

CHAPTER 4

The Divided Monarchy: Israel (931-722 B.C.E.)

With the death of Solomon in 931 B.C.E. and the emergence of two Hebrew states, Israel and Judah, we enter a period for which there is stronger evidence supporting the historical validity of many portions of the Bible. This was a period when Egypt and the major kingdoms of Mesopotamia exerted great power. The arena for this action was the Fertile Crescent. The Fertile Crescent, a belt of territory stretching from the eastern Mediterranean coast to Mesopotamia, and of which Israel and the other Hebrew kingdom, Judah were a part, was an area of unceasing contention among the reemerging empire of Egypt to the southwest and the newer empires of Assyria and Babylonia to the northeast. Each of these empires sought to use this region as a buffer to prevent surprise attacks on its own territory. Each also sought the control of maritime and overland trade routes that made the Fertile Crescent an important link between Africa and Asia. In addition, the Fertile Crescent itself was a profitable source of wealth, as well as a source of recruits for the armies of the dominant powers.

Vassalship was the form of control imposed on Israel, Judah, and the other small states in the region, which were compelled to pay heavy tribute, regularly including contingents of slaves to the larger powers. However, these vassal states, such as the two Hebrew kingdoms, Phoenicia, Edom, Philistia and Aram (Syria) were allowed considerable autonomy in their internal affairs, as well as the right to wage war among themselves. These small states of the Fertile Crescent, for their part, were constantly plotting to regain their independence through secret alliances among themselves or with some rival power. At times they were successful. One such success occurred when King Jeroboam II of Israel forged an alliance in 873 B.C.E. (?) with independent Judah, Aram, and Phoenicia, thus holding off for a time pressures from the larger empires. Just as often, though, these many small states of the Fertile Crescent fought among themselves either as proxies of the empires of Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia, or in their own self interests. The existence of the Divided Monarchy – two Jewish states instead of one – made it easier for Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia to wield their great power.

Of the forty kings who occupied the thrones of Judah and Israel (twenty in Israel and twenty in Judah) during the years of the Divided Monarchy from 931 B.C.E., the year of the schism, to 586 B.C.E., the year of the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, fifteen have been identified outside the *Tanakh* – eight for Israel and seven for Judah. I shall confine myself, in this chapter, to the description of the wars of the eight verified kings of Israel. The chapter following will do the same for the seven verified kings of Judah.

There is no document or inscription verifying the beginning of the Divided Monarchy. King Jeroboam II of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) and King Uzziah (Azariah), his contemporary in Judah (the Southern Kingdom), do appear outside the Bible. A seal discovered at Megiddo bore Jeroboam II's name. An Aramaic stone plaque, discovered on a tomb at the Mount of Olives, bore the name of Uzziah, King of Judah.¹ That tells us that the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah indeed existed, though the precise date of their beginning may be subject to debate. Egyptian, Assyrian, and Babylonian inscriptions provide additional evidence of the existence of the two Hebrew kingdoms, and of many of their monarchs.

New discoveries in genetics have given some sense of a firm historical foundation to this earlier period, now that the DNA of the Kohanim, who exist to this day as descendants of the ancient Jewish priestly class, has been traced back to a single ancestor, an actual person who lived about three thousand years ago, at the approximate time of the construction of the First Temple in the 960's B.C.E.²

It is only beginning with the Divided Monarchy, for which much historical verification exists, that dating acquires a great deal of significance and the discrepancy of dates for the reigns of kings and major events needs to be considered. For example, did the Divided Monarchy begin in 931 B.C.E., as I posit, or in 922 B.C.E., as the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* has it?³ Did Samaria, the capital of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, fall to the Assyrians in 724, 722, or 720 B.C.E.? Was Jerusalem captured by the Babylonians in 587 or 586 B.C.E.? What was the duration of the Babylonian Exile? Is the traditional

¹ Johnson C. Philip, "The People Mentioned in the Bible, and Archaeology," www.biblicalarcheology.net/Biblical_Arch/People.html, pp. 3-4, accessed in 2006.

² Wade, p. 249

³ *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Volume 4, (1962, 1990), p. 29.

answer of seventy years correct? That depends upon whether one thinks it began in 598, 597, 586, or 580 B.C.E. When did Masada fall, in 73 or 74 C.E.? These may seem like trivial differences in time, but when they are played out in the long term, the dating of major events and the reigns of important rulers can be significantly distorted.

There are a number of valid reasons why these chronological discrepancies should be tolerated. For one, there is the problem of just when each year began: Was it spring (Nissan) or fall (Tishrei)? The Jerusalem Temple was destroyed in the summer of 587 or 586 B.C.E. If the religious calendar were followed, then the new year would begin in the fall, and so the date of destruction would be 587 B.C.E., that is, before the new year began. But if the spring is used for the beginning of the new year, this is when the changeover from 587 to 586 B.C.E. would have occurred, and therefore, the destruction of the Temple would be placed in the latter year. Professor Shaye J. D. Cohen of Harvard University follows the religious calendar and, therefore, he places the destruction of the Temple in 587 B.C.E., while Professor Eric Cline of George Washington University follows the secular practice of beginning the new year in the spring or winter, and thus, for him, the destruction of the Temple occurred in 586 B.C.E.

Another problem of dating is that some kings designated their heirs as co-regents, causing ambiguity regarding the beginnings and ends of their reigns.⁴ Corruption of the text or alterations of date by the writer or chronicler constitute a third reason for these chronological contradictions even though this does not occur very often. A fourth problem lies in the tendency among Biblical chroniclers to round out a time span. A fifth, it is speculated, is the possibility that those persons copying the texts were using not the original sources but documents of a more recent date. In the *Tanakh*, for instance, the descriptions of the reigns of the kings of the Divided Monarchy contain references to as many as twenty-four other books or sources which have been lost. As Gerhard Larsson said, "We ought therefore to accept the possibility of

⁴ This occurred, for example, in the time of David and Solomon: "When David reached a ripe old age, he made his son Solomon king over Israel" (I Chronicles 23:1).

the late editors [of the Bible] having had incomplete source material and also having misinterpreted dates in it."⁵ In general, I have used, where possible, the dating of *The Bible Unearthed*.

Permeating the Five Books of Moses and the writings of the major prophets is the belief that all evils afflicting the Hebrew people, whether on the field of battle or produced by nature in the form of famine or plague, were divine punishments for their sins. This is what all the prophets taught. Equally, victories on the battlefield and bountiful harvests were rewards of the Almighty for strict observance of His laws. Josephus expressed the notion of causation in his magnum opus, *The Jewish Antiquities*: "Men who conform to the will of God...prosper [while those who] depart from...these laws...[suffer]...irretrievable disasters."⁶

The punishment which the Almighty told Solomon He would inflict upon the House of David came into effect when Rehoboam, Solomon's son and successor, ascended the throne. The Lord in effect put the script for Solomon's punishment, that is, the destruction of his Kingdom, into the hands of three sets of characters: King Rehoboam, the rebelling Northern Ephraimite general Jeroboam, and the Elders. Probably no amount of tact on Rehoboam's part – and he had none- could have assuaged the hurt feelings of the Northern Tribes or halted the Lord's plan. The scenario was played out in the following manner: Rehoboam's subjects complained that the taxes and forced labor that Solomon had imposed upon them were unbearable. They implored their new sovereign to reduce these burdens. Rehoboam considered the matter and then replied, according to Josephus, that "...if his father had chastised them with whips, they should expect him to do the same with scorpions."⁷ In response, the ten Northern Tribes under the leadership of the Tribe of Ephraim seceded from the kingdom in 931 B.C.E.⁸ The Northern Tribes took

⁵ See the excellent article by Gerhard Larsson, "The Chronology of the Kings of Israel and Judah as a System", *Zeitschrift für Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, 114, Band 2002, p. 226. Anyone working in the field of ancient Jewish History owes an immense debt of gratitude to Gerhard Larsson for the insights he provided as well as for the dating scheme which he proposed.

⁶ *Jewish Antiquities*, I, par. 3.

⁷ *Jewish Antiquities* VIII, viii (2).

⁸ In reality, the two segments of the Israelite state are referred to earlier in the Bible before the actual political breakup at the death of Solomon. This fact, as well as others, has led some archaeologists to assert that a division had never really occurred and that the two pieces had lived side by side for an indefinite period before Solomon's son Rehoboam became king. Indeed, according to the Tanakh, Rehoboam's grandfather, King David, was anointed and ruled for several years as King of Judah before he was anointed as King of Israel.

with them the name of the formerly united country, Israel. In order to avoid chronological confusion, I have attached the name of the capital of the Northern Kingdom – Samaria – to the name of the newly constituted Israel.

There are both Biblical and historical reasons for jealousy between the North, - Israel/Samaria - and the South, known as Judah, which were responsible for Ephraim's successful bid for leadership. Generally, leadership falls to the first born son. That would normally have meant that the line of Reuben, Jacob's eldest son, would have led the Twelve Tribes after Jacob's death, circa 1700 B.C.E. Yet it is the descendants of Joseph who led the succession against the Tribe of Judah. According to the *Tanakh*, Reuben had lost his right to lead the tribes because he trifled with one of his father's concubines. The next to youngest of the twelve brothers, Joseph, Reuben's half-brother, who had brought his father, his brothers, and their families to Egypt, then asked his father to bless his two sons, Manasseh, the elder, and Ephraim, the younger. At that point, possibly 1600 B.C.E., there occurred the second reversal of the traditional leadership succession that was to be critical to the Jewish People.

Joseph took... Ephraim with his right hand – to Israel's⁹ left – and Manasseh with his left hand – to Israel's right – and brought them close to him. But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head – thus crossing his hands – although Manasseh was the first born....

When Joseph saw that his father was placing his right hand on Ephraim's head, he thought it wrong; so he took hold of his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's. "Not so, Father," Joseph said to his father, "for the other is the first-born; place your right hand on his head" But his father objected, saying, "I know, my son, I know. He too shall become a people, and he too shall be great. Yet his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall be plentiful enough for nations..." Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh (Genesis 48: 8-20).

All this took place some centuries before David of the Tribe of Judah ascended the throne, but was remembered as part of the tradition, and formed the rationale for the Divided Monarchy. The historical grievances that gave rise to the schism in 931 B.C.E. included heavy taxes and a growing disparity

⁹ In the Biblical episode in which Jacob wrestled with the Angel, the latter changed Jacob's name to Israel.

between rich and poor and between the urban north and the rural south. The Northern tribes, particularly that of Ephraim, were jealous of Judah's primacy. Also, Ephraim had grown populous and wealthy in the course of time, becoming the dominant tribe of the North. The kings of the United Monarchy had long favored the South. In addition, certain religious groups in the North had raised strong objections to Solomon's idolatrous practice of building temples for his many non-Jewish wives.¹⁰ Against this backdrop, Jeroboam, as king of the secessionist state of Israel/Samaria, had begun the efforts to wean his people from their loyalty to Jerusalem by emphasizing that God could be worshipped from any place.

In the *Tanakh*, even if not in historical reality, David and Solomon had assembled a small empire, but it did not last long. Uprisings ensued on all the frontiers during the last years of Solomon's reign and civil war between the two Hebrew states characterized the first years of the Divided Monarchy. According to the *Tanakh*, Egypt, under the Pharaoh Shishak (Sheshonk I, 945-924 B.C.E.),¹¹ played a key role in the secession of the Northern Tribes from the rule of Rehoboam, son and successor to Solomon.¹² The *Tanakh* relates that Jeroboam had fled to Egypt when he was having difficulty with Solomon, Rehoboam's father (II Chronicles 10:2), and Shishak had given him shelter. In the Biblical account, the Egyptian ruler helped the rebellious Jeroboam. He created a diversion by marching to the gates of Jerusalem plundering both the Temple and the Royal treasury of their valuables (II Chronicles 12: 8-9). According to Simon Dubnov, Sheshonk then conquered Judahite towns and hoped to make Jeroboam an Egyptian vassal, but the attempt proved unsuccessful.¹³

Sheshonk I's actual triumphal relief at Karnak celebrates the ruler's successful campaign against the Asiatics, and also presents a list of towns located both in Judah and Israel.¹⁴ Archaeologists have debated

¹⁰ Dubnov, pp. 153-156 and 163.

¹¹ James Henry Breasted, refers to Pharaoh Sheshonk I's campaign against King Rehoboam of Judah, estimating that the campaign took place in 926 B.C.E. See James Henry Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt: Historical Documents from the Earliest Times to the Persian Conquest, Collected, Edited and Translated with Commentary* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962) Vol. IV, p. 348. Sheshonk's years are given in Breasted's chronology. See Vol. 1, p. 45 of this work.

¹² Pharaoh Shishak is the first Egyptian ruler to be mentioned by name in the *Tanakh*.

¹³ Dubnov, pp. 163-165

¹⁴ Breasted relates that the contents of this relief have been published in Champollion's *Monuments*, 284,285; in Rosellini's *Monumenti Storici*, 148, in Lepsius's *Denkmäler* III, 252,253 a; and in Mariette's *Voyage dans la haute Egypte*, II, 42. The list of cities by itself has been published in Champollion's *Notices Descriptives*, II, 113-119; in

the question of whether this list can actually be considered a description of Sheshonk's conquests. One author, for example, maintains that the topographical list could merely document places that the Egyptian ruler considered a threat, or even stops in a tax collector's itinerary.¹⁵ The controversy is enhanced both by the fact that the relief does not mention the kingdoms of Judah and Israel by name, and, more importantly, by the fact that Jerusalem does not appear on the list of supposedly conquered cities.¹⁶ The list also mentions cities and towns in Israel/Samaria,¹⁷ and one might also question why Sheshonk I would have attacked the kingdom of Israel in the first place.¹⁸ (It is possible that he did so to strengthen Jeroboam as a vassal.)

Despite these questions, it is safe to assert that it is with Sheshonk I (Shishak's) campaign in Palestine that Hebrew history touches solid ground, for the list of places that accompanies the Karnak inscription verifies the existence of Hebrew cities and towns mentioned in the Bible. Though there will still be many gaps in the subsequent historical record, some of them leaving centuries unaccounted for, we have now reached the firm footing upon which the remainder of this manuscript is based. Only those Jewish rulers who have been identified outside the Bible will be considered in this study. Where there are exceptions – and there are three – they will be noted.

The Kingdom of Israel/Samaria's beginning was a troubled one. The Edomites rose in rebellion and were joined from the north by the Arameans (Syrians), whose general retook Damascus from Israel. The Philistines, apparently not made impotent by King David before the secession, fought with Israel again in the time of King Nadab (909-908 B.C.E.), Jeroboam's successor (as yet unvalidated by archeologists).

Brugsch's *Geographische Inschriften*, II, XXIV, and in Maspero's *Recueil*, VII, 100, 101. See Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, Vol. IV, p. 348, footnote "a."

¹⁵ Peter James, "Review, W. G. Dever's *What did the Biblical Writers Know and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology can tell us about the Reality of Ancient Israel.*" Reviewed in *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, Vol. 134, No.2 (2002), pp. 176-177.

¹⁶ Breasted, *Ancient Records of Egypt*, Vol. IV, Sec. 712-716, pp. 350-354.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ See Kevin A. Wilson, "The Campaign of Shoshenq I in Palestine," http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/Wilson-Campaign_of_Shoshenq_I_2.htm, p. 2. Accessed on 11-09-08. Website sponsored by Laramie County Community College, Department of Social Sciences.

Despite this troubled beginning, the Kingdom of Israel in time emerged as a state of considerable international significance because of its location, population and wealth. The territory occupied by the Northern Tribes, which became the Kingdom of Israel, had always been the wealthier, more populous, and more internationally connected region of the United Monarchy.¹⁹ Israel's affluence and urbanization made it a more suitable candidate as a center of empire than tiny, hilly, agrarian Judah, whose capital, Jerusalem, as late as the eighth century B.C.E., was only a small town. The Bible, however, gives more prominence to Judah because it, alone, survived. But in its own day, Israel/Samaria was more prominent than Judah, and so, in focusing on Israel/Samaria, I am reversing the Biblical account in order to mirror the reality of those earlier centuries.

Despite its wealth and strength, in 722 B.C.E., Israel/Samaria was the first of the two Hebrew states to be absorbed into a great empire – the Assyrian – vanishing forever. In a remarkable passage supposedly put down two centuries before that event, the *Tanakh* foretells, through the words of the prophet Ahijah, that the Lord will "strike Israel until it sways like a reed in water. He will uproot Israel from this good land that He gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the Euphrates, because they have provoked the Lord by the sacred posts [idols] that they have made for themselves (I Kings 14:15)."

The Kingdom of Israel existed for 209 years, much of which time has been historically confirmed. The eight historically validated Israelite kings ruled for a total of 144 years, or approximately seventy percent of this period, beginning with the first validated king, Omri (884 – 873 B.C.E.), whose reign began forty-seven years after the breakup of the United Monarchy. According to the *Tanakh*, Judah existed for a period of approximately 345 years. The Judahite kings whose names non-Biblical sources have validated reigned for a total of 145 years of Judah's existence, or forty percent of this era.

Looking first at the history of the Kingdom of Israel, one sees a long era of royal assassinations, coups and bloodshed. Generals made themselves king; coup followed coup. Religious controversies frequently led to prolonged periods of civil war within Israel. In fact, a lengthy period of warfare ensued

¹⁹ See Finkelstein and Silberman, p. 132 .

between the two Jewish kingdoms at the outset.²⁰ It was temporarily ended by King Omri. He concluded an alliance with Judah, in the course of which that kingdom actually became a vassal of Israel. Omri also established friendly relations with his Phoenician neighbors and cemented the alliance when his son Ahab, whose kingship is also historically validated,²¹ married the Phoenician Princess Jezebel. According to one historian, Phoenicians settled freely in Israel, bringing into the country their industry and their culture. They also carried in their baggage the cult of Ba'al, their national god,²² thus reintroducing paganism to Israel and sowing the seeds of the Lord's later retribution.

The amicable relations that had developed between Israel and Phoenicia on the one hand, and Israel and Judah on the other, enabled Omri to turn his military forces against the Moabites. King David, according to the Tanakh, had conquered the Moabites more than a half century earlier, and they were now in rebellion. Omri defeated the rebels, re-establishing Moab's vassalship to Israel and exacting an annual tribute from it. The Mesha Stone, discovered in 1868, dated between 840 and 820, and now in the Louvre in Paris, completes the story. In the words of Mesha, King of Moab, it states that,

As for Omri, King of Israel, he humbled Moab for many
Years... and his son followed him and he also said 'I will humble
Moab'...[B]ut I have triumphed over him and Israel hath perished
forever.²³

This was a slight exaggeration. The inscription commemorates King Mesha's re-establishment of Moab's independence from King Ahab of Israel. But Israel/Samaria was to survive another 130 years before it "perished."

Omri's alliance with the Phoenicians had barred the trade caravans of the Aramean Kingdom of Damascus from their traditional access to the Mediterranean Sea. In a war with the Arameans, Omri was forced to yield several of Israel's cities to them and to provide concessions to Aramean merchants in the Samarian market place. Israel had now been drawn into a regional trade system, and some of its wars

²⁰ See the description of warfare between the two kingdoms in Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, Book VIII, xii (3).

²¹ An Ammonite seal attributed to King Ahab is in the Israel Museum.

²² Josephus, VIII, xiii (1); and Dubnov, pp. 173-175.

²³ A. Leo Oppenheim, "Babylonian and Assyrian Historical Texts," in James B. Pritchard (ed), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1955). The incongruity of dating between the Moabite Stone and the reign of King Ahab, Omri's son, has not been explained.

were related to commerce and trade routes. The same situation prevailed in the reign of Ahab, Omri's son and successor, whose reign is dated 873-852 B.C.E.

The archaeologist Shigeo Yamada has completed a study of the inscriptions of the campaigns of the Assyrian King Shalmenesar III (858-824 B.C.E.) in Syria. One of these inscriptions mentions Ahab, King of Israel. Yamada states that, "In the first encounter between Shalmenesar III and the central Syrian coalition at Qarqar (Tel Qarqar in 853), Adad-idri, King of Damascus, and Ahab, king of Israel, as well as ten other kings, fought together against Shalmenesar..."²⁴ in order to halt Assyria's rising power. One of Shalmenesar III's chronicles taken from the monolith inscription engraved on a stele from Kurkh, states that King Ahab contributed 10,000 foot soldiers and 2,000 chariots to the coalition's war effort.²⁵ Yamada mentions other battles of Shalmenesar's in Syria as well, but it is not clear whether King Ahab's troops participated.

Israel's relationship with the Phoenicians held benefits for both countries, but it also led ultimately to the downfall of the Omrid Dynasty because it introduced the worship of pagan gods, which led to great unrest among the Israelites. Ahab even built a temple to Ba'al in the city of Samaria. Despite the ultimate demise of that dynasty, Israel prospered under Ahab's rule. As summarized by Melvin Konner,

Israel in this era was the most densely settled kingdom in the region, ten times as populous as Judah. Fortified citadels with stunning monumental architecture stood not only at Samaria, the capital, but at Dan, Megiddo, Hazor, Jezreel and elsewhere in the lush Jordan region. Brilliant hydraulic engineering projects brought water into large towns, underground, from nearby springs. Israel was enriched by a major revival of trade in the eastern Mediterranean.²⁶

Jericho, which had lain in ruins for centuries, was now rebuilt for possible use as a base of operations against Moab. Along with internal prosperity, the reign of Ahab was also marked by constant warfare

²⁴ Shigeo Yamada, Appendix A, "Aram-Israel Relations as Reflected in the Aramaic Inscriptions from Tel Dan," in Shigeo Yamada, *A Historical Study of the Inscriptions of Shalmenesar III (859-824 B.C.) Relating to his Campaigns in the West*, (Leiden, Netherlands: Brill, 2000), pp. 312-313. The inscription mentioning King Ahab is known as the Kurkh Monolith.

²⁵ Oppenheim, p. 279.

²⁶ Konner, p. 19. Konner states that agricultural prosperity had raised the population of the Kingdom of Israel to about 350,000 circa 800 B.C.E.

with Aram (Syria), Israel's neighbor to the northeast. In most instances, Aram was the aggressor. One war in particular, described at considerable length in the *Tanakh*, is noteworthy for the magnanimity it attributes to King Ahab:

Ben-hadad [having been defeated]... fled and took refuge inside the town, in an inner chamber. His ministers said to him, "We have heard that the kings of the House of Israel are magnanimous kings. Let us put sackcloth on our loins and ropes on our heads, and surrender to the king of Israel; perhaps he will spare your life." So they girded sackcloth on their loins and wound ropes around their heads, and came to the king of Israel and said, "Your servant Ben-hadad says, 'I beg you, spare my life,' He replied, "Is he still alive? He is my brother." The men divined his meaning and quickly caught the word from him, saying, "Yes, Ben-hadad is your brother." "Go, bring him," he said. Ben-hadad came out to him, and he invited him into his chariot. Ben hadad said to him, "I will give back the towns that my father took from your father, and you may set up bazaars for yourself in Damascus as my father did in Samaria." "And I, for my part," [said Ahab,] 'will let you go home under these terms." So he made a treaty with him and dismissed him. (I Kings 20: 31-34)

This battlefield magnanimity on the part of Ahab met with prophetic disapproval. On his way home, the king met a prophet (of Yahweh), not identified, who said to him, "Thus said the Lord: 'Because you have set free the man whom I have doomed, your life shall be forfeit for his life and your people for his people.'" (I Kings 20: 42.)

In an interval of peace between Israel and Aram, Ahab suggested to Jehoshaphat, then reigning in Judah, that the two combine their forces against Aram in order to restore Ramoth-Gilead, which lay east of the Jordan and had been taken from Israel earlier. The King of Judah agreed to the campaign, and in the war that ensued, Ahab was killed.

Jehu, an Israelite general also validated outside the Bible, staged a bloody coup during another war then raging between Israel and Aram. He ended the line of King Omri by killing Joram, Ahab's son (not validated outside of the Bible), and reigned from 842-814.

Like his predecessor whom he had just killed, Jehu, too, was confronted with an aggressive Assyrian empire pushing ever westward toward the Mediterranean. But unlike Ahab, who had attempted

to halt Assyria by joining in a coalition against the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III, Jehu resorted to the payment of tribute, and this proved to be a successful maneuver. The tribute consisted of gold, silver and precious artifacts.²⁷

Underlying the coup and wars of Jehu's reign was the transformation of the Israelite economy from one characterized mainly by small, proprietor-operated farms to a system of large scale, landlord-owned holdings. The catalyst for this transformation was the new, wealthy merchant class that had developed out of the commercial alliance between Israel and Phoenicia. During such agrarian disasters as droughts, these merchants extended loans to small farmers at extortionate interest rates, confiscating the holdings and enslaving the proprietors and their families in all cases of default.

Jehu, a spokesperson for the aggrieved classes, struck while the last Omrid king was away in Ramoth-Gilead (in present-day Jordan) in yet another war with Aram. Jehu succeeded in killing off all members of the Omrid line, along with members of the maritally connected Judahite monarchy. (Jezebel's daughter, Athaliah, had married King Jehoram of Judah.) Jehu also purged the Kingdom of Israel of all worshippers, priests and temples to the Phoenician gods. His actions resulted in the rupture of Israel's alliance with Phoenicia and Judah, and diverted attention from the defense of the Gilead region of Israel, lying east of the Jordan River, and this permitted the King of Aram to overrun and annex it (II Kings 10:32-33).²⁸ For the remainder of Jehu's reign, the Arameans continued to harass the Hebrew tribes lying to the east of the Jordan, the descendents of Reuben, Gad, and Manassah (II Kings 10: 32-33).

While Jehu was fighting the Arameans, he was also placating a greater power to the east, expanding Assyria, by paying tribute to Shalmaneser III. Shalmaneser's military records show that the items he received from the Israelite king consisted of " silver, gold, artifacts, golden beakers, goblets and pitchers, and staves and javelins." ²⁹

²⁷ Oppenheim, p. 280.

²⁸ Also cited in MacLean, "Jehu," IDB, Vol. 2, p. 818.

²⁹ Daniel David Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1926), Vol. 1, 1968 printing, New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), p. 211. These records are taken from the Black Obelisk, from the central building at Calah (Nimrod). This Obelisk is currently in the British Museum, and bears inscriptions depicting the military achievements of Shalmaneser III.

The wars against Aram (Syria) continued after Jehu's death, with Israel regaining territory. The background against which this military victory took place was the steady push westward of the expanding Assyrian Empire, to which Israel, along with many other kingdoms, was already paying tribute.

In the first millennium B.C.E. Mesopotamia was inhabited chiefly by peoples speaking Semitic languages. The Assyrians were one of these peoples, who then inhabited a landlocked state in central Mesopotamia. This state soon emerged as a significant military power. As Assyria's strength grew, it conquered its neighbors, including Babylonia to the south. The land of Canaan, lying to the west, was now situated between two powerful empires, Egypt and Assyria. Each empire had to make certain that it would not be overpowered by the other; and therefore the Fertile Crescent was not only a crossroads for the movement of goods and peoples, but also a dangerous military highway. States within the Fertile Crescent – Aram, Phoenicia, the Hittites, Judah, Israel, Moab, and Philistia - seeking to maintain their existence frequently had to accept the status of satellite to one empire or the other. Each of these states thus had little control over its own foreign policy, irrespective of its internal institutions or class structure. By the time of Jehu's death in 814, Assyrian military strength had enabled it to exact tribute from the Hittites, Tyre, Sidon, Israel, Edom, Philistia, and many other small kingdoms. The Assyrian kings' successful campaigns against Aram left that country prostrate, enabling neighboring states to make war on it successfully.³⁰ One of these neighbors was King Jehoash of Israel (836-798), Jehu's grandson, who won back towns formerly seized by the kings of Aram. Jehoash also made war on Judah's King Amaziah (798-769), and defeated him.

He [Amaziah] defeated ten thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt, and he captured Sela in battle and renamed it Joktheel, as is still the case. Then, Amaziah sent envoys to King Jehoash son of Jehoahaz son of Jehu of Israel with this message: 'Come, let us confront each other.' King Jehoash of Israel sent back this message to King Amaziah of Judah: 'The thistle sent this message to the cedar in Lebanon, "Give your daughter to my son in marriage." But a wild beast in Lebanon went by and trampled down the thistle. Because you have defeated Edom, you have

³⁰ MacLean, in "Joash," IDB Vol. 2, p. 910, mentions Assyrian inscriptions and the Aramaic inscription of Zakir which describe the regional geopolitical situation prevailing at the time.

become arrogant. Stay home and enjoy your glory, rather than provoke disaster and fall, dragging Judah down with you.'

But Amaziah paid no heed; so King Jehoash of Israel advanced, and he and King Amaziah of Judah confronted each other at Beth-shemesh in Judah. The Judahites were routed by Israel, and they all fled to their homes. King Jehoash...captured King Amaziah ...at Beth-shemesh. He marched on Jerusalem, and he made a breach of four hundred cubits in the wall of Jerusalem from the Ephraim Gate to the Corner Gate. He carried off all the gold and silver and all the vessels that were in the House of the Lord and in the treasuries of the royal palace, as well as hostages; and he returned to Samaria. (II Kings 14: 7-14.)

The war reinforced Judah's vassalship to Israel, and Jehoash's generals' military successes enabled Israel, under Jehoash's son, Jeroboam II (788-747), to achieve its maximum power. Also, because of a hiatus in Assyrian expansion, Jeroboam II ruled an independent kingdom.

B.T. Dahlberg, in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, states that "The book of Kings furnishes but scant information about his [Jeroboam II's] achievements, but it is clear that under him the Northern kingdom attained a prosperity which it had not known before."³¹ The Biblical account of Jeroboam II's forty-one-year reign is indeed sparse. After mentioning one or two items, the text states that a full account of this sovereign's reign is to be found in the "Annals of the Kings of Israel," one of the twenty-four books mentioned in the Bible which remain lost. The archaeological ruins of dwellings of the period of Jeroboam II are larger and wider than those of earlier eras, indicating a heightened prosperity which occurred during his reign. In some respects, Jeroboam II's reign resembles that of Solomon, the last king of the United Monarchy. Wars were infrequent and economic conditions, except those of the poor, indicated considerable prosperity. After seizing some land from Judah to round out his southern border, Jeroboam II established a policy of peace with Judah. He also extended Israel's territory into Aram, which had been weakened by its wars against Assyria. One historian refers to this king's reign as "...the

³¹ B.T. Dahlberg, "Jeroboam", *IDB*, Vol. 2, p. 842.

last serene interlude in the history of the Kingdom of Israel"³² and "...its most glorious era."³³ Thirty years after Jeroboam II's death, the kingdom of Israel was gone, broken up into a series of Assyrian provinces.³⁴

For at least a century, Aram had been receiving the brunt of the Assyrian attacks. The Israelites failed to see the threat to their kingdom in this advance. Even when they paid tribute for long periods to Assyria, they remained unaware of the danger.

The true founder of the Assyrian empire was Tiglath Pileser III (744-727). His army reforms were central to the expansion of his kingdom. To the elements which the army already consisted of, professionals who received land or crops for their services, and slaves and peasants bound to landlords, he added a third: permanent levies from distant provinces. He also initiated the practice of mass deportation, wherein the inhabitants of conquered areas were resettled in other parts of the Empire, and replaced by deportees from elsewhere.³⁵

Tiglath Pileser launched a successful campaign against the Aramean principalities, moving his troops into Israel as well and the Israelite King Menahem (752-742) agreed to pay tribute to him, as Assyrian chronicles attest.³⁶ Shortly thereafter, King Menahem attempted to break away from Assyrian overlordship by inducing the rulers of other satellite states in the western Fertile Crescent to rebel. He also sought assistance from Judah and Egypt. Tiglath Pileser III's own words in Assyrian texts relate the consequences of Menahem's attempted breakaway:

[As for Menahem I ov]erwhelmed him, and he fled like a bird...I returned him to his place [and imposed tribute upon him, to wit:] gold, silver, linen garments...³⁷

By the middle of the eighth century Assyria had consolidated its conquest of Mesopotamia and much of Syria, and Tiglath Pileser III was receiving tribute from other kingdoms besides Israel, such as Tyre, Jebail, Carchemish, Hamath, and Arabia. The tributary commodities that the Assyrian king

³² Dubnov, p. 203.

³³ Ibid., p. 200.

³⁴ On the work of Bob Becking, see pp. 73-74 below. The citation here is for his work, *The Fall of Samaria: An Historical and Archaeological Study*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1992), p. 1.

³⁵ Georges Roux, *Ancient Iraq* (London: Penguin Books, 1992), Third Edition, pp. 206 and 306-307

³⁶ Dubnov, p. 205.

³⁷ Oppenheim, p. 283.

received included gold, silver, led, iron, elephant hide, woolen garments, linen garments, ivory, boxwood, horses, mules, cattle, sheep, and camels.³⁸

Menahem was succeeded by Pekiah, his son, who ruled for two years only. He was assassinated by a military officer named Pekah, who took the throne (735-732). During this decade, Israel was involved in another attempted coalition against Assyria, but Judah was not. Judah, which feared a war with Assyria, preferred to remain a vassal state. This put Judah in the position of having to assist Assyria against Israel, as part of the coalition. Israel thereupon attacked Judah, causing much damage and taking large spoils. Judah then appealed to Assyria for help against Israel and presented the Assyrian king with much gold and silver as an incentive.

Assyria now sent its troops against Aram and Israel. Tiglath Pileser III conquered Damascus and exiled its inhabitants to an Assyrian province. He then turned on Israel, conquering Galilee and Gilead (east of the Jordan), banishing the population to remote districts of his empire. Israel was now reduced to the Ephramite area, of which Samaria was the capital. It became a vassal to Assyria, and its king was deposed. Tiglath's Pileser III's own description of this event is as follows:

The land of Bit-Humria [the land of Omri]...all of its people, together with their goods, I carried off to Assyria. Pakaha, their king, they deposed and I placed 'Ausi [Hoshea] over them as king. Ten talents of gold and [?] talents of silver as their tribute I received from them and to Assyria I carried them.³⁹

When Tiglath Pileser III died, rebellion flared all over the empire- a pattern generally followed when emperors died. Israel sought the assistance of Egypt in order to regain its independence. Tiglath Pileser was succeeded by Shalmaneser V. The new Assyrian king invaded the remnant of Israel. When no help came from Egypt, King Hoshea of Israel tried to regain the favor of the Assyrian Emperor but was rebuffed and taken prisoner. The exact timing of some of these developments is very uncertain. Shalmaneser V then initiated a three-year siege of the city of Samaria. It is not known whether he or his

³⁸ Luckenbill, p. 269. This information was taken from Tiglath Pileser III's annals, engraved on slabs of the central palace at Calah (Nimrud.)

³⁹ Luckenbill, p. 293. This quote was taken from fragmentary annals of the first seventeen years of the rule of Tiglath Pileser III found in the Nimrod building inscriptions.

successor, Sargon II, completed the conquest. However, inscriptions on the walls of Sargon II's palace at Khorshabad quote him as declaring that :

I besieged and captured Samaria, carrying off 27,290 of the people who dwelt therein. Fifty chariots I gathered from among them. I caused others to take their [the departed inhabitants'] portion. I set my officers over them and imposed upon them the tribute of the former king.⁴⁰

Sargon removed numbers of Israelites from Samaria and replaced them with conquered peoples from other parts of the Empire. According to H. B. MacLean, in the *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, the leading citizens, or approximately one twentieth of the population, was deported.⁴¹ Barrel cylinders from Khorshabad, commemorating Sargon II's establishment of his new capital there quote him as declaring that he conquered the peoples of Tamid, Ibadidi, Marsimani, and Haiupa and drove out their remnants to settle them in the land of Israel.⁴²

A monument to this Assyrian victory contains an inscription stating that Sargon carried off 27,290 inhabitants from Israel.⁴³ This is probably an exaggeration. The remnant of the Israelite population in the year following joined forces with other conquered countries in a rebellion against Assyria. The result was another military disaster and additional expulsions of Israelites to distant provinces of the Empire. There were thus three different deportations. The Israelites deported by the Assyrians were absorbed by the peoples among whom they settled, and all traces of their Hebrew faith vanished. Thus, the Ten Tribes of the North became the Ten Lost Tribes.

Both the Hebrew Bible and the inscriptions of Sargon II agree that the removal of a portion of the Israelites from their land, and the re-population of that land by peoples from elsewhere in the Empire did take place. Deportation and re-population upon conquest of territory were practices in which both the Egyptians and the Hittites had earlier engaged, as had the Assyrian kings ruling before Sargon II. The Assyrian empire deported conquered peoples in order to disperse centers of resistance within its domain

⁴⁰ Luckenbill, pp. 25-26.

⁴¹ H.B. MacLean, "Hoshea," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 2, p. 264.

⁴² Luckenbill, pp. 60-61.

⁴³ Dubnov, p. 210.

and along its frontiers. The practice also helped to replenish its continuously active army with new recruits and to supply its economy with agricultural workers and craftsmen.⁴⁴

In conquered Israel itself, Assyrian deportation policies were successful, as there was no revolt after 720. The Israelites' incorporation into Assyrian society slowly but inexorably led to assimilation of the Israelites into the empire's polytheistic religion. Some Israelite deportees even attained important positions in the Assyrian army and achieved a social position such that they could serve as witnesses in legal proceedings. Many other Israelite deportees, however, were relegated to the lower classes. Recent deportees and older established peoples had the same rights and fiscal obligations to the Assyrian Empire.⁴⁵ In the remarkable monograph from which the foregoing has been taken, Bob Becking, a professor at the University of Utrecht seeks to identify the Hebrew names of some of the scattered Israelites by examining relevant cuneiform tablets, but he concedes that his sample is too small to be totally conclusive.⁴⁶

The prophet Micah described the coming end of Israel/Samaria this way:

So I will turn Samaria
Into a ruin in open country,
Into ground for planting vineyards;
For I will tumble her stones into the valley
And lay her foundations bare.
All her sculptured images shall be smashed,
And all her harlot's wealth be burned (Micah 1: 6-7)...

As is known, the ten Northern Tribes are lost to Jewish history. As is also known, the two Southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin were conquered and exiled to Babylonia. After a mere half-century, however, many Judahites returned to the land of Canaan which now took the name of Judea, or the Second Commonwealth, and laid the foundation for the Judaism we know today. We can only conjecture about the actual state of affairs which brought about extinction in the case of Israel and survival in the case of Judah. These conjectures will be presented in connection with our discussion of the Babylonian Exile in Chapter Six.

⁴⁴ Becking, p. 61

⁴⁵ Ibid., pp. 60-61 and 93.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 62.