearing the oracle of Micaiah, but it may well be that Jehoshaphat was in a vassal relationship to Israel at this time. Though there is nothing specific in the biblical text, there are several hints. For instance, Jehoshaphat came to visit Ahab, not the other way around. Jehoshaphat's initial response to Ahab ("like

Ben-Hadad, though he is not named<sup>151</sup>) mustered his chariot corps, instructing them to focus on Ahab, Israel's king (22:31). At first, they mistook Jehoshaphat for Ahab, though they left off pursuit when they discovered he was not (22:32-33). However, though Ahab could not be identified since he was fighting in disguise, he was hardly immune, and a random bowshot pieced the sections of his armor. By the end of the day, Ahab died from his wound, and the Israelite army dispersed (22:34-36). What Elijah and Micaiah had predicted came to pass, even to the dogs licking up the blood of Ahab (22:37-38; cf. 21:19). If the prostitutes who bathed in the pool were cult prostitutes, then there is heightened irony in that Ahab, who promoted the Ba'al cult with vigor, ended his life with his blood being washed in the same pool as them. The concluding summary of Ahab's reign briefly mentions his building projects, many of which have come to light in archaeological excavation (22:39-40).<sup>152</sup> However, such accomplishments were well outside the theological purposes of the compiler of the Kings material.

The summary of Jehoshaphat's reign, which appears in standardized form, offers at least a partial commendation (22:41-43, 46; cf. 2 Chr. 17:1-6; 19:1-3). He succeeded in purging Judah of the male cult prostitutes and generally behaved in accordance with God's laws. However, he was faulted for not eliminating the regional sacred sites where the people performed religious rituals apart from the temple, a clear violation of the Deuteronomic code (cf. Dt. 12). His peaceful relationship with Ahab along with his military campaigns were briefly acknowledged (22:44-45) along with his maritime failure (22:48-50). The mention that there was no Edomite king (22:47) suggests that Edom was under Judah's hegemony during his reign.

The 1 Kings narratives end with a standardized summary of Ahaziah's

---

me, like you; like my people, like your people; like my horses, like your horses", cf. 22:4) is the language of deference if not dependence. Further, Jehoshaphat calls Ahab "the king" (cf. 22:8), which also smacks of deference. That Jehoshaphat allied himself with Ahab by marriage (as opposed to the other way around) may also point toward a vassal relationship (cf. 2 Chr. 18:1). As Walsh has said, none of these hints are determinate in themselves, but their cumulative effect gives the impression of inequality between the two kings, cf. Walsh, p. 344.

<sup>151</sup> While there are some curious features of these war texts, especially the similarity between what is described here and what is described later in connection with Ahab's son, Jehoram (cf. 2 Kg. 8:28-29; 9:14-15), the effort on the part of some historical-critical scholars to rearrange the entire historical context and shift it from the time of Ahab to the time of Jehoram or even Jehoahaz is unnecessary. So-called "doublets" are not necessarily the superimposing of one text on another, and such historical reconstruction presumes far too much.

<sup>152</sup> Ivory with which Ahab decorated his palace was one of the precious commodities in the ancient world, and the amount of ancient ivory recovered from antiquity is remarkable. In the period of the divided kingdom, ivory decorations must have been especially fashionable (cf. Am. 3:15; 6:4; Ps. 45:8). One of the most important ivory finds from the Iron Age comes from Ahab's capital in Samaria, where over 500 ivory fragments were discovered, cf. H. Shanks, "Ancient Ivory: The Story of Wealth, Decadence and Beauty," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1985), pp. 40-53.

short reign in Israel, who continued the paganizing trend of his parents, Ahab and Jezebel (22:51-53).<sup>153</sup>

### **The Transition to 2 Kings**

The fact that 1 and 2 Kings originally were a single scroll is apparent in that the narratives about Elijah and the family of Ahab continue right on from 1 Kings into 2 Kings. The account of Ahaziah, Ahab's son, whose reign is described at the end of 1 Kings, continues in the opening of 2 Kings. Indeed, Walsh has pointed out a chiasmic structure featuring the Omrides that bridges the two books:<sup>154</sup>

*A Civil War: the beginning of the Omride Dynasty (1 Kg. 16:21-34)*

*B Elijah and the Omride Dynasty: Ahab and Ahaziah (1 Kg. 17—2 Kg 2)*

*C Elisha succeeds Elijah (2 Kg. 2)*

*B' Elisha and the Omride Dynasty: Jehoram (2 Kg. 3-8)*

*A' Civil War: the end of the Omride Dynasty (2 Kg. 9-11)*

Especially pronounced is the link between 1 and 2 Kings with respect to the prophetic announcements of doom against the Omride Dynasty. Elijah's grisly denunciation to Ahab and his family (1 Kg. 21:19, 21-24) finds its fulfillment after Elijah's office was passed to Elisha (2 Kg. 9:8-10, 25-26, 35-37; 10:10-11).

### **The Death of Ahaziah, Ahab's Son (2 Kg. 1)**

The suzerainty of Israel over Moab under the Omride Dynasty is attested in the famous Moabite Stone (Stela of Mesha), the central part of which reads:

*...Omri [was] king of Israel, and he oppressed Moab many days, for Kamosh (i.e., patron deity of Moab) was angry with his land. And his son (i.e., Omri's son or descendent) succeeded him, and he too said: 'I will oppress Moab.' In my days, he said so, but I enjoyed his sight and that of his house. And Israel perished utterly forever. And Omri had taken possession of the land of Medeba. And he dwelt in it in his days and the sum of the days of his sons: 40 years; but Kamosh restored it in my days. And I built Baal-*

<sup>153</sup> As with the short reigns of Nadab (1 Kg. 15:25) and Elah (1 Kg. 16:8), Ahaziah's reign may have been less than two years due to the northern system of antedating regnal years (see comments on 1 Kg. 15:25).

<sup>154</sup> Walsh, pp. 371-372.

*meon, and I made a reservoir in it; and I built Qiryaten. And the men of Gad had dwelt in the land of Atarot from of old, and the king of Israel built Atarot for himself; but I fought against the town and took it, and I slew all the people: the town belonged to Kamosh and to Moab. And I brought thence the altar-hearth of his Beloved, and I dragged it before Kamosh in Qirat/my town. And I settled in it the men of Sharon and the men of Maharat. And Kamosh said to me: 'Go! Take Nebo against Israel.' And I went by night and fought against it from break of dawn till noon. And I took it and slew all: 7000 men, boys, women, girls, pregnant women, because I had devoted it to Ashtar-Kamosh. And I took thence the altar hearths of YHWH, and I dragged them before Kamosh. And the King of Israel had built Yahaz, and dwelt therein while he fought against me; but Kamosh drove him out before me, and I took from Moab two hundred men, all the chiefs thereof, and I established them in Yahaz; and I took it to add it to Dibon. I built Qeriho: the wall of the parkland and the wall of the acropolis; and I built its gates, and I built its towers; and I built the king's house; and I made banks for the water reservoir inside the town; and there was no cistern inside the town, in Qeriho, and I said to all the people: 'Make yourself each a cistern in his house'; and I dug ditches for Qeriho with prisoners of Israel.<sup>155</sup>*

Correlating the text of the Moabite Stone with the biblical text presents some challenges, not the least of which is that the only king of Israel mentioned by name is Omri. The rebellion of Moab against Israel probably occurred during the short reign of Ahaziah after Ahab's death, just as 2 Kings states (1:1; cf. 3:5). All the identifiable sites in the inscription are north of the Arnon Gorge in the Transjordan, the traditional allotments of the tribes of Reuben and Gad (and Gad is attested in the Moabite inscription as well). As an interesting side-line, the name Yahweh in the inscription (which is spelled here just as it is in the Hebrew Bible) is the oldest mention of Yahweh yet discovered in any known text or inscription.

The account of Ahaziah's death began with an injury from a fall from an upper storey (1:2a).<sup>156</sup> He sent couriers to enquire about his health at the shrine of Baal-zebul (Lord of the Flies), the Philistine deity popular in Ekron (1:2b). Despite Elijah's ministry, the Baal cult was still alive and well in the royal household, doubtless augmented by the still living Jezebel. Elijah, however, intercepted the king's couriers with a stiff rebuke and the pronouncement that Ahaziah would not recover (1:3-4). Their report back to Ahaziah, as can be imagined, was received with gloom, and while apparently Elijah had not identified himself by name, he was clearly to be recognized by

<sup>155</sup> A. Lemaire, "House of David Restored in Moabite Inscription," *BAR* (May/June 1994), p. 33.

<sup>156</sup> Gray suggests that the palace in Samaria may have contained whole upper storey balconies in the style known from northern Syria, a "house with windows"—balconies closed by screen work admitting air but excluding the strong eastern sunlight, cf. Gray, pp. 462-463.

his appearance (1:5-8).<sup>157</sup> Consequently, Ahaziah ordered a detachment of soldiers to go face Elijah (presumably to arrest him), demanding that he descend from the hill where he was sitting (1:9). In all, three companies of soldiers were sent. The first two were devoured with fire from heaven (1:10-12), but the commander of the third—more cautious than his predecessors—pled for his life and the lives of his men (1:13-14). The *Mal'ak Yahweh*<sup>158</sup> instructed Elijah to go with this officer to the king (1:15).

When Elijah confronted Ahaziah, he repeated his rebuke about the king seeking counsel from Baal-zebub as well as reconfirmed Ahaziah's death sentence, a sentence that soon was fulfilled (1:16-17a). Because Ahaziah had no heir, his brother Jehoram succeeded him as Israel's king (1:17b-18; cf. 3:1).<sup>159</sup>

### **Elijah's Assumption into Heaven (2 Kg. 2:1-18)**

The final episode in Elijah's life was his translation into heaven. That Elijah was to be translated seems to have been commonly expected, at least within the fraternity of prophets, though how they came to know this is not stated. Elisha, Elijah's prophetic understudy since shortly after Elijah's trip to Horeb (cf. 1 Kg. 19:16-17, 19-21), was with his master when they set out toward the transjordan, and he stoutly refused on oath to leave his master's side (2:1-2). In the rather circuitous route from Gilgal (north of Jericho) to Bethel (north of Jerusalem) and back to Jericho (at the Jordan), the two prophets twice were accosted by members of the prophetic guild, who spoke of Elijah's imminent translation (2:3-6). In some sense, this journey would be a reversal of Joshua's entrance into the land, in which the Israelite army had camped at Gilgal from where they attacked their initial targets of Jericho and Ai near Bethel (Jos. 4:19; 6:2; 8:9, 12, 17). The two prophets, who left the cisjordan by crossing the river via a miracle, continued this reverse movement,

<sup>157</sup> Literally, "a man, an owner of hair", which might mean a hairy man or a man with long hair (so LXX), though most English versions understand this to refer to a hairy garment on the basis of later texts (cf. Zec. 13:4; Mt. 3:4).

<sup>158</sup> Both here and in Elijah's confrontation with Ahaziah's messengers to Ekron, the Angel of Yahweh spoke directly to the prophet. In some texts, the functions of the *Mal'ak Yahweh* and Yahweh himself are nearly interchangeable so that one who sees the angel also sees God (cf. Ge. 16:33; Jg. 6:22; 13:22). However, in most cases the angel is a messenger who speaks in the place of Yahweh, cf. E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. A. Heathcote and P. Allcock (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), pp. 75-77.

<sup>159</sup> Since in this general period there now will be two kings with the same name, Jehoram ben Ahab of Israel and Jehoram ben Jehoshaphat of Judah, the convention of calling Israel's king "Joram" and Judah's "Jehoram" has been adopted by some English versions (so NIV, NAB, CEV), though sometimes the same convention is used but the names reversed (so NEB). Other versions simply call the two kings by the same name as appears in the Hebrew text (so RSV, NRSV, KJV, ESV, NASB).

just as Joshua and Israel once crossed Jordan into the land by a miracle (2:7-8; Jos. 3). Bethel and Jericho were critical sites, the former because what once was the “house of God” to Jacob (cf. Ge. 28:16-17) had become the shrine erected by Jeroboam that in turn opened the door to the Ba’al cult (cf. 1 Kg. 12:28—13:3). Jericho, the second site, had been cursed and marked off by Joshua as totally devoted to Yahweh (Jos. 6:17-19, 26), but it had been restored during the Omride Dynasty (1 Kg. 16:34). The purpose of this reverse movement may well symbolize the looming threat of exile. Both Bethel and Jericho had been perverted from their original significance. Just as Israel had entered the land, now Elijah would leave the land, a potent symbol of its eventual abandonment because of covenant unfaithfulness. That Elijah’s final home was in the heavens suggests that for the faithful remnant of Israel, their true home would not be the earthly land of Canaan, which now was defiled by religious apostasy, but what a New Testament writer would call “a heavenly country” (cf. He. 11:10, 16).<sup>160</sup>

After the two men arrived in the Transjordan, Elijah promised Elisha that if he witnessed the translation of his master, he would receive from him the inheritance of the firstborn.<sup>161</sup> Typically, the first-born’s inheritance was understood in terms of arable property, but in this case, Elijah had no property to bequeath. Instead, he would leave with his understudy a “double portion” of his prophetic ministry (2:9-10). Suddenly, a whirlwind with a chariot and horses of fire swooped Elijah into the heavens (2:11). Elisha saw it happen, and though he tore his clothes in consternation at the loss of his master, he returned to the Jordan and tested Elijah’s promise by parting the waters with Elijah’s mantle (2:12-14). When the watching fraternity of prophets saw the miracle, they immediately concluded that Elisha was now functioning in the role of his master (2:15). Though they offered to go look for Elijah, indeed insisted on doing so, no trace could be found (2:16-18).

## **The Elisha Cycle (2 Kings 2:19—13:25)**

---

<sup>160</sup> Indeed, if Elijah in any sense represents the faithful remnant in Israel, his assumption into heaven offers a rationale for his later role as the one who would appear in the eschaton, turning the hearts of Israel toward the way of the Lord before the end (Mal. 4:5-6). His appearance to Jesus at the transfiguration, speaking to Christ about his “exodus” (cf. Lk. 9:30-31), links the episodes of Joshua entering the land, Elijah leaving the land, and Jesus who takes his faithful remnant to a new land not confined to earthly realms.

<sup>161</sup> The firstborn’s inheritance was a “double share” of all the father owned, and it was considered his right (cf. Dt. 21:17). As such an heir, the firstborn continued in the office and role of his father as leader of the family. Here, Elisha will continue in the office of Elijah, the leader of the prophetic fraternity. While an old suggestion has been offered for a more literal fulfillment in Elisha’s life in that he supposedly performed twice as many miracles as Elijah, such a construction is doubtful, cf. Keil, pp. 292-293.

The career of Elisha in the place of Elijah continues without a pause. The legitimacy of his office is immediately confirmed by three immediate miracles. First, of course, he parted the waters of the Jordan River in full view of the other prophets (2:14). Next, he solved a water problem in Jericho by pouring salt from a new bowl into one of the springs, so restoring the water that had caused infertility in the soil (2:19-22).<sup>162</sup> Finally at Bethel, the site of the calf-shrine, some of the boys in the town mocked Elisha for his bald head. Their insolence likely was aimed not only at the prophet but also at Yahweh whom he represented. Elisha pronounced a curse on them for their rudeness, and suddenly two bears emerged from some nearby woods and mauled them (2:23-24).<sup>163</sup> From Bethel, Elisha traveled to Carmel, the site of Elijah's miracle of fire from heaven, and then returned to the northern capital of Samaria (2:25).

### **Jehoram ben Ahab's Campaign Against Mesha of Moab (2 Kg. 3)**

Jehoram's reign in Israel continued the Omride dynastic rule. While like the others in this family he was judged to be evil, he at least removed one relic of Ba'al worship, the stone pillar erected by Ahab (3:1-3).<sup>164</sup> Why he did this is unclear, but one would have to suppose that such an action was not supported by Jezebel, his mother. Still, this was hardly a full scale reformation, and the Bethel cult of Jeroboam continued to thrive.

Mesha of Moab's newly acquired independence from Israel after Ahab's death could hardly be allowed without retaliation. It was customary in suzerain-vassal relationships for any such rebellion to be visited with harsh reprisals. Hence, Jehoram, the new king of Israel, solicited the help of Jehoshaphat of Judah as well as the governor of Edom (3:4-9a).<sup>165</sup> The week-

<sup>162</sup> Ancient Jericho was built around a spring ('Ain es-Sultan), and by the Middle Ages, it came to be known as "Elisha's Fountain", which was located on the east side of the Jericho mound. Yet another spring NW of Jericho ('Ain Duq) is also a possibility for the site of Elisha's miracle, cf. *ABD* (1992) 3.723-724. In modern times, it has been observed that some springs are affected by radio-activity causing sterility, cf. Gray, p. 477, but whether this phenomenon was in any way related to the problem in Elisha's day is unknown.

<sup>163</sup> Bears, one of the carnivore class of wild animals in Canaan, actually survived there until the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, cf. *ABD* (1992) 6.1143.

<sup>164</sup> The *מַצֵּבַת הַבַּעַל* (the *matsebat* of Ba'al) is not described elsewhere. While such a pillar could function in more than one way (i.e., as a covenant marker, as a memorial stele, as a grave marker), by far the most common usage was as a religious standing stone, often a phallic symbol. Rehoboam, for instance, erected such a pillar (1 Kg. 14:23), and later, the kings of Israel would be condemned for erecting them (2 Kg. 17:10). Two kings in Judah purged the south of such relics (2 Kg. 18:4; 23:14), cf. *ABD* (1992) 4.602.

<sup>165</sup> Possibly both Judah and Edom were in a vassal relationship with Israel at this time. Hence, a positive response would be expected to any such invitation from the Israelite king (see Footnote #147). Earlier, the biblical text states that Edom had no king (cf. 1 Kg. 22:47), and later, when Edom revolts against Judah, the biblical text says the Edomites set up a kingship (2 Kg. 8:20). Hence, the reference to a "king" in this

long circuitous route through the desert of Edom, which meant that their approach toward Moab was from the south, was arduous but necessary. Moab now had fortified all the towns on its northern border, plus any attempt to cross the Arnon Gorge with a sizeable army would have been difficult at best. The approach may have taken longer than anticipated, and the army ran out of water for itself and its pack animals. In such desperate straits, Jehoshaphat determined to secure a divine word through Elisha, who was reported to be in the vicinity (3:9b-12). The three kings approached the prophet.

Elisha's opening volley was directed squarely at Jehoram of Israel, and his antagonism, like that of Elijah his predecessor, was scathing. The jibe, "Go to the prophets of your father and mother (i.e., the prophets of Ba'al)," was a stinging sarcasm. Jehoram, however, responded that the call for war had come from Yahweh, not Ba'al (9:13). Elisha retorted that had it not been for Jehoshaphat, he would not have wasted his time on Jehoram at all (3:14). Using a musician,<sup>166</sup> Elisha received from Yahweh the oracle they sought, announcing to them that water would be provided in abundance.<sup>167</sup> Though there would be no wind or rain, the wadi would fill with water sufficient for the army and their animals. In addition, Yahweh would subdue Moab before the coalition of kings (3:15-19), though the instruction that they should pursue a scorched earth policy was certainly beyond what normally would be expected (cf. Dt. 20:19). Sure enough, the next morning there were pools of water in the wadi, just as Elisha predicted, and the Moabite army, which had mobilized to face the threat from the south, saw the reflection of the dawning sun in the pools, concluding it was blood (3:20-23). Since there had been no hint of rain, it never dawned on them that it could be water in what they thought was a dry wadi. Instead, they decided the coalition had fallen out and killed each other! When the Moabites approached the camp expecting to find only corpses and booty, they met instead the full frontal attack of the coalition armies (3:24). The coalition did as Elisha had directed: they sacked the towns, spoiled the springs, cut down the fruit trees and filled the arable fields with stones (3:25a). Only the Moabite capital city of Kir-Hareseth was not destroyed, though it also was attacked by a regiment of slingers (3:25b).

With a crushing defeat imminent, Mesha of Moab attempted to break

---

passage must refer to a deputy or vice-regent, and it presupposes that Edom was in a vassal relationship to either Judah or Israel.

<sup>166</sup> The use of a musician is unique to this passage. Whether or not other prophets used such mediums is unknown, and Von Rad is quite right to regard this as "exceptional", G. Von Rad, 2.59.

<sup>167</sup> The traditional imperative translation "make this valley full of ditches" (KJV, ASV, NASB) may be an incorrect rendering of the infinitive absolute. Better is the rendering, "This wadi shall produce pools upon pools", cf. M. Cogan and H. Tadmor, *II Kings [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1988), p. 45 (so also, RSV, NRSV, NEB, ESV).

through the ranks of the Edomites, probably the weakest link in the chain of attackers (3:26). When this failed, he went up on the city wall, taking with him the crown prince. Here, he slaughtered his own son in full view of the armies.<sup>168</sup> The battle narrative concludes with the intriguing but ambiguous “and great wrath came upon Israel”. The coalition armies withdrew, and Moab retained its independence.

Obviously, there is a relationship between the famous Moabite Stone and this biblical account of war. Both texts tell us that Mesha was formerly a vassal of the Omride Dynasty but had rebelled. However, the Mesha inscription describes a full victory for Moab, while the biblical account narrates a mixed result—the victory of the coalition armies but their withdrawal at the last. Mesha’s account says nothing whatsoever about the punitive action of Israel, Judah and Edom, unless it once was contained in the lower portion of the Moabite Stone that is damaged, where a new enemy of Moab is introduced but the narrative is missing.<sup>169</sup> In any case, it should not be expected that a memorial stela such as the Moabite Stone would contain any record of defeats. Such inscriptions served to enhance the reputation of the national deity and king, so narratives describing adverse circumstances naturally would be omitted.<sup>170</sup>

### **Elisha, the Prophet of Miracles (4:1—8:15)**

The next series of episodes in the life of Elisha narrate various miracles he performed. His reputation as a prophet and seer with highly unusual powers was widely recognized. From foreign kings to little girls, everyone seemed to know that he Elisha knew things and could do things that were far outside normal experience (8:7-8; 5:2-3). Recounting stories of his miracles was fascinating to kings—even kings that nearly hated him (8:4; 6:31). Servants of a foreign potentate were not backward about telling their master, “Elisha, the prophet who is in Israel, tells...the very words you speak in your bedroom” (6:12).

---

<sup>168</sup> Mesha’s sacrifice of his own son may possibly be explained as an act carried out in accordance with ancient Canaanite laws of holy war. In an Ugaritic text from the 13<sup>th</sup> century BC, a prayer to Ba’al indicates that for Ba’al to drive the enemy from the gates called for the sacrifice of a firstborn son: *A votive-pledge we shall fulfill: a firstborn, Baal, we shall sacrifice, a child we shall fulfill [as votive pledge]*. Though the text is some four centuries earlier than Mesha, the practice it describes has been documented as late as the Roman Period. The word “wrath” or “indignation” in 3:27b should then be understood in the sense of dismay, a psychological breakdown or trauma induced in the coalition troops when they watched this grisly ritual, cf. B. Margalit, “Why King Mesha of Moab Sacrificed His Oldest Son,” *BAR* (Nov/Dec 1986), pp. 62-63, 76.

<sup>169</sup> This is the conclusion of A. Lemaire of the Sorbonne, p. 37.

<sup>170</sup> T. Hobbs, *2 Kings [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1985), pp. 39-40.

The point of these miracle stories as they are found within the larger histories of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah is less obvious than for the Elijah narratives. There, the clear context was the crisis of the Ba'al cult, and the Elijah narratives all bear upon that crisis directly. Here, while no doubt the same crisis extended into subsequent history, the various miracle stories of Elijah's successor do not bear upon the Ba'al crisis with the same directness. Hence, some interpreters have treated the narratives as primarily aimed at establishing the legitimacy of Elisha himself as a true prophet in the absence of Elijah. Others see them as a disparate collection of stories that once circulated among the prophetic guild and were intended to encourage this guild in the midst of the daunting opposition from the Ba'al cult. Such goals are not mutually exclusive, and it may well be that the biblical compiler had both in mind. Certainly Elisha's career demonstrated that Yahweh and his representative, the "man of God", held the real power, not kings or pagans. Elisha is nearly the embodiment of Yahweh: he exercises Yahweh's power, executes his decisions, manifests his insight and reveals his plans. The people's attitude toward the prophet is equally their attitude toward God.<sup>171</sup>

It is worth noting the striking parallels between this series of miracles and the public ministry of Jesus of Nazareth. Multiplying food with ample left over, cleansing lepers and raising the dead were also signs in the ministry of Jesus, and as in the ancient world of Elisha, Jesus' signs pointed to the supreme truth that real authority lay not in Rome but in God's kingdom.

#### *Elisha Multiplies the Oil (4:1-7)*

The first miracle, a compassionate blessing to a widow, is briefly recounted, but the initial critical point is that her deceased husband was a faithful worshipper of Yahweh (4:1a). Because of the death and resulting penury, the widow was in danger of losing both her sons to debt slavery (4:1b).<sup>172</sup> Discovering that she had a small amount of (olive) oil, Elisha instructed her to secure as many empty jars as she could. Into them, she was to pour the small amount of oil she had, and it would be multiplied (4:2-4). The oil continued to multiply until every vessel was filled (4:5-6). The multiplied oil was saleable, since it was a basic staple used for cooking, lighting lamps, and medicinal purposes (4:7).

---

<sup>171</sup> J. Goldingay, *Old Testament Theology: Israel's Gospel* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2003), 1. 670-677.

<sup>172</sup> Debt slavery, an ancient method of paying off a loan, was well-known throughout the ancient Near East. The Code of Hammurabi, for instance, limited debt slavery to three years, though no such limitation existed in Assyria. In Nuzi, debt slavery could last up to 50 years, cf. *ABD* (1992) 6.59. In the Torah, debt slavery was limited to six years (Ex. 21:2; Dt. 15:12; cf. Je. 34:14), though at the choice of the slave, if he was content with his master, he could become a debt slave for life (Ex. 21:5-6; Dt. 15:16-17).

### *Elisha Raises the Dead (4:8-38)*

The second miracle story is much more detailed. Once again, it is an act of compassion, this time performed for a woman in Shunem<sup>173</sup> who had been particularly kind to Elisha, providing him with occasional meals and even a private room on the roof (4:8-10).<sup>174</sup> In return for her generosity, Elisha predicted that the woman would have a son, even though her husband was old. It happened just as he said (4:11-17). This prelude leads to the crisis in which her son, now perhaps a toddler, suffered what seems to have been severe sunstroke so that he died (4:18-20). She laid her son's corpse in the room she and her husband had built for Elisha (4:21). Though it was not on one of the typical days that people usually visited the prophet,<sup>175</sup> this determined woman set out for Mt. Carmel to see Elisha (4:22-25). Seeing and recognizing her, Elisha sent Gehazi, his assistant, to ask about her well-being. Her answer was as remarkable as it was conflicted, for it was the same thing she had told her husband: "It is well" (4:23b, 26). Everything was *not* well, of course, but in her resolute faith and trust, she instinctively knew it would be well.

Elisha immediately sensed her overwhelming distress in spite of her words, but he did not know the cause (4:27). Upon finding that her son was dead, Elisha initially instructed Gehazi to go to the boy, but finding the woman resolute, he finally accompanied her himself (4:28-32). He shut himself in the room with the small corpse, praying and walking and crouching over the boy until the little body became warm (4:33-35a). Finally, the boy sneezed and opened his eyes. The woman took her son in gratefulness and returned home (4:35b-37).

### *Elisha Heals the Stew (4:39-41)*

Very briefly, the next miracle concerned a stew accidentally poisoned with gourds (4:38-40).<sup>176</sup> Instructing some of the prophetic guild to put flour

<sup>173</sup> Shunem was in the tribal territory of Issachar (Jos. 19:18).

<sup>174</sup> The typical Israelite house in the Iron Age (1200-586 BC) consisted of four rooms, and literally hundreds have been discovered by archaeologists. This four room domicile had three parallel long rooms separated by two walls or rows of columns, plus a broad room across one end. It is likely that most houses had an upper story where the residents slept, but in this case, if the Shunammite woman's house did not have an upper story, she and her husband took the trouble to build one for Elisha, cf. S. Bunimovitz and A. Faust, "Ideology in Stone: Understanding the Four-Room House," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 2002), pp. 32-36.

<sup>175</sup> No further information is available as to why people would seek counsel from the prophet on the New Moon or the weekly Sabbath, but the New Moon was marked by a sacrifice (cf. Nu. 28:11-15). Apparently, it also was a day for family festivals (1 Sa. 20:5, 26-29). Perhaps these were considered appropriate days for consulting a holy man.

<sup>176</sup> The wild gourds are usually thought to be *citrullus colocynthus*, a small yellowish-green fruit about the size of a large orange that functioned as a strong purgative and was known to cause even death, cf. Cogan and Tadmor, p. 58.

into the stew, Elisha then announced that it was harmless, which indeed it was (4:41).

*Elisha Multiplies the Bread (4:42-44)*

When a gift of some 20 loaves of bread and fresh ears of corn<sup>177</sup> was brought to Elisha by a citizen, he received an oracle from Yahweh that the food would be multiplied to feed the whole company of 100 men (4:42-43). There was even some left over (4:44)!

*Elisha Heals a Pagan Leper (5:1-27)*

These two briefly narrated miracles now are followed by a lengthy account of the healing of a leper, an officer in the army of Aram, Israel's perennial enemy to the northeast. Naaman, a leader whose military success was attributed to Yahweh even though he was not an Israelite, had contracted the dreaded signs of skin lesions (5:1).<sup>178</sup> From soldiers who had raided in Israel, he had acquired an Israelite slave for his wife, a young girl who knew about the famous Elisha, and she urged that there was help in Israel (5:2-3). Securing permission from his king along with a letter of introduction, which probably was intended to secure safe conduct, Naaman packaged up several expensive gifts and headed southward (5:4-6). Upon Naaman's arrival at the palace in Samaria, the King of Israel immediately suspected a trick calculated to incite a war (5:7). (Israel's king is unnamed, but presumably it was Jehoram ben Ahab.) However, Elisha was informed of the foreign visitor and quickly sent word to the king that Naaman should come to see him (5:8-9). The words "[so] he will know that there is a prophet in Israel" is theologically equivalent to "[so] he will know that there is a God in Israel" (cf. 1 Sa. 17:46b). Elisha's word, delivered by a messenger, was that Naaman should wash in the Jordan River seven times and he would be restored (5:10).

Naaman was affronted. That the Israelite prophet did not actually come out to pronounce the word himself was tantamount to disrespect, but to be told to wash in the muddy Jordan River was an outrage (5:11-12)! Still, Naaman's servants urged him that the demand was minor, so at their advice, he did as Elisha had ordered. When he emerged from the Jordan, he was cleansed (5:13-14)!

Overjoyed at his restoration, Naaman returned to Elisha, offering him

<sup>177</sup> The term is a *hapax legomenon* (only appears here in the Hebrew Bible), but a parallel in an Ugaritic text suggests that it should be understood as ears of corn, cf. Cogan and Tadmor, p. 59.

<sup>178</sup> The Hebrew word for leprosy (צָרַעַת) is more general than popularly assumed. It probably is not Hansen's Disease, but based on the treatments prescribed in Lv. 13, refers to any of a broad range of skin lesions that result in scaling of the skin and persist beyond the prescribed quarantine period, cf. *ABD* (1992) 4.277-279.

the gifts he had brought. Elisha refused. When Naaman requested to carry back with him two mule loads of dirt from the “holy” land (presumably to prepare a sacred place for worship in his home in Aram) as well as a pardon for the times he would necessarily be obliged to accompany his own king to the temple of Rimmon,<sup>179</sup> Elisha acquiesced (8:15-19). Naaman, in his confession that “there is no God in all the world except in Israel” and his intent to “never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but Yahweh”, testifies to his conversion to the faith of Israel. Naaman’s conversion to the faith of Yahweh contrasts sharply with Israel’s fascination with the Ba’al cult, not to mention Gehazi’s greed (8:20-24). Gehazi’s subterfuge, however, did not escape Elisha, and the leprosy of Naaman now was transferred to him as a judgment (8:25-27).

#### *Elisha Causes an Iron Axhead to Float (6:1-7)*

In yet another short anecdote, the members of the prophetic guild asked to find a larger place to live, cutting beams with which to construct more spacious quarters. One of them, however, had the misfortune to lose a borrowed axhead, which fell and sank into the river. Elisha simply asked where it had fallen. He cut a shaft, threw it in the river, and the iron axhead floated to the surface.<sup>180</sup>

#### *Elisha Traps an Army (6:8-23)*

The hostility between Israel and Aram had by no means dissipated (cf. 1 Kg. 20, 22; 2 Kg. 5:2a). In one campaign, which is otherwise unidentified, the ruler of Aram was repeatedly thwarted by Elisha in his attempts to ambush the Israelite army (6:8-10), so much so that he began to suspect that he was sheltering a spy who was passing intelligence to Israel’s king (6:11). One of his officers, however, reported on Elisha’s spectacular powers. Hence, the king of Aram sought to capture Elisha in the city of Dothan, an Ephraimite town on the main route north of Samaria (6:12-14). Elisha’s servant (presumably not Gehazi!) was horrified to see the city surrounded by a large force as well as a chariot corps. After expressing his anxiety to Elisha, the prophet prayed that God would “open his eyes”. Suddenly, the servant was allowed to catch a glimpse into the invisible world, where he saw the hills full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha—the very kind that had transported Elijah

<sup>179</sup> Rimmon, the deity known to the Assyrians as Ramanu and a title of the god Ba’al Hadad, was a deity for whom public mourning was conducted in the plain of Megiddo as a counterpart to the mythical mourning of Anat for Ba’al at his descent into the underworld (cf. Zec. 12:11).

<sup>180</sup> Gray’s suggestion that Elisha probed with his stick until he managed to insert it into the socket of the axhead is silly and about as valid as supposing that someone would conclude that recovering a lost golf ball from the creek is a miracle, cf. p. 511.

bodily into heaven (6:15-17; cf. 2:11).

As the army of Aram approached the city, Elisha prayed that they would be struck blind. Leading the blinded soldiers, Elisha took them to Samaria, which was about 10 miles away. Once inside the city, their blindness was suspended and the soldiers discovered that, far from capturing Elisha, they now had been captured by Elisha (6:18-20). When the King of Israel realized how the tables had been turned, he asked if the enemy troops should be executed, but Elisha instructed that they should be treated like guests (6:21-23). This effectively brought to an end the immediate hostility between Israel and Aram. With a prophet like Elisha, further raids would be pointless! The man was worth a battalion all by himself!

*Elisha Predicts a Reprieve from Famine and Siege (6:24—7:20)*

Two ambiguities immediately surface in the next narrative. The rather general Hebrew phrase “and it was after this” is non-determinative, while the name Ben-Hadad seems to have been a court name for more than one king of Aram. In this case, it most likely refers to Ben-Hadad II or III (6:24a). It certainly was not the contemporary of Baasha (cf. 1 Kg. 15:18), though it may have been the earlier antagonist against Ahab (1 Kg. 20:1) or, if later, the son of Hazael (2 Kg. 13:3). In either case, by the time of this narrative, hostilities had resumed between Israel and Aram, and the city of Samaria was under siege, which in turn created a devastating food shortage (6:24b-25).<sup>181</sup> When the King of Israel was accosted by a woman admitting cannibalism, he blamed Elisha and threatened to kill him (6:26-31). Perhaps, if the previous incident where Elisha spared the soldiers of Aram is consecutive with this one, the Israelite king assumed that if he had been allowed to execute the soldiers in the first place, this siege might never have happened. Cannibalism, in fact, was one of the Deuteronomic curses upon Israel for covenant disobedience (cf. Dt. 28:56-57), and Elisha was a staunch defender of the covenant! In any case, like his parents, the king considered the prophet to be the “troubler” of Israel (cf. 1 Kg. 18:17). If the Israelite king was Jehoram ben Ahab (he is unnamed in the narrative), he was acting in the spirit of his mother by seeking Elisha’s life (cf. 1 Kg. 19:2).

When the Israelite king prepared to make good on his dire threat, Elisha preempted him by barring the doors on the advance officer, whom Elisha

---

<sup>181</sup> Siege was the means of starving the defenders of a walled city. If the wall could not be scaled with ladders or battered down by rams or tunneled under, or if the gate could not be breached, then the city was surrounded and cut off from its food and water supply, which was the case here, cf. E. Bleibtreu, “Five Ways to Conquer a City,” *BAR* (May/June 1990), p. 44. Such a siege could last for months, even years, and much depended upon what sort of food reserves and water resources were available to the defenders inside the city walls.

considered to be an executioner (6:32-33a). The speaker who uttered the curt comment, “This disaster is from Yahweh. Why should I wait for Yahweh any longer?” is unclear. No new subject for the verb “he said” is offered in the text, and many English versions assume that by this time the king had arrived and uttered these words. Hence, they insert the subject “the king” in 6:33, though it is missing in the Hebrew text (so NIV, NASB, NAB, NEB, RSV, NRSV, JB).<sup>182</sup> Those that strictly follow the Hebrew text seem to attribute the saying to the messenger (so ESV, JPSB, CEV, ASV, KJV, NKJV).<sup>183</sup> The saying can be interpreted in two ways. One is that since the calamity is from Yahweh, why should anyone hope that there would be a reprieve from Yahweh. Alternatively, the line can be read as a moment of sober realization that if the king killed the prophet, how could he then expect any help from Yahweh after attacking his spokesman.

Regardless of who said the words, Elisha responded immediately to this sentiment of fatality. Yahweh’s oracle was that within a day the deprivation and siege would be over altogether (7:1).<sup>184</sup> Though the possibility seemed preposterous, Elisha told the king’s officer he would see it with his own eyes—but he would not be privileged to eat from the bounty (7:2)!

That same evening, four lepers outside Samaria’s gate determined to go to the enemy camp. To try to enter starving Samaria was fruitless, to stay just outside the gate was fruitless, and if they surrendered to the army of Aram, they might live or die, but at least there was a chance they might live (7:3-4). At sundown they reached the edge of Aram’s bivouac and discovered the camp completely empty, for the noise of chariots and horses of a great army (heaven’s fiery hosts?) had frightened the Arameans into thinking they were being attacked by mercenaries. The soldiers fled for their very lives (7:5-7)!

After the initial shock at their moment of serendipity and the first heady wave of looting, they realized that they must inform their fellow citizens in

---

<sup>182</sup> As it stands, the closest possible subject for the verb **וַיֹּאמֶר** (= he said) is the “messenger” in the previous line. On the basis of 7:2, some translators assume that the king had arrived at this time, and hence insert the words “the king” as the subject of “he said”. Others emend the text by reading the consonants of **וַיֹּאמֶר** (= the messenger) as **וַיֹּאמֶר** (= the king). Hobbs, on the other hand, holds that Elisha himself is the subject of the verb “he said” and that the statement in 6:33 is a continuation of Elisha’s speech in 6:32. Though Elisha knew this crisis came from Yahweh, his words were a sign of his weakening confidence, cf. Hobbs, p. 80-82. Such an interpretation, however, seems doubtful in the larger context without some further corroboration in the text.

<sup>183</sup> However, the NKJV offers a footnote that suggests the king is speaking, not the messenger, as does the JPSB.

<sup>184</sup> Dry measures in the Iron Age in Israel can only be approximated. A seah would be in the range of between 6 and 10 quarts. In Babylonian texts under normal conditions, a measure equivalent to about 100 quarts of barley could be purchased for a shekel of silver, though the price could jump tenfold during siege. If the Israelite shekel was of comparable value, then the price still would be steep, though food was at least available, cf. Cogan and Tadmor, p. 81.

Samaria, which they promptly did (7:8-11). Though the King of Israel initially was reluctant to believe the news, fearing a trap, his officers convinced him to at least investigate (7:12-13). When the scouts verified that, indeed, the Arameans had fled, leaving their clothing and equipment strewn behind them all over their route of escape, the citizens of Samaria quickly fell upon the spoils (7:14-16). Elisha's word stood: the siege had ended, just as he had said. The king put his officer in charge of the gate, but people were exiting so furiously they trampled him to death. Elisha's personal word to him that he would "see but not eat" thus came to pass as well (7:17-20).

*Elisha Effects a Restoration of Property (8:1-6)*

The narrative now returns to the woman whose son Elisha raised from the dead. Famine conditions were widespread, and Elisha had advised this family to relocate for some seven years, which they did (8:1-2). When they moved back to Israel, they discovered that their property had been confiscated by either the crown or someone else, and the woman now intended to reclaim her family property (8:1-3). She made her claim to the king just as Gehazi, Elisha's former servant, was telling him the amazing story about how Elisha raised this woman's son from the dead (8:4-6a). The woman's appeal, buttressed by the miracle story ended with the restoration of her land and all the income she had lost in her absence (8:6b). While the restoration would not itself have been an overt miracle (though one could argue that it was divine providence that put the claim and the miracle story together), it was the recounting of the miracle story that clinched the king's decision to adjudicate her plea.

*Elisha Predicts the King of Aram's Death (8:7-15)*

The final miracle in the series was Elisha's prediction about the death and succession of the King of Aram. Elisha had gone north to Damascus, though the reason is not stated. Perhaps he was prompted by God to fulfill, in the office of his predecessor, the anointing of Hazael (cf. 1 Kg. 19:15). At least if Elijah had previously anointed Hazael, the biblical text does not describe it. Also, Elisha may have felt that given the healing of Naaman, he would have a protective spokesman in the capital of Aram. When Ben-Hadad, who was sick, heard that Elisha was in the area, he immediately sent Hazael his servant with extravagant gifts to enquire whether or not he would survive (8:7-9).

Elisha's answer was enigmatic, depending upon how one reads the

Masoretic Text.<sup>185</sup> What is clear is that Elisha fully expected Hazael to succeed his master and brutally invade Israel, and his icy stare and subsequent weeping were explained in light of this supernatural knowledge of the coming war atrocities (8:10-13). When Hazael returned to Ben-Hadad, he repeated the first part of Elisha's statement but not the second (8:14). On the next day, he suffocated his master (8:15).<sup>186</sup>

### Notations on Judah's Next Kings (8:16-29)

The compiler now returns to the annalistic records, summarizing the reigns of two of Judah's kings, Jehoram and Ahaziah. Jehoram ben Jehoshaphat, not to be confused with Jehoram ben Ahab,<sup>187</sup> began his co-regency with his father,<sup>188</sup> but his marriage to Athaliah, Ahab and Jezebel's daughter,<sup>189</sup> led him straight into the Ba'al cult (8:16-18). Still, God remained faithful to David's dynasty, Jehoram's heresy notwithstanding, because of his covenant promise to David (8:19). For a long time this covenant promise would spare Judah the disastrous fate looming for the northern kingdom (cf. 19:34). Edom's vassal relationship with Judah permanently ended during Jehoram's rule, however, and though Jehoram attempted to take punitive action, he was thwarted when his army narrowly escaped and fled home (8:20-

---

<sup>185</sup> In the *Kethib* form of the text, the consonants אָל are read as the negative marker. In the *Qere* form, they are read as the preposition "to him" (אֵל). These notations in the margin of the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* occur in situations where the traditional oral reading of the text differs from the pronunciation of the letters that the text normally suggests. *Qere* is Aramaic for "read", while *Kethib* is what is written in the text. The English versions follow the written text, not the oral reading. As such, Elisha's two statements either form a contradiction or else he was artfully saying "Yes, you will recover [if circumstances are normal], but in fact, no, you will not recover [because Hazael will murder you]."

<sup>186</sup> This is certainly the way Josephus understood Hazael's action, cf. *Antiquities* 9.4.6. Other less ominous constructions have been read in this verse (i.e., that he was only attempting to cool his master's brow), but smothering seems more likely, though no doubt it was passed off as a natural death to the court.

<sup>187</sup> See footnote #159.

<sup>188</sup> 2 Kg. 3:1 says that Jehoram ben Ahab ascended the throne of Israel in the 18<sup>th</sup> year of Jehoshaphat of Judah and reigned 12 years. If Jehoshaphat reigned 25 years (cf. 1 Kg. 22:42), then Jehoshaphat's son ascended the throne of Judah in the 8<sup>th</sup> year of Jehoram ben Ahab of Israel. However, according to the present text (8:17), Jehoshaphat's son reigned eight years over Judah, which later is stipulated to be until the 12<sup>th</sup> year of Jehoram of Israel (8:25). Hence, there is a four year discrepancy, which can only be accounted for by a co-regency of Jehoshaphat and his son Jehoram. This co-regency seems to have been assumed by the Chronicler (cf. 2 Chr. 21:3).

<sup>189</sup> At first glance, there seems to be some confusion about Athaliah's parentage. In 8:26, the Hebrew text says she was a daughter of Omri, while in 2 Chr. 21:6 as in 2 Kg. 8:18 she is listed as a daughter of Ahab. The problem is resolved when one understands that the Hebrew word for daughter (בַּת) can also have the extended meaning of a female descendent. Hence, most English versions render 8:26 as "granddaughter of Omri" (so NIV, RSV, NRSV, ESV, NASB, NEB, CEV, ASVmg). The NKJV corrects the KJV in this regard, though Roman Catholic versions leave the discrepancy as it stands (so NAB, JB).

22).<sup>190</sup> When Jehoram died, Ahaziah, his son, succeeded him (8:23-24).<sup>191</sup>

Ahaziah continued the religious deviations of his father and mother, which is not too surprising, given that his mother was from the Omride family (8:25-27). His reign was quite brief, since he was fatally shot following a joint war effort when Judah joined Israel against Aram (8:28-29; cf. 9:27). The brief notation about Jehoram ben Ahab's wound and Ahaziah's visit to Jezreel will be detailed more fully in the succeeding narrative.

### **Jehu's Coup d'etat and Purge (9:1—10:36)**

Elijah had predicted the devastating end of the Omride dynasty in the northern kingdom (1 Kg. 21:21-24), and while Ahab himself was now dead (cf. 1 Kg. 22:37-38), the rest of his family remained in power, notwithstanding the death of his son Ahaziah (cf. 1:17). The marriage of Ahab's daughter to the son of Jehoshaphat in Judah only increased their family's influence in both north and south (8:18). It was now time for judgment to fall!

The divine judgment began not untypically with a prophetic action. Elisha, acting in the office of his predecessor Elijah (cf. 1 Kg. 19:16-17), instructed one of the prophetic understudies to go to Ramoth Gilead, the chief city of Gad in the northern Transjordan, and anoint Jehu as the new king of Israel (9:1-3).<sup>192</sup> This anointing was accompanied by an oracle that Jehu was to exterminate the remaining family of Ahab as a divine retribution for the slaughter of Yahweh's prophets by Jezebel (9:4-10; cf. 1 Kg. 18:4). The language of the judgment was nearly identical to that uttered by Elijah years earlier (cf. 1 Kg. 21:21-24). Though at first Jehu tended to dismiss the message

---

<sup>190</sup> The Hebrew text is difficult, because there is ambiguity about whether the chariot officers were from Judah or Edom as well as ambiguity about whose army fled. This double ambiguity leads to two very different constructions. Some translators take it to mean that Jehoram was successful in defeating the Edomites, though in the end was unsuccessful when his army deserted him (so RSV, NASB, ESV, KJV). Others take it to mean that the Edomites surrounded the Judean army causing the Israelite soldiers to flee (so NIV, NEB, NAB).

<sup>191</sup> As with the two Jehorams, there are two Ahaziahs who must not be confused, Ahaziah ben Ahab from the northern kingdom (1 Kg. 22:51) and Ahaziah ben Jehoram from the southern kingdom (2 Kg. 8:24). Fortunately for the reader, they were not ruling simultaneously as were the two Jehorams!

<sup>192</sup> Jehu's pedigree (son of Jehoshaphat, grandson of Nimshi) distinguishes him from the former king of Judah (Jehoshaphat ben Asa, cf. 1 Kg. 22:41). There is, however, another anomaly about Jehu's pedigree, since on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III as well as on three other Assyrian inscriptions he is listed as "Jehu son of Omri". Conventionally, this listing has been explained by suggesting that the Assyrians used the name of the first ruler with whom they had contact to identify a kingdom, and since Ashurnasirpal II was the first Assyrian monarch to campaign in the west, he may have had initial contact with Omri at that time. Thereafter, theoretically, Israel would be known in Assyrian annals as the "land of Omri" and any Israelite rulers as the "son of Omri". Another possibility, however, is that Jehu was indeed the descendent of Omri, but from a different branch of the family than Ahab (e.g., if Omri had a son Nimshi who had a son Jehoshaphat who then had a son named Jehu), cf. T. Schneider, "Did King Jehu Kill His Own Family?" *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1995), pp. 26-33, 80-81.

as excessive, his fellow officers in the army took it very seriously and acclaimed him as the new king (9:11-13). Their support along with the army was essential if a *coup d'état* was to be successful. At the time, the Israelite army was bivouacked in their confrontation with Hazael of Aram (cf. 8:28a). King Jehoram was currently absent after being wounded in the conflict (9:14-15a; cf. 8:28b-29a). Secrecy was paramount if Jehu was to prevent Jehoram from organizing a put-down of the rebellion, so Ramoth Gilead was immediately sealed up so the news would not leak out. Jehu and the supporting army set out for Jezreel, the summer palace, where the two brothers-in-law, Jehoram, the wounded king of Israel, and Ahaziah, the king of Judah, were together (9:15b-16).

At Jezreel, the lookout announced the appearance of troops (9:17a). Jehoram immediately sent out a horseman to find out the meaning of this unexpected return of the army, but the dispatch was forced to join the approach and was not allowed to return to Jehoram (9:17b-18). By the time a second horseman had received the same treatment, the watchman could discern that Jehu was leading the army (9:19-20). That in itself would not have been surprising, since Jehu was an officer, but the appearance of the army at Jezreel when they were supposed to be in the Transjordan was certainly disconcerting! The two brother-in-law kings set out in their chariots to find out for themselves, and they reached Jehu and the army just at the edge of the plot of ground that had formerly belonged to Naboth, whose murder Jezebel had engineered (9:21; cf. 1 Kg. 21).

Jehu's antagonism was immediately recognizable to the two kings, but when they turned their chariots to escape, Jehu shot the fleeing Jehoram in the back, killing him (9:22-24). He ordered the body dumped in the field formerly belonging to Naboth, for Jehu had personally heard the ominous words of Elijah years earlier (9:25-26; cf. 1 Kg. 21:17-19). Jehu then pursued Ahaziah as he fled, and some of his aides wounded Judah's king. Though Ahaziah made it as far as Megiddo, his wounds were too much, perhaps through loss of blood, and he died, also (9:27). He was taken to Jerusalem and buried there (9:28). The parenthetical comment that Ahaziah's reign began in Jehoram's eleventh year (9:29) is at odds with 8:25, which specifies the twelfth year. No satisfactory explanation can be offered other than that there may have been different ways of reckoning the beginning of Jehoram's regnal years.

When Jehu entered Jezreel, the queen mother, Jezebel, put on a bold front, putting on her make-up<sup>193</sup> and sarcastically insulting Jehu by calling him

---

<sup>193</sup> The Hebrew **קִימָה** is powdered sulfide of antimony used to darken the lids, lashes and brows (cf. Je. 4:30).

Zimri, the name of the chariot-commander who years earlier had murdered King Elah (cf. 1 Kg. 16:9-10). Since Zimri's reign lasted barely a week, Jezebel implied that Jehu's usurpation would not last long either. Jehu was hardly to be stopped, however, and he commanded that the eunuchs pitch her out, and when they did, he rode over her with his chariot, killing her as well (9:30-33). After his meal when Jehu ordered her burial, they discovered that the pariah dogs had eaten her, leaving only a few body parts—just what Elijah the prophet had predicted (9:34-37; cf. 1 Kg. 21:23). Her corpse was “like dung on the face of the field” (9:37).

In Samaria, the capital, the purge continued. Remaining in the royal family were some 70 sons (10:1a; “sons of the house of Ahab” should be taken in the broad sense of the royal family). The deaths of Jehoram and his mother notwithstanding, the full success of the *coup d'état* would depend upon taking Samaria as well. Jehu could assume that news of the events in Jezreel would have reached Samaria by this time, and his cleverly worded letter challenged the officials to appoint a successor to Jehoram to defend the honor of the Omride dynasty (10:1b-3). That his letter was addressed to the “officials of Jezreel” (Hebrew text, so NIV, NRSV, KJV) may imply that these officials had themselves gone to Samaria with the news of the takeover, or else, the name Jezreel should be replaced with the name Samaria as in the Septuagint (so Vulgate, RSV, ESV, NASB, NEB, NAB). The prospect of appointing an inexperienced successor from Ahab's family to face such a formidable antagonist as Jehu and the army seemed the height of folly, so the officials responded that they would bow to Jehu's authority (10:4-5). Consequently, Jehu sent a second dispatch, this time calling for the heads of the royal sons.<sup>194</sup> All were duly slaughtered and their heads sent to Jehu in Jezreel in baskets, where they were piled just outside the city gate (10:6-8).<sup>195</sup> When those leaving the city for the fields the next morning saw the piled up heads, Jehu feigned surprise, as though he knew nothing about it (10:9), but he quickly exonerated the butchery on the basis of Elijah's prediction (10:10-11).

When Jehu set out for the capital, he encountered some travelers from Judah, relatives of Ahaziah, who had come northward to see the royal family and Jezebel, the queen mother (10:12-13). Obviously, they had not yet heard of the take-over and purge. Though Jehu commanded that they be taken alive, he quickly exterminated them like the others (10:14). Then, meeting

---

<sup>194</sup> There may be an intentional ambiguity here. The term “heads” could refer metaphorically to the tutors, but clearly, the officials in Samaria took Jehu's words in the most severe sense. If the ambiguity was deliberate, it might have been Jehu's way of distancing himself from this bloodbath.

<sup>195</sup> Decapitation and the piling of heads as grisly warnings that any rebellion would be met with the severest reprisals is graphically displayed in the Assyrian bas-reliefs now on display in the British Museum.

Jehonadab ben Recab<sup>196</sup> along the road, he invited him to witness his final purge of Samaria, where he slaughtered all who remained in Ahab's family (10:15-17).

At Samaria, Jehu assembled the leaders of the Ba'al cult by subterfuge. Claiming that he intended to worship Ba'al himself, he called for all the prophets, priests and attendants of Ba'al to attend a great sacrificial ceremony in honor of Ba'al (10:18-21). When they had come together at his bidding from all over the nation, assembling in Samaria's temple of Ba'al, Jehu had them all robed, ostensibly for honor but in reality for identification (10:22-23). In the middle of their ceremony to Ba'al, Jehu's men slaughtered them as well (10:24-25). They removed the standing stone (phallic pillar) from the Ba'al temple and destroyed it.<sup>197</sup> The temple they reduced to a latrine (10:26-28).

In spite of his bloody fanaticism in destroying Ahab's dynasty to fulfill the oracle of Elijah, Jehu still was to be faulted because he did not remove the cultic centers at Bethel and Dan (10:29). He was commended for his zeal against the Ba'al cult and promised at least four generations of royal descendants (10:30; cf. 15:12), but he failed to abolish the syncretistic lure of the golden calves (10:31).

The purge notwithstanding, Jehu's reign was plagued by weakness. Such a severe blood-letting would have crippled the infrastructure of the kingdom, while the slaughter of the priests and prophets of Ba'al would have brought to an immediate end any alliance he may have enjoyed with Phoenicia. The murder of Judah's king would equally have destroyed any hope of alliance with the south. Hence, it is not too surprising to find that Hazael of Aram now began to encroach upon Israel's Transjordan territory, and there was little Jehu could do to stop it (10:32-33). While the biblical text does not mention it, Jehu also was compelled to pay heavy tribute to Assyria as is depicted on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (858-824 BC).<sup>198</sup>

### **Athaliah Seizes Judah's Throne (11:1-21)**

Though Jehu wiped out the entire family of Ahab in the north, the influence of the Omrides continued in the south through Athaliah, the daughter

<sup>196</sup> Jehonadab's clan, a group of ascetic semi-nomads, will resurface in the time of Jeremiah (cf. Je. 35).

<sup>197</sup> That they "burned" the stone may seem odd, since stone does not burn, but perhaps they heated it and then dashed cold water on it to crack it, such as was done by the Bedouin to the Moabite Stone, cf. S. Horn, "Why the Moabite Stone Was Blown to Pieces," *BAR* (May/June 1986), p. 52.

<sup>198</sup> On the second register of the Black Obelisk (British Museum), the bas-relief depicting a Judean ruler bowing before Shalmaneser III is headed by a cuneiform inscription reading, "Tribute of Jehu, son of Omri". Either Jehu or one of his emissaries brought gifts of tin, silver, gold, a golden vase with a pointed bottom, golden tumblers, golden buckets, and a royal scepter to the Assyrian king, cf. J. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton: Princeton University, 1958), p. 192.

of Ahab and Jezebel, who was the queen mother in Judah. Her marriage to Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, had been arranged between the two ruling families some years earlier (8:18; cf. 8:26), and she was a fitting daughter of her mother. Given the purge of Jehu in the north against the Omrides and the Ba'al cult, it can be assumed that there would be broad sympathies in the south, and almost certainly Athaliah must have suspected as much. Her son, Judah's king, had been in the north participating in the war effort of Israel against Aram, and when he was killed in the fury of Jehu's revolt and his body returned to Jerusalem for burial (9:27-29), Athaliah must have realized that her court standing was very precarious indeed. She immediately took preemptive action, slaughtering the whole royal family (11:1). By seizing the throne and killing all the heirs, she hoped to eliminate all those persons who might likely have been elevated to kingship by the strong conservative elements in Judah. (Her husband, Jehoram, had done precisely the same thing earlier when Jehoshaphat, his father, died, cf. 2 Chr. 21:4). However, her bloody purge was not entirely successful, since one of the royal sons by another mother, Zibiah (cf. 12:1), was secreted away and hidden in the temple with the priests (11:2-3a). This son, Joash, would be hidden there for six years (11:3b). The savior of the child was none other than Jehosheba, the wife of the priest Jehoiada (cf. 2 Chr. 22:11b) and the daughter of King Jehoram himself (a half-sister to Athaliah). For six years, Athaliah held power while this young child was secretly nurtured in the temple, probably passed off as one of the priest's children. For conservative factions in Judah, Athaliah's power was a direct threat to the Davidic dynasty, which now was in danger of becoming extinct. No doubt there was a profound and growing resentment along with a deep religious zeal to protect the rightful family who had been promised such great things in the covenant Yahweh made with David.

In the seventh year (after Athaliah usurped the throne), Jehoiada, the husband of the child's savior and now his protector, began to engineer the overthrow of Athaliah. His action began by revealing to the army commanders and royal guards that there was a living, royal son—a true son of David (11:4).<sup>199</sup> This overthrow would in many respects match what had happened in the north, but the differences are important. In the north, the *coup d'état* was instigated by a prophet and carried out by an army officer, while in the south it would be led by a temple priest along with the palace guards and populace. While in the north the overthrow meant a change in dynasty outright, in the

---

<sup>199</sup> The Carites mentioned here and later (cf. 11:19) are unknown elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, unless they are related to the bodyguards described in the time of David (cf. 2 Sa. 15:18; 20:23). There are, however, scattered references to Carian mercenaries in various ancient Near Eastern texts from Greece, Egypt and Nubia, cf. Cogan and Tadmor, p. 126.

south the overthrow would be a return to the rightful dynasty, the dynasty of David.

Jehoiada put the army officers under oath, instructing them on how to proceed. The Sabbath seemed the best opportunity, since at the changing of the guard, no suspicions would be aroused for troop movements. Jehoiada arranged that when the new units came to the temple to relieve the units that were now off-duty, all would remain on duty to guard the young Joash (11:5-8).<sup>200</sup> Fully armed, the guards positioned themselves to protect the life of the boy king when Jehoiada brought him out for public presentation to all the worshippers gathered for Sabbath worship. Since they were in the temple of Yahweh, they could be presumed to be loyal to the ideals of Yahweh (11:9-11). With appropriate ceremony and protection, the young Joash was crowned king in the temple courtyard before them all (11:12).<sup>201</sup> The people shouted and acclaimed him!

The noise of celebration was heard by Athaliah, since the palace and the temple were not far apart. Quickly ascending from the palace, she discovered the newly crowned boy king standing by the temple pillar (11:13-14).<sup>202</sup> Screaming “treason”, she tore her robes in consternation. Jehoiada ordered her immediate arrest and execution outside the temple precincts (11:15-16).

Jehoiada then renewed the covenant with the people, a covenant of double loyalty, first to Yahweh and then to the Davidic king (11:17), thus embracing both the covenant of Sinai and the covenant of David. In conformity to the Deuteronomic code (cf. Dt. 7:5), the citizens purged Jerusalem of the trappings of the Ba’al cult, destroying the Ba’al temple and its pagan altars while executing its priest (11:18a). Guards were posted so that the boy king could be brought safely from the temple into the royal palace, where he then was stationed on the throne of Judah (11:18b-19). The overthrow was now complete, and the quietness of Jerusalem signified that there would be no resistance (11:20). Joash was only seven years old when he was crowned (11:21).

<sup>200</sup> While the Sur Gate is mentioned along with a “gate behind the guard”, the location of neither can be determined with certainty. Presumably, however, they were near the temple and the site of the anticipated coronation.

<sup>201</sup> There is some uncertainty as to the meaning of the expression *וְאֵת הַקֶּדֶד וְאֵת הַנֶּזֶר*. The word *nezer* means consecration or dedication (as in the dedication of a Nazirite), but here it usually is taken to refer to the king’s crown or diadem. The word *‘eduth* usually refers to a warning or reminder, but it comes from the same root as the word for ornament. Most versions take it in the former sense, translating it as a reference to the scroll of the Torah or the rules for kingship (so NIV, RSV, NRSV, ESV, CEV, NASB, NEB, KJV, cf. Dt. 17:18), while those who take it in the latter sense translate it as the royal jewels or armbands (so NAB, JB, AB). In either case, these symbols of royal office were clearly intended to visually reinforce the legitimacy of the coronation.

<sup>202</sup> The custom of standing by the temple pillar (possibly one of the pillars Jachin or Boaz, cf. 1 Kg. 7:21) is unknown elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible except in the covenant renewal by Josiah (cf. 23:3).

## The Reign of Joash in Judah (12:1-21)

Given that he was only a boy of seven when he assumed the throne, it must be presumed that during the early years of Joash's reign he remained under the tutelage of his protector, Jehoiada, the priest (12:1-2).<sup>203</sup> Jehoiada's influence kept the young king firmly on a right trajectory with respect to the Torah; however, the new king was faulted for not removing the *bamoth* (12:3).<sup>204</sup> Of central interest in his early years was the project of repairing and renovating the temple, which by this time probably was in need of refurbishing. Initially, this responsibility had been laid upon the priests themselves, but after a number of years nothing had been done (12:4-5). Hence, Joash introduced a new collection system, removing the sole responsibility from the priests and giving it to outsider contractors, who hired the necessary craftsmen to do the work (12:6-16). He installed a collection chest beside the altar, and the money was used accordingly for materials and wages.<sup>205</sup>

Though the Kings compiler is silent about the rift between the king and the priests after the death of Jehoiada, the Chronicler is more forthright (2 Chr. 24:17-22). This rift, at least in the Chronicler's record, was the theological cause for the invasion of Judah by Aram, which came as a Deuteronomic judgment because of Joash's paganizing ways in his later years. Hazael of Aram campaigned in both Philistia<sup>206</sup> and Judah, and Joash was compelled to pay a stiff tribute to avoid a siege (12:17-18). Joash's reign ended in

---

<sup>203</sup> Once again, there are kings in both the northern and southern kingdom with the same names, Jehoash ben Ahaziah of Judah and Jehoash ben Jehoahaz of Israel. The name of the first is offered in two forms, a shortened one, Joash (11:2; 12:20 MT), and a longer one, Jehoash (11:21 and thereafter until 12:20). Some translations, following the LXX, use the shortened form throughout for Judah's king (so NIV, NEB, CEV). Others follow the Hebrew text and its variants using both the shorter and longer forms (so RSV, NRSV, KJV, NKJV, ESV, NASB, ASV). For reasons that are unclear, the Roman Catholic translations (NAB and JB) translate "Joash" when the MT text has "Jehoash", and "Jehoash" when it has "Joash".

<sup>204</sup> The Chronicles record indicates that after Jehoiada's death, Joash lapsed into paganism when he came under the influence of other national officials (2 Chr. 24:17ff.).

<sup>205</sup> A highly controversial inscription, purportedly describing this temple work during the reign of Joash, surfaced in 2001. Ostensibly discovered by Arabs outside the eastern wall of the temple mount, this inscription describes the collection of silver, the quarrying of stone, the cutting of timber and the acquisition of Edomite copper for the temple renovation. If authentic, it is the first royal inscription found from a king of Judah. Though at first declared authentic by the Geological Survey of Israel, who examined the patina, it later was rejected by paleographers on the grounds of spelling and grammatical irregularities, cf. H. Shanks, "Is it or Isn't It?" *BAR* (Mar/Apr 2003), pp. 22-23, 69 and "Assessing the Jehoash Inscription," *BAR* (May/June 2003), pp. 26-30. Though some have urged that scholars should not be too hasty in its denunciation, cf. D. Freedman, "Don't Rush to Judgment," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 2004), pp. 48-51, the consensus is that the inscription is a forgery as of the Jerusalem Forgery Conference held in early 2007.

<sup>206</sup> There may be an oblique reference to the destruction of Gath in Am. 6:2, while in Am. 1:6-8 Gath is omitted in the list of Philistine towns.

assassination (12:19-21). According to the Chronicler's record, his assassins were at least half-blood foreigners if not foreigners outright, one from Ammonite and the other from Moabite extraction (2 Chr. 24:26).<sup>207</sup> Joash's son, Amaziah, succeeded him. Even though a political faction ended Joash's life, unlike the northern nation, Judah remained a staunch supporter of the dynasty of David.

### Jehoahaz of Israel (13:1-9)

Meanwhile, the death of Jehu in the northern kingdom (cf. 10:35) made way for his son to succeed him (13:1).<sup>208</sup> Like his predecessors, Jehoahaz maintained the shrines erected by Jeroboam I at Bethel and Dan, and this stubborn refusal to eliminate paganism from Israel resulted in divine judgment through Hazael and Ben-Hadad of Aram (13:2-3).<sup>209</sup> However, when Jehoahaz began to seek Yahweh, an unnamed deliverer arose to provide a reprieve in accord with the Deuteronomic promise (13:4-5). Possibly this deliverer was Adad-nirari III of Assyria, who invaded Aram and may have indirectly brought relief to Israel, or perhaps it was Elisha who predicted Israel's victory over Aram (cf. 13:14-19).<sup>210</sup> Such relief, however, did not cause Jehoahaz to turn away from the long-standing Ba'al cult (13:6).<sup>211</sup> Further, Jehoahaz's

<sup>207</sup> The Hebrew in 2 Kg. 12:21 is very difficult. Quite literally, it reads אֶת־יֹאָשׁ בֵּית מִלּוֹ הַיְיֹרֵד סָלַא (= and they struck down Joash Beth Millo the one going down Silla). All English translations struggle to fill in what seem to be gaps in the text. Mentioned elsewhere is a supporting terrace in Jerusalem on the east side of the City of David called the Millo (2 Sa. 5:9; 1 Kg. 9:15, 24; 11:27; 1 Chr. 11:8; 2 Chr. 32:5), but it is spelled slightly differently (הַמִּלּוֹ). If both refer to the same site, it also should be noted that the passage in 2 Kg. 12:21 is the only one that speaks of the "house" of Millo, though there is a similar (but also spelled differently) expression referring to a stronghold called the "house of Millo" near Shechem (cf. Jg. 9:6, 20). It is possible that the "house" of Millo in 2 Kg. 12:21 may refer to the royal palace. The Silla may refer to a street or neighborhood below and south of the Millo, cf. *ABD* (1992) VI.23. In any case, most English translations assume that Joash was killed in a house, and the Chronicler adds that he was killed in his bed (2 Chr. 24:25).

<sup>208</sup> What might seem to be a one year discrepancy between 12:1 (which says Joash of Judah ascended to the throne in Jehu's seventh year and reigned forty years) and 13:1 (which says that Jehoahaz ascended to the throne of Israel in Joash's twenty-third year) is probably due to the different reckonings of regnal years in the northern and southern kingdoms, cf. E. Thiele, *A Chronology of the Hebrew Kings* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), pp. 14-22.

<sup>209</sup> Hazael apparently died during the reign of Jehoahaz, but his son Ben-Hadad maintained suzerainty over Israel.

<sup>210</sup> W. Hallo, *BA* 23 (1960), p. 42.

<sup>211</sup> The reference to Asherah in 13:6 usually is taken to mean an Asherah pole. As a deity, Asherah emerges most clearly from texts written in alphabetic cuneiform script on clay tablets found at Ugarit on the Mediterranean coast of Syria. Dating to the 14<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries BC, Asherah was the consort of the god El, called "Asherah of the Sea", the mother of the gods, cf. S. Ahituv, "Did God Really Have a Wife?" *BAR* (Sep/Oct 2006), p. 64.

military was severely reduced during his vassalship to Aram (13:7).<sup>212</sup> After a seventeen year reign, Jehoahaz died and was succeeded by his son Jehoash (13:8-9, not to be confused with Jehoash of Judah, see Footnote #203).

### **Jehoash of Israel (13:10-25)**

Jehoash in the northern kingdom is evaluated like all his predecessors—he did not back down from the cult shrines at Bethel and Dan (13:10-11). His most notable accomplishments were his war against Judah (13:12-13, detailed later in chapter 14) and his rebellion in three pitched conflicts against the lengthy suzerainty of Aram (13:22-25). Inserted in the middle of the annalistic record of his reign is the final episode in Elisha’s life (13:14-21). After the earlier series of narratives detailing Elisha’s miracles, his name disappears from the text between 9:1 and 13:14. By this time he was certainly old. Furthermore, he was deathly sick. Jehoash went to visit him, calling him “my father”, a title of immense respect that Elisha earlier had used of Elijah (cf. 2:12) and that an earlier king of Israel had once used of Elisha also (6:21). The added title, “The chariots and horsemen of Israel”, however, was the most exalted title of all, also used by Elisha of Elijah (2:12), and it clearly links and acclaims the ministries of these two prophets as worth more than the whole army!

Though very ill, Elisha instructed Jehoash to open an eastward window (facing Aram) and shoot an arrow symbolizing Yahweh’s victory over Israel’s Syrian enemies. Elisha put his hands on the king’s hands, and the king shot the arrow. Elisha’s hands on the king’s hands symbolized his prophetic support, and indeed, Yahweh’s support! Elisha then instructed the king to strike the ground with his remaining arrows. This command apparently was a test to determine the outcome of the conflict, and three times the king struck the ground, but then stopped. Elisha then predicted that the king’s hesitance to strike the ground more times would mean his victory over Aram would be limited to three pitched battles—but it could have been more! Shortly thereafter, Elisha died from his illness (13:20a).

Sometime later (a minimum of a year, since Elisha’s corpse had decomposed and only his bones remained), when a band of Moabite raiders crossed the Jordan, some Israelites were burying a man. When they saw the raiders, they hurriedly threw his corpse into the tomb of Elisha, and when the corpse touched Elisha’s bones, the man revived (13:20b-21; cf. Sirach 48:13-14). Hence, Elisha’s final miracle was performed posthumously.

<sup>212</sup> Israel’s chariot corps was reduced to only ten chariots, while in the time of Ahab a half century or so earlier, it had been 2000 according to the inscriptions of Shalmaneser III, *ANET* (1978), pp. 279.

After the interlude concluding the life of Elisha, the narrative history of Jehoahaz and Jehoash of Israel resumes. Though Aram maintained its suzerainty over Israel throughout the reign of Jehoahaz, Yahweh still preserved the northern nation in order to honor his ancient covenant with the patriarchs (13:22-23). When Ben-Hadad succeeded Hazael, Jehoash successfully broke this suzerainty and recovered the northeastern border towns that had been lost. His victory in the three pitched battles predicted by Elisha solidified his independence (13:24-25).<sup>213</sup>

## The Kings of Israel and Judah Until the End of the Northern Nation (2 Kings 14-17)

### Amaziah of Judah (14:1-22)

Amaziah's kingship received one of the more positive assessments by the Deuteronomic historian in that he followed the better years of his father before his father's lapse into paganism. Like his father, however, he did not remove the *bamoth* (14:1-4; cf. 12:3). The fact that his father was assassinated in a political intrigue may have made his ascension difficult, and the phrase "after the kingdom was secure in his hand" suggests opposition (14:5a; cf. 1 Kg. 2:12). He acted quickly to execute his father's assassins (14:5b), but he obeyed the Torah's injunction that children should not be executed for the sins of their fathers (14:6; cf. Dt. 24:16) as almost certainly would have been done anywhere else in the ancient Near East.<sup>214</sup>

During his administration, he engaged in a major conflict with the Edomites (14:7). As late as the reign of Jehoshaphat, Edom had no king (cf. 1 Kg. 22:47), but during the reign of Joram, the Edomites successfully rebelled against Judah and established a monarchy (2 Kg. 8:20, 22). Now, Edom again came under Judah's suzerainty.

Flushed with his success against Edom, Amaziah now made overtures toward Jehoash of Israel (14:8).<sup>215</sup> He was rudely rebuffed by Jehoash, who

<sup>213</sup> Extrabiblical data indicates that Adad-nirari III of Assyria invaded the west successfully, subjugating Damascus, cf. *ANET* (1978) 281-282. This invasion indirectly aided Israel, since Ben-Hadad was forced to withdraw his forces from the Israelite border to the southwest and deploy them to face the Assyrian invader from the northeast. In all likelihood, this Assyrian presence was what prompted Jehoash to pay tribute to the Assyrian ruler as indicated in the Tell al Rimah stela: "He [Adadnirari III] received the tribute of Joash [Iu'asu] the Samarian...", cf. W. Hallo and K. Lawson Younger, Jr., eds, *The Context of Scripture: Monumental Inscriptions* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2003) II.276.

<sup>214</sup> Jones, II.508.

<sup>215</sup> It is unclear whether or not the invitation to meet "face-to-face" was intended as an outright threat, an overture of peace or a preliminary overture toward a political marriage (cf. 14:9).

sent an insulting reply in the form of a fable intended to put the king of Judah in his place (14:9-10). Bristling at this rejection, Amaziah pressed his demand, which only succeeded in inciting Jehoash to invade Judah. Amaziah was actually captured, and the Israelite army broke down a sizeable section of Jerusalem's walls, plundered the temple, and took hostages back northward with them to Samaria (14:11-14). The summary of Jehoash's reign that first appeared in 13:12-13 now appears again nearly verbatim (14:15-16).<sup>216</sup> Though Jehoash died soon after and was succeeded by his son Jeroboam II, Amaziah's reign lasted another fifteen years (14:17), though much of his reign was probably a co-regency with his son.<sup>217</sup> At the end of Amaziah's reign, political opponents rose against him, just as had happened with his father. He fled to the outlying military city of Lachish, but his enemies caught up with him there and killed him (14:18-20). Azariah (Uzziah) his son, who was only sixteen at the time, then ascended to the throne (14:21). That he brought Elath (Ezion-geber) on the Gulf of Aqaba back under Judah's hegemony suggests that he continued his father's wars against the Edomites (14:22; cf. 14:7).

### **Jeroboam II of Israel (14:23-29)**

Jeroboam II was the fourth king in the Jehu dynasty over the northern kingdom.<sup>218</sup> A lengthy and relatively stable reign restored much of Israel's lost prosperity (14:23), though Jeroboam did not reverse the sins of his predecessors (14:24). Little details are given,<sup>219</sup> but the fact that he restored the boundaries of Israel as far north as Hamath and Damascus (14:25a, 28), a border not seen since the days of Solomon (cf. 1 Kg. 8:65), implies that he was one of the most successful of Israel's military kings (cf. 14:28). In the south, his border extended all the way to the Dead Sea in the Jordan trench (the term "Arabah" refers to the Jordan depression, and the "Sea of the Arabah" refers to the Dead Sea). In addition, two of his victories in the Transjordan are alluded to in Amos 6:13. Amos' scathing descriptions of the material prosperity and class dominance of the urban citizens with their ivory decorated winter and

<sup>216</sup> This repetition suggests editorial work.

<sup>217</sup> See extended discussion in Thiele, pp. 39-45.

<sup>218</sup> An important seal belonging to Jeroboam's court was discovered at Megiddo. It bears the inscription "[Belonging] to Shema servant of Jeroboam", cf. A. Lemaire, "Name of Israel's Last King Surfaces in a Private Collection," *BAR* (Nov/Dec 1995), p. 50.

<sup>219</sup> One extra-biblical detail dating from the time of Jeroboam II is the discovery of the Samaritan Ostraca, a group of 103 texts on potsherds describing when aged wine and refined oil were delivered from outlying towns to Samaria. Though quite fragmented, these inscriptions are most important for the light they shed on the early Hebrew language and writing practices, cf. I. Kaufman, "Samaria, Ostraca," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, ed. E. Meyers (New York/Oxford: Oxford University, 1997), p. 468.

summer homes (Am. 3:15; 6:11), their decadence and their spiritual complacency (Am. 6:1, 4-6) was no exaggeration. The discovery of the Samaritan ivories attests to this resurgence of wealth in the northern capital.<sup>220</sup>

The extension of the northern border was predicted in advance by the prophet Jonah, the only reference to him outside the book that bears his name (14:25). Despite the rampant paganism in the north, Yahweh had not yet announced the death of the northern kingdom (14:26-27). Nevertheless, the prophet Amos denounced Jeroboam's family, predicting a violent end by the sword and the eventual exile of Israel (Am. 7:11). This reference probably concerns the assassination of his son, Zechariah, and the King's historian only says that Jeroboam "rested with his fathers", succeeded briefly by Zechariah his son (14:28-29).

### **Azariah (Uzziah) of Judah (15:1-7)**

Given the brevity of the annalistic report of Azariah's reign, the reader can easily overlook the fact that if he reigned for 52 years, Azariah's rule apparently was long and stable (15:1-2). The Chronicles record offers a much fuller account, giving additional details about his wars and construction projects (2 Chr. 26).<sup>221</sup> He may even have faced Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria if references to an "Azriau from Iuda" are indeed referring to Azariah.<sup>222</sup> The Deuteronomic assessment of his reign is mixed—he "did what was right in the eyes of Yahweh" while at the same time failing to remove the *bamoth* (15:3-4). His leprosy forced him to reside outside the palace,<sup>223</sup> and much of his long rule was a co-regency with his son, Jotham (15:5). At his death, Jotham assumed full control of the kingdom.<sup>224</sup> The year of his death also was marked

<sup>220</sup> The many ivory objects and hundreds of ivory fragments excavated from Samaria and dating to this approximate period is the most important collection of miniature art from the Iron Age in Israel, cf. N. Avigad, "Samaria (City)," *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. E. Stern (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 4.1304-1306; P. King, "The Marzeah Amos Denounces," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1988), pp. 34-44; H. Shanks, "Ancient Ivory: The Story of Wealth, Decadence and Beauty," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1985), pp. 40-53.

<sup>221</sup> It also is to be noted that the Chronicler consistently uses the name Uzziah (as does Isaiah, Amos, Hosea and Zechariah), while the Kings historian uses both Azariah (14:21; 15:1, 6-8, 17, 23, 27) and Uzziah (15:13, 30, 32, 34). The use of the two names suggests the bringing together of annalistic records from various ancient sources.

<sup>222</sup> Though no mention is made in biblical texts, the annalistic records of Tiglath-pileser III cite this opponent, cf. *ANET* (1978) p. 282. It is debated whether or not this is a reference to Azariah.

<sup>223</sup> The Chronicles record attributes his leprosy to a divine judgment for usurping priestly duties (2 Chr. 26:16-21).

<sup>224</sup> A 1<sup>st</sup> century AD stone tablet marked the traditional burial place (or reburial) of Azariah/Uzziah. Discovered in 1931, this carved plaque bore the Aramaic words, "Here were brought the bones of Uzziah, King of Judah—do not open!", cf. P. McCarter, Jr., *Ancient Inscriptions: Voices from the Biblical World [CD-ROM Version 1.1]* (Washington DC: Biblical Archaeology Society), Image #206.

by the call of Isaiah (cf. Is. 6:1).

### **Two Assassinations in Israel (15:8-16)**

Zechariah ben Jeroboam, the fifth king in Jehu's dynasty (the most of any dynastic succession in the north), lasted only a few months (15:8-9). He was publicly assassinated, and his death brought an end to the dynasty of Jehu, which was predicted to last four generations (15:12; cf. 2 Kg. 10:30).<sup>225</sup> Shallum, his assassin, claimed the throne (15:10-11). Shallum lasted barely a month before he, too, was assassinated, this time by a usurper named Menahem (15:13-14).

Menahem's attack upon the king began at Tirzah, the old capital before it was moved to Samaria (cf. 1 Kg. 15:33; 16:6, 8-9, 15; 16:23-24). This might suggest a Manasseh political faction (Tirzah was in Manasseh), but in any case, Menahem successfully managed a coup d'état, eventually assassinating Shallum in Samaria and claiming the throne. Along the way, he savaged the town of Tappuah, when its citizens refused to recognize him.<sup>226</sup> The barbarity of slitting open pregnant women, known from at least one Assyrian text<sup>227</sup> as well as other biblical sources (cf. 2 Kg. 8:12; Ho. 13:16), was severely condemned by Amos as a war crime for which Yahweh would not forgive the perpetrators (cf. Am. 1:13).

### **Menahem, Pekahiah and Pekah of Israel (15:17-31)**

Menahem ben Gadi lasted a decade, but like his predecessors, he did nothing to reverse the course of paganism (15:17-18). During his reign, Tiglath-pileser III (Pul)<sup>228</sup> campaigned in the west. The Assyrian strategy seems to have been a step-by-step conquest, beginning with a vassal relationship followed by an intensifying demand for tribute and progressing to final military conquest at the least indication of dissatisfaction or rebellion. Menahem's vassalship to Assyria was a first step in this process. In order to

<sup>225</sup> The assassination of Zechariah ben Jeroboam was predicted by Amos (cf. Am. 7:9, 11).

<sup>226</sup> A textual difference for the town name exists between the MT, which reads "Tiphshah", and the Lucianic recension of the LXX, which reads "Tappuah". English translations split on these readings, especially since Tiphshah (Thapsacus) was located so far to the north (on the bend of the Euphrates River), while Tappuah was close at hand on the Ephraim-Manasseh border (cf. Jos. 17:7-8). The Tiphshah reading is favored by NIV, CEV, ESV, NRSV and NASB translators, while the Tappuah reading is favored by RSV, NAB, NEB, JB and AB.

<sup>227</sup> Tiglath-Pileser I also was said to have "slit open the wombs of pregnant women", cf. M. Cogan, *JAOS* 103 (1983), pp. 755-757.

<sup>228</sup> The biblical name Pul is an alternative to the more well-known name Tiglath-pileser III. The name Pul is found in cuneiform texts as well as in the Bible, cf. *ANET* (1978), p. 272.

gain Assyrian support, he levied taxes on the Israelite citizens to pay tribute, an effort that bought him time and temporary security but heralded future demands (15:19-20).<sup>229</sup>

When Menahem died, the reign of his son Pekahiah was short-lived, two years or possibly less (see footnotes #89 and #92). Pekahiah was assassinated in the palace by Pekah ben Remaliah, one of his former military officers (15:23-26).<sup>230</sup> It seems likely that Pekah and his supporters chafed over Assyrian suzerainty. Pekah and the king of Aram collaborated on a defense scheme to oppose the Assyrian reprisals that were sure to come (cf. Is. 7). Menahem had the support of Tiglath-pileser III, and presumably his son would have been assured of the same support. An assassination of an Assyrian-supported king would certainly have been treated as disloyalty to Assyria. On the face of it, Pekah's reign, listed at twenty years (15:27), is virtually impossible to reconcile with Assyrian records, since there is not nearly enough time by several years for Pekah to have had a twenty year reign.<sup>231</sup> However, if Pekah had established a rival kingship in the Transjordan for several years, as seems to be implied in Hosea, then the total length of his reign would have included this period of rivalry while other northern kings (possibly as early as the latter years of Jeroboam II and certainly as early as Menahem and Pekahiah) were still reigning in Samaria.<sup>232</sup> Hence, Pekah probably "reigned" twelve years in Gilead (unofficially?) before he reigned

<sup>229</sup> Menahem's tribute to Assyria is corroborated by Assyrian inscriptions in which Tiglath-pileser III boasted "[As for Menahem I ov]erwhelmed him [like a snowstorm] and he... fled like a bird, alone, [and bowed to my feet(?)]. I returned him to his place [and imposed tribute upon him, to wit:] gold, silver, linen garments with multi-colored trimmings... great... [I re]ceived from him," *ANET* (1978) pp. 283-284. Menahem also is listed as a tributary on a stela, cf. L. Levine, *Two Neo-Assyrian Stelae from Iran* (Royal Ontario Museum, Art and Archaeology Occasional Paper 23 (1972).

<sup>230</sup> The references to "Argob and Arie" (15:25) are puzzling and have yielded several suggestions, ranging from Gileadite warriors to place names to military guard unit names to the guardian statues at the palace entrance (this latter based on the fact that Arie = lion). Some translations relegate them to footnotes or eliminate them altogether (so RSV, NEB, JB and NAB).

<sup>231</sup> Even if Tiglath-pileser III (744-727 BC) gained suzerainty over Menahem almost immediately, there is not nearly enough time before the fall of Samaria in 722 BC for a ten year reign of Menahem, a two year reign of Pekahiah, a twenty year reign of Pekah and a nine year reign of Hoshea if such reigns are taken to be contiguous.

<sup>232</sup> The idea of rival kingdoms in the north has been suggested, because Hosea speaks of "Israel and Ephraim" in addition to "Judah" (Ho. 5:5). The repetition of the name Israel in Ho. 5:5a and 5:5b, especially with the concluding phrase "also Judah with them" suggests that "Israel and Ephraim" are distinct entities (contra the NIV, which takes them to be synonymous parallelisms), cf. F. Anderson and D. Freedman, *Hosea [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980), p. 393 and Thiele, p. 46. Hence, Pekah's reign may have begun a dozen years earlier in Gilead to rival Menahem's reign in Samaria, cf. Thiele, pp. 46-48. Such rival kingships had a precedent in which David reigned in Judah as a rival king of Ish-Bosheth, who simultaneously reigned over the other clans (2 Sa. 2:4, 8-9). David's tenure over Judah amounted to seven and a half years (2 Sa. 2:11), while his eventual reign over a united Israel amounted to thirty-three years. David's total regnal years, then, are listed as 40, even though he did not rule over a united Israel that long (2 Sa. 4:4-5; cf. 1 Kg. 2:11).

another eight years over the whole northern kingdom after the assassination of Pekahiah.

The Assyrian war-lord did indeed come westward. Tiglath-pileser III almost certainly would have perceived the Israel-Aram alliance to be anti-Assyrian (Is. 7), and his reprisal was immediate and devastating, just as Isaiah predicted (cf. Is. 7:16; 8:3-7). The fact that Ahaz of Judah invited Assyrian suzerainty only strengthened what was almost certain to happen anyway (cf. 16:7-9). The Assyrians conquered large territories in Galilee and the Transjordan and deported masses of Israelites (15:29).<sup>233</sup> With Assyrian support, Hoshea successfully assassinated Pekah and succeeded him as an Assyrian vassal (15:30-31).<sup>234</sup> This series of assassinations was condemned by Hosea:

*On the day of the festival of our king the princes become inflamed with wine...they approach him with intrigue...they devour their rulers. All their kings fall... (7:5-7).*

Their kings, like their gods, were their own creations (Ho. 8:3-4)!

### **Jotham and Ahaz of Judah (15:32—16:20)**

The compiler of the annals material now turns back to the southern nation. Jotham<sup>235</sup> ben Azariah's reign over Judah is treated in stereotypical fashion. His reign started with the quarantine of his father, Azariah/Uzziah, who contracted a severe skin disease, and this co-regency lasted until Azariah died (cf. 15:5, 7). Overall, Jotham's reign was assessed positively, though he failed to centralize the sacrificial system, allowing the continued use of the high places instead of requiring exclusive loyalty to the temple (15:34-35a). He did strengthen Jerusalem's defenses, possibly in response to the threats of

<sup>233</sup> These conquests are well-attested in Assyrian records. Tiglath-pileser III claimed to have conquered "all the cities of Bit-Humria (Omri-Land)", leaving "Samaria only", cf. *ANET* (1978) pp. 283. Deportation of the upper classes effectively reduced the district into an Assyrian province. Tiglath-pileser III's records indicate that he deported some 13, 520 prisoners taken from the cities of lower Galilee, and if demographic analysis of the region is accurate that Galilee had about 18,000 residents in the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC, then the Assyrians deported the larger mass of the population, cf. Z. Gal, "Israel in Exile," *BAR* (May/Jun 1998), pp. 52-53.

<sup>234</sup> That Hoshea had Assyrian support is indicated in Tiglath-pileser III's annals, which state, "They [the Israelites] overthrew their king Pekah (*Pa-qa-ha*) and I placed Hoshea (*A-u-si*) as king over them," *ANET* (1978) p. 284.

<sup>235</sup> A signet ring with the inscription "Belonging to *ytm* (Jotham)" was discovered at Ezion-geber, which suggests that the Judean hegemony reached quite far southward into Edomite territory, cf. G. Pratico, "Kheleifeh, Tell El-," *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 3.868-869.

the Aram-Israel coalition. This coalition, which was fervently anti-Assyrian, sought Judah's support, probably first by invitation and later by military threat. The threat reached a crescendo during the reign of Jotham's son, Ahaz.

Ahaz,<sup>236</sup> Jotham's successor, did not follow Yahweh as did his father and grandfather. He succumbed to the Canaanite cult, even burning his own son as a sacrifice (16:1-3). This is the first (though not the last) mention of Israelites who engaged in child sacrifice by fire (cf. 17:17; 21:6), presumably to the Ammonite deity Molech (23:10; Is. 57:5ff.; Je. 7:30-31; 19:4-5; 32:35; cf. Lv. 18:21; 20:2, 4; Dt. 12:31).<sup>237</sup> That Ahaz offered sacrifices and burned incense "on every high hill and under every spreading tree" certainly presumes the fertility rituals of the Ba'al cult (cf. 1 Kg. 14:23; 2 Kg. 17:10; Je. 2:20; 3:6, 13; Eze. 6:13).<sup>238</sup>

The pressure from the Aram-Israel coalition that Judah should join them, a pressure that began in the reign of Jotham, now became more intense, this time augmented by a joint militia arrayed against Judah (16:5). The Kings only offers a bare bones description of this intimidation, but one factor was Judah's loss of Elath and control over Edom (16:6).<sup>239</sup> The Chronicler adds

<sup>236</sup> A bulla containing the seal impression of Ahaz is currently housed in a private collection. The seal inscription reads, "Belonging to Ahaz [son of] Yehotam (Jotham), King of Judah". A fingerprint is discernable on the left edge of the bulla (could it possibly be the fingerprint of Ahaz himself?), cf. R. Deutsch, "First Impression: What We Learn from King Ahaz's Seal," *BAR* (May/June 1998), pp. 54-56, 62.

<sup>237</sup> Jeremiah says that these sacrifices were at the *bamoth* dedicated to Ba'al, though he also links Ba'al to the deity Molech. The interchange between the two Canaanite deities is presumed. The exact nature of this ritual is not clear. Children could have been killed and then cremated or else trussed and then burned alive. Some have suggested that children were not considered viable until they were weaned, though such a suggestion is highly speculative and conflicts with other biblical sentiments (cf. Je. 1:5; Ps. 139:15-16). To date, no repository of child sacrifice has been clearly identified archaeologically in Israel. However, at Achzib (a town in Judah, cf. Jos. 15:44) the burned remains of humans and animals from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 7<sup>th</sup> centuries BC have been found in kraters (large pots), and these may have been cultic remains, cf. M. Prausnitz, *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 1.34-35. Certainly there is evidence of child sacrifice in other parts of the ancient world, such as, Phoenicia and Carthage, cf. Z. Zevit, *The Religions of Ancient Israel* (London/New York: Continuum, 2000), pp. 550-552.

<sup>238</sup> References to the *bamoth* (high places) occur over 100 times in the Hebrew Bible, primarily describing a cultic site. More neutrally, they occasionally refer to cultic sites for the worship of Yahweh, but increasingly toward the latter years of the kingdoms of Israel and Judah they refer to installations connected to Canaanite religion, possibly linked with and in service to the institution of the state as well, cf. B. Nakhai, "What's A Bamah? How Sacred Space Functioned in Ancient Israel," *BAR* (May/June 1994), pp. 18-29. These sites were places for burning incense to the deities, and a wide variety of incense stands in pottery, bronze and stone have been excavated, cf. L. Devries, "Cult Stands: A Bewildering Variety of Shapes and Sizes," *BAR* (July/Aug 1987), pp. 26-37.

<sup>239</sup> The RSV reads "at that time the king of Edom recovered Elath for Edom..." (so also NRSV, NEB, NAB, JB, CEV) instead of "at that time, Rezin king of Aram recovered Elath for Aram" (so NIV, NASB, ESV, KJV, LXX). The variant renderings hinge upon a couple of factors, one circumstantial and the other linguistic. Circumstantially, Aram never exercised control over Edom in the first place, so how could it be "recovered"? Linguistically, the two Hebrew names "Aram" and "Edom" (אַרַם and אֲדָם respectively) are easily confused, and since the parallel text in 2 Chr. 28:17 mentions only Edom, translators suspect a textual corruption. Hence, while the Masoretic Text reads "Aram", many translators suggest that "Edom" is

that the Philistines had become militant also (2 Chr. 28:18). This meant that Judah now had threatening enemies in both the north and the south. Indeed, Isaiah indicates that the citizens in Jerusalem were shaking like leaves in the wind (Is. 7:2)! More details are added by the Chronicler and Isaiah. Citizens from Judah were deported as prisoners of war to Damascus (2 Chr. 28:5a), and Judah's military was seriously reduced by the Israelite army, which sacked the country and took many captives and much plunder, though the prisoners of war were later returned at the counsel of the prophet Oded (2 Chr. 28:5b-15). While Jerusalem was not captured, the northern coalition fully intended to depose Ahaz and install their own man on the throne of Judah, a certain ben Tabe'el (Is. 7:5-6). Isaiah's advice to Ahaz during this crisis was succinct: "If you do not stand firm in your faith, you will not stand at all!" (Is. 7:9b). He even gave Ahaz a sign that the two northern invaders would fail in their bid to capture Jerusalem (Is. 7:10ff.). Isaiah's advice notwithstanding, Ahaz determined to secure his kingdom by his own design, and to this end he sent a huge gift, stripped from the temple, to Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria, assuring the Mesopotamian overlord of his submission as a vassal (16:7-8; cf. 2 Chr. 28:16, 20).<sup>240</sup> Tiglath-pileser III was not slow in answering (and, indeed, he likely already had mobilized and was marching for invasion). He captured Damascus, deporting its citizens and executing Rezin (16:9).<sup>241</sup>

Ahaz' submission to the Assyrians was symbolized by his willingness to construct an altar in the Jerusalem temple patterned after one he saw in Damascus, where he went to personally confirm his vassalship to Tiglath-pileser III (16:10-11). The reader could wish that more was said about the meaning of this altar, since it obviously was of profound importance to the compiler given that he gives such complete details about its construction and use. Quite possibly, its construction was demanded by the Assyrian overlord, or if not, it was at least a capitulation to the current architectural aesthetics of the times. In any case, it was only one of several overtures of Judah's final kings to assimilate themselves to the popular icons and practices of foreigners. While there was no ostensible use of this altar to worship foreign deities, and in fact the offerings described are the ones prescribed in the levitical code (cf. Lv. 1-3), the fact that it displaced the altar installed by Solomon foreshadowed

---

the correct reading and that a transmission error has occurred. Conservative translators are reluctant to go against a clear reading in the MT supported by the LXX. Liberal translators are willing to amend the MT on the basis of the other considerations. One thing is clear: the Edomites regained territory that formerly was under the control of Judah.

<sup>240</sup> This gift is independently corroborated by the annals of Tiglath-pileser III, where he recorded receiving tribute from Ahaz of Judah, cf. *ANET* (1978) p. 282.

<sup>241</sup> The conquest of Damascus was thorough, for Tiglath-Pileser III boasts that "of the 16 districts of the country of Damascus I destroyed (making them look) like hills of (ruined cities over which) the flood (swept)", cf. *ANET* (1978) p. 283.

a general displacement of the ancient patterns (16:12-16). The bronze bulls upon which the old laver had rested Ahaz removed along with several other items (16:17-18)—all in deference to the Assyrian overlord (lit., מֶלֶךְ אַשּׁוּר = “from the face of the king of Assyria”). Upon Ahaz’ death, he was succeeded by his son, Hezekiah (16:19-20).

### **The Collapse of the Northern Kingdom (17:1-6)**

The joint resistance of Pekah of Israel and Rezin of Damascus against Assyria was the beginning of the end. When Hoshea assassinated Pekah, the attack was interpreted favorably by Tiglath-pileser III, who then claimed to have established Hoshea as his vassal ruler over Samaria (see Footnote #234).<sup>242</sup> Like his predecessors, Hoshea was judged as evil (17:1-2). During his tenure, there was a change in Assyrian rulers: Tiglath-pileser III was succeeded by his son, Shalmaneser V, in 727 BC. This change was probably the catalyst seized upon by Hoshea to revolt, and he now appealed for help from So of Egypt (17:3-4). His shift of fealty was nothing less than political suicide. The Egyptian So (as yet not identified with certainty<sup>243</sup>) was no help at all, and Shalmaneser V promptly invaded Samaria, putting it to a three-year siege. The city eventually fell,<sup>244</sup> and Shalmaneser V clapped Hoshea in prison, deported the population, and resettled them in Assyria.<sup>245</sup>

The northern kingdom of Israel had fallen, never to rise again. Massive deportations began under Tiglath-pileser III and continued through the reigns of Shalmaneser V and Sargon II. Assyrian records indicate that deported

<sup>242</sup> An inscribed 8<sup>th</sup> century BC chalcedony seal has been discovered belonging to one of Hoshea’s high-ranking officials. The inscription reads, “Belonging to Abdi servant of Hoshea”, cf. A. Lemaire, “Name of Israel’s Last King Surfaces in a Private Collection,” *BAR* (Nov/Dec 1995), pp. 48-52.

<sup>243</sup> The name “So” so far is not attested in Egyptian records of the late 8<sup>th</sup> century BC. A popular candidate is Tefnakhte of the weak Twenty-fourth Dynasty, but there are objections as well. See discussion in *ABD* (1992) 6.76 and *ISBE* (1988) 4.558.

<sup>244</sup> The biblical record seems to credit Shalmaneser V with the conquest of Samaria (17:3ff.; 18:9-11; cf. Tobit 1:1-2) as do the Babylonian Chronicles, cf. A. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonians Chronicles* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2000), p. 73 (Chronicle 1). Sargon II, however, claimed to be the “conqueror of Samaria (*Sa-mir-i-na*) and of the entire (country of) Israel (*Bit-Hu-um-ri-a* = Omri-land)”, cf. *ANET* (1978) p. 284. To complicate the issue, records from the period of Shalmaneser V are scant and the historical reliability of the claims of Sargon II are questioned. It may be that the actual fall of Samaria is to be credited to Shalmaneser V, but the deportation and resettlement program to Sargon II, who claimed to have deported from Samaria 27,290 prisoners, cf. *ANET* (1978) p. 284. Samaria may have surrendered to Shalmaneser V in the winter of 722/721 BC, but when Shalmaneser V died, the final determination of the city’s future may have taken as much as two years longer. Sargon II may have recaptured the city in 720 BC, and the final deportations may have been accomplished then, cf. Cogan and Tadmor, p. 197.

<sup>245</sup> The location of Halah is debated, cf. *ABD* (1992) 3.25. The Habor River was a tributary to the Euphrates with headwaters in the southeastern mountains of Turkey. It is attested as *Habur* in Assyrian sources, cf. *ABD* (1992) 3.10. The description “towns of the Medes” is fairly general, but Media was in central western Iran.

Israelites served in various capacities in their new homes: military personnel, officials, priests, skilled laborers and merchants. Most of them likely served as agricultural laborers, and their circumstances were probably harsh. The phrase, “I counted them as Assyrians”, appearing in Assyrian texts as early as the time of Tiglath-pileser III, suggests that these Israelites were treated as Assyrian subjects. Some Israelite names survive in Assyrian texts. (The key element for deciphering an Israelite name is the suffix “Yau”, referring to Yahweh.) A certain Nadbi-Yau, for instance, served as a chariot driver under Sargon II. Other names include Azri-Yau, a bodyguard, and Ahi-Yau, an archer, Neri-Yau, an accountant, Palti-Yau, an advisor, and Iadi-Yau, a director of public works. For Sargon II’s construction of his capital at Khorsabad, a letter instructs, “Provide the [Sam]arians [as many as] are [in] your [ha]nds (with work) in Dur-Sarrukin.” A process of “Assyrianization” seems to have occurred, since a family with Israelite names might have children with Assyrian names. In the end, Assyrian records confirm that the Israelites were deported to the very locations mentioned in the Bible—Halah (*Halahha*), Gozan (*Guzana*) and the cities of the Medes. Though various theories about the so-called “Lost Ten Tribes” have been concocted,<sup>246</sup> the real truth about them is that they gradually were assimilated into Assyrian culture and eventually lost their Israelite identity.<sup>247</sup>

### **The Deuteronomic Assessment of the Northern Kingdom’s Fall (17:7-23)**

If all along the entire corpus of materials included in the Kings record has taken its theological focus from the law of Moses, especially that law as it was formulated in the blessings and curses of Deuteronomy, this final assessment of the northern kingdom’s demise climaxes with this same perspective. The northern kingdom fell, not merely due to the vicissitudes of ancient Near Eastern history nor the inadequacy of the regnal policies of its kings. The northern kingdom fell because it broke covenant with Yahweh. The nation’s fall was a divine judgment, not merely a by-product of other things. This is the essential conclusion of the historian in 2 Kings 17. “All this took place because the Israelites had sinned against Yahweh their God...” (17:7). At last they were forced to come to terms with their disloyalty to Yahweh in flippantly disregarding the very first of his commandments (cf. Ex. 20:1-4; Dt.

<sup>246</sup> The most well-known of these theories are British Israelism (that the lost ten tribes migrated to Great Britain and became the English), Russian Israelism (that the lost ten tribes migrated to Moscow and Tobolsk and became the Russians), and Native American Israelism (that the lost ten tribes crossed the Pacific and became the American Indians). All are without historical foundation.

<sup>247</sup> K. Lawson Younger, Jr., “Israelites in Exile”, *BAR* (Nov/Dec 2003), pp. 36-45, 65-66.

5:6-8). His love and mercy was extended to a thousand generations, but his judgment, though reluctant and far less than his mercy, could no longer be suspended if he was to be faithful to himself. The idolatry and paganism inherent in the Ba'al cult, a relapse into the detestable practices of the nations Yahweh had driven out of Canaan in order to give Israel the land in the first place (Dt. 9:5; 18:9-13; cf. Lv. 18:24-27), were so thoroughly embraced that Israel could no longer escape the consequences (17:8-17). Just as the land once had vomited out its earlier inhabitants, so now it vomited out the Israelites (Lv. 18:28; 20:22-23).

The voices of warning through the prophets went unheeded (17:13b, 23; cf. Am. 2:11-12; 7:10-13; Ho. 6:5; 9:7; 12:10). In the northern kingdom there were a number of prophets, most of them mentioned briefly in the narratives with the exception of Elijah and Elisha, whose ministries in the teeth of the Ba'al cult receive considerable detail. However, in addition to those directly mentioned in the Kings narratives were two prophets who left their oracles in written form, Amos and Hosea. The scope of their oracles is beyond what can be treated here, but their conclusion was blunt:

*Fallen is Virgin Israel, never to rise again,  
deserted in her own land, with no one to pick her up! (Am. 5:2)*

*Prepare to meet your God, O Israel! (Am. 4:12b)*

*Samaria and its king will float away like a twig on the surface of the waters.  
(Ho. 10:7)*

*Will they not return to Egypt and will not Assyria rule over them because  
they refuse to repent? (Ho. 11:5)*

Yahweh was indeed angry, and he removed the northern Israelites from before his face, leaving only Judah in the south (17:18). Yet Judah, too, was profoundly influenced by the Ba'al cult. The intermarriage between the family of Ahab and the house of David created deep theological fissures in the south, and while there were some bright points of light in a few southern kings, gaining them a few extra years of reprieve, the tide of paganism was rising there as well, heralding the end for them, too (17:19-20). So, both north and south were kingdoms under judgment (17:21-23). Yahweh delivered the northern kingdom up to exile, and the southern kingdom would eventually follow.

### The Immigrants into Northern Israel (17:24-41)

Deportation was not the only disaster resulting from the fall of Samaria. Just at the Assyrians transplanted northern Israelites in the far reaches of the Assyrian Empire, so they also brought immigrants from other places to populate the denuded territories that once had been the northern kingdom (17:24).<sup>248</sup> When the new arrivals were ravaged by lions, which possibly had gained a taste for human blood from unburied bodies left after the Assyrian invasion, they concluded that it was the local deity they were displeasing. As was not untypical, natural disaster prompted a religious question. The Assyrian king (presumably Sargon II) sent a deported Israelite priest back to teach them about Yahweh (17:25-28). Nonetheless, syncretism continued to prevail, and it is hardly surprising that an Israelite priest from Samaria, who had lived in the cross-tensions between Yahweh and the Ba'al cult, would consider such syncretism as normal (17:29-33). By the time of the Kings compilation, the syncretism remained (17:34-41) “to this day” (17:34, 41).

Traditionally, it has been assumed that the immigrants who were brought into northern Israel intermarried with the remaining Israelites who were not deported, creating a mixed race later called “the Samaritans”.<sup>249</sup> Indeed, the word **הַשְּׂמֹרִיטִים** in 17:29 is translated simply as “Samaritans” in the older English Versions and many newer ones as well (so KJV, ASV, NKJV, RSV, ESV, NEB, JB). However, it is not entirely clear that this reference should be directly connected with the term Samaritan as it is used in the New Testament. Indeed, the Samaritans themselves, a small group lasting into the modern period, vehemently deny it. Hence, several modern versions offer more nuanced translations of 17:29, such as, “people of Samaria” (NRSV, NIV, NASB), “Samaritans” (NAB) or even “Israelites” (CEV). Though their history is a troubled one,<sup>250</sup> the Samaritans referenced in the New Testament are traceable historically from about the 2<sup>nd</sup> century BC to the modern period, where about 500 of them still live near Nablus on the West Bank (biblical Shechem). Their beliefs and practices do not point to pagan syncretism, and in fact, they scrupulously revere the Torah and observe rituals and festivals that

<sup>248</sup> Duplicate prisms were discovered at Nimrud in 1952-53 (now in the British Museum). They contain Sargon’s boast that he brought immigrants into Samaria after deporting its Israelite citizens: “I repopulated Samerina (Samaria) more than before (i.e., Tiglath-pileser’s deportation). I brought into it people from countries conquered by my hand. I appointed my eunuch as governor over them. And I counted them as Assyrians,” W. Hallo, ed., *The Context of Scripture* (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2003), 2.295-296; cf. Younger, p. 42. The places from which these immigrants came were Babylon, Cuthah (northeast of Babylon), Avva (either Syria or Elam), Hamath (Syria) and Sepharvaim (location debated), cf. *ABD* (1992) 1.531, 1220-1221; 3.33; 5.1090.

<sup>249</sup> Josephus, *Anitquities*, 9.14.3; 11.7.2; Sirach 50:26; 2 Maccabees 6:2

<sup>250</sup> The broad outlines of this history are traced in R. Anderson, “Samaritans,” *ISBE* (1988) 4.303-306.

show a close affinity to Judaism. Most modern scholars suggest that the New Testament Samaritans were an offshoot of ancient Judaism, probably in the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 1<sup>st</sup> century BC, who developed a significant difference with regard to Jerusalem and the Jerusalem temple, but they are not to be directly identified with the immigrants from Syria and Mesopotamia who were moved to northern Israel by the Assyrians.<sup>251</sup> As to the Samaritans themselves, they claim separation from historical Judaism as far back as the end of the judges period during the administration of Eli, the priest, though this claim is not historically verifiable.<sup>252</sup>

## **Judah Alone: From Hezekiah to the Fall of Jerusalem (2 Kings 18-25)**

The last major section of the Kings record focuses primarily on two reform movements prior to the fall of Jerusalem. It may well be that the collapse of the northern kingdom sufficiently jolted leadership in the south to the point that at least for Hezekiah and Josiah, the only way forward was sincere covenant renewal. At the same time, one cannot discount the role of the prophets in these reforms. How much citizens in the southern kingdom were aware of the scathing oracles of Amos and Hosea, they certainly would have know of the long ministry of Isaiah and his contemporary, Micah. In addition, Huldah, the prophetess in Jerusalem, while she left no written oracles, certainly left her personal stamp by interpreting in the most severe terms the Torah scroll found in the temple. She left little doubt that if the south were to survive at all, it must do so on Yahweh's terms. Then, Zephaniah and Jeremiah in Judah plus Ezekiel among the exiles of the first major deportation to Babylon strove mightily to stem the tide of paganism while calling for national repentance. The reckless abandon with which Ahaz had followed the Canaanite cult, even burning his own son as a sacrifice, must have been demoralizing to loyal Yahwists. Manasseh was even worse. The very real fear that what had happened in the north just might happen in the south must have shaken at least some of them to the core. To be sure, there were voices of naïve optimism, but the prophets delivered devastating critiques against such superficial hopefulness. The end was near!

---

<sup>251</sup> R. Pummer, "The Samaritans: A Jewish Offshoot or a Pagan Cult?" *BR* (1991), pp. 22-29, 40.

<sup>252</sup> J. Neusner, ed., *Dictionary of Judaism in the Biblical Period* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), pp. 545-547.

## Hezekiah and Sennacherib (18-19)

Not long after Hoshea usurped the throne of the northern kingdom, Hezekiah ben Ahaz succeeded his father in the south (18:1-2).<sup>253</sup> His tenure would produce the first of the two great reform movements in Judah. The record of Hezekiah's reign is the longest single treatment to this point of any of Judah's kings since Solomon, which itself marks Hezekiah was one of the south's most important monarchs. The record of his reign in 2 Kings is supplemented by an extensive treatment in 2 Chronicles 29-32 as well as Isaiah 36-39.<sup>254</sup> In addition, a number of details about his administration are available in Assyrian records. He was commended without reserve by the Deuteronomic historian and compared directly with David for his faithfulness to Yahweh (18:3-8).

*There was no one like him among all the kings of Judah, either before him or after him. He held fast to Yahweh and did not cease to follow him; he kept the commands Yahweh had given Moses (18:5b-6).*

In a litany of accomplishments, the historian summarizes the high points of his administration. Unlike his predecessors, even those that received some positive marks (cf. 1 Kg. 15:14; 22:43; 2 Kg. 12:2-3; 14:3-4; 15:3-4, 34-35), he did not fail to remove the *bamoth* (18:4a). He smashed the pagan *matzevot* (phallic symbol pillars) and cut down the Asherah poles (female icons in the fertility cult). The bronze snake that dated all the way back to the time of Moses was equally destroyed, either because it had become an idol for worship or else it symbolized Judah's political independence (18:4b; cf. Nu. 21:4-9).<sup>255</sup> He also resisted Assyrian suzerainty (18:7) and stopped

<sup>253</sup> The clay impression of Hezekiah's personal seal has been discovered and resides in a private collection. It reads, "Belonging to Hezekiah, (son of) 'Ahaz, king of Judah." It features the icon of a two-winged beetle, and it matches a seal impression discovered much earlier but with an indecipherable inscription. Both seal impressions were burned, and it is now clear that both came from the same seal, cf. F. Cross, "King Hezekiah's Seal Bears Phoenician Imagery," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1999), pp. 42-45. Whether or not the winged beetle was a Phoenician or an Egyptian style image has been debated, cf. M. Lubetski, "King Hezekiah's Seal Revisited," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 2001), pp. 44-50. Further seal impressions from Hezekiah have been discovered recently, making a total of six, and two of them have an Egyptian *ankh*, a symbol known as the "key of life", as well as the image of the winged sun disk. That a king of Judah should borrow such Egyptian iconography is not too surprising, since "once a symbol had been associated with authority, rule, domination or power, it was appropriated by those who wished to embellish their public image," cf. R. Deutsch, "Lasting Impressions: New Bullae Reveal Egyptian-Style Emblems on Judah's Royal Seals," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 2002), pp. 42-51, 60-62.

<sup>254</sup> Indeed, the fact that 2 Kg. 18:17—20:19 is nearly word for word with Is. 36-39 in the Hebrew text suggests either than one text depends upon the other or else both depend upon some common source no longer extant.

<sup>255</sup> Traditionally, since the bronze snake was listed alongside other pagan implements, the conclusion most often drawn is that it had become a means of idolatry. Kristin Swanson (Luther College) has suggested a second alternative—that the snake functioned as an Israelite Uraeus (protective snake) taken over from

the Philistine encroachment that had begun during his father's administration (18:8; cf. 2 Chr. 28:18).

In the early years of Hezekiah's reign, he was by default under the suzerainty of Assyria, since his father, Ahaz, had established Judah as an Assyrian vassal state (cf. 16:7-8). Hence, when Assyria decimated the northern kingdom (18:9-12)<sup>256</sup> and even when the Assyrian army penetrated as far south as Ashdod in Philistia (Is. 20:1),<sup>257</sup> Judah was left unscathed. Upon the death of Sargon II, however, and the ascension of Sennacherib to the Assyrian throne, Hezekiah rebelled against Assyrian suzerainty (18:7b). This rebellion is likely to be linked to a larger rebellion that included other surrounding nations. The citizens of Ekron, for instance, deposed their pro-Assyrian king Padi and delivered him over to Hezekiah for imprisonment, events that are recorded in Assyrian texts but do not appear in the Bible.<sup>258</sup> King Luli of Sidon and King Sidqia of Ashkelon were also part of the rebellion. Ammon, Edom and Moab joined in the revolt, and it was supported by Egypt, who probably hoped to regain control of the Palestinian trade routes. Assyrian records confirm that in 701 BC, Sennacherib invaded the rebels, first Sidon, then Ashkelon, and finally Ekron. Luli fled, Sidqia was captured and deported. Padi was reinstated as the pro-Assyrian ruler of Ekron, probably at the time Sennacherib put Jerusalem to siege.<sup>259</sup> In his invasion, Sennacherib captured all Judah's fortified outlying fortress cities (18:13).<sup>260</sup> His own annals detail this attack:<sup>261</sup>

*As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and to the countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered (them) by means of well-stamped (earth-)ramps, and battering rams brought (thus) near (to the walls) (combined with) the attack by foot soldiers, (using) mines, breeches as well as sapper work. I drove out (of them) 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle beyond counting, and considered (them) booty. Himself (i.e., Hezekiah) I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded him*

---

Egyptian tradition, and that it was politically rather than religiously oriented, cf. H. Shanks, "The Mystery of the Nechushtan," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 2007), p. 58-63.

<sup>256</sup> 18:9-11 repeats the material in 17:5-6.

<sup>257</sup> The Assyrian attack upon Ashdod and the reasons behind it are also mentioned in the inscriptions of Sargon II, cf. *ANET* (1978) pp. 285-287.

<sup>258</sup> These events are recorded in both the Oriental Prism of Sennacherib (University of Chicago) and the Taylor Prism (British Museum).

<sup>259</sup> *ANET* (1978) p. 287-288.

<sup>260</sup> While the names of these cities are unknown, Tel-Halif in the foothills of Judah was probably one of them, as archaeological excavations seem to confirm, cf. O. Borowski, "Tel Halif: In the Path of Sennacherib," *BAR* (May/June 2005), pp. 24-35.

<sup>261</sup> *ANET* (1978) p. 288.

*with earthwork in order to molest those who were leaving his city's gate. His towns which I plundered, I took away from his country and gave them (over) to Mitinti, king of Ashdod, Padi, king of Ekron, and Sillibel, king of Gaza. Thus I reduced his country, but I still increased the tribute, to be delivered annually. Hezekiah, himself, whom the terror-inspiring splendor of my lordship had overwhelmed and whose irregular and elite troops which he had brought into Jerusalem, his royal residence, in order to strengthen (it), had deserted him, did send me, later, to Nineveh, my lordly city, together with 30 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver, precious stones, antimony, large cuts of red stone, couches (inlaid) with ivory, nimeduchairs (inlaid) with ivory, elephant-hides, ebony-wood, boxwood (and) all kinds of valuable treasures, his (own) daughters, concubines, male and female musicians. In order to deliver the tribute and to do obeisance as a slave he sent his (personal) messenger.*

*...I laid waste the large district of Judah and made the overbearing and proud Hezekiah, its king, bow in submission.*

In Sennacherib's construction of his palace at Nineveh, he erected huge bas-reliefs depicting his siege at Lachish, one of Judah's fortress cities and likely the second most important city in Judah. These reliefs, which now reside in the British Museum, visually depict what Sennacherib described in his written annals. In addition, archaeological work at Lachish has revealed considerable detail about what happened.<sup>262</sup> Despite Sennacherib's self-aggrandizing description of his attack upon Judah, he was unable to capture the real prize, Jerusalem, and though he boasted that he shut up Hezekiah "like a bird in a cage", he was unable to break into the birdcage! He did, however, levy heavy tribute upon Hezekiah, as both the Bible and Sennacherib's records show, and Hezekiah managed to pay this tribute by stripping the temple and the palace (18:14-16).

While there is more information about Hezekiah and his relationship to Assyria than for any other king of Judah, there is a confusing chronological element. On the one hand, the Bible and Assyrian records both describe Hezekiah's tribute as described above. On the other, the Bible also describes Sennacherib's threat, his withdrawal and Jerusalem's deliverance by a divine miracle. How can these two narratives be reconciled? If

---

<sup>262</sup> For reports on the excavation work and/or the Nineveh reliefs, see D. Ussishkin, "Answers at Lachish," *BAR* (Nov/Dec 1979), pp. 16-38; H. Shanks, "Destruction of Judean Fortress Portrayed in Dramatic Eight-Century B.C. Pictures," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1984), pp. 48-65; D. Ussishkin, "Defensive Judean Counter-Ramp Found at Lachish in 1983 Season," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1984), pp. 66-73; Y. Yadin, "The Mystery of the Unexplained Chain," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1984), pp. 65-67; D. Ussishkin, "Restoring the Great Gate at Lachish," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1988), pp. 42-47; S. Feldman, "Return to Lachish," *BAR* (May/Jun 2002), pp. 46-51; P. King, "Why Lachish Matters," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 2005), pp. 36-47.

Hezekiah paid tribute, why did Sennacherib attack anyway? Some scholars suggest that perhaps Sennacherib visited Jerusalem twice, once in 701 BC, when he put the city to siege and was bought off by Hezekiah's tribute, and a second time in ca. 688 BC, when he threatened to destroy the city but was thwarted by divine intervention. Between these two campaigns would then be inserted the descriptions of Hezekiah's defense preparations (cf. 2 Chr. 32:2-5, 30), which included the famous tunnel and pool and the building of the huge western Broad Wall (Is. 22:9-11).<sup>263</sup> The tunnel, which is mentioned briefly at the end of Hezekiah's annals (20:20), brought water 1750' from the Gihon Spring under the eastern ridge to the western slope, creating a huge reservoir of water inside the city walls with which to stave off the siege. Sennacherib may have boasted that he would starve them out by famine and thirst (cf. 2 Chr. 32:11), but Hezekiah's advance preparations were sufficient.<sup>264</sup> Hezekiah also built the so-called Broad Wall (23' wide and excavated to a length of 140'), designed to withstand Assyrian battering rams, on the western side of the city (2 Chr. 32:5).<sup>265</sup>

Whether or not Sennacherib invaded once or twice, the Kings record certainly describes the threats made to Jerusalem by his representative, the Rabshakeh (18:17ff.), along with two other Assyrian officers, the Tartan and the Rabsaris.<sup>266</sup> The Rabshakeh, a high-ranking officer who spoke Hebrew (possibly of Israelite descent?), met officials from Hezekiah's court, attempting to coerce them into surrender (18:17-18). Ironically, they met at the same site where years earlier Isaiah had urged Hezekiah's father, Ahaz,

<sup>263</sup> The case for two invasions by Sennacherib is set out by W. Shea, "Jerusalem Under Siege: Did Sennacherib Attack Twice?" *BAR* (Nov/Dec 1999), pp. 36-44. A rebuttal can be found in M. Cogan, "Sennacherib's Siege of Jerusalem: Once or Twice?" *BAR* (Jan/Feb 2001), pp. 40-45, 69.

<sup>264</sup> The modern discovery of this S-shaped water tunnel in 1838 and an inscription inside the tunnel itself discovered in 1880 describing how it was built enhance the biblical references. The Siloam Inscription was removed and now resides in the Museum of the Ancient Orient, Istanbul, cf. H. Shanks, *The City of David: A Guide to Biblical Jerusalem* (Washington DC: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1975), pp. 49-62. One of the most intriguing aspects of the Siloam Inscription is that the tunnel was said to be constructed by digging from both ends and meeting in the middle. How could tunnelers working underground from both ends on an S-curved tunnel possibly hope to meet? Several theories have been produced, but the latest one is that they did so by acoustic messages hammered out between the tunnelers and the surface, cf. H. Shanks, "Sound Proof: How Hezekiah's Tunnelers Met," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 2008), pp. 50-57, 78.

<sup>265</sup> A. Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), p. 420. The Broad Wall was part of Hezekiah's westward expansion of the city, where he protected newly settled areas that included the Tyropoean Valley and the Siloam Pool within the city wall, cf. D. Bahat, "Jerusalem," *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East*, ed. E. Meyers (New York/Oxford: Oxford University, 1997), 3.226. It generally is assumed that the expansion of Jerusalem during Hezekiah's reign was due to Israelite refugees who fled southward at the destruction of Samaria.

<sup>266</sup> The title Rabshakeh (= chief cupbearer) in older English versions (KJV, ASV, etc.) was thought to be a proper name, but after its attestation in Assyrian inscriptions as an official title, most modern versions opt for something more generic. The title Tartan must be a military title, since it was used to describe the head of the Assyrian army that attacked Ashdod (cf. Is. 20:1, Heb. text).

to stand firm in his faith (cf. Is. 7:3). Of Hezekiah's officials, two of them figure in reports by Isaiah, where Eliakim ben Hilkiyah eventually would replace Shebna as the palace administrator (Is. 22:15-24).<sup>267</sup> The substance of the Rabshakeh's diatribe was to belittle Hezekiah's defensive strategies, undermine confidence in any assistance from Egypt,<sup>268</sup> and dismiss as hopeless any expectations for Yahweh's divine intervention (18:19-22). He chided them that even if the Assyrians gave them 2000 war horses, they still would not be able to find a cavalry to mount them (18:23-24). To add insult to injury, he claimed that the Assyrian attack upon Jerusalem was ordered by no less than Yahweh himself (18:25).

Since the Rabshakeh was speaking in Hebrew in the hearing of Jerusalem's defenders, Hezekiah's delegation asked that he speak in Aramaic so that the insulting words would not be understood by most of the people (18:26). The Rabshakeh bluntly refused, further insulting the whole company by saying that official and citizen alike would be so deprived during the siege that they would be forced to eat their own excretion (18:27). Then, addressing the listening citizens directly, the Rabshakeh scorned their trust in Yahweh and Hezekiah, urging them to submit to Sennacherib (18:28-35). None of the local deities of any other nations had successfully evaded the Assyrian war machine, and Jerusalem would succumb as well, Yahweh notwithstanding. No one responded, and Hezekiah's delegation went back to report to him the grim threats (18:36-37).

Hezekiah's understandable consternation immediately led him to seek Yahweh (he went into the temple) and consult the prophet Isaiah (to whom he sent a delegation). It is a mark of Hezekiah's respect for Isaiah as a true prophet that he consulted him at all, since Isaiah had formerly been quite critical of the king's wishful dependence upon Egypt in his resistance to Assyria (Is. 30:1-5; 31:1-3). The metaphor of aborted birth shows that the king and his officers realized their rebellion against Sennacherib and their bid for freedom was near an abortive end (19:1-4). Isaiah, however, had optimistic news! The Rabshakeh's direct affront to Yahweh would not go unchallenged, and Yahweh himself would respond (19:5-7)! In fact, Sennacherib would die after returning home!

---

<sup>267</sup> The deposing of Shebna and his replacement by Eliakim was due to Shebna's arrogance in creating for himself a splendid tomb. In all likelihood, this tomb was discovered in 1870. The title is clear enough ("one who is over the house"), but only the ending of the name is decipherable ("iah"). Assuming that the longer form of the name was inscribed (Shebaniah), this inscription headed the tomb he built for himself, cf. P. McCarter, Jr., *Ancient Inscriptions* [CD-Rom] (Washington, DC: Biblical Archaeology Society), slides 179 and 180.

<sup>268</sup> Ironically, Isaiah, also, was contemptuous of any help coming from Egypt (cf. Is. 30:1-5; 31:1-3).

By this time, the siege of Lachish was either over or nearly so, and Sennacherib had moved on to Libnah, a town in the Shephelah (19:8; cf. Jos. 21:13; 15:42), apparently a border city since it seems to have changed loyalties at least once (cf. 2 Kg. 8:22). Unexpectedly, a report came to the Assyrian king that Pharaoh Tirhaqah of the Nubian 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty (690-664) was mobilizing against him (19:9a).<sup>269</sup> In the face of this new threat, Sennacherib sent to Hezekiah a letter stating much the same things that the Rabshakeh had delivered orally—that Yahweh would be inept before the military machine of the Assyrians (19:9b-13).<sup>270</sup> When Hezekiah received the letter, he took it into the temple and spread it out before Yahweh, presumably near the curtain separating the Most Holy Place from the Holy Place (19:14). Here, he prayed for Yahweh to hear and see the blasphemy of the Assyrian warlord (19:15-19).

Hezekiah's prayer was heard, and soon he received a communication from Isaiah with an oracle against Sennacherib (19:20). The message was in the poetic meter of a dirge with the character of a taunt.<sup>271</sup> Jerusalem, the "Virgin Daughter of Zion", would toss her head at Sennacherib when he fled (19:21). The Assyrian warlord's mockery of Yahweh would recoil upon himself (19:22-23a). His self-aggrandizing boasts notwithstanding (19:23b-24), he was only doing what Yahweh ordained that he would do (19:25-26). Because of his insults, Yahweh would put a hook in his nose—the shameful treatment he had imposed on others—and lead him back to Assyria (19:27-28).<sup>272</sup>

Then, to Hezekiah himself Isaiah gave a sign that would vindicate the authenticity of the prediction. Within three years, farming would be back to normal. In the first and second years, the citizens of Jerusalem would have to subsist on what grew from seeds fallen from the previous year's planting,

<sup>269</sup> The mention of Tirhaqah figures in the debate about whether Sennacherib invaded Judah only once (701 BC) or twice (701 BC and ca. 688 BC). If the former, the title "king" is given him in retrospect, even though in 701 BC he was still just a military officer, cf. Kitchen, p. 16. If the later, the title "king" is taken to mean that Sennacherib's challenge to Hezekiah could not have been earlier than when Tirhaqah ascended the Egyptian throne (see also the resources cited in footnote #263).

<sup>270</sup> The cities cited in Sennacherib's letter had all been within Assyrian dominion for some time. Gozan had been subjected in 809 BC, Haran (northwest Mesopotamia) was also annexed in the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC, Reseph in upper Mesopotamia was by this time the capital of an Assyrian province, and the Edenites of Tel Assar were people of Bit Adini conquered by Shalmaneser III. Hamath (Syria), Arpad (taken by Tiglath-pileser III in 740 BC), Sepharvaim (location debated), and Hena and Ivvah (locations unknown) likewise had long since been incorporated into the larger Assyrian hegemony.

<sup>271</sup> The *qinah* meter for dirges has five stressed syllables in a 3+2 pattern.

<sup>272</sup> Assyrians apparently used hooks in the noses of their captives (cf. 2 Chr. 33:11), cf. Cogan and Tadmor, p. 238.

but by the third year, the farmers would both sow and reap (19:29).<sup>273</sup> This return to normalcy would symbolize the rootedness of Judah, though it would be true for only a surviving remnant (19:30-31).<sup>274</sup> As for Sennacherib, Jerusalem would not succumb to his siege, for Yahweh would defend it for his own reputation and his promise to David (19:32-34).

That very night, disaster from Yahweh came upon the Assyrian camp in which an angel killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers.<sup>275</sup> Sennacherib withdrew to Nineveh, where he was assassinated. Historical-critical scholars flinch at the large number of deaths, usually putting it down to an exaggeration. Others suggest a rereading of the Hebrew text in which 185 Assyrians captains were killed, a much more modest number.<sup>276</sup> In any case, Sennacherib certainly did not penetrate Jerusalem,<sup>277</sup> and when he returned to Nineveh, he was assassinated. Esarhaddon succeeded him (19:35-37).<sup>278</sup>

## The Last Years of Hezekiah (20)

The final two episodes about Hezekiah's reign in the Kings record, like the lengthy Sennacherib narrative, feature direction interaction with the prophet Isaiah. In the first of these, Hezekiah became deathly sick, and Isaiah simply told him to prepare to die (20:1). Hezekiah did not want to die, and he immediately began to pray earnestly (20:2-3). Before Isaiah had left the palace precincts, Yahweh's word came to him that Hezekiah would not die, but he would be healed within three days. In fact, he could anticipate

<sup>273</sup> If the Assyrians stayed from spring to fall in 701 BC, they would have prevented any harvesting for that year. Also, the fall plowing and sowing could not be done, so harvesting in the year 700 BC would be only what grew from the previous year's planting. By 699 BC, however, there would be a full recovery.

<sup>274</sup> Isaiah's language of "remnant" recalls the naming of his son many years early as Shear-yashuv (= a remnant with return), cf. Is. 7:3. Indeed, the concept of a surviving remnant becomes a controlling feature in many of the prophets with respect to the demise of Israel and Judah (cf. Is. 4:3; 6:13; 10:20-23; Am. 3:12; 5:3; 6:9-10; Mic. 2:12; 5:7-8; Zep. 2:3; 3:12-13; Je. 8:3; 24:1-10; Eze. 11:16-21; 14:21-23).

<sup>275</sup> Josephus attributes these deaths as due to a plague described by Herodotus, cf. *Antiquities* 10.1.4-5, in which Herodotus described "a multitude of mice, which devoured all the quivers and bowstrings of the enemy, and ate the thongs by which they managed their shields. Next morning they commenced their flight, and great multitudes fell, as they had no arms with which to defend themselves", cf. M. Komroff, ed., *The History of Herodotus*, trans. G. Rawlinson (New York: Tudor, 1928), p. 131.

<sup>276</sup> The difference between  $\eta\lambda\aleph$  (= 1000) and  $\eta\lambda\aleph$  (= commander) is mostly a matter of vocalization, and of course, the pointing is much later than the consonantal text, cf. C. Martin, "1 and 2 Kings," *The International Bible Commentary*, ed. F. Bruce (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan/Marshall Pickering, 1986), p. 435. See also the discussion in J. Douglas, ed., *The New Bible Dictionary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), pp. 896-897.

<sup>277</sup> It is about this story of Sennacherib's failure to capture Jerusalem that Lord Byron wrote his famous poem, "The Destruction of Sennacherib".

<sup>278</sup> The assassination of Sennacherib is attested in the Babylonian Chronicle, which says, "Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was killed by his son in a rebellion", cf. Grayson, p. 81, and this is further mentioned in a text by Nabonidus of Babylon, cf. Cogan and Tadmor, pp. 239-240.

another fifteen years of life. Yahweh would deliver Hezekiah just as he had delivered the city (20:4-6). Isaiah then put a fig plaster (lit., “a cake of figs”) on the inflamed spot (20:7).<sup>279</sup> Hezekiah then asked if there was to be a confirming sign of this oracle, and a sign was given: the shadow on the sundial would retract ten steps (20:8-11).<sup>280</sup>

The second episode is linked to the former. A diplomatic mission from Babylon’s king, Merodach-Baladan II, arrived with a gift for Hezekiah and an inquiry about his health (20:12).<sup>281</sup> It is to be assumed that this delegation had more on their minds than a sick call, probably an invitation to participate in another anti-Assyrian league. Hezekiah foolishly showed them his entire wealth, and one can be assured that years later, when Babylon would invade Judah, the Babylonians would not have forgotten that the conquest of Jerusalem would be worth their while (20:13)!<sup>282</sup> When Isaiah discovered the identity of the visitors and heard that they had been given the royal tour of all Hezekiah’s treasures, he was dismayed. His resulting oracle predicted the eventual fall of Jerusalem and the exile of Judah to Babylon (20:14-18). One thing is clear: the earlier salvation of Jerusalem “for the sake of David” (cf. 19:34; 20:6b) was not some eternal guarantee. Though Isaiah gave no date for this invasion, it would happen about a century later, when Jehoiachin would be deported to Babylon along with the treasures of the temple and palace (cf. 24:12b-14). Hezekiah accepted the reliability of

<sup>279</sup> The nature of Hezekiah’s illness is unclear. Clearly Hezekiah himself considered it to be fatal, and the word  $\text{רָבַח}$  (= boil) is somewhat vague and may cover a wide variety of skin diseases. According to Pliny’s *Natural History*, figs were used to cure ulcers, cf. Jones, 2.587.

<sup>280</sup> The nature of the device by which Hezekiah was measuring the sun’s passage is unclear. If an actual dial, it may have been an innovation brought from Assyria by Ahaz. Indeed, the Qumran text of Isa. 38:8 says that the shadow was on the “upper dial of Ahaz, marking the setting sun” (1QIsa<sup>a</sup>), cf. M. Abegg, Jr., P. Flint and E. Ulrich, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Bible* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1999), pp. 329-330. The fascinating legend that this retraction of the shadow is to be linked to Joshua’s long day and has been scientifically verified has been repeated in print since 1936 and now circulates on the internet, but it cannot be substantiated and has been debunked repeatedly by such conservative Christian periodicals as *Moody Monthly* and *Christianity Today*, cf. <http://snopes.com/religion/lostday.asp>.

<sup>281</sup> During his nearly 60-year career, Merodach-Baladan led an anti-Assyrian coalition attempting to prevent Assyrian expansion in southern Babylonia, cf. R. Sack, *ABD* (1992) 4.704-705. He is mentioned in both Assyrian and Babylonian texts, and he is depicted on a stela now housed in the *Staatliche Museen zu Berlin Vorderasiatisches Museum*, cf. Marie-Henriette Gates, *Mesopotamian Archaeology in Pictures [CD Rom]* (Washington DC: Biblical Archaeology Society).

<sup>282</sup> Since Hezekiah showed them “everything”, presumably this included his summer palace at Ramat Rahel halfway between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. One of the artifacts uncovered there may actually be a portrait of Hezekiah himself, cf. G. Barkay, “Royal Palace, Royal Portrait?” *BAR* (Sep/Oct 2006), pp. 34-44. For a full account of the excavations of Ramat Rahel, see Y. Aharoni, “Ramat Rahel,” *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. E. Stern (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 4.1261-1267. Hezekiah also constructed public buildings in Jerusalem, and recently a monumental inscription, probably from one of them, was discovered that may possibly contain the name “Hezekiah”, cf. H. Shanks, “A Tiny Piece of the Puzzle: Six-Letter Inscription Suggests Monumental Building of Hezekiah,” *BAR* (Mar/Apr 2009), pp. 52-55.

Isaiah's dark prediction, but he felt relieved that it would not happen in his own lifetime (20:19).

The compiler of the Kings record now sums up Hezekiah's reign, mentioning specifically the tunnel and pool (see footnote #263). Hezekiah eventually died and was succeeded by his son, Manasseh (20:20-21).<sup>283</sup>

### **The Darkest Period: The Reigns of Manasseh and Amon (21)**

The reign of Manasseh, Hezekiah's son, must be reckoned as the spiritual low mark in the history of Judah. According to Jeremiah, Manasseh's spiritual decline into paganism was so severe that even if the greatest intercessors of the past, Samuel and Moses, were to pray for the nation, it would be to no avail because of what Manasseh ben Hezekiah did (Je. 15:1-4). Even though after Manasseh's death Josiah plunged wholeheartedly into reform, still "nevertheless, Yahweh did not turn away from the heat of his fierce anger, which burned against Judah because of all that Manasseh had done to provoke him to anger" (cf. 23:26).

Though only twelve years old when he came to the throne, when presumably he began to serve in a co-regency with his father, Manasseh took a determined turn away from the faithful Yahwehism of his father when Hezekiah died (21:1-2). Perhaps he felt such an expedient was necessary, since the Assyrian Empire was reaching the fullest extent of its power, and to oppose it openly would have been political suicide. Indeed, the Chronicler

---

<sup>283</sup> While the Kings text makes a vague allusion to "all [Hezekiah's] achievements", some of those achievements can be described more specifically. First, the Chronicler narrates extensively Hezekiah's religious reforms, including his purification of the temple and restoration of its worship patterns, his celebration of Passover, his destruction of the Canaanite shrines, and his collection of contributions for the maintenance of the temple (2 Chr. 29-31). In addition, Hezekiah's era saw a flourishing of literacy in Judah. No doubt this was augmented to a considerable degree by Assyrian influence, where the spread of writing in the ancient Near East paralleled the rise of the Assyrian Empire as the Assyrians dispatched scribes and overseers to administer their conquered lands in the west. The number of archives and libraries in the ancient Near East rose sharply, and nearly every major city had them. This spread of literacy was not confined to the royal courts but also affected the common people as well. Archaeologically, a noticeable increase in graffiti on pots and in tombs occurred in Phoenicia, Judah and other nearby countries. In Judah, Hezekiah was a pivotal figure in this literary explosion. Under his leadership, early collections of the Proverbs were made (cf. Pro. 25:1). When Hezekiah revived the celebration of the Passover, he sent written communications to all the outlying provinces, and even to what was left of northern Israel (2 Chr. 30:1), a procedure that presumes widespread literacy. This is the earliest mention in the Bible of such a general written communication. Indeed, one of the literary theories about the Kings record is that it was largely composed before the exile of Judah during the time of Hezekiah, cf. W. Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2004), pp. 77-81. Whether or not that theory is true, it certainly is true that archaeologists have found a plethora of seal impressions on jar handles from the period. Called *lamelech* jars (*lamelech* = belonging to the king), almost a thousand such impressions are now known, and they seem to have been produced in the years preceding Hezekiah's revolt against Sennacherib, since they are often found in destruction layers that date to Sennacherib's invasion and conquest of Judah's towns, cf. A. Mazar, pp.455-458.

states that Manasseh was actually deported to Babylon with a hook through his nose and then restored, which suggests that whatever loyalties he felt toward Assyria must have been grudging (cf. 2 Chr. 33:10-13). In any case, Manasseh is listed in Assyrian records as a vassal who supplied building materials for Nineveh under Esarhaddon.<sup>284</sup> Ashurbanipal, Esarhaddon's successor, also lists Manasseh as one who "brought heavy gifts to me and kissed my feet".<sup>285</sup>

Manasseh's sins are listed bluntly. He restored the *bamoth* that had been destroyed by Hezekiah (21:3a; cf. 18:4). He built altars to the Canaanite fertility deities, reinstating the Ba'al cult that had been championed by Ahab in the north many years earlier (21:3b). The fact that Ahab is mentioned at all is profoundly ominous, since Ahab's importing of Ba'al and Asherah worship led directly to the downfall of Samaria. Further, Manasseh went beyond the Canaanite borders, borrowing the astral religions of Mesopotamia and installing altars to them in the temple itself (21:3c-5).<sup>286</sup> Like Ahaz, his grandfather, he sacrificed his own child in the fire (21:6a; cf. 16:3). He turned to the occult, the very practices strictly forbidden by the Torah though widely used in the ancient Near East (21:6b; cf. Dt. 18:9-13). He installed an Asherah in the very temple, a deliberate defiance to Yahweh unparalleled in the history of the nation (21:7-9). Yahweh's prophets challenged him directly that his egregious sins would result in the extermination of the nation, but to no avail (21:10-15).<sup>287</sup> The hyperbole that Manasseh filled Jerusalem with blood may refer to his slaughter of God's prophets, just as Jezebel had done a century or so earlier in the north (21:16; cf. 1 Kg. 18:4).<sup>288</sup> A longstanding tradition is that Isaiah was martyred during Manasseh's reign by being sawed in half.<sup>289</sup> When Manasseh died after a long reign, he was buried in a private garden (21:17-18).

The reign of Amon, his son, continued Manasseh's spiritual decline. Coming from the union of Manasseh with what may have been an Arabian

---

<sup>284</sup> ANET (1978) p. 291.

<sup>285</sup> ANET (1978) p. 294.

<sup>286</sup> Assyrian religion was an adaptation of Sumerian religion, including cosmic and astral deities, cf. M. Harsenell, *ISBE* (1988), pp. 86-87 and Ringgren, pp. 52-68.

<sup>287</sup> We do not know these prophets by name. Isaiah and Micah may be too early (Is. 1:1; Mic. 1:1), while Zephaniah and Jeremiah are too late (Zep. 1:1; Je. 1:2-3). Perhaps their oracles were verbal rather than written. The Chronicler mentions that Yahweh spoke to Manasseh, but no details are offered (cf. 2 Chr. 33:10).

<sup>288</sup> So, Josephus, *Anitquities* 10.3.1

<sup>289</sup> This tradition is preserved in Chapter 5 of the pseudepigraphical work *The Martyrdom and Ascension of Isaiah* composed about the 1<sup>st</sup> century, but the tradition may be considerably older, cf. J. Charlesworth, *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1985), 2.143-176. This same tradition is alluded to in the New Testament (cf. He. 11:37).

or Edomite mother,<sup>290</sup> Amon made no effort to turn back to Yahweh (21:19-22). His short reign ended when his officials assassinated him in the palace (21:23). In retaliation, a populist uprising lynched the assassins, and Josiah, Amon's son, was installed on the throne at the tender age of eight (21:24). Amon was buried in the same private garden as his father (21:25-26).

### **Josiah and the Second Reform (22:1—23:30)**

If Manasseh's reign was the theological low point of Judah's national existence, the reign of Josiah was the last great hope. Because of his father's assassination, Josiah ascended the throne at the tender age of eight (22:1). He is the only king other than Hezekiah to receive full commendation by the Deuteronomic historian (22:2; 23:25; cf. 18:3-7). The early years of his reign are left without remark, but presumably he was under the tutelage of court officials or perhaps even the priest, such as was Joash when he became king at the age of seven (cf. 2 Kg. 11).<sup>291</sup> The Chronicler indicates that Josiah's initial reforms occurred when he was only a teenager (2 Chr. 34:3-7), but both the Kings and Chronicles records agree that when he was twenty-six (his 18<sup>th</sup> regnal year) Josiah ordered repairs to the temple (22:3-7; cf. 2 Chr. 34:8ff.). It was during these repairs that a momentous discovery fueled the fires of reform.

The discovery was made by the high priest Hilkiah, who reported it to Shaphan, the secretary.<sup>292</sup> It was a Torah scroll (lit., "a writing of the Torah"). Shaphan read it, reported the find to Josiah, and read it to him as well (22:8-10). When the king had heard the reading, he was filled with consternation and immediately asked that a spiritual assessment of what he had heard be solicited. Apparently, the writing contained searing words of denunciation for covenant disobedience, and while no quotations are offered,

<sup>290</sup> The site of Jotbah is uncertain, but the queen mother's name is similar to Arab and Edomite constructions, cf. Gray, p. 711.

<sup>291</sup> The ascension year of Josiah can be fixed in 640 BC, since the date of his death can be fixed from the Babylonian Chronicle of Nebopolassar (British Museum) as being in 609 BC, H. MacLean, *IDB* (1962) 2.997-998.

<sup>292</sup> The ring of Hilkiah's son may have been found and resides in a private collection. The three-line inscription reads "[belonging] to Hanan son [of] Hilqiyahu the priest", cf. J. Elayi, "Name of Deuteronomy's Author Found on Seal Ring," *BAR* (Sep/Oct 1987), pp. 54-56. The fact that there are two Hilkiahs from about the same period—the high priest in the temple and Jeremiah's father, who also was a priest (cf. Je. 1:1)—leaves the identification uncertain. More certainty, however, is to be accorded to two bullae, one with the name "Azaryahu son of Hilkiyahu" and the other with the name "Gemaryahu son of Shaphan". The fact that both names and both father's names also appear in the Bible (1 Chr. 6:13; 9:11; Je. 36:10-12) is a strong factor as well as that the two bullae were found in the same hoard, linking them both as they are also linked in the Bible, cf. T. Schneider, "Six Biblical Signatures: Seals and Seal Impressions of Six Biblical Personages Recovered," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1991), pp.31-33.

the king's reaction suggests that at least part of this scroll consisted of a curses section, such as is found in Deuteronomy 27-28 (22:11-13). Josiah's officials took the scroll to the prophetess Huldah, who may have been the senior prophetess in Jerusalem at the time (22:14).<sup>293</sup>

Huldah's interpretation of the Torah scroll was scorching! Disaster for covenant disobedience loomed as an imminent threat! The paganizing tendencies of Manasseh and Amon and their predecessors had raised Yahweh's ire, and his anger would not be quelled (22:15-17). Josiah, however, would be given a reprieve. His reform efforts had not gone unnoticed by God, and while disaster would surely overtake Judah (cf. 21:10-15), it would not come in Josiah's lifetime (21:18-20).

So what was this Torah scroll discovered in the temple? An incredible amount of ink and paper has been expended by scholars on this question. In the first place, one must remember that the so-called "Books of Moses" were not preserved in a codex, such as would be done later in the Christian era, but in single scrolls. It is a moot question as to whether the various scrolls of the books of the Pentateuch were available at this time in this way. Conservatives have generally assumed that they were, while historical-critical scholars are quite sure they were not.<sup>294</sup> Both sides, however, generally agree that the best candidate for the Torah scroll discovered by Hilkiah is the scroll of Deuteronomy. Certainly Josiah's reforms emerged

---

<sup>293</sup> The appeal to Huldah is striking for two reasons. First, she is the only prophetess directly mentioned in the kingdom era of either Judah or Israel other than the brief mention of Isaiah's wife (cf. Is. 8:3). Earlier, Miriam, Moses' sister, and Deborah, the Judge, are both given that title, also (Ex. 15:20), but in a patriarchal culture, female spiritual leaders are the exception, not the norm. Second, it is entirely possible that the young Jeremiah was available, since the early years of his ministry began during Josiah's 13<sup>th</sup> regnal year (cf. Je. 1:2), and possibly Zephaniah as well (cf. Zep. 1:1). This incident would have been five years later than the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry. That the appeal was made to Huldah might suggest that she had "seniority" over the young Jeremiah and Zephaniah.

<sup>294</sup> Without straying too far afield, it can at least be said that historical-critical scholars do not envision the final form of the Books of Moses to have been achieved quite this early. They believe the material was still in the process of being compiled and edited. Perhaps more to the point, they believe that this particular scroll was likely presented to Josiah while the ink was still wet (so to speak). How much it may have rested on Mosaic tradition varies from scholar to scholar, some granting substantial traditions dating back to Moses himself and some allowing very little, if any, to be later than Josiah's reform. What they do agree on, however, is that the Torah scroll presented to Josiah was some portion or even all of the Book of Deuteronomy. For one thing, the book of Deuteronomy itself is described as "the words of this Torah which are written in this scroll" (Dt. 28:58, 61; 31:26; cf. Jos. 1:8). For another, the curse sections of Deuteronomy seem most likely to be consonant with the consternation of Josiah and the searing interpretation by Huldah. Deuteronomy urges the centralization of worship (Dt. 12), and of course, this becomes a centerpiece for the reforms of Josiah, cf. J. McConville, "Deuteronomy, Book of," *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, eds., T. Alexander and D. Baker (Downers Grove, IL/Leicester, England: InterVarsity, 2002), pp. 184-187. Conservatives, on the other hand, still give Mosaic priority, though they suggest that during the dark days of Manasseh the scroll of Deuteronomy may have been suppressed, perhaps even stuffed away somewhere out of sight, which is why it was discovered by Hilkiah during the temple repairs.

from the reading of the scroll (23:2), and since those reforms consisted especially of centralizing all worship in the Jerusalem temple, a theme that is found only in Deuteronomy, the conclusion seems solid enough.

The reform itself began with a public reading of the newly discovered Torah scroll (23:1-2), which was conducted “by the pillar”, where years earlier Joash was anointed king and keeper of the covenant (23:3; cf. 11:12-14). The temple was purged of the pagan implements installed by Manasseh, the ashes of their burning carried to the northern shrine at Bethel where they were discarded, and the pagan priests of the *bamoth* were deposed (23:4-5, 9; cf. 21:4-5, 7). The *bamoth* were purified of their pagan accretions in all Judah (23:8), and indeed, in all Israel (cf. 2 Chr. 34:6). The site of child sacrifice south of the city was desecrated (23:10; cf. 16:3; 21:6; Je. 7:31; 19:5) and the horses and chariots dedicated to solar worship were removed (23:11).<sup>295</sup> The pagan altars installed by Ahaz and Manasseh were removed as well and destroyed (23:12; cf. 21:4-5).<sup>296</sup> Some shrines east of Jerusalem had been retained since the time Solomon, and these, too, were destroyed (23:13-14; cf. 1 Kg. 11:5-8).<sup>297</sup> The practice of strewing human bones on the site was an act of desecration. Josiah’s purge extended even northward into what had formerly been the kingdom of Israel. At Bethel, the southern shrine originally erected by Jeroboam I, he demolished the *bamah*, burning it down and desecrating it with more human bones, a direct fulfillment to the oracle given by the unnamed prophet so many years earlier (23:15-16; cf. 1 Kg. 13:2). When the grave of this prophet was discovered, however, Josiah left it undisturbed along with the grave of the other prophet who was buried near him, since both were side by side in the same tomb (23:17-18; cf. 1 Kg. 13:29-32). Moving farther northward, Josiah continued to purge the land of pagan shrines, executing pagan priests and desecrating them with human bones (23:19-20).

---

<sup>295</sup> Because of the large number of terra cotta horse artifacts recovered from this period in Jerusalem, it has been usual to assume that the horses and chariots mentioned here were these same figurines. Some of the horse images seem to have a sun disk between their ears. However, it has also been argued that what Josiah purged were real horse, not figurines, since there is evidence that Assyrian religion used real horses and “divine” chariots as a means of divination from the period of Sargon II. The sun god Shamash played a central role, and horses served as a medium for divination. The chariots served to make the invisible deity present, cf. O. Keel and C. Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images of God in Ancient Israel*, trans. T. Trapp (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), pp. 343-345.

<sup>296</sup> If the altars on the roofs are the same as those described by Jeremiah and Zephaniah, they were cultic sites for worshipping the zodiac as well as Ba’al (cf. Je. 19:13; 32:29; Zep. 1:5).

<sup>297</sup> There is some evidence that Josiah’s reforms stretched southward as well as northward. Though Edomite deities are not mentioned in the list of foreign shrines, an Edomite shrine in southern Judah has been excavated (‘En Hatzeva). It is apparent that the site was destroyed, probably during the Josiah purge, cf. R. Cohen and Y. Yisrael, “Smashing the Idols,” *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1996), pp. 40-51, 65.

Josiah's actions in the north suggest that he had extended Judah's hegemony well beyond its traditional northern border, annexing the provinces of Samaria and Megiddo and possibly even Gilead in the Transjordan. Ashurbanipal, the Assyrian king, had died in 627 BC, and the resulting struggle for the throne between rivals, not to mention the beginning encroachment of the Babylonians into southern Assyria, left Judah relatively free by default. The great Assyrian Empire was unraveling! The last gasp of Assyria came during Josiah's reign, enabling him to make a clean break with Assyrian domination as the Assyrian Empire tottered toward extinction. Possibly, as Bright suggested, there were few Assyrian troops left to oppose Josiah by this time, and the remnants of northern Israelites may even have welcomed him.<sup>298</sup> The young Jeremiah, at least, seems to have encouraged independence (cf. Je. 2:18).

The high point of this political reprieve and its associated religious reforms was a celebration of Passover—a celebration on a scale that had not been seen for several hundred years (23:21-23)! Josiah's passion for reform, prompted by the discovery of the Torah scroll, continued unabated (23:24-25).<sup>299</sup> His efforts notwithstanding, Yahweh's judgment against Judah by exile and his rejection of Jerusalem and Solomon's temple were not cancelled, only postponed (23:26-27; cf. 24:3-4).

The final summary of Josiah's reign includes an account of his death in 609 BC. By this time, the Assyrian Empire was on its last legs. Assyria had reached the height of its power under Ashurbanipal, but paradoxically, it was the beginning of the end. The empire was considerably overextended, and even though the army and navy ranged as far as Thebes down the Nile, which they sacked,<sup>300</sup> fissures in the Assyrian superstructure began to show plainly. Judah's vassalship to Assyria ended due to the break-up of the empire. Records of the latter years of Ashurbanipal (after 639 BC) have not survived, but internal affairs were apparently chaotic, and under the reign of Sin-sar-iskun, the empire fell apart. Nebopolassar of Babylon managed to break free of Assyrian dominance by 620 BC, and he followed up his advantage by invading the Assyrian heartland. Asshur, the southern capital, fell in 614 BC. Nineveh, the northern capital, fell in 612 BC. A refugee government tried to hold out in Haran of northwest Mesopotamia under Assur-uballit II, but by 609 BC he was killed as well. By 605 BC, Egypt, the

---

<sup>298</sup> Bright, pp. 314-316.

<sup>299</sup> This revival of Yahweh worship may have provided a context for the creation of the small silver amulet discovered from about this period containing the tetragrammaton YHWH in a prayer context, cf. G. Barkay, "News from the Field: The Divine Name Found in Jerusalem," *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1983), pp. 14-19.

<sup>300</sup> For the Assyrian texts, see *ANET* (1978) p. 294-296.

last supporter of the Assyrian hegemony, would be defeated at Carchemish.<sup>301</sup>

In the midst of this political chaos, Judah was caught up in a bipolar struggle for power. With the eminent demise of Assyria, both the Egyptians and the Babylonians hoped to lay claim to the imperial carcass. The newly enthroned Pharaoh Necho II of Egypt (26<sup>th</sup> Dynasty) was by default a supporter of the tottering Assyrian refugee government in Haran. Babylon, of course, was gobbling up land coming from southwest Mesopotamia. Judah, unfortunately, lay between these superpowers, so it was nearly impossible to remain neutral. Josiah, for his part, determined to oppose Egypt (and implicitly Assyria). When Necho II marched his armies northward to come to the aid of the Assyrian army with its back to the wall against the Babylonians, Josiah attempted to ambush the Egyptians in the Megiddo pass (23:29a). Necho II warned Josiah not to interfere (cf. 2 Chr. 35:21), but Josiah refused to back down (cf. 2 Chr. 35:22). He was shot in the conflict, died and his body was returned to Jerusalem for burial (223:29b-30; cf. 2 Chr. 35:23-24). Jehoahaz, his son, succeeded him.<sup>302</sup>

### **The Death of the Kingdom of Judah (23:31—25:30)**

The death of the kingdom of Judah occurred less than a quarter century after the death of Josiah. The political pathway toward destruction can be pieced together from both the biblical accounts as well as Babylonian records.<sup>303</sup>

#### **The Calendar of Judah's Political Death**

609 BC      Pharaoh Necho II marches north to support the dying Assyrian Empire in its struggle against Babylon. Josiah interposes his army at Megiddo and is killed. Jehoahaz, his son, succeeds him, but he is quickly deposed by Necho and replaced with Jehoiakim as a vassal king.

<sup>301</sup> For a summary of this history, see *ISBE* (1979) 1.337-338.

<sup>302</sup> Josiah's attempt to interfere between Egypt and Babylon was the first in a series of political decisions and turning points for Judah that ultimately would result in the nation's collapse. Caught between powers, Judah shifted first one way and then another, attempting to save itself from political disaster. Several states, Judah included, put their faith in Egypt, a political trajectory that the prophets scorned as hopeless (cf. Eze. 16:26; 17:17; 23:8, 21, 27; 29:6-7; Je. 2:18, 36; 37:6-8; 46:17, 22-24), cf. A. Malamat, "Caught Between the Great Powers," *BAR* (Jul/Aug 1999), pp. 34-41, 64.

<sup>303</sup> The following calendar is based on the one produced by A. Malamat, p. 37.

- 605 BC Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon routs Pharaoh Necho II at Carchemish on the Euphrates. Syria and Palestine fall to the Babylonians. Judah continues to depend upon Egyptian support, guaranteeing future conflict with Babylon.
- 603 BC Judah surrenders to Babylon as Nebuchadnezzar sweeps through Syria and Palestine. Jehoiakim is forced to change fealty from Egypt to Babylon.
- 601/600 BC Babylon attacks Egypt and is defeated in the Eastern Delta. Nebuchadnezzar withdraws to Babylon for two years to rebuild his army. This allows Necho II to campaign in southern Palestine, where Jehoiakim switches his allegiance once again to Egypt.
- 598 BC Late in the year, Nebuchadnezzar strikes back at Judah. Jehoiakim dies during the siege and is succeeded by his son, Jehoiachin.
- 597 BC Jerusalem surrenders to Babylon on March 16. Appeased by Judah's capitulation and Jehoiakim's death, Nebuchadnezzar orders that the city be spared. Nebuchadnezzar deports Jehoiachin and thousands of other Judahites to Babylon. He installs Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah, as a puppet king.
- 595 BC Necho II of Egypt dies and is succeeded by the ambitious Psammetich II.
- 594/593 BC Zedekiah, emboldened by news of a rebellion in Babylon, hosts a mini-summit of neighboring petty states—probably also to plan a revolt against Babylon. The conspiracy ends when Nebuchadnezzar enters Palestine and is assured of Judah's continuing loyalty.
- 592 BC Pharaoh Psammetich II marches into Palestine and Phoenicia intending to foment anti-Babylonian feeling in Judah, Philistia and Phoenicia.
- 590/589 BC Zedekiah, probably inspired by the new Pharaoh Hophra, rebels against Babylon.
- 589/588 BC Nebuchadnezzar, in a delayed reaction to Pharaoh Hophra's aggression, attacks Judah and places Jerusalem under siege.
- 586 BC The Babylonian army breaches the wall of Jerusalem in July. Zedekiah is caught while trying to escape the city at night. He is blinded as a punishment and deported to Babylon. In August, the city and the temple are burned, and more Jews are deported to Babylon. Here, the dynastic rule of David's sons comes to an end.

Jehoahaz/Shallum (cf. 1 Chr. 3:15) was only twenty-three when his father, Josiah, was killed. He was hardly prepared to face the superpowers threatening him, and his reign lasted a brief three months (23:31)—not long,

but long enough for the Deuteronomic historian to judge him as unfaithful to the covenant (23:32).<sup>304</sup> Pharaoh Necho II promptly summoned him to his headquarters in Riblah (central Syria), clapped him in chains and deported him to Egypt. Ezekiel described it thus: the lion of Judah's cub was trapped and led "by hooks" to Egypt (Eze. 19:1-4). Jeremiah's blunt comment was: "He will never return" (Je. 22:10-12), and indeed, he died there. Necho demanded heavy tribute from Judah and installed Eliakim, Jehoahaz' older brother, on the throne, changing his name to Jehoiakim (23:33-34). The demand for tribute forced Jehoiakim to levy a head tax on all free citizens in order to pay it (23:35). Jehoiakim hardly improved Judah's condition, though he ruled for nearly a dozen years. Like his brother, he "did evil in the eyes of Yahweh" (23:36-37).

Early in Jehoiakim's reign, the remnant of the Assyrian Empire finally succumbed to Babylon. Earlier, Nebopolassar had successfully captured Asshur and Nineveh, absorbing much of the Assyrian territory into his realm. Now, the last Assyrian king made his stand at Haran in northwest Mesopotamia, where the Egyptians attempted to support him against Babylon. Josiah of Judah was killed when he attempted to intervene in 609 BC. Within a couple years, the last shreds of Assyrian resistance disappeared, leaving only the two of the great superpowers to vie for control, Babylon and Egypt. In 605, Nebopolassar sent Nebuchadnezzar II,<sup>305</sup> the crown prince, against Pharaoh Necho II, and the two armies collided at Carchemish in northern Syria (cf. Je. 46:2-12). Here Nebuchadnezzar won a decisive victory but was forced to return to the city of Babylon upon the death of his father.<sup>306</sup> Egypt, for its part, had long hoped to revive the empire it had lost at the end of the Bronze Age (about 1200 BC), and despite the defeat at Carchemish, Egypt worked to foment uprisings among the small Mediterranean kingdoms now ostensibly under Babylonian hegemony. Judah was one of these small kingdoms, and the political life of Judah's final kings were lived out in this context.<sup>307</sup>

Jehoiakim was almost certainly pro-Egyptian, since Necho II established him as a vassal king in Jerusalem when he deported his brother, Jehoahaz, to Egypt. However, when Nebuchadnezzar II invaded Judah,

---

<sup>304</sup> A partial inscription uncovered at Arad from about 600 BC might contain a letter from Jehoahaz to the military commander at Arad, but Aharoni's reconstruction of the missing parts is debated, cf. H. Shanks, "Letter from a Hebrew King?" *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1980), pp. 52-56.

<sup>305</sup> The Babylonian name *Nabu-kudurri-usur* is the source of the name differential in the Hebrew Bible between Nechadnezzar (appearing 58 times) and Nebuchadnezzar (appearing 32 times).

<sup>306</sup> Grayson, pp. 99-10 (Chronicle 5).

<sup>307</sup> P. Beaulieu, "King Nabonidus and the Neo-Babylonian Empire," *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. Sasson (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2000) II.971-972.

Jehoiakim changed fealty and became a vassal of Babylon (24:1a), probably in 603 BC.<sup>308</sup> This ostensible shift in loyalty did not last long, for he rebelled against his Babylonian vassalship when Nebuchadnezzar's advance against Egypt was successfully thwarted by Necho II in 601/600 BC. Nebuchadnezzar subsequently withdrew to rebuild and his army, and Jehoiakim seized the moment to break his vassal status with Babylon. Jeremiah warned Jehoiakim that Egypt's victory was only temporary, that Nebuchadnezzar would return, and that in the end Egypt and all her allies would succumb to the Babylonians (cf. Je. 46:13-28). In fact, Jeremiah had been saying for some time that the certain future of Judah was exile (cf. Je. 25:1ff.; 26:1ff.; 35:1ff.; 36:1ff.; 45:1ff.), and the compiler of the Kings record fully supported this anticipated disaster (24:2-4; cf. 23:26-27). Jeremiah's pessimistic oracles nearly resulted in his execution (cf. Je. 26:11, 16-19), and though he was spared, Jehoiakim executed two of Jeremiah's supporting contemporaries (cf. Je. 26:20-24). Though Jeremiah was not killed, Jehoiakim personally burned his written oracles (cf. Je. 36:22-26). Jeremiah notwithstanding, Jehoiakim was determined to put his faith in Egyptian support. He used the respite from Babylon to begin expanding the royal palace (cf. Je. 22:13-17). Just as Jeremiah predicted, Nebuchadnezzar returned after another two years and put Jerusalem to siege.<sup>309</sup> Jehoiakim apparently died in the siege, again at the prophetic word of Jeremiah.<sup>310</sup> The teenage Jehoiachin<sup>311</sup> was left to assume the throne in the most desperate of circumstances (24:5-6, 8-9). All hopes of Egyptian support failed entirely (24:7).

Nebuchadnezzar's initial siege of Jerusalem is recorded in terse terms in the Babylonian Chronicle: "The seventh year [of Nebuchadnezzar]: In the month Kislev [December] the king of Akkad [Babylonia] mustered his army and marched to Hattu [Palestine]. He encamped against the city of Judah [Jerusalem] and on the second day of the month Adar [March], he captured the city (and) seized (its) king. A king of his own choice he appointed in the

<sup>308</sup> The Babylonian Chronicle is defective at this part, so no direct information is available from the extra-biblical texts. However, it is to be assumed that the surrender of Jehoiakim was originally included in the now defective part.

<sup>309</sup> The references to Syria, Moab and Ammon against Judah are probably to be understood as assaults directed by the Babylonians themselves and part of the larger punitive effort by Babylon against Jehoiakim's rebellion.

<sup>310</sup> While the Chronicler indicates that Jehoiakim was captured by the Babylonians and chained for deportation (2 Chr. 36:6), Jeremiah seems to indicate that before this could take place, Jehoiakim would die and his corpse would be unceremoniously dumped outside the city wall (Je. 22:18-19). The LXX indicates that Jehoiakim was buried in the same private garden as Manasseh (2 Chr. 36:8; cf. 21:26), but this tradition seems in conflict with Jeremiah's prophetic word.

<sup>311</sup> Jehoiachin's name appears in two variant forms in the Book of Jeremiah, Coniah (Je. 22:24, 28; 37:1) and Jechoniah/Jeconiah (Je. 24:1; 28:4; 29:2).

city (and) taking the vast tribute he brought it into Babylon.”<sup>312</sup> The surrender of the city (24:10-12a) was followed by several months of preparation before the massive deportations could be arranged, which took place in the next year (24:12b-16). The deportations included the king, his mother, his harem, his officials, the leading citizens, his military officers, and many craftsmen and smiths in addition to many other citizens. Among the exiles was a young priest named Ezekiel (cf. Eze. 1:1). This deportation, usually dubbed the “First Deportation” to distinguish it from what would happen a dozen years later (cf. 25:11), divided the people of Judah into two large groups, those allowed to stay in Jerusalem and those removed to Babylon, where they were allowed to live as an intact ethnic community. In addition, the temple was stripped for booty. Jehoiachin’s exile was no more than Jeremiah predicted, and in fact, as Jeremiah indicated, the king would never be allowed to return (cf. Je. 22:24-30). Jehoiachin, the last legitimate king in David’s dynasty,<sup>313</sup> was no more than a shattered pot fit to be discarded (cf. Je. 28). As a puppet ruler, Nebuchadnezzar installed as king Mattaniah/Zedekiah, Jehoiachin’s uncle (24:17; cf. Je. 37:1; 52:1-3).

Over the next eleven years, the period of Zedekiah’s kingship, Jerusalem was reduced to bare subsistence. Zedekiah, the puppet king, did nothing to reverse the downward spiritual spiral that had begun so many years earlier, and he earned the final condemnation of the Deuteronomic historian (24:18-20a). Stripped of the best of his citizens and skilled laborers, Zedekiah vacillated back and forth as his advisors pressured him to resist Babylonian suzerainty.

Early in Zedekiah’s reign, Jeremiah delivered an acted out parable to illustrate his prediction that exile was certain. He took to wearing an ox yoke around his neck, a symbol that Judah along with the other surrounding small states soon would all wear the yoke of Babylon (27:1-7). Unfortunately, Jeremiah stood largely alone in this pessimistic forecast. The court prophets, who were rabidly anti-Babylonian (and tacitly pro-Egyptian) predicted just the opposite (cf. Je. 27:8-15). Some even prophesied that the booty stripped from the temple would soon be coming home (cf. Je. 27:16-18). One in particular predicted that Jehoiachin and all the other exiles would be home within two years (cf. Je. 28:1-4). He even removed Jeremiah’s wooden yoke to symbolize this glowing anticipation (cf. Je. 28:10-11). Jeremiah was

---

<sup>312</sup> Grayson, p. 102 (Chronicle 5).

<sup>313</sup> That Jehoiachin was considered the legitimate king, even though exiled, is implied by the fact that Ezekiel dates his oracles from the year of Jehoiachin’s exile, still calling him “the king” (cf. Eze. 1:2, etc.). In Babylonian texts dated to 592 BC, Jehoiachin and his five sons are mentioned as recipients of food rations in Babylon, cf. *ANET* (1978) p. 308.

unimpressed. Not only would the stripped booty from the temple not be coming home, anything now left in the temple would soon be stripped as well and taken away (cf. Je. 27:19-22). As for the wooden yoke that was removed, it would soon be replaced by an iron one (28:12-17)! Jeremiah even sent a letter to the community in Babylon, encouraging them to settle in and make the best of things. They could expect to be in Babylon for a very long time (29:1ff.)!

Though the compiler of the Kings material does not mention it, Zedekiah traveled to Babylon in his fourth regnal year, 594 BC. Jeremiah sent a written oracle predicting the ultimate doom of Babylon along with this company (cf. Je. 51:59-64). The purpose of Zedekiah's visit is unclear. It may have been to allay suspicions as well as to pay tribute. An earlier oracle of Jeremiah seems to hint that there was an anti-Babylonian foment involving several small city-states in the Levant (cf. Je. 27:3), and the Babylonian Chronicle also indicates that Nebuchadnezzar was preoccupied with more than one revolt around this time.<sup>314</sup> Perhaps Zedekiah was compelled once more to swear his allegiance to his Babylonian overlord. Even if he did so, he could hardly have been very happy about it, and perhaps Jeremiah's prediction that Babylon would someday fall encouraged Zedekiah's hope for reprieve.

A popular notion among those left living in Jerusalem was that since they had been spared exile, they were God's remnant—marked out for survival. Jeremiah emphatically disagreed! Those still in Jerusalem were nothing more than rotten figs (cf. Je. 24:1-10). In fact, it was the community in exile that would survive to become God's remnant people! Many miles to the east, Ezekiel echoed these same themes. Yahweh had abandoned the temple (cf. Eze. 1, 10; 11:22-24). Soon, Jerusalem would be under siege again (cf. Eze. 4-5). Total disaster was imminent (cf. Eze. 7). Those who survived the sword in Jerusalem would soon follow their brothers into exile to Babylon (cf. Eze. 12). Judah was of no more worth than a charred and useless vine (cf. Eze. 15). Zedekiah's intention to break his vassalship with Babylon, hoping for support from Egypt, was utterly doomed (cf. Eze. 17:11-21).

In spite of Jeremiah's dire warnings, Zedekiah capitulated to the counsel of his advisors and rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar (24:20b). Perhaps he felt that he should imitate the courage of Hezekiah, when his famous ancestor had stood firm against Sennacherib. But Zedekiah was hardly a Hezekiah, and much had happened that could not be ignored! When

---

<sup>314</sup> J. Thompson, *The Book of Jeremiah [NICOT]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p. 532.

the king entreated Jeremiah to seek Yahweh as to whether or not his reckless initiative in resisting Babylon would be rewarded (cf. Je. 21:1-2), the prophet was blunt: the king should prepare for the worst! Nebuchadnezzar would certainly return and burn the city to the ground (cf. Je. 21:3-14)!

The siege began in Zedekiah's ninth regnal year and lasted nearly two years (25:1-2).<sup>315</sup> It was a brutal and horrific attack. At first, Jeremiah was allowed his freedom in spite of his scathing predictions. Zedekiah appealed to the prophet for his prayers (cf. Je. 37:3-4). A hopeful sign was the withdrawal of the Babylonian armies, who had received intelligence that Egypt was on the move (cf. Je. 37:5, 11). Jeremiah's word was that this withdrawal was only temporary. The Babylonians would soon be back and burn down the city (37:6-10). Later, Zedekiah imprisoned Jeremiah for his gloomy predictions, putting him under gag orders, but at least preserving his life (cf. Je. 32:1-5; 34:2-8; 37:11-16, 18-21; 38:4-13). When Zedekiah consulted the prophet again, Jeremiah was adamant—the Babylonians would not relent. Jerusalem was doomed (cf. Je. 37:17). Far away in Babylon among the exiles, Ezekiel would say the same thing: Jerusalem was like a cooking pot in which everything in it would be boiled dry and burnt to a crip (cf. Eze. 24:1ff.). The very best thing Zedekiah could do was simply to surrender in order to save as many lives as possible (cf. Je. 38:14-28).

The siege dragged on until starvation was rampant (25:3). Desperate citizens resorted to cannibalism (cf. La. 4:10). Some citizens slipped out of the city and gave themselves up to the Babylonians (cf. Je. 38:19). The calendar of critical junctures was carefully recorded.

***Zedekiah's 9<sup>th</sup> Regnal Year***

10<sup>th</sup> day      10<sup>th</sup> month (25:1)

*Siege begins*

***Zedekiah's 11<sup>th</sup> Regnal Year***

9<sup>th</sup> day      4<sup>th</sup> month (25:3-4; cf. Je. 52:6)

*Wall breached*

***Zedekiah's 11<sup>th</sup> Regnal Year***

*(Nebuchadnezzar's 19<sup>th</sup> regnal year)*

7<sup>th</sup> day      5<sup>th</sup> month (25:8)

*Temple burnt*

Indirectly, Jerusalem had been protected by outlying fortress cities that guarded major routes and passes into the central mountains, but Nebuchadnezzar's troops systematically destroyed them. The last two were Lachish and Azekah (cf. Je. 34:7), and twenty-one military letters written on shards (ostraca) have been excavated from one of Lachish's small gate rooms, mostly sent to "my Lord Yaush", an army commander, by "your

<sup>315</sup> It may be noted that the record in 2 Kings 25 is largely paralleled and supplemented by Jeremiah 39 and 52 as well as 2 Chronicles 36:15-21).

servant Hoshayahu”, a subordinate apparently stationed not far from the city who was set so that he could see the signal fires of Lachish and Azekah. These so-called Lachish Letters have become justifiably famous, because they come from the very context of Nebuchadnezzar’s advance toward Jerusalem. Especially intriguing are references to an unnamed prophet (Letters 3 and 6: could this be Jeremiah?), a delegation sent to Egypt for support (Letter 3),<sup>316</sup> the signal fires of Lachish and Azekah (Letter 4) and several personal names also known to us from 2 Kings and Jeremiah (Mattaniah, Gedaliah, Elnathan, Hodaviah, Gemariah, Jaazaniah and Neriah).<sup>317</sup>

When the wall was breached by Nebuchadnezzar’s battering rams, Zedekiah and the army attempted to flee by night, the very thing that Ezekiel in Babylon had predicted (25:4; cf. Eze. 12:12-14; 17:19-21). It was to no avail, for the Babylonians caught him before he could cross the Jordan River, his soldiers were scattered, and he was taken as a prisoner of war to Riblah, Syria to be led before Nebuchadnezzar (25:5-6). Here, he was forced to watch the execution of his own sons, and then was immediately blinded so that his last visual memory was their deaths. He was deported to Babylon in chains and died there (25:7; cf. Eze. 17:16).

The destruction of Jerusalem included burning all the important buildings, especially the temple, as well as breaking down the fortification walls (25:8-10).

*Pick your way through these everlasting ruins,  
all this destruction the enemy has brought on the sanctuary.  
Your foes roared in the place where you met with us;  
they set up their standards as signs.  
They behaved like men wielding axes  
to cut through a thicket of trees.  
They smashed all the carved paneling  
with their axes and hatchets.  
They burned your sanctuary to the ground;  
they defiled the dwelling place of your Name.*

Psalm 74:3-7

<sup>316</sup> Ezekiel apparently was aware of the tendency to depend upon Egypt, but he offered scathing rebuttals to any such hope (Eze. 17:17; 30:20-26; cf. Je. 37:5, 11).

<sup>317</sup> D. Pardee, *The Context of Scripture: Archival Documents*, ed. W. Hallo (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2003), 3.78-81; R. Wright, “Lachish and Azekah Were the Only Fortified Cities of Judah that Remained,” *BAR* (Nov/Dec 1982), pp. 72-73; O. Borowski, “Yadin Presents New Interpretation of the Famous Lachish Letters,” *BAR* (Mar/Apr 1984), pp. 74-77. Of course, there is no way to be certain that these personal names are precisely the same people who are named in the Bible, but the presence of so many common names certainly suggests a likelihood that some of them may be.

Jerusalem's remaining citizens, other than the poorest of the poor, were deported along with any Jews who had deserted earlier (25:11-12). Large temple implements, like the pillars (1 Kg. 7:15-22), the stands (1 Kg. 7:27-37) and the laver (1 Kg. 7:23-26), were broken up (25:13, 16-17). Smaller items were carried off intact (25:14). Citizens with positions of prominence, both religious and military, were taken to Riblah, Syria to appear before Nebuchadnezzar before they were executed (25:18-21).<sup>318</sup>

Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah ben Ahikam as governor over Jerusalem (25:22).<sup>319</sup> This appointment seemed satisfactory to the remaining citizens and military personnel, who voiced their acceptance of his oath of office and pledge of well-being (25:23-24; cf. Je. 40:7-10). Years earlier, Gedaliah's father had been involved in Josiah's reform (cf. 22:12), and he had been a supporter of Jeremiah as well (cf. Je. 26:24). If this Gedaliah is the same as the one whose name was discovered in a seal impression at Lachish, then he had previously served in the administration of Zedekiah.<sup>320</sup> One of those who initially pledged support to Gedaliah, a former officer named Ishmael, fomented an assassination of the new governor, apparently at the instigation of Baalis of Ammon (25:25; cf. Je. 40:13—41:3). Some of those close to Gedaliah were aware of the plot, and though they warned the governor, he did not take them seriously. After the assassination, the fear of Babylonian reprisals spurred a whole company led by army officers to flee to Egypt, Jeremiah included (25:26; cf. Je. 42-43).

The Kings record ends with a short account of Abel-Marduk's ascension to the Babylonian throne [Evil-Merodach in the Hebrew Bible] (25:27-30; cf. Je. 52:31-34). The significance of this narrative is that Jehoiachin, now in his 37<sup>th</sup> year of Babylonian exile (561/560 BC), is still to be considered the rightful king of David's dynasty. He was pensioned by the

<sup>318</sup> The archaeological evidence for the fury of the Babylonian destruction largely has been erased by the long subsequent history of Jerusalem's rebuilding, later destruction and later rebuilding. Nevertheless, some sense of the ferocity of the destruction can be found at Ashkelon, Philistia which the Babylonians also destroyed. Unlike the Assyrians, who tended to rebuild destroyed cities, the Babylonians left everything in ruins after the burning and looting, and the excavations at Ashkelon have revealed charred wood, hundreds of smashed pots, charcoal, vitrified mudbrick and wall and ceiling fragments. A large container of olive oil enabled the destructive fires to reach temperatures where mudbrick and other clay materials melted into glass. The skeletal remains of a young woman about 35 years old who had been attempting to hide was lying where she died with her skull smashed in, cf. L. Stager, "The Fury of Babylon," *BAR* (Jan/Feb 1996), pp.76-77.

<sup>319</sup> Jeremiah offers an expanded account of Gedaliah's governorship and the attending circumstances (cf. Je. 39:11-14; 40:5—41:18).

<sup>320</sup> This bulla, along with sixteen other seal impressions, was discovered in a clay jar in Level II (the period ending in the Babylonian destruction). The inscription reads, "belonging to Gedaliah, who is over the house", cf. D. Ussishkin, "Lachish," *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*, ed. E. Stern (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993) 3.910.

state and given honors! Some have speculated that perhaps Abel-Marduk considered reinstating Jehoiachin as a vassal king in Jerusalem, but he himself died in 560 BC, and the next time Jehoiachin's name surfaces it is after his death when his seven sons, including Shenazzar (Sheshbazzar?), are listed in the genealogical records of David's royal line (1 Chr. 3:17-18). Zerubbabel, one of the leaders of those who later returned from exile to rebuild the temple, was Jehoiachin's grandson (cf. 1 Chr. 3:19; Mt. 1:12).<sup>321</sup> It is significant that centuries later, when Matthew records the genealogy of Jesus, one of the genealogical hinges for his structure of Jesus' pedigree was "Jeconiah/Jehoiachin and his brothers at the time of the exile to Babylon" (cf. Mt. 1:11).

---

<sup>321</sup> The discrepancy between Zerubbabel as Jehoiachin's grandson through Pedaiiah (1 Chr. 3:19) or through Shealtiel (Ezr. 3:2; Hg. 1:1) is usually explained as either as a case where Shealtiel died childless and through levirate marriage his brother fathered a son in his name (cf. Dt. 25:5-10) or else a transcription error.