

CHAPTER 5

Divided Monarchy: Judah (931-586)

Kings of Judah validated outside of the Bible

1. Uzziah, also known as Azariah 785-733 B.C.E.
2. Jotham 729-743
3. Ahaz 743-727
4. Hezekiah 727-698
5. Manasseh 698-642
6. Jehoahaz 609-608
7. Jehoiachin 597

For Jews, the Kingdom of Judah is a link to immortality, a cultural chain, strained but unbroken from Biblical times to this day. Its sister state, the Kingdom of Israel, perished in 722 B.C.E., a victim of its disastrous rebellion against Assyria.

The Kingdom of Judah possessed certain advantages over Israel. One was the strength of the dynasty founded by David; another was the centrality of the religious shrine in Jerusalem; and a third was the absence of strong, aggressive neighbors. The Philistine Federation, a once formidable neighbor, had lost power, as had the Moabites, Ammonites, and Edomites.¹ Judah remained a vassal of the Assyrian Empire, which continued to be a threat especially after the fall of Samaria. Judah had not joined the anti-Assyrian alliance, and therefore had avoided destruction.

As Judah evolved from an agrarian to a mercantile and manufacturing society, the motives for clashes between it and its neighbors changed. (But the clashes themselves continued.) When agrarian societies expanded, the cause often was the pressure of population prompting aggression to obtain additional territory. But as societies developed complex urban centers and became involved in commerce and manufacturing, the struggle over raw materials, markets and trade routes attained primacy. The expansion of empires, which was a continuous occurrence in the Ancient Near East, was a particularly important cause of war, as was the seizure of key raw materials and precious metals. For example, King

¹ Dubnov, p. 161.

Amaziah of Judah (798-769 B.C.E.)² reconquered Edom in order to gain control of that country's iron and copper mines.³

Rehoboam (931-914 B.C.E.),⁴ son and successor of Solomon, was the first king of the rump state of Judah. He had been king of the unified state when the Northern tribes broke away under Jeroboam to form the Kingdom of Israel. Rehoboam's mother, one of King Solomon's many wives, was an Ammonite. The Ammonites were a polytheistic people living east of the Jordan. In the years before Rehoboam came to the throne, Solomon had ruled despotically.⁵The *corvee*, which required three months per year of forced labor, had been deeply resented, and it was among the grievances that led to the breakup of the kingdom after Solomon's death. The society over which Rehoboam ruled in the tenth century B.C.E. was, for the most part, agrarian, although there were a number of towns, including Jerusalem.

In the preceding chapter it was found necessary to include Rehoboam, not yet identified outside the Bible, in order to complete the story of the division of the kingdom. Rehoboam also established a military defense system for Judah to repel a possible invasion by Rehoboam's contemporary, the Pharaoh Shishak of Egypt, who was seeking to re-establish the old Egyptian empire in western Asia.

One military writer stresses the role which Rehoboam played in building up Judah's fortifications as a means for assuring its survival. According to this writer, the system, which was based on the fortification of all approaches to Judah's mountainous heartland, lasted for generations.⁶ It is described in II Chronicles as follows:

Rehoboam dwelt in Jerusalem and built fortified towns in Judah. He built up Bethlehem, and Etam, and Tekoa, and Beth-zur, and Soco, and Adullam, and Gath, and Mareshah, and Ziph, and Adoriam, and Lachish, and Azekah, and Zorah, and Aijalon, and Hebron, which were in Judah and Benjamin, as fortified towns. He strengthened the fortified towns and put commanders in them, along with stores of food, oil and wine, and shields and spears in every town (II Chronicles 11: 5-12).

² Last part of his rule was as regent for Uzziah.

³ II Kings 14:7 and Cornfeld and Freedman, p. 149.

⁴ The *Tanakh* gives seventeen years for Rehoboam's reign (I Kings 14:21 and II Chronicles 12:13). I am following the chronology given in Finkelstein and Silberman, p. 20

⁵ *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 4, p. 29.

⁶ Mordechai Gichon, "Judah's Fortifications Under Rehoboam," in Herzog and Gichon, p. 199.

Translated into soldiers' language, as Gichon does:

Rehoboam's system of defense represents a concept diametrically opposed to that of Solomon. With the limited resources at his disposal, Rehoboam decided to concentrate on the defense of the area primarily essential for the preservation of Judah's independence. His other outstanding consideration was the use of the fortification as a means to block any hostile penetration of the area. The fortifications were to be sited and disposed so as to compel the enemy to besiege as many strongholds as possible on any potential line of approach and to serve as bases for counter-attack once the enemy had exhausted much of his resources and offensive capabilities, or when, for whatever reason, the hour for counter-offensive was deemed proper. Accordingly, Rehoboam decided to renounce the defense of all territory outside the Judean mountains, the cradle, heartland, and natural bulwark of the southern tribes.⁷

Regrettably, even if the buildup of the long-lasting fortifications of Judah was the work of Rehoboam, there are no archaeological remains documenting this. In the previous chapter, it was noted that the two Hebrew kingdoms were at war with each other throughout the reign of Rehoboam. The turmoil was intensified when Pharaoh Shishak invaded Judah in an effort to assist King Jeroboam, founder of the Kingdom of Israel and a prospective vassal, in establishing himself. In the course of this invasion, Shishak looted the Temple and the Royal Palace in Jerusalem of their gold and silver. He also conquered a number of Judahite towns, all of which have been historically validated. Fortunately for Judah, internal events in Egypt forced Shishak to abandon his invasion and return home.

The *Tanakh* refers to a campaign of Asa, Rehoboam's grandson (911-870 B.C.E.) against a force of Ethiopians which had invaded Judah (II Chronicles 14: 9-14).⁸ This force was repulsed. The exact date of this battle is unknown. The source of the invasion may have been a frontier garrison which Shishak left behind when he returned to Egypt. Neither this battle nor the reign of King Asa has been verified outside the Bible, although the idea of an African invasion of Judah is of interest. The king of Judah

⁷ Ibid., pp. 199-200.

⁸ Also mentioned in Bright, p. 231.

pursued the invaders and ravaged part of the frontier territory. For the next century and a half, Egypt was too weak to meddle again in the affairs of western Asia.⁹

The intermittent warfare between Judah and Israel came to an end when Ahab became king of Israel in 873 B.C.E. As part of the peace arrangement Ahab gave his daughter, Athaliah, to King Jehoram of Judah (851-843 B.C.E, not verified outside the Bible) in marriage. Athaliah was a strong-willed woman, very much like her mother Jezebel and was destined to come to a similar violent end. She soon took the power of the Judahite throne into her own hands (II Kings 8: 26-27; II Chronicles 22: 2-3). When her son Ahaziah visited the Northern Kingdom, he was murdered. Athaliah seized this opportunity to eliminate all the male heirs of the House of David, except one, and to rule in her own name. The one survivor, Joash, was hidden by Athaliah's sister and her husband, the High Priest (II Kings 11: 1-3; II Chronicles 22:10-11)

Long gaps exist separating the historically validated kings of Judah. From 931 B.C.E., when the Kingdom of Judah was established, until the reign of Uzziah, also known as Azariah, 146 years later (785-733 B.C.E.), none of the kings of Judah has been validated outside the Bible. That eventful period of approximately a century and a half must be omitted here because of this lack of validation.

Although Uzziah ruled for many years, he had leprosy, and during part of his reign, he was obliged to be the power behind the throne on behalf of his son Jotham and later his grandson Ahaz. (In the ancient world, many dermatological conditions were classified as leprosy. King Uzziah apparently actually had the disease, and was "permanently quarantined in separate quarters."¹⁰

Uzziah ruled during the period of Assyria's growing power, and he sought to build an alliance to check Assyrian expansion. He obtained fame as a warrior by fighting battles with the redoubtable Philistines, demolishing the walls of the cities of Gath, Jabneh and Ashdod, and building Judahite cities in Philistine territory (II Chronicles 26:6). As a result of his campaigns, which expanded Judah's dominion over the Negev, including parts of Philistia and Edom, he was able to obtain control over the caravan

⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁰ Louis Isaac Rabinowits, "Leprosy," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 11, Col. 33.

routes that passed through these regions. Uzziah carried out other building projects, including the strengthening of the fortifications of Jerusalem.¹¹

He was a contemporary of Jeroboam II of Israel and is regarded as one of the great kings of Judah. The era of these two kings was one of peace between Judah and Israel, because Judah accepted the permanence of the schism.¹² Cornfield and Freedman describe Uzziah's validation outside the Bible:

An ossuary, inscribed in Aramaic and purporting to contain the bones of Uzziah was discovered not in the royal necropolis, but in the ancient cemetery at the foot of the Mount of Olives. It will be recalled that Uzziah had to resign his kingship because of his leprosy, and this fact may help to explain the curious disposition of his bones.¹³

It was toward the end of the reign of Uzziah that Isaiah, the first of the great Hebrew prophets, made his appearance (Isaiah 6:1).¹⁴ He remains the most popular of the prophets, and portions of his writings have become part of synagogue ritual, particularly the *Haftarot* drawn from the prophetic works which follow the weekly readings of the Torah portion. Isaiah's writings are also read in connection with the commemoration of the destruction of the First and Second Temples on Tisha B'Av (9th of Ov). His book is the longest of those of any of the prophets, comprising sixty-six chapters. I shall not focus on Isaiah's prophetic calling as such, but, rather, on his role as a royal adviser to four successive Judahite kings: Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah.

Uzziah was succeeded by Jotham, who reigned in Judah from 743 to 729. He continued the work of his father, further strengthening the walls of Jerusalem. He built the upper gate of the Temple, which faced north and was to help repel invaders. Jotham also constructed cities, forts, and towers in the Judahite hill country. The prosperity which characterized his reign is attested to in the writings of the

¹¹ Cornfield and Freedman, p. 127.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ It is important to note that there are two Isaiah's. The first thirty nine chapters of the prophetic book by this name deal with the eighth century B.C.E. The Isaiah to whom these first chapters refer is simply referred to as Isaiah. Chapters 40-46 in the Book of Isaiah deal with events which took place two centuries later. The Isaiah that these later chapters refer to is known as "the Second Isaiah," or "Deutero-Isaiah." The reference here is to the first Isaiah.

prophets Isaiah and Hosea. He fought the Ammonites successfully, exacting a heavy tribute from them for three successive years (II Chronicles 27:5).

During Jotham's reign, Aram and Israel in alliance carried out military raids against Judah to compel it to join an anti-Assyrian coalition. The successful military campaigns of Jotham and his father Uzziah had enlarged the kingdom of Judah considerably. According to *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Judah had become, "perhaps," the strongest of the three states--Israel, Aram (Syria), and Judah--and no alliance against the Assyrians would have been viable without Judahite participation.¹⁵ The Bible refers to battles fought by Jotham but does not provide details.(II Chronicles 27:7).

Jotham's son and successor Ahaz, also known as Jehoahaz, reigned on his own probably from 734-715. This king has come down to us with a grim reputation. For the story of Ahaz, we go to Josephus's *Jewish Antiquities*. Josephus reports that:

...Jotham passed away at the age of forty-one years, of which he had reigned sixteen, and was buried in the royal sepulchers. The kingdom then came to his son Achaz, who in acting most impiously toward God and violating his country's laws imitated the kings of Israel, for he set up altars in Jerusalem and sacrificed on them to idols, to which he even offered his own son as a whole burnt-offering according to the Canaanite custom, and he committed other offences similar to these. But, while he was thus acting like a madman, there came against him ..[Rezin], the king of Syria and Damascus, and .. [Pekah], the king of Israel – for they were friends, - and, after driving him into Jerusalem, they besieged it for a long time, but because of the strength of its walls accomplished nothing. However, the King of Syria took the city of ..[Elath] on the Red Sea and, after killing its inhabitants, settled Syrians therein. And, when he had in like manner done away with the Jews in the garrisons and in the surrounding country, and had carried off much spoil, he withdrew with his army to Damascus. But the king of Jerusalem, on learning that the Syrians had returned home, and thinking himself a match for the king of Israel, led out his force against him and, after joining battle, was defeated because of the anger which God felt at his many great impieties. One hundred and twenty thousand of his men were slain that day by the Israelites, whose general Zacharias killed in the battle the son of king Achaz, named ..[Maaseiah], and took captive .. [Azrikam], the governor of the entire kingdom, and ..[Elkanah], the chief officer of the tribe of Judah; they also carried off the women

¹⁵ *I.D.B.*, Vol. 2, p. 1000.

and children of the tribe of Benjamin, and, having seized much spoil, returned to Samaria.¹⁶

The kings of Aram and Israel continued to pressure the King of Judah to join them in an alliance against the Assyrian thrust. King Ahaz, however, chose to pay tribute to King Tiglath Pileser III of Assyria (744-727 B.C.E.), as the kings of Moab, Ashkelon, Gaza, Edom and Byblos had been doing. Their tribute consisted of gold silver, tin, iron, garments, horses and mules.¹⁷ Having failed in their attempts to recruit King Ahaz into the anti-Assyrian alliance, the Aramean and Israelite kings decided to try to replace King Ahaz, of the House of David, with Tabeel, a member of the House of Tobias. The prophet Isaiah, when King Ahaz consulted him, took the position that war would not solve the problem of Assyrian aggression, and that Judah would ultimately be saved.

The Lord spoke further to Ahaz: 'Ask for a sign from the Lord your God, anywhere down to Sheol or up to the sky.' But Ahaz replied, 'I will not ask, and I will not test the Lord.' 'Listen, House of David,' [Isaiah] retorted, 'is it not enough that you treat men as helpless that you also treat my God as helpless? Assuredly, my Lord will give you a sign of His own accord! Look, the young woman is with child and about to give birth to a son. Let her name him Immanuel. (By the time he learns to reject the bad and choose the good, people will be feeding on curds and honey.) For before the lad knows to reject the bad and choose the good, the ground whose two kings you dread shall be abandoned. The Lord will cause to come upon you and your people and your ancestral house such days as never have come since Ephraim turned away from Judah – that selfsame king of Assyria (Isaiah 7: 10-17).

In the end, the Israelite-Aramean plot to depose Ahaz failed. Ahaz turned to Tiglath Pileser III of Assyria for assistance, offering tribute and becoming a vassal (II Kings 16: 7-9) (II Chronicles 28: 16),¹⁸ and Assyria vanquished Israel and Aram.¹⁹ [As we shall see, Judah was, in fact, paying tribute to Assyria

¹⁶ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, ix, p. 243-247. See also II Chronicles, 28:7. Josephus' numbers, like those in the *Tanakh*, should not be taken too seriously. It may be recalled that Josephus was re-writing the Bible for the Greco-Roman world of which he was a part, in order to present the history of the Jewish people and to demonstrate their ancient lineage.

¹⁷ Nimrud tablets and slabs, dated 728 B.C.E., currently in the British Museum, containing building inscriptions providing a resume of the first seventeen years of Tiglath Pileser III's reign, cited in Luckenbill, p. 287.

¹⁸ These Biblical citations are given in Avi Yonah, p. 96.

¹⁹ Cornfeld and Freedman, pp. 152-153

during the reign of Sargon II (721-705 B.C.E.),²⁰ and thus eluded the fate of the Northern Kingdom, which Sargon II destroyed in 722.]

The prophet Isaiah also pleaded with Ahaz to inaugurate a religious revival, cleansing the land of idolatry, in order to strengthen Judahite against its enemies. He got nowhere. Prophetic tradition holds that because of this failure, at the end of Ahaz's reign, Judah was militarily weakened and vulnerable. Only a few years before the accession of Ahaz's son and successor Hezekiah (727-698), the Northern Kingdom of Israel had fallen to Assyrian forces. King Hezekiah, in contrast to his father, did listen to Isaiah and did inaugurate religious reform in order to find favor in the sight of the Almighty (II Kings 18:4).²¹ The reform was apparently so thoroughgoing that a reaction came in the reign of Hezekiah's son Manasseh (698-642).

During the years of Ahaz's reign, Judah had faced continuous wars with the Arameans, the Edomites, and the Philistines, as well as a burdensome annual tribute to Judah's overlord, the Assyrian king. This situation continued into the era of King Hezekiah, whose reign coincided both with that of Sargon II and with that of his son Sennacherib (704-681 B.C.E.)

There are many instances in which the smaller states of the western Fertile Crescent, including Judah, attempted to form alliances aimed at throwing off Assyrian rule. These alliances invariably occurred at the time when one Assyrian ruler died and his successor was not yet in full control of the state apparatus. Sargon II's chronicles reveal an attempt by a Hittite monarch to recruit Moab, Edom, and Judah into one such attempt. This plot proved abortive because Sargon's troops marched on the Hittites and the rebel monarch fled.²²

King Hezekiah was offered participation in yet another alliance against Assyrian domination. This offer came in 722/21 B.C.E. from the king of Babylonia, who had attempted unsuccessfully to free his kingdom from Assyria. Babylonia had been under Assyrian rule from the middle of the ninth

²⁰ Prism inscriptions of Sargon II, dated before establishment of capital at Khorshabad, currently in British Museum, Cited in Luckenbill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*, Vol. II, p. 105

²¹ Chronicles II, 29-31 offers details about the cleansing of the Temple.

²² Oppenheim, p. 287. Cited from inscription on broken prism published by H. Winckler, *Die Keilschrifttexte Sargons* (Leipzig, 1889).

century B.C.E. and was now challenging Assyrian hegemony. Both Isaiah and Micah, his contemporary warned the King Hezekiah against joining the Babylonian alliance.²³ It is unclear whether or not Hezekiah joined this alliance. At Sennacherib's accession in 704 B.C.E., the small states in the western Levant once again attempted to break from the Assyrian hold and established an alliance to regain their independence. Hezekiah played a major role in another rebellion against Assyria's King Sennacherib (704-681 B.C.E.).

Sennacherib was a younger son of Sargon II, who somehow succeeded his father. At a young age, he was placed in the "Succession House," and grew up apparently unscathed. This ruler was bold, fearless, and apparently very brutal. He faced almost a lifetime of warfare by the many tributary states which his father had collected and which, on his accession to the throne, rebelled simultaneously. The Cimmerians of south Russia now emerged to Assyria's north as a growing power. They were pushing southward, confronting Assyria's rebellious northern vassals. This situation eased the pressure on Sennacherib, but at the same time, made him wary of growing Cimmerian power.²⁴

Hezekiah's preparations for the coming conflict with Assyria included the digging of the Siloam tunnel, which was to channel the waters of the Gihon Spring into Jerusalem, should the city come under attack. Hezekiah's other measures included the building of storehouses for food, the fortifying of Jerusalem's walls, and the strengthening of Judah's chariot forces (II Kings 22:8–11).²⁵ Despite these preparations, Sennacherib of Assyria invaded Judah in 701. Sennacherib's annals describe the chain of events leading to the siege of Jerusalem, and the siege itself, as follows.

The officials, nobles and people of Ekron [a Philistine city-state], who had thrown Padi, their king, bound by (treaty to) Assyria, into fetters of iron and had given him over to Hezekiah, the Jew – he kept him in confinement like an enemy – they became afraid and called upon the Egyptian kings, the bowmen, chariots and horses of the king of Meluha (Ethiopia), a countless host, these came to their aid.... They offered battle. (Trusting the aid of Assur, my Lord, I fought with them and brought about their defeat. The Egyptian charioteers and princes, together with the charioteers of the Ethiopian king, my hands took alive in the midst of battle.... I drew near to Ekron and slew the governors and nobles who had

²³ Cornfeld and Freedman, p. 154.

²⁴ Roux, pp. 319-320

²⁵ Cited in Cornfeld and Freedman, p. 154.

committed sin, and I hung their bodies on stakes....Padi, their king, I brought out of Jerusalem, I set him on the royal throne over them, and imposed upon him my kingly tribute. As for Hezekiah, the Jew, who did not submit to my yoke, 46 of his strong, walled cities, as well as the small cities in their neighborhood, which were without number...I besieged and took. 200,140 people, great and small, male and female, horses, mules, asses, camels, cattle and sheep, without number, I brought away from them and counted as spoil. Himself [Hezekiah], like a caged bird, I shut up in Jerusalem, his royal city. Earthworks I threw up against him – the one coming out of the city gate I turned back to his misery. The cities of his, which I despoiled, I cut off from his land and to Mitinti, King of Ashdod, Padi, King of Ekron, and Silli-Bel, King of Gaza, I gave them. And thus I diminished his land....

In addition to 30 talents of gold and 800 talents of silver (there were) gems, antimony, jewels...ivory...boxwood, all kinds of valuable treasures, as well as his daughters, his harem, and his male and female musicians (which) he had (them) bring after me to Ninevah, my royal city.²⁶

As Sennacherib's description points out, the invasion resulted in Hezekiah's imprisonment in Jerusalem. It also brought about Judah's loss of many cities and villages, so that "...only Jerusalem and its environs were left, and they were under siege."²⁷

The *Tanakh* describes vividly the exchanges between Sennacherib's emissaries and King Hezekiah.

The taunts that Sennacherib's officials hurled at Hezekiah included the following:

"You tell Hezekiah: Thus said the Great King, the King of Assyria: What makes you so confident? I suppose mere talk tames counsel and valor for war! Look, on whom are you relying, that you have rebelled against me? You are relying on Egypt, that splintered reed of a staff, which enters and punctures the palm of anyone who leans on it." (Isaiah 36: 4-6).

Hezekiah is seducing you to a death of hunger and thirst, saying, 'the Lord our God will save us from the king of Assyria....Surely you know what I and my fathers have done to the peoples of the lands? Were the gods of the nations of the lands able to save their lands from me? Which of the gods of any of those nations whom my fathers destroyed was able to save his people from me, that

²⁶ Sennacherib's annals taken from the text of the Taylor Prism, dated at 691 B.C.E., held by British Museum. Also taken from annals in another prism, dated 689 B.C.E. held by Oriental Institute, University of Chicago. Cited in Luckenbill, Vol. II, pp. 119-121.

²⁷ Cornfeld and Freedman, pp. 155 and 128.

your God should be able to save you from me?' (II Chronicles 32: 11-14)

Despite the taunts and the devastating siege, Sennacherib ended up retreating. Isaiah, who had previously remonstrated against rebellions or alliances opposing Assyria, now assured the inhabitants of besieged Jerusalem that Yahweh would break Assyria's power.²⁸ When Hezekiah went to Isaiah to seek God's help, the prophet replied that God was on Judah's side. He repeated this message from God:

I will delude him [the King of Assyria]. He will hear a rumor and return to his land, and I will make him fall by his sword in his land (II Kings 19:5-7).

That night, an angel of the Lord went out and struck down one hundred and eighty-five thousand in the Assyrian camp, and the following morning they were all dead corpses (II Kings 19:35)

So King Sennacherib of Assyria broke camp and retreated, and stayed in Nineveh. While he was worshipping at the temple of his god Nisroch, his sons Adrammelech and Sarezer struck him down with a sword (II Kings 19: 36-37).

A military analyst ascribes a different reason for Sennacherib's hasty lifting of the siege of Jerusalem. Sennacherib had to withdraw his troops from Jerusalem because Judah's Egyptian allies, whom the Assyrians had earlier defeated, had now regrouped and launched a major attack against Sennacherib's forces. The Egyptians seized this opportunity because Sennacherib had used up so much of his strength in attempting to break through Judah's defenses,²⁹ described above. The figure of 200,140 Judahites deported as spoil by Sennacherib was widely accepted for a time, but now is questioned³⁰.

Hezekiah's son and successor Manasseh undid virtually all of the religious reforms that his father had instituted. Features of his counter-reform included the restoration of local shrines to Yahweh in the High Places which Hezekiah had demolished,³¹ the erection of an altar to Ba'al,³² and the re-introduction

²⁸ Cornfeld and Freedman, p. 155.

²⁹ Gichon, in Gichon and Herzon, pp. 210-214.

³⁰ Leon A. Feldman (ed.) *Essays in Ancient and Medieval Jewish History: Essays by Salo W. Baron* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1972), p. 14.

³¹ Lisbeth S. Fried opposes the view that Hezekiah destroyed provincial shrines to Yahweh. Instead, she argues that he did not rebuild them after Sennacherib had destroyed them. See Lisbeth S. Fried, "The High Places (*Bamot*) and

of human sacrifice. Among those sacrificed was his own son³³(II Kings 21:6). Under Manasseh's rule, Judah remained a vassal of Assyria, both under the rule of Eserhaddon (680-669 B.C.E) and that of Ashurbanipal (668-626 B.C.E.)³⁴ The Judahite king attempted to rebel but was unsuccessful.³⁵The *Tanakh* describes the attempted rebellion:

The Lord spoke to Manasseh and his people, but they would not pay heed, so the Lord brought against them the officers of the army of Assyria, who took Manasseh captive in manacles, bound him in fetters, and led him off to Babylon (II Chronicles 33: 10-11).

The *Tanakh* goes on to relate that this imprisonment led Manasseh to repent of his misdeeds and to return to the worship of Yahweh. Upon re-entering Jerusalem, he fortified the city's outer walls, placed garrisons in Judah's fortified towns, and demolished all altars to foreign gods, rebuilding the one to Yahweh (II Chronicles 33: 12-16).

Assyria's weakening regional position may be the reason why King Manasseh was allowed to return home and to abolish the worship of the foreign gods which he himself had previously instituted, in part at Assyria's behest.³⁶

The tale of Josiah (639-09) is a different one. A very diligent search has failed to turn up the historical validation of this king. One author appeared to make a reference to Josiah's presence in Herodotus' *History*, but an examination of the text of the "Father of History" referred to the battle of Megiddo in which Josiah allegedly perished without making any reference to Jews or to the Judahite

the Reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah: An Archaeological Investigation," *Journal of the American Oriental Society*, Vol. 122, No. 3 (July-September, 2002): 445-447.

³² H.B. MacLean, "Manasseh," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 3, p. 254.

³³ Human sacrifice was a Canaanite religious custom.

³⁴ The Assyrian king Eserhaddon alludes to Judah's vassalship in mentioning that country among those from which he ordered building materials for his palace. From Prism 13, published by R Campbell Thompson, *The Prisms of Eserhaddon and Ashurbanipal* (London, 1931). Cited in Oppenheim, in Pritchard, p. 29. Ashurbanipal, for his part, mentions Judah as a tributary in an inscription on one of the cylinders depicting his campaigns against Elam, Tyre and Egypt. Cited in Luckenbill, Vol. II, pp. 340-341.

³⁵ Avi-Yonah, p. 97.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

King.³⁷ Also, Herodotus did visit a Hebrew military colony on the frontier between Egypt and Nubia (Sudan) called Elephantine without mentioning the Hebrew presence in that place.³⁸

Not long ago, an ostracan (pl. ostraci) or pottery shard with an inscription was found bearing Josiah's name, but this turned out to be a fraud.³⁹ Archaeological diggings in several places in Israel during the 1960s have uncovered evidence of Josiah's work. These include "...feudal estates on the shore of Philistia [and]...unwalled settlements in the south and east of Gaza." In addition, the town of En-Gedi, founded in Josiah's time as a royal balsam plantation, was uncovered.⁴⁰ This archaeological evidence is promising, but does not clinch the matter for the historian regarding the validation of Josiah himself.

In addition, some of the actions attributed to him have been called into question by the findings of certain archaeologists. Lisbeth Fried, for example, states that many of the shrines whose destruction the Tanakh attributes to Josiah were destroyed earlier by foreign kings, or placed underground for protection against destruction. The shrine in Tirzah did not exist in Josiah's time, while the one in Gezer (Samaria) was destroyed in 722 by Shalmeneser V of Assyria.⁴¹

The case of Josiah may be compared with that of Solon of Athens, a near contemporary of his, to understand the impact a leader can have upon his society although few archaeological records of his rule survive. In Athens a decade or so after the presumed death of Josiah, the institutions of government had reached an impasse. Class relationships and political and social bonds threatened to dissolve. A man named Solon appeared and rewove the legal fabric through a series of wise decrees which survived him by many generations. Unfortunately, almost all records of his rule were lost except for some ostraci which were gathered together two centuries later to reconstruct his reforms. The same may be true of Josiah and the Judahite society he ruled. Thus his reign needs to be looked at from more than one viewpoint.

³⁷ Herodotus, *History*, Book II, (New York: A.A. Knopf, 1997) p. 151.

³⁸ Ibid..

³⁹ Scham, Sandra, private conversation.

⁴⁰ Moshe Weinfeld, "Josiah," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 10, Col. 289.

⁴¹ See Fried, pp. 450-61.

Josiah's religious reforms described in II Kings 22-23 and II Chronicles 34-35 are important for three reasons: he inspired a spiritual revival throughout the country; he instituted religious reforms which were central to the evolution of Judaism; and he attempted to introduce more humane laws governing the social and economic relationships among his people. In addition, his work offers the possibility of understanding why it was that through the people of Judah, Judaism survived while the people of the Northern Kingdom disappeared from Jewish history. (See Chapter 5). According to one writer, his "...role in the resuscitation of Israel can hardly be overestimated."⁴² As the Tanakh puts it, "There was no king like him before who turned back to the Lord with all his heart and soul and might, in full accord with the Teaching of Moses; nor did any like him arise after him (II Kings 23:25)."

The beginning of Josiah's religious reforms parallels the weakening of Assyria's hold on Judah and seems to be connected with that development. The weakening of Assyria led to Judah's gradual independence, achieved without any strife with that dominant power. At the same time, Judah was expanding into the southern part of what had been the Kingdom of Israel as well as westward into Philistia. There are discrepancies between accounts in II Kings and II Chronicles as to when the reforms actually commenced,⁴³ but the issue is of little importance here. In religious practice, Josiah attempted to eliminate the surviving pagan rituals and centralized the worship of Yahweh in Jerusalem by destroying competing shrines around the country and assigning the priests of these shrines to Jerusalem.⁴⁴

These reforms were allegedly based upon a "Book of the Law" discovered in the year 622/21 in the course of repairs undertaken on Solomon's Temple. This book was brought before King Josiah and read to him. According to the *Tanakh*, its provisions, which seem to be part of the Book of Deuteronomy, were at variance with the practices of the day. One gets the very clear impression that the Passover festival first began as a result of the discovery and public reading of the "Book of the Law." This remains a matter of supposition, however, because "The problem of identity of this book is central to Biblical

⁴² Weinfeld, Col. 288.

⁴³ H. Tadmor, "The Period of the First Temple, the Babylonian Exile, and the Restoration," in H.H Ben-Sasson, *A History of the Jewish People*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1976), p. 149.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

research."⁴⁵ In other words, since scholars do not know what the "Book of the Law" actually said, they can only infer its contents.

Professor Salo Baron says that King Josiah's other reforms were based on the demands of the prophets for healing social discontent. The Deuteronomic reforms of Josiah were aimed at alleviating such conditions as usury and slavery. Specifically, usury was to be abolished, and slaves were to be liberated after their sixth year of servitude. Baron called this limitation of slavery "half hearted."⁴⁶ Female slaves were to be granted the same boon of liberation, thus obscuring the sexual purpose for which they had often been enslaved. Deuteronomy forbade the return of fugitive slaves to their masters.⁴⁷

The states of Mesopotamia in the earlier centuries had adopted price fixing in order to prevent the gouging of consumers. Baron believes that such measures would have been infeasible for Judah's foreign trade. New laws did forbid flagrant misrepresentation and required fair weights and measures. The expropriation of debtors' lands was not fully addressed. There was instead a statement to the effect that original owners were to have their lands restored to them every Jubilee year. The problem of land confiscation in lieu of unpaid debt continued as a burning issue in later times, undermining the fabric of Judean society. The admonition to extend charity to *gerim* (strangers as well as landless Judahite laborers) represented a weak attempt to deal with this problem.⁴⁸ Another interesting legal provision was intended to prevent starvation:

When thou comest into thy neighbor's vineyard, then thou mayest eat grapes until thou have enough at thine own pleasure; but thou shalt not put any into thy vessel. When thou comest into thy neighbor's standing corn, then thou mayest pluck ears with thy hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle into thy neighbor's standing corn (Deuteronomy 23: 25-26, cited in Baron, A Social and Religious History of the Jews, Vol. I, p. 86).

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 150.

⁴⁶ Salo Wittmayer Baron, *A Social and Religious History of the Jews*, Vol. I, (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1952), 2nd Edition, p. 85.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 85-86.

Before we examine the final years of the Kingdom of Judah, we must pause briefly to consider two topics: 1) the causes of the multitudinous international wars in which both Israel and Judah were involved; and 2) the bureaucratic institutions which enabled larger empires such as the Assyrian, the Babylonian, and later the Persian, to expand and sustain themselves.

The two kingdoms of Israel and Judah were part of a major crossroads connecting three continents. The simple, nomadic society which characterized the early centuries of Jewish existence gave way over the centuries to the cosmopolitanism which characterized the civilizations of its larger neighbors. Hebrew nomadic existence evolved into a settled, agricultural society. It was further transformed into a commercial society with agricultural surpluses, and it therefore moved into the channels of international trade. This development required the Hebrew kingdoms' defenses of their own trade routes as well as access to those of other powers. As the statement by Thucydides at the beginning of Chapter Three indicates, use of force was an integral element of sustaining this system. As to why individuals resort to war, the primary motivation may be psychological, but that motivation creates situations and events which have their own empirical justification.

On the subject of large empires, the distinguished historian William McNeill points out (almost all of the phrases below are his) that the institutional basis for large societies was first established in Mesopotamia before the invasions of the Bronze Age (18th century B.C.E.). In that century, he goes on, Hammurabi developed a political system dominated by bureaucrats – that is, administrators whose powers lay in their offices, not in their persons. This system was used also by the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the Persians. To be successful, the administrator of a very large province dealt with local authorities, temple priesthoods, city magistrates, territorial princelings, and others. In the course of time, official relationships among all of these and the provincial governor became fixed and customary. This applies not only to taxes of various kinds, but also to military recruitment as well as to religious practices for appeasing the gods. Since these provincial governors and the imperial center itself could rely upon the steady flow of revenues and recruits, the ruler was able to maintain and expand his empire. This system of expansion while maintaining cohesion enlarged empires like Assyria, Babylonia, Persia, and Medea,

enabling them to develop military superiority which would guarantee them the continued flow of wealth and military conscripts. Assyria in particular ensured its own military preponderance by developing a permanent officer corps with promotions based on merit, as well as regular units. The Assyrian military also built and patrolled roads which facilitated the transit of troops and goods. Constant campaigns also maintained the army's fighting fitness. A very large imperial guard could be moved quickly to meet any internal challenge. "...In the larger frame of world history the development of such a fundamental instrument of power as a standing army, supplemented by a semi-professional militia for campaigns, clearly marks a major landmark of political evolution."⁴⁹

Josiah himself was confronted with a very complex international situation. By the end of the 7th century, the Assyrian Empire had been sufficiently weakened by raids from nomads to the north, by internal civil war, and above all, by the challenges of emerging Babylonian expansion.⁵⁰ All of Babylonia's trade was with powers to the west, and expansion in that direction was inevitable. Babylonian conflict with Egypt, which also traded in the same area, was inescapable.

Assyria's predicament had enabled Josiah to extend his reforms into some of the former provinces of Israel, in particular the lands previously held by the tribes of Manasseh, Ephraim, and Naphtali. In effect, he enlarged his realm to include part of the former Kingdom of Israel as far north as Galilee. Growing Assyrian weakness enabled Josiah to reconstitute much of the Davidic state.⁵¹ Many towns in former Samaria now became part of the Kingdom of Judah. It seems that Josiah took all of these steps while still professing loyalty to Assyria.⁵²

Egypt and Assyria, age-old rivals for domination of the Fertile Crescent, now buried their rivalry and joined in an alliance against the rising Babylonians and their allies, the Medes (a tribe we shall meet half a century later as sharing with the Persians the conquest of the Babylonian Empire). Josiah, while

⁴⁹ William H. MacNeill, *A World History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 58

⁵⁰ Eric H. Cline, *Jerusalem Besieged: From Ancient Canaan to Modern Israel* (Ann Arbor, MI: Univ. of Michigan Press, 2004, 2007 printing), p. 50.

⁵¹ MacLean, "Josiah," p. 997.

⁵² *Ibid.*

attempting to stop the Assyrian and Egyptian armies from joining forces against Babylon⁵³ at Megiddo, died there in the ensuing battle (609). After Josiah was killed, the Egyptian Pharaoh Necho II (610-595 B.C.E.) took all of Judah and a portion of the former Kingdom of Israel which Josiah had annexed.⁵⁴

Another element adding to the complexities of affairs was the emergence of the prophet Jeremiah. He was a prophet of both despair and hope, and he gave freely of his political advice, even when it was not sought. After Josiah's death, his second son Jehoiakim (also not validated outside the Bible) came to the throne, and Jeremiah delivered a sermon at the temple on the occasion of his coronation. The prophet urged the people of Judah not to rely upon the Temple as the center of power and grace of the Almighty (made so by the reforms of Josiah) but to look instead upon themselves and their own right conduct as their means of salvation from their external enemies (Jeremiah 7: 3-4). He was later to berate Jehoiakim for permitting setbacks to Josiah's reforms and engaging in repressive and self-seeking policies. At one point, the enmity of the king and the priests caused Jeremiah to go into hiding.

After the battle of Carchemish in 605, in which Babylonia defeated the forces of the Egyptian-Assyrian alliance, Jeremiah delivered a sermon predicting the destruction of Judah. "When Pashur the priest heard it, he beat the prophet, put him in stocks in the upper Benjamin gate of the Temple, and left him there overnight."⁵⁵

The battle of Carchemish on the Euphrates was the arena in which Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon (605-562) dealt a decisive blow to the Assyrian Empire.⁵⁶ The Babylonian-Mede alliance then conquered Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, putting an end to the Assyrian Empire altogether. Babylonia was now supreme and Judah became a vassal state, paying "heavy tribute" to Nebuchadnezzar in 604.⁵⁷

⁵³ MacLean, *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 2, p. 998.

⁵⁴ Stephan G. Rosenbarg, "The Jewish Temple at Elephantine," *Near Eastern Archaeology*, Vol. 67, No. 1 (2004).

⁵⁵ Muilenburg, "Jeremiah the Prophet," *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 2, p. 827.

⁵⁶ Cline, *Jerusalem Besieged*, pp. 51-52. Nebuchadnezzar is also referred to in some sources as Nabuchadrezzar.

⁵⁷ John W. Betlyon, "Neo-Babylonian Military Operations Other Than War in Judah and Jerusalem," Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2003), p. 264. See also II Kings 24:1, and Bustanay Oded, "Nebuchadnezzar," *Encyclopedia Judaica*, Vol. 12, Col. 913.

For Judah the denouement came quickly. Of the last three kings of Judah, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedakiah, only Jehoiachin has been verified historically. Regrettably, there is no sixth century B.C.E. Josephus to provide an adequate chronicle of the last decade of Judah's existence.⁵⁸ In addition, the Babylonian Chronicle breaks off before Nebuchadnezzar's final siege of Jerusalem, leaving a very large gap in the historical record. For these reasons, the Tanakh and Josephus must be the sources for this brief period. Judah's demise at the hand of Babylonia came in the form of four deportations: one in 598 B.C.E., a second in 597, a third in 586 (the largest), and a fourth in 580 B.C.E.

Jehoiakim had come to the throne with the assistance of Pharaoh Necho I, and he may thus have retained pro-Egyptian leanings despite the fact that Judah was now in the Babylonian sphere of influence and was paying regular tribute to the king of Babylon. When, in 601, the two giant empires of Egypt and Babylonia fought a very bloody but inconclusive battle, Jehoiakim decided that Babylonia was weakening and therefore ceased paying further tribute. Nebuchadnezzar waited three years and then, in 598 B.C.E., struck Judah with great force. It is not known whether Nebuchadnezzar had a hand in the death of Jehoiakim in that year, but three thousand prominent Judahites were deported.⁵⁹ As Josephus relates,

...the king of Babylon made an expedition against Jehoiakim...when he [Nebuchadnezzar] was come into the city, he did not observe the covenants he had made, but he killed such as were in the flower of their age, and such as were of the greatest dignity, together with their king Jehoiakim, whom he commanded to be thrown before the walls, without any burial; and made his son Jehoiachin king of the country, and of the city: He also took the principal persons in dignity for captives, three thousand in number, and led them away to Babylon; among which was the prophet Ezekiel, who was then but young. And this was the end of king Jehoiakim, when he had lived for thirty-six years, and of them reigned eleven. But Jehoiachin succeeded him in the kingdom...He reigned three months and ten days.⁶⁰

⁵⁸ Josephus was a participant in and an observer of the great Jewish rebellion against Rome (66-70 C.E.), and he left behind seven volumes of that major event which have survived to the present day.

⁵⁹ Avraham Malamat, "The Last Kings of Judah and the Fall of Jerusalem: An Historical/Chronological Study," *Israel Exploration Journal*, Vol. 18 (1968): 137-155. See also John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1962), Second edition, p. 326.

⁶⁰ Josephus, *Jewish Antiquities*, 10.6.96-98, cited in Cline, p. 53.

Nebuchadnezzar returned the following year (597 B.C.E.), and once more laid siege to Jerusalem. The new king, Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim, surrendered with his whole family. Nebuchadnezzar brought home to Babylon not only the royal family and court officials but also all the treasures from the Temple and the Royal Palace, as well as "...all men of valor, seven thousand, and the craftsmen and the smiths, one thousand, all of them strong and fit for war."⁶¹ Ben-Sasson puts the figure at 10,000. This was the first of three Babylonian deportations of Judahites.

As the first attack by Babylonia occurred in 597 B.C.E., the prophet Habakkuk, a contemporary of these events, responded with a beautiful, if bitter, rebuke to the Almighty:

How long, O Lord, shall I cry out
And You not listen,
Shall I shout to You, "Violence!"
And You not save?
Why do You make me see iniquity
[Why] do You look upon wrong? –
Raiding and violence are before me,
Strife continues and contention goes on.
This is why decision fails
And justice never emerges...(Habukkuk 1: 2-4)

Habukkuk also supplied a stark delineation of an aggressor:

For lo, I am raising up the Chaldeans
That fierce, impetuous nation,
Who cross the earth's wide spaces
To seize homes not their own.
They are terrible, dreadful;
They make their own laws and rules.
Their horses are swifter than leopards,
Fleeter than wolves of the steppe.
Their steeds gallop – their steeds
Come flying from afar.

Like vultures rushing toward food,
They all come, bent on rapine.
The thrust of their van is forward,
And they amass captives like sand.
Kings they hold in derision,
And princes are a joke to them;
They laugh at every fortress,
They pile up earth and capture it.
Then they pass on like the wind,

⁶¹ II Kings, 24:16, cited in Cline, p. 55.

They transgress and incur guilt,
For they ascribe their might to their god...(Habakkuk 1: 6-11).

Habakkuk then asked the question that rabbis asked during the Holocaust:

You, O Lord...whose eyes are too pure to look upon evil,
Who cannot countenance wrongdoing,
Why do You countenance treachery,
And stand by idle
When the one in the wrong devours
The one in the right? (Habakkuk 1: 12-13)

To proceed with our sad tale, Nebuchadnezzar then placed Zedekiah, Jehoiachin's uncle, in charge of Judah as a regent. According to Professor Baron, the Babylonian king toyed with the idea of restoring Jehoiachin to the Judahite throne as a vassal, but gave up the scheme because the sentiment for independence in Judah was very strong. This sentiment was articulated in a confrontation in the Temple between the prophets Hananiah and Jeremiah, described in Chapter 28 of the Book of Jeremiah. In the course of this confrontation, Hananiah expressed faith that the Lord would free Judah from Babylonian domination.

'Thus said the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel: I hereby break the yoke of the king of Babylon. In two years, I will restore to this place all the vessels of the House of the Lord which King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon took from this place and brought to Babylon. And I will bring back King Jeconiah son of Jehoiakim of Judah, and all the Judean exiles who went to Babylon" (Jeremiah 28: 2-4)

Jeremiah, who had fastened a yoke around his neck to dramatize his words, countered Hananiah:

'Amen! May the Lord do so! May the Lord fulfill what you have prophesied and bring back from Babylon to this place the vessels of the House of the Lord and all the exiles! But just listen to this word which I address to you and to all the people: The prophets who lived before you and me from ancient times prophesied war, disaster and pestilence against many lands and great kingdoms. So if a prophet prophesies good fortune, then only when the word of the prophet comes true can it be known that the Lord really sent him' (Jeremiah 28: 6-9).

Strife within Judah, where "pro" and "anti" Babylonian groups were each striving for the ear of the regent, was intense. When several prophets attempted to forecast a dim future for the Babylonian Empire,

Nebuchadnezzar had them executed. Nebuchadnezzar had imposed territorial restrictions and other measures detrimental to Judah, and it is difficult to conceive how such a small nation was willing, after all these blows, to stand forth once more against the giant.

Zedekiah and his advisers were blind to the reality of the situation. In fact, shortly after his accession, he apparently sent troops to Pharaoh Psammeticus to assist the latter in his Ethiopian campaign. In addition, he seems to have begun the construction of an anti-Babylonian coalition encompassing a number of the neighboring states: Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre, and Sidon. Apparently a secret meeting was held, probably in Jerusalem. Cline believes that Zedekiah lacked an understanding of realpolitik, for he would otherwise not have attempted a rebellion against the dominant power of that time.⁶² Jeremiah proclaimed the futility of such a rebellion, declaring:

Thus said the Lord to me: Make for yourself thongs and bars of a yoke, and put them on your neck. And send them to the king of Edom, the king of Moab, the king of the Ammonites, the king of Tyre, and the king of Sidon, by envoys who have come to King Zedekiah of Judah in Jerusalem; and give them this charge to their masters: Thus said the Lord of Hosts, the God of Israel: Say this to your masters:

It is I who made the earth, and the men and beasts who are on the earth, by My great might and My outstretched arm; and I give it to whomever I deem proper. I herewith deliver all these lands to My servant, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon; I even give him the wild beasts to serve him. All nations shall serve him, his son and his grandson – until the turn of his own land comes, when many nations and great kings shall subjugate him. The nation or kingdom that does not serve him – King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon – and does not put its neck under the yoke of the King of Babylon, that nation I will visit – declares the Lord – with sword, famine, and pestilence, until I have destroyed it by his hands...(Jeremiah 27: 2-8)

Whether or not this coalition would have come to fruition is unclear, but Judah began its own rebellion against Babylonia either in 591 or 590. Egypt had assured King Zedekiah of assistance since Pharaoh Psammeticus believed that an alliance with Judah would, in time, help Egypt regain the

⁶² Cline, p. 56.

domination of the Western Fertile Crescent.⁶³ Nebuchadnezzar responded at the beginning of 587 by entering Judah with an army and destroying each city, town, and village he encountered on his march. The Egyptians did keep their promise by sending an army to assist Judah, but no details of this incursion have been found, and in any event, the effort was unavailing. Jerusalem underwent a siege of eighteen months before capitulating. Conditions of hunger and thirst became so extreme that masters released their slaves in order to escape responsibility for their upkeep. Privations eventually broke the resistance of the defenders. The archaeological remains testify to utter devastation.

King Zedekiah, when brought before Nebuchadnezzar, had to witness his own sons' execution. Then he was blinded, the customary punishment for a vassal for breaking his oath of fealty, and taken to Babylon as a prisoner. He was liberated in 562 after the death of Nebuchadnezzar.

Excavations of the last two decades of the twentieth century have revealed "massive [Babylonian] destruction" of Jerusalem. They also show that Babylon did not attempt to rebuild what had been destroyed. After the destruction of Jerusalem and the demolition of Solomon's Temple, Nebuchadnezzar carried out a second deportation of Judahites. A third deportation occurred in 580 after Gedalia, the Babylonian-appointed Jewish governor of Judah, was assassinated. No one knows the exact number of Judahites deported in these three expulsions, but a likely estimate is 20,000.⁶⁴

Several thoughts come to mind concerning the destruction of the two Hebrew kingdoms. When it was destroyed in 722 B.C.E. the Kingdom of Israel had rebelled against its vassalship to Assyria. That rebellion sealed its fate. Had its king been content to remain a vassal, Israel/Samaria would have continued, and its people would not have been deported to "lands east of the Euphrates," disappearing forever from Jewish history.

In that same year of 722, the king of Judah was also a vassal of Assyria, and he chose NOT to rebel. Thus Judah retained its existence as a relatively autonomous kingdom until 586 B.C.E. In that year, the king of Judah was a vassal of the Babylonian Empire, and he rebelled against his overlord,

⁶³ Tadmor, pp. 156-157.

⁶⁴ Betlyon, in Lipschits and Blenkinsopp, pp. 266-267.

Nebuchadnezzar II. The Kingdom of Judah was conquered, Jerusalem and the First Temple were destroyed, and many Jews were deported to Babylonia. Had Zedekiah, Judah's last king, and two of the kings before him, chosen not to rebel, Babylon would not have overrun and destroyed the Kingdom of Judah.

What the internal driving forces were which underlay the rebellions of these two states is not fully known. Whether the tribute they paid their imperial masters had become unbearable is also not known. We can tell from the prophets' denunciations of the rich merchants and the greedy landowners that the wealthy were becoming wealthier and the poor more impoverished. There is no way of knowing whether or not the rebellions were intended as a diversion of popular attention from deepening social cleavages, as has often been the case in the past. David Biale, in his excellent book *Power and Powerlessness in Jewish History*, posits the existence of a "party" favoring the status quo and a "party" favoring revolt in Judah, but there seems to be insufficient evidence to round out the picture.⁶⁵ Despite the seemingly endless revolts of dependent states against their imperial masters, the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah managed to sustain considerable internal growth and change, and even to engage in foreign wars while remaining satellites of a larger power.

Biale makes the statement that "the norm from the time of the Judges to the end of the Second Temple was subjugation to imperial power, broken by, at best, brief episodes of independence."⁶⁶ The endless wars that I have chronicled in Chapters 4 and 5, describing real kings fighting real wars, most of the latter validated by the records of Assyria, Babylonia, and Egypt indicate that Biale's "vassals" were never quiescent. Indeed, they were a troublesome lot. Israel and Judah were no exceptions. For example, Biale praises the Judahite King Manasseh, a validated monarch (698-642), for remaining at peace for many decades by demonstrating fealty to Assyria.⁶⁷ This differs from the account provided by the *Tanakh* in Chronicles II. According to the *Tanakh*, Manasseh rebelled against Assyria, was taken prisoner, and was later allowed to return as king. He was not "peace loving," and his vassalship to

⁶⁵ Biale, pp. 13-14.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 14

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

Assyria was superficial only. The kingdoms of Judah and Israel were indeed vassals from time to time, but this situation seems to have had little impact on their capacity to wage war.

Professor Salo Baron comes closer to the mark, I think, when he says that

Internecine wars [between Israel and Judah] were but episodes in the more difficult defenses set up first by the Northern Kingdom and then by Judah against the inroads of the great neighboring powers of Assyria-Babylonia and Egypt. It was fortunate for the Israelite people, and indirectly for the world at large, that in the struggle of these two "superpowers" of the ancient Middle East there was a long hiatus of some three centuries when, preoccupied with their own internal dissensions and other difficulties, the countries bordering on the Nile or on the Euphrates-Tigris, played a relatively minor role in Middle Eastern affairs. It was during that period that Israel consolidated its hold on the country and laid the foundation for its unique culture and its memorable contribution to world civilization.⁶⁸

It was in these centuries that all the small states of the Fertile Crescent, the city states of Philistia, the Phoenician city states of Tyre and Sidon, the kingdoms of Moab, Aram, Ammon, Edom, Israel and Judah fought their wars with each other, singly and in groups.

It is true that between the tenth and sixth centuries B.C.E., the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah were confronted by imperialist powers – notably Egypt in the south and Assyria and Babylonia in the northeast. However, smaller Fertile Crescent states like the two Hebrew kingdoms retained some freedom of political maneuver. The Kingdom of Judah, for example, allied itself with the less powerful of the two empires confronting it, thereby managing to maintain a precarious independence. Also, while the payment of tribute to imperial powers was burdensome, it nevertheless allowed both Israel and Judah to continue their internal development unhampered.

While imperialist powers like Egypt, Assyria, and Babylonia generally allowed their satellites some internal independence, the consequences of rebellion were severe. This was because the rebellions of the Judahite kings against Babylon, and later, the first Jewish rebellion against Rome, were so costly to the imperialist powers as to threaten their very existence and therefore to prompt harsh retaliation. Babylon

⁶⁸ Salo W. Baron, "The Ancient and Medieval Periods: Review of History," in Salo W. Baron and George S. Wise (eds.), *Violence and Defense in the Jewish Experience*, (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1977), p. 27

destroyed the First Temple and deported Jews. Rome destroyed the Second Temple and sold Jews into slavery.

David Biale is absolutely correct in noting the development of an essentially "Jewish" way of life which evolved in the course of the period of the Divided Monarchy. This "Jewishness" seems to have matured in the course of the "Persian Era."

I have sought to make use of the fifteen Hebrew rulers who have been validated extrabiblically and three – Rehoboam, Jeroboam, and Josiah – who have not yet been validated. The total of eighteen is less than half the number of kings who reigned in Israel and Judah between 931 and 586. Someday we may have the validation of all forty kings, and this will make the history of the Divided Monarchy even more bloody and war-ridden than it already is, but it may also provide some insight into the motives and social conditions which fueled these conflicts.