

(SP10)

An Outline of the History of Israel:

... From the Disruption to the Fall of Jerusalem.

The United Kingdom under David was the work of a master administrator. The geography of the land of Palestine is such as to make a large united kingdom almost impossible. The isolated hill communities would be hard enough to unite; but this fact coupled with the position of Palestine with reference to the two more favoured lands of Egypt and the Tigris-Euphrates valley, make a strong united kingdom of Palestine almost impossible. Certainly it is true that only during times of Peace and wise administration would it be possible at all.

Thus it is not surprising that during the reign of Rehoboam, a disruption occurred. The story in Kings¹ tells us that Rehoboam upon receiving the throne at the death of his father Solomon, threatened his people with heavy taxes and drastic measures of punishment. Solomon's domestic policy had been rather severe and the people were complaining under it. Indeed a general revolt under one Jeroboam a native of Zebulun, occurred. Jeroboam was forced to flee to Egypt where he was given the favour of the Egyptian king. However when it became evident that Rehoboam was going to be even more harsh than his father, and to exercise a completely irresponsible and dictatorial rule, most of the kingdom revolted. Jeroboam came back out of Egypt and became king of the Israelite parts. Only Judah remained loyal to the house of David. This was largely due to the fact that Jerusalem so dominated the country in its immediate neighbourhood that no other course was open to it.

The history of Israel from here on is a story pretty well between the two kingdoms and other states of the Syro-Palestinian corridor. It wasted its substance in these wars until the time came that Assyria became strong enough to strike. When that time came these kingdoms collapsed easily. During this time the internal history of the two kingdoms was quite different. In Israel at least six kings were assassinated. Dynasties changed at least four times. In nearly all cases the king had to be careful how he treated his people or else he would be a revolt. As an institution the hereditary kingship was in a precarious state most of the time. In Judah

¹ 1 Kings 12

on the other hand the Davidic dynasty held the throne until the end. There was at least one count revolt of a serious nature but the Dynasty did not change. None the king was more dictatorial in his policy and, largely because of his strong position at Jerusalem, his authority was seldom questioned.

It is evident that the writer of Kings is biased in his presentation of the religious policies of the two kingdoms. What can be seen that throughout the two kingdoms the religious situation was about the same. Local shrines were in use everywhere... were taken for granted. The worship of Yahweh was not pure in any case although because of its position Israel would be naturally subject to more foreign influence. The worship of Yahweh consisted of rites and rituals much like those of the religious round about, in all this Judah was no purer than her sister Israel.

After the destruction Jeroboam I immediately set about solidifying his position and uniting his realm. He re-built Shechem as his capital and fortified it. He rebuilt and gave new importance to the ancient sacred places of Dan and Bethel, thus giving a religious as well as political unity to his kingdom. The "Kings" narrative suggests that he emphasized the use of the calf in the worship. It seems that this element of the cult was peculiar to the northern tribes and certainly a hint of this goes back to the time of Joshua. His religious policy thus seems to be rather shrewd under the circumstances.

For the next fifty years there is war between Israel and Judah. We get suggestions of this in the "Kings" narrative rather than direct mention. From external evidence it would seem that Judah is successful at first. By 931 B.C. Sheshonk of Egypt invades Palestine. From evidence found in an inscription at Karnak it would seem that Sheshonk was attacking Israel as well as Judah for several northern towns are mentioned. It seems strange however that Egypt would attack a king that it had so lately patronized. The evidence rather points to the fact that Rehoboam has taken these towns and Sheshonk has come to Jeroboam's assistance. He plunders Jerusalem while he is there and returns to Egypt.

It is difficult from the records to discover what were the foreign policies of the two kingdoms during these times. The compiler

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of Kings is more interested in their domestic policies as have their own. This is exemplified. We get only hints of the diplomatic situation. By the time of Achaz - son of Joram. Israel, though still at war with Judah is now warning against Philistia. The alliance that David had with Phoenicia is not spoken of and an alliance with Syria is suggested. Certainly Abijah and Asa, successors respectively to the throne of Judah, both had alliances with Damascus. It seems that both these kingdoms had renewed David's policy of alliance with Tyre and Sidon and conquest of the Transjordan track route. Hence the policy is one of alliance with Damascus and conquest of the coastal track route. Both policies represent attempts to sit astride some one important track route and to redirect traffic through their realms to their ally.

Achaz, the second king of Israel is murdered in an army revolt during the siege of Gath. A town in Philistia. Baasha his assassin seizes the throne. He is evidently a good warrior because we soon find him fortifying the town of Ramath just eight miles north of Jerusalem. He is also evidently in agreement with the foreign policy of his predecessor. He is mentioned as also being in alliance with Damascus.^③

Under Asa Judah makes a new alliance with Syria enticing her to make war on Israel. The pressure is evidently great enough to force Baasha to retire from Ramath and make his capital in Tirzah. Certainly the tide of the Kingdom of Israel is at a low ebb. Elah the son of Baasha continues to make a feeble attempt at gaining control of the coastal roads. While the army was busy at the second siege of Gath a palace revolt results in the murder of Elah and the seizure of the throne by one Zimri. The army however chase its General Omri as king and raising the siege marched to Tirzah and placed him on the throne.

Omri established the first strong dynasty in the northern kingdom. He was a good warrior and a wise administrator of domestic and foreign affairs. The Book of Kings is silent concerning him but we gain many hints and external evidence pointing to his great success. There is no more war between Israel and Judah and it is evident from the relationships of the kingdoms in later years that

③ 1 Kings 15:19

Judah has been subjected. We hear of no more attacks from Damascus. We get a suggestion from a later passage that Omri had to accept for a time a rather humiliating armistice agreement but at least Syria did not see fit to attack him. Omri renewed the foreign policy of his predecessors. He sought an alliance with Phoenicia, marrying his son Ahab to Jezebel, daughter to the king of Sidon. He attacked and captured Moab and was evidently attempting to gain control of the Transjordan trade routes in order to divert trade from Damascus to the coastal Empire of Phoenicia. Omri built a new capital for his empire ~~in~~. Samaria was built and fortified. It was excellently well situated and commanded most of the plain.

Omri's policy finally aroused Syria. By the time Ahab succeeded his father Omri Moab revolted. Benhadad King of Damascus attacked Samaria. There seems to be countless Syrian wars. Benhadad besieges Samaria at least twice. He is so thoroughly defeated the last time that the old armistice agreements are renewed. By this time it is evident that Judah is fully subjugated. Jehoshaphat the successor to Aha is more or less under orders to Ahab. His son Jehoram is married to Ahab's daughter. During this resurgence of the strength of Israel Edom is captured.⁽³⁾ Had not the strength of Damascus and Israel been so evenly balanced, the latter might have succeeded in its attempt to gain control of the Transjordan route and settled into a period of easy prosperity. However wars continued among all the states of Syro-Palestine. Only once did they realize the danger threatening from Assyria and allied themselves together to meet Shalmaneser in the Battle of Karkar 853 B.C. None the allies suffered heavily but Assyria was checked for some years. It seems that Ahab was convinced that Assyria was no longer a danger and he opened hostilities with Damascus again. Perhaps believing that Karkar had weakened his enemy he attempted to capture Ramoth Gilead. In this operation he met his death.

Ahab in his domestic policy and in the policy of his queen comes especially under the condemnation of the writers of Kings. It is evident that his queen's activities were condemned by many of

(3) Edom revolts during reign of Jehoram.

her contemporaries. Certainly the Eliza stories have a great deal of basis in truth. It seems that Jezebel inaugurated the worship of Tyrian Baalim - a cult that was certainly not much different from the cult of Yahweh. However it was a cult which represented a much more advanced type of society. To the native Israelites many of whom were still nomads or at best free landholding peasants, her cult represented all the conceptions of aristocratic life. The type of civilization it represented was one in which the authority of the king was absolute. He was irresponsible, and had no checks on his power. At least for the people of Israel Tyrian Baalim came to represent that kind of social doctrine. The story of Naboth is typical of the difference between the attitude of the two cults to the authority of the ruler. To Ahab - Naboth was owner of the plot of ground. If he didn't wish to sell - nothing could make him do it. To Jezebel nothing was impossible for royalty. The cult of her people came to be identified with that type of rule and was opposed by several movements within Israel.

During this period of the early monarchy there was a great deal of literary activity. Neither the V. or E. histories were completed as yet but many of the material that went into V. was doubtless written by this time. It was a great age of prose. Certainly some early legal writings had appeared of this time as has been shown by the discovery of the Law code of Hammurabi ... antedating even these times. One other great piece of work that was written by this time is that story of David's eventful life which has been incorporated into 1 Kings.

The battle of Karkar does not seem to have taught the Palestinian states its lesson. Instead of retaining their alliance against the rising power of Assyria the states continue war among themselves. We can gather from the oracles of Amos that all the states, Syria, Ammon, Edom, Moab, Israel, Judah are constantly fighting. That is the history of the period up until the time of Assyria's great conquests. By this time a united stand of the states is impossible. All through this period Egypt is intriguing with these states to keep up their dissensions.

opposition to Assyria. Perhaps she, as much as their own local animosity is as responsible for the unwise foreign policy of these states.

Under Ahaziah - son of Ahab the siege of Ramoth Gilead was renewed. From the Elah stories in Kings we gain an impression that Israel's Syrian wars were largely local sporadic wars. Between the royal houses there might be peace and yet there is constant border warfare.

Jehoram, son to Ahaziah of Israel attacks Moab again. This time through Edom in the south. With the help of Jehoshaphat - still king of Judah, he defeats the Moabites and in adverse weather conditions but fails to capture the Capital. Edom itself revolts and attempts to break free from Judah. Ramoth Gilead is again besieged. This time of Israel with the help of Jehoram of Judah.

During the siege there is another revolution in Israel. Jehu a general in the Kings army leads the revolt. It includes a court party, the peasant element and some elements of the country. Jehu rode back from the siege at Ramoth. Killed Jehoram, king of Israel and Ahaziah - son of Jehoram of Judah. He carried out a wholesale massacre of all Jezebel's priests and adherents and the old queen mother herself. The revolt did not immediately spread to Judah. Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah took the opportunity to seize the throne and eliminate all other claimants. The priests of Jerusalem however hid the young heir Jehoash and six years later the revolt in Judah took place. It was confined to the court however and Jehoash was placed on the throne by a party of priests and the temple guard.

In both cases this so-called prophetic revolution failed in bringing about any moral change. In Judah Jehoash the boy king repaired the temple and a reform of worship was attempted but nothing final was done.

In Israel things became worse. The Kingdom of Israel reached its nadir under Jehu. Politically the revolution was a bad thing. Jehu failed to ally himself with Damascus as Assyria again attacked her. He submitted as soon as she fell and as early as 841 B.C. he is listed as paying tribute to Assyria.

Under Jehu Israel lost control over Judah. The latter was no longer a vassal. - Later in his reign Damascus gained strength. Assyria was busy with internal affairs and Syria regained its power. Transjordan fell. By the time his son Jehoahaz ascended the throne Israel was almost completely subdued.

By 805 B.C. Assyria had her internal affairs settled for a time and again moved west. Damascus was weakened and finally subdued by Adad-Nirani III. He got no further in his conquest westward and both kingdoms of Israel got a breathing spell. There was a renewal of power and prosperity in both kingdoms. Under Jehoash Israel expelled the foreign forces that were within it. Amaziah of Judah brought defeat to Edom. It seems also that he attempted a war with Israel but was defeated and Judah again became the subject kingdom.

Under Jeroboam II Israel had a real renewal. There were encouraging Transjordan conquests. With Damascus knocked out it was relatively easy to get across the Transjordan highway. Uzziah of Judah with his co-regent Jotham conquer Edom and even some Philistine country. The kingdoms of Israel and Judah enjoy a period of great prosperity and freedom from worry.

During this period Israel developed just that type of society that had been so opposed during Jezebel's life. There was the rise of a new merchant class. Wealth was becoming concentrated and a wealthy - functionless class was springing up. The small independent land owner - the yeoman class - was disappearing. He was losing his title because of debt and corrupt courts. Israel experienced just that type of social experiments which has preceded the downfall of so many states. The collapse was sped on by the established religion of the day. It catered to the corruptions of the aristocracy. It was so modeled as to make the people complacently accept the rotten social situation. Religion had no strong spiritual foundation. Society had less. A few great men who stood out alone opposed this movement. These men saw utter ruin for Israel if she didn't change her ways. It was they who gave to

their times and to perpetuity a corruption of an ethereal Yahuw. They saw that society had to have strong moral foundations or no matter how materially prosperous it was it would collapse. They wrought out of the kingdom that did collapse a kingdom of spiritual realities which is still alive in the world. and will be until it conquers it.

As the early prophets were wise enough to see, Israel did collapse. Forty years after the prophesying of Amos the northern kingdom had ceased to exist. During these years Israel showed all the signs of a kingdom on the decline. All the kings following Jeroboam were murdered by their successors. The domestic state of the country was thus in a precarious position. Assyria was knocking relentlessly on the east and Israel trembled and fell. Zechariah, successor to Jeroboam II reigned six months and was murdered by his successor Shallum. Shallum reigned one month and was murdered by his successor Menahem. The complacency of the age of Jeroboam was at an end. In 738 B.C. the Assyrians are again in the west. Menahem seems to have secured without a struggle. Tiglath-pileser III received tribute from him on his way west. It is interesting to notice that the tribute was raised by a poll tax which suggests that there was money circulating in the country.

The son of Menahem, Pekahia, after two years of ruling was murdered by Pekah who seized the throne. Pekah was a ~~Israhel~~ and under him an alliance was formed with Damascus. Under Rezin Damascus was gathering strength and an attempt was made to coalesce Judah into joining the alliance. Aha who had succeeded Jeroboam resisted. Jerusalem was attacked. Against the advice of Isaiah⁽⁴⁾, Aha sought help from Tiglath Pileser. By 734 that gentleman made another expedition west. Damascus was completely knocked out, and most of Israel was subdued. Hoshea who had assassinated Pekah was left in control of a remnant of the kingdom. and a definite policy of depopulation was begun. Judah does not seem to have been invaded but Aha made some changes in the temple worship to suit the Assyrian king⁽⁵⁾. Such changes could only mean that it was a vassal state.

④ Isaiah 7.

⑤ 2 Kings 16¹⁰⁻¹⁶

Hoshea of Israel was lead on, by the intrigues of one Sabako of Egypt to join in a Revolt against Assyria. Shalmaneser V was then king. It seems that each new king of Assyria had to win his empire over again. He moved west again and besieged Samaria. He died in the attempt but Sargon his successor carried on the siege. Captured Samaria, killed Hoshea he moved on down the corridor capturing the Philistine cities and entering Egypt. Israel was made a province of Assyria and many of her best families exiled. a policy of foreign immigration was also inaugurated. The northern kingdom was crushed for ever. During the general revolt following Sargon's death none of the provinces are heard from, Israel is completely subdued.

c. 705 Sargon died. Under the brilliant Manduk-apal-iddina a general revolt throughout the whole empire was organized. The Akkadians and Elamites in Mesopotamia first: - Egypt and many of the vassal states of the corridor. Under Hezekiah, Judah joined the revolt. Padi of Ekron, a loyal vassal was imprisoned in Jerusalem. Isaiah criticized him for joining the revolt and for trusting Egypt in her intrigues. (6) However Hezekiah set about a definite policy of strengthening his position. He attempted to unite the country by a reformation of the cult. As Isaiah makes no mention of his religious reforms it is most likely that the 'Kings' narrative is exaggerating the virtues of the king's reform. He was probably trying to eliminate the local shrines supply for the policy of centralizing worship and strengthening his nation. He also set out on a definite policy of supplying the city. Its great weakness was a lack of a water supply. Hezekiah set about supplying an aqueduct that would keep the city supplied.

Sennacherib, successor to Sargon, defeated the rebels in Mesopotamia. Then he moved west. Phoenicia fell. Edom, Moab, Ammon, c. 701 B.C. He entered Judah. He seemed more anxious to capture Lachish than Jerusalem. The latter was an excellent fortress and out of the main stream of traffic. It would take a great deal of men and be of little consequence when captured. He therefore sent out a small detachment to blockade the city and continued with his campaign. In spite of Isaiah's advice Hezekiah accepted the terms of the Assyrian general and surrendered Padi.

Egypt arose and gave some trouble to Sennacherib. He gave his attention to that land and crushed her in the meantime sending a letter to Hezekiah to be sure he does not take advantage of his preoccupation. Sennacherib was called back to Mesopotamia by new revolts. An epidemic also struck at his army. However there again was a Judah being disloyal to Assyria.

The successors of Sennacherib maintained the Assyrian hold on Egypt with difficulty. During this time Manasseh was king of Judah. His domestic policy was very bad. Civil administration was poor. Human sacrifices re-installed and the hated Tiroian Baalam revived. Ammon was like his father. Finally he was murdered in a court conspiracy and the boy Josiah aged 8 came to the throne. Things carried on in about the same fashion until the boy grew older.

Meanwhile in 625 B.C. Egypt regained her independence. Ashur Bani Pal died. The Assyrian Empire began to decline. Thus began a movement that in the history of the Valley Kingdoms has always meant the collapse of an empire. Infiltration of peoples came from the north and east. These immigrants were used at first for mercenaries and then they began to be a threat. This time it was the Cuthians, a fierce warlike people, great soldiers and excellent fighters without the patience or mechanism to storm a fortress. Coupled with this there began the rise of the Chaldeans. Under Nabopolassar and then his son Belshazzar there began a revolt. In desperation the Assyrians allied themselves with the new kinglets of Egypt. However the latter seemed to be in the habit of always getting back late for a campaign. In 616 the Chaldeans attacked the Assyrians in 614 they were joined by the Medes. Sometime around 607 Ninveh fell. After a terrific struggle the Assyrian Empire was broken. Hezekiah kept up the struggle but by 605 was defeated in the battle of Carchemish.

During this time and as early as 621 there is evidence that Judah is independent of Assyria. Josiah begins to renovate the temple. To cleanse it of foreign influence. During the repairs a book of the law is found. A covenant is made with all the people on the basis of this law. The temple is thoroughly purified. Foreign cults removed; there is to be only one altar; sacrifices to the sun god are removed; prostitution and homo-sexuality in connection with temple worship are

forbidden. Worship was centralized in Jerusalem. Local shrines were destroyed provision made to support the Jerusalem priesthood and the local priests were given menial tasks in the Jerusalem Temple. Josiah also attempted to make the Passover a festival in which the whole nation took part at Jerusalem.

It is interesting to note that in his eulogy over Josiah, Jeremiah speaks of his civil administration not his religious policy. It is likely that here again is represented a political scheme to destroy the dynasty that was all too common in Palestine. It also points to the fact that Judah was enjoying some independence. In 608 however Necho met Josiah at Megiddo and killed the Judah king.

Jehoiakim the successor of Josiah by popular vote did not continue the autonomous reform. Nor did he reign long. He might have shown signs of having a Pro-Babylonian policy because on his return Necho captured the king and placed his son on the Judah throne.

Jehoiakim, because of his Egyptian backing as well as having an Egyptian policy, was quite sure of his position. He was a tyrannical ruler. He was forced to pay an indemnity to Egypt and in order to do so adopted a policy of forced labour throughout the country. Finally in 605 Nebuchadnezzar defeated Necho at Carchemish. At this time Jeremiah began advocating his pro-Babylonian policy but was not heeded by the king. By 601 when Nebuchadnezzar had over-run Palestine Jehoiakim changed his allegiance and was subject to Babylon for three years. At that time, due to Egyptian intrigues he rebelled again.

Jehoiakim died soon after his change of policy and his son Jehoiachin was left to reap the benefits of his change. Nebuchadnezzar besieged the city and between 597 and 586 captured it. The king and his family were taken in chains to Babylon. The best of the aristocracy and the solid citizens such as the artisans were taken in exile to Babylon. Zedekiah, the uncle of Jehoiakim was made king.

Zedekiah was a weak man. With the best of the aristocracy gone he was at the mercy of a ~~row~~ lot of advisors. He succumbed to the wills of Egypt and the Egyptian party. Jeremiah who is still a member of the Babylonian party attempted to advise him but in vain. The death of Necho and the ascension of Psammetichus caused

a pre-mature revolt of the states of Moab, Ammon and Phoenicia in 588 B.C. became king of Egypt. Judah and Ammon chose this as time to rebel. Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem. It was a difficult time. There were many pro-Babylonians within the city and many dissenters. Jeremiah was imprisoned. Although water was plentiful it looked as though there might be a shortage of food. Masters freed their slaves - was not to be responsible for their keep. In the midst of all this, Egypt raised the siege. The masters demanded their slaves back. A short-lived wave of optimism swept the city. The Egyptians were defeated however and Jerusalem besieged again. The city was finally starved into surrender. Zedekiah was captured and blinded after he had seen his sons murdered before him. Babylon was to have no more trouble from the fortress at Jerusalem and laid the place utterly waste. All of authority was spilled. Judah as a kingdom was crushed.

A small remnant remained under Gedaliah of the family of Shaphan. Some of the older nobility and Jeremiah were included. However following the assassination of Gedaliah by some Ammonites, although the deed was avenged, the remaining Judahs, fearing a misunderstanding with the Chaldeans, - fled to Egypt. There they disappeared. The Hebrew experiment with the kingdom is over. Utter destruction fell upon the political kingdoms of Israel and Judah. There remained yet for these great men heirs of the prophets that had gone before them, to raise out of this ashes a cultural and religious kingdom the like of which and of whose influence the world never knew.