

**JUDAH AND HER NEIGHBOURS IN THE SEVENTH  
CENTURY BCE**

by

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This thesis is dedicated to the memory of a great lady, Sally Dermeik. Your love, caring, empathy, encouragement and warmth typify the thirty-seven years of friendship I was privileged to share.

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## SUMMARY

This thesis investigates the period in Judah which took place precisely a century between the death of Hezekiah (687 BCE) and the final fall of Jerusalem (587 BCE). Seldom has a nation experienced so many dramatically sudden reversals of fortune in so relatively short a time. Throughout the first half of the seventh century BCE the Assyrian empire reigned supreme. In the second half, in rapid succession, Judah, as a vassal, experienced periods of independence and of subjection, first to Egypt, then to Babylonia, before finally destroying herself in a futile rebellion against the latter.

The aim of the thesis was to set Judah in the global context and investigate the role she played. To this end the Great Powers, namely Assyria, Egypt and Babylonia were surveyed, as well as were the Small Powers, like Judah, Phoenicia and the Transjordanian states, and the relationships probed.

The thesis traces the life of the wicked but extraordinarily successful King Manasseh, and his equally reprobate son, Amon, who was brutally murdered by his servants, and was avenged by 'the people of the land'. Josiah is the only monarch who fits the Deuteronomistic requirements of a good king. Religious and national reform generally go hand in hand with politics, and the cultic reform and centralization of the cult characterise his reign.

With the fall of Assyria, the temporary surge into prominence by Egypt and the tragic death of Josiah in 609 BCE, Judah experienced radical political fluctuations and with them alternate subjugation by, and rebellion against, each of the major powers. Inexperienced leadership and a situation of dual kings, followed Josiah's death. The rapidly changing international scene demanded of the rulers of Judah skillful manoeuvring and exceptional adaptability, and frequently confronted them with ominous political situations. Judaeans leaders and the puppet King Zedekiah, propped up by false prophets, failed to grasp the shift in the balance of power, and clung to questionable Egyptian aid against the new world power, Babylonia. Highly vulnerable and left in the lurch, Jerusalem faced protracted siege and famine in Jerusalem, destruction of the Temple, and deportation of the cream of her people.

### Key Terms:

Assyrian collapse; power vacuum; Egyptian-Babylonian hegemony struggle; geopolitical realities; King Manasseh; apostasy; pragmatism; minor rehabilitation; King Josiah; cult reformation; cult centralization; Megiddo tragedy; fluctuating foreign policies; inept dual kingship; Jerusalem siege; Temple destroyed; Judaeans Exile.

## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

<b>AASOR</b>	<i>Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
<b>AJBI</b>	<i>Annual of the Japanese Biblical Institute</i>
<b>ANET</b>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament</i> (3rd ed, Princeton 1969)
<b>AusBR</b>	<i>Australian Biblical Review</i>
<b>BA</b>	<i>The Biblical Archaeologist</i>
<b>BAR</b>	<i>Biblical Archaeology Review</i>
<b>BASOR</b>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
<b>BJRL</b>	<i>Bulletin of the John Rylands Library</i>
<b>BM</b>	British Museum
<b>BZAW</b>	<i>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<b>CAH</b>	The Cambridge Ancient History
<b>CBQ</b>	<i>The Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<b>CCK</b>	Chronicles of the Chaldaean Kings
<b>IEJ</b>	<i>Israel Exploration Journal</i>
<b>JANES</b>	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies</i>
<b>JAOS</b>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<b>JARCE</b>	<i>Journal of the American Research Centre in Egypt</i>
<b>JBL</b>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<b>JCS</b>	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
<b>JESHO</b>	<i>Journal of the Economic &amp; Social History of the Orient</i>
<b>JNES</b>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<b>JNSL</b>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
<b>JQR</b>	<i>Jewish Quarterly Review</i>
<b>JSOT</b>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<b>JSS</b>	<i>Journal for Semitic Studies</i>
<b>JTS</b>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<b>MDAIK</b>	<i>Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Abteilung Kairo</i>
<b>OLP</b>	<i>Orientalia Lovaniensia Periodica</i>
<b>Or</b>	<i>Orientalia</i>
<b>OTL</b>	The Old Testament Library, eds. Ackroyd, Barr, Anderson and Bright (Philadelphia, Westminster Press 1968)
<b>PEQ</b>	<i>Palestine Exploration Quarterly</i>
<b>RA</b>	<i>Revue d'Assyriologie</i>
<b>RB</b>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
<b>REg</b>	<i>Revue d'Égyptologie</i>
<b>RSV</b>	Revised Standard Version of the English Bible
<b>SAK</b>	<i>Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur</i>
<b>SHANE</b>	<i>Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East</i>

<b>TA</b>	<i>Tel Aviv</i> (Journal of the Institute of Archaeology of Tel Aviv University)
<b>UF</b>	Ugarit-Forschungen
<b>VT</b>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<b>VTS</b>	<i>Vetus Testamentum Supplement</i>
<b>ZA</b>	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>
<b>ZAW</b>	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<b>ZDPV</b>	<i>Zeitschrift des Deutschen Palästina-Vereins</i>

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 GENERAL REMARKS

The word "history" has various meanings. To most people it means the human past, or fragments of it. But history can also mean the historian's attempt to explore past happenings, and to tell a story about them. A man's imagination generates ideas; his disciplined intelligence tries them out. Conjecture and refutation, interpretation, the recognition of an hypothesis and the attempt to prove it wrong - that is the rhythm of scientific endeavour.

There is no one method or specific way of dealing with history which is *intrinsically* superior to another. The German historicism of the nineteenth century, now so much under a cloud, took its first inspiration from two sources: the textual criticism of the philologist, and the mechanics of physical science. Towards the end of the last century, the dominant sciences of physics and philology were replaced by biology, anthropology and sociology, with the result that history became both subtler and less certain, more relativist and more aware of the variety of circumstances that make up any given situation. All that has happened is that new and often more rigorous techniques used by them have come to the attention of the historian looking for 'new methods'.

Elton (1967:34) noted that research work deserves to be judged by the only tests it seeks to satisfy: is it honest and exhaustive, has it asked questions that are right and adequate in the context of the problem, has it found reasonable answers, does it prove the author to have learned his trade? He observed that historical materials are nearly always unsuitable for the kind of studies envisaged. The comparative method conceals within itself self-destructive error; and sociological results in history are as a rule remarkably jejune. Sociological enquiry is distinguished by its object and its method, the object being the analysis of social relationships and the method the counting of heads in categories. Historical studies derived from sociological influence can never be more than a small part of the whole enterprise. There are some questions, however interesting, that cannot be answered, and attempts to force answers to them in the teeth of historical evidence produces at best hypothesis, at worst false dogma. They in effect accept the 'models' produced by their admired preceptors and use a form of analogical argument to apply them to history.

While different kinds of history have been studied and written everywhere, from the chronicles of Egypt and Mesopotamia to the myths of Scandinavia and Asia, no other primitive sacred writings are so grimly chronological and historical as is the Old Testament, with its express record of G-d at work in the destiny of generations

succeeding each other in time. Only in the civilization which looks back to the Jews was history ever a main concern, a teacher for the future, a basis of religion, an aid in explaining the existence and purpose of man. This thesis offers no specific "ology", no encapsulated model or stereotypical paradigm. The Immanent approach has been used, and if a label has to be attached to the work done, the appropriate words might be that a Jewish Historical-Critical and Historical-Cultural point of view has been attempted. This thesis also worked politically and archaeologically.

When first proposed in the 18th century, the historical-critical method was revolutionary. According to Gabler (1753-1826), a renowned scholar of his time, Biblical theology is a purely historical discipline, directed towards what the authors had in mind when they composed the text. This is to be sharply distinguished from dogmatic theology, which subjects the text to historical and philosophical critique. The clarification of these distinctions by scholars, and their vindication of historical method in Biblical studies were increasingly recognised as a great and liberating achievement, a freeing of the original text from the encrustations of subsequent misconceptions and an assertion of its autonomy against ecclesiastical tradition.

While most interpreters feel constrained to acknowledge a certain obligation to authorial meaning, they are also unwilling to limit the meaning of a text to the meaning explicitly intended by the original author. But if we extend the meaning of a passage to include senses of which the author could not have been aware, where do we stop? Are there not likely to be as many readings of a text as there are readers of it? For a new meaning to count as genuinely implicit in a text, one must be able, without difficulty, to conceive of the author accepting it, had he had the opportunity to consider it.

## 1.2 AIM

The primary aim in this thesis has been to place Judah within the global context in that period. Certain events occurred that could not have happened at any other time. Assyria's fight for supremacy, together with Egypt's inherent weakness of empire, made for opposing groups. Assyria wanted to maintain its hegemony. Babylonia wanted to replace Assyria. Egypt fought for economic supremacy and control of the *Via Maris*. In this struggle Judah had no reason to become involved - but she did, and played out her destiny in the role of a small power within a great power conflict. This study will seek to trace the forces of change in Judah some two centuries after Solomon's kingdom split into two until the Babylonians ended Davidic rule in Jerusalem.

A number of recent trends in various quarters of Old Testament research are converging to reopen questions about the relationship between the Judaeen monarchy and First Temple cultic organization and practice. However, newer literary research has thrown into question earlier assumptions about the delineation and dating of sources, particularly in the Pentateuch. Recent archaeological discoveries and fresh examinations of biblical and extra-biblical written sources indicate the existence of a closer link between cult and court in Judah than formerly believed. In the light of newer academic research, the involvement of Judaeen kings in cult reformation requires investigation anew.

### 1.3 METHOD

As a Judaicist and a historian the method used in this thesis utilises the Masoretic Text as portrayed in the *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* as well as the modern version of the Hebrew Bible with analytical notes. The RSV is compared with the Jerusalem Bible and the New English Bible. The British Museum translations of the *Annals of the Assyrian Kings* and the *Chronicles of the Chaldaean Kings (Babylonian Chronicles)* were studied and compared with available French and Italian translations. Corroborative evidence was found in the works of Josephus and Herodotus. In the Immanent method reader-audience does not play a role and the focus is inherent on what is in the text, but always from a Jewish philosophical perspective.

As a Judaicist and in conformity with traditional Jewish writing, when mention is made of the Almighty, the abbreviations YHWH and G-d are used, and are not written out in full. In addition, the letters BCE (Before the Common Era) replace BC (Before Christ).

A wealth of epigraphical evidence from Palestinian excavations sheds light especially on a new trend towards Nebuchadnezzar's policy towards conquered lands. The lack of Biblical data for the rest of the country is offset, to some extent, by the archaeological and Hebrew epigraphical evidence from several Judaeen sites, which highlight the drama of the close of the First Temple period. Thus evidence, especially from archaeological survey reports, will be analysed to find correspondences and/or differences. Analysis of the Lachish and Azeka ostraca proved invaluable. Evidence, for example, in one of the Lachish Ostraca, shows that there was dissension and tension over the attitude by Judah's monarchy to adopt toward Babylonia.

It became apparent that while there was a vast amount of material on the individual countries, and specific problems relating to them, there was no comprehensive work on the subject; neither could any consensus of these accounts be found. Therefore books and articles written from the last century up to 1994 on Judah and her neighbouring states in the seventh century BCE, were sifted and analysed.

This thesis also wishes to point out that while scrupulous care has been used in referencing, in rare instances a specific page number is not given (e.g. Oestreicher 1923, or McKay 1973). This means that the entire corpus or hypothesis of that specific writer is entailed within that reference.

The very decision to select **this** problem, rather than that, demonstrates one's subjectivity. Yet how can any person in any walk of life who does not select the problems and, offer evidence which seems likely to have a bearing on them? In concurrence with Hancock (1969:48), that the good historian starts with a point of view and as his work proceeds he modifies it, drastically, if need be, in the light of new evidence and new insights, the accounts were sorted. Many were found to be extremely biased. Bias is not selection but indiscriminate collection. Bias and a point of view are two different things. In the case of drastically differing viewpoints (e.g. Rainey versus Na'aman, Kitchen versus Redford, to mention but two 'schools') I contacted these luminaries, either personally or by letter, for elucidation and

clarification. Sifting minutely through all the available evidence, an individual opinion was eventually formed. That opinion, together with innumerable hypotheses of the major writers, are offered, in order to submit a balanced viewpoint.

#### **1.4 Chapter 2 - Judah and her Neighbours: the Geopolitical Realities in the 7th Century BCE**

Chapter Two looks at the material conditions of life in monarchical Judah under Assyrian rule, along with the other states of note in the Ancient East at that time, viz. Egypt, Babylonia and the Transjordanian states. Assyria achieved its greatest expansion in the reign of Esarhaddon (680-669 BCE). In three spectacular campaigns he subjugated a large part of Egypt. But this was the splendour which preceded decline. His successor, Ashurbanipal was occupied with predominantly defensive wars. Assyria emerged victor against Babylonia after the 652-648 campaign, but within a few years the Assyrian empire collapsed entirely. The thesis traces and analyses the causes of Assyria's demise. When the Assyrian influence had receded from Syria and Palestine, Egypt filled its place. The period covers, too, the fascinating Twenty-Sixth Dynasty in Egypt. By 601 BCE Saite control had ended, and Babylonia came into her own.

The thesis endeavours to demonstrate that the economic and cultural demands of Assyrian imperialism threatened social cataclysm. Social tensions which had been introduced into the establishment of a monarchical state, were exacerbated under the strain of Judah's imperial obligations. Social problems became clearer and less acceptable to more people.

After dealing with the global sweep of the seventh century BCE, a separate chapter is dedicated to each of the Judaeen kings of this period.

#### **1.5 Chapter 3 - King Manasseh**

Chapter 3 deals with Manasseh, the sovereign regarded by the Biblical writers as the most wicked of both the Israelite and Judaeen kingdoms. Supporting a monarchical state was too much for many Judaeans who could barely produce enough to support themselves. Though opposition to the monarchy grew, Davidic political and religious authority managed to keep the lid on things. One of the aims in this chapter will be an attempt to offer a critical analysis of Manasseh's reign to prove that despite the Biblical condemnation which Manasseh suffers, and despite being a king in an economically depressed state he brought great material benefits to Judah. Pragmatism rather than ideology characterises Manasseh. By virtue of Assyria's almost unlimited power there was no other recourse than being a good vassal.

Furthermore, it is intentioned to show that while the assumption of Neo-Babylonian cultic impositions are no longer tenable, Manasseh's reign saw the general resurgence of the old Canaanite cults (which had been so strongly condemned by the prophets in the 8th century BCE). During his reign a great deal of Judaeen poetry, prophetic and epic literature was committed to writing. It is therefore strange that there is very scanty Biblical information, and little of it concrete.

It is interesting that while the Kings editor portrays him as the most wicked king who ever reigned, the Chronicler and the Deuteronomist both present highly stylised descriptions of Manasseh, making him a key figure, symbolising something greater than himself. The Manasseh narrative seemingly prepares the necessity for Josiah's reform.

### 1.6 Chapter 4 - King Amon

In chapter 4 the unfortunate King Amon will be analysed, as well as the influence played by the 'people of the land', the *am ha-aretz*. The phenomenon of stability within a dynastic succession was typical of Judah, in contrast with Israel, where assassinations frequently occurred, leading to the overthrow of dynasties. The *am ha-aretz* was assimilated into the emerging socio-political framework of the empire in the early stages, and as will be attempted to show not to be solely derived from the axiomatic tribal-amphictyonic institutions. His order comes at a time in international political dramatic changes. This was the beginning of the rapid decline of the Assyrian empire, which, concurrently with Egyptian ambitions, come to the fore and influence Syria-Palestine. The chapter will try to make sense of the brutal murder. As fear of Assyrian reprisal would have been a negligible factor, the stress comes to the fore on Egyptian instigation behind the courtiers' revolt.

### 1.7 Chapter 5 - King Josiah

The incomparable King Josiah is featured in Chapter 5 in historical context. Josiah is centred from his grandfather Manasseh, to his grandson, Zedekiah. As will be shown, the Assyrian empire, which reached its zenith during the time of Manasseh, was shaken and collapsed in a relatively short time as a result of internal crises, on the one hand, and of extensive pressures from the outside on the other hand. It is hoped that the events associated with Josiah's reign will, therefore, be easily understood in the light of the gradual disintegration of the Assyrian Empire.

It is the premise of this thesis that insufficient emphasis has been given concerning the significance of the fact that Josiah's actions were taken in his **eighteenth year**. In fact it has been found that these observations offered have not received any emphasis in any other source. In the light of Jewish history and philosophy, this is a crucial point, because the Hebrew number eighteen denotes life. This number appears in Jewish writings in many contexts. For example, *Shemoney Eshray* (lit. "eighteen [benedictions]") which is a collection of benedictions forming the principal prayer of Jewish religious services. It is also known as the *amidah*, (literally "standing") because it is always recited standing silently, facing the East, i.e. Jerusalem. (In the synagogue one faces the direction of the Ark). The *Shemoney Eshray* is the only prayer recited at every service, three times on week days, four times on the Sabbath, Rosh Ha-Shanah, the three Festivals, and Rosh Hodesh, and five times on Yom Kippur. The name "eighteen" is derived from the original number of benedictions in the prayer when it was ordained, hence this name is applied to all such prayers.

The Talmud offers a variety of reasons for the number eighteen. It corresponds to the eighteen times G-d is mentioned in Psalm 29, as well as in the *Shema*. The three patriarchs, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob are mentioned eighteen times in the Bible. This

number also corresponds to the eighteen vertebrae of the spinal column (Berakhot 28b; Birnbaum Siddur 1949:81-82). It is the opinion of this thesis that it is of the greatest significance that Judah reached this point (*inter alia* exactly a century after the destruction of Samaria's kingdom) when Josiah conceivably recognized the symbolic significance of his eighteenth year of regnal life. The eighteenth year of Josiah's reign disclosed his political and national goals.

### **1.8 Chapter 6 - Cultic Reformation and Cult Centralization**

Chapter 6 is devoted to Josiah's religious reform. This of necessity entails some description and analysis of the centralization of the cult. An attempt will be made to show that Josiah's reforms were far more positive than mere iconoclasm.

Out of this imperial era ferment deuteronomic reform theology began to emerge. Born of social unrest, deuteronomic theology bears a family resemblance to anti-monarchical protest. It incorporates popular discontent with the monarchy but transforms it, directing its force outward against Assyria. Deuteronomic theology thus shows a curious mixture of contempt for the royal cultic status quo, and support of the monarchy. After the disintegration of the Assyrian empire, deuteronomic reform became the basis of a crown-initiated cultural revolution meant to reconstitute a national identity for Judah, now free of imperial domination. Deuteronomic theology exhibits seemingly irreconcilable tensions, because under the pressure of foreign domination, deuteronomists found a way to reconcile irreconcilable social interests.

Recent scholarly trends make this investigation timely. Growing concensus against Alt's theory of kingship in the South and North, the current disfavour towards Noth's amphictyonic theory, and the decline of form-critical approaches to historical books and the general rejection of von Rad's credal hypothesis undermine many of the assumptions upon which tradition-historical reconstructions of deuteronomism have been built. The widespread conviction that Noth's proposal oversimplified the matter has led to important modifications which specifically address the redaction of Kings.

Kings is inextricably bound with Deuteronomy. Both in its legal core (chs. 12-26) and in the surrounding narrative, Deuteronomy raises concerns and uses language central to the Kings evaluation of monarchical history. In fact, key units in Kings appear to be modelled on particular passages in Deuteronomy. It is unnecessary here to determine precisely the nature of the process by which Kings and Deuteronomy evolved. It is suspected they exerted mutual influence on one another and grew in a somewhat dialectical fashion, probably from the time of Hezekiah down through the exilic period. The close connection of the two books transcends mere speculation, however. Therefore this research in concurrence with Lowery's 1991 approach, moves cautiously but freely between them in order to discern their nature and development. While one may accept Deuteronomic influence on the portrayal of these matters, to regard their substance as fiction seems to allow the historian a greater measure of freedom in respect of his sources than he is likely to have enjoyed.

Both Kings and Chronicles present history as a theological construct. As social historical records, they are both suspect. Neither can be dismissed, however, as

historically useless. Coordinating their portrayals with other literary and archaeological data and avoiding conclusions which require greater precision and certainty than the evidence can offer, the social historian may profitably use Kings and Chronicles to reconstruct pre-exilic social history.

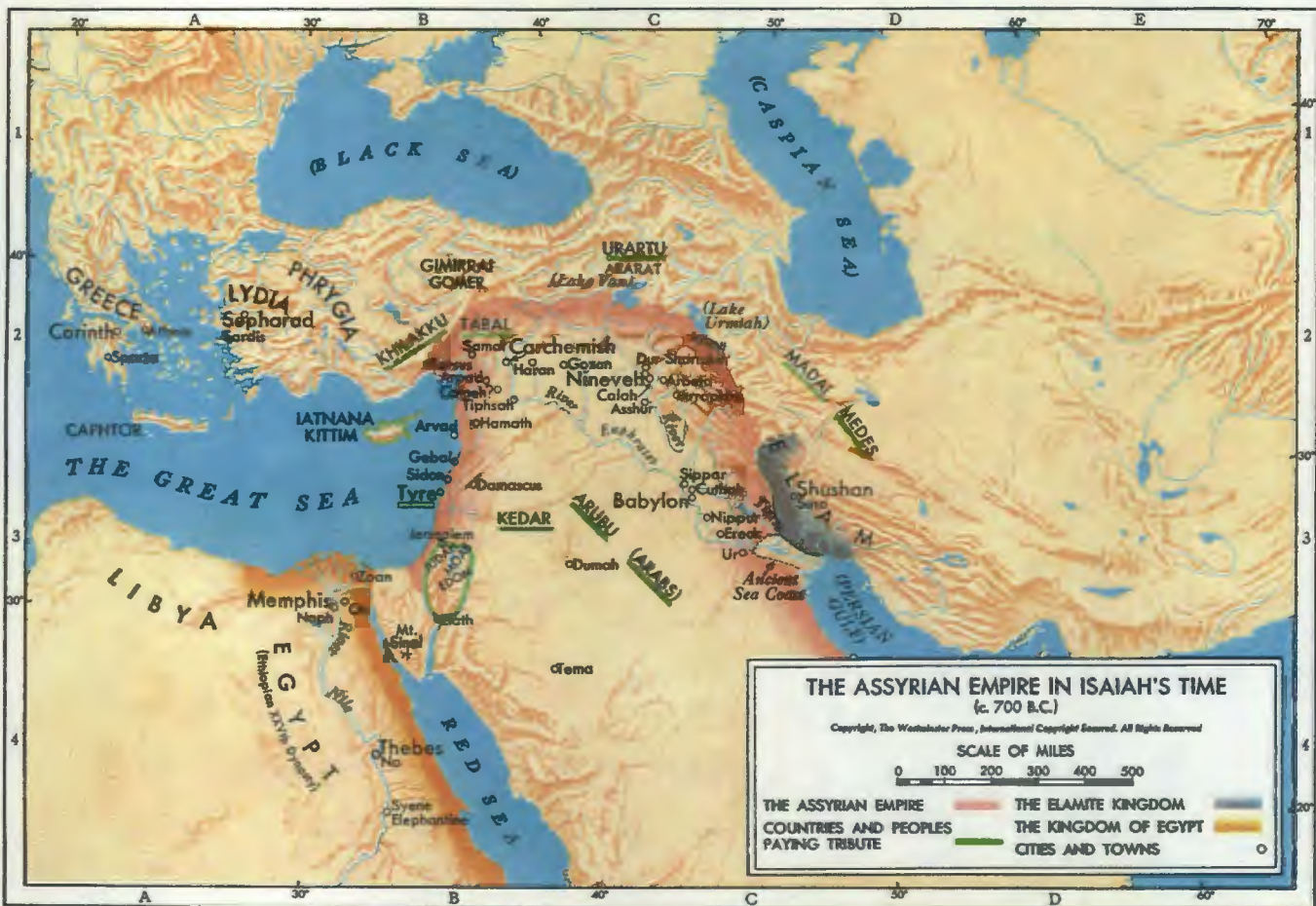
Several important characteristics of Chronicles have direct bearing on the study of cult reform in Judah. The Chronicler draws heavily from a text of Kings which will have been very similar to the version of that book preserved in the Masoretic Text. Yet there are key divergences. (1) The Chronicler's text of Kings differs from the Masoretic Text; (2) The Chronicler has other sources which correct the Kings record; (3) The Chronicler adds to, deletes from and revises Kings freely to fit his own literary-theological project. Each can be argued strongly at various points in Chronicles.

### **1.9 Chapter 7 - Judaeen Foreign Policy in its Final Two Decades**

Taking into account all that has preceded, Chapter 7 tries to bring together a broad-sweep social history of deuteronomic theology in the monarchical period, and the wildly fluctuating foreign policy in the final two decades in the monarchical period. The decision with which state to side is a crucial factor for the small state, as in order to survive, this choice must be based on sober calculations and long range interests. This thesis is based on a specific geopolitical or geostrategic point of view. It stresses the fact that a proper perspective for evaluating the historical factors underly the final fate of Judah, factors which determined the policies of its rulers. The sources are to be obtained only from beyond Palestine, primarily the Neo-Babylonian Chronicles and, to a lesser degree, Egyptian documentation.

### **1.10 Chapter 8 - Conclusion**

It appears that utilising the method described, the aims have been achieved.





## CHAPTER 2

### JUDAH AND HER NEIGHBOURS - THE GEOPOLITICAL REALITIES IN THE 7th CENTURY BCE

#### 2.1. INTRODUCTION

For the modern historian one of the most vexing problems of the period of the decline of the Assyrian empire is the precise chronological relationships among the various kingdoms, namely Assyria, Egypt, and Babylonia. The sources on Assyria in this period consist mainly of six major inscriptions on Ashurbanipal, comprising tablets and prisms. These writings present the historian with literary accounts of the king's wars, in which the Assyrian scribes often alter facts, telescope historical events, and omit pertinent details. Working with all the relevant facts and information pertaining to this period, the important question is whether they attempted to aggrandize the achievements of the king, or whether it should be seen as a courageous attempt to hide the inevitable decline of a great empire. In fact, each edition appears to supercede the previous one. As an example of this scribal editing, Prism F (composed ca. 645 BCE) omits the entire first campaign of Ashurbanipal against Egypt [*Assyrian Historiography*, 1916:53-59]; and the final redaction the Rassam Cylinder, paralleled by Prism A, (although the most complete) contains too many condensed accounts. The Harran Tablets seem to have telescoped a more complete historical narrative as Prism E bears witness. The general outline of these historical events is clear.

Working with these texts, as well as the Biblical and the classical writers such as Herodotus and Josephus, it appears that these events are so intertwined that it is impossible to separate the histories and thus write separate accounts on each of Judah's neighbours. It is therefore necessary to go back to certain events over and over again, to shed light on the different countries' perspectives on those events and how they affected Judah. The history of the late Assyrian Empire is, therefore, interesting from both a Classical and a Near Eastern viewpoint, especially in terms of the major interconnections between the Greek world and the civilisations of Egypt and Mesopotamia growing out of the expansion, and subsequent decline, of Assyrian influence.

If each of Judah's neighbours is regarded as a skein of coloured wool, the role of this chapter is to endeavour to weave the strands into a whole tapestry.

The 7th century BCE saw the decline and fall of the mighty Assyrian empire, and consequently the efforts by Egypt and Babylonia to fill the vacated gap. Situated strategically as she was, Judah became embroiled in the competing powers, which led ultimately to the destruction of the Temple and the exile of the cream of Judah. These

powers will be dealt with in survey form. The account of the final two decades of Judah's foreign policy is discussed in Chapter 7.

As will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5 on Josiah, the premise of this thesis is that although Josiah's reign has been historically reconstructed along the pattern of an increasingly anti-Assyrian foreign policy, in the light of Assyria's indifference to the religious policies of its vassals, there is no reason to assume that Josiah's attitude towards Assyria was any more hostile than that of his grandfather Manasseh. As Nelson (1983:183) notes foreign policy remained a matter of political reality, not ideology.

## **2.2 THE ASSYRIAN DECLINE**

### **2.2.1 The basic reasons for the Assyrian Decline**

The intrinsic weakness of all great empires is a feature which often led to their rapid decline. It is the fact that they were all made up of a multitude of nations which had been subjugated in a more or less violent and brutal way. They were inhabited by different populations and the only factor they have in common was hostility towards the dominant populations; and that they were basically centrifugal. The very mass of peoples who had to be controlled, coupled with the extension of these empires which had grown up in a completely inorganic way, combined with the difficulties and slowness of communications, made such empires eventually virtually ungovernable. Inevitably their administration became increasingly inefficient, slow and muddled. More and more resources had to be devoted to repression, with a consequent waste of men and means, and not infrequently the destruction of resources. Such is the fate of top-heavy empires. By lasting for several centuries Assyria was an exception. Assyria crumbled, as did the Greek and Roman Empires, the Ottoman Empire and others, even the much-vaunted British Empire and, most recently, the collapse of the USSR.

It is also possible that during this same period other events occurred in Palestine, which could also be connected with the general uprising against the Assyrian suzerainty. Perhaps even the Assyrian province of Samaria also joined the mutiny.

### **2.2.2. Transjordan and Judah**

By the Transjordan states we understand, in accordance with current usage, the kingdoms of Edom, Moab and the children of Ammon. However, only the last named lay, properly speaking, across the Jordan from western Palestine; Moab being situated east of the Dead Sea rather than of the river Jordan, and Edom for the most part east, but also partly west, of Wadi-l'Arabah, the south-west extension of the Jordan-Dead Sea depression down to the gulf of Aqabah.

#### **2.2.2.1 Israel and Judah**

Ginsberg (1950:347) avers that in the year 733 BCE Tiglath Pileser III, the king of Assyria, *inter alia* detached from Israel its territories east of Jordan, like Gilead (2 Kgs.15:29). More or less simultaneously the Assyrians permitted the children of

Ammon to annex the southernmost part which constitutes the land of Gad (cf. Jer.49:1ff). The rest of Israelite Transjordan was annexed to Assyria. In the same year, 733 BCE, or possibly in the preceding one, Judah lost Elath to the Edomites (2 Kgs. 16:6) which meant that her border might have receded at least to Mount Halak. Perhaps the Edomites actually seized most of the east Negev. The rump kingdom of Israel (often called Ephraim in Isaiah and Hosea) perished in 721 BCE without having recovered a foothold in Transjordan. Judah was now the sole Jewish kingdom, and it is not impossible that she might have regarded herself as its heir and, as such was thus entitled to inherit all of its sister's claims and aspirations.

It is therefore not inconceivable that there is a measure of truth in the historical fact to the notice in 2 Chronicles 28:18 that the Philistines nibbled at the north-west corner of Ahaz's realm at the same time as the Edomites bit off a chunk from its south-east corner.

### 2.2.2.2 Invasions from the North

According *inter alia* to Cazelles (1976:22-44) another factor that upset the balance of the Assyrian empire came from the north (Jer.1:14). The Akkadian sources mention invasions of tribes with such names as Gimirraya and Ashkuzaya. These tribes seemingly came from the regions around the Caspian and Black Seas and they penetrated forcefully into Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, Syria, and perhaps also Palestine. The Babylonian Chronicles mention the Umman-Manda as a power supporting Babylon and Media in their wars against Assyria (see Wiseman, 1961). Besides these northern tribes, Arabian tribes also penetrated the borders of the fertile crescent from the desert, destroying vast areas such as the Transjordanian region in Palestine (Oded 1970a:185f).

Na'aman (1993:118), as well as in personal discussions with me at Tel-Aviv University, on 27 April 1994, emphasises that in the period under discussion:

- (a) Considerable changes in the composition of the population of Palestine took place. Large population groups were transferred to new homes throughout the empire. Two large areas in particular suffered from deportations, namely the Galilee and in particular Lower Galilee as well as the Shephelah of Judah. Surveys conducted in both areas have revealed a dramatic reduction in the number and scope of settlements during the 7th century BCE. Unlike the later Babylonian one-way deportations, the Assyrians exercised both one and two-way deportations. Such two-way deportations were less destructive, in some instances even serving as an impetus for prosperity. It is clear, for example, that Assyrian deportation and building activity near its border with Egypt brought about an unprecedented prosperity for all concerned.
- (b) In the 7th century BCE the kingdom of Edom also reached its height of prosperity during the period of vassalhood to Assyria. The flourish was due mainly to Assyrian involvement in Arabian trade and possibly also in copper mining in the Arabah. At this point it is not yet clear whether deportation played any role in the prosperity of Edom. We may, however, conclude that

Assyrian deportation, when combined with planned development, could create settlement growth and economic prosperity.

- (c) The demographical changes in the late 8th and 7th centuries BCE had only a marginal effect on the material culture of Palestine. Assyrian residences have been discovered at several sites and artifacts of Assyrian origin have been discovered in centres like Samaria, Gezer and Tell Jemmah. In the present state of research, documentary evidence should, therefore, remain the primary source of information for identifying the new ethnic elements that entered a certain region.
- (d) The considerable changes in the ethnic composition of the population may well have brought about societal changes in economy and cult. It should be emphasised that following the *Pax Assyriaca*<sup>1</sup>, the borders between kingdoms were open. As a result, international and local trade developed and contacts took place between the Empire or its vassal states located on its periphery. The available evidence relating to the material culture of Judah in the 8th century BCE attests that the border of the kingdom were largely closed and that contacts with neighbouring states were limited. On the other hand, in the 7th century BCE, contacts with neighbouring regions were manifold. Various questions may be posed in this light, such as:
  - (i) How did Sennacherib's mass deportation of 701 BCE influence the societal structure of the kingdom of Judah?
  - (ii) How did the emergence of Ekron as a new centre influence the economy of the land of Judah?
  - (iii) Were 'foreign' cults only evidenced in the national Temple of Jerusalem, or did they also influence the local cult places?

There are many questions which should be extensively investigated and discussed. As far as the kingdom of Judah and its neighbours in the 7th century BCE are concerned, the issue of deportations should always be taken into consideration.

### 2.2.3 Assyria and Samaria

Between 720 - 708 BCE the Assyrians deported thousands of local inhabitants from Samaria and the coast of Philistia to various parts of the Assyrian empire. King Sargon brought in various other transferred population groups to fill in their place. For example, peoples from the Zagros region were settled near the Brook of Egypt, and possibly also in the kingdom of Ashdod. Other groups from Babylonia and from the Syro-Arabian desert were settled in the Samaria hill country, as far as the area of

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<sup>1</sup> See Rainey (1993:151,2) (and discussions with me personally at Tel Aviv University, 25-4-94) who asserts there was no such thing as a *Pax Assyriaca*. He maintains there were constant wars. The premise of this thesis would venture to show that the so-called *Pax Assyriaca* did not embrace the entire Ancient Near East, but was either a peace pact consisting of certain selected kingdoms, all contributing in their own way to the needs of the pact, or merely a tacit "cease-fire" between tired armies, rather than a formal pact.

Beth-el. Na'aman (1993:111) also avers that there is a marked difference between the policy of Tiglath-pileser III and Sargon II. While the former deported **local** inhabitants of the newly established provinces, but did not settle others in their place; the latter, on the other hand, conducted **two-way** deportations, bringing new deportees in place of local exiles, and making an effort to settle at least part of the deserted places.

#### 2.2.4 Assyria and Judah

Deportations in the time of Sennacherib (704-681 BCE), and the conquest of Judah is related in Sennacherib's annals. The events of the year 701 BCE depicted in 2 Kings 18 are described by Sennacherib as follows:

*"As for Hezekiah, the Judaeen, who did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered them...I drove out [of them] 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle beyond counting, and considered [them] booty".*

According to Na'aman (1993:113) annexation of Judah was not part of Sennacherib's plans and is not mentioned in any source relating to the 701 BCE campaign. Rather, he intended to create a balance of power among the various small, weak (and weakening) kingdoms located in the buffer zone between Assyria and Egypt. The destruction of the towns of Judah and the deportation of its people directly served this aim. In his opinion, with which the view of this thesis concurs, Sennacherib's campaign was a great success from the Assyrian point of view and for this reason was described in great detail in the king's royal inscriptions and reliefs. The fact that no western alliances (either for or against), nor another campaign against Judah are mentioned in the inscriptions of Esarhaddon or Ashurbanipal, is the best proof of the success of the campaign of 701 BCE.

Sennacherib's campaign was disastrous for Judah:

- (a) Destruction of dozens of cities, and the deportation of many thousands of its inhabitants (Broshi 1974:21-26).
- (b) Vast districts were grievously damaged and their resettlement was a slow and gradual process:
  - (i) The immigration of Israelites who came to Judah from the Northern Kingdom after the fall of Samaria 722/1 BCE, and
  - (ii) the influx of disposed refugees from the territories taken from Judah by Sennacherib and given to the Philistine cities as a result of the 701 BCE campaign, swelled the dimensions of the city of Jerusalem.
  - (iii) Many refugees fled to Jerusalem, which since the eighth century had become the immeasurably largest city in Judah.
  - (iv) The campaign greatly increased the subjugation of Assyria, as well as of Assyrian involvement in the internal affairs of the kingdom. This in time resulted in a significant increase of 'foreign' influences in both cult and culture. According to Na'aman (1991:3-4) Sennacherib's

campaign represented an historical turning point of the utmost significance to the kingdom of Judah, following which the kingdom underwent a series of profound demographic, social, economic and cultural changes. Na'aman emphasises that the paucity of information on the six decades between Sennacherib's campaign and Josiah's accession, and on the latter king's activities, present a difficulty when attempting to sketch the outline and contemporary history of Josiah's kingdom.

#### 2.2.4.1 Hezekiah

It has been suggested by the CAH (1991, Vol. III, Part 2:372) that Hezekiah, his energies having been sapped by the worries of the Assyrian invasion and by the ill-health which he suffered at that time, decided to appoint his young son Manasseh as co-ruler. Thus he began the process of passing the burdens of rule to him, and to prepare him for kingship. Although there is no specific evidence for this, chronological deductions favour the commencement of such a co-regency in 697 or 696 BCE, when Manasseh was twelve and Hezekiah forty-four. Due to the lack of concrete evidence, this must remain purely hypothetical. According to 2 Chronicles 32:33, Hezekiah is said to have been buried in the upper section of the royal cemetery, and to have been honoured by the people.

#### 2.2.4.2 Manasseh

Manasseh's relations with Assyria seem to have been peaceful in the earlier part of his reign. This coincided with the last years of Sennacherib, who was assassinated in 681 BCE, and was succeeded by his son Esarhaddon. In the account of Manasseh's reign in 2 Chronicles 33:11-13, however, there is brief mention of an episode in which he is said to have been captured by an army of the 'king of Assyria' and taken in chains to Babylon, but allowed to return to Jerusalem as a result of the providential activity of YHWH. There is no reference to such an episode in Kings or in extra-Biblical documents, and doubts have been expressed about its authenticity. It is not intrinsically impossible, however, and there is indeed no reason why a recalcitrant vassal should not have been brought to Babylon rather than Nineveh, for Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, the two kings mainly contemporary with Manasseh, are both likely to have visited Babylon.

Although no Biblical text names the Assyrian king in whose time Manasseh was taken to Babylon, the most likely occasion could have been the revolt of Shamash-shum-ukin. On the other hand it seems far more likely that this episode took place during Esarhaddon's western campaign in 671 BCE. According to the Babylonian Chronicle his 674 BCE campaign against Egypt was unsuccessful, and this could have encouraged certain of the kingdoms in the area to throw off their vassal status. The *adu* or Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon which were discovered at Nimrud, specify the obligations of some of his eastern vassals. They also illustrate his likely response to rebellion, typical, of all Assyrian kings. The Esarhaddon *adu* contain seven extant names of territories with whom oaths were taken. Three were provinces, one had recently surrendered to Esarhaddon, and the remaining three are unknown. The Assyrians treated independent vassal states markedly differently from those of the

provinces. Such states maintained a certain autonomy, although usually a pro-Assyrian force was in control. The circumspect ruler attempted to prevent the destruction and take-over of his homeland by appearing at the Assyrian court, along with other tribute-bearers, to proclaim his allegiance publicly. It is known that at times vassal states had to supply a quota of men for the Assyrian army during campaigns in their region. It should be noted that these demands were wholly political.

Assyria also distinguished between territories annexed as provinces directly under her control, and vassal lands under native rule. The latter were free of any cultic obligations toward their master. Oaths of allegiance were regularly imposed on local officials; they were required to swear loyalty to the Assyrian king and to report to him whatever they saw or heard. Failure to observe the oaths could result in swift and cruel punishment, since to break an oath of allegiance was a sin against the gods as well as man. (Cogan 1974; Frame 1992). The Babylonian Chronicle entry for 671 BCE states that Esarhaddon took Memphis and the Egyptian king fled. Though this occasion is undated, Esarhaddon died two years after his campaign of 671 BCE, so it is probable that the tribute of building materials by Manasseh and the other kings was paid between 671 BCE and 669 BCE.

Manasseh was less successful in recovering Edomite-held land than in regaining Philistine-led districts. The redemption of the former had to await the rise of Judah's great irredentist king, Josiah.

### **2.2.5 Excavational Evidence of Settlements during the 8th and 7th Centuries BCE**

#### **(a) General**

Excavations in Judah have provided plenty of evidence for the thoroughly destructive nature of the Assyrian 701 BCE campaign. Large sites in the Shephelah that were destroyed in the course of the Assyrian campaign (Beth Shemesh, Tell Eton, Tell Beit Mirsim) remained deserted during the 7th century BCE. The number of 8th century BCE sites discovered in the recently conducted survey of the Shephelah is several times higher than the number of 7th century BCE sites. Furthermore, the overall inhabited area and estimated population size of settlements dating to the 8th century BCE are about four times higher than those of settlements dating to the 7th century BCE. The destructive results of Sennacherib's campaign remained remarkably clear even in the last years of Josiah's reign (639-609 BCE), almost a century later. The kingdom of Hezekiah was considerably stronger than the kingdom of Josiah, with more extensive borders, larger and stronger settlements, larger population, and greater military power and economic capability.

#### **(b) Hezekiah**

Contrary to the situation in Judah, there was an increase in building activity and a growth in population and economic prosperity in the coastal plain of Philistia in the 7th century BCE. This is particularly clear at Ekron, Judah's closest western neighbour. In the 9th-8th centuries BCE, Ekron was a small

town situated mainly on the tell's north-east acropolis. In the 7th century BCE it suddenly expanded, covering an area of 60 acres, and became a major industrial city. The massive growth of Ekron in the 7th century BCE is the direct result of Judah's decline, the destruction and mass deportation of 701 BCE, and Assyrian counter-support of its western neighbour. Ekron took the place of Judah in the northern Shephelah, exploiting some of Judah's agricultural territories, developing its economy and possibly attracting many refugees from the destroyed Judaeen towns. Ekron's strength is one of the reasons for Judah's continuous weakness along its western border and particularly in the northern Shephelah during the 7th century BCE. (Population statistics: Na'aman 1993:114).

**(c) Shephelah**

A large number of settlements was destroyed in the Shephelah, in Benjamin, around Jerusalem and in the southern hills of Judah and remained deserted for decades or even hundreds of years. Consequently, tens of thousands of people must have been deported by Sennacherib, causing the extreme weakness of the kingdom of Judah in the 7th century BCE (Halpern 1991:28-49). The kingdom was relatively small with a limited reservoir of man power. The territory of Judah had been sparsely inhabited in the Iron Age I period, and it took some 200 years, from the 10th to the 8th century BCE, to settle and populate it. Following the massive Assyrian deportation in 701 BCE's Sennacherib campaign, the kingdom of Judah lacked the human resources needed to resettle the destroyed and deserted areas. The period of *Pax Assyriaca* in the 7th century enabled Judah to recover gradually, to restore some of its settlements and strengthen its economy. However, the time span of less than a century that separated the Assyrian campaign of 701 BCE from the death of Josiah (609 BCE) was too short for more than a partial recovery. Josiah's political, military and economic weakness can be fully explained by the disastrous results of Sennacherib's campaign of 701 BCE.

Judah was never an Assyrian province and therefore its prosperity and welfare was not the concern of the Assyrians. Moreover, Sennacherib radically changed his father's external and internal policy, reducing Assyrian intervention in the affairs of the south-west and north-west fronts of the empire. Instead, he concentrated on the Babylonian front and particularly on Assyria's internal affairs. Thus no further Assyrian campaign to the west nor conflict with Egypt is known from his later years. Also no deportations to the west are mentioned in documents from his reign. A clear sign of the change of policy on the south-west front was the re-establishment of the policy of his father. Sennacherib likewise conducted a lenient policy towards the rebellious kingdoms of Ashkelon and Ekron. He neither destroyed them nor exiled their population. The change of policy may well have brought Sargon's impetus for development on the empire's border with Egypt to a halt. Sennacherib's innovative policy on the south-west front of his empire established a balance of power and preserved what was already gained, replacing the previous Assyrian policy of offensive and initiative in the region.



At the end of 689 BCE Babylonia had reached a low point in its existence. The country was totally controlled by Assyria, and was incorporated directly into the Assyrian empire. There was no longer a "king of Babylon" (even one who was also ruler of Assyria), and Babylon, the capital, lay devastated and abandoned.

For their part, Assyrian kings made a special effort to reconcile Babylonians to Assyrian rule, by experimenting with various methods of governing the southern kingdom, and by showing favour to its cities, people and gods. Although a large number of rebels were executed after the revolts of 694-689 BCE, and 652-648 BCE, no mass atrocities committed by Assyrian troops against Babylonians are recorded for the years 689-627 BCE, and no large-scale deportations are known to have occurred.

## **2.2.6 Assyria and Babylon 689 BCE - 627 BCE**

### **2.2.6.1 Babylonia**

During the years 689-627 BCE Babylonia remained weak, disunited, and subject to Assyria. Although revolts did occur sporadically throughout these years, only once was Assyria's domination seriously challenged, namely during the Shamash-shum-ukin Revolt of 652-648 BCE; even then, Assyria never lost control of the country, and eventually the rebels were crushed. Nevertheless, a few short years after this period, Babylonia was to rise to its greatest height under the Neo-Babylonian dynasty, to destroy its former overlord, Assyria, and to win hegemony over western Asia from that country

Although 689-627 BCE may be characterised as a period of political weakness and disunity in Babylonia, a time when the land was dominated by its northern neighbour, Assyria, it was also a period of internal vigour and a turning point in Babylonia's existence. During this low point in Babylonia's history, momentum was building up which was to result in the founding of the Neo-Babylonian kingdom of Nabopolassar.

#### **(a) The Role of Tribal Groups**

Babylonia's internal disunity was its major weakness, making it difficult for the country to unite behind one leader. A number of different population groups made up the Babylonian state, and these had varying backgrounds and lifestyles, interests and purposes. By virtue of both Assyrian and Elamite interference and internal rebellions, no one Babylonian family held the kingship of Babylonia for any length of time. As a result there was no one individual or family who could make a claim to the throne which would find ready acceptance by the people as a whole, let alone to unite the country against the Assyrians. As Frame observes (1992:258) only once did a large segment of the population unite against Assyria, and then it was behind a brother of the Assyrian king. Characteristically of this period it was tribal groups, especially the Chaldaean tribes, who were the most active in opposing Assyria.

#### **(b) Assyrian Policy towards Babylonia**

Frame (1992:250) contends that the purpose of Assyria's policy towards Babylonia at this time was to keep Babylonia within Assyria's sphere of

influence and under Assyria's control. For many reasons the possession of Babylonia was desirable to the Assyrian empire, such as:

- (i) Babylonia was a rich country, located on several important trade routes, and thus a source of wealth.
- (ii) For Assyria's security it would have been extremely unwise to have an independent and potentially hostile neighbour.
- (iii) If Babylonia was allowed to gain its freedom, other vassals would view it as a sign of Assyrian weakness and be encouraged to revolt.

#### **2.2.6.2 Assyria**

The primary goal of Assyrian policy in the west was complete, uncontested mastery of the rich commerce that flourished in the eastern Mediterranean basin. To achieve their aims, the Assyrians had to maintain their domination over the maritime states of the Phoenician and Philistine coast and also to control the caravan roads coming from north and south Arabia to the sea coast and to Egypt. The Cushite pharaohs of the Twenty-fifth Dynasty were doing everything in their power, mainly by diplomatic intrigue and enticement, but also by promises of military support, to frustrate the Assyrian ambitions. Therefore, the expulsion of the Cushites from Egypt became a high priority objective of Assyrian policy (Spalinger 1978:42-43).

Redford (1992:355) avers there is circumstantial evidence (of moderate weight only) to suggest an increased presence of Egyptian forces in the Levant during the two decades from 710 to 690 BCE. Thereafter, in 684-3 BCE, and 682-1 BCE all indications are that formal campaigns were mounted that reached as far north as the Phoenician coast. He adds that the next eight years in Egypt's history, from 671-663 BCE, were characterized by contemporaries as that period of *'The raging of the foreign lands'* or *'that evil time'* (ANET 2: 293). As the army of Ashurbanipal disappeared over the horizon in the summer of 663 BCE, and returned to Assyria, few would have predicted anything but a servile, provincial status for the land of the Nile, now permanently reduced to a vassal of the great king in Nineveh.

Surveying the events in the Assyrian Empire in the seventh century BCE, it became clear to this thesis that Assyria achieved its greatest expansion in the reign of Esarhaddon (680-669 BCE), who in the course of three campaigns succeeded in subjugating a large part of Egypt. Unfortunately this was the splendour preceding decline. It is observable that under his successor, Ashurbanipal (669-627 BCE), Assyria was now occupied with predominantly defensive wars. In 655 BCE Pharaoh Psammetichus I (663-609), the founder of the 26th Dynasty, regained Egypt's independence. Between 652 and 648 BCE there was a campaign against Babylon from which Assyria emerged victorious, but much weakened and it was only a question of a few years before the Assyrian empire collapsed completely.

#### **2.2.6.3 A Survey of the Assyrian Kings**

##### **(a) Esarhaddon (681-669 BCE)**

Esarhaddon was the son of the assassinated Sennacherib. During the last decade of Sennacherib's reign, he was deeply engaged in conflict with Elam

and the unruly Chaldaeans. This had given the Cushite Taharqa (690-664 BCE) an opportunity to stir up trouble among the countries of the Levant (Spalinger 1978c:23-33; 41-42). Esarhaddon had to deal with the results of Taharqa's activities. On the Arabian scene, Esarhaddon was approached by Hazael, king of the Arabs, who reaffirmed his allegiance and requested the return of the Arabian cult statues which Sennacherib had taken to Assyria as hostages to assure Arabian fidelity.

**(i) Esarhaddon and the 'pro-Babylonian' Party**

Esarhaddon belonged to the pro-Babylonian party within Assyria and devoted considerable effort and resources to undoing the devastation his father had wrought in Babylon. He resettled the citizens who had fled, and returned them their lands. He reinstated the citizens' privileges and tax exemptions.

This pro-Babylonian policy served Assyria's interests. Though the Chaldaean areas gave some initial trouble, Esarhaddon was able to replace hostile chiefs by others from their tribes willing to accept Assyrian vassalhood.

Esarhaddon's recognition of the Medes' growing political importance is reflected in treaties with vassal Median princes, which contained an obligation upon them to support his arrangements for the royal succession after his death. In brief, Ashurbanipal was proclaimed crown prince of Assyria, and the other son, Shamash-shum-ukin, crown prince of Babylonia. Undoubtedly Esarhaddon hoped to prevent a recurrence of the civil war that threatened his own succession.

Eph'al (1982:126-127) is of the opinion that this may have been related to Esarhaddon's placatory policy towards the Babylonians. Hazael was an important figure in the commerce to Babylon from the west across the North Arabian desert. It would also have been a wise adjunct to Esarhaddon's policy in the west. He was about to begin the project of restoring Assyrian supremacy after the erosion of Assyrian authority due to Taharqa's subversive activity.

**(ii) Assyrian advance in the North-West**

In the north-west, Assyria had gradually been pushing its control beyond north Syria and Cilicia into Asia Minor, but this advance was checked by the Cimmerians and Scythians. Sidon, one of the Phoenician cities linked to Cilicia by common maritime interests, miscalculated Assyrian strength and rebelled. Sidon was sacked and its territory made into an Assyrian province. But Assyria still preferred indirect rule where possible, for the neighbouring Phoenician king of Tyre who had remained loyal to Assyria, was left in possession, with some of the outlying settlements of Sidon made over

to his kingdom. It is not impossible that this is the reason why Judah was left partially intact.

**(iii) Syria, Sidon and Palestine**

Apart from Sidon, Syria and Palestine gave no trouble to Assyria. Prism B relates that in Esarhaddon's fourth year (677 BCE) the city of Sidon had been sacked and in the same year the rulers of subject states in the west were forced to furnish corvée. Manasseh was one of these. The timber and stone demanded were delivered to Nineveh, the capital of Assyria. Esarhaddon was able to call on a large group of kings of the petty states of the area for building materials for his palace at Nineveh. The kings he lists include King Manasseh of Judah.

**(iv) Transjordan States**

East and south of the states of Transjordan (Ammon, Moab and Edom, firmly in Assyrian control) was the desert, with its Arab tribes. These tribes were also important to Assyria as they controlled the spice trade from south Arabia, and it was the Arabs alone who could safely negotiate the Sinai desert between south Palestine and Egypt.

**(v) Egypt**

With Palestine and Transjordan firmly under Assyrian control, and with the desert Arabs under pro-Assyrian leaders, Esarhaddon now attempted to secure direct control of Egypt. (Assyria had control of the Palestinian coast right down to Gaza, which was nominally the frontier with Egypt). An inducement might have been the rise in Egypt of an aggressive new dynasty of southern origin, which was attempting to increase its influence among the coastal cities of Palestine, a policy illustrated by the revolt of Tyre, hitherto a loyal vassal.

During 675 BCE the Assyrian government was distracted by troubles with Elam and the Chaldaeans. Finally, in Esarhaddon's seventh year (674 BCE) an attempt was made to carry the war to Egypt, with disastrous results. According to Chronicles 1:9-15 and Grayson (1975,83-84): "Seventh year: On the fifth day of the month Adar, the army of Assyria was defeated in Egypt".

Not unsurprisingly, the Assyrian Annals do not discuss this Assyrian defeat. It was evidently about this time that Esarhaddon found it necessary to intervene directly in the affairs of the north Arabian tribal league. The pertinent record does not appear in the Heidel Prism, but it is found in the Thompson Prism, written in Adar 673 BCE, to the effect that one Wahn induced all the Arabs to revolt against Yauta, in order to establish Wahn's own kingship. But Esarhaddon sent in combat troops to assist Yauta. All the Arabs were subdued, and Wahn and his troops and entourage were taken to Esarhaddon.

There are many reasons besides the demand for tribute payments that would have induced Esarhaddon to support his loyal vassal. Not the least would be the fact that the highest priority in Assyrian policy at that time was to expel the troublesome Cushite pharaohs from Egypt. This required that the Assyrians move a large body of troops across Sinai *en masse*; to do so they would have needed the logistic support of the Arabs (Eph'al, 1982:137). Rainey avers (1993:155) the failure on the first attempt to invade Egypt may have been partly due to improper logistic support. In fact, Wahb's attempted coup against Yauta may have been a contributing factor. It was crucial to the Assyrian war planners that the Arabs have a stable and loyal leadership capable of providing the needed assistance on the forthcoming campaign.

The attack on Egypt commenced in 675 BCE, and occupied several years of difficulties and set-backs. Once in Egypt proper, Esarhaddon routed the army of Taharqa, and besieged Memphis, the capital. At this success the princes of all of fragmented Lower Egypt hurriedly acknowledged Esarhaddon's suzerainty. Assyrian officials were appointed in the native princedoms, and Esarhaddon proclaimed himself king of Lower and Upper Egypt and Ethiopia. No sooner had the Assyrian main army withdrawn from the country, however, than Taharqa returned to reclaim Memphis.

In 671 BCE Esarhaddon achieved his initial goal by conquering the Egyptian delta. But on the way, he had to punish Ba'lu, king of Tyre, who had been supporting the Cushite Taharqa. There can be no doubt that there was support of the Arabian kings with their camel corps. This is stressed in Tablet K 3082 + S 2027 + K 3086 from the British Museum that this was a major contributing factor in transporting the Assyrian army across Sinai. Rainey (1993:156) believes they were essential to the success of the campaign. However, participation in such a bloody war, so far from their native land, may not have been as rewarding as the Arabs had hoped. Their dissatisfaction found expression in the rebellion of Yauta, king of the Arabs (Kedar). That event is passed over by the Annals, and also by the Chronicles (Eph'al 1982:129). It is only attested in the records of Ashurbanipal's Annals and in a more detailed letter to the god Ashur.

Esarhaddon felt prepared to renew his war against Taharqa by 669 BCE. The Sinai route was now firmly in his control due to his previous successes in the delta. However the king fell ill and died on the way.

Esarhaddon's plans for the succession went into operation, but both kingdoms had their problems and these tensions resulted eventually in civil war.

## **(b) Ashurbanipal (668-627 BCE) and his Campaigns**

Ashurbanipal, Esarhaddon's son, continued his father's programme.

- (i) The year 667 BCE saw him marching to Egypt to punish Taharqa, who had tried to unseat the delta rulers appointed by Esarhaddon. The subject rulers of states in the Levant paid their tribute and joined in the van. The climax of the war with Egypt came in 664/663 BCE

	EGYPT	JUDAH	ISRAEL	DAMASCUS	ASSYRIA
775	XXII Dynasty ca. 935-725	Uzziah 783-742	Jeroboam II 786-745		Assyrian weakness
750	XXIII Dynasty ca. 759-715	(Jotham coregent ca. 750) Jotham 742-735 ( <i>Isaiah</i> ) ( <i>Micah</i> )	( <i>Amos</i> ) ( <i>Hosea</i> ) Zechariah 746-745 Shallum 745 Menahem 745-737 Pekahiah 737-736 Pekah 736-732 Hoshea 732-724 Fall of Samaria 722/1	Rezin ca. 740-732	Tiglath-pileser III 745-727
725	XXIV Dynasty ca. 725-709 (←) XXV (Ethiopian) Dyn. ca. 716/15-663	Ahaz 735-715			Shalmaneser V 726-722 Sargon II 721-705
700	Shabako ca. 710/9-696/5 (?) Shebitko ca. 696/5-685/4 (?) (Tirhakah coregent ca. 690/89) (?)	Hezekiah 715-687/6 701 Sennacherib 688? Sennacherib	invades ← invades?		Sennacherib 704-681
675	Tirhakah ca. (690) 685/4-664	Manasseh 687/6-642			Esarhaddon 680-669
	← Invasions of Egypt; Sack of Thebes 663				Asshurbanapal 668-627
650	XXVI Dynasty 684-525 Psammetichus I 664-610	Amon 642-640 Josiah 640-609 ( <i>Jeremiah</i> ) ( <i>Zephaniah</i> ) ( <i>Nahum</i> )	Neo-Babylonian Empire Nabopolassar 626-605	Medes	Sin-shar-ishkun 629-612
625		Jehoahaz 609 Jehoiakim 609-598 ( <i>Habakkuk</i> )		Cyaxares ca. 625-585	Fall of Nineveh 612
600	Neco II 610-594 Psammetichus II 594-589 Apries (Hophra) 589-570	Jehoiachin 598/7 Zedekiah 597-587 Fall of Jerusalem 587 Exile	Nebuchadnezzar 605/4-562		Asshur-uballit II 612-609
575				Astyages 585-550	

Ca. Mid-Eighth to Mid-Sixth Centuries

when Ashurbanipal's army conquered No-Amon<sup>2</sup> (Thebes) and expelled the last of the Cushite rulers, Tantamani (Rassam Cylinder II, 28-48).

- (ii) Not long afterward, Ashurbanipal's third campaign was directed against Ba'lu of Tyre (Katzenstein 1973:288-291). Ba'lu of Tyre surrendered quickly and managed to maintain his position as commercial leader of the eastern Mediterranean states. Obviously he had realised that the Cushite ruler of Egypt was no longer there to support him. While the exact date of this campaign is impossible to determine it must have been not long after the capture of No-Amon. Now, with Psammetichus I installed in Sais as a loyal vassal of Assyria, it must have seemed that Ashurbanipal should be able to enjoy some stability along the Mediterranean seaboard.
- (iii) Despite Ashurbanipal's initial efforts to maintain social and political stability in Elam, by making generous foreign aid to the Elamite king, relations soured between Ashurbanipal and his brother Shamash-shum-ukin's kingship of Babylonia, where Elamite nobles intrigued against Assyria. The rebellion against Ashurbanipal by his younger brother, Shamash-shum-ukin, king of Babylon, occurred in 652/651 BCE. It was obviously preceded by considerable political intrigue. Ashurbanipal stressed the disaffection of subject peoples throughout the empire, especially in the west (Rassam Cylinder III, 96-106). The Assyrians defeated the Elamite army, cleared south Babylonia of organised Chaldaean forces supporting Shamash-shum-ukin, who died in his palace in flames in 648 BCE after famine in the besieged city compelled surrender.

Within forty years of Ashurbanipal's rampage through Elam, the Assyrian empire was at an end.

### 2.2.7 Assyria and Egypt

- (a) In a country like Egypt the native princes were indispensable for efficient administration, and Necho, a northern prince, was treated by the Assyrians with clemency. The southern Egyptian dynasty continued its attempts to regain Lower Egypt, with Taharqa's successor besieging the Assyrian garrison in Memphis in 664 BCE. By the following year Ashurbanipal's army captured not only Memphis but pushed south to the ancient capital of Thebes, which was captured and looted.
- (b) In the scramble over inheritance of the former Assyrian territories, a decided advantage in time was held by Psammetichus I, who reigned in 644-610 BCE. It would appear as if Josiah's expansion apparently began only in 628 BCE,

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<sup>2</sup> Under its Hebrew name of No-Amon, the fate of Thebes is referred in the Bible in Nahum 3:8-10.

upon the institution of his reform in his 12th regnal year according to 2 Chronicles 34:3. He came to the throne as a minor in 639 BCE.

Psammetichus's variegated relations with the Assyrians can be divided into four phases:

- (1) Initially with the reconquest of Egypt by Ashurbanipal in 663 BCE, he was an Assyrian vassal;
- (2) Between 656 BCE and 652 BCE he threw off the Assyrian yoke, with the support of Gyges king of Lydia, who died in 652 BCE;
- (3) Shortly after, he undoubtedly began undermining Assyrian rule in Palestine. This is reflected in Herodotus (II,157), concerning Psammetichus's conquest of Azotus, that is, Ashdod, after a siege of supposedly 29 years. Also the extension of Egyptian hegemony over Phoenicia, at least towards the end of Psammetichus's reign, is indicated by an Egyptian stele from his 52nd year, i.e. 612 BCE. This inscription shows the princes of Lebanon to have been vassals under an Egyptian commissioner and paying tribute to Pharaoh (Freedman & Redford 1970:477).
- (4) Finally the weakening of home-rule in Assyria proper, following the rise of Babylonia (and later also the Medes) led to a community of interests with Egypt, and thus to a league between the erstwhile rivals.

#### **2.2.7.1 The latest datable evidence concerning Assyrian control in Egypt**

Malamat (1973:270) emphasises the fact that the gradual disintegration of Assyrian rule in Palestine in the second half of the seventh century BCE is obscured by a paucity of data. The latest datable evidence for Assyrian control in the various regions of this country is as follows:

- (i) Assyrian deeds of sale found at Gezer, dating to 651 and 649 BCE, pointing to an Assyrian administration at this site;
  - (ii) the mention of an Assyrian governor at Samaria in 646 BCE; and
  - (iii) the punitive expedition undertaken by Ashurbanipal to Akko and Usu (mainland Tyre), now to be dated 644/643 BCE, or a year or two earlier.
- (c) On the western border of the empire, in Egypt, Psammetichus I (664-610 BCE) the leader of the Egyptian national revival movement, had already asserted the independence of Egypt 655/4 BCE (Kitchen, 1973: 399-408). Psammetichus not only brought an end to Assyrian sovereignty in Egypt but he also planned campaigns into Palestine in order to restore long-lost Egyptian control over the area (see Herodotus II,157 on the conquest of Azotus [Ashdod] by Psammetichus I).

By 655 BCE Psammetichus had succeeded in imposing his rule over all of Egypt and installed his daughter in the priesthood of No-Amon. This he did with the aid of Lydian mercenaries sent by Gyges, a professed friend of



Ashurbanipal. Egypt of the Twenty-sixth dynasty was now completely independent of Assyria. It is possible that Psammetichus also used his new freedom to begin inciting the Levantine rulers to favour Egypt at the expense of Assyrian interests. What is known about the Levant is that Ashurbanipal had to deal with a new outbreak of hostility on the part of the Kedarites. Yauta, to whom Ashurbanipal had originally returned the cult statues of Kedar, took the occasion to attack the land of Amurru, i.e. the Levantine provinces of the Assyrian empire. Ammuladdin, another Kedarite leader, who also took part in these razzias against Amarru (Eph'al 1982:147-149; 151-152) but he was defeated and apprehended by the king of Moab, a loyal vassal of Assyria.

- (d) Na'aman (1991:35) avers that during the decade 650-640 BCE the Assyrians were still active in the Syro-Palestinian arena, suppressing elements which endangered their rule, and ensuring security and prosperity. He cites such evidence in Ezra 4:9-10 regarding Assyrian defence and development in the south-western provinces. Following the campaigns against Babylonia (652-648 BCE) and Elam (647-646 BCE), Ashurbanipal exiled residents of those remote areas and resettled them in the province of Samaria. In addition he points out that once Ashurbanipal was no longer occupied with the wars in the southern and eastern regions of his empire, he launched a campaign against the Arabs living on the edge of the Syro-Arabian desert, eliminating them in numbers, and thus protecting the border areas of Syria and Palestine (Eph'al 1982:157-64). A year later (ca. 644 BCE) the Assyrian army again played a major role in the area, suppressing the revolt which had broken out in the province of Tyre.
- (e) According to Herodotus (II, 157) the Egyptians besieged Ashdod, the capital of the Assyrian province in Philistia, for twenty-nine years, until it fell at the hands of the Pharaoh Psammetichus I. It is, therefore, possible that Egypt's first attempts to annex Assyrian territories in Southern Palestine and especially those in the Philistine area, occurred at the same time. If we accept Herodotus' general reliability where the history of the Near East during that period is concerned, then 639 BCE is the latest possible date we can give for the beginning of the siege, as Psammetichus I died in 610-609 BCE. Malamat (1953:29) refutes any later date for this event, and believes the date 640-639 BCE serves well to link the event with the period of his reign (664-663 to 610-609 BCE) since several years previously, about 650 BCE, he had begun to throw off the Assyrian yoke. Evidence of the control of Philistia by Psammetichus I is provided by an Egyptian fortress of the same type as was erected by him in Daphne and Naukratis. Herodotus' description (I, 105) of Psammetichus's encounter with the Scythians, south of Ashkelon, indicates a similar situation.

If Malamat (1953:29) is correct that the above hypothesis agrees with the historical facts, it would appear that we now have evidence of a new synchronism between Assyria, Judah and Egypt, and this means additional proof of the extensive political and military activity in Palestine in the year 640-639 BCE. It is the premise of this

thesis that this conceivably led to the ultimate destruction of Judah *per se*, and of Jerusalem in particular.

Probably shortly after the withdrawal of the Scythians, Psammetichus followed up his diplomatic triumph by seizing the Philistine city of Ashdod, if Herodotus II:157 is to be believed. Tadmor (1966:102) has suggested that the figure "29", which in Herodotus indicates the *length* of the siege in years, should be construed as the regnal year of Psammetichus I, viz. 635 BCE. The fact that the traditional hegemony of the Scythians is "28 years", may be understood together with this datum to indicate that it was the years following the Egypto-Scythian encounter that Psammetichus effected the capture of the city (Malamat 1950:218; Cazelles 1967:25-6.42). Gaza and Ashkelon may well have passed into Egyptian control voluntarily, with the coincidence in time of the weakening of Assyria, the Scythian raid and the renewed Egyptian initiative. 'Good relations' are mentioned in the Adon-letter (an Aramaic papyrus from Sakkara, sent from Adon, king of Ekron, whose city lay in the path of the Babylonian advance, entreating aid). A fragmentary ostraca from Arad, mentioning the king of Egypt, may date to this period (Porten 1981:36-52; Yadin 1976:9ff). This reflects the formal treaty relationship many a south Palestinian city now entered into with its Egyptian overlord. We know little of the fate of the south Phoenician coast after the destruction wrought by Ashurbanipal's army (ca. 645 BCE), but certainly well before the close of Psammetichus I's reign Egyptian control had been extended to Tyre, and probably Arvad as well (Redford 1992:442).

This marked the maximum extent of Assyrian expansion in the south-west; the same period saw its maximum in the north-west, in Asia Minor. But the honeymoon was brief. Assyria faced major troubles in both Egypt and Elam. By 651 BCE Psammetichus had cleared the Assyrians out of Egypt. With troubles mounting elsewhere, Assyria could no longer afford the considerable resources to maintain its forces in Egypt.

Eph'al (1982:155) divorces these actions from the revolt by Ashurbanipal's brother, Shamash-shum-ukin. He is evidently correct that they took place no later than 652 BCE, but at least one can say that the unrest they represent on the part of the Kedarites reveals that the ground was ripe for a rebellion, and the subsequent pro-Babylonian stance taken by Yauta's successor, Abiyate, makes sense in this context.

Ashurbanipal's pacific policy was the result of his decision that Egypt was extremely hard to control, especially with a fierce enemy to the south, and with the ever-present danger of another revolt in the Delta. In fact Assyria failed in its conquest of Egypt when it failed to crush Taharqa (if that was its objective). Unlike the Persians, who only had to fear the native Egyptians, and not the Cushites (who were no military threat at all), the Assyrians had bitten off more than they could possibly chew. Spalinger (1974:323) believes we should also remember that the only reason the Assyrians ever moved into Egypt was a result of the meddling by the Cushitic king, and not by native Egyptians, in the Phoenician cities of Gaza<sup>3</sup>. This could be an

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On this matter, see Tadmor's discussion of the Assyrian evidence in BA 29, 1966:86-102 and especially 88-92.

indication that the Assyrians only wanted commercial domination over Phoenicia and Philistia, and no invasion nor eventual conquest of Egypt or Judah were on the agenda of the Assyrian kings.

In most of the editions of Ashurbanipal's historical texts which supply a framework of campaigns, the second is given to another expedition against Egypt. This account suggests that Taharqa had been succeeded by his nephew Tantamani (664-656 BCE), who had been able to reclaim the territory lost by his uncle. Ashurbanipal sent a punitive force, probably in 664 or 663 BCE to deal with this new trouble, and though there is no specific mention of the matter in the Bible, it is probable that the news of the passage along the coast route of a large Assyrian force encouraged Manasseh to continue his loyalty. The fact that Ashurbanipal was able to fight on the borders of Ammon and Edom suggests that they, like Moab, remained docile vassals. The Assyrian campaign was a success. All the events, which are included in the account of Prism B, must have taken place before the Babylonian rebellion of Shamash-shum-ukin, which occupied Ashurbanipal during the years 652-648 BCE, and are unlikely to have escaped Manasseh's attention, perhaps acting as an encouragement to him to remain subservient to Assyria.

In contradistinction to the age of Manasseh, when Assyrian pressure was actively felt in the West, in particular during the campaigns of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal to Egypt, Josiah's reign occurred during the days of Assyria's decline and fall. By the middle of the 7th century BCE, Assyria had lost control of Egypt, and for over a decade was involved in wars in Babylonia and Elam. Babylon was reconquered in 648 BCE after a long siege; Elam was ravaged and its capital, Susa, finally pillaged and destroyed in 645 BCE. On its northern border, the Empire was troubled by the activity of nomadic hordes, the Cimmerians (or in the opinion of some scholars, the Scythians; Cazelles 1967:22-44). Evidence of Assyrian operations in the lands neighbouring Judah can be gleaned from the latest of Ashurbanipal's historical inscriptions. These tell of campaigns against the Arabs in the area of Damascus and the Transjordan, and of a punitive expedition against Ushu, the coastal section of Tyre - all before 643 BCE (see ANET 3, 297-301). To the same period belong two economic documents written in Neo-Assyrian, found at Gezer, which attest to jurisdiction at a major Israelite city (Cogan & Tadmor 1988:291). Conceivably Assyria left Judah alone during Manasseh's reign, as the evident loyalty he had shown to his vassal made Judah a suitable buffer state in defense of Assyria's potential aggressors.

It is the premise of this thesis that Assyrian rule in Palestine had already come to an effective end by the early thirties of the seventh century BCE, that is, a decade prior to the death of Ashurbanipal in 627 BCE. The political vacuum and the no-man's land left in the Assyrian districts in this country, were the objects of rivalry primarily between Egypt and Judah.

Assyria's troubles elsewhere (e.g. in Egypt) may have provided the occasion for those opposed to Assyrian rule to revolt. Elamite kings undoubtedly encouraged anti-Assyrian feeling in Babylonia in order to weaken Assyria's hold over that country. The conditions that were developing in Babylonia, and the Near East in general during

those years, led to the rise of Nabopolassar, who became king of Babylonia in 626 BCE, and to the decline of Assyria. In all probability a major cause of Assyria's rapid collapse between 627 and 609 BCE was due to the fact that Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal had over-extended the strength of Assyria with their conquests of Egypt and Elam. Neither country was held by the Assyrians for any appreciable time; it was really only when the Assyrian army was present on their soil that they formed part of the Assyrian empire. Frame (1992:258) believes correctly that Assyria proper was just not large enough to maintain this empire.

The note in Ezra 4:9-10, concerning the settlement of foreign peoples in Samaria by Asenappar (usually identified with Ashurbanipal) may indicate an extreme measure against an uprising in that country. Evidence for deferring the date of this event to the period under consideration may be found in the list of nations exiled to Samaria, which includes exiles from Elam and its capital, Susa. The last campaign of Ashurbanipal against Elam took place at the beginning of the year 642 BCE and the complete destruction of Susa was accomplished by 641-640 BCE. There is, therefore, a connection between at least part of the nations that in the reign of Ashurbanipal were exiled to Samaria, beyond the Euphrates and Eber ha-Nahar in general, and his campaign to Syria and Palestine mentioned above.

The list of exiles in Ezra, which, according to Malamat (1953:28) is "somewhat questionable in its present form", also mentions settlers from Erech (Archevites) and Babylon. This information, if authentic, would tend to advance the date of that part of the list's contents by several years, i.e. after the fall of Babylon (648 BCE). In that case the settling of these nations in Eber ha-Nahar, would be linked with the first campaign of Ashurbanipal against the Arab tribes. However, with regard to the settlers from Erech, Malamat believes it is worth noting that this city did not join the Babylonian revolt in the years 652-648 BCE. On the contrary, its governor fought at the side of the Assyrian king against Shamash-shum-ukin, the insurgent monarch of Babylon. It is improbable, therefore, avers Malamat, that the inhabitants of Erech, if it is they who are actually referred to by the term 'Archevites', were exiled at that time. For this event, too, according to Malamat, a background for a later period must be sought.

Some scholars<sup>4</sup> have claimed that the Assyrian domination of Palestine collapsed several years before the death of Ashurbanipal (variously given as 631 BCE and more commonly 627 BCE), and that, at the time of Josiah's rise to power, the Assyrian presence had become so weak as to be scarcely noticeable, thus enabling Josiah to operate for many years in the vacuum created. Their reasoning concerning what Na'aman terms "the premature Assyrian retreat from Palestine" (1991:134) was occasioned by pressure on the part of northern tribes, whose campaigns, according to Herodotus, reached as far as the Egyptian border, as well as by the erosion of Assyria's own power following the protracted wars against Babylonia, Elam and the Arabs in 652-645 BCE.

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Ginsberg, 1950:351-55 and n.19; Cross & Freedman 1953; Noth 1958:272-3; Cogan 1974:71; Malamat 1974:270-1; Eph'al 1979:281-2; Miller & Hayes 1986:381-385; Halpern 1987:97 - will be discussed later.

Josiah commenced his reign in a world in which Egypt was beginning consciously to reassert its hegemony in the traditional regions of its interest along the Levantine coast. It will be shown in this thesis that Egypt's intentions would appear to have been commercial rather than military. Thus Egypt could afford to take the initiative in the Levant, not, what Redford (1992:441) calls as "an agent of a withdrawing Assyria" (whose protégé Egypt had briefly been), but as "a supplanter acting in its behalf". Ashurbanipal in fact construed Psammetichus's independence of action as a rebellion. He could, however, do little by way of retaliation. A suspended war with Elam was followed by a grievous civil war with Ashurbanipal's brother, the regent of Babylon (652-648 BC). A brief punitive raid followed against the Arabs in Transjordan east of the Dead Sea; but it was the Assyrian army's last appearance in the west. This would seem to concur with the hypothesis of this thesis regarding the so-called "*Pax Assyriaca*", namely that it was a tacit peace rather than a formal one. The disastrous war with Elam was shortly resumed and dragged on for most of the decade. Ashurbanipal's eventual victory (639 BC) can in reality be aptly termed 'Pyrrhic', for it left Assyria exhausted and ill-equipped to withstand the storm of resentment that was shortly to arise.

After Ashurbanipal died, his son Ashur-etillu-ili succeeded to the throne. There were widespread disturbances throughout the empire. In Palestine, the reforming activities of King Josiah in 629 BCE included throwing out cult objects with Assyrian associations, which probably/possibly included elements of anti-Assyrian feeling. Attacks on his neighbouring territory without Assyrian intervention are recorded in II Kings 23:15-20. Another son of Ashurbanipal, Sin-shar-ishkin was accepted as king of Assyria for most of the period from his father's death until 612 BCE. A Chaldaean prince, Nabopolassar was proclaimed king of Babylonia in 626 BCE, but did not immediately succeed in controlling all Babylonia. In 616 BCE Nabopolassar was in a position to take the offensive against Assyria. Reported clashes indicate that Assyria was receiving support both from Egypt and from the Mannaeans in north-west Iran.

In spite of the extensive involvement of Assyria in the west in the time of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, no deportations to Palestine are mentioned in their inscriptions. Two possible reasons can be offered for this lack of reference: First, since Palestine was already subject to Assyrian rule, and had experienced two-way deportation, any further deportations would not have been exceptional and might not have been deemed worthy of comment. Second, there appears to have been a change in the scribal tradition for writing royal inscriptions that de-emphasized the motif of deportation. Na'aman (1993:116) has observed that during the 640 BCE's the Assyrians were still active in developing their southernmost province by settling new groups of deportees in its area.

Na'aman (1991a:35) submits that Cogan's claim (1974:71) that the omission of any reference to Assyria in the account of the murder of Amon, king of Judah (2 Kgs 21:23-24) indicates that by that time (640 BCE) Judah had already begun to free itself of the Assyrian yoke. But, Na'aman points out, there is no mention of the Assyrians throughout the description of the reigns of Manasseh, Amon and Josiah either. Na'aman suggests that by the same reasoning, the continuity of the Book of Kings

should lead readers to conclude that Judah had freed itself of the Assyrian yoke as early as Hezekiah's days. In Na'aman's opinion, in Amon's murder the author of the book focused on the ascension of a descendant of the House of David to the throne, and did not go into detail regarding the background of the deed. He suggests that the Assyrians may have supported the measures enacted by those circles who placed the heir of the ancient dynasty of Judah on the throne. By virtue of the fact that their own interests were not adversely affected by this development, they may have preferred not to intervene. A further possibility is that the Assyrians may well have intervened, and the author of the Book of Kings preferred to ignore this, since he described the progression of events without reference to the Assyrian presence.

No one appeared to have managed to oust Assyria from Syria and Palestine before Ashurbanipal's death in 631 BCE and the outbreak of the revolt in Babylonia in 626 BCE. Na'aman (1991a:38) correctly points out that the great crisis in the Assyrian empire (as opposed to various episodes) did not begin until after the outbreak of the revolt in Babylonia, which Assyria, despite repeated attempts, did not manage to crush between 626 and 623 BCE.

The last of Ashurbanipal's annals was written in 639 BCE. From that time until the appearance of the Babylonian Chronicles describing the revolt in Babylonia in 626-623 BCE, there are no 'historical' documents enabling the reconstruction of the history of the Assyrian empire. On the other hand, Babylonian documents inform us that the years 647-627 BCE were years of peace and economic growth, characterised by continuous and uninterrupted Assyrian rule in Babylonia.

Little is known about the last years of Ashurbanipal. But when he died in 627 BCE, the end was near at hand. Assyria's gargantuan structure rocked on its foundations, toppled and fell. In less than twenty years Assyria was no more. Closer to home we need only to think of the rapid disintegration of Russia in the twentieth century!

There can be little wonder that the turmoil in Assyria which followed Ashurbanipal's death in 627 BCE weakened the authority of the central government and simultaneously awakened nationalistic movements in the subjected states. In the east, Nabopolassar, the Chaldaean founder of the Neo-Babylonian empire, took advantage of the instability in the Assyrian royal court and asserted the independence of Babylon in 626 BCE. He was supported by Media, and the two powers together sought to destroy the Assyrian empire in a series of military campaigns which are reported in the Babylonian Chronicles.

## **2.2.8 The Saite Empire in the Levant (664 BCE - 525 BCE)**

The Restoration of the Saite Dynasty (XXVI) was the accomplishment which Redford (1992:431) ascribes to the perspicacity and diplomacy of one man, Nabushezibanni, the son of Necho, henceforth called Psammetichus I (664-610 BCE). In 650 BCE (the 15th year of the pharaoh) Psammetichus found not only the 'southland' (i.e. Upper Egypt) but the entire Levant within the Egyptian penumbra, basking in the glow of a revived Egypt. The aged Manasseh was approaching the end of his fourth decade on the throne of Judah in the year of 650 BCE; and his younger contemporaries, Sil-bel of Gaza, Mitinti II of Ashkelon, Ikaushi of Ekron, Amminadab of Ammon, Musri of

Moab and Kaushgabri of Edom were probably at the peak of their careers (see ANET 2, 294).

Spalinger (1977:221) has noted that too often the role of the Saite Pharaohs in the Levant has been written from a point of view which is Babylocentric or exegetic in outlook. Thus his basic studies on the role of Egypt during the Saite period deal with the fall of Judah under Josiah or the rise of Babylon and later Persia. As the period is of such particular interest to Judah, it is the opinion of this thesis that it is necessary to give some additional information about this era.

Spalinger (1977:222) has attempted to provide a clearer understanding of the attitude of the Saite monarchs towards their northern neighbours, and Babylon in particular; chronological and religious considerations take second place. His theory, with which this thesis concurs, is that from the latter half of the 7th century BCE, to the first quarter of the 6th, Egypt's policy in the Levant, rather than being belligerent, had commercial aspirations, and was in fact quite benevolent in application. This *laissez-faire* attitude was short in duration. A study of this period shows Psammetichus I and Necho preferred to leave the international affairs of the northern states alone, so long as they could secure sufficient economic advantages from them. These first two rulers maintained a strong and ready standing army composed of Greeks and Asiatics to oppose the threat of Babylonian opposition. Subsequently, when this policy failed, first Necho and then Psammetichus II turned to the sea. At the same time, the Egyptian kings tried more forceful measures in Palestine but with little result.

Saite Egypt became a highly desirable employer for Asiatics as well as Greeks. Syrians came to Egypt and are found in communities at Migdol, Athribis, Memphis, Thebes and Aswan and, at special encampments in the Delta. It is clear that the prime function of all these enclaves was paramilitary, although nothing prevented any of them from engaging in commerce. They were organised into 'garrisons' and paid salaries from the royal treasury. Although their own internal organization and their command system was not dispensed with, the Egyptians nonetheless insisted on assigning their own liaison officers to each garrison. Since the foreigners enjoyed a certain degree of autonomy and moreover often proved unruly, the Egyptian officer's task was very difficult (Redford 1992:443).

There exists a longstanding assumption that the bloody events at the Judaeen court in the days of Amon (2 Kgs.21:19-26) reflect hostility towards Assyria. This would mean that the Assyrians were still of some weight in the west in 640/639 BCE. However, this assumption loses much of its substance, with the discovery of a new prism of Ashurbanipal, which necessitates dating the above Assyrian punitive expedition several years prior to the events of Amon's reign<sup>5</sup>. In this light it is possible to venture to attribute the murder of Amon to Egyptian instigation; Egypt was

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<sup>5</sup> For the date of Ashurbanipal's campaign to the Phoenician coast in 644/3 BCE, cf. H. Tadmor, *Encyclopaedia Biblica* (Jerusalem, 1968, 5:109 f. (Hebrew). For a 645/4 BCE dating of this latter campaign, calculated on the basis of Ashurbanipal's prism F (published by J.M. Aynard, *Le prisme du Louvre*, AO 19.939, (Paris, 1957), see I. Ephal, *The Nomads on the Border of Palestine*..(Doctoral Dissertation, Jerusalem, 1971, 114 and n.315 (in Hebrew). Quoted by Malamat, 1973:270).

possibly already seeking to bring a sympathetic faction to power in Judah. This finds support in the fact that it was the *am ha-aretz* - the 'people of the land' who undertook the counter-coup in Jerusalem, eliminating "*them that had conspired against King Amon*", and placing his son Josiah on the throne. For the *am ha-aretz* appears to have been a steadfastly anti-Egyptian faction, as is indicated by its support of both Josiah and Jehoahaz, two kings of clear anti-Egyptian sentiment, whereas the pro-Jehoiakim, Josiah's first-born, natural heir to the throne, was purposefully rejected by this body. (See Chapter 4 on Amon and the *am-ha-aretz*)

With the fate of Assyria becoming more and more tenuous, Psammetichus I of Egypt correctly foresaw the final outcome: Babylonian domination over Assyria's former colonies, among which was Syria. In 616 and 610 BCE the Egyptians moved their troops across the Euphrates against the rising power of Nabopolassar of Babylon. In both years, following an offensive by the Babylonians, the Egyptians tried to oust the Babylonians from recently fortified garrisons. Egypt's alliance with Assyria was probably a result of the unstable political conditions in Upper Syria. Not only was Egypt's northern border endangered by Median and Babylonian thrusts in Urartu, but the eastern trans-Euphratean areas of Syria as well. With Harran, Gablini and Hidanu, all in eastern Syria, under attack from Nabopolassar, the Egyptians had to secure another ally. It is quite possible Egypt's defeat in 610 BCE at the hands of the Babylonians, which forced a reversal of policy by Josiah, might account for Josiah's attack against Necho at Megiddo in 609 BCE.

### 2.2.9 The Final Decades of the Assyrian Empire

The final decades of the Assyrian empire saw the weakening of its hold on subject and vassal states. The CAH Vol.III, Part II (1991:386) assumes that the breakdown of Assyrian authority began in the year following the commencement of Josiah's reforms. This thesis suggests that the one might have influenced the other. These reforms are probably to be seen as continuing over a period. It may well be that the loosening of Assyrian power in the north came at about the time when Josiah was seeing success in Judah, and desired to bring religious reform to the land which had once formed part of the kingdom of David and Solomon. He thus took advantage of the situation to annex the provinces of Samaria, Megiddo and Gilead. Discussion as to whether this was religiously or politically motivated appears in chapters 5 and 6 in this thesis on Josiah and the Cult. Archaeological evidence for such annexation, however, is limited. At Megiddo the walled city of Level III, which had been the Assyrian provincial capital, was succeeded in Level II by an unwalled settlement with a substantial newly built fortress, possibly the work of Josiah. It is possible that one or other of two minor destructions in Level VI at Schechem are to be associated with him.

Redford (1992:440-443) comments that the ultimate source of the latter event, surviving in numerous later histories, was the Babylonian Chronicle, and believes that we may surmise that the source of the raid itself was likewise the same Chronicle. (*Though the tablets covering the years in question have not yet come to light*). Twenty-eight years before the fall of Nineveh in 612 BCE would bring us to 641-640 BCE, the twenty-fourth year of Psammetichus I. Interestingly it is to this very year



that Eusebius in his chronicle adds the terse statement "*Scythii usque ad Palaestinam penetraverant*" (the Scythians have penetrated up to Palestine). Within months King Amon, son of Manasseh and the young ruler of Judah, was assassinated in a palace conspiracy. His eight-year old son, Josiah, was catapulted to the throne on the tide of a popular uprising<sup>6</sup>. Redford states one can only suspect a connection between this precipitous action on the part of a populace filled with panic, and the havoc caused by a recent raid of barbarians never seen before, and possibly still roving the countryside.

The Chronicler (2 Chron.34:3) notes the eighth (633/632 BCE) and twelfth (629/628 BCE) years of Josiah as turning points in his religious reform. Since this reform was not an anti-Assyrian move, Nelson (1983:188,9) believes there is no reason to expect any correlation to Assyrian events as attempted by Cross & Freedman (1953:56-58).

In contradiction to Na'aman's (1991:38) 'minimalist' theory about Josiah's land dimensions, Ginsberg (1950:362) adopts the 'maximalist' view. Beginning in his twelfth year (629/628 BCE), little more than a century after the first appearance of Tiglath-pileser III in Palestine, Josiah extended Judah's jurisdictional authority into Northern Israel, i.e. the Assyrian province of Samaria. Such a move would earlier have signalled open rebellion against Assyria. That he was able to proceed unhindered implies that Nineveh had lost all effective control over its Palestinian provinces. Cogan (1974:71) has observed that it has become a commonplace among scholars to connect Josiah's cultic reforms with the wave of rebellion which swept the Assyrian empire after the death of Ashurbanipal (cf. e.g., Cross & Freedman 1953:57). But while 2 Kings 18 acknowledges revolts against Assyria and Babylonia by Hezekiah (among other pious acts!) no such act is credited Josiah, Jehoiakim (2 Kgs.24,1) and Zedekiah (2 Kgs.24,20). The premise of this thesis suggests that this absence may be due, **not** to an oversight on the part of the Kings editor, but to his accurate reflection of the by then non-existent Assyrian control in Palestine.

The combination of textual and archaeological information has enabled scholars to conclude that Josiah's kingdom was considerably weaker than the kingdom that had existed in the eighth century BCE. The destructive results of Sennacherib's 701 BCE campaign remained evident even in the last years of Josiah's reign, nearly a century after the end of that almost cataclysmic campaign. Many sites which had been destroyed in 701 BCE and their inhabitants exiled, were still unsettled. The period of *Pax Assyriaca* enabled Judah to recover gradually, restore some of its settlements, and strengthen its economy (Na'aman 1987:9-15). But it was not only Judah who enjoyed a period of tranquillity and prosperity at this time. So did its eastern and western neighbours, whose expansion was to exert considerable influence on Judah's fate in the last stages of its existence (Na'aman 1991a:57,8).

No datable happenings occurred until 627 BCE, the death of Ashurbanipal, and a year of major crisis. In 626 BCE Sin-shar-ishkun and Nabopolassar seem to have

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Inter alia Redford says, that while it may be that their action reflects an anti-Egyptian stance, but regarding Malamat JANES 5,p.271 & VTS 218,126 it is misguided to construe this innocuous term as synonymous with a kind of 'party' with political goals.

recognised each other as kings of Assyria and Babylon respectively. After 627 BCE there was no likely prospect of Assyrian intervention in the west, considering the continuing struggle with Nabopolassar, the Medes, and the Scythians. It is accepted that Assyria's last real penetration into Babylon was in 624 BCE; although a garrison would remain at Nippur somewhat longer. In 623 BCE Der revolted.

Nelson (1983:184) points out that biblical historians have insufficiently appreciated the fact that Egypt apparently continued to maintain good relations with Assyria throughout the 630s and 620s BCE. Psammetichus was able to enjoy the economic benefits of Syria-Palestine without conflict and could gradually move into the power vacuum left in Philistia. By 616 BCE (ANET, 303-5) when the Babylonian Chronicle picks up, Egypt is a full Assyrian ally. Nelson believes there is apparently no reason to see this as a change of long-standing policy. Josiah would have had very limited foreign policy options in this situation. As Jeremiah 2:18 puts it, he had to drink from both the Nile and the Euphrates, and ally himself with both nations.

As Assyria continued its slide towards disaster, Egypt undoubtedly realised the danger of a new Babylonian world empire. The obvious policy for Psammetichus I, and for Josiah, too, would be to support Assyria, as the weaker party, in order to prevent a concentration of power in Asia. It is not unreasonable to suppose that Josiah remained a nominal vassal right up to the end, and his penetration into the Assyrian provinces to the north, without opposition from either Egypt or Assyria, is evidence for this (Nelson 1983:184; cf. Albright 1963a:80 and Ginsberg 1950:353).

Due to the paucity of documents, Psammetichus I's policy before 616 BCE is obscure. In fact the origins of the expansion of Saite power in the Levant are extremely murky. In view of later Saite control over Philistia, it is highly likely that Psammetichus did take Ashdod about the time he sent his armies into Syria and the Euphrates. By 616 BCE the Egyptians were able to transport their armies north to Carchemish and as far as Gablini on the Euphrates. This show of military strength must imply that some type of alliance existed between Josiah of Judah and Psammetichus, even though the Bible is silent concerning any collusion between these two kings. Egypt had secured the *Via Maris* (the Way of the Sea) for herself as well as a pledge of neutrality (if not benevolent in nature) from Josiah. The Jewish king, Josiah, was more concerned with his religious reformation than to foolhardily risk another defeat by the Egyptians, especially since in the 620 BCE's and early 610 BCE's Egypt was the only power in Palestine. When the Assyrian influence had receded from Syria and Palestine, it was Egypt that filled its place.

But in 610 BCE the Babylonians and their allies took Harran. Ashur-uballit fell back across the Euphrates with the wreckage of his forces into the arms of the Egyptians. The precise course of events is uncertain and the details are wholly obscure. Bright (1981:315) suggests it is not unreasonable, however, to presume that it was the result of internal troubles which weakened Assyria's hold on her massive empire. In October 626 BCE, Nabopolassar defeated the Assyrians outside Babylon and the following month took the throne. Within a few years Assyria was fighting for her life against the Babylonians and Medes. In this desperate hour, surprisingly, she found an ally in Egypt. Apparently Psammetichus I, realising that Assyria could no longer threaten

him, and fearing that a Medo-Babylonian axis would prove more dangerous, desired that a weakened Assyria be kept in existence as a buffer. Probably, too, he saw the chance to gain in exchange for his aid a free hand in Egypt's ancient sphere of influence in Palestine and Syria. Egyptian forces arrived in Mesopotamia in 616 BCE (possibly earlier - the Babylonian Chronicle for 622-617 BCE is missing) in time to assist in checking Nabopolassar, who had advanced far up to the Euphrates and administered to the Assyrians a serious defeat. But the Medes now began to take a decisive part. After various manoeuvres Cyaxares took Ashur, the ancient capital of Assyria, by storm in 614 BCE. Nabopolassar, arriving on the scene too late to participate, concluded a formal treaty with him. Two years later (612 BCE) the allies assaulted Nineveh itself and, after a three months' siege, took it and utterly destroyed it. Sin-shar-ishkun died in the destruction. Remnants of the Assyrian army, under Ashur-ubalit II, retired westward to Harran where, with their back to the Egyptians, they endeavoured to keep resistance alive. Ashur-uballit of the Assyrian royal family was proclaimed king. Nabopolassar was now in competition with his former allies for the inheritance of the Assyrian empire. Ashur-uballit had two years to reorganise at Harran. In 610 BCE the Ummanmanda returned to Mesopotamia and attacked Harran, being quickly joined by Nabopolassar who arrived to safeguard Babylonian interests.

Assyria was finished and an attempt in 609 BCE to retake Harran failed miserably.

#### **2.2.10 The Final Decades of the 7th Century BCE**

It is interesting to note Spalinger's observation (1977:223) that *if Josiah did not attack the Egyptian armies operating in Riblah, Carchemish and Megiddo, neither did Egypt attack Judah*. This confirms the hypothesis posited concerning the predominantly commercial aims on Egypt's part: No massive expansion of Pharaonic arms into Palestine was attempted by Psammetichus I. In fact, considering the rising commercial domination by the Greeks (both in Anatolia and on the Greek mainland), it would seem Egypt had more to fear from a Hellenic commercial monopoly in the Levant than a Judaeen super-power.

In 616 BCE and 610 BCE the Egyptians moved their troops across the Euphrates against the rising power of Nabopolassar of Babylon. The Babylonian Chronicle (BM 21901) indicates that Psammetichus was trying desperately to stave off an invasion of Syria by Babylon and her Median allies. With the fate of Assyria becoming more and more tenuous, Psammetichus correctly foresaw the final outcome, namely Babylonian domination over Assyria's former colonies, among which was Syria. Hence, the alliance with Sin-sar-ishkun made by Psammetichus some time prior to 616 BCE, must have been a result of Egypt's fear of losing Syria. In both years (616 BCE and 610 BCE) following an offensive by the Babylonians, the Egyptians tried to oust the Babylonians from recently fortified garrisons (at Gablini and later at Harran). When and where this alliance took place is still a moot point. The opinion of this thesis is in agreement with Spalinger (1977:224) that it is likely that Egypt's alliance with Assyria was a result of the unstable political conditions.

If Egypt feared the Babylonian and Median attacks upon Syria, and wished to stem the rising tide of those nations, she had to do so quickly.

### 2.2.10.1 The Babylonian Advance on Syria

- a) 616 BCE: Babylonians take Gablini and plunder Mane, Sahiri and Balihu
- b) 612 BCE: Ashur taken by the Medes: Cyaxares and Nabopolassar join forces.
- c) 610 BCE: Babylonia and the Median host take Harran; Egyptians and Assyrians abandon the area.
- d) 609 BCE: Assyrians and Egyptians recapture Harran; Babylonians move against Izalla in Syria while the Medes move against Urartu.
- e) 608 BCE: Babylonians in Bit-Hanunya in Urartu.
- f) 607 BCE: Babylonians move against Urartu (possibly) and Kimuhu, near Carchemish.
- g) 606 BCE: Egyptians take Babylonian garrison of Kimuhu; Babylonians march to Quaramatu and take Sunadiru, Elammu and Dahammu in Syria.

Events certainly moved fast!

Spalinger (1977:225) believes that even a cursory glance at the list reveals the continual threat which Egypt had to face in Syria. Not only was the northern border endangered by the Median and Babylonian thrusts in Urartu, but the eastern trans-Euphratean areas of Syria as well. With Harran, Gablini and Hidanu - all in eastern Syria - under attack of Nabopolassar, the Egyptians had to secure another friend. It is the premise of this thesis that Egypt probably regarded Judah as a suitable ally, whereas Egypt's military weakness, so conspicuously demonstrated a short time prior to the Battle of Megiddo by the successful invasion of the Scythian tribes on Egypt's border, most certainly affected Josiah's decision to attack.

This Egyptian-Assyrian alliance came into existence, apparently, between 622 BCE and 617 BCE, as can be inferred from the data in Nabopolassar's Babylonian Chronicle. Such a dating is based on the fact that, in the first tablet of the Chronicle (BM 25127), reporting on Nabopolassar's first years, 626-623/22 BCE, there is no mention of Egypt in the struggle between Assyria and Babylonia; however, in line 10 of the following tablet (BM 21901) which opens with the events of 616 BCE, after a gap of 6 years, mention is already made of the military assistance rendered to the Assyrians by Egypt. Similar Egyptian aid was rushed to the Euphrates in 610 BCE and 609 BCE. But in 606 BCE and twice in 605 BCE (the last instance being the renowned battle with Nebuchadnezzar at Carchemish cf. Jeremiah 46:2) the Egyptians alone were left to face the Babylonians, as is revealed by the Neo-Babylonian Chronicle (end of BM 22047 and beginning of BM 21946). By analogy, we may assume that in previous cases, too, Carchemish served as the central Egyptian base on the Euphrates. Carchemish is also specifically mentioned in 2 Chronicles 35:21 as the destination of Necho's campaign in 609 BCE, which passed through Megiddo. Based on this latter campaign, in turn, we may assume that the other campaigns had also been conducted via Megiddo, which undoubtedly was an essential staging base for the Egyptians in their lengthy route to the Euphrates. There are no grounds for assuming

that the Egyptians reached Syria by sea in previous campaigns, bypassing Palestine, as is sometimes held, (cf. e.g. Yoyotte, Supplement, 375. Cf. too Na'aman's view [1991a:51ff] on this). An additional base on this military route was surely at Riblah in Syria - as is inferred from 2 Kgs.23:33, as well as from the flight of the Egyptian army from Carchemish to the land of Hamath (in which Riblah was situated), where it was finally annihilated by Nebuchadnezzar in 605 BCE (BM 21946, lines 1-7). While some might regard the Egyptians as opportunists, the premise of this thesis is that this was pragmatism.

By contrast, Na'aman (1991:56) has endeavoured to prove that Josiah was subjugated to Assyria throughout the first portion of his reign, and that, following the Assyrian retreat, Egypt took over both Assyria's territories and a fair amount of its clout. Na'aman regards the idea of rival pro-Assyrian and pro-Egyptian factions operating in Judah in Josiah's time "to be divorced from reality and based on an erroneous analogy with the state of affairs at a later period, when Babylonia and Egypt were struggling for control of Palestine<sup>7</sup>". Na'aman believes that Assyria and Egypt were allies, not rivals in Josiah's time. As a result, it might be possible to speak of nationalist circles calling for political daring, which might endanger the well-being of the kingdom versus the more conservative circles, which advocated compromise with the great powers and restraint from measures. In light of the lessons learned from Sennacherib's campaign, this was not bad advice. But the opinion of this thesis concurs with Na'aman and Spalinger, namely that it is certainly not correct to speak of opposite Assyrian and Egyptian orientations.

It is not possible to know with any certainty whether or not Egypt gained a foothold on the coast of Philistia, even before the Assyrian retreat from Palestine. What is certain, however, is that the main change in the state of affairs in the area took place only after Assyria failed in its efforts to suppress the Babylonian revolt, which began in 626 BCE, and after the outbreak of civil war in 623 BCE. Na'aman (1991:57) avers that following these developments, Assyria retreated from *ebir nari* ('Beyond the River'), and turned those territories over to Egypt in exchange for military aid. In subsequent years, Egypt occupied itself with reinforcing its status in the evacuated regions and with military assistance to Assyria. Consequently, therefore, Judah enjoyed a considerable measure of independence, despite being formally subordinate to Egypt.

After an attempt to regain Harran, the combined Assyrian-Egyptian forces made their base at Carchemish. The new pharaoh, Necho II, decided on maximum support for Ashur-uballit and led the main Egyptian army into Syria. Chaldaean diplomacy had met with substantial success in Palestine; not only did Necho have to put down a rising in Gaza (Jer.47:1), but also Josiah made a fatal attempt to harry the Egyptian forces at Megiddo (Jer.46:2). Despite these hindrances Necho got his forces through to the main Assyrian-Egyptian base at Carchemish. But now the tide turned. Up to this time, according to Saggs (1984:120), the Chaldaean forces had not been

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See Malamat 1953 & 1975 for a critique on the concept of 'pro-Assyrian' or 'anti-Assyrian' policy as implemented by the kings of Judah [Manasseh, Amon & Josiah], also Nelson, 1983.

conspicuous for military prowess; their major successes had depended earlier upon Assyrian civil strife, and later upon support from the Medes and Ummanmanda. An outstanding general, Nebuchadnezzar, son of Nabopolassar, took over control of the Babylonian army, who took his forces across the Euphrates and made a direct attack on the Egyptian army at Carchemish. With the collapse of the Egyptian army, the Assyrian empire was at an end. Syria and Palestine fell to Nebuchadnezzar.

Josiah's attack on Necho at Megiddo in 609 BCE must be regarded as extraordinary. Various scholars (cf. *inter alia* Malamat, Spalinger, Nelson, Frost) have advanced theories concerning Josiah's untimely death at Megiddo. These views, as well as the events leading to his death, and its consequences, will be discussed in detail in Chapter 5.

Undoubtedly Necho's conciliatory policy towards Judah was in part a result of his fear of Babylon. He could not afford to risk losing a valued ally in Palestine. Yet the Egyptian Empire of Necho and Psammetichus I does not appear to have been geared to direct annexation, nor to personal intervention on the part of the Pharaoh. However, note Freedy & Redford's opposite position (1970:474-476 and 479-85). They believe Egyptian interference occurred only once, in early 587 BCE, when the Babylonians were in Palestine after 601 BCE. (Cf. Malamat 1968:150-156). Nebuchadnezzar's campaigns of 597 BCE and 587/6 BCE were directed at the complete destruction of Judah; Spalinger (1977:225ff.) believes Necho's campaigns were never aimed at such an undertaking. Despite the fact that Necho killed the Judaeen king it is the premise of this thesis that Necho felt that Judah could still be a valuable ally, especially with a pro-Egyptian king being placed on the Judaeen throne. By retaining a Judaeen king, (albeit of his own choosing rather than the original Judaeen choice), the pharaoh could assume the Jewish population would be more tractable than under some Egyptian governor.

#### **2.2.10.2 Archaeological Evidence concerning Megiddo**

The excavators Amiran & Dunayevsky (1958:25-32 and figs.1-2 on p.27) and Albright (1943:2, note 1) somewhat hesitatingly ascribed Stratum II of Megiddo, including the fortress, to Josiah actually only on the basis of historical considerations, that is, because of their belief of the expansionist tendencies of this Judaeen king within the territories of the former kingdom of Israel. This ascription has been accepted by other archaeologists, such as Kenyon (1960:286) and Yadin (1961:104), who regarded the destruction of Stratum II as the outcome of Josiah's 609 BCE defeat by the Egyptians. However, Malamat (1973:268 ff.) suggests there are theoretically three other possibilities with regard to the construction and control of Megiddo Stratum II:

- (i) A continuation of Assyrian occupation;
- (ii) A fortress built by the Babylonians following Nebuchadnezzar's conquest in the west, beginning in 605 BCE; and
- (iii) A site under Egyptian control with a fortress built by Psammetichus I or at least passed into his hands.

In concurrence with Malamat (1973:269 f.) the first possibility is regarded as untenable. By the second half of the seventh century BCE, not only had Assyrian rule in Palestine disintegrated, but it is inconceivable that the Assyrians themselves would disregard the plan of their own earlier city, with its fortifications, in favour of an isolated fort, built in a style varying from theirs.

The second possibility would force scholars to lower the date at the end of Stratum III to at least 605/4 BCE; i.e. obliging to ascribe a duration of a century or more to this stratum. Though this is not an impossibility, Stratum II would have been of a very short duration, indeed, only a few years, and this is a most unlikely proposition. This chronological conclusion derives from the fact that the pottery of Stratum I still included typical Iron Age II forms, signifying that the beginning of this stratum was around 600 BCE according to the excavators and, in any event, not much later than this. Moreover, there is another possible factor negating both of the above two possibilities, viz. the measurements of the fortress in relation to the standard employed. The measurements do not seem to suit the standard Assyrian or Babylonian cubits; that is, the short cubit of 49,5 cm commonly found in the Assyrian and Babylonian building projects. Malamat (1973:269) was able to confirm that the fortress was built according to a "reed" (qaneh) - commonly used in Palestine - based on the cubit of 44,5 cm. The investigation seemed to be of aid in identifying the fortress as being of Israelite or Egyptian foundation, rather than Assyrian or Babylonian.

Generally speaking, the archaeological findings in Megiddo Stratum II leave us with the alternative raised initially: to regard this stratum as an Israelite or Egyptian settlement. This latter suggestion may seem surprising, for, at least according to the meagre remains recovered, Stratum II is not of an Egyptian character though it must be noted that in two loci of Megiddo Stratum II, Egyptian faience figurines were found, one of them identical with figurines of Dynasty XXVI in Egypt. (See Megiddo, vol. 1, pl. 76, 2,3 Malamat 1973:269). It can thus be concluded that Megiddo became an Egyptian base at some time after 646 BCE and certainly prior to 616 BCE. As noted, in this latter year an Assyrian governor is mentioned at Samaria, implying Assyrian presence still in the province of Magiddu (an Assyrian governor at Megiddo proper is mentioned last in 679 BCE). This, then, is the range for dating the end of Stratum III at Megiddo, and for the construction of the Stratum II fortress there. But irrespective whether the fortress was built by Psammetichus I or by Josiah, we can safely assume that Megiddo was already a logistic base, or at least a vital way-station, for the Egyptian army in campaigns to Syria no later than 616 BCE, and probably even several years earlier. Megiddo Stratum II remained under Egyptian control till Nebuchadnezzar's campaign to the West in 605 BCE, or at the latest, the autumn of 604 BCE, when the Babylonian Chronicle has the king of Babylonia leading his army into southern Palestine and to the conquest of Ashkelon (Malamat 1973:274).

### **2.2.10.3 The influence and presence of Egypt**

The 'empire' of Egypt's XXVIth Dynasty in Syria and Palestine is reflected in additional literary sources (ANET 2, 307). The Wadi Bisra inscription of Nebuchadnezzar, originally thought to narrate the campaign of Nebuchadnezzar in

587/6 BCE, is clearly reflective of his war years earlier. This text is a retrospective monument with a definite propagandistic purpose. The inscription was carved for all to see upon the rock sides of the main pass in Wadi Bisra. The monument relates the capture of the Asiatic territories of Egypt by Babylonia, although the language employed and the metaphors utilized by the scribe are more literary than factual. This verbiage, with many quasi-poetical allusions, makes it clear that this inscription was carved for the express purpose of justifying Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of the Levant in 605 BCE. Nebuchadnezzar explicitly states that he eradicated the enemy of the Lebanon and that he made the country happy, the latter phrase being remarkably similar to propaganda from the 'liberation' movements of today. A switch of political domination is indicated, but little else. Nebuchadnezzar's claim of bringing a mild rule to the Lebanon may or may not be true. Still, his so-called 'beneficent rule' may have been an explicit policy followed by the Babylonians to placate the Phoenicians. With all of Syria falling to Babylon by 605 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar was clever to portray himself as a gentle and wise ruler. Spalinger (1977:227) considers, and his view is regarded by this thesis as being probably correct, that such an attitude could have been conditioned by the mild Egyptian domination over Syria.

Unfortunately, the only Egyptian evidence for an Empire in Asia is contained on a stele dated to year 52 of Psammetichus I (612 BCE) in Phoenicia. According to this stele a 'royal inspector' was placed over the Lebanese princes; no one king ruled in Syria or Lebanon. However, the problem remains as to whether this oft-quoted stele proves Saite control over all Syro-Palestine. Whereas to the south the states of Judah and the Transjordan were left alone, such was not the case in Syria. The military staging areas of Riblah, Carchemish and Megiddo were not repeated to the south; no garrisons such as Harran or Gablini existed inland in Judah. In fact, until Nebuchadnezzar's victories in 605 BCE, the Egyptians had only the Scythians to fear, and the latter were met and defeated long before Necho faced Nebuchadnezzar.

A statuette now in the Walters Art Gallery (No.221203) in Baltimore, USA, preserves the name and titles of a high-ranking Egyptian commissioner in Asia. A certain Pa-di-ese held the position of 'messenger of Canaan and Philistia'. Egypt had little direct control over her neighbours to the north-east during the Third Intermediate Period; a date posterior to 664 BCE is in order. The title 'messenger [or envoy] of Canaan and Philistia' does not indicate that Pa-di-ese was an emissary from these lands. The title 'messenger of Canaan and Philistia' could equally signify that Pa-di-ese was the king's emissary sent to Canaan and Philistia and that he resided there. Other such "messengers" could be sent to Syria or the Levantine cities and stay there for an indefinite period. They would be in charge of the traffic in goods and information sent to Egypt rather than the reverse (Spalinger 1977:229). As has been demonstrated Egypt maintained strong control over the Philistine cities (a policy going back into the 8th century BCE) even though the Palestinian state of Judah was left alone for most of the time. Such cities as Ashkelon (which resisted Nebuchadnezzar in 604 BCE) and Ashdod were considered to be political units distinct from the other states of Syria and Palestine.

We know from 2 Kings 24:30 and 2 Chronicles 36 that the 'people of the land' selected Jehoahaz to follow Josiah on the throne. Whether or not Jehoahaz instituted



any action against the Egyptians, or whether Josiah's opposition to Necho had drawn the latter's critical attention to Judah is not clear. But it appears that Necho was not satisfied with the people's choice of king, no doubt because the *am-ha-aretz* was anti-Egyptian. In 2 Kings 24:34 and 2 Chronicles 36:1-4, Necho is said to have deported Jehoahaz after only 3 months, first of all to Riblah, and then to Egypt. He placed Eliakim, Jehoahaz's half-brother, on the throne, and changed his name to Jehoiakim. The substitution of the divine name YHWH for the more general element *el*, and the change of name, were probably aimed at establishing his legitimacy in the eyes of the people, in spite of his subservient position as a vassal of Necho.

The dominance of Egypt in the latter part of the 7th century BCE is illustrated by the discovery at Arad of an ostrakon inscribed in the hieratic script, and another in Hebrew script. Though there are no precise data bearing on the extent of the territory controlled by Judah at this time, the dominance of Egypt suggests that the larger area embraced by Josiah had been once more reduced by Egypt to what it had been before his time.

The Egyptians remained in Palestine, receiving tribute from Judah (2 Kgs.23:35) and also in Syria. The Babylonian Chronicle states that in 606 BCE Nabopolassar had an encounter with them on the Euphrates, and that at the beginning of 605 BCE they defeated the Babylonian garrison at Quramati, probably on the great bend of the Euphrates. This action seems to have prompted the energetic crown prince, Nebuchadnezzar, to muster the Babylonian army and, leaving his father in Babylon, to lead a punitive campaign to the west, where he defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish, and the fleeing remnant at Hamath. Nebuchadnezzar's military operations were interrupted by the death of Nabopolassar, but after he had assumed the throne in Babylon, he returned in the autumn and '*marched about victoriously in Khatti*', finally returning with booty to Babylon in early 604 BCE.. '*Khatti*' was not a precise term, referring in the 1st millennium mainly to north Syria, but the fact that later in this document is treated as including Judah, suggests that Nebuchadnezzar's victorious march may have extended into Palestine. Military campaigns to the west are recorded for each of the years between 605 and 601 BCE, but no specific names of subjected states are mentioned (except Ashkelon). (See CCK:66-71. The relevant passage is BM 21946, lines 1-23, and verse lines 1-7).

Na'aman (1991:36) has noted that in 609-607 BCE, when all the major cities of Assyria had already fallen into his hands, King Nabopolassar of Babylonia launched campaigns into districts south of the kingdom of Urartu, a region and kingdom mentioned in cuneiform texts and the same as Biblical Ararat. Na'aman believes this leads us to conclude that, throughout its existence, the Assyrian empire maintained control of its northern districts, up to its border with Urartu. He asks whether we are to assume that a different state of affairs prevailed on its south-western front, and whether Assyria had previously withdrawn from that front.

Confirmation of the above statements can be found in the Aramaic papyrus discovered at Sakkara, in Egypt, and now dated to 601/600 BCE. The writer of this letter, Adon, probably the prince of Gaza or Ashdod, urgently requested help from the Egyptian king in order to stave off a Babylonian assault, and invoked a treaty between his city

and Egypt. This desperate appeal from a Philistine city was an outcome of the control which Egypt exercised over Philistia as early as the reign of Psammetichus I. The fall of Ashdod must have occurred before 616 BCE, because Psammetichus could not have moved his army into Syria with the key city unconquered. Subsequently, upon his return from campaigning in 609 BCE, Necho crushed the Philistine city of Gaza. Apparently as a result of Josiah's sudden switch at Megiddo, Necho felt it necessary to take direct charge immediately of the cities on the *Via Maris*. That the Philistine states maintained an alliance with Egypt different from that of Judah is also reflected in the Book of Jeremiah (47: 1-7). Both Gaza and Ashkelon are cited in Jeremiah out of among the Philistine cities which would soon fall to Babylon. The final destruction of the city can be visualized from the Babylonian Chronicle (BM 21946, lines 18-20) as well as from the Greek poet Alceus. Nebuchadnezzar smashed the Philistine states before moving upon Egypt; with Necho's allies removed, Nebuchadnezzar felt relatively secure from attack at the rear. Hence, despite the stalemate of 601 BCE, Egypt was unable to regroup her forces in Philistia. That year saw the effective end of Saite land control in Asia. It is thus not surprising to find both Esarhaddon and Nebuchadnezzar crushing the Philistine cities before moving against Judah, undoubtedly because of their pro-Egyptian stance.

#### 2.2.10.4 Jeremiah

The historical circumstances surrounding the prophecy of Jeremiah 47, a sermon devoted entirely to Philistia, have, so far, not been adequately explained, according to Malamat (1953:3). The scholars who have associated it with the campaign of the Babylonian army, have done so solely on conjecture. To Malamat there is no doubt that Nebuchadnezzar's army did invade Philistia during its campaigns in Palestine, and probably more than once. But to him it is difficult to reconcile the contradiction between the dates of these campaigns and the chronological indication at the beginning of the prophecy: "*before that Pharaoh smote Gaza*" (vs.1).

Redford (1992:450) has complimented Jeremiah as "the most gifted tragic poet the ancient Hebrews ever produced and the formulator of a theological concept never surpassed for its sublimity in the history of Judaism". Redford believes Jeremiah grew up in the heady, iconoclastic atmosphere of reform. He surmises that although in the process of centralizing the cult in the Jerusalem Temple his own family must have been to some extent disenfranchised, he nonetheless grew to support the reform for its ethical content. According to Jeremiah 1:3 he began prophesying in the thirteenth year of King Josiah. However, Redford regards it a moot point as to whether Jeremiah had begun to make such public utterances before Josiah died. Nonetheless, the events of 609 BCE certainly evoked a torrent of words. Scholars have long admitted the connection between these words and the testimony of Herodotus on the conquest of Gaza by Necho after the battle at Megiddo. Obviously the fall of Gaza took place a short time after the battle between Necho and Josiah at Megiddo in 609 BCE. Its conquest can perhaps be understood as consistent with Necho's firm policy of settling the troublesome political questions in Palestine (such as the exile of Jehoahaz and the coronation of Jehoiakim in Judah), and may be related to the return home of the Egyptian army after its campaign in Syria. At any rate, the event took

place a fair time before the first Babylonian invasion of Syria and Palestine in 605 BCE. To Malamat it is unthinkable that Gaza was conquered by the Egyptians after the Battle of Carchemish in 605 BCE, as maintained by several scholars, for at that time the Egyptian army was in disorderly retreat, pursued by the Babylonian army (cf. Malamat 1950:218).

The speed with which the political alignment of the nations was changing from 623 BCE provoked a plethora of such prophets. Some, like Zephaniah, spurred by the destruction of Nineveh, execrated those guilty of social injustice, and revelled in the prospect of the Chaldaean invasion, as though it were the instrument of G-d to punish Judah (Zeph.2:13-15; Hab.1:6-10; 2:6-16). Redford (1992:451) suggests that in the zeal that popular frustration at Jehoiakim's rise to power promoted, some directed their public diatribes toward a much more sensitive topic: the very survival of Jerusalem and its Temple. From Jeremiah 26:1ff and 26:20 we see Uriah in Kiryath Yearim and Jeremiah in Jerusalem gave vent in a public forum to predictions of doom. But from 609 to 605 BCE Jehoiakim's pro-Egyptian alliance was riding on the crest of a wave. Encouraged by the vigorous action taken by the new Pharaoh, Jehoiakim was not about to tolerate such opposition from the ranks of the plebeians.

Jeremiah may be seen not only as a prophet with his own perspectives on Judaeon life and international affairs but also as the spokesman of a minority position, probably the *am ha-aretz*, concerning the most appropriate foreign policy for the state. He represented those who felt that submission to Babylonia was the most advantageous policy Judah could take (Miller & Hayes, 1986:403). One can only conjecture whether he might have influenced Josiah to this effect.

Jeremiah and Jehoiakim seem seldom to have held similar opinions about either Judaeon life or international affairs. From the start of his reign (conceivably between his accession and coronation) Jeremiah had delivered his famous Temple sermon (Jer.7:26) warning that, unless repentance and strict adherence to the law were forthcoming, the Jerusalem Temple would become like the temple of Shiloh (Jer.26:6). The implication of the sermon suggests that Jehoiakim was no strict Yahwist like his father. Jeremiah 7:31-32 and ch.19 imply instead that the king had returned to the old time religion of pre-Josianic days.

The tensions between Jehoiakim and Jeremiah did not subside with the passage of time. In the 4th year of Jehoiakim (605 BCE) the year of the battle of Carchemish, Jeremiah proclaimed that Yahweh would send for all the tribes of the north and for Nebuchadnezzar and would bring them against the land of Judah and utterly destroy it (Jer.25). He predicted that "this whole land shall become a ruin and a waste and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years" (Jer.25:11). To Miller & Hayes (1986:405) YHWH's scourge at the hands of the Babylonians was to reach other nations as well, including Egypt (Jer.25:15-26; 46:1-12). (Cf. Malamat 1950:220 who believes the events of Jer.47 pertain to the Scythian invasion rather than the Babylonian one). Clearly, Jeremiah saw Nebuchadnezzar as YHWH's new man, as YHWH's servant, to master the nations for the coming years (Jer.25:9). In his denunciations of Jehoiakim, Jeremiah seems clearly to have called for the assassination of the king and his family. These announcements of judgment were

proclaimed as rhetorical calls for assassination, but apparently there were no takers. We have an echo in the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Rabin in November 1995, where the assassin has claimed for this type of sanction.

### 2.2.10.5 Babylonia and Egypt

From the time that Necho stopped Nebuchadnezzar's first attempt to invade his country in 601 BCE, to the final collapse of Judah under Zedekiah in 587 BCE, the foreign policy of Egypt changed considerably. Realizing that he could not significantly alter the Babylonian domination in Syro-Palestine, Necho continued to foment trouble in Judah and, at the same time, turned to the sea. The introduction of the trireme to Egypt can be dated to his reign (*see Na'aman in this connection* 1991:51 f.).

Under Nebuchadnezzar, son of Nabopolassar, the Babylonians made a direct attack on the Egyptian army (605 BCE). There was slaughter on both sides. The Egyptian army "characteristically panicked and bolted in disorder for Egypt" (Saggs 1962:141). Nebuchadnezzar was able to pursue the retreating Egyptians to their own borders, and might have well continued into Egypt, but for the death of his father, which required his presence in Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar's ability as a statesman and military commander have made him one of the most notable figures of the ancient world. Jeremiah recognised early in his reign that he was the new power in international politics and estimated the duration of his empire as three decades (Jer.27:7). Jehoiakim, the Judaeen king appointed by Necho, made submission to Nebuchadnezzar at his defeat of the Egyptian army, but returned to allegiance to Egypt when the time appeared to be opportune. Jeremiah was wiser than Jehoiakim, for in 597 BCE Nebuchadnezzar's forces besieged Jerusalem, and his son, Jehoiachin was taken captive to Babylon, together with the nobility, craftsmen and troops.

The whole of Palestine and Syria was once more in the hands of a hostile power, and inevitably Egypt's trade, which made considerable use of the Phoenician ports, was bound to be badly affected. Saggs (1962:142) is of the opinion this may explain the decision of Pharaoh Hophra of Egypt to undertake an invasion of Palestine. Initially the Egyptian forces were successful, taking Sidon, and Jerusalem, and no doubt other cities. The Babylonian garrison was forced to retire, leaving the anti-Babylonian statesmen in control. Nebuchadnezzar reacted strongly, dispatching a powerful army to the west as had been foreseen by Jeremiah. The Egyptians made a hurried withdrawal, leaving their erstwhile vassals to be dealt with piecemeal by the Babylonian forces. Jerusalem was blockaded for eighteen months, and finally starved out.

The scholars who have attributed the deeds described in this prophecy to the Babylonian armies, assumed that the words '*before that Pharaoh smote Gaza*' were erroneously interpolated by a later editor (cf. most commentaries on Jeremiah, *inter alia* Cornill, Giesebrecht, Condamin, Volz.etc. quoted by Malamat 1950:155). On the other hand, Kauffmann (1948:410) and Malamat date this chapter to 609 BCE. It seems that despite the commentators' views, we have a chronological marker

purposely introduced to separate the event concerned in our prophecy from similar events which occurred a few years later. The historical situation appropriate to this prophecy of destruction must be sought in the sequence of events which occurred before 609-608 BCE. Therefore, says Malamat (1950:155) the Babylonian campaigns are irrelevant here.

The various sources at hand are sufficiently adequate to determine the exact dates of these happenings, and to intercalate them into the general sequence of events. If there has been no error in the above discussion, and if we accept the position of those scholars who see a connection between the last action of the Egyptian army in 609 BCE, reported in the new Babylonian Chronicle, and the campaign of Necho in Palestine, as described in the Bible, then, says Malamat (1950:156), the following chronological sequence can be outlined:

- (a) **Marcheshwan** (*November*) 610 BCE (The sixteenth year of the reign of Nabopolassar): The Umman Manda (Scythians), with the Babylonian army, besiege the city of Harran (Babylonian Chronicle lines 59-60).
- (b) **Adar** (*March*) 609 BCE: The Babylonian army returns home; the Scythians penetrate quickly into Syria and Palestine (Babylonian Chronicle lines 64-65). They do not tarry to loot these countries (note that the prophecy on Judah reflects a threat to the 'Scythian danger' only) and even the Philistine coast is looted only during their retreat. These facts seem to demonstrate that the Scythians in their military alliance with the Babylonians and Medes, took upon themselves the role of destroying the Egyptian army in particular. They pursued the Egyptians from the Euphrates to the Egyptian border, without delays or diversions, presumably to press the advantage.
- (c) **Nissan-Siwan** (*April-June*) 609 BCE: The Scythians are halted by Psammetichus; they suddenly retrace their steps and disappear, partially devastating Philistia on the way. The echo of their sudden intrusion into Philistine cities can be heard in the prophecy of Jeremiah 47: 2-3. Afterwards, the Scythians are no longer mentioned in the Babylonian Chronicle. They undoubtedly withdrew from further military intervention, persuaded by gifts from Psammetichus.

In the meantime, Psammetichus died and Malamat poses the question as to whether his death might be connected with his surrender to the Scythians, (1950/51:157) It is the premise of this thesis that Psammetichus did not die in battle. In 615 BCE Psammetichus I was probably in the region of seventy years old, and might well have been afflicted with disease. There is some evidence of sickness in the family (Redford suggests this 1992:447, quoting Wild, H - MDIAK 16, 1958) but whether it affected the king is unknown. The new Pharaoh, Necho II, dispatched urgent military aid to the remnants of the Assyrian army in the vicinity of the Euphrates. The Egyptian army passed through Palestine on its way to Syria in the early months of spring (*the time when kings go forth*), and was stopped by Josiah near Megiddo (2 Kgs.23:29-30; 2 Chron.35:20-24). Perhaps the Egyptian humiliation at the hands of the Scythians a few weeks before is one of the reasons for the Judaeen king's audacity in making a stand against the Egyptian army. (For other factors which motivated Josiah to make

a stand at Megiddo, cf. Malamat, 1950:219). At any rate, the Egyptian troops do not hesitate long in Palestine, but hurry on to Syria :'*And G-d has said to me to make haste*' (2 Chron.35:21).

- (d) **Tammuz (July) 609:** The Egyptian army joined the army of Ashurubalit, the last Assyrian king, and with united forces they attack Harran (Babylonian Chronicle line 66).
- (e) **Tammuz-Elul (July-September) 609:** Their combined siege being at first successful (Babylonian Chronicle line 68), Necho from his political headquarters in Riblah seized the opportunity to settle the political situation in Judah. He exiled Jehohaz three months after the latter had succeeded Josiah to the throne, setting up Jehoiakim in his stead and exacting a heavy fine also, from the inhabitants of Judah (2 Kgs.23:31ff.).
- (f) **Elul (September) 609:** The indecisive siege of Harran is lifted and Necho returned to Egypt (Babylonian Chronicle line 69). The Egyptian army, on its way home, conquered Gaza, which apparently had revolted at the same time as Judah (Jer.47:1; Herodotus ii, 159)<sup>8</sup>. From the above it is clear that the Scythian attack on Philistia took place between the months of Adar and Tammuz of 609 BCE, when the Egyptian army was renewing its campaign in Syria, whether this campaign was led by Psammetichus or by Necho. This period of time coincides with the historical setting of the prophecy of the destruction of Philistia in Jeremiah 47. It is likewise clear that half a year elapsed from the time that the Scythians stormed Philistia to the time that Pharaoh conquered Gaza in the autumn. That the fall of Gaza did not take place immediately after the battle of Megiddo can also be deduced from the fact that Necho had already reached the Euphrates in the month of Tammuz, an impossibility if he had returned to Philistia to reduce Gaza. Malamat (1950/51:158) emphasises that this half year is precisely the interval between the subject of this prophecy and the chronological marker at the beginning of the prophecy. Consequently, even if it is demonstrated that the action of the Egyptian army mentioned in the Babylonian Chronicle is not the campaign of Necho known to us from the Bible, a campaign which in any case could hardly have taken place later than 608 BCE, it is still impossible to separate the Scythian attack from the fall of Gaza by more than a year and a half; the latter would then have occurred in the autumn of 608 BCE. (For the Egyptian expedition to the north, noted in Nabopolassar's Chronicle, see Gadd (1923), BM 21901, lines 10, 61, 66; Wiseman, 1956:55ff.).

It should be noted that the prophet mentions only Gaza and Ashkelon, the cities which the Scythians really passed through on their retreat through Palestine (the former very probably, the latter certainly), as has been noted above. The attempts of some scholars to emend the text to some other city are thus historically unfounded. There

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The writer of this thesis wishes to acknowledge Malamat 1950:157 for the dating of the above events.

is even a parallel between Herodotus' account of the fate of Ashkelon and the special emphasis in our prophecy on its destruction:

*'Ruined is Ashkelon...the sword of the Lord...; but how can it be at peace, since the Lord has given it a charge, has made it an appointment against Ashkelon and the seashore' (vs.5-7)<sup>9</sup>.*

In Malamat's opinion the special style of this chapter gives further proof to the above arguments as it is the one that Jeremiah usually uses to describe the '*nation from the north*', which has been generally interpreted as referring to the Scythian invasion of Palestine. Of course this evidence is inconclusive in itself, for descriptions in a similar style may be found in the prophecies on Babylonia and even on Assyria, though not on Egypt. Malamat demonstrates that for this reason alone it is impossible to accept that opinion, or for the prophecy that refers to the conquest of Philistia by the Egyptian army, as held by a few scholars. (Cf. commentary of Giesebrecht on Jeremiah cited in Malamat 1950/51:159) When added to the other arguments, however, Malamat believes this detail strengthens our conclusions concerning the historical setting of this chapter.

For the moment, Egypt was still supreme in Syria-Palestine. Jehoiakim, along with Judaeen society at large, was clearly pro-Egyptian. Jehoiakim may already have ascended the throne in 609 BCE, but certainly no later than 608 BCE, and for four years he remained a loyal vassal.

The tide appeared to have turned in Necho's favour. Although he had to abort the siege of Harran, the very size of the army he had been able to muster must surely have impressed Nabopolasser, for until September 607 BCE the Babylonians refrained from pursuing their aims in western Mesopotamia. The Babylonian Chronicle does not mention the presence of Egyptian expeditionary troops until 606 BCE; so it is probable that Necho's campaign in 609 BCE and the garrison he left behind must have been sufficient to galvanize Syria against the new threat to Babylon.

Necho used these two and a half years (autumn 609 BCE to spring 606 BCE) to initiate a number of new projects. (Cf. Pithom stela, 10 [Urk II,90]; Herodotus 2,158;4,39). In 607 BCE Nabopolasser returned to the attack in western Mesopotamia. The presence of a strong Egyptian garrison at Carchemish could not be tolerated by Babylon if Mesopotamia was to remain in its hands and free of outside interference.

The war had now acquired a momentum of its own: neither side was willing to desist. Within weeks of the fall of Kumukh, Nabopolasser counter-attacked. By early October 606 BCE his forces had encamped at Qurumati on the Euphrates south of Kumukh and were raiding across the river. The attacks, however, did not seriously weaken the Egyptian position. In fact, when in late January 605 BCE Nabopolasser left his army at Qurumati and returned to Babylon, the Egyptian garrison at Carchemish quickly crossed the Euphrates and marched to Qurumati, sending the Babylonian forces dashing southwards.

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This quotation from Malamat is from his own translation from the Hebrew Bible.

In January 603 BCE Nebuchadnezzar quit Ashkelon and made his way back to Babylon, but three and a half months later he returned with siege machinery. (Wiseman 1961: *Chronicles*, 28-29, 70). If, as seems likely, the fragmentary lines of the Chronicle are here to be restored with a reference to 'Gaza' (Malamat, 1973:277, n.33; idem VTS 28, 1975:131,n.18), Nebuchadnezzar's strategy is chillingly clear: he was intent upon wholly neutralizing and reducing the Philistine plain and the coastal highway to Egypt by utter destruction and depopulation. Gaza fell, we may be sure, and shortly an exiled community of Gazaeans turned up in Babylonia. Philistia was barren, its kings and population in exile, and the road lay open to Egypt.

In 606 BCE the Egyptian army had overcome the Babylonian garrison at Kimuhu near Carchemish, but the Egyptian-Babylonian struggle was already tilting in favour of Babylon. The small nations were crushed between these two major powers, sometimes to extinction. A year later, in 605 BCE, the great encounter for dominance in the Eastern Mediterranean Seaboard between Babylonia and Egypt occurred at Carchemish (see Jer.46:1-12, although the events are not depicted in chronological order). The Babylonian crown prince, Nebuchadnezzar, led his forces to an overwhelming victory. It should be noted that his foreign policy was not always consistent, but changed with circumstances, in line with his own pragmatic views. After a vain attempt to halt the Babylonians at Carchemish, the Egyptian army retreated, only to be defeated again in Hamath. The remnants of the Egyptian army were decimated while fleeing Syria for their homeland. As noted, Judah's troops formed part of the Egyptian military fighting to halt Nebuchadnezzar's advance westward. Henceforth Nebuchadnezzar could justifiably regard himself as master of Syria-Palestine and could portray himself as a liberator freeing the region from Egyptian domination (see ANET 307). In 604 BCE, following his victory at Carchemish, Nebuchadnezzar marched unopposed into Syria-Palestine and conquered the Philistine city of Ashkelon. For the following two years, 603-602 BCE, the Babylonian texts are fragmentary, but Nebuchadnezzar seems to have continued to operate in Syria-Palestine and to secure his control there. No doubt after the Babylonian capture of Ashkelon in 604 BCE, Jehoiakim gave up his previous determination not to submit to the Babylonians and became Nebuchadnezzar's vassal. Apparently neither he nor the majority of his officials ever lost their confidence in Egypt, however, and remained loyal to Babylonia only long enough to pay annual tribute on three occasions (2 Kgs.24:1), probably in 603, 602 and 601 BCE.

If Jehoiakim transferred his allegiance from Necho II to Nebuchadnezzar sometime in 604/3 BCE, then it would have been about 600 BCE that he decided to withhold tribute and challenge Nebuchadnezzar. From the Babylonian Chronicle it becomes obvious why Jehoiakim chose to pursue this action which otherwise appears irrational. The chronicles report:

*"Year 4 (601-600 BCE): The king of Akkad (Nebuchadnezzar) sent out his army and marched into Hatti land (Syria-Palestine). They marched unopposed through Hatti land. In the month of Kislev he took the lead of his army and marched toward Egypt. The king of Egypt (Necho) heard of it and sent out his army; they clashed in an open battle and inflicted heavy losses*



*on each other. The king of Akkad and his army turned back and returned to Babylon" (ANET 564:ABC 101).*

This thesis believes that the frank Babylonian report demonstrates that Nebuchadnezzar attempted to invade Egypt late in 601 BCE but was either defeated or fought to a draw. This Egyptian-Babylonian battle also appears to have been noted in Herodotus II:159, who reports that

*'with his land army, he (Necho) met and defeated the Syrians (=Babylonians?) at Magdolus (=Migdol in Egypt?), taking the great Syrian city of Cadytis (=Gaza?) after the battle'.*

Jeremiah 47:1 also refers to the Egyptian capture of Gaza. Probably in late 601/early 600 BCE, Babylonia invaded Egypt, was severely defeated and repelled from Egypt, and Necho carried the conflict into Palestine, where he captured the city of Gaza. According to the Babylonian records, Nebuchadnezzar spent the year following his defeat in Babylon, refurbishing his chariot forces (ANET 564; ABC 101). For the first time since 604 BCE no Babylonian campaign was conducted in the direction of Syria-Palestine. Miller & Hayes (1986:407) therefore suggest that perhaps Jehoiakim, encouraged by the pharaoh's showing and by the absence of the main Babylonian army, took the occasion to withhold tribute and thus to rebel.

Following their victory in 601/600 BCE over the Babylonians, Necho and the Egyptians, while still attempting to foment rebellion in Syria-Palestine, were either unable or unwilling to reassert themselves further in land battles with Nebuchadnezzar. Necho turned his attention more to the sea. Perhaps recognising that the Babylonians had control of the land area of the Eastern Mediterranean Seaboard, Necho sought a greater share of the naval commerce. A canal joining the Mediterranean and the Red Sea was begun and large seagoing triremes were introduced into the Egyptian fleet. Spalinger (1977:231) cites several scholars (e.g. Smirin 1952:100; Liver 1958:421; Yoyotte 1960:372,375) who have assumed that, on previous campaigns, the Egyptians conveyed their forces to Syria by sea. The question which comes to mind is why did Necho II not adopt the tactics of the Egyptian kings at the time of the New Kingdom, who often sailed as far as the Lebanese coast and launched campaigns from there, via the Nahr el-Kebir (Eleutheros) to the Orontes? In this way, Necho could have gone by sea to the Lebanese coast and set out from there on foot, by way of his military base at Riblah (Cf. Na'aman 1992:51). Partly because of their naval preoccupation, the Egyptians proved not to be a major support, although an Egyptian victory triggered Jehoiakim's revolt.

Redford (1992:456) notes that the effect of these overwhelming victories and the 'Babylonian fury' on Judah can easily be imagined. Nebuchadnezzar had not yet turned his attention to the hinterland. His overall strategy demanded reduction of the *Via Maris* and a direct attack on Egypt. But Jehoiakim could not doubt that sooner or later the Babylonian siege engines would be dragged eastward up into the mountains toward Jerusalem. Redford surmises that it was most likely in 601 BCE, that upon the appearance of the Babylonian army in the west, Jehoiakim capitulated. He presumably dispatched the tribute expected of him to Nebuchadnezzar's

headquarters. It was precisely this moment that Nebuchadnezzar had chosen for the showdown with Egypt. While the Chronicle does not tell us the month in which the Babylonians set out, Redford's hypothesis seems plausible that it was probably later than usual, perhaps toward the end of summer. He suggests that the settling of affairs of Judah, which may have involved a march to Jerusalem formally to accept the obeisance of Jehoiakim, would have occupied Nebuchadnezzar until well into the autumn. Thus it was not until late November 601 BCE that his troops assembled at their staging point somewhere on the coastal plain, and set forth against Egypt.

In the 6th year of his reign (599 BCE), Nebuchadnezzar moved back into Syria-Palestine, but the period was spent in raids against Arab tribes in the desert (ANET 564; ABC 101). The main Babylonian forces took no direct action against the rebel Jehoiakim. Two Kings 24:2 notes that:

*"YHWH sent against him bands of the Chaldaeans, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites and bands of the Ammonites".*

Apparently Nebuchadnezzar contented himself for the moment with allowing the Jerusalem situation to be handled by auxiliary forces and the Babylonian (Chaldaeian) garrisons stationed in the region. In the following year Nebuchadnezzar marched out with his main army and ANET 564 details his suppression of the Judaeian revolt.

Nebuchadnezzar bypassed the inland route and led his forces confidently down the coast. On this occasion he could not achieve the surprise that had aided him at the battle of Carchemish. The advanced outposts gave Necho ample warning, and when the Babylonians came within sight of Migdol, they found the Egyptian army drawn up and waiting. (See Malamat 1973: 275).

The battle amounted to a signal defeat to Babylonian arms. Jeremiah and the doomsayers were confounded. For not only had the Egyptians fought Nebuchadnezzar to a standstill, but Necho seized the opportunity of the Babylonian retreat (in defiance of Jeremiah's opinion of him) to follow up his advantage and seize Gaza, now deprived of its fortifications through the recent siege.

As far as the Babylonians were concerned, Migdol had meant the loss of troops and equipment, and no further hostilities could be envisaged for the immediate future. It is probable that the comment from the Babylonian Chronicle 31,70 that Nebuchadnezzar remained at home in Babylon *'to gather together his chariots and horses in great number'* in fact relates from January 600 BCE to late November 599 BCE. The tide definitely appeared to have turned against Babylon, and when in December 599 BCE Nebuchadnezzar came again to the west, it was a weak show of force. Nebuchadnezzar was obliged to return to Babylon in March 598 BCE, leaving only small contingents to raid further south on the border of Judah. Throughout the summer and autumn no foreign army set foot in Palestine (Redford 1992:459 and see 2 Kings 24:2).

But it was only a matter of time, for Nebuchadnezzar determined to punish Judah for its desertion. In late November 598 BCE the muster of troops took place in the plains of Akkad, and the long march began to the west. Just a few days later, and probably before news of the Babylonian advance had reached him, Jehoiakim died on December

6, aged 36. The heir apparent was his eight-year old son, Jehoiachin, who duly took the throne, unwitting of the disaster about to fall. Redford (1992:459) suggests that in light of the event, the Babylonian Chronicle is here to be preferred over the record of 2 Kings 24:8, which makes Jehoiachin eighteen at his accession. The sudden and unexpected investment of the city of the Babylonians must have come as a rude shock to the court and the inhabitants of the city, which was probably unprepared for a protracted siege. The Babylonian Chronicle 72 gives a reference to an event reflected in the Bible:

*"In the seventh year (i.e. 598-597 BCE) in the month Kislev the king of Akkad mustered his troops, marched to the Hatti-land (i.e. Palestine-Syria) and besieged the city of Judah. On the 2nd day of the month of Adar (March 16, 597 BCE) he seized the city and captured the king"*

Necho II died in the fall of 595 BCE, and was succeeded by Psammetichus II. Since the encouraging victory of 600 BCE, Egyptian activity had concentrated on another theatre of interests, the south, perhaps since the general consensus was that the northern frontier was now safe. In the south the XXVIth Dynasty had continued to maintain itself as the ruling power over vast reaches of the Sudan from its traditional seat at Napata and nothing could dissuade these rulers from considering their eventual return to Egypt. As a consequence Psammetichus I had had to fortify the southern border at Elephantine and station a strong garrison there, which included a Judaeans element (Herodotus 2:126-30).

The decade preceding the capture of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 587 BCE was marked by an extremely cautious policy on the part of the Egyptians. The few Egyptian thrusts into Palestine appear to have been on the initiative of Judah or the petty states on the sea coast. The small army sent by Hophra in 587 BCE to stave off a final Judaeans collapse was easily broken by the Babylonians (Malamat 1968: 150-155; Freedy & Redford 1970:481-85). Neither Psammetichus II nor Hophra appears to have wished to meet Nebuchadnezzar face-to-face. In fact, the former was busy with a military campaign in Nubia in his 3rd year (592 BCE). The feint by Egypt into Palestine in 588 BCE was a small affair, if Jeremiah 37:5 and Josephus (Ant.X, 108-111) can be trusted. The Lachish letters reveal the dispatch of a military mission to Egypt led by a certain Coniah, son of Elnathan; it is possible that he was the commander in chief of the Judaeans army. (Translated in ANET, 321-322; see also the remarks of Malamat 1968:151-2). His task was successful: Egyptian troops did appear in Palestine. However, as Jeremiah and Ezekiel prophesied (Jer.37:7-10; Ezek.30:18-20), the Judaeans' desperate attempt to defeat Babylon came to naught. Hophra, who succeeded Psammetichus II in 589 BCE, failed to relieve the besieged Jerusalem.

With Necho II's disgrace on the battlefield, and resulting ignominious fate, his successor, Psammetichus II had somehow to reverse that trend. Watchful towards the north, he sent his troops south at the exact moment when Nebuchadnezzar had relaxed his vigilance in Palestine. The war was massively publicised not only in Egypt, but also in Palestine. Rather, Psammetichus sent his army to an easy victory over a weak foe in order to shore up the sagging and military situation within Egypt

(Spalinger 1978a:23). Hence, Psammetichus II literally broadcast his victory over the Cushites with a royal tour of a peaceful nature in Palestine. Unfortunately for the locals, they believed him; when the Babylonians ultimately returned to Judah and Philistia they found active resistance to their plans of hegemony. Despite the desperate tone of the local kings, both of Judah as of Philistia, and the supplications of Egypt's allies in the Levant, little if any Egyptian aid was forthcoming.

Zedekiah's advisors seem to have been intent upon breaking the tenuous relations with Babylon, although Zedekiah appears to have been weak to fully accomplish their aims in this regard. The anti-Babylonian conference was held in Jerusalem in 594/3 BCE (see Jer. 27, 28), preceding Psammetichus' trip to Asia. Ezekiel's prophecies (although opposed to Egypt's military resurgence in Judah) indicate that Psammetichus II and Zedekiah aligned themselves by a treaty (Ezek. 8). Before Nebuchadnezzar's final campaign to Jerusalem in 589 BCE, the only secure date for a Babylonian intrusion in south Palestine is 594 BCE (BM 21946). The Asiatic voyage of Psammetichus II conveniently occurred soon after Nebuchadnezzar withdrew from Judah, but before the Babylonians returned for their final siege.

The peaceful voyage of Psammetichus II in 591 BCE was followed by a more intense reliance by the Egyptians on their naval forces. It is highly likely that the land attacks upon Sidon were preceded by naval manoeuvres and that Hophra transported his soldiers to Phoenicia by sea; the land, of course, was under the control of the Babylonians. Spalinger (1977:234) disputes Freedman & Redford's hypothesis (1970) in which they try to see a joint naval and land strategy of Hophra. The premise in this thesis, however, in concurrence with Spalinger's view, is that there was no indication of any armed forces travelling overland in Palestine at this time (the troops sent against Sidon reported by Herodotus II, 161, probably were sent by sea) as the Babylonians controlled all of Syria and Palestine. (See Na'aman 1991a:55 in this regard). Although the Egyptian naval ventures were undertaken partly to counteract the Babylonian advance in the Levant, they cannot be seen as solely directed against Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonian king, himself, was at the same time fighting a long and tedious war against Tyre (see esp. Ezek. 29:18). The siege lasted from 586 BCE to 573 BCE. Spalinger (1977:234) follows the accepted position that Hophra's wars in Phoenicia occurred soon after the collapse of Zedekiah in 587 BCE. Although Babylonian arms remained in that land for at least one succeeding year, Nebuchadnezzar turned his sights to Cilicia in 585 BCE, as his intervention in the Median-Lydan war indicates. Apparently to offset Nebuchadnezzar's rapid successes the Saite kings turned to the sea to combat their enemy.

The collapse of Jerusalem - the final Babylonian victory over the Judaeans - occurred in 586 BCE, and shortly after that, Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt. The failure of Hophra to aid Zedekiah in the spring of 587 BCE is an episode known only through allusions in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and the late account of Josephus (Ant. X 110). In 586 BCE Nebuchadnezzar began his 13-year siege of Tyre and four years later marched his army into the Transjordan, repeating the early foray there in 599 BCE.

## 2.3 CONCLUSION

The purpose of this chapter was to show that contrary to what is usually claimed, the Assyrians in the seventh century BCE did not find Egypt an easy land to rule. Moreover, it was not even Egypt which was the real enemy. The real culprit was Cush. The Assyrians somehow failed to make this distinction, and Ashurbanipal was obliged to face first Taharqa and then Tantamani. Egypt, which had earlier been the scene of intense battles between the Assyrians and the Cushites from the south, was, (ca.664/3 BCE), administered by numerous local potentates, chief among whom was Psammetichus I, son of Necho I. There was little ill-will between Psammetichus of Sais and Ashurbanipal. The Assyrian king had driven out the hated southerners and Sais had been placed in the forefront of the Egyptian cities. In addition, a treaty had been made between Psammetichus and Ashurbanipal. It is significant that during the last decade of the Assyrian Empire, Egypt under Psammetichus I was an ally of Nineveh. When the Egyptian Delta revolted, Ashurbanipal made peace simply in order to stave off the Cushite takeover of Egypt. For that would have meant a resumption of interference in Assyria's Palestinian hegemony. and this she certainly did not want.

No anti-Assyrian alliance directed against Ashurbanipal can be reconstructed. Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Egypt was the zenith of Babylonian power in the Levant, and the nadir of the divine concept of kingship in the Saite Period.

The ease with which Psammetichus II's forces overcame the Cushite threat is enough to indicate that Cush was no longer the threat it had been one century earlier. That ease of success in Cush, coupled with the absence of Babylonian arms in Palestine one year later, lend further support to the view that the Egyptians were not in the least intent upon reviving an empire, much less eager to meet Nebuchadnezzar face-to-face.

As has been shown the Assyrian empire ( which reached its zenith during the time of Manasseh) was shaken and collapsed in a relatively short time as a result, on the one hand, of internal crises and, on the other hand, of extensive pressure from the outside. The events associated with Josiah's reign in Judah can be easily understood in light of the gradual disintegration of the Assyrian Empire. These events raise the questions as to what was the background to the national revival and what were the political conditions which enabled Josiah to enlarge his kingdom even into those areas which were under Assyrian sovereignty.

Up to 609 BCE Judah had maintained her independence from Egypt and no tribute seems to have been paid to Psammetichus. After Josiah's switch in 609 BCE such was not to be the case. It is significant that whereas 2 Chronicles 36:3ff. and 2 Kings 23:33ff. indicate the rearrangement of Judah after Necho's victory over him, neither book (nor the prophecies of Jeremiah) indicates a subservience to Egypt by Judah. Perhaps the fact that Necho had newly ascended the throne was an added incentive to Josiah. In any case, it is significant that Necho did not bother to reorganise the Judaeon monarchy after his victory over Josiah. The Pharaoh presumably felt that intervention in the affairs of Judah was best left until his return to Egypt.

Judah's neighbours must have recovered their independence, if they had lost it, immediately upon Josiah's death and Judah's subjection to Egypt in 609 BCE. It may

have been in the same year that the children of Ammon recovered the land of Gad; for Necho, thinking it unsafe to suffer Judah to remain a powerful kingdom which might again try to block his passage from the coastal plain into Galilee and points north, may very well have deprived Josiah's successors (Jehoahaz and Jehoiakim) of Galilee and Samaria, in which case all of Transjordan would have become practically untenable for them. There is, however, no reason for supposing that Edom also made any considerable territorial gains in 609 BCE.

Necho's conciliatory policy towards Judah was in part a result of his fear of Babylon. He could not afford to risk losing a valued ally in Palestine. Yet the Egyptian empire of Necho and Psammetichus I does not appear to have been geared to direct annexation, nor to personal intervention on the part of the Pharaoh. Nebuchadnezzar's campaigns of 597 BCE and 587/6 BCE were directed to the complete destruction of Judah; Necho's were never aimed at such an undertaking.

Five years previous to the fall of Jerusalem in August 586 BCE, Psammetichus II embarked upon a peaceful mission to Palestine. The precise significance of this venture is still debated, even though it is agreed that the Egyptian monarch and his officials conducted themselves more as conquering heroes returning home than as an expeditionary force intent on invasion. This trip by the Pharaoh was undoubtedly connected with Zedekiah's revolt against Nebuchadnezzar and it is highly likely that it served to uplift the morale of the Judaeans. Although Freedy & Redford's attempt (1970:480) to link this royal 'tour' with Ezekiel 20:1ff. fails from a chronological basis, they are correct in viewing the return of Egyptian land forces to Asia as deriving from the changed political situation in Judah (cf. Malamat 1975:139).

According to Ezekiel (29:17) the Babylonians invaded Egypt in the twenty-ninth year of the exile of king Jehoiakim (= 571 BCE). The invasion of Egypt by the Babylonians is also reported by Josephus (*Ant. X*, 182). The eruption of Babylonian forces into Egypt against Hophra was an isolated incident and Nebuchadnezzar could not hold onto that land. If a major power like Babylonia could not hold onto his land, it comes as no surprise that a small state, like Judah, was crushed by its might.

## CHAPTER 3

### KING MANASSEH (687/6 - 642 BCE)

#### 3.1. INTRODUCTION

There is an often unstated judgment that Manasseh was a yielding and unpatriotic weakling, who was willing to sell out his heritage because of his pro-Assyrian position. Manasseh might have been the very model of the good vassal, but hardly for reasons of ideological attachment. The premise of this thesis concurs with Nelson (1983:178) that Manasseh might have realised Assyria was a stabilising element in Palestine, which worked to Judah's advantage. He was not unlikely to have taken cognisance of the fact that his capital was a mere half a day's journey north to the Assyrian imperial border. But Manasseh's religious policies cannot automatically be taken as indications of subservient vassalage. Pragmatism undoubtedly paid dividends in making Manasseh's reign the longest in the history of Israel.

A striking feature in the latter part of 2 Kings is the alternation in the representation of fathers and sons as good and wicked kings. Ahaz is depicted as a godless king, his son, Hezekiah, pious. His grandson, Manasseh is evil, while Manasseh's son, Amon, was murdered too early in his reign to be accorded critical scrutiny. The role of good king was accordingly given to Manasseh's grandson, Josiah.

According to the Book of Kings, Manasseh was not only the complete opposite of his father, King Hezekiah, he was the most wicked monarch who ever reigned over Judah. Reacting to his evil ways the Lord decided to destroy the Judaeen state, and not even the righteous King Josiah could avert the doom. Jeremiah 25:3-29 expresses the same view as 2 Kings 21:10-15. However, in 2 Chronicles 33:10-15 Manasseh is given a minor rehabilitation, and becomes the prototype of a remorseful sinner, who was pardoned by G-d after his conversion. Josiah is portrayed as the best monarch since David, challenging the oracle of doom which foretold that the king's sons and dynasty would meet with disaster, because of their father's sins.

Obviously Josiah could not be punished for the sins of his grandfather, Manasseh. The problem the biblical author had to face was that in the framework of the section on Manasseh it is stated that this king reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem and died a natural death at the age of sixty-seven. However, an oracle announcing the end of the Davidic dynasty would have been contrary to the prophecies of an eternal house for David. Another solution had to be found - and one was. The premise of this thesis will suggest that the people of Jerusalem and Judah were to pay for the king's sins, rather than Manasseh personally, or the Davidic Dynasty.

In this chapter the disparate views on Manasseh depicted in the Books of Kings and Chronicles will be discussed. More important than the historical discrepancies, however, is the theological impact on the Manasseh story for the Chronicler's post-exilic audience. Mere longevity cannot suffice; Manasseh's stunning success as a king

needs analysis.

## 3.2 HISTORICAL AND CULTIC BACKGROUND

### 3.2.1 Ahaz

The association of Judah and Assyria occurred when Ahaz, king of Judah, went to Damascus in 732 BCE to meet Tiglath-pileser III. He became an Assyrian vassal and the status of his nation was to remain more or less unchanged for over a hundred years. This century is noted in the book of Kings (2 Kgs. 16-23) as one of the most corrupt in the history of Israel's religion, and many scholars during the past 50 years have argued, or assumed, that the religious decadence of the age resulted mainly from the Assyrians' policy of imposing the worship of their gods on subject peoples. The decline began, it is believed, when Ahaz set up an altar, usually said to be Assyrian, in the Temple. Then, after an unsuccessful attempt to cast off the Assyrian yoke in the reign of Hezekiah, the situation deteriorated rapidly during the 7th century BCE under Manasseh. Throughout this period, it is maintained, the presence of Assyrian cults encouraged the revival of other pagan practices which rapidly multiplied until true YHWHism was almost completely swamped in a morass of heathenism (McKay 1973:1).

Throughout the entire century of Assyrian domination of Syria-Palestine (ca. 740-640 BCE) Judah succeeded in retaining its nominal independence by consistently submitting to the political will of Assyria. It was never annexed to the empire, and so was spared the disastrous fate of Northern Israel.

Despite direct military pressure to join the Syro-Ephraimite League in rebellion, (see 2 Kgs. 16:5; Isa. 8:5-6) it seems that Hiram of Tyre joined with Rezin and Pekah in this anti-Assyrian alliance. Ahaz remained loyal to Assyria. In 732 BCE he personally greeted the victorious Tiglath-pileser III after the Assyrian conquest of Damascus.

### 3.2.2 Hezekiah

This posture of submissiveness continued into the reign of the succeeding king, Hezekiah; the results of the summary treatment of Samaria at the hands of Sargon (720 BCE) were apparently not lost on Jerusalem. But by 712 BCE Hezekiah became involved in rebellion against Sargon at the side of Ashdod. After the loss of the border fortress, Azekah, Judah averted by some means the central Assyrian attack. Oded (1970a) holds that Azekah belonged to Ashdod (not Judah) in 712 BCE since it had been occupied during the Philistine penetration reported in 2 Chronicles 28:18 and resumed its vassal status. (See Nineveh Prism A, and comments by Tadmor, JCS 12:79 ff.). A letter recently recovered at Nimrud notes the receipt of horses as part of the tribute from the subdued principals in this rebellion.

Upon the death of Sargon, Hezekiah organised the southern Palestinian states in further revolt, occasioning a most serious threat to Judah's territorial integrity. In a single campaign (701 BCE) Sennacherib "*stripped Judah of 46 walled cities and countless small towns in their environs*" (2 Kgs. 18:7-8) to force its complete surrender. Apparently willing to accede to the continued autonomy of vassal Judah,



Assyria withdrew. The lost cities were annexed to Philistia and Jerusalem alone was left to pay the oppressive war indemnity and the increased annual tribute.

### 3.3. MANASSEH

#### 3.3.1 General

As Lowery (1991:169) has aptly remarked the expanded national borders, and an enhanced trading relationship with the empire, no doubt made life better for the top layer of Judaeen society than it was just after Hezekiah surrendered. A larger tax base made the national debt to Assyria easier to meet. For the labouring majority, however, nothing much changed. The contradiction of supporting a domestic monarchy and a foreign empire continued to make them highly vulnerable. Socially, politically and economically, Manasseh's rule marked a return to what had been the *status quo* prior to Hezekiah's rebellion. The non-biblical documents provide no hints of a rebellion against Esarhaddon or Ashurbanipal which involved Manasseh. On the contrary, Judah, together with Ammon and Moab, is mentioned as one who faithfully paid tribute to Assyria. Manasseh himself appears in the Assyrian Annals as a faithful subject to Assyria. There is clear evidence that Manasseh, as a vassal king, was obliged to collect taxes and also to provide some military forces to the Assyrian campaign. Judah's enslavement during the days of Manasseh is further borne out by the stationing in Lachish of a Philistine garrison under Assyrian control. The reigns of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal were the climactic apogee of Assyrian domination. The capture of the Egyptian city of No-Amon (Thebes) by Ashurbanipal left a strong impression on nations such as Judah (Nahum 3:8-10) and such an accomplishment would have offered Manasseh no encouragement to rebel.

#### 3.3.2 Internal and Domestic Struggle

According to Oded (1977:453) it is plausible to assume that the sequence of Hezekiah's reform, followed by Manasseh's cultic activity and subsequently Josiah's reform, reflect an internal domestic struggle which occurred in Judah (2 Kgs. 21:16; 24:4). This struggle was apparently between those advocating a pure Israelite cult, including an experiment in the centralisation of YHWH worship in the Jerusalem Temple, with a contrasting movement which inclined towards an adjustment to Gentile customs.

If this view is accepted, then the first group would have included the prophets from the circles of Isaiah, Zephaniah and Jeremiah (Jer. 7:18; Zeph. 1:8) together with the priests of the Jerusalem Temple (Nielsen 1967:105). The second group would probably have included the members of the royal court, most of the leaders and princes, the priests of Ba'al and Astarte, and other Judaeen circles which had close contact with the foreign population of the country, and with the Assyrian administration (Zeph. 1:8ff.). It is mainly because of these latter groups that the reign of Manasseh became a period of syncretism and international interchange. Assyrian policy or practice of imposing their religion upon subjected people played no role. The internal struggle of the two Judaeen groups was a bloody one. According to 2 Kings 22:16:

*"Moreover, Manasseh shed very much innocent blood, till he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another."*

Two Kings 24:4 emphasises:

*"...for the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had shed; for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood..."*

### **3.3.3 Manasseh's Early Career**

Cultically too, Manasseh's reign returned Judah to traditional values. The high places were restored. The syncretistic cult he allowed was the orthodox First Temple cult, enhanced by Assyrian practice and belief, but the received tradition nonetheless. The era of cultic experimentation during the headier days of Hezekiah's rebellion had ended. Under Manasseh, the YHWH cult got back to basics - at least, as those basics had been understood since Ahaz.

The same year that saw Judah's catastrophic defeat by the Assyrians (701 BCE) had also witnessed King Hezekiah falling victim to a serious illness. Hezekiah was promised recovery and fifteen more years to live. At the time, his son, Manasseh, was eight years old; when Manasseh reached 12 years (697/696 BCE) he was made co-regent (2 Kgs. 21:21). For the next ten years Judah had to struggle under the burden of heavy war debt and diminished economic resources. There is no indication that Sennacherib did anything to alleviate Hezekiah's financial straits. It would have been contrary to Assyrian interests to allow the former leader of the western rebellion a chance to gain surplus income with which to rearm and refortify. The Philistines, the Edomites and the Arabs enjoyed the profits of the caravan trade (Rainey 1993:149).

Certainly the circumstances prevailing in Judah during Manasseh's early career were not auspicious. His father, Hezekiah, had just recently suffered terrible loss in a senseless rebellion against King Sennacherib. The biblical sources play up the fact that Jerusalem was not conquered by the Assyrian army (2 Kgs. 18-19; Isa. 36-37; cf. also 2 Chron. 32:1-22). However, they do not refer to the crushing burden imposed upon Judah as a result of the conflict. Not only were forty-six walled cities of Judah and the dependent villages ravaged by Sennacherib's troops, thus wrecking the entire infrastructure of the kingdom, but large portions of economically and militarily strategic territory were detached from Judah and given to those local rulers who had remained loyal to Assyria. Therefore, in order to save his kingdom, Manasseh had to compromise and to accept almost the impossible. He could not overthrow the Assyrians, but he could accept their presence and their power, and thus survive.

Manasseh succeeded Hezekiah in 687/686 BCE (2 Kgs. 21:1; 2 Chron. 33:1). Both Kings and Chronicles (probably because they wrote from the same point of view) begin their accounts of his reign by stating that he did evil in the sight of YHWH, and that he allowed, or indeed fostered, the kind of pagan practices which had characterised the religion of the Canaanites. They then catalogue a remarkable series of aberrations of true YHWHism. The introduction of pagan objects into the actual Temple established a new extreme of apostasy, because, while several earlier rulers had introduced foreign images and altars into the land, these had always been outside the Temple precincts. (See CAH Vol. III, 1991:374,5).

Rainey (1993:147) notes that King Manasseh is a much maligned figure in the Book of Kings. The Deuteronomistic editor(s), not surprisingly, sought to blame Manasseh for the ultimate downfall of the Judaeian kingdom (2 Kgs. 23:26-27). The Chronicler, on the other hand, preserves an account of Manasseh's arrest and deportation to Babylon (2 Chron. 33:10-17) during which time he repented, was restored to his kingdom and launched a programme of restoration and reconstruction. If the Chronicles passage is taken seriously, then it becomes necessary to explain just how a king so vilified in the Book of Kings could have been given such a reprieve by the Chronicler. Noth (1981:58-60) agrees that the Chronicler's statements about building projects and military activities probably are derived from a genuine ancient source, and believes there is no reason not to accept this evaluation, in spite of many critical objections by 20th century scholars - e.g. Welten, 1973. Noth adds that the military exploits have a special ring of authenticity by virtue of the geographical details that they include; the same holds true for the geopolitical outlook expressed by the Chronicler in citing such sources.

### **3.3.3.1 Manasseh and Herod**

There are similarities in the depiction of Manasseh and of Herod the Great. Grant (1973:81, 2) has noted that Herod is often condemned as a collaborator with Rome, a quisling who preferred subservience to heroic rebellion. While admitting that he was a collaborator with Rome, to call him "a quisling" ignores a fundamental difference between the conditions of Herod's lifetime and the great wars of the twentieth century.

"Vidkun Quisling, during a war that might be lost or won, sided with the foreign power that would enslave his nation against those who would liberate it. Herod had no such choice. There was no great war in which he could select the side he preferred. After the brief flash-in-the-pan of his enemy, Antigonus, who chose Parthia and was defeated, there was only one power in charge of Israel's destiny, namely Rome, and the chances of escaping from its domination were so small as to be non-existent. The only alternative was a rebellion which, as was shown seventy and again a hundred and thirty-five years later, could only end in defeat, immeasurable hardship and obliteration. Herod saw this clearly, and in order to save his people from the catastrophe he settled for the best terms he could get. It seemed to him that in spite of all the seedy compromises this policy involved, it was better than the miserable deaths (in a cause that could not be won) of countless Jewish men, women and children".

While in no way trying to exonerate the biblical writers' essentially negative characterisation of Manasseh, Grant's comment on Herod might be analogous to Manasseh's situation. Herod's collaboration with Rome brought an unprecedented 33 years of peace to Israel. Manasseh's reign of 55 years too brought peace to his people. A stable reign, a reign of peace, must have affected his grandson, Josiah. His formative years were spent under the influence of and at the side of his grandfather who must have been a reasonably effective king to have lasted so long.

### **3.3.4 Manasseh assumes responsibility for the State**

With Hezekiah's death in his twenty-ninth regnal year (687/686 BCE) Manasseh

assumed the responsibility for reviving the economy of Judah. The steps he took to achieve this goal were detrimental to the Jerusalem priesthood and the associated religious establishment and thus they are denounced in the prophetic history:

*"And he did what was evil in the sight of the Lord, according to the abominable practices of the nations whom the Lord drove out before the people of Israel" (2 Kgs. 21:2-7).*

A litany of Manasseh's evil acts follows.

Quite obviously, Manasseh would never have contemplated taking such drastic steps while Hezekiah was alive, whose links with the Temple and the prophets (especially Isaiah) were too strong. It is no coincidence that the prophet-historian pointed out the parallel between Manasseh's new policy and that of Ahab, king of Israel in the ninth century BCE. The obvious implication that Manasseh was entering into political and commercial relations with Tyre has not been lost on historians (Katzenstein 1973:263-264; McKay 1973:20-27). These new political/economic ties were expressed in terms of the foreign cults established in Jerusalem. Many of the shrines to the various deities were doubtless associated with the embassies/consulates established by the diplomatic missions that came to Jerusalem. (Cf. during Solomon's reign I Kg. 11:3-8, and for the location of the many shrines in Manasseh's day, cf. 2 Kgs. 23:13-14).

By way of background to the geopolitical developments during Manasseh's reign, it is necessary to understand the economic framework of the Ancient Near East, and Judah's position in it. Its control of the trade routes from Arabia to the Mediterranean coast was essential to her economic success; that was practically her only source for outside income. Not only the fees demanded from caravans for security and passage, but also the profits gained from the supply of provisions, fodder and watering privileges to the passing caravans were Judah's most important means of sharing the benefits of a steadily growing world trade. The main route in question was undoubtedly that from the Gulf of Elath to Gaza via Kadesh-barnea and Beer-sheba. It is these fluctuations of Judah's fortunes *vis-a-vis* the rival nations, that had a vested interest in the commercial exploitation of those trade routes, which provide the Chronicler a measuring stick for the divine favour and disfavour. Although specific details about the situation during the reign of Manasseh are not given, either in Kings or Chronicles, a study of the Assyrian royal inscriptions will shed considerable light on the importance of the southern Levant and northern Arabia during the seventh century BCE. The behaviour and the fate of Manasseh during that period may then be placed in its proper focus (cf. Rainey 1993:141).

The economic logic behind these moves is obvious. Judah had no raw materials or manufactured goods worthy of export other than her agricultural produce (cf. Ezek. 27:17). On the other hand, the Phoenicians were predominantly engaged in maritime-related activities (Ezek. 27:8-9), and were, therefore, in constant need of food stuffs to maintain their industrialized society. It thus seems clear that Manasseh was in need of markets for his agricultural products. He also required links with other neighbouring countries such as the Transjordanian kingdoms, which had not suffered from the war with Sennacherib, and who, therefore, constituted potential markets for

Judah. As their own economies were still, to a great extent, based on pastoral pursuits, ready access to the highway from Arabia to Damascus would bring dividends to the regional caravan trade.

Manasseh's relations with Assyria seem to have been peaceful in the earlier part of his reign, which coincided with the last years of Sennacherib, who was assassinated in 681 BCE, and was succeeded by his son Esarhaddon. The reigns of Manasseh, Amon and Josiah coincide with the important changes on the political horizon of the Mediterranean basin. The Greek city states, for instance, underwent dramatic political transformations that would eventually continue to play an important role, even today. The **crux**, perhaps, is that no weak king, unsuccessful in military, economic and/or diplomatic matters, would have been allowed to remain on the throne.

### 3.3.5 Manasseh's Later Years

In the account of Manasseh's reign in 2 Chronicles 33:11-13, there is brief mention of an episode in which he is said to have been captured by an army of the 'king of Assyria' and taken in chains to Babylon, but allowed to return to Jerusalem as a result of the providential activity of YHWH. There is no reference to such an episode in Kings or in extra-Biblical documents, and doubts have been expressed about its authenticity. It is not intrinsically impossible, however, and there is indeed no reason why a recalcitrant vassal should not have been brought to Babylon rather than Nineveh, for Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, the two kings mainly contemporary with Manasseh, are both likely to have visited Babylon.

The Biblical text does not name the Assyrian king in whose time Manasseh was taken to Babylon, but it has been suggested that a likely occasion might have been the revolt of Shamash-shum-ukin. It seems more likely, however, that such an episode might have been connected with Esarhaddon's western campaign in 671 BCE.

There is only scanty and contradictory Biblical information concerning the reign of Manasseh. By virtue of the fact that his reign was longer than that of any Judaeon or Israelite king, this is rather remarkable. Nielsen (1967:103) has correctly observed that this period of Israelite history was well versed in the art of writing, which was used for each and every purpose, and not only for those employed with administration or engaged in correspondence, diplomatic or personal. All over the Near East the 7th century BCE was a period of intense literary activity, the predilection for ancient customs and traditions being quite outspoken, in Egypt as well as Mesopotamia e.g. the famous library of Ashur-banipal in Nineveh. Without doubt in the 7th century BCE, in the first half of which Manasseh reigned, a great deal of Judaeon poetry, prophetic and epic literature was also committed to writing.

As a result it is remarkable that the Bible has very scanty information, and little of it concrete, on the reign of Manasseh. In concurrence with Nielsen (1967:103), this thesis believes that the historical traditions of Manasseh which were known to the composers of the biblical works of history, must have been censored and shortened by them rather drastically, before the traditions were allowed to be handed over to later generations, neatly arranged as starting points for pieces of theological instruction.

Cogan's statement (1974:6) is quite correct when he avers that the Deuteronomistic historiographers, in their anxiety to censure Manasseh's apostasy, left much unreported in 2 Kings 21 concerning daily life in Judah. Modern historians, however, have not hesitated completing the lacunae, often adding to Manasseh's burden. Some of the phenomena traced to the seventh century include:

- (i) the displacement and the ultimate disappearance of the covenantal ark from the Jerusalem Temple;
- (ii) the importation of the standard (Mesopotamian) terminology of the sun-god literature for use of Judahite psalmists, and
- (iii) the composition of Deuteronomy based on an Assyrian Vorlage.

All such observations must ultimately be examined in the light of the exact political-religious relationship which obtained between the Neo-Assyrian empire and the Israelite states.

There is also today a more general appreciation of the complexity of the primary historiographic sources from both Judah and Mesopotamia. The Deuteronomistic history was written for a political and religious purpose and underwent at least one major editorial reworking. The Assyrian and neo-Babylonian materials were also created for political and even religious purposes. They too sometimes underwent redaction, as in the case of the sources for the reign of Ashurbanipal. (See previous chapter concerning the Assyrian and neo-Babylonian sources.)

Nelson (1983:178) stresses that it is essential to understand the terminology 'anti-Assyrian' and 'pro-Assyrian', as these terms carry the implication of ideological loyalty, in the sense of 'pro-Palestinian' or 'pro-American' to modern ears. Of course no Lydian, Egyptian or Judaeian was ever likely to be pro-Assyrian in that sense. Being pro-Assyrian could have meant nothing more than the belief that, in the ever-changing arena of international politics, this year, at least, the nation's best interests were served by subservience to Assyria. It is simply not possible that any king of Judah was ever so pro-Assyrian in the sense that he would go one single step beyond the national self-interest in supporting Assyrian policy.

Thus to label Manasseh 'pro-Assyrian' would be to invite misunderstanding. Whilst agreeing that Manasseh was conceivably a 'very model of the good vassal', he was hardly so for reasons of ideological attachment. He would naturally have valued Assyrian trade contacts, and would have found protection from hostile domestic elements in Assyrian suzerainty. At about the age of seven Manasseh himself had lived through Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem, and undoubtedly he would have wished to avoid punishment or death by his Assyrian masters.

### **3.3.6 Manasseh's Foreign Policy**

Manasseh achieved sole rulership in 687/686 BCE after a ten year co-regency. His only sensible course was loyal vassalage, if there was any hope of reversing the territorial loss caused by Sennacherib, and in order to prevent a recurrence of the disaster of 701 BCE. Assyrian architectural features in Stratum II of Lachish after 701 BCE suggest that it was garrisoned by Assyrian occupation forces and that Manasseh may have had a sort of Assyrian high commissioner watching over his

shoulder (Saggs, 1962:123).

Manasseh ruled over the diminutive Judahite state for 55 years. Throughout, he remained a loyal subject of Assyria, except for what Cogan (1974:67) has aptly termed "the short and questionable interval of his incarceration". Two Chronicles 33:11-13 tells of the capture of Manasseh and his forced appearance before an Assyrian monarch in Babylon. Unexplained is the absence from Kings regarding the historical 'fact' of Manasseh's revolt and capture. We assume that the editor of Kings omitted from his work any event which might be interpreted as punishment or blame, (if only in some small way), that the king was responsible for the loss of the kingdom (see 2 Kgs. 23,26). Note that mention of Manasseh's building activities at Jerusalem was similarly overlooked (cf. 2 Chron. 33,14). For the Chronicler, however, the story of Manasseh's capture confirmed a basic theological premise: each individual was adjudged during his own lifetime. Besides, the Chronicler did not make Manasseh out to be the sole cause of Judah's downfall, as had the editor of Kings before him (cf. 2 Kgs. 24:3; 2 Chron. 33:17-23; 36:14-15). According to Cogan (1974:67, 68) had the incident been reported in Assyrian Annals, it would have indicated that he had been suspected of active rebellion. But the Annals only mention Manasseh as a loyal vassal. He, *Menasi sar al Iaudi*, was among the 22 western kings summoned to the court of Esarhaddon to deliver materials for the reconstruction of the royal storehouse at Nineveh. With minor variations in their ranks, these same rulers presented gifts to Ashurbanipal, who then proceeded with their help to conquer Egypt. Neither Assyrian report can be connected with the Chronicles passage, as neither give any indication of arrest. It is difficult, therefore, to decide the Assyrian or the Hebrew version. The premise of this thesis concurs with Cogan that conceivably both contain elements of truth.

Nelson (1983:182) agrees that Manasseh's only real chance to chart an independent foreign policy would have come with the rebellion of Shamash-shum-ukin between 651 BCE and 648 BCE. As he points out, this was Mesopotamia's first serious internal squabble since the death of Sennacherib thirty years previously. The crisis was ended with the taking of Babylon in 648 BCE, the death of Shamash-shum-ukin, and mopping up operations between the Arabs in Elam, ending with the destruction of Susa in 646 BCE.

As Manasseh's stance as a punctilious vassal pertained during the reign of Esarhaddon (680-669 BCE), most writers have found the appropriate occasion of Manasseh's revolt to be the civil war led by Shamash-shum-ukin against Ashurbanipal. The uprising in Babylon reportedly stirred revolt in other territories. With the main insurrection in hand by 648 BCE, Ashurbanipal moved to make reprisals as far west as Edom and Moab, at which time he may have brought Manasseh into line for possible involvement on the side of Babylon (Albright 1963a:79). But Cogan (1974:69) objects strenuously to this reconstruction. He argues that Ashurbanipal's campaign to the west was concerned with maintaining control over the major Arabian trade routes. Action was, therefore, limited to territories east of the Jordan River. Moreover, the list of defeated towns and districts in the Ashurbanipal cylinder Rm. VII. 108-116 shows neither geographical nor chronological order, suggesting that it is a late compilation of sporadic local army reports. Judah was in no way implicated,

being situated as she was, outside the area of concern. This thesis concurs with Cogan's hypothesis.

The first quarter century of Manasseh's reign was a period of almost unlimited Assyrian power. Thus the only wise policy open to Manasseh was that of the loyal vassal. The fortification of Judah and Jerusalem reported in 2 Chronicles 33:14 was probably undertaken not as a show of independence from Assyria, but to help Judah serve its expected role as a buffer against the Egyptians. As Nielsen (1967:105) observes there is no reason to condemn Manasseh for doing what he had to do. Judah certainly benefited from this period of stability. Judah's territorial security over against the Edomites or the Philistine states would have been assured. Jerusalem continued its population explosion throughout this period. (See Broshi 1974:21-25). We know of no prophetic activity in Manasseh's reign, perhaps in part because there were no major crises, nor any real options in foreign policy to preach about.

Cogan's alternative suggestion (1974:69, 70) merits closer attention. According to the Babylonian Chronicle Esarhaddon had conducted an unsuccessful campaign against Egypt in 674 BCE, which might well have encouraged some of the kingdoms in the area to throw off their vassal status. The Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon which were discovered at Nimrud, and which specify the obligations of some of his eastern vassals, illustrate his likely response to rebellion, typical, of course, of all Assyrian kings, and the Babylonian Chronicle entry for 671 BCE states that he was able to take Memphis and put the Egyptian king to flight. Though this occasion is undated, Esarhaddon lived for only two years after his campaign of 671 BCE, so it is probable that the tribute of building materials by Manasseh and the other kings was paid between 671 and 669 BCE. (Cf. CAH Vol. III, 1991:375). Esarhaddon's campaign to Egypt in 671 BCE included punitive actions against cities along the Phoenician coast that had allied themselves with the Egyptian rebel, Taharqa. Tyre and Ashkelon are known to have come under serious attack. In addition, one very fragmentary inscription, in summary fashion, seems to record the pacification of all 22 western monarchs on this same occasion. These circumstances account well not only for the 'capture' of Manasseh, who had presumably sided with the anti-Assyrian coalition, but provide the background for the additional settlement of refugees in the Samaria province reported in Ezra 4:2. We can only imagine the terms under which Esarhaddon reinstated Manasseh on the throne; but if similar reports from the Annals are any indication, a renewed pledge of loyalty and increased tribute undoubtedly headed the list. The hypothesis of this thesis must agree with Cogan that not even at this juncture is there any ground for supposing a change in Judah's autonomous vassal status.

In the 650 BCE's Assyria gradually relaxed its hold on Egypt. Nelson (1983:181,2) offers the plausible theory that this took place with Assyria's tacit permission or at least benign neglect. Assyria had not wished to control Egypt politically in the first place and was increasingly preoccupied with an Elamite threat which began in 654 BCE and with rebellions among the Arab tribes. Any temptation Manasseh may have had to use this as an opportunity for independent action would have been tempered by the apparently still cordial relations between Egypt and Assyria, to say nothing of the Assyrian police actions taken against the Arabs in that decade, which involved



Edom, Moab, Ammon and Zobah.

It is not known whether Manasseh took this opportunity to withhold tribute or to give aid and comfort to Assyria's enemies. In a footnote Nelson (1983: 182) states that the Chronicler's report in 2 Chronicles 33:11-13 is clearly tendentious. He believes that although the Chronicler does provide us with reliable information about military construction and organization, we should hesitate to trust him when his own theology is so strongly supported by an event he reports without outside support. The mention of Babylon may be a kernel of historical truth. Ashurbanipal's gentle treatment of Necho I indicates a willingness to forgive a still useful vassal. The one solid clue is that Manasseh sacrificed his son sometime in his reign (2 Kgs. 21:6), an action of extreme national danger. In most of the editions of Ashurbanipal's historical texts which supply a framework of campaigns, the second is given to another expedition against Egypt. This account suggests that Taharqa had been succeeded by his nephew Tantamani (664-656 BCE), who had been able to reclaim the territory lost by his uncle. Ashurbanipal sent a punitive force, probably in 664 or 663 BCE to deal with this new trouble, and though there is no specific mention of the matter in the Bible, it is probable that the news of the passage along the coast route of a large Assyrian force encouraged Manasseh to continue his loyalty. The fact that Ashurbanipal was able to fight on the borders of Ammon and Edom suggests that they, like Moab, remained docile vassals. The Assyrian campaign was a success. All the events, which are included in the account of Prism B, must have taken place before the Babylonian rebellion of Shamash-shum-ukin, which occupied Ashurbanipal during the years 652 - 648 BCE, and are unlikely to have escaped Manasseh's attention, perhaps acting as an encouragement to him to remain subservient to Assyria. (CAH vol. III, 1991:379, 380).

Manasseh remained constrained for the next quarter century. But by the close of his reign Assyria seems to have permitted the building of Jerusalem's outer defenses and the restationing of Judahite forces in the countryside, perhaps to counter the increasingly hostile position of Psameticus I in Egypt. De Vaux (1969:230) noted the defense work undertaken by Hezekiah at Jerusalem was continued by Manasseh.

There is no indication whatever that throughout this period Manasseh was able to begin rebuilding Judaeen sites in the biblical Negev. Rainey (1993:151,2) is scathing about what he regards the so-called archaeological fact posited by Beit Arye, and believes Na'aman in 1987 developed an historical 'explanation' to the effect that Manasseh benefited from the *Pax Assyriaca* whereby commerce began to flourish along the trade routes to Arabia in the seventh century due to firm Assyrian control. Rainey regards what he condemns as 'this idle fancy' has been blown up into a full fledged chapter in Judaeen history. In his view, not only is it totally devoid of any real archaeological support, but it is also completely unrealistic with regard to Assyrian activity in the west. In fact, there were constant wars during the *Pax Assyriaca!*

The present understanding of Egypt's neutrality in this affair and the present dating of most of the Arab campaigns to before 651-48 BCE, make a rebellion less likely than it may once have seemed. This premise is pivotal to understanding Amon's short and violent career, and Josiah's actions. It is fair to say, however, that Manasseh's

decision, whatever it may have been, was conditioned by the realities of power politics and not by some unsubstantiated pro-Assyrian attitude.

The Bible offers two coherent reports on the reign of Manasseh, one in 2 Kings 21:1-18, the other in 2 Chronicles 33:1-20. Generally the Kings version report is more acceptable to scholars, who regard it as more trustworthy than that of the one in Chronicles, conceivably because of the Chronicler's evident bias. But a critical examination of 2 Kings 21 yields meagre details. We are told that Manasseh became king when aged twelve. His mother was Hephzibah. He reigned 55 years and was buried in the garden of Uzza. He was succeeded by his son, who had an Egyptian name, Amon. We are informed that Amon was born 22 years before the death of Manasseh, i.e. in 663 BCE, about the time of the Assyrian conquest of Thebes and the total subjugation of Egypt to Ashurbanipal. Additionally, 2 Kings 21 offers the very controversial report of Manasseh's religious activity. He rebuilt the local shrines which his pious father, Hezekiah, had destroyed, and he walked in the steps of the Israelite king Ahab, as far as Ba'al and Asherah worship was concerned. He introduced the worship of the host of heaven in two courts of the sanctuary of Jerusalem and was devoted to enchanters and wizards. He set up an image of Astarte in the shrine of the Lord, and he made his son to pass through fire.

The report of 2 Chronicles 33, although being dependent upon that of 2 Kings 21, differs from it on two essential points. First it is said in 2 Chronicles 33:11 ff. that Assyrian captains, by order of the Lord, took Manasseh away with hooks and fetters to Babylon. There Manasseh greatly humbled himself for the G-d of his fathers who heard his supplication and brought him back to Jerusalem. Having returned, Manasseh reformed the worship, so that the Lord, the G-d of Israel, was again worshipped in Jerusalem. It is added that at the local shrines in the Judaeen country, too, people worshipped the Lord (Nielsen 1967:103).

It is noteworthy that several scholars have credited in part, at least, the story of Manasseh's conversion in 2 Chronicles 33, so they are willing to accept an hypothesis according to which Manasseh rebelled against Ashurbanipal at the time when Shamash-shum-ukin, the governor of Babylon, started a revolt against his brother, the Assyrian king. Having overcome the rebellion in Babylon in 648 BCE, Ashurbanipal might have called Manasseh just to Babylon; and there he was pardoned. By means of their special report the Chronicles have given Manasseh a minor rehabilitation, and it might be supposed that the Deuteronomist purposely suppressed the historical tradition. However, the premise in this thesis agrees with Nielsen (1967:104) that even a transitory deportation of the Judaeen king should have been regarded by the Deuteronomists as a punishment, and it is, therefore, difficult to maintain that such a tradition should have been suppressed by them, had they had any knowledge of it.

We find the second deviation from the report of 2 Kings 21 and in 2 Chronicles 33:14. According to that verse Manasseh fortified the western side of Jerusalem and reorganised the military in the fortified cities of Judah.

But as far as the second deviation from the Book of Kings, in the report of 2 Chronicles 33:14 is concerned, there is every reason to give credence to it. Precisely because of his loyalty to Ashurbanipal, Manasseh was allowed to reconstruct the outer

wall of the city of David on the west side of Gihon, towards the Fish Gate, so that it encompassed Ophel, and to install captains in the fortified cities of Judah. In this way the kingdom of Judah might better serve its purpose as a kind of buffer state between Egypt and Assyria. And already in 655 BCE the Egyptian Psammetichus I rose up against the Assyrian king, who at that time had sufficient troubles in his own country.

Interestingly, apart from these two biblical texts Manasseh is mentioned twice in Assyrian inscriptions. Esarhaddon says that he summoned the kings of the Hatti-land, and the kings between the river, to Nineveh in order to acquire building materials for the construction of his palace. In this inscription Manasseh is mentioned together with Ba'alu, king of Tyre and Qaushgabri, king of Edom. Esarhaddon's building activity in Nineveh may be dated to one of the last years of his reign when he had pacified Syria and Phoenicia in order to start a campaign against Egypt (673 BCE). Esarhaddon's successor, Ashurbanipal, who conquered Egypt, mentions in an inscription almost the same royal persons when speaking of the vassals who had to accompany him on his march against Egypt shortly after his succession, when Taharka of Egypt had revolted. The three above-mentioned kings also occur. This is the only Assyrian inscription from the reign of Ashurbanipal in which the name of Manasseh is found. In many other inscriptions Ashurbanipal tells us in great detail of rebellious princes who had to pass under his yoke again, among them the kings of Tyre, Arvad and Cilicia. But the name of Manasseh does not occur. The inevitable conclusion must be that Manasseh was firmly in the Assyrian camp.

In concurrence with Nielsen (1967:104), this thesis believes that the Assyrian inscriptions from the 7th century BCE depict the political situation of the reign of Manasseh as one being marked by the culmination of Assyrian power, and by the steady loyalty of the Judaeen king towards Assyrian supremacy. This picture is indirectly confirmed by the Books of Kings, in which there is no word of any rebellion on the part of Manasseh, no word of any deportation to Babylon, but on the contrary many mentions of the influence of Assyrian culture and religion, which was allowed to make itself felt in Jerusalem and its royal shrine during the reign of Manasseh.

From what we know of the Deuteronomist, any observations concerning the political and military points of view would, however, have been of less importance than culture and religion (cf. *inter alia* Nielsen 1967:104). From the very beginning their main cause was the fight against every kind of foreign influence. And it is just here that the similarity between the reign of Ahab and that of Manasseh is obvious. The only difference is that in the case of Ahab the threat against the Israelite culture came from Phoenicia, whereas in the reign of Manasseh it was the Assyrian culture which infiltrated the culture and religion of Judah. From the history of Ahab we know of strong reactions against the foreign culture, a reaction which was guided by the prophets Elijah and Elisha. Now the question is whether or not it is possible to demonstrate that similar reactionary movements took place in Judah against the religious policy of Manasseh. Nielsen believes that we have to leave the Deuteronomistic passage of 2 Kings 21:8-15 out of the account, since it was written not less than 80 years after the death of Manasseh.

### **3.3.6.1 Prophetic Activity in Manasseh's Reign**

The prophets of Israel and Judah were called into action chiefly in periods of political crisis, more or less conveniently for their people and their king, to whom they had to deliver their oracles. It is of extreme significance that the Bible knows by name of no prophet during the reign of Manasseh. Just before his kingship we have the Judaeen prophets Proto-Isaiah and Micah, and not many years after his death we find Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk and Jeremiah. This lack of prophetic activity in this period must not therefore be interpreted as if the religious conditions during his reign were not deeply decayed. During the 55 year reign of Manasseh when the Assyrians dominated the world, an independent Judaeen policy was simply precluded. So there had hardly been an occasion for any prophet to deliver any public message, just as was the case in a later period, when the Persian government was established during the reign of Darius I. Then the voice of the prophets became silent for centuries. The prophets were interpreters. Their silence must be an indication that despite censure against Manasseh, his ability as a king cannot be faulted.

It should again be emphasised that in spite of heavy duties to the Assyrians, and in spite of the obligation of placing Judaeen auxiliaries at the disposal of the Assyrian king, Manasseh's 55 years' of government most certainly was a period of prosperity. As Nielsen (1967:106) observes the syncretism in Jerusalem was one of the reasons for these urgent warnings against foreign customs, and they reveal that the Judaeen Levites, in spite of the material favour which Manasseh bestowed upon them, ultimately could not avoid taking a controversial position *vis-a-vis* the ruling circles of Jerusalem.

### 3.3.6.2 Religious Situation under Manasseh

Inasmuch as Nineveh never issued a "white paper" in religious policies within the Assyrian empire, Cogan (1974:5,6) poses leading questions of the Neo-Assyrian historical corpus (i.e. royal inscriptions, state letters, legal and business documents):

- (i) Did Assyrian conquest and rule affect the on-going native cults of defeated nations? In what areas?
- (ii) Was it imperial policy to impose the worship of Assyrian gods? What specific cultic demands were made? Was such policy enforced in all territories?

Only with an account of Neo-Assyrian religious policy in hand, arrived at isolation from the biblical record, do we turn to re-study specific Israelite problems from the period of Assyrian domination over Palestinian affairs, i.e. ca. 750-625 BCE. To the biblical data we address the following questions:

- (a) What pagan innovations in the Israelite cult were peculiar to the Neo-Assyrian age? Can their introduction be traced to Assyrian imperial policy?
- (b) What were the immediate and long-range effects of Assyrian policy upon traditional Israelite religion?

Biblical narratives of the Neo-Assyrian age provide complementary evidence of the tolerant Assyrian religious policies both in the provinces and in vassal states. Judah, for the better part of a century (ca. 740-640 BCE) bore the onerous yoke of Assyrian vassalage, but never experienced the imposition of Assyrian cults. The foreign innovations reported by the reigns of Ahaz and Manasseh are attributable to the

voluntary adoption by Judah's ruling classes of the prevailing Assyro-Aramaean culture. Pagan cults, whether of Mesopotamian origin - as e.g. horse dedications to the sun god, seem to have gained entrance into Judah through Aramaean mediation, only after having merged with local Palestinian pagan traditions (Cogan 1974:88), or of Aramaean derivation - as e.g. Molech child sacrifice. One of the most vexing problems of late Judahite religion is the notorious cult of Molech. Due to the inconsistent biblical accounts of the cult, opinion is divided as to its nature and extent. Legal texts are unequivocal in their descriptions of the prohibited cult. Apart from the Holiness Code, the terms of Deuteronomic law, too, prohibit the "transfer by fire/passing through fire" of sons or daughters. Historical accounts record similar distinctions. Of both Ahaz and Manasseh it is said: "*He passed his son through fire*" (2 Kgs. 16:3; 21:16). This royal observance of Molech ritual, which came to an end with the Josianic reforms, seems to have reached Palestine through Aramaean mediation, and was then wedded to local pagan practice. In Judah, disenchantment with YHWHistic tradition, which apparently could not account for the grievous state of affairs after Hezekiah's defeat in 701 BCE, abetted the assimilation of such foreign ritual.

In 1923 Oestreicher (quoted in McKay 1973:1) postulated that politics and religion in the ancient world cannot be separated from each other, and thus any religious event must also be political. The account of Judah's religion recorded in 2 Kings 16-23 should, therefore, be read in the context of world history. Since this was the age of Assyrian suzerainty, the cult in Jerusalem itself became, to all intents and purposes, Assyrian during the reign of Ahaz. Ahaz set aside the old altar of YHWH and replaced it by a new one dedicated to Ashur of Nineveh. After the abortive revolt of Hezekiah, Judah remained faithful to Assyria until, on the occasion of the death of Ashurbanipal, (according to Oestreicher's chronology in 627 BCE, the 12th year of Josiah's reign) the Judaeen king rose in rebellion and began his purge of Assyrian gods.

McKay (1973:3) avers that while the premise regarding the inseparability of religion and politics found support, many of the details of Oestreicher's thesis have not proved acceptable. His central arguments, that Judah was obliged to accept the cults of her overlord as a sign of vassal status, and that motivation for the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah was primarily political, have been widely welcomed and supported. Indeed a number of scholars have seen in these arguments the solution to the historical and religious problems of the century of Assyrian rule in Judah. Cross & Freedman (1953:56-58) attempted to restate and reaffirm Oestreicher's thesis, by arguing that all the dates given in 2 Chronicles 34:3ff., including Josiah's eighth year, correlate exactly with major upheavals in the Assyrian empire during its years of decline. The reigns of Ahaz and Manasseh, because marked by (Assyrian) paganism, have been regarded as times when Assyrian overlordship was passively accepted. Even the book of Deuteronomy has been thought to be, in part at least, the deposit of a movement for national revival and independence calling Israel to holy war against all paganism in the land during the Assyrian era. Thus, over the years there has grown a complete interpretation of Judah's history and religion founded on the premise that, as a vassal kingdom, she was obliged to worship the gods of her overlord, Assyria. The problem

to be solved is whether Ahaz took his action because he had become so decadent, or whether he was forced to do so. If the former, he was the cause of the people's idolatry. If the latter, the altar in the Temple was merely a sign of submission to the overlord. A similar situation occurs when we come to analyse Manasseh.

While conceding that not every argument has been found to be equally acceptable, for many the central theme has remained convincing. McKay (1973:4) conjectures most scholars prefer to allow a wider estimation of the role of Deuteronomy in Josiah's reformation and would argue that the reforms were partly motivated by its demands, but they would also maintain that the earlier stages of reform resulted from the pressure of an anti-Assyrian movement for independence. However, the whole hypothesis needs to be re-examined. Firstly, it has been questioned whether the altar that Ahaz installed in the Temple was a copy of an Assyrian one rather than a Damascene prototype.

During a visit to Damascus to greet Tiglath-pileser III after the Assyrian conquest of that city, 732 BCE, Ahaz observed an altar whose design he sent back to Jerusalem. If we take into account that this design was from Damascus, then it can be accepted that the new altar replaced the old Solomonic bronze altar, which was set aside for use by the king in his own private worship (2 Kgs. 16:10-18).

McKay (1973:4) has also proposed that the note in 2 Chronicles 33:1-13 about Manasseh's summons before the Assyrian king may be historically trustworthy and may indicate that he was not always as passively submissive to his overlord as the proliferation of paganism in his reign is taken to suggest. While a few would still maintain that most of the gods worshipped in Judah at this time were Assyrian, an increasing number of scholars are inclined to identify most of them with local Palestinian deities and it has even been argued that the cult of the Host of Heaven was indigenous rather than Assyrian. Finally, this thesis, in concurrence with McKay, believes that the contemporary records of the Assyrians which have recently come to light, provide no clear evidence that they regularly imposed their gods on subject peoples.

The theory that the Assyrians imposed the worship of their gods on Judah, which was widely accepted, formed the basis for many detailed studies in Old Testament history and religion. But an attempt by McKay (1973:23-27) has been made to show that this hypothesis rests on an unsubstantial foundation. He supports his premise by pointing out that the various deities worshipped in Judah during the period of Assyrian domination lack the definitive aspects of the Assyrian gods and generally exhibit the characteristics of popular Palestinian paganism. They were worshipped, not as official representatives of the overlord in the Temple, but in the local cults of the Judaeen populace. Similarly, it has been seen that the cultic innovations of Ahaz and Manasseh, heretofore interpreted in terms of the overlord's imposition of religious sanctions, do not appear to have been acts of "Assyrianization", but rather to reflect many different forms of digression from traditional YHWHism and apostasy to a wide variety of indigenous and foreign practices. As in the days of Hellenization, we should possibly look at the different religious outlooks and many parties. It is possible that there was a "YHWH-only" party/group, and possibly the Deuteronomist came from

this group. It is equally possible that many of the prophets belonged to this group. As in the days of the Hellenists, there was undoubtedly a tendency among certain groups to "Assyrianise", in order to survive. Similarly, in the accounts of the purges of Hezekiah and Josiah no element of anti-Assyrian polemic has been found, and it seems logical to infer that Assyrian cults played no significant part in the politics or the religion of Judah. This conclusion is further supported by the observation that extant Near Eastern writings offer no evidence to support the hypothesis that imposition of the cult of Ashur was a regular feature of any importance in the Assyrian religio-political ideal.

On the other hand, it is not suggested that there was no Assyrian religious influence in this period. Indeed, the Old Testament clearly indicates that a number of Mesopotamian gods were known and worshipped in Judah, both before and after the time of the nation's vassalhood. But there is no indication whatsoever that these represented an official Assyrian presence in the land.

If correct, it suggests that the hypothesis itself is beginning to crumble. Biblical scholars should look again at the accounts of Judah's relationship with her Assyrian overlord, to test the premises and arguments of Oestreicher and his followers, and to re-evaluate the significance of the available sources, for our understanding of the nature of Israelite history and religion in this period.

Following McKay's lead (1973), Cogan (1974) toppled the argument that Judah as a vassal was obliged to accept Assyrian cultural and religious domination. In fact, the course of Assyria's century-long domination emerges clearly: Judah was permitted to retain its national sovereignty in return for loyal submission to Assyrian political will. One is impressed by Assyria's apparent reluctance and/or inability to expend efforts on incorporation of Jerusalem - implying, thereby, **the city's insignificance for imperial goals**. Accordingly, as an independent vassal-state Judah suffered none of the religious impositions known to Assyrian provinces. The genesis of foreign innovations in the Judahite cult during the Neo-Assyrian era, often seen as impositions of the Assyrian empire, must now be sought in other areas.

The prophecies of Zephaniah provide a striking eye-witness account of the cosmopolitan atmosphere in Jerusalem prior to the Josianic reforms, which complement the picture derived from extra-biblical a scene not unlike the Hellenist and Roman periods. It is not one of violent religious reactionism, nor of enforced paganism. Quiet, complacent assimilation prevails. Courtiers ape *'foreign dress'* and *'skip over the threshold'* in Philistine fashion, while filling the temple with the gain of their lawlessness and treachery (Zeph. 1:8-9). Zephaniah warns of the impending doom of YHWH which will overtake all those who *'bow on rooftops to the heavenly host'* and *'swear by YHWH'* and *'their king'* at one and the same time (1:20). But these arrogant Jerusalemites believe: *'YHWH will neither benefit nor harm'* (1:12).

During the time of Ahaz YHWH was increasingly forsaken for the false hope that comes from empty cult and dark ritual. Under Hezekiah (or conceivably under Hezekiah who, in turn, was under the influence of a certain party or group) a glimmer of hope returned. Judah, with various other Palestinian states, rebelled against Assyria in the sincere hope that independence could be re-established. The nationalistic zeal

engendered on this occasion was sufficient to encourage both king and people to rally to the banner of YHWH and put their whole trust in his power to save. Naturally, this meant that the cult had to be purged, strengthened and unified. YHWH was therefore declared sovereign and independent, and all symbols of his vassal status were removed. A 'miraculous' deliverance of the city from the jaws of Sennacherib's powerful Assyrian army in 701 BCE added further impetus to this zeal and must indubitably have encouraged further reforming activity throughout the land.

The excitement and religious fervour after Jerusalem's 701 BCE deliverance were shortlived. A feeling of disillusionment in YHWH's ability to change the fortunes of his people was abroad. Isaiah's promises of ultimate victory over the Assyrian enemy notwithstanding (e.g. Isa. 10:12-19), Judah's observable situation for close to a century was subservience to the will of Assyria. Owing to this political decline, Judahites succumbed to the lure of new gods. Judah was not strong enough to maintain her independent status and now entered a long 'dark age' of vassaldom, which continued more or less unbroken for well over half the seventh century. Once more true YHWHism went into partial eclipse behind the resurgent paganism of Ahaz's reign. The Canaanite cults reappeared throughout the land and the obnoxious rites in honour of Molech were revived. Astral cults flourished together with such superstitious practices as divination and necromancy. Among Manasseh's cultic innovations in the Jerusalem sanctuary was worship of the heavenly host (2 Kgs. 21:3), i.e. the sun, moon, stars and planets. At open-air altars in the two Temple courts (2 Kgs. 21:5) and the roof of the royal residence (23:12) the heavenly host was served by bowing, censuring and libation. According to Cogan (1974:84) the "host" was apparently an imageless cult, and although occasionally cited in company with Ba'al and Asherah, no specific deity was ever invoked by name in its service. YHWHistic zeal had dwindled with the departure of hope for independence and its decline amongst the populace was given additional impetus by the example set by the king himself. Manasseh, probably because of his marriages and other alliances, introduced the Phoenician cults of Ba'al and Asherah to the national shrine itself and dedicated a plot of land in the city to the god of his Arabian wife. The stars were also venerated in the Temple, no doubt partly as a result of Assyrian influence, and a sun-cult with horses and chariots and with its own sacred buildings was established in the Temple court. McKay (1973:72) argues that these and other abuses illustrate the multiform nature of paganism under Manasseh, and he believes that doubtless behind each non-YHWHistic cult and practice there lies a tale that can no longer be told. But the complexity itself is an indication that no one simple hypothesis will solve all the mysteries of this obscure period. The premise in this thesis concurs that Assyrian influence must have been considerable by this time, to be sure, but it seems that Manasseh's sympathies were not undivided. The Assyrian king, if the Chroniclers' tradition is to be accepted, did not always regard Manasseh's fidelity as being beyond reproach. It may thus be that his grounds for suspicion lay in the observation that Manasseh maintained close contact with his neighbours, who were not the least troublesome of Assyrian vassals. Undoubtedly these unions and alliances have left their traces on the accounts of his reign, as also have a whole variety of other pressures and circumstances, many of which are now inevitably lost to history.



In the final analysis it must be recognised that, just as the actions of both Ahaz and Hezekiah were governed largely by the age in which they lived, so also the reign of Manasseh was ideally suited to the revival of paganism. As the Assyrians asserted their authority, Judah began to recognise her weakness and the excitement of rebellion died. No doubt, when the populace realized that there was no real hope of independence in the foreseeable future, their religious fervour too was dimmed. Disillusioned once more by the seeming ineffectuality of their national G-d, many must have turned to the "stronger" gods of Assyria, and to the cults which offered more immediate satisfaction. The old Canaanite cults reappeared and their local sanctuaries were restored throughout the country, including the savage rites of the Hinnom Valley. The religions of popular superstition flourished again and soon star-worship, soothsaying, augury, necromancy and wizardry became common in both city and land. It does, however, also seem fairly clear that Manasseh himself positively encouraged this revival of heathenism, since he introduced the gods of his intimate allies, permitted both foreign and superstitious religion in the Temple precincts, and attempted to silence opposition. He is, therefore, rightly condemned by the Deuteronomist, but one wonders how it could have been otherwise, for this was an age when the voice of YHWHism was inevitably falling on deaf ears.

Manasseh's restoration of the rural cult sites and their pagan accoutrements, rejected by the reforms of his father, Hezekiah (cf. 2 Kgs. 21:3), becomes understandable as well, once we recognise the religious exigencies of the late Neo-Assyrian era. In concurrence with Cogan (1974:96) this thesis suggests that this unprecedented demoralization threatened Judah's unique cultural and religious identity; only with the return of national self-confidence, which was to follow upon the decline of Assyria, could the assimilation of Manasseh's age be halted.

As we can be certain now that Assyria did not demand the adoption of its religion as a condition of vassalage, Manasseh's religious policies cannot automatically be taken as indications of subservient vassalage, nor Josiah's reformation as a declaration of political independence from Assyria. The religious policies of these two kings can more reasonably be understood now as matters of internal struggle. The *lmlk* jar handle stamps<sup>1</sup> can no longer be used to deny any substantive expansion of Josiah to the North. Nelson (1983:177,8) points out that new light has been thrown on the last decades of Assyrian history in matters of chronology, and by redaction-critical studies of the source material. This should justify a new look at the previous preconceptions on the period.

Public recognition of Assyria's political suzerainty by the vanquished, which took the form of ceremonious surrender, and the avowal of subject status, was usually sufficient to obtain the restoration of the exiled statues to their shrines. There is no evidence, textual or pictorial, to suggest that Assyria subjected native cults to regulation or that it interfered in any way with customary rites.

While Nineveh extended official recognition to foreign gods, it also required subject

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<sup>1</sup> Formerly thought to date both Sennacherib's campaign of 701 BCE to Judah and in Josiah's reign, it is now known that the *lmlk* jar stamps apply only to the former.

peoples to acknowledge the majesty of Assyria's 'great gods'. However, only in territories formally annexed as provinces was an Assyrian cult introduced, the planting of 'Ashur's weapon' in the provincial centre serving as its focal point.

Such cultic impositions obtained only within the territorial confines of the Assyrian state; vassal states bore no cultic obligations whatsoever. Alliance with Assyria demanded of vassals unwavering loyalty in political and economic matters, and any trespass of loyalty oaths (adu) incurred immediate punishment. But there is no record of the imposition of Assyrian cults upon vassal states. The occasional presence of the royal stele in these territories merely served to mark the outer reaches of Assyria's political influence and did not signify the inauguration of a royal cult, an idea itself foreign to Assyria. Another possibility, of course, is the ancient concept of indicating property and especially inheritable property, by means of 'house idols'. Perhaps the placing of an Assyrian idol in a vassal state's main sanctuary had something to do with indicating possession, or authority, or some kind of ownership - especially if the cultic tolerance of the Assyrians are taken into account.

This thesis fully concurs with McKay's assessment (1973:20) that since there is little in 2 Kings 21:1-18 which does not derive from the pen of the Deuteronomist, or of the exilic redactor, which were probably written "as a prelude to the reformation of Josiah", care must be exercised in distinguishing history from polemic. *Prima facie* there is no reason to doubt that Manasseh did have official Assyrian cults in the Temple. On the other hand, the cult could equally well be indigenous. There is nothing in the text to indicate whether these abuses had been introduced under compulsion or had arisen spontaneously. Nevertheless, the sources at our disposal do give much information about Manasseh's apostasy and they seem to indicate that his official policy may not have been simply Assyrianization.

In short, the diminutive Judahite state was buffeted on all sides by the cultural patterns dominant in the Assyrian empire. Although Assyria made no formal demands for cultural uniformity among its subjects, one of the by-products of political and economic subjugation was a tendency toward cultural homogeneity. Involved as it was in imperial affairs, Judah was faced with the problem of assimilation of foreign norms on a national scale, for the first time in its history. Abetting this natural process of assimilation were Judah's leading circles, who, according to Zephaniah, had become disenchanted with Israel's G-d, or had discerned greater gains with other gods. From our own times and the influence (often very decadent) of the USA, for example, one can safely say that cultural examples are often more enduring and especially far more forceful than any other types of examples.

There are two significant omissions in the Chronicler's copying of the introduction and conclusion to the reigns of Manasseh and Amon. The names of Hephzibah and Meshullemeth, the mothers of Manasseh and Amon, are omitted in the Chronicler's history, although he faithfully recorded the name of every preceding Judaeon queen-mother where that name was in the Kings parallel. The Chronicler, clearly ashamed to claim Maacah as queen-mother of the good King Asa, avoided mentioning her name as far as possible and, when she was introduced as queen-mother of Abijah, he altered her non-YHWHistic name, Maacah daughter of Abishalom, to the more

acceptable Micaiah daughter of Uriel (2 Chron. 13:2). The name of Hephzibah must similarly have been considered a stain on the reputation of both Manasseh and the Davidic dynasty, as also were the names of the mothers of Amon and Josiah (McKay 1973:22,3). McKay's (1973) and Cogan's (1974) studies of the records of Manasseh's reign explain some of the hitherto enigmatic features of the records of his reign and it may be that he showed no more fidelity to Assyria than necessity dictated.

### 3.3.6.3 Biblical picture of Manasseh

At first sight the section of Manasseh in the Book of Kings appears rather dull. It seems to consist mainly of an enumeration of all the evil Manasseh perpetrated during his long reign. Nevertheless, rather dramatically Smelik (1992:132) suggests that a close reading of the passage on Manasseh reveals that the author presents to the reader a well-balanced portrayal of the king as G-d's principal antagonist on earth.

The catalogue of Manasseh's sins is enumerated and the more specific sins are also listed. He is reported to have made several cult objects and installations which the biblical authors associate with idolatry: high places, altars for other gods than the Lord, asherahs as well as images. For the period before the building of the Temple at Jerusalem, the biblical authors consider these cult places as legitimate, as we can see from I Kings 3-2:

*"Only the people sacrificed at the high places, for no Temple was built for the name of the Lord until those days".*

After the building of the Temple, however, the high places became illicit, at least in the eyes of the authors. In I Kings 11:7-8, Solomon is censured for having built high places for the gods worshipped by his many foreign wives.

In 2 Kings 16:4 it is told of King Ahaz that he himself made offerings at the high places, which were only abolished by Hezekiah. After Manasseh had rebuilt them, they were finally destroyed by Josiah. It can be concluded from this that Manasseh committed a serious offence by rebuilding the high places and annulling the reform of his father Hezekiah. It is a deed only comparable to idolatrous acts of Solomon and Jeroboam I.

It is noticeable that no other king is reputed to have perpetrated all the acts of idolatry that Manasseh did. Other kings are accused of only some of Manasseh's sins. This means that Manasseh is worse than even such notorious monarchs like Jeroboam I, Baasha, Ahab and Ahaz. Manasseh's reign is regarded the nadir of the history of kingship in Israel. Whereas in Kings we see that many of Manasseh's sins are also attributed to the Israelites and Judaeans in general, 2 Kings 21:17 however, states:

*"And as for the rest of the acts of Manasseh and all that he did, and his sin that he sinned, are they not written in the Book of Chronicles of the Kings of Judah?"*

The remark about Manasseh's sin is unique within the context of the other references to sources in the Book of Kings (Cogan and Tadmor 1988: 269). As an appendix to the list of Manasseh's sins, we find in 2 Kings 21:16 a comment on the many murders committed by Manasseh in Jerusalem.

The double sin in 2 Kings 21:3 in which Manasseh set up altars to Ba'al and made an asherah is dealt by Smelik (1992:145), who compares both acts with the idolatry of Ahab. The Torah strictly forbids the typical pagan idolatry of asherah, thus Manasseh's action is serious. The next transgression in Manasseh's list is the veneration of the heavenly host. In the Book of Kings the adoration of the heavenly host is associated only with Manasseh and the Israelites in general, and this practice is brought to an end by Josiah, which had been introduced by his grandfather. The cult is also criticised in Deuteronomy and Jeremiah. The fact that Manasseh is the only king censured for this kind of worship underlines once more the serious nature of his transgressions.

In 2 Kings 21:6a, Manasseh is also accused of *'making his son pass through the fire'*, which is probably a euphemism for sacrificing his own child by fire. This sacrifice, forbidden in the Torah, is also attributed to king Ahaz, to the Canaanites, the Israelites, Judaeans and to the new immigrants in the former Northern Kingdom. In the Books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel it features as a clear example of the horrifying consequences to which the people's disobedience - or fear - leads.

Smelik (1992: 146,7) continues that also in 2 Kings 21:6 four kinds of idolatrous divinations are mentioned in which Manasseh is supposed to have participated. From other texts it becomes clear that there were more expressions for the author from which to choose. In Deuteronomy 18:10-11 we even find a list of eight types of divination which are prohibited. The only other monarch who is connected with necromancy is Saul, while Josiah is reputed to have completely suppressed this kind of divination. The culmination of the idolatrous acts was Manasseh's making of an idol representing the goddess Asherah, which he placed in the Temple. The only parallel for this act of image worship (and then it was not placed in the Temple) was Maacah, mother of Asa, who is blamed in I Kings 15:3 for making an idol. Asa destroyed the idol and burned it near the brook Kidron. Manasseh's asherah was pulverised by Josiah (2 Kgs. 23:4) who also burnt the cult vessels of Ba'al, Asherah and the heavenly host.

McKay (1973:26) observes that the Deuteronomist gave no details of Manasseh's reign, but was solely concerned to depict his age as Israel's darkest, as a foil to the reign of Josiah. Doubtless the Chronicler also exaggerated the comprehensiveness of Manasseh's reforms, but there is an element of truth. Manasseh probably sympathised with his neighbours in their rebellion, being united to them by marriages and other now unknown ties. These unions have left their traces on the accounts of the reign, indicating also that Manasseh was apostate to the paganism of Canaan, Phoenicia, Arabia and possibly even Egypt. It is therefore not at all obvious that the mere mention of the Host of Heaven in 2 Kings 21 can be regarded as indicative of the presence of enforced Assyrian cults (never mentioned otherwise) in the Jerusalem Temple.

Manasseh is the complete opposite of his father, Hezekiah, in his pagan actions. The comparison with those two of all the Israelite and Judaeans kings suggests that Manasseh's fate will be identical with that of Ahab, whose dynasty was exterminated at G-d's command (2 Kgs. 10:30) and not with that of Hezekiah, whose lifetime was

extended by an act of divine grace. Manasseh acted in the same way or even worse than the Canaanites, who had been disinherited and destroyed by the Lord, because of those abominations. Moreover, the king seduced his people to follow him. It is therefore evident to the biblical writers that the same fate would befall him and his people.

Smelik (1992:159) is intrigued with a comparison between the behaviour of an individual, (though a king) and that of a whole nation. He also finds it a striking feature in the latter part of the Second Book of Kings as the alternation in the representation of fathers and sons as good or as wicked kings. Ahaz is depicted as a godless king, his son Hezekiah as a pious monarch, and his grandson Manasseh again as an evil king. According to the scheme, Amon should have been portrayed as a pious king, but this role is attributed to Amon's son, Manasseh's grandson, Josiah. It is Josiah who brings Manasseh's idolatrous heritage to an end. Josiah takes counteractions against all of Manasseh's idolatrous deeds. We can thus conclude that Manasseh is the negative counterpart of Josiah.

The problem for the biblical writer was that Manasseh's reign was the longest in the history of Israel and that he died a natural death at the age of sixty-seven. Smelik (1992:162,3) believes this circumstance precluded the possibility that the author could present the king as paying for his sins during his life, unless he were to change the existing chronology in the framework. Therefore, the reckoning had to be of a different nature. It can be discerned that in other chapters of the Books of Kings several instances of a possible solution for this kind of problem are encountered. The author introduces an oracle of doom into the account, in which it is foretold that the king's sons and dynasty will meet with disaster because of their father's sin. This solution could have been used here too as far as it concerned Manasseh's son, Amon, who was murdered after a reign of two years. It would, however, have created insuperable difficulties with regard to Manasseh's grandson Josiah, who, after all, is portrayed as Judah's best monarch since David. It is evident that he could not have been punished because of his grandfather's sins. Moreover, an oracle announcing the end of the Davidic dynasty would have been in contradiction to earlier prophecies in which David is promised an eternal 'house'. Another solution had to be found, and indeed one was. Neither Manasseh nor the Davidic dynasty had to pay for the king's sins. The people of Jerusalem and Judah were to pay.

#### **3.3.6.4 Some theories concerning Manasseh's culpability**

Finally, our investigation calls into question critical discounting of the Deuteronomist's charge that Manasseh alone was responsible for Judah's fall. Von Rad (1961:77) following Noth's 1958 formulation, put it succinctly: The Deuteronomist's sole concern was a theological interpretation of the catastrophes which befell the two kingdoms. Consequently, he examined past history page by page with that in view, and the result was quite unambiguous: the fault was not YHWH's; but for generations Israel had been piling up an ever-increasing burden of guilt and faithlessness, so that in the end YHWH was obliged to reject His people.

Cogan (1974:114) regards Manasseh as merely that Judahite king who, culminating an almost unbroken series of breaches of the revealed will of G-d, tipped the scales

in favour of the long-due judgment.

Cross (1967:17) rejects this view of the Deuteronomistic historian. He believes that before the pericope of Manasseh there is no hint in the Deuteronomic history that hope in the Davidic house and in ultimate salvation is futile. To Cross the very persistence of this theme of hope in the promises to David and his house, requires that the Deuteronomist was writing a sermon to rally G-d's people to the new possibility of salvation, obedience to the ancient covenant of YHWH, and hope in the new David, Josiah.

Cross (1967:18) further contends that the attribution of Judah's demise to the unforgivable sins of Manasseh is the product of an exilic editor (ca. 550 BCE) tacked on and not integral to the original structure of the [Kings] history.

Cogan (1974:114,5) poses the question as to whether the passages condemning Manasseh are really 'tacked on', or whether Manasseh was merely the *most* recent idolator in Judah's past. He tends to believe that this was not. The Deuteronomistic historian viewed the age of Manasseh as unprecedented both in the nature and scope of its 'apostasy'. Our literary and archaeological study has confirmed this evaluation; it was indeed an age of unprecedented abandonment of Israelite tradition. Heretofore royal 'apostates' had been blamed for straying from the Mosaic law for known causes, such as foreign wives instigated both Solomon and Jehoram to idolatry. But all previous idolators had been punished. Only Manasseh's apostasy was 'groundless' and unexpiated. The feeling that such enormities as described in 2 Kings 21:1-16 could only be expiated through destruction and exile, need not be late exilic rationalization. After Israel's collapse in 720 BCE, the threat of exile hung over Judah. When the hopes of YHWH's grace were dashed by Josiah's untimely death in 609 BCE, the presentiment of doom may have set in (cf. Jeremiah 15:4). This thesis concurs with Cogan that Manasseh's dubious distinction need not, therefore, be ascribed to schematized historiography, nor is it peripheral to the Deuteronomistic history. It expresses the resignation of those Judahites who, having sponsored the Josianic reforms, now anticipated YHWH's final judgment.

The Biblical author succeeds in uniting both themes, namely of the idolatry of Manasseh and the disobedience of the people, and in this way succeeded in smoothing away the problem that Judah, rather than Manasseh, would pay the penalty for the king's idolatry. The author's solution of the problem as to who will undergo the punishment for Manasseh's sins, has interesting implications. It gave the authors of Kings the possibility to explain why the Babylonians could crush the Judaeen state with G-d's consent, notwithstanding the great virtues of their favourite monarch, Josiah.

The representation of Manasseh in 2 Chronicles 33:1-20 differs from that in 2 Kings 21:1-18. In Kings, several kinds of idolatrous acts are attributed to Manasseh (previously described) in order to portray him as the most reprobate king who ever reigned, more wicked even than the Israelite kings and the Amorites. In Chronicles, Manasseh is reputed to have perpetrated almost the same sins, but the effect on the readers is quite different. Firstly, because Manasseh later repents and tries to account for the evil he did previously. Secondly, because the representation of the other

Israelite and Judaeon kings in Chronicles is also different. The Chronicler and the Deuteronomist both present highly stylised descriptions of Manasseh. For both authors he is a key figure, symbolising something much greater than himself. The authors are diametrically opposed, however, in the way they understand Manasseh's significance. For the Chronicler, Manasseh is a symbol of punished, restored and newly blessed Israel. To Lowery (1991:189) the historical kernel of the story of Manasseh's exile and restoration is impossible to recover from known sources, but the historical veracity of the Chronicler's account is highly doubtful. Manasseh's exile, restoration and reform function to keep hope alive in the post-exilic Israel.

The premise of this thesis is in agreement with Lowery (1991:189) who proposes that the Deuteronomist's Manasseh represents Judah's most dangerous threat, as he is the mirror-opposite of Josiah. The portrayal of Manasseh is intended not so much to explain an accomplished fact (the Babylonian exile) as to warn against an unrepentant path. It is not reflection on disaster. It is preparation for reform. The characterisations and threats of the Deuteronomist's Manasseh narrative prepare the reader for radical change, the radical change of Josiah's deuteronomic reform. The Manasseh narrative in its definitive form is Josianic-era literature of persuasion, supporting the necessity of Josiah's reform.

Regarding 2 Chronicles 33:1-20, the Chronicler's version of Manasseh's rule, like Kings, is heavily stylised to reflect the author's key theological themes. Manasseh's surprising repentance and cult reform, supported by no other known source, raises historical questions to be sure. But the Chronicler's portrayal of Manasseh has more important significance as a metaphor for post-exilic Israel. (Cf. Noth *DH*:73 quoted by Lowery, 1991:185, who says the Deuteronomist explicitly sets up a parallel between the immanent fate of the state of Judah and the accomplished fate of the state of Israel.) Manasseh's story shows Israel the efficacy of repentance. YHWH not only forgives, but brings prosperity to those who humble themselves and turn from even the most wicked ways.

The Chronicler's report of Manasseh's Babylonian exile and subsequent restoration has sparked a good deal of discussion about the historical record of his reign. Older works dismissed the account as another example of Chronicler's "pure fiction" (see Torrey in *Ezra Studies* p.231 cited by Lowery 1991:186). Burrows (1955:126) expressed the opinion of many scholars, that, when writing history, the Chronicler "interprets the whole past in terms of individual retribution, even though this sometimes involves a radical reconstruction of what could be known from the more ancient sources". Eissfeldt and Rudolph (cited in notes 3 and 4 by Lowery 1991:186) anticipated more recent arguments which find a kernel of history for Manasseh's exile in the gathering of Assyrian vassals in 672 BCE when Ashurbanipal took the throne. The Chronicler either misinterpreted or magnified this meeting, turning it into a personal exile for Manasseh. Still others (*inter alia* McKay 1973:22-27, Oded 1977:455-56 and Reviv 1979:200-201) defend the basic historicity of Manasseh's detention in Babylon, relating it to the crushed rebellion of Ashurbanipal's brother, Shamash-shum-ukin. Manasseh's participation in a rebellion is out of character with the Judaeon monarch portrayed in the sources outside Chronicles. Lowery adds that the lack of external confirmation of Manasseh's exile is insufficient in itself to judge

the account unhistorical. In his view the account's heavy patterning to reflect key themes of Chronicles, however, casts serious doubt on its accuracy. Lowery therefore believes there are plenty of reasons to think the Chronicler has fabricated the story to fit the book's larger purposes, and few reasons to believe that he has picked up the story from a reliable source.

Smelik (1992:179) has pointed out that a main distinction between Kings and Chronicles is the fact that the Israelite kings are scarcely mentioned in Chronicles. In Kings the general representation of the Judaeen monarchs is more positive than that of the Israelite kings. Although some Judaeen kings sin, the Israelite kings always prove to be worse, except in the case of Manasseh. The author of Chronicles shares the negative outlook on the Israelite kings but focuses almost completely on the behaviour of the Judaeen monarchs. Manasseh, on account of his deeds after his conversion, belongs to the group of Judaeen kings who in Chronicles are reputed to have suppressed idolatry.

Undoubtedly Chronicles and Kings present slanted views of Manasseh. For the Chronicler, an otherwise unreported conversion and reform solves the theological problem of Manasseh's success, but in the process creates a big historical problem for Josiah's now redundant reform. Kings, on the other hand, uses the Manasseh narrative to set the stage for Josiah's deuteronomic reform, but in the process blames Manasseh for introducing cult practices he inherited. Though neither is entirely accurate, together Kings and Chronicles present a plausible characterization of a king who, like other Davidic kings, was a mixture of bad and good, and a keeper of YHWHistic orthodoxy as he and his monarchical predecessors understood it.

Lowery (1991:186) acknowledges Mosis (1973:192-94) and Williamson (1982:393) when they point out that the Chronicler makes nothing out of Manasseh's longevity, a fact which tells against those who argue that the Chronicler invented the whole story in order to defend an alleged doctrine of rigidly individualistic retribution. It is not longevity alone, however, which presented a problem for the Chronicler's theology of retribution. It was also Manasseh's incredible success as a king. The theology of individual retribution does play a part in the production of this narrative. It is not, however, the only or even the prominent theme which runs through the chapter.

Lowery (1991:188) finds Manasseh's cult reform (2 Chron. 15-17) presented as a result of his repentance in exile, is also spurious. Verse 22 of the same chapter directly contradicts the portrayal of Manasseh as faithful reformer. Manasseh's removal of foreign gods and abominable images also makes Josiah's reform redundant. Boldly Lowery announces: "The Chronicler's reform of Manasseh cannot even be supported by Chronicles!"

More important than the historical discrepancies, however, is the theological impact of the Manasseh story for the Chronicler's post-exilic audience. In the Chronicler's portrayal, Manasseh becomes a symbol of post-exilic Israel. Lowery (1991:188-9) contends that Manasseh's Babylonian exile is not coincidental. He regards Manasseh to be like the people of Judah. Manasseh suffered the pain of exile, because he had committed hideous sins and refused to heed the warnings of G-d (2 Chron. 33:10). More important than his exile, however, was his repentance, restoration and



commitment to reform. For the Chronicler, Manasseh is a clear example of G-d's mercy and willingness to forgive those who truly repent. His restoration and prosperity is proof of G-d's surprising willingness to bless even those who must repent of serious sins. His cult reform shows the righteous action which follows the repentance. This thesis concurs with Lowery that for the Chronicler, Manasseh stands as a paradigm of righteousness for an exiled and now restored post-exilic community. He is a key symbol of hope, based in trust that YHWH forgives and blesses beyond imagination those who truly humble themselves and turn from evil. Manasseh then becomes the Chronicler's strongest object lesson for restored Israel and their greatest reason to hope for the future.

### 3.4 CONCLUSION

Reconstructions of the history of the reigns of Manasseh, Amon and Josiah tend to share certain characteristics:

1. Critical events in Judah, such as the murder of Amon or Josiah's 12th year, are co-ordinated with significant Assyrian happenings.
2. Religious apostasy and reformation are linked to loyalty and disloyalty to Assyria.
3. Manasseh and Amon are characterised as pro-Assyrian in foreign policy, Josiah as anti-Assyrian.

At the beginning of Manasseh's reign Assyria was at the peak of her power and even Egypt had been brought under her sway. But the seeds of rebellion were never removed. As stated in the previous chapter, Babylon was ruled by Shamash-shum-ukin, the elder brother of Ashurbanipal, but unrest continued as usual in both Babylon and Elam. In Egypt Psammetichus I was expanding his power, having the sympathy of Gyges of Lydia who longed for the humiliation of Assyria. Meanwhile, pressure from the Medes on the northern frontier of the empire kept the Assyrians fully occupied and offered Psammetichus I an opportunity to withhold tribute, which he probably did in 655 BCE or soon after. There seems to have been no repercussions, and Psammetichus and Gyges may have encouraged discontent in Syria-Palestine. When Babylon and Elam rebelled under Shamash-shum-ukin in 652 BCE, disaffection spread in Syria-Palestine and at the same time desert Arabs overran the Assyrian vassal states in Edom, Moab and other lands in eastern Palestine and Syria. Although it is not known whether Judah was actively involved in the rebellions, the close relations which, if the foregoing arguments are correct, existed between her and some of the Arabian and Phoenician states could have induced Manasseh at least to express his sympathy with the rebel cause. However, the revolts could not be sustained. In 648 BCE Babylon was crushed and Elam suffered a similar fate some years later. Ashurbanipal also turned to the west where he conducted lengthy campaigns against the Arabs. Egypt was never reconquered, but Palestine may have been subdued and resettled at this time. At some stage during these disturbances, probably soon after 648 BCE, Manasseh, because of his friendships with the Arabs and the Phoenicians, may have been taken to Babylon and required to reaffirm his allegiance. Subsequently

he may have been allowed or commissioned to fortify Jerusalem and to garrison the cities of his land with his own army so that Judah could become a buffer-state against Egypt.

Once the contention that Assyrian imposition of state cults was the source of Israelite idolatry falls, then several other popular notions are likewise discredited.

- (a) The cult reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah can no longer be thought of as expressions of political rebellion directed against Assyrian rule. Nor can Manasseh's reform, according to the Chronicler's report (in itself spurious), be characterised as a 'nationalistic revolt accompanied by nationalistic religion'. We may therefore reconsider their stated intent as 'religious reform', and look for their motivation in what Kaufmann (1960:265-67) has termed "the spirit of repentance and soulsearching" which took hold in Judah during the recurring crises of the 8th century BCE. Kaufmann (quoted in Cogan 1974:113) says this is not to deny that political events had an effect upon religious movements, e.g. Samaria's fall served as an object lesson for the reform-minded Hezekiah (cf. 2 Chron. 30:7) and the decline of Assyria during Josiah's regency must have encouraged a national revival.
- (b) The assumption of Neo-Babylonian cultic impositions on the analogy of supposed Assyrian models is no longer tenable (Cogan 1974:113). In the light of what was and would be happening in the Mediterranean Basin, it is conceivable that it was a political/nationalistic movement, with religious overtones.

For the most part the evidence suggests that it was the Canaanite cults that flourished in Judah under Manasseh's patronage. Reference is also made in 2 Kings 21:7 to a graven image of Asherah which Manasseh erected in the Temple. Whilst it has been argued that this was an image of the Assyrian goddess, Ishtar, there are good reasons for believing that its presence in the Temple is much more a mark of Canaanite, or more properly, Phoenician, rather than Assyrian influence.

Thus it would seem that Manasseh's reign saw the general resurgence of the old Canaanite cults which the prophets had condemned in the 8th century BCE. It is by no means unlikely that the buildings of altars to Ba'al and the erection of an image of Asherah in the Temple did follow the precedent set by Ahab in the North, as the Deuteronomist suggests, particularly since her cult, it seems, had not hitherto flourished in Judah. There are grounds for believing that it was precisely because of Manasseh's marriage that Arabian astral religion received royal patronage in Jerusalem. Patai (1965:37-52) has shown that the cult of the Phoenician Asherah was firmly entrenched in Northern Israel from a very early date, but he fails to distinguish clearly between the cult of the Asherah image in Samaria and the local *serim* cults of the *bamot*. McKay's study (1973:91) presents a useful collection of the evidence. Although there are doubtlessly many lacunae in our knowledge of the history of the Asherah cult in Israel and Judah, the information given by the Deuteronomist in his history certainly appears to suggest that both the Ba'al altars and the Asherah image introduced by Manasseh were dedicated to Phoenician deities.

After the death of Manasseh, Judah began to reawaken to the possibility of rebellion.

Unfortunately we do not know the reasons for Amon's assassination, but it may be surmised that it was a symptom of this renascent spirit, for the party which put Josiah on the throne did lead the country to both independence and reform. How the rebellion and the reformation were inter-related is now difficult to determine, since the Old Testament has preserved no record of the former. But it is likely that, as in the days of Hezekiah, resurgent nationalism contributed much to the demand for cultic purity and unity centred on the worship of the G-d of Israel. Again, as in the days of Hezekiah, religious zeal was stirred by prophets (Zephaniah and Jeremiah) and also by the Deuteronomist. Although *Urdeuteronomium* was not publicly produced until the 18th year of Josiah's reign, its proponents must have been active for some time before that date, probably even in the royal court itself. As their work and teaching both encouraged and was concurrent with the revival of YHWHistic zeal, they were able to apply their energies to guiding the reforms on a more positive course than mere iconoclasm. Doubtless any Assyrian gods in the Temple and the land would have been swept away, but only as an act of reformation, not as a declaration of rebellion. Political factors were indeed important. As McKay (1973:72-3) puts it, they set the tenor of the age. But they did not dictate the course of the reformation. He believes this was controlled by something much deeper, viz. by the zeal for YHWH which, having lain dormant in the hearts of many, now burst into flame when the voice of G-d was heard once more in the land calling all true Israelites to his service (see Deut.10:12-13).

## CHAPTER 4

### KING AMON (642 - 640 BCE)

#### 4.1. INTRODUCTION

Amon ruled for only two years (642-640 BCE). He did not stray far from his father, Manasseh's, ways and he was assassinated by a court plot of unknown motivation (2 Kgs. 21:19-26; 2 Chron. 21-25). His reign was brought to an abrupt end by a palace coup by a group of courtiers ('Amon's servants', v. 23). The *am ha-aretz*, or 'people of the land' promptly executed the conspirators and installed his minor son, Josiah, on the throne, thus upholding the Davidic line of succession. The short reign of Amon is depicted as simply the continuation of the age of idolatry fostered by Manasseh.

The expression 'people of the land' is a problematic one and there are many interpretations concerning its meaning. Unfortunately, the Biblical verses in which the term appears, give no precise definition of the concept. The expression appears by itself, unaccompanied by any comment as to the political, social, or religious nature of the body, which is referred to as *am ha-aretz*. There is no stand taken, nor evaluation made by the biblical authors concerning this body. Moreover, the verses in the Bible in which the concept appears, pertain to different periods, from the time of the patriarchs (Gen. 23:12f.) up to Daniel (Dan. 9:6). In most cases the term refers to Israelites, but in some cases also to non-Israelites e.g. Gen. 23:12f.; Ezra 3:3; Neh. 9:30. (Cf. Reviv 1969:283-297).

#### 4.2. HISTORY OF THE AM HA-ARETZ

The '*am ha-aretz*' (in the singular) is found fifty-two times in biblical literature. It is a collective noun which refers to a group of people, and never applies to an individual. Thirty-seven of the fifty-two occurrences of *am ha-aretz* are clustered in four Biblical books: 2 Kings, 2 Chronicles, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, i.e. in books which record the history of the rival kingdoms of Judah and Ephraim. Talmon (1967:71) says it should be stressed that not even once is the term *am ha-aretz* employed in a specifically Ephraimite setting. Therefore it is quite in order to present the issue at hand as 'the problem of the Judaeen *am ha-aretz*'. In other words, we are dealing with a term which is specifically connected with the Judaeen body politic. Especially in the later phases of the history of Judah, thirty-seven mentions are found in passages of the Books of Jeremiah and Chronicles which parallel records of events that are also related in the Book of Kings. Thus the figure of thirty-seven may be reduced to twenty-seven independent single occurrences. A salient feature is the conspicuous absence of the term '*am ha-aretz*' from the Book of Deuteronomy and from the Book of Joshua, which is said to have been subjected to a far-reaching deuteronomic

revision. Talmon (1967:71) believes this absence of the term from the hard-core of deuteronomic literature appears to take the wind out of the sails of the school, headed by von Rad, that credited the *am ha-aretz* with a large share of responsibility for the Deuteronomy-centred reform that was carried out by Josiah.

Explicit references to the *am ha-aretz* are spread over a period from about the middle of the ninth century BCE to the beginning of the sixth century BCE. The earliest mention on record in 2 Kings 11 (cf. 2 Chron. 23) relates to the events of 836 BCE, when the *am ha-aretz* was instrumental in the overthrow of Athaliah, who had usurped the throne of Judah. In the wake of the rebellion, the *am ha-aretz* restored the throne to the rightful heir of the murdered King Ahaziah, the crown-prince Joash.

The next mention of the *am ha-aretz*, the last before the apprehension and subsequent execution of sixty of its members by the Chaldeans, pertains to the year 640 BCE. Again a king of Judah, Amon, is murdered by his courtiers. Again the *am ha-aretz* quickly reacts, and restores order by inflicting the death penalty on the plotters, and by putting Amon's son, Josiah, on the throne (2 Kgs. 21:23-24). In this, as in virtually all the other cases mentioned, we find a similar constellation of opposing forces. The *am ha-aretz* intervenes to counteract an imminent threat to the continuity of the Davidic dynasty, a threat which was brought about by regicides from among the royal courtiers who hatched their plots in the metropolis. This recurring grouping of opposed forces indeed may disclose an underlying tension between by the *am ha-aretz* and the city, or the acropolis of Jerusalem.

The last reference to the *am ha-aretz* in a distinctly historical context is in the detailed description of the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians. Among the civic leaders who were captured in Jerusalem, and were subsequently executed at Riblah, by Nebuchadnezzar, together with King Zedekiah's sons, sixty members of the *am ha-aretz* figure prominently, as well as the *sofer* of the *am ha-aretz* (2 Kgs. 25:19; Jer. 52:25). It is the opinion of this thesis that it is appropriate to quote from Talmon (1967:74) who states:

"These two, chronologically speaking widely removed events in the recorded history of the *am ha-aretz* clearly illustrate that in weal and in woe this body was aligned with the Davidic dynasty, and ultimately shared its unfortunate fate. The first impression is fully substantiated by a survey of the other historical incidents in which the Judaeen *am ha-aretz* was involved. It may well be that the recurrent assassinations of Davidic kings between 842 and 769 BCE - Ahaziah, Joash, Amaziah - necessitated a regularised and continuous association of the *am ha-aretz* with the royal house, more so than in the past, or...in the future...when, as a result of his illness, Uzziah was unable to control the realm effectively, but yet did not relinquish power, his son, the crown-prince Jotham, took charge of state affairs and at the same time appears to have assumed direct control of the *am ha-aretz*".

There is no information in the Bible concerning such opposition during Manasseh's reign. Amon, however, became the victim of a conspiracy at the royal court, and it may well be that this conspiracy was instigated by the priesthood of Jerusalem, who could not condone his idolatry. The conspirators were later defeated by the *am ha-*

*aretz*, who felt themselves obliged to support the house of David and who might have had no reason whatsoever to get rid of the son of Manasseh.

Nielsen (1967:106) believes that the Deuteronomistic movement soon spread to the kingdom of Judah. This is evidenced by the story of the reform of Josiah and by the present form of Deuteronomy. The fight against foreign worship and religion on the soil of Israel obviously had a special appeal for those in the kingdom of Judah who were most embarrassed by foreign influence, i.e. the priests of Jerusalem (*cf. conspiracy against Amon 4.3 below*). Perhaps this revolt was instigated by priests of Jerusalem who were already under the influence of deuteronomistic teaching.

The sanguinary events described in 2 Kings 21:19-26, and in 2 Chronicles 33:21-25, concerning the slaying of Amon by his courtiers and the subsequent retaliation upon the conspirators by the *am ha-aretz*, have remained an enigma. The undercurrents of these court intrigues are overlooked in the Biblical account and, so far, no suitable explanation has been discovered in the general historical development of the Ancient Near East. The theory currently accepted among historians attributes to these events merely a religious background: according to this theory the King of Judah was assassinated by the Religious Reform Party, but, as a reaction, the 'people of the land' restored the *status quo*. There is however no undisputed evidence supporting this hypothesis, nor do the social classes involved in these events ('the servants of the king' and 'the people of the land') display dominantly religious characteristics. Malamat (1953:26ff.) has endeavoured to show that the regicide and the subsequent retaliation were enacted against a political and military background, and attempted also to link these Judaeon fluctuations of power with other events in the contemporary history of the Near East. This thesis concurs with Malamat, but at the same time the question remains concerning the characters who were regarded as the most feared militarists. If there was any religious influence from the North, this might account for the acceptance of the Deuteronomistic fiats, and the question is whether Manasseh and Amon possibly sided with the wrong foreign powers.

### 4.3. THE CONSPIRACY AGAINST AMON

The Biblical narrative (2 Kgs. 21:23; 2 Chron. 33:24), does not explain the reason for the assassination nor disclose the ideological, political or religious background of the conspirators. A study of the relevant references in Biblical, as well as extra-Biblical, sources leave us, thus, with several opinions concerning the matter:

**4.3.1** One possibility is that Amon, of whom it is said in both Kings and Chronicles that he continued in the sinful ways of his father Manasseh (2 Kgs. 21:20-22; 2 Chron. 33:22f.) was murdered by factions who were faithful to the tradition of Israel, and in favour of Hezekiah's reform (Nielsen 1967:105).

**4.3.2** A second possibility is that the murder reflects an anti-Assyrian political act, probably instigated by Egypt and carried out by factions opposed to Assyrian rule. Scholars holding this opinion, like Hayes & Miller (1977:456) thought that

- (a) the international political situation (i.e. the decline of the Assyrian

- empire);
- (b) the growing strength of the Chaldaeans, and
  - (c) the renewed rise of Egypt,

made the time ripe for rebellion. These factors might have given rise to a belief by the assassins that Egypt would replace Assyria as a world ruler.

It may be that most of Amon's retainers were in fact those who had served Manasseh, and who had perhaps transferred their allegiance only unwillingly to Amon while planning to replace him by one of their own number. If this is so, the fact that they had served Manasseh without protest would suggest that it was the person of Amon and not his religious policy to which they objected. This must remain a matter of speculation. According to both Kings and Chronicles the conspirators were almost immediately exterminated in what may be seen as a popular uprising of the people. Amon's son, Josiah, was installed in his place (2 Kgs. 21:24; 2 Chron. 33:25). The active agents in this revolt are designated as the *am ha-aretz*, a technical term designating a select body of influential citizens who played a special role in the state, albeit one that changed with the passage of time. More probably, however, it simply referred to the population in general, who took the law into their own hands in order to right a grievous wrong.

This thesis, in concurrence with Cogan & Tadmor (1988:276), believes that as matters stand now, the reasons for Amon's murder remain elusive, and the question should, therefore, be left open. Court histories of the Ancient Near East are replete with examples of murdered kings, sometimes by their offspring, who were bypassed in the line of succession. In Judah, too, such fraternal rivalries cannot be ruled out. During his long reign, Manasseh ruthlessly silenced his opponents, supported, as seems likely, by the presence of the Assyrian army in the land. Only after Manasseh's death, and coincidentally with the retreat of Assyria from the West, did countercurrents begin to surface, in so violent a form as regicide.

Throughout this period, the stabilising factor in Judah was the *am ha-aretz*, who remained loyal to the Davidides. The Davidides appear to be those who favoured a religious over-tone to Judaeen politics. Possibly the Theocrats, they were the matrix for Chronicles. They appear at a moment of dynastic crisis to ensure the continuation of the House of David, by placing Josiah on the throne. If the analogy to Joash be extended, it can also be argued that even though the *am ha-aretz* avenged the violent death of Amon, they were not supporters of the religio-political policies of Manasseh and his successor. This is seen from the thrust of Josiah's actions, after a decade of rule by the *am ha-aretz* during the period before Josiah obtained his majority. The influence upon the king of these circles, loyal to Israelite tradition, was striking. From the death of Amon until the fall of Judah in 586 BCE, the people of the land came forward whenever the dynasty was endangered. They were also among the first to be punished by Judah's conquerors (cf. e.g. 2 Kgs. 23:35):

*"...And Jehoiakim taxed the land to give the money according to the command of Pharaoh. He exacted the silver and the gold of the people of the land, from every one according to his assessment, to give it to Pharaoh*

*Necho.*"

The phenomenon of stability within a dynastic succession was typical of Judah, in contrast with Israel, where assassinations frequently occurred, leading to the overthrow of dynasties. Amon's assassination was not followed by the establishment of a new dynasty in Judah. The text reports:

*"The people of the land slew all those who had conspired against King Amon, and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead"* (2 Kgs. 21:24).

#### **4.4. SUMMARY OF SCHOLARLY OPINIONS ON THE *AM HA-ARETZ***

If we limit ourselves mainly to the cases from the period of the monarchy (most of these are mentioned in 2 Kings, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and 2 Chronicles), we find that the concept is connected with the history of the kingdom of Judah, and is not mentioned in connection with the kingdom of Israel. In a few instances, *am ha-aretz* is mentioned with or next to other important figures - king, *nasi*, *sar* and priest (Jer. 1:18; 37:2; Ezek. 7:27; 22:29). Jeremiah charges the *am ha-aretz* with not freeing slaves (34:9) and Ezekiel presents the *am ha-aretz* as a body which robs and persecutes the poor. *Am ha-aretz* appears as a body with judicial authority (Jer. 36; 2 Kgs. 21:9) and military strength (2 Kgs. 25:19; Hayes & Miller, 1977:457).

On the basis of the above-mentioned verses, we can conclude:

**4.4.1** This was a body which represents a privileged social and political class or an aristocratic institution of landowners, which was active on the legal and military level and which had political influence. In time of crisis, it had the power to determine the fate of the dynasty. (Daiches 1929:245-9 and Gordis 1934:237-59). There are some who view this privileged body as a kind of national council, which represented the people before the king. This 'democratic' institution would thus have developed out of the ancient institution of the elders, the body which was made up of the heads of the clans (Sulzberger 1909:72-78 and Auerbach 1952:362-6).

**4.4.2** Another interpretation, which has variations, views the concept *am ha-aretz* as a collective name for the simple people. This is the 'proletariat', robbed, exploited, driven off the land and without rights, as opposed to the nobility. This opinion is based on verses such as Exodus 5:5 and 2 Kings 24:14. The references in Ezekiel 7:27 and Jeremiah 1:18 are interpreted in this approach as showing the *am ha-aretz* in opposition to the authorities and not as a parallel body.

**4.4.3** Another opinion holds that the concept should be interpreted as referring collectively to the free citizens and property-owners who have both obligations and privileges (De Vaux 1964:167-172).

**4.4.4** Alt's opinion (1966:251-4) that *am ha-aretz* refers to the population of the provincial towns of Judah, especially farmers, as opposed to, and as distinguished



from, the residents of Jerusalem, is fraught with difficulties, as there is no real evidence that Judah and Jerusalem constituted two distinct political units which were united in a 'personal union' by the house of David, nor for any real differences between the population of Judah and the residents of Jerusalem.

4.4.5 To Soggin (1993:187-95) the term *am ha-aretz* refers to a large group in the population which worshipped G-d in the spirit of the prophets. This body represented those who were faithful to the YHWHistic tradition in Judah and had no special or social associations.

4.4.6 Nicholson (1965:59-66) reaches the conclusion that the concept has no set, precise definition. He believes, however, that it can be said for sure, that the people of the land was a political-social element which was loyal to the house of David. This element in the society was the main factor behind the phenomenon of hereditary succession in Judah.

4.4.7 Not once in its recorded history did the *am ha-aretz* serve in an advisory capacity, as do the *zeqenim* - 'elders' - (e.g. at Rehoboam's invitation). Consequently, the *am ha-aretz* is not an institution of deliberation, but rather an instrument of action. To describe it as a 'national council', is therefore totally misleading according to Talmon (1967:75), who adds that the *am ha-aretz* was never formally convened, or called upon the king, or some other agent, although it was apparently headed by a functionary designated 'sofer'. To Talmon it thus follows that this body was not an institution at all, but a fairly loosely constituted power group within the Kingdom of Judah. The *am ha-aretz* appears to go into action *ad hoc*, when extraordinary political conditions make action imperative.

In concurrence with Talmon (1967:75) it is the premise of this thesis that the *am ha-aretz* could not have comprised more than a comparatively small group, possibly of a few hundred individuals. This deduction is based on the fact that the overthrow of Athalia within the Temple precincts was, of necessity, a small group; while the explicit reference to 'sixty' members of the *am ha-aretz* executed after the conquest of Jerusalem, makes it unlikely that the *am ha-aretz* incorporated all full-fledged citizens of Judah. Talmon believes the exclusive concentration of all its actions within the acropolis of the city of Jerusalem militates against its definition as a stratum of landed nobility and adds that the only recognizable *raison d'etre* of the *am ha-aretz* is the *de facto* championing of the house of David, which lacks any *de jure* circumscription in the political framework of the Judaeen kingdom. Accordingly, the *am ha-aretz* can not be defined in terms of a constitutional-legal nature.

The term *am ha-aretz* can be shown almost exclusively to apply to the city of Jerusalem and the city of Hebron. David, after all, rebuilt Jerusalem after conquering it, and repopulated it there with his *gibborim*, former Hebronites and other elements of Judah.

## 4.5. THE MURDER OF AMON

The 'people of the land' and the political crises in Judah, together, show that both the

international and domestic conditions must be considered as the background of this political change. As for the international political sphere, it was the time of dramatic changes. About 656 BCE the Egyptians succeeded in expelling the Assyrians from Egypt. This was the beginning of the rapid decline of the Assyrian empire. At the same time, the Egyptians, as an ambitious heir to the Assyrians, began to influence Syria-Palestine. This situation seems to be reflected in Manasseh's change of religious policy, and his fortification of the city of David and the citadels in Judah (2 Chron. 33:14-16; Ishida 1975:24-38). This was an attempt to recover the sovereignty from the Assyrian rule. The time, however, was not yet ripe. Because of this rebellious attempt, Manasseh was punished by the Assyrians (2 Chron. 33:11; Aharoni 1966:346; Bright 1981:311) We can assume that the Judaeen king was caught between the anti-Assyrian movement supported by the awakening people, and the Assyrian pressure in the last years of his reign.

The laconic report of a major crisis in the history of Judah has given rise to several scholarly conjectures as to the background of the murder of the king. Malamat (1953:26-29) has offered an explanation in international terms. He postulates that Amon was killed by an anti-Assyrian party, which would have Judah join an area-wide uprising against Ashurbanipal in 640 BCE. With the approach of the Assyrian army to Syria, and especially with the capture of Akko (related in the latest edition of Ashurbanipal's annals; cf. ANET 3, 300b), the moderates gained the upper hand, placated Assyria, and elevated young Josiah to the throne. This reconstruction rested upon synchronizing the death of Amon, usually dated to the years 641/640 BCE and the Assyrian campaign to the West, presumed to have taken place in 639 BCE (following the accepted ordering of Ashurbanipal's campaigns). However, a revised chronology of the historical inscriptions of Ashurbanipal has shown that the Akko episode cannot be dated later than 644/643 BCE (Tadmor 1960:240,1; Cogan & Tadmor 1988:81-85). Moreover, the capture of Akko was not part of a campaign to the West, but was a local, small-scale punitive action, the date of which might have been earlier than 644 BCE. No connection between that Assyrian action and the assassination of Amon in 640 BCE can, therefore, be established.

Current opinion favours viewing this episode as an attempt at revolt against Ashurbanipal by anti-Assyrian elements, with the 'people of the land' representing those forces who wished to prevent a military encounter with Assyria. But the facts might be construed otherwise. The last record of Assyrian intervention in the affairs of south Palestine dates to 643 BCE. Nomadic invasions, perhaps Scythian, kept Assyrian military forces occupied on the northern reaches of the empire, it now seems as early as 640 BCE. Consequently, at the time of Amon's assassination, fear of Assyrian reprisal would have been a minimal factor in Judahite politics. Malamat (1973:271) suggested the possible identification of Amon's assassins as Egyptian agents. Therefore, by slightly modifying this theory, Malamat has put the stress on the Egyptian instigation behind the courtiers' revolt against Amon. It is very likely that around 640 BCE, when Amon's assassination took place, there was a conflict between a 'pro-Assyrian' group and a 'pro-Egyptian' party at the Judean court, because in that period the Egyptians tried to take over the Assyrian domination in Western Asia. Malamat (1973:270-273) notes that while expulsion of the Assyrian

rule from Egypt took place between 656 and 652 BCE, the alliance between Egypt and Assyria against the Chaldeans came into being between 622 and 617 BCE; thus Egyptian activity of taking over the Assyrian rule in Palestine must have been limited to the years between 652 and 622 BCE. On the other hand, Amon's yielding to the foreign cult (2 Kgs. 21:20-22; 2 Chron. 33:22-23) would show his submissiveness to the Assyrian rule. Therefore, it is possible to assume that the Egyptians urged conspirators to murder their pro-Assyrian king

It seems, however, that this political conflict was interwoven with domestic antagonism. When Manasseh died at sixty-seven, Amon was a young prince of twenty-two (2 Kgs. 21:1, 19; 2 Chron. 33:1, 21). Amon was born to Manasseh when he was forty-five. Judging from the fact that almost all the Judaeen kings were born when their fathers were about twenty, it is likely that Amon was neither the first-born nor the eldest surviving son. (According to the CAH Vol. 3, 1992:232, another case of a young son succeeding his father who had reigned for an unusually long period is that of Ramesses II [ca 1290-1224 BCE] whose twelve eldest sons died before he was succeeded by his thirteenth son, Merneptah.) If this is the case we can assume that some court intrigue helped Amon ascend the throne, as is usually the case when the principle of primogeniture is overruled. On the other hand, the Biblical source testifies to a bloody antagonism among the inhabitants of Jerusalem under Manasseh (2 Kgs. 16; cf. 24:4). Although we are not informed of the situation, it is not unlikely that it was the beginning of the clash between the pro-Assyrian party and the pro-Egyptian faction. The former backed Manasseh's rule and Amon's succession, while the latter tried to overthrow the pro-Assyrian regime by supporting Amon's elder brothers under Egyptian instigation. One can only conjecture about Amon's two-year reign. They were perhaps two years of independent rule **after** Manasseh's death; or possibly he co-ruled with his father for a while, during which time he might have already started steering Judah in the wrong direction.

Another suggestion was advanced by Nielsen (1967:103-6), who explains the assassination in terms of inner Judahite politics, the struggle between the followers of Manasseh's religious policies and the opposition of the Jerusalem priesthood, the circle whose interests were hurt most by those policies. It is the opinion of this thesis that it is conceivable to combine these two theories, by regarding them as but two sides of one coin. Possibly the key lies in Amon, weak and insipid, against Manasseh who was strong, a survivor, an elder statesman. Perhaps Amon was compared with his father who, at the time of his death, was an able, competent ruler. By now it must have been accepted that the Davidic monarchy was a hereditary kingship, and one wonders why they would have resented Amon succeeding his father. There is no evidence that he was a usurper, and one has to wonder whether the revolt was anti-Amon or anti-Davidide. Yet a further possibility might be that it was a purely political struggle between rival parties.

According to Reviv (1979:201) Amon was killed by his servants (2 Kgs. 21:23; 2 Chron. 33:24), perhaps as the aftermath of the political dissatisfaction, still obscure in a background, that had started in Manasseh's time. The fact that Amon followed in his father's footsteps (2 Kgs. 21:19-22; 2 Chron. 33:21-22) may have aroused resentment among those who planned the murder and who considered the accession

of the new king a suitable opportunity to change Judah's policy. Amon, who did not agree with this political view, **might** also have been killed by the supporters of rapprochement with Egypt and opposed to the traditional pro-Assyrian policy (cf. Malamat 1973:271).

To Malamat (1953:26,7) the murder of Amon was undoubtedly an anti-Assyrian repercussion of his foreign policy, since the Bible unequivocally presents him as a loyal satellite of the Assyrian regime. In this respect, the Chronicler is most outspoken in describing Amon's devotion to Assyrian customs as being more extreme than that of his father, Manasseh:

*"But he did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord, as did Manasseh his father; for Amon sacrificed unto all the carved images which Manasseh his father had made, and served them. And humbled not himself before the Lord, as Manasseh, his father, had humbled himself; but Amon trespassed more and more" (2 Chron. 33:22-23).*

As noted in the previous chapter there is no evidence that the Assyrians imposed their religion on their vassals, so this thesis concludes that Amon did what he did by choice, and not by compulsion, thus concurring with the Biblical disgust at his unmitigated evil behaviour.

According to the most reasonable chronological calculation Amon's death occurred in the year 640-639 BCE. (See Thiele 1944:108.) Indeed from Assyrian sources we learn that in this very same period a rebellion was organized in Eber ha-Nahar, i.e. the region between the Euphrates and the Mediterranean Sea, the Arabians, including the tribes of Qedar and the Nebaioth, revolted against the rule of Ashurbanipal. This uprising seems to have been quite extensive, since we hear of it also in connection with the defection of Acre and Ushu (Tyre on the mainland). The Assyrians, however, were as yet strong enough to conduct a successful military campaign westward, and to defeat decisively the Arabian tribes on the Syrian border (in the vicinity of Damascus and the Bashan region). The revolt was suppressed with all the usual severity, as we learn from the fate of Acre and Ushu. These cities fell at the end of Ashurbanipal's campaign and their inhabitants were killed or exiled to Assyria. Malamat concedes (1953:26,7) that we have no exact date for this campaign of Ashurbanipal; it was apparently the second one against the tribes in revolt. Malamat believes we may assume that these events took place during the great revolt of Elam, between the years 641-639 BCE.

It seems most likely that there was some connection between these events and the progress of matters in Judah according to Malamat (1953:27). We may assume that the *coup d'etat* in Jerusalem was aimed against the pro-Assyrian policy of Amon and that the conspirators wanted to join the general uprising against Ashurbanipal. However, upon the approach of the Assyrian army to Syria and Palestine, and its initial successes against the rebels, those forces in Judah who wished to prevent a military encounter with Assyria gained the upper hand. This suggests to the opinion of this thesis that they were wiser in the ways of foreign politics. Thus a counter-revolution was achieved and the nobles, who had wished to throw off the yoke of Assyrian rule, were exterminated. It was "a stitch in time", and it seems to have

placated the Assyrians, for we hear of no punitive action being taken against Judah by their army. (A similar development took place among the Arabian tribes. The rebel chieftain, Uaite II, son of Bir-Dadda, was finally deposed by his subjects, in order that his tribe might escape the reprisals of the Assyrian army.)

It appears that the 'people of the land' avoided this struggle in Jerusalem. Judging from the political development under Josiah and his successors, it is clear that 'the people of the land' belonged neither to the pro-Assyrian party nor to the pro-Egyptian faction. But when Jerusalem fell into chaos at Amon's assassination, they intervened in the conflict on their own accord. By taking advantage of the confusion among the ruling people in the capital city, they were able to carry out a 'national revolution', in order to bring about nationalistic reform under a Davidic king.

#### 4.6 CONCLUSION

Taking into account both the domestic, socio-religious conditions, and the international political ones, it may be accepted that Amon was assassinated by an anti-Assyrian party, but a counter-revolution was achieved by 'the people of the land', who was afraid of Assyrian punitive action. In contrast to the rebellion against Athaliah, it is remarkable that 'the people of the land' played the leading role in this political change. We do not know exactly how they came to dominate in this period. Possibly, the collapse of the military power as a result of the Assyrian invasion at Hezekiah's time weakened the authority of the central government. The severe domestic struggle in Jerusalem under Manasseh and Amon also undermined the control of the central authority. In addition, we can assume that the northern tribes, who took refuge in Judah from the catastrophe of Samaria in 722 BCE and the subsequent disturbances, brought with them the strong tradition of the popular sovereignty, and strengthened the people's voice in political affairs. In any case, 'the people of the land' are mentioned most frequently in the Old Testament in the last days of Judah. Moreover, the fact that they are mentioned side by side with the ruling class, such as the kings, the royal servants, the nobles, the priests and the prophets (Jer. 1:18; 34:19; 37:2; Ez. 7:27; 22:24-29) testifies to the influential position they occupied in this period.

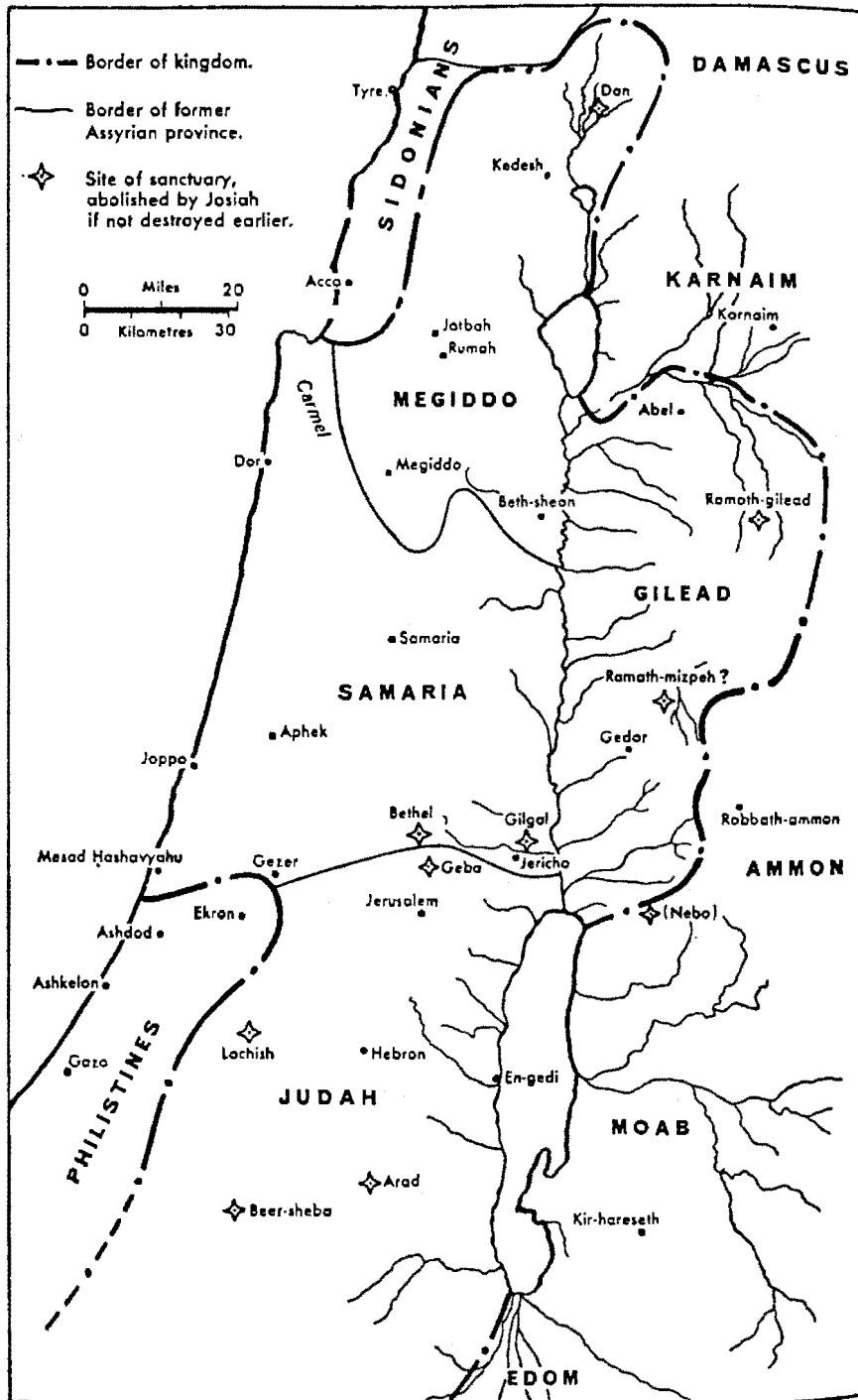
The *am ha-aretz* is a social phenomenon, rooted in the city life in the territory of Judah, *ergo* in the structure of a sedentary society. As Talmon (1967:76) aptly observes, in the early stages of the Davidic monarchy it was assimilated into the emerging socio-political framework of the empire, and which thus can be shown not to be solely derived from axiomatic tribal-amphictyonic institutions.

Contrary to the institutionalizing tendencies of recent Biblical research, the *am ha-aretz* of Judah can not be viewed as a democratic or otherwise constitutionally circumscribed institution. Evidence makes it clear that it was, rather, a body of Judaeans in Jerusalem that rose to some power and importance which was ultimately derived from their loyalty to the Davidic dynasty. The *am ha-aretz* in fact constitutes a sociological phenomenon that belongs to and illustrates a power structure which appears to be typical of a hereditary monarchy without clearly defined constitutional

foundations. The readily given support of a group like the *am ha-aretz* helps in maintaining the political equilibrium by counteracting the possible eroding impact of an ascending class of courtiers and ministers. Unwavering loyalty arising from kin ties balances a pragmatic allegiance rooted in vested interests. However, as Talmon remarks (1967:76) the very support given by the *am ha-aretz* to the king entails a dependence of the king on the *am ha-aretz* which effectively circumscribes the king's power. Thus, although lacking a constitutional definition, the *am ha-aretz* is simultaneously both a supportive, and yet a restrictive force which prevents the deterioration of the monarchy into an absolutist regime.

Viewed in historical retrospect, the *am ha-aretz* served as an important means for the implementation of an ideology inspired by the Davidic dynasty which took the form of a prophecy from the mouth of Nathan:

*"And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever" (2 Sam. 7:16)..*



The Kingdom of Josiah.

## CHAPTER 5

### KING JOSIAH (640 - 609 BCE)

#### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The Bible (2 Kgs. 22:2) says of Josiah that:

*"he did what was pleasing to YHWH; he followed all the ways of David, his ancestor, straying neither to the right nor the left".* In verse 25 the Bible adds: *"There was no king like him before, who turned back to YHWH with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might, in accord with the entire teaching of Moses; and after him, no one arose like him".*

Josiah plays an important role in the Deuteronomistic history, and Josiah alone of the kings, not excepting David, escaped all criticism.

As Na'aman states (1991:4) the limited nature of the source material has not prevented scholars from investigating the period of Josiah's rule, **due to its crucial importance in the history of the Jewish People** (my emphasis). It is commonly accepted that 'the Book of the Law' (2 Kgs. 22:8, 11), otherwise known as 'the Book of the Covenant' (23:2; 21), was written during Josiah's reign, and that its composition gave rise to a comprehensive cultic reform throughout the kingdom, and to the initial widespread influence and literary activity of the Deuteronomistic school. **The years of Josiah's reign constitute an important starting point for the study of developments in Jewish religion, cult, law and literature,** (my emphasis) and have, therefore gained the attention of a considerable number of scholars, starting in the earliest days of Biblical research. The scarcity of Biblical data invited a wide variety of opinions concerning the extent of the kingdom, its internal structure, economy, etc.

Who was Josiah? Very little information is available about him. His mother was Jedidah, daughter of Adaiah of Bozkath (cf. Josh. 15:39). Na'aman (1991:27) has noted the correspondence between the town list and the state of settlement in Judah in the seventh century BCE, beginning with the marriages of the kings of Judah. Manasseh married a woman from Jotbah (2 Kgs. 21:19). Amon married a woman from Bozkath (2 Kgs. 23:36). We know of two wives of Josiah: Hamutal, daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah (2 Kgs. 23:31) traced her lineage to the rural nobility of Judah (and thus to the *am-ha-aretz*). Zebudah (Zebidah), daughter of Pedaiah, originated from Rumah (2 Kgs. 23:36) in the Beth Netopah Valley in Galilee. It thus appears that ties with various regions of the kingdom were strengthened by marriages with important families in border districts. Kings records the names and ages of three sons of Josiah - Eliakim (Jehoiakim) by his wife Zebidah (2 Kgs. 23:36); Jehoahaz (Shallum) (Jer. 22:11) and Mattaniah (Zedekiah) by his wife Hamutal (2 Kgs. 23:31;



24:18). According to 1 Chronicles 3:15 there had been a fourth son, Johanan, Josiah's first-born, but nothing is known of him, and he may not have survived to manhood.

## 5.2 POLITICAL AND SOCIO-ECONOMIC ASPECTS OF JOSIAH'S RELIGIOUS REFORM AND NATIONAL RESTORATION

### 5.2.1 General

Josiah's history begins with his grandfather's return from Assyria. The next chapter in his history took place when his father was assassinated by his own army officers, who, in turn, were dethroned by the *am-ha-aretz*. And so the assassins of Amon's murderers became the people who accepted the responsibility for the upbringing of his son, the new king who was a mere eight years of age. We know he was the grandson of a king who ruled fifty-five years, thus he came out of a tradition of a peaceful reign, and must have been conscious of the strengths of his grandfather.

### 5.2.2 Josiah and the *am-ha-aretz*

It is the opinion of Nel (1996:4ff.) that Josiah was either "converted", or realised of his own accord, that religion would be the one unifying factor in his country. In either case, religion was a necessary factor to root out those who were impeding him, i.e. the Levites. Josiah became the protégé of the *am-ha-aretz*. The reason he was on the throne of David was that he was the hereditary successor, and was backed by the elite keepers and founders of the Davidides. With their backing, and with the upbringing as their ward, their policies and their politics were also his policies and politics. Josiah knew that from the days at Hebron there existed a tacit agreement between the Levites and the Davidides. He realised that the only way to rule as a monarch in his own right, would be to end the might of the Levites. He was not the first to attempt this: both Solomon and Hezekiah tried. Josiah's attempt, however, was so successful that the Levites would never again play any significant role in Judaeen politics.

Nel (1996:5) cites MacGregor Burns (1979:1-5) that one of the most universal cravings is a hunger for compelling and creative leadership. He avers that leaders and the led have a relationship of power, of mutual needs, aspirations and values - almost a relationship that functions as a form of a parasitic co-existence. Nel thus contends that in the symbiotic relationship that existed between the *am-ha-aretz* and the Davidide king, the one could not exist or survive without the other. The *am-ha-aretz* secured for the successor of the throne, namely Amon's son Josiah, in order to continue the Davidic reign and rule of law. Nel (1996:9) believes the cleansing of Jerusalem (2 Chron. 34:8-33) was the most crucial time in Judaeen politics, namely the point in history when the seat of power of the *am-ha-aretz* was established. From this moment onwards Hebron and the Judaeen Levites of Hebron, were no longer the power behind the throne. "In a very successful coup d'etat the Jerusalem *am-ha-aretz* hijacked the power seats. Jerusalem would no longer be the city of

David, the city of YHWH, the city of Judah (in that order), and Hebron the legislature. From now on it would be Jerusalem the legislature and the executive seat of power of whomever ruled the country".

Josiah was made king by 'the people of the land', who had also put to death the murderers of Amon (see previous chapter on the *am ha-aretz*). We are not told why the conspirators murdered Amon. Noth (1976:272) notes it might be possible that it was simply an act of personal vengeance, or due to a court intrigue. The new king, Josiah, or his regents, soon followed a line quite consistent with the general historical situation. We do not know precisely at what age a king could begin to reign independently, or whether a particular age for this was customary, but this was probably at twelve or thirteen. During the first years of his reign when he was still under age nothing of decisive significance occurred. The continuity of the House of David was thus preserved, along with the tendency to see in vassalage to Assyria a guarantee of independence and stability. The political assertiveness of the 'people of the land' had anything but restraining effects. As representatives of traditional Judahite values, the 'people of the land' must have planned and nurtured Josiah's regency, which ended in the overthrow of Judah's foreign alignments and far-reaching cultic reforms. But as soon as time for independent action was ripe, he succeeded by degrees in breaking free from his dependence on Assyria.

### 5.2.3 Josiah and Assyria

Assyria reached the zenith of its power in the first half of the 7th century BCE, with the conquest of Egypt. But by the time Josiah reached the age of majority in the latter part of the same century, Assyria was on the verge of collapse. With the decline of Assyrian power, Josiah had a relatively free hand to rule his own country, and perhaps to expand his authority over the former Northern Kingdom of Israel. If anything, these factors would demonstrate the validity of the Jerusalem tradition which proclaimed that YHWH had selected Zion and the House of David, and that YHWH would guarantee their security forever. If Manasseh and Amon are characterised in the Old Testament and by subsequent exegetes, as 'pro-Assyrian' in foreign policy, Josiah is regarded as being 'anti-Assyrian'. The explicit opinion is that Josiah's loyalty to YHWH and solidarity with Judah's past traditions of greatness made him so rigidly anti-Assyrian that he was willing to risk his life, his nation's army, indeed Judah's very existence as a nation to prevent aid from reaching Assyria in its final hour (Nelson 1983:177). There is no reason to assume that Josiah's attitude towards Assyria was any more hostile than his grandfather's had been. The view of this thesis is that foreign policy surely remained a matter of political reality, not ideology, especially in light of Assyria's indifference to the religious policies of its vassals.

Self-evidently one needs to analyse to what extent events during the reign of Josiah are linked to these international affairs. Cogan & Tadmor (1988:293) suggest that from the standpoint of the Deuteronomistic historian, Josiah's actions are a reaction to the decadent age of Manasseh. Viewed on the political level, Judah's resurgence under Josiah, including his activity in Samaria (cf. 2 Kgs. 23:15-18), must have

coincided with, and resulted from, the retreat of Assyria from Judah's borders and the termination of the former's century-long sovereignty over that region. All the undertakings of King Josiah were inevitably connected, directly or indirectly, with the pattern of world politics of his time. This pattern, according to Herrmann (1975:263), offered him the possibility of new independent domestic and foreign policies, but at the same time gave its seal to the greatness and the tragedy of this king.

There is no clear evidence that Assyrian cults were to be found amongst those that Josiah abolished from the Jerusalem Temple, let alone that they had been introduced under obligation. The long-held view of monolithic Assyrian imperialism holding sway and enforcing its rule in all areas of the Near East is undocumented. While Biblical texts of the period focus on religious apostasy, there is not the slightest hint anywhere that the adoption of foreign ways was *imposed*, rather than *imitated*. The real threat to the cult of YHWH was the religious and cultural disintegration which lay at the doors of those syncretists in Judah who sought the adoption of foreign ways in a conscious fostering of new gods and new cults when the old one seemed to fail (Cogan 1993:412,3).

Josiah reformed Judah's official cult with a scope and depth which was unprecedented for a Davidic monarch, and never to be repeated. Having argued that Assyria did not interfere with its vassals' cult practices, Cogan (1974:113) finds it unlikely that Josiah's reform was part of a political rebellion against Assyria.

Josiah's reformation built on Hezekiah's earlier reform, but was not limited by it. Josiah purged indigenous and Assyrian cults. The purging of these cults were not the only change which is described as Josiah's reform. It was only the precondition. But, as Herrmann observes (1975:265), because cultic centres were done away within the framework of the reform, it is appropriate to take the two actions, emancipation and reform, in close conjunction, even though they should not be confused. His reform was the heart of a nationalistic cultural revolution which gained momentum after Assyrian rule ended in the West. Josiah, ruling a state free from imperial constraints, for the first time in a century, found in deuteronomic theology a national identity fitting Judah's newly independent status. Appropriately, Josiah reportedly ended his reform with a national celebration of Passover, the festival celebration of Israel's deliverance from foreign slavery. Lowery (1991:208,9) believes that Josiah's deuteronomic reformation was part of a comprehensive view of the world deeply rooted in the ancient traditions of Judah, tempered by the historical experience of foreign domination, and reflecting the changed reality of national independence.

Any discussion on Josiah needs, *inter alia*, analysis of the discovery of the Law Book and the process in which the Davidic monarchy came to dominate the social and cultural life of Judah, as well as the vexing questions about the events at Megiddo in 609 BCE, in which Judah's greatest king lost his life. (Chapter 6 will analyse Josiah's Cult Centralisation and Cultural Reformation.)

As Assyria lost her grip on her empire, Judah found herself once more, by default as it were, a free country. Coincident with the achievement of independence, and partly as an aspect of it, the young king Josiah launched the most sweeping reform of her history.

Judah's independence became a fact under Josiah. The steps by which this was achieved remain somewhat a matter of conjecture. We know nothing of his childhood years. Presumably the affairs of state were in the hands of advisers who pursued a discreet course *vis-a-vis* Assyria. The notice in 2 Chronicles 34:3a indicate that as early as Josiah's eighth year (633/2 BCE) the decision had been taken to make a shift in the national policy as soon as that should appear feasible. It seems that in his twelfth year (629/8 BCE) the opportunity came. By that time Assurbanipal was old and his son Sin-shar-ishkun had come to the throne as his co-regent. Assyria, whose effective control of the west had begun to loosen, was no longer in a position to interfere.

Assyrian non-intervention in this nationalistic activity suggests that Judah, as early as 640 BCE, had begun to free itself of vassal restraints, long before the final disintegration of the empire which set in with the death of Ashurbanipal in 627 BCE.

Josiah's reign and activities are described in 2 Kings 22:1ff. 2 Chronicles 34:1ff, differs considerably, however, both in sequence of events and point of view, even though they complement each other. Examination of the Biblical sources concerning the religious activities of Josiah shows the sequential and chronological reliability of Chronicles and the need to insert there the account in Kings. In the eighth year of his reign Josiah began *"to seek after the G-d of David his father"* (2 Chron. 34:3). The new trend in Judahite politics shows the influence of 'the people of the land'. The king had probably been educated by high officials in accordance with the views of 'the people of the land', and his first political steps must be credited to his advisers (cf Zeph. 1:8). The second part of 2 Chronicles 34:3 says:

*"...and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, the Asherim, and the graven and molten images".*

Purification of the cult, which is described in detail, included destroying the alien cults and symbols and totally removing all signs of popular worship except from the central sanctuary in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 34:3-7; 2 Kgs. 23:4-20). According to 2 Chronicles 34:6, purification included *"the cities of Manasseh and Ephraim and Simeon, even unto Naphtali, with their axes round about"*, but the book of Kings defines the area purified as *"from Geba to Beer-sheba"* (23:8). Reviv (1979:202) avers this geographical difference may indicate stages in implementing purification. In any case, the cult centers within the Assyrian provinces populated by Israelites were destroyed (2 Kgs. 23:19) including the ancient cult centre in Beth-el which seems also to have been used by permission of Assyrian authorities (2 Kgs. 23:8-9). Halpern (1991:77) is of the opinion Josiah's iconoclasm was Cromwellian in scope, directed against any plastic art that could remotely be construed as cultic. The purification took six years, long enough to show that Josiah was not content only

with the physical destruction of the cult places, but wanted greater political strength beyond Judah's northern border. The **eighteenth year** of his reign disclosed his political and national goals.

### 5.3 JOSIAH'S REFORM

#### 5.3.1 Its Major Features

The order in which Josiah's various steps were carried out, nor how long they took, cannot be definitely stated. Close analysis of the account in Kings of subsequent activity (2 Kgs. 23:4-24) suggests that the reform occurred in stages which the compilers have telescoped. The main focus, and surely the initial stage, had to do with the Temple in Jerusalem and with cult places in the immediate vicinity. As stated, the Biblical editors of the material noted a number of actions taken to purify worship. (It must be remembered, however, that the editors wanted to glorify Josiah's actions and thus may have exaggerated the non-YHWHistic features associated with earlier monarchs as well as the 'purges' of Josiah.) The 'idolatrous' priests whom the kings of Judah had appointed to officiate in non-YHWHistic worship were deposed (2 Kgs. 23:5). According to 2 Kings 22:3, the reform took place in Josiah's **eighteenth year** (622 BCE) when, in the course of repairs to the Temple, a copy of 'the book of the law' was found. Brought to the king's attention, it evoked in him the profoundest consternation. Having consulted the oracle, he summoned the elders of the people to the Temple, read the law to them, and entered with them into solemn covenant before YHWH to obey it. The impression is conveyed that this law was the basis of his various measures, and that all of these were carried out (cf. 2 Kgs. 23:23), as it happens quite erroneously, in the same year.

It is the premise of this thesis that the very fact that the Temple was being repaired when the lawbook was found indicates that reform was already in progress, for the repairing and purification of the Temple was itself a reform measure. The Chronicler, on the other hand, tells us that the reform was accomplished in several steps, and that it had been going on for some years before the lawbook was found. He too schematises his material, placing virtually the whole of the reform in Josiah's twelfth year and leaving little to be done in the eighteenth save to hold a great Passover, which is likewise unlikely. Both accounts seem to have telescoped measures taken over a period of time. It is possible, according to Bright (1981:318) that in Josiah's eighth year, when Assyria's power was diminishing, Josiah might have started his radical purge of idolatrous practices, which was extended into Northern Israel too, as Josiah moved into that area. During the period of religious reform instituted in Josiah's twelfth year, he received prophetic support in his endeavours. His probable kinsman, Zephaniah, condemned idolatry and warned of coming judgment 'in the days of Josiah' (Zeph. 1:1). Jeremiah, a man of priestly family 'to whom the word of YHWH came in the days of Josiah ben Amon, King of Judah in the thirteenth year of his reign' (Jer. 1:2), i.e. in the second or third year of his reform, continued active until the end of the kingdom. Huldah, a prophetess, was

evidently active at this time (2 Kgs. 22:12; 2 Chron. 34:22). Jeremiah's message was one of condemnation of false prophets and corrupt priests and of idolatry and immorality throughout the nation, and of consequent judgment. He spoke also, however, of the future ideal king (Jer. 23:4-6; 33:15-16) and a time of restoration. Then, in the **eighteenth year**, Assyrian control having quite ended, the finding of the lawbook **gave the reform direction and drove to its conclusion**. Thus the hypothesis of Chronicler's picture of a reform in various steps is sound. Reform paralleled independence and went forward in step with it.

As mentioned in Chapter 1 Deuteronomy proceeds directly to a description of the events in Josiah's **eighteenth year**, which are for him **the crowning point of Judah's history**. In this free composition, Josiah is depicted as concerning himself with the physical restoration of the Temple, which had fallen into a dilapidated state. In highlighting this act, Josiah's piety is underscored, for it was a primary duty of ancient Near Eastern monarchs to care for and to maintain the temples of the gods.

### 5.3.2 The Book of the Law

According to the Bible, there was a connection between the repair of the Temple under the aegis of high officials, and the discovery of the *'Book of the Law of the Lord given by Moses'* (cf 2 Chron. 34:14 and 2 Kgs. 22:3 ff). The story of the Temple repairs is modeled on the older account in 2 Kings 12, which related in much detail how in the days of Jehoash, the king ordered repair work on YHWH's house. Cogan & Tadmor (1988:293) are at pains to point out that the verbal similarities between these stories (e.g. 2 Kgs. 22:5-6 and 12:12-13; 22:7 and 12:16), which have often been pointed out, are not sufficient cause to postulate that both derive from Temple archives. The description of the repairs in 2 Kings 22 is abbreviated, with only the preparatory stages of the work reported. The conclusion of the narrative, which would have told of the repair itself, is nowhere given (cf. 12:15 - *'they repaired ... the Temple'*). Moreover, unlike 2 Kings 12, in which the high priest Jehoiada is a main actor, in 2 Kings 22, it is the king who is shown to be versed in Temple matters. In a royal decree, Josiah orders the disbursement of money to the skilled workmen. It is in this context of continuing and active reform that the discovery of the Book of the Law may reasonably be set. According to both Kings and Chronicles, in his **eighteenth year** (623/622 BCE), Josiah turned his attention to the repair of the Temple. It was in the early stages of this programme that Hilkiah the high priest found the book (2 Kgs. 22:3-8; 2 Chron. 34:8-15). The book has commonly been identified with some form of the Biblical Book of Deuteronomy. Opinions have differed concerning what proportion of the existing Deuteronomy constituted the Book of the Law in Josiah's time: whether only parts, or substantially the whole. It was evidently of such a length that it could be read through twice, and possibly three times, in one day, and therefore could well have constituted the major part of the Biblical Book of Deuteronomy, which can be read through in under an hour and a half (CAH Vol. III 1991:387,8). In a note in the CAH it is stated that the English translation can be read in about 85 minutes, and the Hebrew version is considerably shorter). After the Book was discovered, there was

a national assembly and a public reading (2 Chron. 34:29 ff.), at the conclusion of which a covenant was made

*"before the Lord to walk after the Lord, and to keep his commandments, and his testimonies, and his statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the covenant that were written in this book" (2 Chron. 34:31 and cf. 2 Kgs. 23:3).*

A mass celebration of the Passover concluded the festivities (2 Chron. 35:19; 2 Kgs. 23:23).

The covenant climaxed Josiah's activities. Its ideological expression was the book that was found in the Temple. The current view is that this book was a pre-canonical version of Deuteronomy, or part of it, because of the close link between Deuteronomy and the events of this period. According to Reviv (1979:202,3) the 'Book of the Law of the Lord given by Moses' or the 'Book of the Covenant' suited Josiah's purposes, although its contents began to be formulated before his time by scribes who wrote down ancient formulations tailored to the framework that they had created.

Modern scholars call Josiah's actions a "reform", but whether this was "reform" or intensification and fulfillment of existing aspirations in Judah is variously interpreted (Reviv 1979:203). The events in Judah in Josiah's reign are, nonetheless, similar to occurrences in Hezekiah's reign on the eve of 701 BCE, because of an essential affinity of motives and situation. As the result of conditions absent in his grandfather's lifetime, Josiah was able to develop and extend the objectives which had guided Hezekiah. He was able to add the instructive novelty of the Covenant and the Book, thus following a line fixed on the eve of the year of 701 BCE, and achieving a far-reaching goal which Hezekiah had been prevented from realizing. In a planned, gradual, nearly ten-year-long operation, Josiah concentrated the cult completely in the Central Sanctuary in Jerusalem and forbade worship of the G-d of Israel in any other place and in any other form. The religious and national revival, to which a Covenant based on the Book is central, was meant to rally the people around Jerusalem, the Sanctuary, and the king to realise the political aim of restoring political independence in Judah. Halpern (1991:78) observes that the nature and the extent of Josiah's centralization "speak volumes about the party's doctrinaire theology, ruthless fanaticism, and long-standing frustration".

This single-minded concentration of political ambition demonstrates the weakness of Assyria and its inability to come to grips with a situation with which it earlier would have been able to deal. Josiah's activities were therefore not discrete from events beyond his borders, as every single stage in the execution and timing of the "reform" proves.

### **5.3.3 Political Changes under Josiah**

The political change in Judah in the eighth year of Josiah's reign reflects the upheavals in Assyria towards the end of Ashurbanipal's life. The stages were:

**5.3.3.1** The beginning of Josiah's plan, which, as the sources show, was veiled, cautious, and exploratory.

**5.3.3.2** In the twelfth year of his reign he took more obviously significant steps, apparently in the year of Ashurbanipal's death. When Ashurbanipal died, or a little earlier, the rivalry for succession started, facilitating Josiah's undertaking. This was when he penetrated the areas inhabited by Israelites and purified them.

**5.3.3.3** The completion of the purification, the concentration of the cult, and the establishment of the Covenant in the eighteenth year of Josiah's reign, accord with the time when Assyria lost its political importance and became at least two political entities.

#### **5.3.4 Cult Purification**

Miller & Hayes (1986:397) suggest that the book of Deuteronomy was formulated not only as a document of religious independence but also as a document of political independence. Assyrian political domination and religious influence lay at the root of many of its formulations. By 622 BCE Assyrian presence in Palestine must have been minimal, if not nil. The Egyptians had filled the political vacuum, but the 'anti-Assyrian' religious reforms could be carried out under Egyptian control and without such reforms representing a move for political autonomy.

The historian has set Josiah in center stage, but since the main subject of the present account was to be the Book of Teaching and the king's reaction to its discovery, the repair story is given in very brief form.

The account opens abruptly with a statement by Hilkiyah, the high priest, that he has found the Book of Teaching. Shaphan receives the book and reads it, and is so deeply impressed by its contents, that he reports its discovery to the king. After hearing the words of the Book, Josiah is thrown into a state of shock. "Can this book that had such a profound effect upon all its hearers be identified?" ask Cogan & Tadmor (1988:294). They note that it has become an accepted maxim in Biblical scholarship ever since De Wette's *Dissertatio Critica* in 1805, that the book is Deuteronomy or its nucleus (see Nicholson 1967:1-7). Deuteronomy presents itself as a covenant, and from a literary point of view the book has the structure of a political treaty. It is, therefore, cardinal for the understanding of the Josianic reform that it is described as having emerged from the book of Deuteronomy or a significant part of it. Josiah's act of cultic reform (cf. 2 Kgs. 23:4-14, 21-24) which culminated in the centralization of all worship in Jerusalem, are presented in terms and style almost identical to that of Deuteronomy. Moreover, no other book of the Pentateuch besides Deuteronomy requires cultic centralization in YHWH's chosen city. Josiah's mournful reaction to the book also points to Deuteronomy, in which the legal code concludes with lengthy maledictions, a dire warning to all violators of YHWH's covenant. The question then arises whether the report of this finding can be taken at face value.

The premise of this thesis avers that this indeed can be taken at face value. Opinions



have differed concerning what proportion of the existing Deuteronomy constituted the Book of the Law in Josiah's time: whether only parts, or substantially the whole. This question is associated also with that of the origin and authorship of Deuteronomy, concerning which views range from the time of Moses to the post-Exilic period in the 5th or 4th century BCE. The hypothesis in this thesis believes that the description of its discovery and use suggest that at that time it had the appearance of age, being immediately accepted as authoritative, and those who discovered it, who made it known to the king, and who participated in the actions to which it led, **"were presumably honest men. It is unlikely, therefore, to have been a recent compilation expressly placed in order to be found, pseudo-accidentally, soon after its deposit"** (my emphasis) (CAH Vol. III 1991:388).

The writer of this thesis refutes entirely Claburn's offensive and unacademic remarks (1973:12) when he sarcastically says that:

"Given the obviously close connection between the reforms and much of the Book of Deuteronomy, it is understandable that many scholars would thus use that connection as an excuse simply to avoid explanation by pretending to live in a world in which it is conceivable that the `finding' of some dusty old unused document along the lines of Deuteronomy in a temple undergoing repairs (2 Kgs. 22:8) would automatically result in a sweeping national religious transformation - as though the discovery of a previously unknown earlier edition of the United States Constitution, or a previously unknown source related to the life of Jesus would suddenly transform the present legally constituted form of the United States government or the established religious organizations of Christendom!"

The premise in this thesis affirms that the discovery of old documents during repairs of temples is an attested phenomenon in the Ancient Near East. From Egypt come reports of scrolls discovered in the masonry of buildings, and in Mesopotamia ancient foundation deposits and stelae were eagerly sought and their recovery faithfully recorded. (One has only to think of the phenomenon of depositing "time capsules", whether in the foundations of buildings or on the surface of the moon, so popular in this century in the 60s!) But whether the Book of Teaching brought forward by Hilkiah was a *bona fide* find at the time of the repairs to the Temple in Jerusalem, or was purposefully presented as such, cannot be ascertained. Cogan & Tadmor (1988:295) suggest that at issue is the date of the book of Deuteronomy, which if one accepts the position adopted for over a century in Biblical scholarship, was composed in the seventh century BCE, though it may well include older material from Northern Israel.

Cogan & Tadmor (1988:295) continue that although the `discovery' of the book is credited to Hilkiah personally, it is quite possible it was either a reinstated Zadokite, or from the priestly circle living at Anathoth (2 Kgs. 22:4). Others, a new elite, comprising priests, scribes and prophets (cf. 2 Kgs. 23:2) supported Josiah and may be seen behind the promotion of the new reforms.

The Biblical narratives about Josiah in 2 Kings 22:3 and 2 Chronicles 34:5 are concentrated around his cultic activity and the discovery of the 'book of the law' in the Temple. In dealing with Josiah's reform one must distinguish between (a) the *purification of the cult* and (b) *its centralization in Jerusalem*. Halpern (1991:88) cites Pryce-Jones, 1989 and paraphrases the latter's recent analysis of Islamic culture: Judah's social organization passed from a stage in which individuals were housed within kinship and patronage groups to one in which their links to central authority and to their god were immediate, unmediated, without having the opportunity to develop any significant institutions or customs of civil society, or moderate political culture.

#### 5.3.4.1 Purification of the Cult

The purification of the cult refers to the destruction of the pagan foreign cults which the Biblical tradition states had been introduced into Israel in Solomon's days (2 Kgs. 23:13), were expanded during the time of Ahaz, and reached their climax in the reign of Manasseh (2 Kgs. 23:12). It seems (Hayes & Miller 1977: 460) Josiah's actions in purifying the cult were not limited to Judah but extended to Beth-el (2 Kgs. 23:4; 15) and the '*cities of Samaria*' (2 Kgs. 23:8; 19; 2 Chron. 34:6). According to 2 Chronicles 34:31 the influence of the book was limited to the renewal of the covenant between the people and G-d '*to keep his commandments and his testimonies and his statutes*'. This of course radically differs from the account in 2 Kings which explains the purification of the cult against the background of the discovery of the law book.

#### 5.3.4.2 Centralization of the Cult

Conditions were different under Josiah than during Hezekiah's reign. The priests of Jerusalem would have had their own reasons for favouring centralization, and it was perhaps under their influence that the idea was written into the Deuteronomic materials from the beginning. Times were different now, however, and the need to strengthen national defense on the basis of a centralized place of worship was no longer at issue. Thus even if Josiah pushed the idea, it seems not to have met with overwhelming success.

- a) The command to centralise the cult in the one place chosen by G-d is only found in the book of Deuteronomy (12:5). Josiah's reform abolished the worship of the *bamoth* and required a centralization of the cult in one place - Jerusalem.
- b) The book found in the Temple included curses and threats (2 Kgs. 22:16; 2 Chron. 34:24) and only in the book of Deuteronomy do we find collected together curses which G-d will visit upon the people if they fail to keep the covenant. Among the Deuteronomic curses, we find the threat of exile and destruction (Deut. 28:36f.; 63-65).
- c) Josiah sent a delegation to Huldah the prophetess (2 Kgs. 22:11-20) who was prominent among the king's supporters according to the law of

Deuteronomy 18:15.

- d) Both in Kings and Chronicles, the passages which discuss the book that was found, and its association with Josiah's activity to centralize the cult, and the celebration of the Passover in Jerusalem appear together (2 Kgs. 23; 2 Chron. 34-5). A similar juxtaposition between centralization and Passover is again found in Deuteronomy 16:5-8 according to which the Passover is to be celebrated at *'the place which the Lord thy G-d shall choose'*.

Hayes & Miller (1977:462) cite the views of Nichol森 (1963:380,9 and 1967:103-6) and Weinfeld (1967:249-62) and observe that in spite of these and other reasons, there are those who have doubts about the theory that the book of Deuteronomy was composed in Josiah's days and that Josiah's reform actually dealt with the centralization of the cult. Such doubts have been raised by scholars who claim that an emphasis on the centralization of the cult first occurred during the period of the exile and restoration. On the other hand, there are scholars who claim that the idea of cultic centralization and the book of Deuteronomy are much earlier than the time of Josiah (see 2 Chron. 17:9).

Similarly, scholars are divided as to the 'school' from which the book of Deuteronomy, unique in its homiletic and rhetorical style and phraseology, originated (see Weinfeld 1972, cited in Hayes & Miller 1977:462). This poses the dilemma as to whether the Deuteronomic author was one of the Levites, among whose duties was the teaching of the law (see 2 Chron. 17:9; Neh. 8). Or was he one of the prophets who struggled against idolatry and worship on the high places and whose preaching had much in common with the book of Deuteronomy in phraseology (especially the book of Jeremiah)? It is equally probable that perhaps the Deuteronomic author was one of the court scribes, who dealt with literary and written documents and were familiar with the structure of covenants. If the Biblical writer's purpose (2 Kgs. 22f.) was to make the reader suppose that Josiah's reform rested on Deuteronomy, though he himself knew full well that he did not, he was not very skilful, according to Rowley (1963:194, 195) and large numbers of careful students missed this until De Wette drew attention to it. Two Kings 23:9 notes *"nevertheless the priests of the high places came not up to the altar of YHWH in Jerusalem"*. Rowley states that unless there were some expectations that they would come to the altar, this is a pointless observation. "But surely no writer of a fictitious account designed to lead the reader to the false supposition that Deuteronomy was the basis of Josiah's reform would have added this. If his honesty had surprisingly revolted against misleading the reader here, and only here, he might just have said nothing about the point. The fact that he does manifest honesty here ought rather to encourage us to believe that in the rest of the account he is a reliable authority - especially he is probably recounting events that happened within his own memory".

As previously stated, prominent among the king's supporters is the prophetess Huldah, whose response to Josiah's enquiry is given in somber tones: the fate of Judah is sealed, just as written in the book; but his personal contribution will be rewarded in that he will die 'in peace', before the doom overtakes his kingdom (2

Kgs. 22:15-20). Cogan & Tadmor (1988:295) believe many recognise here the hand of the later Deuteronomistic historian, who has worked over the original prophecy of Huldah. The prediction of unrelenting doom '*against this place*', which does not consider the possibility of repentance, would not have encouraged Josiah to proceed with his reform. A positive divine word, now transformed into a prophecy of woe by vv. 16, 17, 20b, originally strengthened him in his task. At the same time, the incongruity between the promise to Josiah that he would die 'in peace' and his untimely death at Megiddo (2 Kgs. 23:29) identifies vv. 19-20a as part of the original kernel of the prophecy. The late rewriting surprisingly did not eliminate this incongruity, which runs contrary to the historiographic viewpoint of the Deuteronomistic circle, for whom the fulfillment of prophecy played a key role. These words of Huldah remain a striking example of unfulfilled prophecy, according to Cogan & Tadmor (1988:295).

In concurrence with Rowley (1963:195) it is entirely possible that Deuteronomy was written early in Manasseh's time, and emanated from a small group of reformers who wished to embody the lessons of Hezekiah's reform in a plan for the next occasion that should offer. They could not know that half a century would pass before such an occasion would arise, and that probably all of them would have died and their work lie not so much forgotten as unknown in the dust until 621 BCE. When it was found none knew where it had come from, nor what was its age, but the priesthood of Jerusalem was prepared to resist the one point where they felt their interests to be adversely affected.

#### **5.3.4.3 The Great Passover**

Encouraged by Huldah's prophecy, Josiah convened a grand assembly, all Judah, from the capital and the countryside, priests and prophets, the entire population, young and old. They undertook the obligations of the 'newly recovered' book of the covenant, and pledged their loyalty to YHWH. To demonstrate compliance with the teaching, Josiah proclaimed the celebration of a unique Passover, unlike ever previously observed. According to both Kings and Chronicles Josiah's Passover was celebrated in a manner different from all celebrations before the beginning of the monarchy, but no indication is given of the nature of the innovation. What Cogan & Tadmor (1988:296) term as "a finishing touch inspired by the Deuteronomic ideal" comes in Deuteronomy 16:1-7. They note that the historicity of the description given here may, however, be limited, for it comes from the hand of a partisan of the Deuteronomic school. They thus believe it is made to appear as if all events flow from the finding of the Book of Teaching. The Chronicler, in 2 Chronicles 34-35, presents a different order of events, one in which the Book does not play as central a role as in 2 Kings 22. Yet in whatever way the divergent account in Chronicles is to be understood, 2 Kings 23:1-3 states that for the first time in the history of the monarchy, the entire community undertook a covenantal obligation to observe the divine ordinances based upon a Book of Teaching. This thesis accepts Cogan & Tadmor's observation (1988:296) that in this respect, the Josianic covenant can rightly be seen as a new departure in the history of Judah. For the first time, a Book

of Teaching is set as the constitutive base of the community of Judah, and with this act the first steps were taken to collect and codify Israel's legal and literary heritage. Consequently, the emergence of Deuteronomy into the public realm marked the beginnings of the Pentateuch.

ANET 3:289 gives an example in which, in order to ensure the undisturbed transfer of rule from father to son, Ashurbanipal reports that his father "gathered the people of Assyria, young and old, from the upper and the lower seas, and had them take an oath by the gods and enforced the(ir) obligations". In addition, as has been shown in several studies, there is a distinct affinity between some of the curses which conclude the covenant in the book of Deuteronomy and those in the 'vassal treaties' of Esarhaddon. Therefore, the description of the entire community undertaking an oath of loyalty to YHWH is literarily similar to the descriptions of oath ceremonies in Assyria during the days of Sennacherib, Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal. But Cogan & Tadmor (1988:297) aver that questions relating to the literary origins of Deuteronomy should not be combined with issues concerning Josiah's act of covenant-making. The loyalty oath in Sargonid Assyria concerned itself with the newly appointed successor and in this respect can be compared to the covenant undertaken by the people to protect the succession of Jehoash (2 Kgs. 11:17). There is no parallel anywhere in the ancient Near East of an entire community swearing allegiance to its god as depicted in 2 Kings 23:1-3. Josiah's act and the Biblical concept of a covenant made between G-d and people remain unique.

The question is complex, and Hayes & Miller (1977:462-3) accept the following assumptions:

- a) The book of Deuteronomy does demand the **centralization** of the cult in one place, but **the idea itself was not invented in Josiah's time** as any discussion of Hezekiah would illustrate. Thus Josiah's reform need not necessarily be closely associated with the discovery of the book of the law. According to Chronicles, the book was found in the temple **after the reform was already under way** (my emphasis).
- b) The book designated 'the book of the covenant' (2 Kgs. 23:2) was obviously some form of the book of Deuteronomy, though whether in its present or an earlier form is uncertain (see 2 Chron. 17:9 for reference to a 'book of the law of G-d' at the time of Jehoshaphat). The book of Deuteronomy has the style of a covenant in a form found in Near Eastern international treaties (Weinfeld 1972:59-81). Usually these treaties included three elements:
  - (i) a historical introduction intended to justify the covenant (cf. Deut. 1-11);
  - (ii) the conditions of the treaty (see Deut. 12-26); and
  - (iii) curses which were to come upon the participant who did not observe the treaty stipulations (cf. Deut. 27-8). Thus the name 'book of the covenant' is an appropriate description of the book of Deuteronomy.

- c) One can suggest that the book was hidden in the temple during the days of Manasseh and Amon, that is, at the height of the Assyrian oppression and the religious-cultic syncretism, and then discovered when Josiah's reform took place.
- d) The strong impression which the book had on Josiah can be explained by the fact that only in the book of Deuteronomy do Israelite legal traditions speak about the institution of kingship and its responsibilities (see Deut. 17:18). In the rebuking words of Huldah the prophetess (2 Kgs. 22:15-17), one can hear an echo of the words of Deuteronomy 28:36 concerning the destiny of the king and nation.

### 5.3.5 The Second Stage of the Reform

The second stage of the reform involved an attempt to extend the purge throughout the land - *'from Geba to Beer-sheba'* - i.e., throughout Judah proper (2 Kgs. 23:8). What was involved in Josiah's purge of the cult at large in Judah is not entirely clear. Two Kings 23:5 notes that the king deposed the idolatrous priests in Judah who had earlier functioned under royal patronage. Action must also have been taken against some YHWHistic establishments as well, since 2 Kings 23:8-9 notes that *"he brought all the priests out of the cities of Judah and defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beer-sheba"* (cf. Ezek. 44). These verses suggest:

5.3.5.1 that some attempt was made to put the local YHWHist priests and their sanctuaries out of business by defiling the YHWHistic high places, but

5.3.5.2 that the attempt was not very successful.

The material in Deuteronomy 12 clearly emphasises the restriction of the sacrificial cult to one sanctuary and makes provision for certain changes that would result as a consequence. Destruction of other places of worship is decreed. Allowance is made, however, for priests in other shrines to come *'to the place which YHWH will choose'* and there they *'may minister in the name of YHWH' their G-d* (Deut. 18:6-7).

On historical grounds, by about 625 BCE Josiah was already free of any vassalage to Assyria. This would have permitted his expansion into the northern territories prior to his eighteenth year (2 Kgs. 22:3). But lacking firmer evidence, free of historiographic considerations, exact dates for the various stages of Josiah's reform cannot be fixed (Cogan & Tadmor 1988:299).

The centralization of the cult in Jerusalem must be viewed in connection with the desire to strengthen the relations between the residents of the provincial cities and the central government in Jerusalem. In addition, Josiah's reform extended beyond the borders of Judah into areas which belonged to the former kingdom of Northern Israel (2 Kgs. 23:4; 2 Chron. 34:6-7). These areas were part of Assyrian provinces where exiled people from other countries had been settled (2 Kgs. 17:24; Ezra 4:9).

### **5.3.6 The Geographical Dimensions of Josiah's Kingdom**

**5.3.6.1** In discussing the geopolitical background and date of the Assyrian Retreat from Palestine, Na'aman (1991:33,4) affirms that Josiah is generally regarded as being a strong and independent ruler, who was active for many years in the vacuum formed by the Assyrian retreat from Palestine, and was able to expand considerably the borders of his kingdom. There are many variants, concerning such points as:

**5.3.6.2** the date of release from Assyrian bondage

**5.3.6.3** the number and distribution of towns conquered by Josiah and annexed to his kingdom;

**5.3.6.4** his relations with Egypt.

The gaps in the Book of Kings have been filled in by the works of various scholars (several of whom have been discussed). Na'aman (1991:56) points out that:

- a) Many scholars have assumed that Josiah freed his kingdom from the Assyrian yoke in the early stages of his reign, enjoyed many years of independent rule, and expanded his kingdom over vast areas.
- b) A few have gone so far as to assume that he controlled most of the Israelite territory, and even to ascribe to him the tendency to restore David's kingdom to its former glory.

Undoubtedly Josiah did take advantage of this situation to implement comprehensive reforms in his kingdom, focused on the extirpation of 'foreign' cults and the concentration of worship in the Temple in Jerusalem. In this, he was assisted by the awakening of nationalist consciousness in extensive circles, throughout the kingdom, although other, oppositionist circles, no doubt did all in their power to prevent the implementation of the reforms. Some time later, Josiah expanded northward; he captured Beth-el, the cult centre which had been Jerusalem's great rival throughout the days of the Divided Monarchy, destroyed the site of worship, and annexed the area to his kingdom. He may also have extended his rule into Samaria, outside the range of Egypt's immediate political interests, in which there was no well-formed body to assume control and concentrate independent power following the Assyrian retreat. The extent of Josiah's activity in Samaria is not known; however, he surely did not dare to annex the region, in view of the expected Egyptian response to such a deed, and perhaps also because of the varied ethnic composition of its population following the Assyrian deportations and the difficulties foreseen in attempting to assimilate that population into his kingdom.

This thesis concurs with Na'aman's opinion (1991:57, and in personal discussions at Tel Aviv, April 1994) that Josiah was unable to expand westward, due to the danger of conflict with Egypt, as well as the growth and strengthening of his neighbour Ekron, which became a sort of buffer state between the coastal area and the kingdom of Judah. Na'aman therefore believes that our conclusions regarding the limited borders of the kingdom are of extreme importance in evaluating his achievements.

He admits that his conclusions clash with the many generally accepted conventions pertinent to the history of his reign.

All attempts to reconstruct the boundaries of the kingdom beyond the borders of Judah proper and vicinity are speculations, being dependent upon sources which are ambiguous. The views of various scholars are offered, but the premise of this thesis concurs with Na'aman's 'minimalist' assessment of the dimensions of Josianic realm.

Some scholars have concluded that Josiah's kingdom consisted mainly of the area between the Beer-sheba Valley and Beth-el; others, by contrast, have suggested that Josiah attempted to restore the kingdom of David in all its glory, and that he controlled much of the Cisjordanian areas. The dimensions of the Josianic kingdom, likewise archaeological data, will be discussed in detail below. It is of great importance that recent archaeological research has provided us with new data pertinent to the study of this period, data which were not at the disposal of those scholars who discussed Josiah's kingdom in the past. Thus we are able re-evaluate the written sources. It appears that, by re-integration of all these sources, we may now suggest a fairly new picture of Josiah's kingdom, including its territorial extent, population, economic power, and international status. This picture is based on firmer foundations than previous reconstructions according to Na'aman (1991:34, 35).

A minimalistic approach would limit Josiah's annexations in the north to the area of Mt Ephraim alone. Thus Malamat (1973:271) citing Mazar (1940:35-37) followed by Kallai (1960:75f) contends that the actual borders of the kingdom of Judah at that time were reflected in the delimitation of the reform: *from Geba to Beth-el* (2 Kgs.23:9). This approach leaves open the matter of the spread of Josiah's political influence towards Megiddo, in contrast to actual control.

Na'aman (1991:57) avers the extent of the kingdom of Judah in Josiah's time is reflected in the town lists of Judah and Benjamin in the Book of Joshua. These lists and their meaning and date, constitute a starting point for the discussions in the second part of this study. The information at our disposal on the period of Josiah's reign, drawn from the descriptions in the Books of Kings and Chronicles, is surprisingly limited, and does not enable us to determine the extent of his kingdom, let alone its strength and economic power. The dating of the town lists in Josiah's time, and the integration of the date with the archaeological data on the extent of settlement, strength, and deployment in Judah in the seventh century BCE, provide the foothold so vital to our discussion.

**5.3.6.5** In the Chronicler's account Josiah is credited with carrying his reform as far north as Naphtali (2 Chron. 34:6). The compiler of Kings says nothing of this, but does credit him with carrying it beyond his borders of Judah to Beth-el. Rowley (1963:197) offers a plausible premise that there is no reason to doubt that Josiah went beyond the borders of Judah, at least as far as Beth-el is concerned. Since there was no longer any royal house in the Northern Kingdom to claim men's loyalty, and to offer them leadership, Rowley regards nothing would have been more natural than



that Josiah should aspire to restore a united, independent kingdom. It was the Philistine menace which had brought North and South together at the time of the foundation of the monarchy, and now again both stood in a similar situation, since both were controlled by Assyria, though the North had been reduced to the status of a province, while the South had retained a king.

**5.3.6.6** Alt (1925:100-16) is of the opinion that the source of the town lists in the book of Joshua, pertaining to both the southern and northern tribes (as Josh. 15:21-62; 19:2-7) is an administrative document from Josiah's reign. The lists of towns in Joshua 13 and Numbers 32:3; 34-8 relate to Josiah's territory in Transjordan.

**5.3.6.7** Ginsberg (1950:355-63) surmises that from the oracle against the Ammonites in Jeremiah 49 and from Isaiah 9:1-7 we may conclude that Josiah ruled over the Gilead. Josiah, in restoring the ancient empire of King David, brought not only practically all of the former territories of Judah and Israel under his direct rule, but also the three Transjordan states (minus some territories) under his suzerainty.

**5.3.6.8** Malamat (1973: 271) tends to exclude Galilee from Josiah's rule, and states that Josiah extended his rule over territories which coincided, more or less, with the former Assyrian province of Samaria (2 Kgs. 23:15, 19 in contrast to 2 Chron. 34:6f; 33).

**5.3.6.9** According to Hayes & Miller (1977:464) Josiah also succeeded in enlarging his kingdom to the west, to the sea-coast, in the area of Philistia, as evidenced from the archaeological discoveries at Mesad Hashavyahu, which included Hebrew inscriptions (cited by Cross 1962:42-6 and Naveh, 1960 in Hayes & Miller). Surveys along the western shore of the Dead Sea (Kochavi 1972:93), together with excavations at Ein Gedi, provide evidence of extensive settlement and the construction of fortifications in this area during the 8th-7th century BCE.

Hayes & Miller (1977:466) find it plausible that Josiah had to reorganise the kingdom's administration and needed funds to carry out his policy, whose main aims were to solidify his rule over Judah from the capital of Jerusalem, to strengthen his country by fortifying cities and enlarging the army, and to extend the boundaries of his kingdom, especially to the north.

In the south, the fortress at Arad was strengthened and additional fortifications erected to defend the southern border (Aharoni 1979:30-32). One of the Arad inscriptions refers to the Kittim, which probably points to the existence of a Greek mercenary force in Josiah's service. Similarly, the presence of eastern Greek pottery at Mesad Hashavyahu probably also indicates Greek mercenaries in Josiah's service. The Third Preliminary Report on the Excavations in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City, shows that the city expanded towards the west and north-west in the later period of the monarchy, probably during Josiah's reign. In addition, Josiah's marriage to Zebidah from a family in Rumah in Galilee (2 Kgs. 23:36) and to Hamutal from a family in Libnah (2 Kgs. 23:31) located on the Philistine coast are evidence of the enlarged extent of Judah during Josiah's reign.

**5.3.6.10** To Bright (1981:317) it is reasonable to suppose that at this time (cf. 2 Chron. 32:3b-7) Josiah both launched a sweeping reform and moved to take possession of appreciable portions of Northern Israel. The extent of Josiah's annexation is, however, uncertain. Bright regards it makes sense that Josiah controlled the erstwhile province of Samaria, and he believes Josiah carried his reform into that area. He also, at least for a time, held a corridor reaching to the sea, as a fortress of his on the coast south of Joppa indicates. The sanctuary ('high place') of Beth-el, founded by Jeroboam, is singled out for special notice of all the cultic sites desecrated. Further, the king defiled these sites by burning human bones upon them, at the same time sparing the bones of the two prophets buried at Beth-el. Some believe that he gained control of the provinces of Megiddo (Galilee) and Gilead as well. But we cannot be certain. The fact that Josiah later met his death fighting at Megiddo shows that he regarded Galilee to be a part of his legitimate sphere of influence and that he had freedom of movement there. It does not, however, necessarily prove that he had incorporated that area into his realm. It is the premise of this thesis that it is more likely that Na'aman's view on this topic, namely that the dimensions of Josiah's border were considerably smaller than Bright has proposed, is correct.

It is difficult to establish the date when Assyria lost both its hold over the province of Samaria and its hegemony over Judah. The earliest possible date is in the 630s; another possibility would be 627 BCE, the year of Ashurbanipal's death. Josiah's thirty-one years of reign come, then, during a critical stage in the history of the Near East. The conclusion of this thesis is that it is unknown when, and by what steps Josiah enlarged his domain. However, since Assyria was no longer in a position to oppose him, and since most northern Israelites probably welcomed the change, it is unlikely that he encountered much resistance. It may even be that he took these steps while nominally a vassal, Assyria being both unable to prevent it and willing to go to any length to retain his loyalty and woo him from Egypt, at this stage still a hostile power. Be that as it may, by the time Josiah's reform reached its climax (622 BCE) Assyria was *in extremis* leaving Judah both in name and fact a free country.

### **5.3.7 Polemics against Cults**

Cogan & Tadmor (1988:299) note that nowhere in this account does the Biblical writer tell of the fate of the mixed cults and their worshippers in the repopulated city of Samaria and the cities of that province (cf. 2 Kgs. 17:24-33). Yet the polemic against these cults in 2 Kings 17:24ff. is terminologically tied up with the narrative in 2 Kings 23:15-20 (cf. the similar usages: '*cities of Samaria*' [2 Kgs. 17:24; 23:19]; '*shrines of the high places*', [2 Kgs. 17:29 and 32; 2 Kgs. 23:19], '*priests of the high places*' [2 Kgs. 17:32; 23:20]). The narrative further states that '*until this day*' one could observe these syncretistic practices - that is, until Josiah purged the north of its idolatry. Though not specifically mentioned in 2 Kings 23:19-20, the new YHWH cult in the Assyrian province of Samaria was exterminated along with the old Israelite cult. The manner in which the priests are slaughtered (2 Kgs. 23:20) is in line with the punishment specified in Deuteronomy 13:13-19 for the man who

has gone astray after foreign gods. (It is of significance that the officiants are called *kohanim*, 'priests', and not *kemarim*, 'idolatrous priests'). In sum, the polemic in 2 Kings 17:24-33 is part of the Josianic propaganda written in support of Josiah's reform in the north.

By all these acts, Josiah fulfilled an ancient prophecy, which an unnamed man of G-d had pronounced against Jeroboam's altar (1 Kgs. 13:1-3;32). Cogan & Tadmor (1988:300) are of the opinion that the prophecy serves, *inter alia*, for the ideological basis of Judah's triumph against the rival Northern Kingdom. It is quite plausible that by eradicating the ancient cult centre at Beth-el, a symbol of Jeroboam's rebellion, Josiah squared the account once and for all and re-established Jerusalem's centrality.

### 5.3.8 The Historical Realities

In concurrence with Na'aman (1991:55,56) Josiah's reign is far removed from the description of those years as reflected in the Book of Kings, nor less distant, either, from the sketch of the period presented in modern historiography. Historical reality is in direct contrast to the account of the author of the Book of Kings, which represents Hezekiah's revolt against Assyria as an impressive success, and the Assyrian campaign into Judah as having ended in the failure and retreat of the Assyrian ruler, following the dramatic intervention of the G-d of Israel. The writer of this thesis has noted the inflated and often inexact Assyrian and Babylonian Annal and Chronicle accounts, in which 'victories' mask disasters. It is thus interesting that Na'aman postulates that, in order to reinforce this picture of the revolt as a success, the Biblical author omitted any mention of Assyria from that point on! Anyone reading the history of Manasseh, Amon and Josiah in the Book of Kings, and finding there no hint of Assyrian domination, would have to conclude, in view of the internal sequence of events of the Book of Kings, that Judah fell under the yoke of Assyria in the reign of Ahaz and was freed during that of Hezekiah. In this way, the author of the Book of Kings avoided having to describe the reality in Josiah's day, a reality in which Judah was subjugated to one great power for many years, and, following the retreat of that power, became subordinate (at least nominally) to another; a reality far out of line with the image of the righteous king. Instead, the Biblical author concentrated on internal affairs, and described in great detail the implementation of the reforms, by which all foreign cults were eradicated, leaving only the sacred worship of the G-d of Israel, centred in the Temple in Jerusalem. Not until the account of Josiah's death, and even then with deliberate brevity, did the author make any reference to Judah's foreign affairs. From that point on, the great powers and external politics assume a central role in his work. According to the description in the Book of Kings, Judah became subjugated to Egypt during the reign of a sinful king (Jehoahaz), just as it had become subjugated to Assyria under another sinful king (Ahaz), and had won its liberty under a righteous king (Hezekiah). Nor should we marvel that all of the last Kings of Judah, who were dominated by foreign powers (first Egypt, then Babylonia), were described in the Book of Kings as having done *'what was evil in the sight of the Lord'*, a phrase which, according to Na'aman (1991:56), may not represent the actual state of affairs.

As the research in this thesis continued, it became increasingly evident that it must be concluded that there is no clear evidence that Josiah carried out a purge of Assyrian gods on the hill-shrines and other local sanctuaries of Judah. On the other hand there is good reason to believe that some such purge would have been an integral part of the campaign at Beth-el and other Northern cities (2 Kgs. 23:15-20). There must have been some kind of anti-Assyrian motivation for this campaign, even if many other factors were involved, for Samaria was at this time still an Assyrian province in fact, if not in power, and any sortie into its territory must have been regarded as an open act of military rebellion. However, the extent of Josiah's intervention in Samaria is extremely difficult to determine and there is nothing to indicate that an anti-Assyrian iconoclasm was one of his main objectives. There is not even a hint that these were the primary objects of Josiah's purge. Whatever may have motivated the Northern campaign, McKay (1973:42) notes the account of it in 2 Kings 15-20 is written in stereotyped Deuteronomic language which prohibits detailed investigation and leaves no impression whatsoever of a purge of Assyrian gods. Likewise, 2 Kings 23:24, the postscript to Josiah's reforms, makes no allusion to anything that could be regarded as particularly Assyrian. The terminology is thoroughly Israelite and the proscribed divinatory and pagan media are all known to have been found in the land at a much earlier date, well before the advent of the Assyrians.

The premise in this thesis, therefore, is that it must be concluded that if Assyrian gods were worshipped on the *bamot*, whether of Judah or of Israel, they did not impress themselves on the historiographer as being noteworthy marks of apostasy, and hence it is unlikely that their cults were officially imposed by the Assyrians as symbols of vassal status.

As has been stressed, Josiah's central activity was concentrated in the period following his twelfth year, and **culminated in the events of his eighteenth year: the Covenant and the exclusive concentration of the cult.** This does not mean the end of his enterprise, however, although Reviv (1979:203) believes it is questionable whether the territorial expansion and construction projects could have been completed in only six years. Since the exact size of Josiah's kingdom is not known, it is important that one should seek help in the lists of those "*that went up out of the captivity*" (Ezra 2:1), in order to prove that Lod, Hadid and Ono belonged to Judah in Josiah's time (Ezra 2:33).

Nelson (1983:184) has pointed out that Biblical historians have insufficiently appreciated the fact that Egypt apparently continued to maintain good relations with Assyria throughout the 630s and 620s BCE. Psammetichus was able to enjoy the economic benefits of Syria-Palestine without conflict and could gradually move into the power vacuum left in Philistia (Spalinger 1977:222,3). By 616 BCE (ANET:303-5) when the Babylonian Chronicle picks up, Egypt is a full Assyrian ally. Nelson believes there is apparently no reason to see this as a change of long-standing policy. Josiah would have had very limited foreign policy options in this situation. As Jeremiah puts it (Jer. 2:18) he had to drink from both the Nile and the Euphrates,

and ally himself with both nations.

Nelson (1983:184) has theorised that as Assyria continued its slide towards disaster, Egypt probably realised the danger of a new Babylonian world empire. The obvious policy for Psammetichus, and for Josiah too, would be to support Assyria, as the weaker party, in order to prevent a concentration of power in Asia. Citing Albright (1963:80) and Ginsberg (1950:353) Nelson correctly asserts it is not unreasonable to suppose that Josiah remained a nominal vassal right up to the end. His penetration into the Assyrian provinces to the north, without opposition from either Egypt or Assyria, is evidence for this. There is Biblical evidence for an Egypt-Judah-Assyria alliance as well. The Jeremiah 15-18 oracles, which decry trust in Egypt and Assyria, and must date between 627 BCE and 622 BCE have already been mentioned. However, a change from one nation to the other, as is usually assumed, is not necessarily implied. It could, therefore, be just as natural to conclude that Judah had added an alliance with Egypt to an earlier one with Assyria.

*"And now, what do you gain by going to Egypt, to drink the waters of the Nile? Or what do you gain by going to Assyria to drink the waters of the Euphrates?" (Jer. 2:18)*

*"How lightly you repeat your way. You shall be put to shame by Egypt as you were put to shame by Assyria". (Jer. 2:36)*

Isaiah 19:16-25 describes an Assyrian-Egyptian alliance with Judah as its religious centre. A highway connects Egypt with Assyria, Israel is the third partner in the axis, and G-d announces:

*"Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel my heritage"*

Gottwald (1964:224-7) dated this oracle as between 660 and 609 BCE, and Nelson (1983:185) surmises it gives strong support for the idea of an alliance of Josiah with both Egypt and Assyria. Certainly it may also emphasise the universality of G-d although there is, of course, the possibility that it could be a third century BCE reference to the diaspora of the Seleucid and Ptolemaic kingdoms. Gottwald notes further that the Deuteronomistic historian, writing during Josiah's reign, and speaking through Moses, clearly excludes Edom, Moab and Ammon from the land of promise (Deut. 2:5, 9, 11). David's imperialism in Syria is taken as the model for Israelite hegemony (Deut. 1:7; Josh 1:4), and these Transjordanian elements of his empire are explicitly eliminated. In concurrence with Nelson's proposal (1983:185) this is exactly what we would expect if Josiah had expanded northward as a nominal Assyrian vassal, but was still obliged to respect the territory of his fellow vassals. Therefore, as far as Nelson is concerned, the historian is looking forward to Judah's rule in the Assyrian provincial system to the north to an extent that has not yet taken place under Josiah, but excludes the territories of the vassal states outside the provincial system.

Frost (1968:370,371) suggests that as the weight of Assyrian domination lifted, so

the tide of Judaeen nationalism and the hope of freedom and independence rose. In his view this religiously rising tide expressed itself in the deuteronomic reformation. Politically, it took the form of an attempt by Josiah to spread his influence northwards, and to take into his dominions some at least of the old Israelite territory which had been ruled by his ancestors, but which had been lost to the House of David at the time of Jeroboam's revolt. Thus Frost interprets Josiah's action in destroying the shrines at Beth-el and the other cities of the Northern kingdom as an assertion of the reunion of the land of Israel with the land of Judah, so that the Temple at Jerusalem should be the one shrine of all of newly restored Israel. This thesis rejects Frost's statement that "*in attempting to re-establish the old Hebrew kingdom of his father David, Josiah was not, according to Old Testament pattern of thought, and no doubt according to his own sincere understanding of the matter, simply indulging in personal aggrandizement*". Whilst accepting that politics and religion go hand in hand, personal aggrandizement by Josiah is **not** an aspect that this thesis has discovered. Frost says the theme of the Hebrew interpretation of history is summed up in the words '*I will be their G-d, and they shall be my people*'. That had been the promise to Abraham; it had been renewed to Moses; and it had been fulfilled in David. While the belief that the House of David would continue by divine providence always to reign over Judah and Israel, it was certainly no innovation in the post-exilic period. In the opinion of this thesis it is neither accurate nor academic, to pronounce the theory as "poking gentle fun at the Jews for their capacity to believe in the eternity of that which had manifestly passed away for ever, viz: Belief in the eternity of something that has ceased to exist is characteristic of Judaism in its early stages". Frost regards "The idea of a divine covenant with the House of David, was a codicil, as it were, to the major covenant of YHWH with the people of Israel", and he sees Josiah in seeking to establish his control over the Northern Kingdom as conceiving himself to be implementing the old dream of the United Kingdom under G-d. He views Ezekiel's oracle of the two sticks as verbalising thoughts which, even though the expression of them may come from post-exilic times, may have been long current in the royal court of Judah, and especially among the court prophets of Jerusalem. Frost theorises that this might have been the kind of oracle which encouraged Josiah as he set out on the expedition to bring Beth-el and Samaria under the control of Jerusalem, or indeed as he set out to do battle, as he later decided to do, with Egypt at the pass of Megiddo.

Nelson's (1983:186) hypothesis includes mention of a bloc of other Isaiah prophet legends (2 Kgs. 18:17-20:19) to which the Deuteronomic historian includes the visit of the envoys of Merodach-baladan to Hezekiah (2 Kgs. 20:12-19). Although often understood as a *vaticinium ex eventu* of the Babylonian exile, no exile is actually in view. Military defeat is neither mentioned nor implied, and there is only a fairly general mention of a transfer of national treasure and of the selection of members of the royal family as courtiers in Babylon. The unit's only obvious point is the speech of the dangers involved in an alliance with Babylon, which, Nelson asserts, would mean merely trading one suzerain for another even more rapacious one. He suggests (leaving aside from the question of the origin and transmission of

this unit) that it raises the question of why the Deuteronomistic historian felt the need to include it. His conclusion is that the advice on the folly of accepting an alliance with Babylon would make sense in the Josianic period only if Josiah were still a nominal Assyrian vassal but the possibility of a switch was being discussed. If by the time of the Deuteronomistic history's composition (certainly after 622 BCE), Josiah had already come to an understanding with Nabopolassar, there would have been no motive for including such a warning.

### 5.3.9 The Later Years of Josiah: The Aftermath of Reform

There is as yet no agreement among scholars whether there was a third stage in Josiah's religious reform, namely a movement beyond Jerusalem and the boundaries of Judah (*'from Geba to Beer sheba'*; 2 Kgs. 23:8), although both 2 Kings 23:15-20 and 2 Chronicles 34:6-7 suggest there was. It is highly doubtful that Josiah extended Judaeen borders or purged religious cult places outside Judaeen territory, except in the case of Beth-el. Except for the latter case, the assertions in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles that Josiah carried his reformation into old Israelite territory are sweeping statements, which supply no specific details and which appear to be later editorializing notations. In the later Persian provincial system, which generally followed the situation inherited from the Babylonians, Beth-el was part of the province of Judah. This suggests that Josiah expanded his kingdom a few kilometers northward from Geba, to include the region around Beth-el, and that this was later left under Judaeen authority by the Babylonians. The old royal sanctuary at the site was destroyed and polluted in the process.

Important in this context is the fact that in 609 BCE the king of Judah blocked the road of Necho II near Megiddo. At this point his rule almost certainly extended at least as far as the Valley of Jezreel. Judahite presence in Megiddo is signified by the fortress and the open settlement next to it (Stratum II) which were destroyed upon Josiah's defeat. Excavations at different sites have added information and thus clarified the extent of Josiah's kingdom. At Arad a settlement and citadel dating from his time have been uncovered (Stratum VII). The town and the citadel were an administrative and military centre for the surroundings, a conclusion strengthened by the ostraca found there, though they are of a later date. A foreign mercenary force at Arad, alluded to later, possibly began in Josiah's reign. The excavation at the citadel of Mesad Hashavyahu, attributed to Josiah's time, also indicates that foreign mercenaries were there. One of the ostraca refers to a royal estate worked by *corvée* workers among the people of Judah under the supervision of officials directly appointed by the king. In En-Gedi a settlement was uncovered (Stratum V) with equipment probably used to manufacture perfume. Spicers and perfumers who worked for the royal establishments may have lived in this place.

These pieces of evidence, in addition to findings from other excavations in Judah itself, as well as in Samaria, point to the effort made by Josiah to develop and fortify his country, and to the extensive economic activity in his time. Whether Josiah had a foothold in Transjordan is equivocal, according to Reviv (1979:204) but it cannot be ruled out that he extended the borders of his country eastwards. The Biblical and

archaeological data demands re-examination of the theory that connects the districts of Judah in Joshua 15, with Josiah's kingdom. His kingdom did however, extend beyond the Judahite borders of 701 BCE, and therefore he controlled the more important trade routes.

As Assyria declined and in the last decade of Josiah's life his kingdom held the political balance of power in the region, Judah became the largest and most important kingdom in Syria and Palestine due to:

- a) the extensive territory,
- b) the complete liberation from vassalage, and
- c) the improved economy.

As stated previously, Ginsburg (1950:352) believes that Josiah, taking advantage of the rapid decline of Assyrian power in the second half of his reign, made a bid to restore the ancient borders of the Davidic kingdom. But opinions differ as to the extent of his successes and the extent of the traces they have left in the Biblical texts. It is obvious that a writer's estimate of the former will be largely determined by his views on the latter. Now that archaeology has furnished the datum that the history of Megiddo Stratum II ends with a partial destruction ca. 600 BCE, there may still be serious scholars who question the historicity of the Jewish king's '*deseccration of Beth-el*' (2 Kgs. 23:15) and '*the shrines of Samaria*' (2 Kgs. 23:19f) but they will surely not give as their reason that Josiah had no jurisdiction over those localities. For if the destroyers of Megiddo II were not Egyptians taking action against Jews in 609 BCE (see 2 Kgs. 23:29) they were Jews trying to oust Egyptians or Assyrians, if the destruction took place before 609 BCE. The latter, however, probably decided somewhere along the line, to make a virtue of necessity and let Josiah advance unhindered, perhaps as their nominal vassal; much as they had already done (ca. 655 BCE) with Psammetichus I of Egypt, and as some empires have done today with their Nehrus, Jinnahs and Soekarnos. (Even at the beginning of Josiah's reign, before pressure of Medes and Chaldaeans in her rear had compelled her to give up all of the West, Assyria had probably made some concessions to him in order to woo him away from Egypt, which at that stage was naturally anti-Assyrian and encouraged the Jewish king's irredentism. This three-cornered game is doubtless reflected in Jeremiah 2:16; 18; 36-37).

Ginsberg (1950:357), in discussing Alt's town-lists in the book of Joshua, states that he is unable to accept a Josian dating for any of these lists. He feels the place to seek for reflexes of Josiah's exploits is not in a book like Joshua, which was obviously completed, except for odd glosses, centuries before Josiah was born, but the books of Nahum and Jeremiah and the post-Isaian portions of Isaiah 1-39.

It is now recognised that Jeremiah 6-13 and 14-15 is indeed by Jeremiah and as verse 6 states, from the reign of Josiah; and that chapters 30-33:13, though secondarily supplemented and complemented, are primarily Jeremian. What therefore can be more obvious than that there must be some connection between passages like 3:6f.



and 31:4-6 on the one hand and Josiah's achievements, or at least ambitions, on the other, asks Ginsberg (1950:357). It is hard to say to what extent these passages were inspired by Josiah's work and to what extent they inspired it. On the other hand, it is pretty clear that the pilgrimage we read about in Jeremiah 41:5 of people from the province of Samaria to Jerusalem, which took place after the house of David had lost both the one and the other, it is a *sequel* to Josiah's conquests and reforms in central Palestine. A fourth passage in Jeremiah (Jer. 49:1ff) reflects, though hitherto the fact does not seem to have been realized, Josiah's ambitions, if not actual conquests, lay still farther afield: in Transjordan. This thesis finds Ginsberg's observations seem to be plausible, but they cannot be substantiated elsewhere.

### 5.3.10 The Events of 609 BCE

Josiah's death in 609 BCE has produced furious debate amongst scholars *inter alia* Frost, Malamat, Na'aman, Rowton, Nielsen.

The year 609 BCE should be regarded as a watershed in both the history of Judah and the Ancient Near East. The Babylonian Chronicle for that year reports that in July (Tammuz) a large Egyptian army crossed the Euphrates, marched toward Haran, and laid siege to the city. Haran was in Babylonian hands, who had ousted the last Assyrian king, Ashur-uballit II. Though the continuation of the passage in the Chronicle is broken, it appears that even with Egyptian aid, the Assyrians could not dislodge the Babylonians from the city. The king of Egypt at this time was no longer Psammetichus I, but Necho II, who had come to the throne at the end of the preceding summer (Freedy & Redford 1970:474). Necho continued the policies of his father, and assisted Assyria during her final death throes.

#### 5.3.10.1 Overview of the Relations between Egypt and Judah

In order to understand the circumstances which led to the tragic encounter between Necho and Josiah at Megiddo in 609 BCE, the relations between Egypt and Judah during the preceding decades must be considered, particularly after the withdrawal of Assyria from the West. An enigmatic statement in Herodotus relates that Psammetichus besieged Ashdod for twenty-nine years. Such a long siege is incredible, according to Cogan & Tadmor (1988:300). But they concede that if this statement is based upon a reliable historical tradition, one might suggest that the city fell to the Egyptians in the king's twenty-ninth year, i.e. 635 BCE. In addition, an Egyptian stele dated to 612 BCE includes a claim by Psammetichus to suzerainty over the Phoenician coast (Freedy & Redford 1970:477). Furthermore, Babylonian Chronicles record that an Egyptian force fought at the side of Sin-shar-ishkun, king of Assyria, as early as 616 BCE. While the route taken by the Egyptians northward is unknown, it has been suggested that it was by the Megiddo pass. Megiddo had been transferred by Assyria to Psammetichus to serve as a logistic base, or at least a vital way station, for the Egyptian army in campaigns to Syria, (Malamat 1973:267-78). Malamat rejects any relation between the defeat of the Syrians at Magdolus and the Megiddo episode in 2 Kings 23.

From the Tablet BM 21901 (Fall of Nineveh Chronicle) it appears that the Assyrians and Egyptians were allies at this time. The Biblical statement (2 Kgs. 23:29) that *'Necho came up to the king of Assyria, to the River Euphrates'* is to be understood in this light. No explanation of Josiah's motive is given, but such a military enterprise would be understandable if he viewed Necho's expedition to meet and support the Assyrians as an undesirable attempt to prop up the hated Assyrians, now in eagerly awaited decline.

Modern historians (see below) are of the opinion that Josiah's appearance at Megiddo should be seen as an attempt to stop the Egyptian advance. If so, this signaled the end of the *modus vivendi* which had prevailed in the territory of Israel after Assyria's withdrawal. The question is whether Josiah was prompted by the capture of the Assyrian stronghold at Haran by the Medes and the Babylonians in 610 BCE, or by the accession of Necho II, a new, yet untried king to the throne in Egypt. Some have even surmised that the king of Judah aligned himself at this crucial stage with Babylonia, fearing an Assyro-Egyptian revival (See Bright 1981:324-25).

As Cogan & Tadmor (1988:301) so aptly point out, each of these attempts at understanding what happened at Megiddo proceeds on the assumption that Josiah met Necho in a military engagement. This is based on the explicit account to that effect in 2 Chronicles 35:2-24. This is not borne out by 2 Kings 23:29, in which the description borders on the cryptic. If one follows the laconic passage in 2 Kings 23:29, which is the only contemporary evidence, there was no battle or military move (Heb. *wayyelek...liqra'to* does not necessarily imply warlike action). Josiah came to meet Necho at Megiddo, and according to Noth (1966:279) Necho succeeded in some way or other in seizing the person of Josiah and killing him. Welch (1925:255-260) thought that Necho summoned Josiah to explain his suspicious conduct; and what took place at Megiddo was not so much a battle as a court-martial.

Malamat (1973:267-278) has attempted to clarify the historical background of the clash between Judah and Egypt at Megiddo in the summer of 609 BCE. He says we are faced with a double dilemma, historically and militarily. Consequently, the question must remain who held Megiddo at this time. Did Josiah, king of Judah, seek here to block the Egyptian advance to the north? Or did Megiddo already serve as an Egyptian base? We are faced with the archaeological quandary concerning Stratum II at Megiddo, generally ascribed to the second half of the seventh century BCE. Was the massive building discovered in this Stratum an Israelite fortress built by Josiah, as often thought, or should it be regarded as Egyptian, whether actually built by Egyptians or merely appropriated?

Malamat's (1973:267-8 and 1968:137f.) studies on this period have noted the latter possibility. He assumes that Josiah's move was intended, inter alia, against the centre of the former Assyrian province of Magiddu which, in the meantime, had most likely been taken over by the Egyptians' recently acquired allies of Assyria. The lack of clear-cut data, however, concerning whether Megiddo Stratum II was Israelite or Egyptian, leaves any preference between the above alternatives in the realm of

conjecture.

Noting that political and strategic factors may have governed Josiah in deciding to attack Necho's army at Megiddo, Malamat (1973:274) states that one of the possible additional factors behind this bold step, is the as yet unnoted Egyptian military failure on the Euphrates in 610 BCE, half a year or so before the battle at Megiddo. The Egyptian intervention in the north in 610 BCE seems to have been passed over generally, for in the Babylonian Chronicle the name of Egypt in the relevant passage is damaged and must be restored.

It is difficult to make sense of the Megiddo incident of 2 Kings 23:29-30 if we accept an alliance of Egypt, Judah and Assyria. In 616 BCE and again 610 BCE Egypt had joined first Sin-shar-ishkun and then Ashur-uballit in an endeavour to prop up Assyria as a buffer against the Medes and Babylonians. Judah's interests presumably corresponded to Egypt's in this. Josiah's control of the former Assyrian provinces would have been short-lived, unless some sort of "rump Assyrian state" could be maintained across the northern approaches to Palestine. After the fall of Nineveh 612 BCE and the 610 BCE loss of Haran (ANET:304-5) the situation undoubtedly became critical. One may conjecture that Necho II, who had just succeeded his father, might have been eager for military glory, and thus prepared to move north to join Ashur-uballit in an assault on Haran. The fortress of Megiddo lay across his route. There is controversy as to whether Josiah or the Egyptians controlled Megiddo. The cubit measure used to construct it suggests it was built by either Egypt or Judah, but in the absence of any definite archaeological indications Nelson (1983:187) believes we should maintain an open mind in this regard (cf. Malamat 1973: 274f.). He regards it unlikely that there was a permanent Egyptian presence so much further north, because Josiah controlled Mesad Hashavyahu, 13 km north of Ashdod. In Nelson's view if Josiah had taken over the Assyrian province of Maggidu as a vassal, the provincial capital would have presumably gone with it.

Josiah had not hindered his Egyptian allies on their march through the Megiddo pass in 616 BCE or 610 BCE. However, as far as the 2 Kings 23:29 report about the 609 BCE campaign is concerned, Nelson (1983:187) refutes entirely the general assumption that Josiah went out to oppose Necho. He finds it hard to accept an attack by Josiah on Necho, even apart from the probability that Josiah was an ally of both Necho and Ashur-uballit. The Egyptian line of march would not have directly threatened Judah, and Josiah would have had no reason to take any risks in order to give Assyria its *coup de grace* when matters were going so poorly for Ashur-uballit anyway. Nelson, therefore, finds it difficult to see what Josiah would have had to lose by simply waiting for the outcome of Necho's rescue attempt, whereas he would have had everything to lose by opposing Necho's 'great Egyptian army' with his mercenaries and militia.

Whether merely garrison troops were brought up from Carchemish to the battlefield or, even more so, an expeditionary force dispatched especially from Egypt, the failure of the Egyptian army in 610 BCE undoubtedly left its impression in both Egypt and Judah, unlike the moderately successful operations of 616 BCE.

Chronologically, it has recently been ascertained that Necho already reigned at this time, for Psammetichus I died between the end of July and the end of September 610 BCE. We do not know whether Necho personally took part in the unsuccessful military operation, nor whether he himself passed through Palestine less than a year prior to the battle at Megiddo. His not being mentioned in the Babylonian Chronicle is of no significance, for in 609 BCE, too, when Necho II stood at the head of a military expedition, as witnessed by the Bible, the fact was overlooked in this Babylonian source. In any event, in the spring or early summer of 609 BCE Necho made intensive efforts to field a new expedition, for the Chronicle emphasizes that in Tammuz 'a great Egyptian army' crossed the Euphrates (lines 66-67). Yet Egypt and her Assyrian allies were unable to retake Haran. The Egyptian military defeat the year before was undoubtedly an encouraging factor in Josiah's decision to stand up to Necho at Megiddo, which battle unluckily ended in an Israelite fiasco.

The details of the conflict between Egypt and Judah in 609 BCE remain confused. The Book of Kings, which merely outlines the events (2 Kgs. 23:29-30), does not even relate the opening of the battle. This has often led scholars **unjustifiably**, to doubt the military background of the episode.<sup>1</sup> In this instance we may prefer the fuller version in 2 Chronicles 35:2-24, according to which matters did not go beyond a mere skirmish because of Josiah's fatal wound at the very outset. It is this version on which the tradition of 1 Esdras 23-21 and Josephus (Ant.X 1,5) is based. The latter, besides his embellishments, drew additional data from reliable sources independent of the Biblical account, for he appears to be acquainted with the geopolitical situation revealed in Gadd's Chronicle. He relates that Necho went up to the Euphrates in order to fight the Babylonians and the Medes. The version in 2 Chronicles 35:21 has Pharaoh declaring to Josiah that his campaign is not intended against Judah: *"But he sent envoys to him [Josiah], saying 'What have we to do with each other, king of Judah? I am not coming against you this day, but to bet milhamti; and G-d has commanded me to make haste. Cease opposing G-d, who is with me, lest he destroy you'"*. It has been suggested that Necho's words were of little point if actually stated near Megiddo, and more sensible if delivered in southern Palestine, before Josiah could guess Necho's intentions and true destination (Malamat 1973:275,6).

Na'aman (1991:52,3) points out that it is against this background that one must re-examine the Biblical description of the events of 609 BCE. In 2 Kings 23:29 we are told: *"In his days Pharaoh Necho king of Egypt went up to the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates. King Josiah went to meet him; and Pharaoh Necho slew him at Megiddo, when he saw him"*. The opening verse 'in his days' (*bymyw בַּיְמֵי*) is

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<sup>1</sup> Gadd read *mat gul*, but the initial sign of the country's name is certainly *mi*, as first suggested by J. Lewy, MVAG 29 (1923:85), followed by Wiseman, *Chronicles* 62 and cf. pl. xii, line 61. Since then, several scholars have noticed the allusion to Egypt in 610 BCE - e.g. E. Vogt, VTS 4, 1957:69; Yoyotte, *Supplement*, 375; Cazelles RB 74:26; Freedy & Redford, JAOS 90:474f - but without drawing any conclusions for the battle of Megiddo. Cited by Malamat, 1973:274.

a typical opening formula for an archival source. The description gives not the slightest hint of a battle. Na'aman regards it is, therefore, possible that Josiah reported to the Egyptian ruler, his lord, at Megiddo, to swear an oath of fealty to him. In the critical situation of the new ruler's impending first campaign to the north, Josiah was suspected of disloyalty and slain on the spot. Na'aman notes the fact that some scholars reject the version given in Chronicles, and view it as a sort of later interpretation, arising from an attempt to fill in the gaps in Kings. They propose various reconstructions for the account of Josiah's death. Na'aman cites Welch (1925:260) and Boehmer (1933:203) who suggest Josiah was executed because his responses did not satisfy the Egyptian ruler before whom he was brought to trial. Noth's hypothesis (1958:278,9) is that Josiah controlled Megiddo, but by some unknown means fell into Necho's hands, and was put to death. Nelson (1983:376) is of the opinion that the two rulers may have met as allies, in an attempt to reach a mutual understanding, but Necho traiterously slew him in the course of that meeting. A few scholars (Frost 1968:376; Miller & Hayes 1988:402) have discussed this incident without offering any solutions. The opinion of this thesis is that Malamat and Na'aman's evidence, together with the personal discussions I held with them in April 1994, should be accepted.

Malamat believes we ought clearly to distinguish between the Biblical Megiddo and Herodotus's Magdalos. The latter was most probably the well-known Egyptian border fortress of Migdol, west of Pelusium. Only in this case can sense be made of the course of Necho's campaign according to Herodotus, for Gaza lies on the *Via Maris* east of Migdol, whereas the emendation reading "Megiddo" would create difficulties in the geographical order. Moreover, the invasion of an enemy into Egypt is more likely if subsequent to Necho's defeat at Carchemish in 605 BCE, and assuming that it took place at the instigation of the Babylonians.

Malamat (1973:277) avers that without resorting to Herodotus and to emendations of the Biblical text, we can suggest here a reasonable interpretation of Necho's seemingly peculiar message, and of the historical-military course of events. We may assume that Pharaoh was still in southern Palestine when he became aware of Josiah's military preparations, and he attempted to forestall any attack on the Egyptian army by explaining his intentions to the Judaeian king. But it was this very message which told Josiah of his route, passing through the Egyptian base at Megiddo. It might even be that the enigmatic term *bet milhamti* (Lit. "house of my war") refers to a "fortified base" or "garrison city". Then this hapax legomenon would refer to the Egyptian base at Carchemish or Riblah, as already suggested - though it could equally be the fortress in Stratum II at Megiddo.

Concluding his premise, Malamat (1973:278) states that Josiah's chances at blocking the passage of the Egyptian army in the south, in the Judaeian corridor between Gezer and Mesad Hasavyahu, were hardly favourable, for this fairly level region would have necessitated a pitched battle with Pharaoh's forces. The topographical conditions farther south, especially in the Ashkelon region (or near Raphia between the sand dunes and the sea coast) are much better suited for such an attack. But

Josiah was certainly denied access to this region by the cities of Ashdod, Ashkelon and Gaza. Under the circumstances, he preferred to spring an ambush on his enemy in the Plain of Megiddo, more precisely at the strategic pass leading out of Wadi Ara, before the Egyptian army could deploy on the plain or find protection within Megiddo. Admittedly, initiating such an attack at this spot, 1,5-2km from Megiddo, necessitated considerable daring on Josiah's part, especially if Megiddo itself were in Egyptian hands. Nonetheless the risk was not unreasonably calculated. Josiah thus hastened at the head of his army through Samaria to the Megiddo region, in order to intercept the Egyptian column winding its way up Wadi Ara. Such a reconstruction quite suits the chain of events as described in Chronicles, following Necho's appeal: *"Nevertheless, Josiah would not turn away from him but girded himself in order to fight with him. He did not listen to the words of Necho from the mouth of G-d, but joined battle in the plain of Megiddo"* (2 Chron. 35:22). Thus, Josiah put his military plan into operation in spite of Pharaoh's attempt to dissuade him. In fact, it was Necho's very message which prompted him to march toward Armageddon as he so fatefully did (Malamat 1973:278).

Necho's predecessor, Psammetichus I, is said by Herodotus (2:157) to have taken Ashdod in Philistia. A fragmentary Egyptian inscription from Sidon suggests that Necho controlled the Phoenician coast. Thus Josiah must have been alert to the Egyptian presence, and since Necho, in making for the Euphrates to join the Assyrians, may have passed across his regained northern territories, (as is indeed specifically claimed by Josephus) it is entirely natural that Josiah should have attempted to intercept him at the strategic pass of Megiddo. According to 2 Chronicles 35:20-21, Necho had sent a message to Josiah denying any hostile intentions against Judah, but this was disregarded by Josiah who came determined to fight. At the encounter he was mortally wounded by a bowshot, and was transferred from his war chariot 'to the second chariot', perhaps a larger supply vehicle, in which he was carried back to Jerusalem, about 100 km away. The text concludes *'and he died'* (2 Chron. 35:21-4), presumably in Jerusalem, though possibly on the road. 2 Kings 23:29-30 states more briefly that Necho (presumably in the sense of 'the Egyptians') *'killed him at Megiddo'*, and that Josiah's retainers drove him dying from Megiddo to Jerusalem, where he was buried in his tomb, which, according to Chronicles, was in the cemetery of his fathers (2 Chron. 35:24). This appears to have been a reversal of the innovation introduced at the death of Manasseh, and followed after Amon's death, of burying the king in the palace grounds. If this practice had indeed been adopted because of crowding in the royal cemetery, it may be that the religious authorities made a particular point of fitting Josiah into the traditional cemetery, out of deference to his memory as a reformer, and the feeling that he should not be put with the obnoxious Manasseh and Amon. His loss was evidently regretted by faithful YHWHists, because Jeremiah is said to have lamented over his death, his lamentation being taken up by the professional singers and preserved in writing with other such lamentations (2 Chron. 35:25). Josephus claimed, some centuries later, that Jeremiah's lament was still extant in his own time. According to the CAH Vol. III (1991:391) however, there

is no reason to connect it with the Biblical Book of Lamentations.

Na'aman (1991:53,4) raises two pertinent questions:

- 1) Did Josiah try to change the status quo and rebel against Egypt?
- 2) Did he, having maintained a policy of caution throughout Psammetichus I's reign, take advantage of the transfer of power and of the crucial situation of 609 BCE in order to attack the new ruler when he passed through Palestine?

Na'aman then raises several important issues concerning an assumption of a battle near Megiddo (1991:54):

- (i) Why would the ruler of a small kingdom choose to fight the ruler of a great power in a battle on an open field, in circumstances giving the larger, stronger army all possible advantages?
- (ii) Why would he make a stand in a place so far from his kingdom, which provided him with no advantage at all?
- (iii) If Josiah was such a strong ruler as to dare to report for battle on an open field against the kingdom of Egypt, why did his kingdom surrender unconditionally, so soon after his death, enabling Necho II to assume absolute control?

In Nelson's view (1983:187), the realities of the situation left Josiah with two options, neither of which was an attack on a friendly Egyptian army:

- 1) He could wait out the result of the rescue attempt, and then come to terms with the victor;
- 2) Or he could actively aid Necho in his attempt to fragment the Mesopotamian threat.

Nelson (1983:188) believes Necho double-crossed Josiah. He regards it is probable that Josiah went out from Megiddo to welcome his ally Necho, not to oppose him. Psammetichus had died one to four months before the Haran conflict of 610 BCE, and it was probable that Josiah and Necho were meeting as fellow kings for the first time. Nelson surmises that Josiah intended to throw open the pass to the Egyptian advance and re-establish the understanding he had had with Psammetichus. Instead Necho killed him. Nelson's reasoning is that Necho wanted to re-establish Egypt's former hegemony in Palestine. His father had already conquered Ashdod as a first step in this direction. Furthermore, Necho was unwilling to leave his escape route under the control of an independently-minded ally, who might switch sides and block his retreat before a victorious Babylonian army. He wanted Megiddo as part of a chain of cities from Ashdod through Riblah to Carchemish. The cheapest way to gain Megiddo was by treachery. He murdered Josiah at the onset of their negotiations in or near Megiddo. The fortress received an Egyptian garrison. Necho hurried north to his rendezvous with destiny, leaving behind a Judah shattered and demoralized by its encounter with *Realpolitik* in its most cynical form.

Nelson (1983:188) freely admits that this reconstruction runs counter to the generally accepted view. He concedes that there are valid objections that we know too little about Josiah's situation to understand whatever motives and whatever optimism could have precipitated an attack on Necho. He argues, however, that this reconstruction is not as outrageous as it might at first appear. Josiah had no reason to be anti-Assyrian in an ideological sense. He quotes the Biblical evidence (Deut. 2:5; 2 Kgs 20:12-19) that Josiah had remained a nominal Assyrian vassal and that he was part of the Egyptian-Assyrian alliance (Jer. 2:15-18, 36; Isa. 19:16-25). Given what we do know of the international situation, such a policy would have made sense.

Nelson's (1983:189) opinion is that it was the Chronicler who first led us astray with his tale of battle. He argues that if Josiah had been friendly to both Assyria and Egypt, only treachery can explain his death at Necho's hand. And treachery, too, is the best explanation for the narrator's reticence in describing the event itself: *'King Josiah went to meet him, and he killed him in Megiddo when he saw him'* (2 Kgs. 23:29). Nelson's conclusion is "how embarrassing that the noble Josiah should have died as a fool dies" (cf. 2 Sam. 3:33-34). Oddly Nelson adds that the very ambiguity of Josiah's end meant that his life and death could be viewed in a strangely positive way by those who reflected on them (cf. 2 Kgs. 22:20; Jer.22:10, 15a-16a).

Frost (1968:373) too mentions "the embarrassment" caused by the death of Josiah which, he believes, first shows itself in the very nature of the account of his death given in 2 Kings. For *'went to meet him'*, ERV reads *'King Josiah went against him'*, and for *'Pharaoh Necho slew him at Megiddo when he saw him'*, the Jerusalem Bible reads *'but Necho killed him at Megiddo at the first encounter'*. Frost concedes the first translation is thus "a little interpretive", but asserts the second is "reprehensibly so". To Frost the very terseness of the original wording tempted translators into paraphrasing. The phrase may point to some minor textual disturbance, he admits, but the general impression remains of an account which, in trying to convey its content as shortly as possible, had ended up by being obscure. Frost says the same "embarrassment" further shows itself in the almost complete absence of any other comment. Perusing Lamentations 4:20 and Jeremiah 22:15-16, Frost detects no reference of any lamenting; "though there may be a faint suggestion that while Josiah occupied himself with real king's business, i.e., the administration of justice, all went well with him". It was only when he "indulged in political pretensions that things went wrong" (1968:374,5). Speculating further in Zechariah 12:11, Frost concludes that "the mourning at Megiddo was then a cult mourning and had no reference to Josiah whatsoever".

It is plausible that Pharaoh Necho marched north in 609 BCE, towards the Euphrates, ostensibly to assist Assyria in her troubles, but no doubt also to protect and indeed to further his own interests. This makes sense, and this thesis can accept the premise that Josiah could have seen in the Egyptian move to be a threat to Judah's new-found independence. He might thus have hurried to occupy the strong point of Megiddo which had been left vacant by the departure of the Assyrians. Here



in the narrow pass, if anywhere, the Egyptian advance northwards might be stopped, and the new threat to Judah's independence might be decisively rejected. What this thesis cannot accept is Frost's conclusion (1968:371) that "it was gallant but a foolhardy thing to do, and merely resulted in the king losing his life.... Josiah died ignominiously and with him died Israel's freedom".

Noth (1968:279) refers to the remarkably brief reference to the event in Kings and adds we may conclude from this that a battle between the two sides did not in fact take place at Megiddo, but that Necho succeeded in some way or other in seizing the person of Josiah and that the Israelite forces gave up the fight after Josiah had been killed. Frost (1968:379) regards this as "highly speculative", but stands by Bright's older view that a battle did take place (1981:303).

Hayes & Miller (1974:467) regard Josiah as the aggressor. They say the collapse of the Assyrian empire, echoed in the vision of the prophet Nahum, created an opportune time for Josiah to fill the vacuum which was created in Israel. The process of restoring the kingdom of the house of David, however, was halted before it reached completion, halted by strong powers, interested in the Assyrian legacy in Syria and Israel. Two Kings 23:29 and 2 Chronicles 5:20 refer to Pharaoh Necho's military expedition to Carchemish on the Euphrates (609 BCE). As the Egyptian forces passed through the valley of Megiddo, Josiah attacked Necho and was killed (see Malamat 1973:274ff.).

Rowton (1952:128-30) states that Josiah wanted to delay Necho long enough to ensure the defeat of Ashur-uballit II, the last Assyrian king, and was successful in doing so, but lost his life in accomplishing his aim, and indeed went to Megiddo, prepared to sacrifice himself and his army to do this. Frost (1968:379f.) argues this is both conjectural and implausible. He says it is a New Testament style, not an Old Testament style, and on this particular point this thesis will agree.

These questions and subsequent oral discussions with the writer of this thesis in April 1994, are in agreement with the views of Na'aman, who suggests it seems preferable to adopt the brief, untendentious testimony (based on an archival sources) in the Book of Kings, rather than the detailed and colourful testimony in the Book of Chronicles, and to assume that Necho II slew Josiah when he appeared before him, perhaps to swear an oath of fealty. The background for this deed is unknown, and any possible hypothesis in this regard (e.g. dissatisfaction at the independence shown by the king of Judah and evidenced by his reforms; his activity in Samaria, outside the borders of his kingdom; his refusal to send an army to assist the king of Egypt in his campaign), will remain unproven (1991:55).

If Rowton (1951:129) is right that Necho refrained from battle, he must have arrived too late, and by the time he approached the Euphrates the Medes and Babylonians had already finished off Ashur-uballit. Necho was not prepared to venture alone into Mesopotamia; nor, on the plausible assumption that there was a strong Egyptian-Assyrian garrison in Carchemish, would his enemies have felt it safe to thrust past the fortress and seek out Necho in Syria. The result was a complete stalemate.

Rowton therefore questions whether we have any reason to believe that an entirely unforeseen event occurred to delay Necho's arrival, and consume the ruin of Assyria. Rowton believes the answer is in the Bible. Josiah's desperate act in attempting to bar the passage of the Egyptian army at Megiddo has puzzled early Jewish historians quite as much as it has modern scholars. The great advantage of the reconstruction suggested here is that it offers an immediate and simple explanation of this stubborn problem. Assyria was the mortal enemy of Israel, and Josiah's motive becomes crystal-clear if we assume that he was fully aware of the vital importance of delaying the Egyptian advance. In that case, he proceeded to Megiddo knowing only too well the risk involved but, in the hope that by forcing Necho to deploy his forces, he would have effectively sealed the doom of the Assyrian king. Thus, it seems very probable that the last of the great Jewish kings laid down his life in a truly heroic and entirely successful bid to avenge the dreadful wrongs his nation had suffered at the hands of Assyria.

Emanating from the events described above, two further questions arise, namely why did king Jehoahaz of Judah not trust his fortresses and his army, in those districts where the Egyptian army was obviously weak and where he could have enjoyed a significant advantage over his rival, especially as the king of Egypt had just failed in his campaign and was hard pressed by the Babylonians? In addition, why did he report, of his own will, to distant Riblah, even though he could easily have guessed the king of Egypt's reaction (cf. Jer 22:10-12)?

Finally, there is some reason to believe that Necho may never have reached the Euphrates. For when 3 months later Jehoahaz was deposed he was not taken straight to Egypt but was first of all sent northward into Syria and brought before Necho at Riblah in the land of Hamath. This strongly suggests that it was there that Necho had established his headquarters, and, if so, he was keeping well away from the Euphrates.

In Mesopotamia, as might well be expected, and as is confirmed by Josephus (see above), the news that the Egyptian pharaoh was himself taking the field had the effect of bringing out not only the Babylonian army, but also the Medes, those redoubtable allies of the Babylonian king. The Assyrians alone would not have stood the slightest chance against such a coalition. Everything, therefore, must have depended on Necho's ability to reach the scene before the Medes and Babylonians did so.

The Babylonian Chronicles make it clear that the Egyptian king marched to the Euphrates on his way to Haran in support of Ashur-uballit, the Assyrian ruler, who was struggling against Nabopolassar and his allies (Wiseman 1961:55; also Joseph. *Ant.* V i). Thus the political situation clearly demonstrates that Egypt and Babylon fought for the right of inheritance to the Assyrian empire. Already in 616 BCE the Egyptians had moved to the aid of Assyria, not in an effort to salvage the Assyrian hegemony but, on the other hand, to regain control of Syria and Palestine. The activities of Psammetichus I in Philistia and Phoenicia demonstrate Egypt's ambition in the buffer regions between Egypt and Mesopotamia. Josiah clearly understood the

political consequences for his kingdom should the Egyptians be victorious over Babylon. It is possible that Josiah believed that by offering resistance to Pharaoh Necho II he would be demonstrating a pro-Babylonian policy (cf. Cross & Freedman 1953:56-58). In exchange, he probably expected that distant Babylon would recognize his hegemony over Israel after the fall of Assyria and the defeat of Egypt. Josiah's failure and death at Megiddo placed Judah at the mercy of the Egyptians. With this altered political situation in Palestine should be associated the information about Pharaoh Necho's capture of Gaza, reported by Herodotus and Jeremiah 47:1, and probably the destruction of the fortress of Mesad Hashavyahu.

In the discussions of the relationship between the kingdom of Judah and Egypt, naturally an important role is occupied by the death of Josiah near Megiddo in 609 BCE. As a great deal of literature has been written on this subject, the main difference of opinion has centered on the question whether to give credence to the version related in 2 Chronicles 35:20-24, despite its drastic deviation from that given in 2 Kings 23:29-30.

Frost (1968:369,70) interprets the Chronicler's version as an attempt to find a moral. He regards it is significant that an event of climactic importance, both for the contemporary situation and also for the long-term developments of Hebrew history, should have occurred during the full tide of the prophetic movement, and that there should be, as far as has been recorded, no attempt by any prophet to interpret this event, nor indeed any mention of it in all the prophetic literature, apart from one very oblique reference (the character of which, he feels, only serves to underline the abnormality of the situation). Frost therefore offers what he terms "a conspiracy of silence", to which theory he has adherents, but which is disputed by others, including *inter alia* this thesis. A paucity of information cannot be automatically (and artificially) assumed there was a conspiracy. The opinion of this thesis is that conspiracies or cover-ups do not characterise the Hebrew Bible.

The dominant event in world politics at the time we are concerned with is the disappearance of Assyria. We know that Ashur-uballit was still in the field in 608 BCE, whereas 3 years later, at the time of the Battle of Carchemish, Assyria was no more. In 610 BCE Ashur-uballit had to evacuate his capital Haran, and in 609 BCE his attempt to retake it had failed disastrously, although he was reinforced by a strong contingent of Egyptian troops. The text is rather badly damaged at this point but it seems that after the Battle of Haran, the territories still under the control of Ashur-uballit were extensively ravaged by the Babylonians. The Babylonian king resumed the campaign at the very beginning of the year 608/7 BCE, but unfortunately, the tablet with the statement to that effect comes to an end. Nevertheless, this much is clear: after the disastrous events of 609 BCE the position of Ashur-uballit must have been critical, to such an extent that it would be somewhat surprising if he survived the campaign of 608 BCE. Many scholars defend the hypothesis that, on his way north with his army, Necho II passed through Palestine, and encountered Josiah near Megiddo. In the opinion of this thesis, if Egypt and Judah were in fact allies, an encounter should not have provoked Josiah's death.

In this context, Na'aman (1991a:51) poses a question which he feels has been hitherto insufficiently discussed, viz. why did the Pharaoh and his army have to pass through Palestine on their way to northern Syria? He questions why Necho II did not adopt the tactics of the Egyptian kings at the time of the New Kingdom, who often sailed as far as the Lebanese coast and launched campaigns from there, via the Nahr-el-Kebir (Eleutheros), to the Orontes. Several scholars (*inter alia* Alt, Na'aman, Liver) have assumed that, on previous campaigns the Egyptians conveyed their forces to Syria by sea. In this way, Na'aman avers, Necho II could have gone by sea to the Lebanese coast and set out from there on foot, by way of his military base at Riblah on the Orontes, to northern Syria, shortening the travel time and refraining from exhausting his forces in a grueling forced march from the Egyptian border to the battlefield near the Euphrates (cf. Spalinger 1977:231 on the Egyptian use of the trireme at this time).

In concurrence with Na'aman (1993:52) this thesis believes that the reason Necho II chose to travel via Palestine relates to the transfer of power which had taken place in Egypt not long before, and the oath of fealty to the reigning pharaoh customarily taken by Egyptian officials. When the king died, the oath became invalid, and the officials had to swear fealty to his successor. It is not unlikely that Necho II apparently came to Palestine in 609 BCE for that very reason, namely to administer an oath of fealty to his vassals, whose previous oath had become invalid on the death of his father, Psammetichus I, in 610 BCE. If this possibility is accepted, then there is no need to assume that the entire Egyptian army passed through Palestine on the way north. It is even probable that Necho II reached Palestine by sea on his way to the Lebanese coast, and stopped there only briefly. It should be remembered that, at various times during the times of the New Kingdom, auxiliary forces were enlisted from among the vassals, in order to assist the Egyptian army in its wars. Therefore one may wonder whether he did not take the opportunity to enlist an army from his vassals and append them to the Egyptian expeditionary force on its way north. This might also have been the case in 609 BCE: Necho's vassals may have been ordered to dispatch army units to assist in the northward campaign.

Surprisingly Frost (1968:371,2) concedes that "while there are not many events which can be properly described as catastrophic, this surely was one". Just as the move to occupy Samaria had been both politically and religiously significant, so the tragedy (Frost calls it a 'fiasco') at Megiddo was a disaster for both politics and religion. Frost avers on the one hand that it is inconceivable that Josiah went up to Megiddo trusting in the very modest military strength of Judah alone. 1 Kings 1-5 and 22:1f. and cf. 2 Samuel 5:17-21 announce that YHWH will help his anointed: other nations will collapse and fall, but those anointed will rise and stand upright. Frost (whose stance this thesis finds to be ambiguous) then conjectures that such a liturgy might very well have been written for the occasion of Josiah's expedition against Pharaoh Necho. Frost therefore believes Josiah would not have dared to do battle with the overwhelmingly superior forces of Egypt, unless he had received specific assurances from the prophets and the priests that divine aid would be afforded him in this task. That help, however, did not materialize and, as a result,

Josiah died.

If Josiah died as a result of a court martial in those circumstances it seems unlikely that the body would have been given back to his servants for honourable burial. The author of the account in Kings could hardly have invented that detail since a number of his readers would have been in the position to remember whether Josiah did or did not have a proper funeral in Jerusalem. It seems probable to Frost (1968:376) that 'the people of the land' would have proceeded to nominate Jehoahaz. He would not have felt himself at liberty to accept the throne if Necho had already assumed such direct control of Judaeian affairs as a court-martial would indicate. The impression at this point, (as at many others), is of a confused situation in which Necho's authority takes time to assert himself. To Frost the Chronicler is therefore probably right when he interprets the uninformative phrases of 2 Kings 23:29 as referring to a battle, though there is little doubt that his own description of Josiah's death was freely copied from the account in Kings of the death of Ahab. But whether it was a battle or a court-martial, the result was the same: the death of Josiah and the end of Judah's political hopes. Frost's ambiguity has cost him credibility regarding a "conspiracy of silence" on the subject, "a conspiracy broken only by the rather unconvincing account of a battle in the Chronicler's reworked version of the account in Kings". He adds *"The events at Megiddo must, however, be recognized as something more than just a military defeat; and we may not dismiss the downfall of Josiah as simply one more illustration that the unworthy political aims of Judaeian kings fail, but the religious ideals of the Hebrew prophets march grandly forward."* This easy distinction between politics and religion will not do for the Hebrew Bible. Rather, John Bright (1981:323) is correct when he sees in the chain of events which began with the death of Josiah and ended with the fall of Jerusalem a challenge to the classic theology of the Old Testament.

Frost (1968:378 ff.) avers that history had caught up with the deuteronomistic compilers of Kings in the events at Megiddo. In dealing with Josiah they were recording the facts of their own time. Their sole effort to offer any theological rationalization was to preface the appendix, in which at a later date, they recorded the death of Josiah and the sorry events which led inevitably to the fall of Jerusalem twenty years later, with a sentence or two reiterating Huldah's forecast that the sins of Manasseh and his generation were so great that not even the virtue of Josiah and the deuteronomistic reformation could turn away the divine wrath. The Chronicler when he came to the problem, several centuries later, tried to go back to the older method of dealing with this kind of difficulty: he sought to discover in Josiah a moral fault to which the disaster could be attributed. The Chronicler not only says that Josiah fought a battle with Necho, but that before the battle Necho tried to dissuade him, claiming (as did Sennacherib to Hezekiah) that he had come at the prompting of G-d, and that for Josiah to attempt to oppose him was to oppose the divine plans of G-d. Triumphantly Frost declares that Josiah's guilt is thus shown to be his inability to recognize the word of G-d when he heard it: *'Josiah did not listen to the words of Necho from the mouth of G-d'* (2 Chron. 35:22). "Certainly Josiah might be forgiven for not recognizing the word of G-d when it came from such an

unlikely source as Pharaoh Necho", says Frost magnanimously, and questions whether if G-d wanted to give him a word, would not Josiah naturally expect it to be given through the prophets? Hence, says Frost, the general 'conspiracy of silence' on the subject of the death of Josiah, because, according to him, given the Old Testament premises, no one could satisfactorily account for it theologically. The profound silence following the death of Josiah, says Frost, is the silence of the historiographers. Israel had invented history writing by accepting a premise: YHWH is at work in the events of time achieving his will. Later, that premise was amplified by saying that he worked in history through the application of moral law as the expression of his nature. Starting from that premise, Israel had told the story of her past in such a way as to disclose the purpose of G-d in history: the establishment of his kingdom. But now something had happened which had contravened the premise, and that something was the tragedy of Megiddo. Nationally, the ensuing fall of Jerusalem and the captivity of the people were far greater events, but theologically the moment of disaster was the death of Josiah at Megiddo. Its effect was to destroy the premise on which all Hebrew historiography had been built. This thesis is unable to concur Frost's novel theory.

More acceptable to this thesis is Hayes & Miller (1974:402), who note that despite the scholarly conjecture, what happened at Megiddo remains a mystery. The Chronicler (2 Chron. 35:20-23) turns the meeting of the two monarchs into a military confrontation, the pharaoh into a YHWHistic preacher, and Josiah into a "second Ahab", who though disguised was accidentally killed in battle (see 2 Chron. 18:28-34). **Any proposed scenario about why and how Josiah was killed at Megiddo must be based on speculation** (my emphasis). Was it the result of some understanding between the new pharaoh and Judaeen king on their first meeting? Were some extenuating circumstances, some accident of history, to blame? Did Josiah assume that something was to be gained by opposing Egypt and siding with Babylonia? **The historian can simply not know.** Both 2 Chronicles and 2 Kings agree on one thing: the Judaeen king was returned to the capital city and given a proper burial in Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 23:30; 2 Chron. 35:24).

In an interesting paper (unpublished) Nel (1996:9,10) has suggested that Josiah was a king like no other before or after him, because there was nothing to criticise him. Nel regards Josiah not as a tool of restoration, nor a weapon of destruction, but a perfect puppet for his masters, the *am-ha-aretz*, in fact the perfect weapon in the hands of his masters. This thesis cannot concur. It is the premise in this thesis that it is improbable that Josiah was merely an unpractical dreamer, who completely failed to see that if religion were purely inner and individual, it would not at all long survive. To do so would be to leave history incomplete. Discussion of the history of Judah in the late eighth and seventh centuries BCE in general, along with the Bible's most perfect king cannot be left without some mention of the prophets who exercised their ministry. Unlike other nations whose monarchs' imperfections were never breathed, the Hebrew prophets preached, as Bright (1981:289) says: "as the shadow of Assyria fell over the land and as the northern state tottered to its grave, and both lived on into the tragic years that followed". Unafraid, the prophets

thundered abroad the local socio-economic ills (Isaiah and Micah) for which the official religion had no effective rebuke; as well as the spiritual emergency coincident with and attendant upon it which threatened the national character and national religion at its foundations. In the official theology the moral obligations proper to YHWHism were imposed on the king (e.g. Ps. 72) who was to maintain justice on pain of severe chastisement. This thesis cannot imagine that a Jeremiah, or a Zephaniah would have tolerated a less than perfect king without mention had there been imperfections. The prophets were not afraid to attack idolatry, and were ready to prophesy disaster and doom, and to liken Judah to an adulterous wife who will surely be divorced if she does not repent (Hos. 3:1-5). They were highly unlikely, in the view of this thesis, to have allowed a "good press" for King Josiah, if he had not merited this description. For if Josiah's reform was merely the religious side of a bid for freedom which ended in the death of the king and the establishment of Egyptian rule, until the latter gave place to Babylonian, it could hardly hope to maintain itself. It would have been discredited by failure. This thesis thus eschews conjecture, and places its faith in the Biblical picture that: *"There was no king like him before.... and after him, no one arose like him"* (2 Kgs. 22:25).

### 5.3.10.2 The Events after 609 BCE

Immediately after Josiah's death, Necho II continued on his northward campaign, and Jehoahaz, Josiah's son, was crowned in Judah. Although Necho failed in his campaign against Babylonia, and was forced to retreat from Mesopotamia, he was still in absolute control of Judah. Na'aman (1991:53) observes Necho was able to arrest the Judaeen ruler who appeared before him in Riblah, in order to swear an oath of fealty and obtain Necho's permission to rule in Judah, to crown another ruler (Jehoiakim) according to his own choice, and to impose a heavy tax on the kingdom (2 Kgs 23:31-35). During the implementation of these measures, Necho II remained in Riblah, in Syria, and, to the best of our knowledge, required no military means in order to impose his will. Significantly, Na'aman adds that this is sufficient to confirm the conclusion that, as early as Josiah's day, Judah was at least formally subordinate to Egypt, and that the slaying of Josiah was intended to intimidate the Judaeans into abiding by the Egyptian ruler's instructions.

After the failure of the Assyro-Egyptian army to retake Haran in the preceding year, Pharaoh Necho II resolved on a supreme effort and in 608 BCE led an army in person to the rescue of his ally, Ashur-uballit II. Though the expedition is mentioned in several sources, nowhere is it said that it culminated in a battle between the Egyptians and the Assyrians on one side, the Medes and the Babylonians on the other. (*Necho's expedition is mentioned in 4 sources: 3 Kgs. 23:29; 2 Chron. 35:20; Joseph. Ant.s.5,1; Herodot.ii, 159. The text of Chronicles datum shows it to be independent of Kings. The date 608 BCE for Necho's expedition can be considered virtually certain. If Necho himself had commanded the Egyptian contingent in 609 BCE, as some have assumed, his presence in the field would quite certainly have been mentioned in the chronicle. Necho's expedition cannot, therefore, be identified with the campaign of 609 BCE).*

## 5.4 CONCLUSION

We know virtually nothing of Josiah's reign between the completion of the reform and his death. The last pretense of Assyrian suzerainty having ceased, there was for the moment no one to question either Josiah's independence or his control of such territories as he had been able to annex. Bright (1981:322) believes that though we cannot be sure of the exact extent of his domain, it is probable that he seized as much northern Israelite land as he could. (Cf. Na'aman' minimalist theory 1991:34ff.). As the erstwhile province of Samaria was in his hands, and, though this is not certain, he may have held parts of Galilee as well (regarding Transjordanian lands we have no information), he also held a corridor to the Mediterranean coast. Though we are not informed of Josiah's further royal acts, a reorganisation of the military must have been imperative in view of the country's newfound independence and its expanded frontiers. An overhaul of administrative machinery must likewise have been necessary. Moreover, the reform, though directed primarily at religious abuses, undoubtedly had beneficial results that reached far beyond the sphere of the specifically cultic. The abolition of pagan cults with their nameless rites could not have failed to be a blessing to the land, morally and spiritually. And since the state was committed to the observance of covenant law, and since Josiah was himself a just man (Jer. 22:15f.), Bright (1981:322) is of the opinion that we may be sure that public morality and the administration of justice underwent, at least for a time, a significant improvement.

It is increasingly clear that Assyrian domination profoundly affected not only the political but also the cultural and religious life of Palestine. We can be tolerably certain that religious standards never fell so low as in the days of Assyrian supremacy, under Manasseh and Ammon. Rowton (1951:130) says it is permissible to infer that Jeremiah would have fully supported the Megiddo expedition. Indeed, he can hardly have opposed it, or we would have heard from him a good deal on the subject. Rowton surmises that Jeremiah was teaching, if not prophesying, already in the thirteenth year of Josiah. But in the full flush of the Deuteronomic reform he would perhaps have been inclined to take YHWH's will too much for granted, too confident that the nation's good fortunes were assured. Any optimism he might have felt would have been shattered by the outcome of the Battle of Megiddo, and the dreadful change in the outlook, as Jeremiah saw it, would amply explain the continuous and pressing inquiry of YHWH's intentions which we witness from that moment on.

Na'aman (1993:58) has neatly encapsulated the facts by saying that our historical conclusions are in line with the lack of descriptive material concerning conquests and expansions in Palestine under Josiah, a lack which has puzzled and perplexed many scholars, and has engendered many and varied explanations. Even the argument in favour of 'a conspiracy of silence' supposedly formed about Josiah's death, seems unfounded. In concurrence with Na'aman, those reading the enthusiastic, pro-Josiah description in the Book of Kings will naturally be surprised at the fate of the



righteous king; those presenting a historic picture which emphasises that these actions were accompanied by a burst of popular enthusiasm and the awakening of nationalist ambitions, along with hopes for the restoration of the kingdom's former glory, expansion, and prosperity. In reality, however, things were different: Egypt strengthened its presence in the region, and Josiah's activity within his kingdom and beyond its northern border irritated the great power. The details of the occurrences cannot be precisely reconstructed, nor can we state why Necho II decided to rid himself of Josiah when the latter appeared before him at Megiddo. In any event, Josiah's death cooled the recently-awakened hopes, and Egyptian intervention in the internal affairs of the Judaeian kingdom became an established fact.

## CHAPTER 6

### CULTIC REFORMATION AND CULT CENTRALISATION

#### 6.1 INTRODUCTION

Two major issues have been the focus of scholarly debate concerning Josiah's reform:

- 1) the nature of the measures and their relationship to the Book of Teaching found in the Temple, and
- 2) the chronology of the enactments.

Halpern (1991:7,8) articulates a vision of the transformation of Judah's culture from a traditional one to an elite one. He argues that the Near East underwent a Renaissance during the boom of the eighth century BCE, in which Judahite culture was bombarded with foreign input and internal innovations. He therefore suggests that this growing literacy and the cataclysms of 722 and 701 BCE paved the way for the socialization of prophetic *Sprachkrecht*, and the identification of folk culture as alien Israelite tradition and to elite theology. This Reformation led among others to the definition of a centralized state cult as the only acceptable cult.

Lowery (1991:210) believes that from start to finish, the official religion of Judah legitimated royal political claims and expressed royal interests. He points out that cult reforms in Judah were always led by kings and were intended to serve the social-political interests of the monarchy. This is true even of Josiah's radically unorthodox and anti-imperialistic deuteronomic reform. The reform texts reflect a process seen throughout the biblical and archaeological records: the Davidic monarchy came to dominate the social and cultural life of Judah.

#### 6.2 A RELIGIOUS REFORMATION OR A POLITICAL REVOLT?

As stated in Chapter 3, Judah's history since 1923 has been interpreted in such a way that Josiah's actions are regarded not so much in terms of a religious reformation as in terms of a political revolt against Assyrian suzerainty. In this context the iconoclasm became an outward expression of rebellion in the form of a public rejection of the gods which had been the official symbols of vassal status. One of the main difficulties with Oestreicher's interpretation in 1923 is that it leaves little or no room for the influence of the law-book (usually thought to be *Urdeuteronomium*), which was presented to Josiah in the 18th year of his reign, 622 BCE. Indeed,

Oestreicher himself subsequently admitted that the finding of the law-book had not really the significance which is ascribed to it today, but most present-day scholars, it seems, would prefer some modified version of his thesis. It would now be generally acknowledged that the reforms of 622 BCE were primarily motivated by the demands of the *Urdeuteronomium*, but it would be argued that there had been an earlier phase of reform, as the Chronicler suggests, which was entirely independent of the book and resulted from the pressure of a movement towards independence and national self-assertion.

In 621 BCE further disturbances in Nineveh afforded Josiah an opportunity to continue the purge throughout his kingdom. It was during this year that the finding of the law-book (2 Kgs. 22) gave additional impetus to the reforms, but its significance was only incidental, for the basic motivation of the reformation was political. By Josiah's time many Assyrian gods were venerated in the Temple, but the reformers took care not to arouse the wrath of Assyria by hasty action. Thus the pagan deities were removed slowly and cautiously. At first only the cultic vessels were taken away (2 Kgs. 23:4), then the astral cults with their Assyrian priesthood were abolished (v.5). With the removal of the cult of Ishtar (vv.6-7) the old Solomonic Temple was cleared of Assyrian gods. In preparation for possible reprisals Josiah desecrated the local sanctuaries in Judah and around Jerusalem (vv.8-10). The climax of the rebellion followed with the removal of the cult of Shamash (= Ashur), who had his own sacred buildings in the Temple court. Finally, the purges were completed by the abolition of the few altars left in the Temple (v. 12) and the desecration of the last remaining centres in the land (vv. 13-14). Josiah had now, by **his 18th year**, declared his independence from Assyria and had made full preparations to meet the consequences of his action (McKay 1973:28-44).

Oestreicher's 1923 hypothesis had called attention to the fact that the reform sought to purge Judah of foreign cults, i.e. they aimed for *Kultusreinheit* "cult purity", not *Kultuseinheit*,<sup>1</sup> "cult centrality". But the cultic innovations of Ahaz (2 Kgs. 16:10-16) and Manasseh, heretofore interpreted in terms of the overlord's imposition of religious sanctions, do not appear to have been acts of Assyrianization, but rather to reflect many different forms of digression from traditional YHWHism and apostasy to a wide variety of indigenous and foreign practices. Similarly, in the accounts of the purges of Hezekiah and Josiah, no element of anti-Assyrian polemic has been found, and it seems logical to infer that Assyrian cults played no significant part in the politics or the religion of Judah.

Josiah's deuteronomic reform was not an act of political rebellion as his grandfather Hezekiah's cult reform had been. In concurrence with Lowery (1991:216) it was rather the core of a post-imperial cultural revolution by which the monarch sought to create a nationalist consciousness fitting Judah's newly independent status. Political independence from Assyria already had occurred via the demise of imperial power in the West. Josiah's reform sought cultural independence as well. With one or two important exceptions, the key ideas of deuteronomic theology were nothing

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<sup>1</sup> Lit. "unity", but in this context "centrality".

new. Lowery regards the distinctiveness of deuteronomism lay rather in its fresh ordering of old traditions. That ordering reflects an overarching concern about the ill effects of imperial subjugation and the new possibilities of YHWH-centered freedom.

### **6.2.1 The Law Book**

The lawbook found in the Temple which so profoundly influenced Josiah was, as is generally agreed today, some form of Deuteronomy. The consternation that it evoked is illustrated by Josiah's behaviour, who rent his garments in dismay (2 Kgs. 22:11). Through a solemn covenant (2 Kgs. 23:3), engaged in both king and people (i.e. YHWH was a witness rather than a party to it), Deuteronomic law was, in effect, recognised as the basic law of the state, to which all its policies must conform. The reform called the people back behind the official theology of the Davidic covenant to an older notion of covenant, and committed nation and people to obedience to its stipulations. The king played a role similar to that of Moses in Deuteronomy (and Joshua in Josh. 24:27). According to Bright (1981:320) Josiah undeniably took many of the steps recorded of him at its behest. This was certainly true of his centralisation of the cult in Jerusalem and his attempt to integrate the rural clergy with that of the Temple, for those are measures specifically called for only by Deuteronomy (e.g. Deut. 12:13f.; 17f; 18:6-8). Moreover, the law of Deuteronomy 13, which with unparalleled vehemence pronounces idolatry a capital crime, may explain the ferocity with which he treated not only pagan cultic functionaries, but also YHWHistic priests of Northern Israel, who were in his view idolatrous.

### **6.2.2 Assyrian Indifference**

What stands out about the cult practices purged by Josiah is that most of them are indigenous. They cannot be traced to Assyrian imposition. The clearest example of a long-standing Judaeon cult practice on the purge list comes in 2 Kings 22:7, with the destruction of the sacred prostitute quarters in the Temple. Known at least as early as Rehoboam (1 Kgs. 14:24) cult prostitutes were a commonly accepted part of life in monarchical Judah (cf. Gen. 38:12-26).

Asherah and Ba'al cults are indigenous, not Assyrian imports. Asherah is one of Judah's most ancient deities. Her frequent mention in connection with YHWH's high places (1 Kgs. 14:23; 2 Kgs. 18:4; 23:13-14; 15; cf. Deut. 16:21) indicates that Asherah worship was considered a key component of the basic royal cult offered in all official cult centres. Ba'al is well attested at Ugarit and in Judah, at least from the time of Jehoshaphat's alliance with the Omride dynasty (cf. 2 Kgs. 11:18). Ba'al and Asherah were common to the Northwest Semitic milieu long before the Assyrians came.

The astral cults purged by Josiah could have origins in the native religion of Northwest Semitic culture or in imperial religion of Assyria. The roots of Ba'al, sun, and moon worship in pre-Assyrian Judaeon practice are clear and the following picture emerges: Astral worship was present in the pre-Assyrian Judaeon cult.

When Ahaz brought Judah into the imperial orbit, he also introduced Assyrian astral cult practices, whether as an 'obligation' of Judah's vassalage or an 'imitation' of imperial culture. The astral cult fits easily into a syncretistic First Temple cult already accustomed to astral worship.

As previously stated McKay (1973:67) found that extant Near Eastern writings offer **no** evidence to support the proposition supporting the importance in the Assyrian religio-political ideal. Cogan's own research in 1974 concurred with this assessment and he further suggested (p.113) that a distinction is observable between administration of annexed territories and that of vassal states. In the latter, there is **no** evidence of imposition upon or interference with native cults. He concluded that the foreign innovations reported of the reigns of Ahaz and Manasseh are attributable to the voluntary adoption by Judah's ruling class of the prevailing Assyro-Aramaean culture.

Rowley (1963:187-208) and Nicholson (1963:380-389), to mention but two scholars, find substantial Northern influence throughout the deuteronomic literature. Basically they believe that after the fall of the North in 722 BCE, these Northern deuteronomists fled to Judah, where they constructed a reform programme. Cult centralization originally had Schechem rather than Jerusalem as its base, but the idea was easily adapted to the Jerusalemite theology of the Davidic court. The influence on Deuteronomy and Kings on the Northern Kingdom cannot be denied. However, the Northern prophetic theory of origin runs into problems at several points. Lowery (1991:199) says that assuming Hezekiah's reform is historical, it is odd to think he would be influenced by a group of recent emigrés to overturn more than two centuries of Davidic tradition and centralize the cult. The emergency conditions of Hezekiah's rebellion, however, make sense of centralization. A plausible explanation can be found in the social-political conditions of late eighth-century Judah. If the need to find some kind of Northern setting for cult centralization is removed, Schechem has nothing to recommend it as the sole shrine originally envisioned by the deuteronomists. Finally, the generally positive view of the Judaeen monarchy, and the adoption of Davidic election theology by the deuteronomic literature, remain difficult to explain in an originally Northern setting. **Northern influence does not mean a Northern origin.** Several characteristics of the literature are better explained by reference to a native Judaeen context.

Cogan (1993:405) states however, that like all the investigators who had preceded him, (Spieckermann, to mention but one) made use of the basic corpus of Biblical and Assyrian texts; thus, it is not some newly discovered document, but rather differing emphases and interpretations of the extant corpus that separate the two camps. The Bible makes no mention of Assyrian requirements in the cultic sphere and if such requirements are to be discovered, evidence for them would have to be shown from the extra-Biblical documentation. This thesis concurs with Cogan, who is mildly critical about Spieckermann, who began an "exhaustive (and often

exhausting) analysis of 2 Kings 22-23, Josiah's reform, in which a coercive Assyrian religious policy is assumed, before having presented any of the cuneiform material".

Cogan admits that both Spieckermann and earlier investigators, including he himself, had adopted the commonly used terms "vassal", "vassal state" and "province", assuming the operation of a system developed by Tiglath-Pileser III, and followed by his successors, whereby step by step, the political independence of these petty states was destroyed in three stages:

- 1) a vassal relationship was established, marked by the payment of annual dues and tribute, and the enlistment of national troops for Assyrian campaigning;
- 2) upon the discovery of disloyalty, military action to remove the unreliable vassal was undertaken, followed by his deportation and that of his supporters; a new ruler over a reduced territory, bearing increased obligations, was appointed;
- 3) in the end, and after further rebellion, even this vassal might be removed, his kingdom incorporated and provincialised after Assyrian fashion.<sup>2</sup>

Cogan (1993:406) is at pains to note that ideological texts are not entirely devoid of historical information; yet the reader must constantly beware of the pitfalls of ideological conformity. Thus, historians have long known that behind a description of an Assyrian victory may, in fact, lie a military setback. As examples of this phenomenon, likely to be familiar to biblicalists, one may point to the following: the enemy blood flowing in the plain of Qarqar on the Orontes covers up the setback suffered by Shalmaneser III, or Sennacherib's boasting of having received an inordinately heavy indemnity payment from Hezekiah leaves unexplained why he did not replace Hezekiah or occupy Jerusalem after the successful Assyrian campaign in 701 BCE.<sup>3</sup> Yet the stereotyped descriptions of the political and social arrangements imposed on conquered territories recorded in the royal inscriptions are accepted at face value. At times, single items concerning distant regions and distinct reigns are combined by some historians in a pastiche, as if a unitary, consistent imperial policy prevailed. The premise of this thesis believes this means that historians must carefully define the relationships in each case in accordance with the data.

This thesis would not dispute with Cogan's (1993:405,6) view that Assyrian historical inscriptions are first and foremost ideological statements, aimed at promulgating Assyrian imperial ideology. (Twentieth century poetic writing, as well as narratives regarding wars and confrontations, show that even the vanquished become victorious at the hand of the author. Egyptian bridges and monuments, let alone poems, proclaim their "victories" after their 1967 and 1973 defeats!) The royal scribes, working under conceptual constraints and supported by a rich store of traditional style and language, presented the 'official interpretation of events'

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<sup>2</sup> (For this model, often cited in the literature, see Donner, 'Israel unter den Volkern', VTS 11, 1964) and idem, in *Israelite & Judaeon History*, ed. Hayes & Miller, 418-21).

<sup>3</sup> See ANET 287-88. For detailed study of this scribal "cover-up", see H. Tadmor's 'Sennacherib's Campaign to Judah: Historical and Historiographical Considerations', (*Zion* 50 1985:65-80).

surrounding the valorous deeds of the king and his gods. Yet now, upon renewed examination of the texts, Cogan (1993:407) believes that the reconstructed rule and the terms associated with it do not do justice to the wide spectrum of arrangements that developed between the conqueror and the conquered, especially in border and peripheral areas, particularly in the west. As Cogan has pointed out, the degree of induction and absorption into the empire changed several times over the long century from Tiglath-Pileser III's first appearance on the Mediterranean coast in 734 BCE, until Ashurbanipal's withdrawal back to the confines of the Assyrian homeland, and was determined anew as circumstances changed. As a result neat categories may be easily grasped by the uninitiated reader, but hardly ever do they reflect the complex realities of life. Cogan adds that this should not be construed as a call for literalism, which can lead to similarly unsatisfying results. For example, Na'aman (1991: 49-59), discussing population changes in Palestine, noted that the texts of Tiglath-Pileser III and Sennacherib report the deportation of exiles from Israel and Judah, without the corresponding importation of new settlers, suggests that the Galilee and Shephelah were, as a matter of policy, left vacant by their respective conquerors. Yet for Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, whose texts also omit mention of resettling foreigners in Israel, there is evidence for such a policy in Ezra 4:2, 9-10 (acknowledged by Na'aman). Cogan (1993:407) therefore suggests, with which this thesis heartily concurs, it might be wiser, given the very fragmentary state of the Tiglath-Pileser texts, and the obvious incompleteness of the texts of the other monarchs, to err on the side of caution when discussing policy issues.

Yet just a decade later, a king of Ashdod, Mitinti, is known to have paid homage to Sennacherib. Does this mean that Ashdod, the province, had revolted and regained its independence? It seems highly unlikely. But it is not impossible that at the time of its formal incorporation under Sargon, or soon thereafter, Ashdod was permitted to reinstall a king who reigned alongside the Assyrian governor. Dual rule is attested as late as the reign of Ashurbanipal, when in 669 BCE Samas-kasid-ayabi-sakin-Asdudu, served as eponym, and Ahimilki was king of Ashdod. Not only the cities of the Philistine coast enjoyed monarchical privileges while under Assyrian control. Esarhaddon's reorganisation of Egypt following its conquest included the appointment of Assyrian administrators and officials, a vast bureaucracy, as well as the recognition of numerous local kings. In this case the payment of dues to support a cult of Assyria's gods in Egypt is recorded (ANET:292-3).

Royal inscriptions report that, in a number of instances, the statues of the gods of defeated nations were subject to pillage by the Assyrian army. In most cases, however, they were deported and held hostage, so to speak, for the good behaviour of the vassal and his kingdom. With reference to the images of several Arab tribes, their repatriation, after long exile and much negotiation, was achieved. The only requirement imposed upon the renewed cult was the incising upon the images of a cuneiform inscription proclaiming the "*might of the god Ashur, my lord and my* [i.e. the king's name]" - a daily reminder in the recesses of north Arabian desert of continuing Assyrian hegemony. Cogan (1993:408) emphasises that it should be kept in mind that during the absence of the cult statue(s) in Assyria, native rites were not

suspended, as some means were found to rationalise the absence of the god from his shrine and a surrogate object fashioned, until the venerated statue(s) returned home.

If we turn to the *ade*, or so-called vassal treaties, for a statement on Assyrian control over conquered areas, we observe that these documents, known mostly from the reigns of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal, deal **only** with political matters, serving "as a means of protecting the king and his heir-designate against potential conspiracies and uprisings" (Parpola, 1987:161-83). The extant oaths never refer to any cultic act to be performed within vassal territories. The statement in the Esarhaddon *ade* that the oath taken with Ashur as god and Ashurbanipal as king was to be respected now and in the future, and that the tablet, sealed with the seal of Ashur, was to be guarded. That Ashur and other Mesopotamian and West Semitic gods are invoked as guardians of the oaths, in no way means that an Assyrian cult was established in the cities of the Medians, in Tyre, or in any other territory. Nor does the fact that Assyrian subjects and their native gods were required to take part in *ade* ceremonies, (likely conducted in the presence of the imperial gods), or mean that such official state ceremonies were acts of religious coercion, which implied any modification of native cultic practice.

Cogan (1993:409,410) points out that for just what was required of Ahaz after his voluntary submission in 734 BCE is not reported in Assyrian sources. To interpret the laconic statement of 2 Kings 16:15b (referring to the king's private sacrifice upon the old bronze altar which had to make way for the new Damascene-style scene) as evidence for the worship of the imperial god of Tiglath-Pileser III, "is to spin a tale out of whole cloth". Similarly, the terms of Hezekiah's renewed vassalage after his defeat in 701 BCE are simply unknown. Doubt has even been raised as to whether Judah at any stage of its relations with Assyria, was bound by a formal, written *ade* treaty. Rather the more traditional terms of dependence - the 'performance of servitude' (*epis arduiti*) - may have been in force. Only the 'tyranny of a construct' could lead one to suggest that Hezekiah had to live with Assyrians stationed in Jerusalem, who practiced an Assyrian cult in YHWH's Temple. Once again we have no evidence to this effect, and once again it must be accepted that religious syncretism was voluntary, not enjoined by Assyria. The conclusion of this thesis must perforce agree that apostasy in Judah was voluntary, and not obligatory.

Biblical historical works represent a distinct historiographic-ideological corpus, whose terms of reference and testimony address issues and phenomena that the Assyrian texts do not consider. Thus, the Deuteronomistic censure of Ahaz and Manasseh in the books of Kings is not concerned with whatever political arrangements were enforced upon Judah, or whether these were accompanied by an etiquette that acknowledged the imperial god Ashur. That censure is of a different sort; it reflects the Deuteronomic demand for whole-hearted loyalty to the G-d of Israel.

The cultic activities of Ahaz and Manasseh are described in standard Deuteronomic terms (e.g. 2 Kgs. 21:6//Deut. 18:10-11), and both kings are compared to the sinful monarchs of the kingdom of Israel (2 Kgs. 16:3), particularly Ahab (2 Kgs. 21:3). At the same time, note should be taken of the innovations:



- a) Ahaz was the first "to pass his son through fire" (2 Kgs. 16:3);
- b) no earlier king of Judah had installed an image of Asherah in YHWH's Temple as did Manasseh (2 Kgs. 21:7);
- c) he also introduced service of the heavenly host (2 Kgs. 21:3,5).

Ahlstrom (1982:75-81) prefers to view Manasseh as a "traditionalist in religious matters", and cautions against the term "apostate". But Ahlstrom did not consider that, besides restoring the high places that had been closed down during the Hezekian reform, Manasseh is credited with new installations, the key to understanding the temper of the king and his era. The grounds for these acts is not stated, but the premise of this thesis believes there is no reason to think that the Deuteronomistic historian avoided recording their true source. Cogan (1993:410) raises the questions as to whether unmasking their imperial roots would have mitigated in some way the grave indictment he directed at these apostates. Furthermore, would this have detracted from the praise he heaped upon the reform-minded Hezekiah and Josiah? Cogan's answer is an emphatic "no".

One should consider that with reference to King Solomon, the historian did not shy away from naming the foreign deities and their cults introduced into Jerusalem for his many wives: Ashtoreth, goddess of Tyre; Milcom, god of Ammon; Chemosh, god of Moab (I Kgs. 11:1-8). That Solomon's behaviour likely followed accepted political norms was of no interest to him. Rather, it was the king's enthusiasm for those cults that came in for round criticism. Thus, in like fashion, the Deuteronomist could have named the Assyrian cult in his depiction of the apostasy of Ahaz, if that is what it was. Or Manasseh's ready worship of Ashur and Ishtar, even if only to please his overlord, could have been stated in plain words. There was no reason whatsoever to hide behind the list of deities said to have been worshipped by the Canaanites: Ba'al, Asherah and the host of heaven (see 2 Kgs. 21:3). Moreover, if politically motivated cultic impositions were disguised by the Deuteronomist, then what effect could his charge of cultic wrongdoing possibly have had on his audience, who would have known that this presentation was distorted? What is scored in the description of Manasseh's reign in 2 Kings 21 is the service of a mixture of Canaanite and Aramaean gods, **not** an imperial cult, which that renegade king introduced into the national shrine and sponsored throughout Judah. It was against such features, as well as sundry non-Israelite cults which had survived from the early days of the monarchy (2 Kgs. 23:13), that Josiah directed his reform.

Summing up, then, Cogan (1993:412) believes, with which this thesis fully concurs, it should be clear that a more nuanced reading of Assyrian royal inscriptions, as well as the Biblical historical texts, is called for. The view of a monolithic Assyrian imperialism holding sway and enforcing its rule in all areas of the Near East, is **undocumented**. No Assyrian text states or implies that conquered peoples were required to worship the gods of Assyria. Furthermore, no single paradigm can explain the mosaic of political and social relationships that developed between Assyria and its dependents. Biblical texts of the period focus on religious apostasy, as was their wont.

Assyria was a new phenomenon in the history of the ancient Near East, unifying for the first time the Nile Valley with Anatolia and the Zagros range. Consequently it is impossible to deny that Assyrian power and prestige did not leave its mark on the west. Indeed, the vast political upheavals brought about by the military and economic forces of the empire:

- a) the ceaseless movement of armies and merchants,
- b) the massive population exchanges, and
- c) the flow of taxes, tribute, goods and services

were followed by the unprecedented opening up of the Near East and precipitated a mixture of styles and fashions in all areas of life. In the end, it was a new cultural and technical koine,<sup>4</sup> Assyrian-Aramaean in derivation, that ultimately dominated the entire region wherever Assyria appeared. This koine insinuated itself into the very court of Nineveh.

### 6.3 DEUTERONOMIC THEOLOGY

Lowery (1991:200), who has scrutinised minutely the cults and society in First Temple Judah, correctly observes that the quest for the tradents of deuteronomic theology is as confused as the search for a motivation for Josiah's reform. He comments that it is an odd literature which leads its critical readers to conclude that "it is anti-monarchical and pro-monarchical, Northern and Southern in origin, the product of rural levites, Jerusalem priests, royal scribes, recent emigrés, courtly insiders, wisdom teachers and prophetic circles"! All these proposals have been put forward, however, because each of them has some warrant in the literature. A closer look at Josiah's reform sets the context for sorting out some of these contradictory characteristics of deuteronomic theology.

Lowery (1991:201) poses an interesting question (which cannot be settled), namely whether to go with the Deuteronomist's version of a one-time lawbook-inspired reform of the Chronicler's version, or a two- or possibly three-stage reform over several years. Ogden's fascinating comparison (1978:22-33) between the Kings and Chronicles accounts of Josiah's reform, shows heavy patterning in both narratives. Studying Chronicles, Ogden correlates the geography of Josiah's reform (2 Chron. 34:6) with similar geographical descriptions in 2 Chronicles 15:9 (Asa) and 30:18 (Hezekiah) to argue that the Chronicler "deliberately extends the geographical parameters to assert that Josiah's programme was superior to all other reform attempts". In 2 Kings 23:16-20, Ogden argues, the Deuteronomist has presented Josiah as another Jehu. The Deuteronomist's focus on the discovery in the Temple, abolition of the high places and defilement of the Beth-el sanctuary into a very busy **eighteenth year** of Josiah, an improbable level of activity for the time Kings allows. On the other hand, Chronicles has its own agenda in the dating of the reforms. The Chronicler is anxious to show that Josiah started the cult reform as soon as possible (cf. Hezekiah's reform *'in the first year of his reign in the first month'* [2 Chron.

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<sup>4</sup>

Gk. *koine* (*dialektos*) - common language.

29:3)). Therefore, the Chronicler dates Josiah's reform in his twelfth year, the first year of adulthood. (This could, of course, be understood as (1) a sign of his preconsciousness, or (2) symbolically - beginning/initiating these reforms as a sign of maturity, or a reaching of manhood). Placing the discovery of the lawbook in Josiah's **eighteenth year**, following an initial reform in the twelfth year, also fits the Hezekiah pattern in Chronicles. Two Kings 22:3-8 says the discovery of the book came during Temple repairs. The Chronicler, following the pattern of the Hezekiah account (2 Chron. 29), presents Temple repairs as part of a cult reform already begun. Thus in Chronicles, reform preceded the Temple repairs which resulted in the discovery of the book. That discovery prompted more reform.

#### **6.4 RELIGIOUS POSITION IN SAMARIA**

Cogan (1993:413) believes a glimpse in the process of acculturation may be obtained from the depiction in 2 Kings 17:24-41 of the development of the Samaritan cultus. Despite the text's acknowledged tendentiousness, an expression of the antagonisms that developed between Israelites and Samaritans early on, its report concerning the operation of Assyrian administration in a kingdom annexed as an Assyrian province is sound. What this thesis regards as the crux of the matter is that the foreigners resettled in Samaria were free to adopt the local Israelite cult of YHWH; their private worship of a panoply of gods, of native gods brought with them abroad and of the local god, was unencumbered by any public homage that may have been paid to the "weapon of Ashur" set up in the provincial capital.

#### **6.5 JUDAH**

Matters in the kingdom of Judah were little different. Though diminished in size and importance for most of the long century of Assyrian domination, Judah could not, as it were, sit on the sidelines, shielded from the effects of assimilatory process. The altar of Aramaean design imported from Damascus, horses dedicated to the sun god as was common in Assyrian ritual, child immolation popular in Phoenician circles and more were all items which bear witness to the cultural wave that inundated Judah from all sides.<sup>5</sup>

This thesis concurs with Cogan (1993:413) that for those in Judah who viewed their people's fate in the exclusivist terms of the cult of YHWH, as interpreted in prophetic and Deuteronomic circles, the real threat was not from the vassal's appearance before his hegemon at some official ceremony with cultic overtones. Favoured by the conqueror, such rites would disappear with his eventual disappearance. Rather, it was from native quarters that Israelite tradition was threatened; the religious and cultural disintegration lay at the door of those syncretists in Judah who sought the

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<sup>5</sup> Cogan (1993:413) acknowledges the "substance, if not the slighting tone of Lemche's assessment (1985:310): while acknowledging the non-coercive 'official' Assyrian attitude toward religious practices in subdued areas", Lemche speaks of "considerable Assyrian cultural influence in Palestine, as this almost invariably occurs whenever a superior culture comes into contact with a cultural backwater".

adoption of foreign ways in a conscious fostering of new gods and new cults when the old one seemed to fail.

Discussing Hezekiah, Manasseh and Josiah, Lowery (1991:211) observes that culturally the monarchy legitimated its social dominance through an official cult which presented the king as the divinely chosen earthly representative of YHWH, the national G-d of Israel. YHWH's 'son', the Davidic king, exercised all the rights and responsibilities of an heir. As high G-d of Judah, YHWH was true owner of the land and sovereign of the people. As vicar of YHWH on earth, the king collected and invested the sacred rent and told YHWH's people what to do. Royal cult reforms in the period before the advent of Assyrian imperialism in Judah underscore the ideological function of First Temple YHWHism. Cult and court were inexorably bound. The king built sanctuaries, instituted and spent cultic taxes, used the Temple treasuries as political events dictated, appointed and deposed priests, erected and demolished cult objects and defined priestly roles. Lowery suggests the king was the single most important figure in the cultic life of the nation and whilst this thesis might not accept this description entirely, it must be accepted that the king was indeed important.

Reforms throughout the period of the monarchy reflect the syncretistic character of the First Temple cult. YHWH indisputably headed the national pantheon, but other gods sat in Judah's heavenly court. Indigenous Judaeans gods, such as Asherah and Ba'al, had rituals performed for them as part of the royal cult. And, in accordance with the terms of international alliance, non-Judaeans gods were worshipped in the capital city's 'embassy row', along the Mount of Olives, opposite Jerusalem.

## 6.6 JOSIANIC REFORMS

This thesis has touched on the reforms of Hezekiah and Manasseh, but Josiah reformed Judah's official cult with a scope and depth which was unprecedented for a Davidic monarch, and never to be repeated.

Josiah's reform most closely resembles Hezekiah's rebellion-reform in its abolishment of the high place shrines. The differences between the two reforms are striking, however. (It is the belief of this thesis that Hezekiah had Sennacherib breathing down his neck, whereas Josiah had no such looming threat. He could thus more actively reform those practices which were abhorrent to him). Hezekiah shut down the high places. On the other hand, Josiah *'tore down'* the high places, *'defiled'* them, *'burned human bones'* on their altars, *'deposed'* and even *'executed'* their priests. The Deuteronomist does not give much detail about Hezekiah's high place reform, but neither does Kings give any indication that Hezekiah extended it beyond those sanctuaries which were part of the official first Temple system. By contrast, Josiah reportedly destroyed the official Judaeans sanctuaries and went on to attack the foreign embassies in the Jerusalem suburbs and the non-Judaeans temple at Beth-el.

Josiah, like Hezekiah before him, abolished the high places, that is, the royal cult shrines in the countryside served by priests 'appointed' by the kings of Judah (2

Kings. 23:5; cf. vv. 8-9). Lowery (1991:206,207) states correctly, that the picture is confused about the fate of the priests who served there. According to 2 Kgs. 23:5, Josiah 'deposed' them (*hisbit*). Verses 8-9 imply, however, that Josiah called all the high place priests in to Jerusalem, presumably to serve at the central shrine, in accordance with the terms of Deuteronomy 18:6-7. The high priests of vv.8-9 do not go up to serve at the central sanctuary. The net result is the same. Whether Josiah 'deposed' them or whether they refused to serve in the central sanctuary, these high place priests were out of a job.

According to Lowery (1991:173,174) the exile was the result of the collective guilt of the house of David. The closing chapters of Kings offer two different theological explanations of the Babylonian exile. One says the collective guilt of the Davidic monarchs throughout history brought the final destruction. This theory contradicts the pro-Davidic thrust of Kings as a whole. A second theory explicitly blames the exile entirely on Manasseh. The two passages late in Kings which advocate the 'Manasseh alone' explanation sit awkwardly in the narrative and are best explained as secondary additions to a text which already had incorporated the collective guilt theory.

It is undoubtedly correct that much has been written about Josiah's reform because interpreters have long recognised that in Josiah's reform lies the key to Deuteronomy, and in Deuteronomy lies the key to much of the Old Testament.

Lowery (1991:190) notes that the deuteronomic reform executed by Josiah did not spring full-grown from the heads of Josiah and his priest Hilkiah, and believes the high place, Asherah, sacred pillar reform of the rebel king, Hezekiah, stood at the heart of Josiah's reform. However, along the historical path from Hezekiah's rebellion in 701 BCE to Josiah's reform around 621 BCE, the reformist agenda picked up several additional elements.

With the death of Ashurbanipal the final disintegration of the empire began, and Josiah ruled a kingdom free of the imperial yoke for the first time in a century. As far as the Biblical historians were concerned, the most important way Josiah used this new-found freedom was to reorganize and reform the official cult top to bottom, inside and out. Consequently, they tend to emphasise the cult reform and give insufficient attention to geopolitics. Hints of Josiah's political designs are given here and there, for example in his reform push to Beth-el, and in his failed and fatal attempt to stop the Egyptian army at Megiddo. But in concurrence with Lowery's premise (1991:191), throughout their accounts, the Biblical authors keep the clear, and more appropriate focus on the fiercely nationalistic cultural revolution that Josiah attempted from the top down.

The coincidence of Judah's independence and Josiah's reform raises a question about how Judah's vassal status relates to Josiah's overhaul of the cult. And the key question has been whether Josiah's deuteronomic reform formed part of a rebellion against Assyria. Some of the reasons which have been sufficient to raise the question have been:

- The family resemblance between Josiah's reform and the cult reform of the rebellious Hezekiah;

- Josiah's violent purge of 'foreign' cult practices, and
- the international political context of Josiah's reign.

The rejection of a political motivation for the reform has found a receptive audience from many scholars. Cogan (1974:70-71) rejects the view of Bright, Noth, Malamat and others, that the assassins of Amon were anti-Assyrianist conspirators and that 'the people of the land' who executed the assassins and put Josiah on the throne, did so to prevent a confrontation with Assyria. Josiah's subsequent actions, aimed at purging 'foreign' elements from the cult, and presumably, at overthrowing foreign alignments, indicate that these people of the land had anything but restraining effects on Judah's foreign policy. Cogan cites Assyria's failure to intervene in Judah's coup and counter-coup as evidence that Judah, as early as 640 BCE, had begun to free itself of vassal restraints, long before the final disintegration of the empire which set in with the death of Ashurbanipal in 627 BCE. One may thus conclude that Assyria had little influence in Judaeon politics by the time Josiah took the throne; nor was it likely that Josiah's reform was part of a political rebellion against Assyria. Instead, genuine cultic decay occurred during the reign of Manasseh. Judaeans, rocked by the fall of the North, discouraged by Hezekiah's failed rebellion and disheartened by their continued subservience to Assyria, came to a crisis of faith and began to revert to indigenous Canaanite practices. As Cogan (1974:70-71) avers, and with which this thesis concurs, Josiah's reform comes as a genuine religious reform in a period characterised by a 'spirit of repentance and soul searching'.

Lowery (1991:194) is of the opinion that scholars who identify the national will for reunification and independence as a moving force behind Hezekiah's and Josiah's reforms are on the right track. But he believes their arguments are derailed, however, by their view of the high places as hotbeds of syncretism. The Biblical authors describe high place worship as filled with illegitimate cult practices:

"However, as 2 Kings 23 itself attests, no Judaeon shrine came close to the Jerusalem Temple in sponsoring foreign cult practices. The Temple had it all. Yet Josiah did not close the Temple because it was syncretistic. He purged it. He would have done the same for the high places, if his only concern were the presence of 'foreign' cults there. Josiah had some other reason for centralizing the cult at Jerusalem".

As for the foreign cults which were practiced in the Jerusalem Temple and in the Judaeon countryside, Cogan & Tadmor (1988:298) consider them to be typical of the "cultic amalgam" which had developed in the western regions of the Assyrian empire as a result of the massive population shifts enforced by the conqueror. Thus the worship at the high places, according to the Deuteronomistic view, was a long-standing aberration of the cult of YHWH. That their closing was more than just a temporary measure is proved by the thoroughgoing defilement of both the high places and the Topheth (2 Kgs. 23:8 and 10). Certainly the intent was not to reinstitute Topheth once the Assyrian threat passed!

### 6.6.1 Cult Purity and Cult Centrality in Deuteronomy

No clear-cut separation exists in the book of Deuteronomy between cult purity and cult centrality. The law of centralization in Deuteronomy 12:2-4 is introduced by a statement requiring the eradication of the manifold Canaanite cult sites throughout the land and a single chosen site is enjoined upon Israel. Josiah acts in accordance with this law. By desecrating the rural shrines, he perforce centralizes worship at a single site. As Cogan and Tadmor (1988:298) note, Jerusalem and its Temple are the direct beneficiaries of the Reform.

Lowery (1991:199) points out that as far back as 1926, Bentzen (pp.73-74) had suggested that cult centralization was economically motivated. The levitical priests of the smaller shrines in the countryside legislated cult centralization as a way of integrating themselves into the more lucrative ministry at the central shrine. Shutting down the high places was thus a means of better providing for the material welfare of rural priests. (Cf. Ezek. 44).

Claburn (1973:11-22) also picks up the economic argument, but somewhat differently. According to Claburn, the rural Levites were a wealthy class of local cultic bureaucrats, to whom the peasants paid tithes. The Levites took their due and passed on the rest of the revenue to the central royal administration. These Levites, however, became increasingly independent of the Jerusalem court, keeping more of the tax money than the monarchy could afford, and building an ever stronger political base for themselves on the local level. Claburn's premise is that in an attempt to re-establish monarchical authority, consolidate power, and especially to replenish the royal coffers, Josiah centralized the cult and brought tithe revenues directly to Jerusalem. Josiah's centralization of the cult thus undercut the Levites' economic and political authority in the countryside.

Lowery (1991:195) considers Bentzen's theory does not fit in with the response of the rural priests to cult centralization as portrayed in 2 Kings 23:9: *"However, the priests of the high places did not come up to the altar of YHWH in Jerusalem. Rather, they ate bread in the company of their brothers"*. If Lowery is correct, the rural Levites did not benefit from Josiah's abolition of high places, and are unlikely proponents of centralization. Lowery regards Claburn's proposal "better accounts for the opposition of rural Levites to Josiah's reform. Centralization is an important part of the reform, but Josiah did much more than abolish high places".

The writer of this thesis read a paper in 1995 concerning texts versus their critics, in which it was suggested that any text is inevitably shaped by the author's historical background, particularly his economic and social background. In this paper it was stated that it is surely no exaggeration to say that the quest for authorial intention represents the fundamental aim of historical-critical exegesis. It was stressed that authorial meaning rests ultimately on an ethical choice, because we are aware of an obligation not to use the words of our own purposes any more than we would use the person himself merely for our ends. While most interpreters feel constrained to acknowledge a certain obligation to authorial meaning, there are also some who are unwilling to limit the meaning of a text to the meaning explicitly intended by the original author. It is, furthermore, the belief of this thesis, that we must be alert to

unattended meaning and subconscious meaning, and should also ask whether the passage shines in a new light through being read in a new life-setting. This preamble is given here in order to quote some passages by Claburn who, in his opinion, has overstepped the boundaries of good taste, let alone academic ones.

Claburn commences an article concerning the fiscal basis of Josiah's reforms (1973:11ff.) with the following words:

"The famous reforms of Judah's King Josiah surely constitute one of history's most lastingly enigmatic oddities. Under a banner proclaiming purification of YHWHistic worship all YHWHistic shrines in Judah were desecrated and destroyed, except the one having perhaps the greatest propensity of all toward pagan syncretism - the Temple in Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 22:17 and 23:8a). And in the name of sacred national unity against foreign influence, major traditional religious practices of a sizable segment of the indigenous population were vigorously attacked (2 Kgs. 23:1-24). Could such measures actually be expected to achieve purification and unification, as these goals have been understood by modern scholarship? Or would they not, in fact, be expected to produce almost effects exactly opposite to those alleged intentions of the reformers?"

"It is quite understandably not the usual practice of either religious or political institutions or movements to attempt to abolish all the sacred places but one in an entire politically viable realm. Frequently one such centre achieves pre-eminence, but that seldom leads to bloody campaigns to abolish all the local shrines. The lack of material for comparison leaves us in a most embarrassing position when we come to the task of discovering the process by which such events could transpire".

After demolishing the very idea of the veracity of a Biblical finding of the document in the course of Temple repairs (2 Kgs. 22:8) Claburn continues:

"Items like gods, flags and moral scruples can ordinarily be shared peacefully because even giving them away does not require giving them up. It is in connection with the disposal of more substantial items of which shortages frequently exist that smashing, looting, and killing are more commonly undertaken, even when done officially in the name of religion or patriotism. Could it be that somewhere behind all that grisly rampaging, sanctuary-smashing piety of Josiah, somebody was out to get something more substantial than somebody else's deity symbols? If so, who was after what from whom?"

According to Claburn (1991:15):

"The answer to the question was right there in front of us for centuries, directly and frankly stated, had the question been rightly posed. It is this: How does an ambitious king most efficiently get his hands on the largest possible proportion of the peasantry's agricultural surplus? And the answer is: If he is smart, he does it, not by raising the assessed level of taxes, but by reforming his fiscal system so that he brings into the capital a larger



proportion of the taxes already being assessed. He does this by substituting for the semi-independent local dignitaries to whom the peasants had been paying the taxes (but who had been pocketing most of the proceeds locally), a hierarchically organized central internal revenue bureau of paid officials under his direct control".

Claburn is referring to the Levites, and believes the provision by Deuteronomy (18:6-8) that Levites should come in from the countryside to take up positions in the Jerusalem Temple "takes on an entirely different set of implications now that a fiscal explanation for the reforms must be considered". Claburn believes the fact that the naming of the Levites in the lists in Deuteronomy of categories of persons to receive welfare contributions along with the indigent or disadvantaged means that the tax-collecting aspect of the Levitical role is what is paramount, and says:

"So instead of the seductive picture of the Levites as pious paupers preserving in the Judaeen back country the ancient traditions of the common people, with which our minds have rested curiously content for the last few decades, we suddenly have before us the quite contrasting picture of a class of local dignitaries wealthy from peasant sacrifices combining in their hands elements of local civil, religious and military power, collaborating with foreign oppressors and their legitimating gods in the manner depicted by Ezekiel 44:10-14, and deliberately subverting the YHWHistic monarchy for personal gain".

It is the contention of this thesis that Josiah was not incorrect in his actions. In 2 Kings 22:20 the Bible confirms that: He (Josiah) slaughtered all the priests of the high places. In contrast to his behaviour in Judah (vv. 8-9) Josiah massacred the priests who served at the high places in the North, treating them as if they were idolatrous, though they are called kohanim. **For this was in the spirit of the law requiring the punishment of Israelite cities that strayed from YHWH** (cf. Deut. 12:13-19; AB II Kings, Cogan & Tadmor 1988:290).

Deuteronomy 12:3-6a says:

*"You shall tear down their altars, and dash in pieces their pillars and burn their Asherim with fire; you shall chop down the graven images of their gods, and destroy their name out of the place...But you shall seek the place which YHWH your g-d will choose out of all your tribes to put his name and to dwell there; there you shall go, and there you shall bring your burnt offerings and your sacrifices, your tithes..."*

## **6.6.2 Major Issues of the Josianic Reformation**

### **6.6.2.1 Ideology of Josiah's Reforms**

If the first major issue concerns the ideology of Josiah's reform, the second major issue concerns the principle of cultic centralization that permeates the book of Deuteronomy and its impact on the collection and distribution of the economic resources of the land. The central feature of Josiah's reform was the closure of all sanctuaries outside of Jerusalem and the demand to worship exclusively at the

Temple in Jerusalem. The command to worship YHWH exclusively at the one place where YHWH chooses to cause the divine name to dwell is likewise the central feature of the book of Deuteronomy with the "book of the Torah" that serves as the basis for Josiah's reform programme (cf. Nicholson 1967:98,99). Although Deuteronomy never identifies the site for worship with Jerusalem, scholars have recognised this requirement as a feature of the Jerusalem cult tradition which identifies Zion as the only legitimate worship site. Furthermore, it represents a modification of the Older Covenant Code law in Exodus 20:21-26, which allows for the existence of multiple altars.

#### **6.6.2.2 Economic Implications**

Although this requirement appears at first sight to be strictly religious, recent studies have pointed to the economic and administrative implications of the command for cultic centralization by centralizing the collection of tithes, in that it enhances the monarch's control over the economic resources of the land (Claburn 1973:3-11). Such a perspective corresponds well to the authority exercised in Judah by the House of David, which justified its economic and administrative control over the country by the right of divine election based upon David's establishment of Jerusalem as the site for the sanctuary of YHWH.

The inter-relationship between cultic and economic centralization is evident insofar as the celebrations of the major Temple festivals serve as the occasions on which the tithe is delivered to the central sanctuary. Each male is required to bring to the sanctuary a portion of the produce of grain, oil, herd and flock. In essence it constitutes the tax upon the produce of the land that is collected at the major festivals (Weinfeld 1971:56-62).

#### **6.6.3 Cult Centrality**

Because the Deuteronomic law code requires the closing of all sanctuaries except for the one place which YHWH will choose, the collection of the tithe will be centralised in one location. This eliminates outlying sanctuaries as collection points; consequently, according to Sweeney (1994:10), the centralised collection of tithes appears to place greater control over the economic resources of the land into the hands of Temple priesthood.

But this is not the case. The Deuteronomic law of the tithe apparently reduces the amount of income due to the Levites. Deuteronomy 14:22-29 does not grant the entire tithe to the Levites or even to the king. Rather, it stipulates that the tithe must be taken to the central sanctuary, where it will be eaten before YHWH at the festivals. Here, the people, not the Levites or the king, eat the tithe. The requirement to give also to the Levite (v. 27) indicates some consideration must be given to the priests, but this hardly constitutes the entire tithe that was formerly collected at the sanctuary. Instead, they must rely on the offerings that are made at the sanctuary (Deut. 18:1-8) and the leftovers of the tithe that might be given to them by the people (Deut. 12:18-19; 14:27). This loss is also evident in the command to store the tithe in the cities every third year for the use of the Levites,

aliens, orphans and widows (Deut. 14:28-29). Although the law at first sight appears to be designed to support the Levites, it actually undermines them again. They are not entitled to a yearly tithe, but only to that of every third year; and they must share it with the disadvantaged classes of the land, the alien, orphan, and widow. In short, the Deuteronomic law of the tithe reduces the income of the Levites by placing a substantial amount of the tithe in the hands of the people. It is uncertain whether the later priestly law of the tithe in Numbers 18:21-32, which grants the entire tithe to the Levites, reflects pre-exilic practice. But statements concerning the pre-exilic collection and distribution of the tithe in Genesis 14:18-20; 28:18-22; 1 Samuel 8:15; and Amos 4:4-5 indicate that it was brought to the sanctuary to be used either by the priests or by the king. (McConville 1984:70-87, cited by Sweeney 1994:10). Sweeney (1994:11) believes the central sanctuary serves nevertheless as the primary focus for the collection and distribution of the tithe. Insofar as this represents a modification of previous practice, one may legitimately ask who benefits from the centralization of the collection and distribution of the tithe. Obviously, the Levites do not, and the people do. But the matter is not quite so simple, in that some authority must be responsible for such change. Although the priests officiate at the Temple, they would hardly be the party responsible for the reduction of their income. In this regard, two factors suggest that royal authority may be the source of this modification. First, the law of the tithe gives special consideration to the disadvantaged, i.e. the alien, the orphan and the widow. In the Ancient Near East, the care of the orphan and the widow in particular, and the justice due to them, is the responsibility of the king, and his fitness to rule is measured by his care for these advantaged parties (Fensham 1962:129-139).

#### **6.6.4 Royal Sanctuary**

The central sanctuary is also the royal sanctuary, and the tithe of the produce of the land is generally regarded as the due of the king in the Ancient Near Eastern world, and in Israel, which he may distribute to support his political or his religious establishment. (See 1 Sam. 8:15 and Gen. 14:18-20; cf. Weinfeld 1971:1156-1162). Dare we assume, therefore, that this was in fact **not** a religious correction? Because the distribution of the tithe is a royal prerogative, the Deuteronomic modification of the law of the tithe may well be traced to royal authority, especially insofar as it benefits the alien, the orphan and the widow. It enhances the king's standing in that it weakens the position of the Levitical priesthood and benefits the people. In this regard, the centralization of the collection and the redistribution of the tithe functions as an economic and political tool that strengthens the position of the monarch who employs it as a means to gain popular support. If the writer of this thesis correctly interprets Sweeney (1994:12) Josiah's reforms indeed had a fiscal basis.

### **6.7 DEUTERONOMIC LAW CODE**

The book of Deuteronomy also centralizes the administration of justice, especially with regard to the centralization of legal authority and the modification of prior legal practice (Steinberg 1991:161-170 cited in Sweeney 1994:13). This is evident in several features of the Deuteronomistic law code:

- a) It modifies prior legal tradition, especially the Covenant Code of Exodus 20-23;
- b) It grants greater legal and economic rights to disadvantaged classes, especially indebted Israelites and women; and
- c) It grants greater authority to the state to regulate the economic and family life of the people.

Bald-faced, Claburn (1973:14-17) then gives his version of the events:

"Now read one of the deuteronomistic versions of the centralization demand, and notice its punchline: 'Three times a year all your males should appear before Yahweh your God at the place which he will choose: at the feast of unleavened bread, at the feast of weeks, at the feast of booths. They shall not appear before Yahweh empty-handed'" (Deut. 1:16).

Regarding the specified festivals at the Temple, especially the great Passover Josiah had decreed, Claburn holds the following view::

"the seasonal collection days in the capital would have to be turned into a more impressive celebration than ever before, to give the peasants additional motivation to go up to the capital to do the king's new thing. (2 Kgs. 23:22-23). For the kind of circuses Josiah was capable of staging for his followers, one should recall the similar mass meetings, public spectacles, and courtroom dramas staged in recent times in various countries better left unnamed. Perhaps the more exciting the circus, the less the bread is missed....what is now known generally about the exploited role of peasants as participants in larger social contexts and particularly about the long tradition of exploitation of Palestinian peasants that existed even before development of the Hebrew kingdoms there (as reflected in the Amarna letters) would lead us to expect that they probably had not had the opportunity to consume their own tithes at the religious festivals since the Stone Age....It seems most likely then, that, so far from being the kind of holdover from traditional religion...the deuteronomistic stipulation of worshipper-participation in the tithe consumption was an innovation of the seventh century to sweeten Josiah's fiscal reforms for the peasants".

The writer of this thesis upholds academic freedom and the right to hold an own opinion. It is nonetheless felt that intemperate language, exaggerated sarcasm, and denigration of the beliefs of others are unscientific, unacademic and unacceptable.

Sweeney (1994:13) cites scholars (*inter alia* Eissfeldt, Von Rad and Rentdorff) who have long noted the inter-relationship between the Deuteronomistic law code and the Covenant Code of Exodus 20-23. Von Rad provides a long list of parallel passages from Deuteronomy and the Covenant Code in which the content and formulation of the laws are similar. In many cases, Deuteronomy modifies the provisions of the

Covenant Code; as noted above, for example, Deuteronomy allows for only one legitimate sanctuary, whereas the Covenant Code allows more than one. Various scholars have, therefore, argued that the Deuteronomic code was intended to replace the older Covenant Code (Eissfeldt). Others point out that Deuteronomy does not modify or replace all of the laws of the Covenant Code; rather, it must be read together with the Covenant Code in that it represents a revision of the older code that allows the unmodified laws in Exodus 20-23 to stand as written. This conclusion may be confirmed by the observation that Deuteronomy frequently specifies the procedures or rationales for law that appear in the Covenant Code, but the Covenant Code does not specify the procedures for laws found in Deuteronomy.

The Deuteronomic modifications of the Covenant Code clearly have an impact upon the means and authority for making legal decisions, but they have an economic impact as well. In assigning to itself greater legal authority in each of the aforementioned cases, the state also reserves for itself the right to assign the economic resources of the parties involved. In each case, economic resources are taken from the hands of people in positions of power, and placed in the hands of those who lack power. But in each case, it is the state that decides.

According to Sweeney (1994:19) one may ask about the identity of the authority that stands behind the Deuteronomic code, and again, the question of who benefits and who does not, is relevant. Obviously, disadvantaged people benefit from these laws, while advantaged people do not. The situation is analogous to that observed above in relation to cultic centralization. The disadvantaged classes, i.e. the poor and women, benefited from the loss of economic resources by the Levites as a result of cultic centralization. Likewise, the disadvantaged, i.e. the poor and women, benefit from the loss suffered by the wealthier or more powerful parties among the people, as a result of state authority.

The monarchy appears to be the party responsible for such change. As noted above, it is the monarch who is ultimately held responsible for the care of the disadvantaged in Ancient Near Eastern societies, and the Deuteronomic law code addresses precisely their situation. But the monarch is also responsible for the promulgation of law, including the regulation of criminal and civil affairs in Ancient Near Eastern societies. The monarchy generally ascribes the authority to promulgate such law to the deities of the state, but the monarch nevertheless serves as the mouthpiece for the deity, and by necessity must be the final authority for interpreting what the deity intends. In this regard, it is noteworthy that the Deuteronomic law code places both the Levites and the upper or advantaged classes of Israelite society at an economic disadvantage. This would suggest that it is indeed the monarch who stands behind the promulgation of this law code in that he would be the only authority capable of such action.

Sweeney (1994:22) notes that the Davidic monarchy in particular would benefit from greater cultic centralization, since it authorized only one royal sanctuary, in Jerusalem, that served as the basis for defining the Davidic monarchy's concept of divine election. The Northern monarchies maintained two such royal sanctuaries in Dan and Beth-el.

These factors have some important implications for understanding the so-called 'Torah of the King' in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. The 'Torah of the King' plays an important role in this issue in that scholars normally point to its provisions and portrayal of the king as a basis for arguing that Deuteronomy stems originally from Northern Israelite circles. It appears to restrict the power of the king in that it defines a number of stipulations by which the king must abide. He must not be a foreigner; he may not amass horses to himself nor lead the people back to Egypt for such a purpose; he may not amass wives to himself nor silver and gold; and he must write a "copy of this Torah" for himself in the presence of the Levitical priests and read all the days of his life.

No Northern monarch ever meets the standards for righteous kingship that are defined in the "Torah of the King". Instead, every Northern monarch is condemned for acting contrary to the will of YHWH. Worship of YHWH was never centralised at one location in the Northern kingdom and pagan cults were allowed to exist; these appear to be the primary bases for condemning the Northern monarchs throughout the Deuteronomistic history. The only monarch who meets the requirements for a righteous monarch as defined in Deuteronomy 17:14-20, is King Josiah of Judah. Although several other monarchs are praised, Josiah is the only king described in the Deuteronomistic History who *"walked in all the paths of David his father, and who did not turn to the right or to the left"* (2 Kgs. 22:2). The formulation that requires one not to turn to the right or to the left (*sur yamin usemo'el*) is used throughout Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomistic History to describe righteous conduct and obedience to YHWH's commands; it is the formulation used to describe the righteous monarch in Deuteronomy 17:20, *"so as not to turn from the command to the right or to the left in order that he may lengthen his days upon his throne"*. One can only conjecture whether Deuteronomy 17:14-20 refers to Josiah only, or whether it was written specially to promote his image. The premise of this thesis is that it was not written specially to promote Josiah's image. Whereas we can ascribe court scribal editing for the aggrandizement of a Solomon, it is not the belief of this thesis that the Deuteronomist, with his emphasis on righteous conduct would have so far strayed from his own precepts to give unwarranted praise to someone non-deserving.

As previously stated, Oestreicher was the first to ask and answer the question about the political dimension of Josiah's cult reform. Taking the Chronicler's version to be more accurate (2 Chron. 34:3 and 8) Oestreicher argued that Josiah's deuteronomic reform took place in two stages, firstly in 627 BCE when Josiah purged Assyrian cults from Jerusalem, and then extended in Judah in 621 BCE after the finding of the lawbook. He believed the lawbook gave incentive to continue the reform, and was not the reason to start the reform in the first instant.

There are good reasons to question the chronologies of Kings and Chronicles. In the final analysis, however, it is not of critical importance to settle which account is more reliable. To Lowery (1991:202) the close correlation of Josiah's reform with Assyria's declining power in the West is the chief reason to prefer the Chronicler's chronology. Cogan (1974 and 1993) however, is thoroughly convincing that Assyrian power was virtually non-existent in Judah throughout Josiah's reign.

Without the necessity of paralleling Assyrian chronology, very little is at stake in favouring Chronicles over Kings. Recent questions about Josiah's designs on the North, and his alleged intention to recreate a Davidic-Solomonic empire cast further doubt on any precise correlation of Josiah's reform measures with events limiting Assyria's power in the West. But, asserts Lowery, it is unnecessary to accept a two- or three-stage reform in order to explain Josiah's political motive. On the other hand, neither is it critical to assert a one-shot, all-encompassing reform, as portrayed in Kings. "Presumably, Josiah's deuteronomic reform took time. Or it may have been carried out rather quickly. Without the need to fit Josiah's reform in with some external chronology, its social-historical impact can be seen to be essentially the same, whether it happened in phases or all at once".

Lowery (1991:207) points out that with 2 Kings 23:9, Josiah's high place reform reached the outer boundaries of Hezekiah's centralization programme. In v.13 Josiah turned on the foreign embassies, the 'high places' just east of Jerusalem, along the south side of the Mount of Olives. To Lowery, these cult places had sealed the marriage alliances of Judaeon kings from Solomon onwards (cf. 1 Kgs. 11:5-7) and served to symbolize the ongoing international relationship. The continued existence of these particular foreign 'high places' shows that Hezekiah's centralization reform did not include an attack on embassy row. When Josiah attacked these Mount of Olives 'high places', he was not centralizing the cult. He was breaking off foreign relations. Josiah may well have defiled these embassy-sanctuaries, as 2 Kings 23:14 suggests. Whether in its own cult or in its international relations, Josiah's Judah (or Judah's YHWH followers) was fiercely nationalistic and single-mindedly committed to its national G-d, YHWH.

Lowery, (1991:208,209) summarises the events thus:

- Josiah's reformation built on Hezekiah's earlier reform but was not limited by it.
- Josiah purged indigenous cults and Assyrian cults.
- He even launched an attack on foreign embassies near Jerusalem.

Josiah's reform was the heart of a nationalistic cultural revolution which gained momentum after Assyrian rule ended in the West. Judah's new-found freedom called for a new direction. Royal policy had brought Judah to the breaking point under the strain of imperial obligations. Deuteronomic theology had grown in those conditions as a protest against the imperial *status quo*, in all its dimensions. Josiah, ruling a state free from imperial constraints for the first time in a century, found in deuteronomic theology a national identity fitting Judah's newly independent status.

Though deuteronomic theology and Josianic reform charted a new direction for Judah, it was not a creation out of whole-cloth. Communities do not simply 'invent' symbol systems. They receive them and transform them, based on their concrete experience. Lowery (1991:209) believes Deuteronomic theology reached deep into Judah's past, bringing forward traditions which pre-dated the monarchy itself. But they were ancient traditions (not necessarily steeped in YHWHism) reinterpreted by the historical experience of foreign domination.

## 6.8 CONCLUSION

Hezekiah's limited cult reform had been part of a strategy of rebellion. Josiah's deuteronomic reformation was part of a comprehensive view of the world deeply rooted in the ancient traditions of Judah, tempered by the historical experience of foreign domination, and reflecting the changed reality of national independence. Deuteronomic reform built on that, but took it much further. Deuteronomists, including their monarchical patron Josiah, sought not so much to reform the cult as to transform the culture.

Political, religious and economic theories about Josiah's cult reform fall short of explaining it, because their scope is too narrow. Deuteronomy and the Josianic reforms cover more than mere politics or economics or even religion. Deuteronomic theology is a comprehensive symbol system which incorporates all these.

From McKay's study (1973:42) it must be concluded that there is no clear evidence that Josiah carried out a purge of Assyrian gods on the hill-shrines and other local sanctuaries of Judah. On the other hand there is good reason to believe that some such purge would have been an integral part of the campaign at Beth-el and other Northern cities (2 Kgs. 23:15-20). There must have been some kind of anti-Assyrian motivation for this campaign, even if many other factors were involved, for Samaria was at this time still an Assyrian province, in fact, if not in power, so any sortie into its territory must have been regarded as an open act of military rebellion. However, the extent of Josiah's intervention in Samaria is extremely difficult to determine, and there is nothing to indicate that an anti-Assyrian iconoclasm was one of his main objectives. There is not even a hint that these were the primary objects of Josiah's purge. Whatever may have motivated the northern campaign, the account of it in 2 Kings 23:15-20 is written in stereotyped Deuteronomic language which prohibits detailed investigation and leaves no impression whatsoever of a purge of Assyrian gods. Likewise, 2 Kings 23:24, which constitutes the postscript to Josiah's reforms, makes no allusion to anything that could be regarded as particularly Assyrian. The terminology is thoroughly Israelite and the proscribed divinatory and pagan media are all known to have been found in the land at a much earlier date, well before the advent of the Assyrians. Thus it must be concluded that, if Assyrian gods were worshipped on the *bamot*, whether of Judah or of Israel, they did not impress themselves on the historiographer as being noteworthy marks of apostasy. Hence it is unlikely that their cults were officially imposed by the Assyrians as symbols of vassal status.

The very fact that the Assyrian gods were not considered worthy of special mention in the account of the reforms suggests that they neither enjoyed a privileged status in the Judaeen cult, nor formed a peculiar focus for the reformation. No clear indication was found that Ahaz or Manasseh were compelled to introduce Mesopotamian cults to Judah and, even if anti-Assyrian sentiment aided Josiah in some aspects of his purges (a fact which, considering the historical situation, can hardly be doubted), it seems that Oestreicher's thesis must now be considerably



modified. Political factors were, of course, very important, for they set the tenor of the age. Assyria was on the decline and her empire slowly crumbling. As in the days of Hezekiah, the hope for independence began to rise again, and no doubt the rebirth of nationalistic expectation did much to promote the demand for a strong, purified and united national cult. Both Zephaniah and Jeremiah (who in particular was known for his YHWHistic and nationalistic fervour) spared no words in condemning the paganism of their day and in warning of the consequences of continued apostasy. The time was ripe for both rebellion and reform. Nevertheless, the call to reform was not primarily political, but religious, for it was voiced above all by those men who stood behind the law-book which was produced in 622 BCE. The importance of the movement which these men represent for the study of the causes of Josiah's reforms is clearly signified by the fact that it produced the book used by Josiah himself, and later edited the most authoritative account of the reformation that we possess.

At the primary level the reform was quite obviously a facet of resurgent nationalism. Nevertheless, the lawbook alone cannot explain the reform. The premise in this thesis would concur with Bright's observation (1981:320) that the oscillation between syncretism and reform, coincident with shifts in the national policy, should surely have been noticed, and is certainly no accident. Josiah's annexation of parts of northern Israel, (regardless whether the writer of this thesis agrees or disagrees about its extent) which gave political expression to the ideal of a free Israel, united once more under the sceptre of David, necessarily had its religious aspects. Essentially an affirmation of Judah's official theology, it must have been accompanied by heightened stress on YHWH's choice of Zion as the seat of his rule and the one legitimate national religious centre. Political unification thus inevitably involved some degree of cultic unification and, withal, rough treatment for rival shrines, YHWHistic or pagan, that might stand in the way of it. In these respects the reform was an aspect of nationalism and, indeed, but a stronger reassertion of the policy of Hezekiah. Side by side with the excitement of newly found independence, and the optimism implicit in the official dynastic theology, Bright believes there walked what he terms "a profound unease, a prenomination of judgment, together with the feeling, doubtless for the most subconscious", that the nation's security lay in a return to ancient tradition.

Just at this time, moreover, the prophetic movement entered upon a new floruit, says Bright (1981:321). By asserting that the nation was under judgment and would know the wrath of YHWH if she did not repent, the prophets helped to prepare the ground for reform. Two prophets who exercised their ministries at this time were Zephaniah and the young Jeremiah. Zephaniah denounced the sins, both cultic and ethical. Announcing that the awful Day of YHWH was imminent, he declared that the nation had no hope save in repentance, for which YHWH had offered one last chance. Jeremiah savagely attacked the idolatry that filled the land, and declared it an inexcusable sin against the grace of YHWH who had brought Israel out of Egypt and made her his people. Whilst not agreeing with Bright's views on Assyrian cultic imposition in Judah, the writer of this thesis certainly concurs with his comment that, preaching of this sort of prophetic predictions undoubtedly aroused sympathy for

Josiah's political and religious policy. Although it is unlikely that Jeremiah took an active part in its execution, he almost certainly initially favoured its aims; he would scarcely have admired Josiah as he did (Jer. 22:15f.) had he thought that the king's major action was an error.

To Na'aman (1991:59) the grief at the king's sudden death was certainly heavy, and the feeling of immediate crisis was surely no less acute. Nevertheless, he believes it is doubtful whether this episode drastically altered the course of events; and anyone observing the event from a slightly later perspective might not even have perceived it as fateful. It appears that the impression made on contemporaries by the slaying of Josiah was less profound than assumed by modern scholars, and, for that reason, was so sparingly mentioned in works dating from after Josiah's time. The premise in this thesis, however, suggests that stunned shock might have occasioned this lack of outpourings of grief.

This thesis concurs with Bright (1981:311) that anyone who has grasped the nature of Judah's national theology as popularly understood, will see that it was totally unprepared to meet the emergency that was impending. This theology was centered in the affirmation of YHWH's choice of Zion as his seat, and his immutable promises to the Davidic dynasty of an eternal rule and victory over its foes. Though thrown into crisis by the Assyrian invasions, Isaiah had reinterpreted it and enabled it to survive. Though Josiah's reform had called the nation behind this dogma to a yet older theology, this had been unfortunately temporary, and largely cancelled by the disillusionment of Josiah's tragic death and the unfortunate events that followed.

In response to speculation as to whether it would have been possible to expect great things of Josiah, had he not been killed before his time, Na'aman (1991:58) is correct that we cannot reconstruct historical events which did not actually take place. While any discussion of what might have been is necessarily hypothetical, Na'aman points out that it can, however, be seen that the hope of restoring Judah to its former glory could not have been realized in the conditions prevailing in the late seventh century. The state of affairs under David and Solomon, when no great power was active in the area of Syria and Palestine, and the balance of forces was determined in accordance with the strength of the kingdoms then springing up in the area, differed completely from the state of affairs under Josiah and his heirs. Within a few short years of Josiah's death Babylonia was to take the place of Assyria and Egypt as the ruling power in the area. Attempts by the kings of Judah to demonstrate an independent policy led Judah directly into destruction and exile. It seems consequently that many scholars were deceived by the false similarity between Josiah's reign and the days of the United Monarchy. By placing emphasis on the hopes and longings based on the distant past, they managed to reconstruct a concrete reality in which those hopes and longings were achieved in fact. The period in which Josiah lived and acted was different in every way from that characteristic of the great kings who were his forefathers. His hands were constantly tied and thus his ability to realize his ambitions was limited. Accordingly, there is no basis to compare the achievements attained in his day with the earlier reality.

Into 'this ferment of resurgent nationalism, and yet of anxiety' (Bright 1981:321,2), the Deuteronomic law fell like the thunderclap of conscience. Though no doubt re-edited in the generation preceding the reform, this was no new law, still less the 'pious fraud' of von Rad, but rather a homiletical collection of ancient laws that derived ultimately from the legal tradition of earliest Israel. Apparently handed down in Northern Israel, it had no doubt been brought to Jerusalem after the fall of Samaria and there, at some time before Hezekiah and Josiah, reformulated and made into a programme for reform. Its laws, therefore, could not have been for the most part so very novel. But the picture of the primitive Mosaic covenant and its demands, for centuries overlaid in the popular mind by another notion of covenant, the Davidic, was novel indeed. "Deuteronomy, shot through with that nostalgia for ancient days characteristic of the times, declared with desperate urgency that the nation's very life depended upon a return to the covenant relationship in which the national existence had originally been based", says Bright.

There can be little doubt that the sudden and tragic death of Josiah was considered a calamity by his contemporaries. Later tradition recorded that "the prophet Jeremiah composed a song of lament for his funeral which remains to this day". The Deuteronomistic historian must have been hard put to account for the death of the hero of his narration, a righteous king, the greatest since David. The astonishing fact is that 2 Kings 23 offers no explanation for the events at Megiddo. The historian could not reconcile Josiah's death with his world view of just retribution; nor could his death be accommodated to Huldah's promise that "*you will be gathered to your grave in peace*" (2 Kgs. 22:15-20). Two centuries later Josiah's death is attributed to his refusal "*to listen to Necho's words according to G-d's order*" (2 Chron. 35:22). In a subsequent rationalization, it was inattention to the warning of Jeremiah the prophet which led Josiah to his end (1 Esd. 1:28-29).

In a footnote Cogan & Tadmor (1988:302) mention that Josephus seems to have altered his *Vorlage*, the text of Chronicles, to suit his Greek-speaking audience. He interprets Josiah's action thus: "*It was Destiny (variant: fated boastfulness), I believe, that urged him on to this course, in order to have a pretext for destroying him*". And then Josephus adds other details: "*As he was marshalling his force and riding in his chariot from one wing to another, an Egyptian archer shot him...*" This heroic description has at its base 2 Chronicles 35:23-24, which in turn is strikingly similar to the one in 1 Kings 22, of Ahab, at the battle of Ramoth Gilead. Both accounts speak of "dressing up of war", and the wounding of a king by a bowman.

Frost (1968:377) states something which this thesis feels is of importance, viz.:

"It was not only the nationalistic 'the Lord of Hosts is with us, the G-d of Jacob is our refuge' type of theology which was challenged by Josiah's death, but also that 'yet older theology' to which Bright refers, the faith of the prophets, the faith of Deuteronomy, the faith of the Psalter, the faith of the Old Testament as a whole. That 'older theology' - and in using Bright's phrase, I am not underwriting the view that this theology was in fact any older or more venerable than the nationalistic type of thought from which he

seeks to differentiate it. It was in fact the central conviction of the Hebrew faith. It was, in brief, the belief that if a man did what was right he would be materially blessed and temporally prospered. This conviction - 'faith' would be a more appropriate word, since it was an unproven hypothesis very strongly adhered to - is to be found in all types of literature in all periods from at least the eighth century forward".

Accordingly, Frost (1968:382) comments that thereafter, in his view, no one wrote history in Israel for centuries, not until "the Chronicler gave an ecclesiastically embroidered version of events now safely sacralized in a far distant past". When the Jewish people did resume contemporary historiography in the same time of the Maccabees, it was written not on the Hebrew pattern but on the Greek. It is still moralistic history, it is still in that sense providential history; but the story now told concerns events *in* history, rather than the events *of* history.

"No longer is the writer of history a son of prophets. He makes no implicit claim that YHWH does nothing without revealing his secret to his servants the historiographers of the *Heilsgeschichte*. Rather, he tells his story as a small part of a larger sweep of history, the interpretation of which he leaves to the apocalyptists".

Frost believes it is true to say that Jewry has never resumed the Hebrew style of historiography.

## CHAPTER 7

### JUDAEAN FOREIGN POLICY IN ITS FINAL TWO DECADES

#### 7.1 INTRODUCTION

*"... the case study of Judah in its final years may serve as a universally valid paradigm for the conduct and function of a small or secondary state in a bipolar system. Unable to remain detached in a major confrontation between the great powers, the small or weak state must side with either of the big actors. In time of conflict, the precarious status of neutrality for a small state, particularly when it is located in the centre of the system, is practically impossible or at least not advantageous, a fact already stressed by Machiavelli. By remaining neutral, it would invariably and eventually arouse the enmity of each of the big competitors. Genuine neutrality, resting on independent strength, contains a prerequisite: the peaceful co-existence of the two big powers or the existence of a multiplicity of political entities of roughly equal power, namely a multi-power system.*

*"The decision with which antagonist to side, is a crucial factor for the small state and poses a serious dilemma. In order to survive, this choice must be based on sober calculations and long range interests" (Malamat 1990:75).*

This chapter will discuss the specific geopolitical or geostrategic viewpoint pertaining to the last decades of Judah. To evaluate the historical factors underlying the final fate of Judah, (factors which determined the policies of its rulers) the sole sources available are from beyond Palestine, primarily the Neo-Babylonian Chronicles and, to a lesser degree, Egyptian documentation.

#### 7.2 THE EGYPTIAN AND ASSYRIAN ALLIANCE

With the weakening of the Assyrian empire, and as a result of the rise of Babylonia and Media, which had captured one Assyrian centre after another (Ashur in 614, BCE, Nineveh in 612 BCE and Harran in 610 BCE) Egypt, traditional enemy of Assyria, now became its ally (probably between 622 and 617 BCE). The Babylonian Chronicle of Nabopolassar, founder of the neo-Babylonian kingdom, shows that the Egyptians rushed military assistance to the Euphrates region in order to support the Assyrians in their struggle against the Babylonians in 616, 610 and 609 BCE.

Josiah's attempt to stem the Egyptian thrust northward in 609 BCE placed Judah in a common front with Babylonia, although it is uncertain whether this resulted from overall strategy preplanned by the two countries. Any disastrous event is a time for re-evaluation. The outcome of such a re-evaluation is always affected by the expectations of the dominant group. Despite inadequate details of the encounter between Necho and Josiah in either 2 Kings or 2 Chronicles, in concurrence with Malamat (1979:206), this thesis believes Josiah's move was based on carefully calculated political and strategic considerations:

- 1) The Egyptian king, less than a year on the throne, lacked military experience.
- 2) At the time of the sudden attack in the Megiddo Plain, the Egyptian army was not only far from home but still beyond reach of its stronghold at Megiddo.
- 3) It is also possible that Egypt had somewhat earlier been humiliated by the Scythians who, according to Herodotus (I,105), burst out of the north to Philistia and whose threat to Egypt proper was removed only through payment of a bribe by Psammetichus (see: Rowley 1962:206ff. and Cazelles 1967:24-44). Malamat states that his previous suggestion in 1950-51:154-159 is no longer tenable, since it has been established that Psammetichus I died between the end of July and the end of September, 610 BCE.
- 4) Josiah's daring move might have been occasioned by the Egyptian blunder in the Euphrates region in 610 BCE, six months or so before the battle of Megiddo, when the army had to abandon Harran and retreat to the west bank of the Euphrates.

Psammetichus I (664-610 BCE), Necho's father, apparently imposed his suzerainty on the Philistine cities and the Assyrian province of Magiddu, (covering the Jezreel Plain and Galilee), including the city of Megiddo itself, which by then must have become an Egyptian base. Josiah, on the other hand, managed to extend his rule only over the province of Samaria and to establish a corridor to the coast in the northern Shephelah. The background of the Judaeo-Egyptian clash in 609 BCE lay in the geopolitical changes resulting from the disintegration of the Assyrian empire, which provoked rivalry between Judah and Egypt over the inheritance of the Assyrian provinces in Palestine. King Josiah's defeat by Necho II (610-595 BCE) at Megiddo in 609 BCE was a pivotal moment in the latter years of the kingdom of Judah: national prosperity and high hopes for a renewed Judaeo empire dissolved into incessant turmoil, with Judah caught in a political bi-polar system between Egypt and Babylonia, until it finally fell in 586 BCE. The disastrous outcome of the battle of Megiddo led to radical political fluctuations in Judah, causing alternate subjugation by, and rebellion against, each of the major powers, Egypt and Babylonia. The rapidly changing international scene demanded of the rulers of Judah skillful manoeuvring and exceptional adaptability, and frequently confronted them with ominous political situations. (See especially Jeremiah).

### **7.3 JUDAEAN FOREIGN POLICY IN THE LAST TWO DECADES**

**7.3.1** Six crucial stages which constitute turning points in Judah's foreign policy in the last two decades, can be seen. Malamat (1990:75) depicts an alternation between loyalty and rebellion. These were:

**7.3.1.1 609 BC - Battle of Megiddo** - prior to Judah's direct involvement in the Egyptian-Babylonian conflict.

**7.3.1.2 605 BCE** - Four years later Egypt was defeated by Nebuchadnezzar at the Battle of Carchemish. Babylonian military superiority determined the power setup in the Near East and sealed the fate of Syria and Palestine. Judaeen leadership failed to grasp the shift in the balance of power, and clung to questionable Egyptian aid. Babylonian subjugation of Judah (ca. 603 BCE) induced Egypt to try and bring Judah back into the fold, again entailing direct military confrontation between Egypt and Babylonia.

**7.3.1.3 Winter 601/600 BCE** - Babylon attacked Egypt proper. Babylonian failure, assumably exploited by Egyptian propaganda, encouraged Judah to rebel, and defect to the Egyptian camp.

**7.3.1.4 Winter 598/7 BCE** - Nebuchadnezzar struck at Judah. This constituted the first Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. The Judaeen king surrendered to save Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar demanded heavy tribute and deportation (which proved ultimately short-sighted).

**7.3.1.5 Inexperienced leadership and a puppet king (Zedekiah)** led to international intrigue, resulting in the anti-Babylonian mini-summit 594/3 BCE in Jerusalem, thus rebelling against the power which had enthroned Zedekiah. Conceivably intrigue by "false prophets" inspired the revolt, after predicting the previous winter of the imminent return of the Babylonian exiles. The coalition of Edom, Moab, Ammon, and Phoenician city states, together with Judah attempted a league against Babylonia. They lacked political and military cohesion, and each promoted its own narrow interests and priorities. They thus comprised no real threat to Nebuchadnezzar. There is no clear evidence, but conceivably Egypt subverted Judah against Babylonia. Psammetichus II staged an expedition to Palestine and Phoenicia in 592 BCE, undoubtedly conceiving anti-Babylonian sentiments within Judaeen leadership.

**7.3.1.6 589/88 BCE - Siege of Jerusalem** - Judah was highly vulnerable. Diplomatically and militarily she was left in the lurch, and had to face Babylonia alone. A temporary lifting of the siege of Jerusalem ensued when the Babylonians moved to counter a rumoured Egyptian relief force. But in the end it proved abortive (as correctly foreseen by Jeremiah and Ezekiel). The walls were breached on 9 Tammuz (July 18) 586 BCE, and the Destruction on 7-10 Ab (Aug.14-17). The fall of Jerusalem, its total destruction of palace and Temple, brought the Davidic dynasty to an end. Judah was divested of its polity for generations to come.

#### 7.4. A SMALL STATE WITHIN A GREAT POWER'S ORBIT

This chapter will be discussed in terms of a small state within a great power confrontation. Instead of turning to powerful Babylonia, the Judaeans toyed with false hopes created by the misleading image of Egypt, and hazardously gambled on her protection. Egypt was able at best to offer her camp-followers only short-range advantages, and proved powerless in the hour of peril.

Within the theoretical framework of Rothstein (1968), Handel (1981), Roseneau (ed. 1969), and Malamat (1990:67) the concept of multi-polar and bi-polar systems basically encompasses a multi-polar system which accommodates small or secondary states, insofar as it is more capable of maintaining the fragile balance of power, thus deterring violation of the states within the region. However, the bi-polar system, (whose stability as such is still debated by political scientists) also entails tranquility for secondary states, granting that the big states adopt policies of peaceful coexistence. Once the equilibrium is disturbed or upset by one of the partners seeking hegemony, the secondary power, lacking sufficient economic and military potential, turns to inexpensive diplomatic means to alleviate its plight.

In essence the above was the fate of Judah. This thesis will endeavour to analyse the above concepts and reach certain conclusions concerning Judah. Judaeon leadership failed to grasp the shift in balance of power, and clung to the dubious image of a strong Egypt which would rush to aid its allies in time of need (Malamat 1990:70). There are further incidents of other states in Palestine seeking Egyptian aid against Babylon (e.g. the letter to the Pharaoh from Saqqara, likely from Ekron in Philistia, requesting urgent military assistance against the impending Babylonian onslaught) proving the incorrect assessment by a small state of the early warning signals of a shift in the 'global' power structure.

There is a common assumption in International Relations that small states conduct prudent relations in foreign affairs. But this thesis concurs with Malamat (1990:70) who points out that Judah's behaviour during this period contradicts this model. Judah's actions demonstrate that small states may in their ineptness, coupled with the inherent lack of a developed intelligence system, adopt high-risk policies, often with fatal consequences. (For a contrasting model of the current opinion concerning the phenomenon in modern times, see: East 1972/3:556-76.)

Although Rothstein, Rosenau and Handel, previously cited, deal with states in modern history, the point of departure of this thesis is that certain similarities which apply equally to ancient wars can be detected. Small Powers must, therefore, rely on essentially ambiguous external aid for the accomplishment of the basic goal of all states: survival. If they have learned anything from history, it is that external support usually arrives late, and that it is given only in expectation of future benefits. Moreover, a Small Power is rarely in a situation where it can increase its *own* power sufficiently to affect the outcome. That rare instance usually occurs when its existence is of minor significance in the dominant Great Power struggle (and thus the increase in its own power has only transitory effectiveness, until the larger conflict is decided). The result, in any case, is that the Small Power has only peripheral control over its



own fate. It has fewer realistic policy options than a Great Power and its spectrum of choice is more limited. It can do less, by itself, to counter a threat which may be more extensive than a similar threat to the Great Power. If a Small Power is threatened by a Great Power, that threat is a total threat to its independent existence (whereas a Great Power's threat to another Great Power *may* concern only marginal values).

This combination of factors must be joined to another: the narrow margin of safety which a Small Power possesses. With a small territory (normally), with few resources, and with uncertain friends, it has very little time in which to correct mistakes. Fearing to take risks, caution is enjoined. Yet the small margin of error available means that decisions cannot be safely delayed. Consequently, the Small Power is forced into an intense concentration on short-run and local matters to the exclusion of, or at least to the detriment of, any concern for long-run stability. The present is simply too dangerous to justify excessive concern for hypothetical future effects. In addition, few Small Powers enjoy the luxury of possessing enough strength to handle all the problems on their political horizons. Rothstein (1968:28f.) suggests that at best, they may be able to confront and survive the most serious problems, provided that they perceive them accurately.

Thus, a Small Power is a state which recognises that it can not obtain security primarily by use of its own capabilities, and that it must rely fundamentally on the aid of other states, institutions, processes or developments to do so. The Small Power's belief in its inability to rely on its own means must also be recognised by the other states involved in international politics.

Small Powers can have a significant effect on ensuring the success of external actions like collective security (for example Egypt and Judah against Assyria). But an individual Small Power is not likely to be critical. Conversely, it is clear that the policies of the Great Powers are vital determinants or limiting factors in the actions that Small Powers undertake. Here again we can cite Judah's actions *vis-a-vis* Egypt and Babylonia.

The precept that the balance of power protects the independence of all states has been absolute only for the Great Powers. The survival of Small Powers in any system which claims allegiance to the rules of the balance of power is inherently uncertain, since they may find themselves sacrificed in order to allow the weaker Great Powers to recoup their fortunes. Nevertheless, the idea of the balance of power appears to be intrinsically appealing to Small Powers, despite its dangers. As Rothstein (1968:34-38) observes, traditionally, Small Powers - at least those which are not bent on altering the *status quo* - have sought a particular kind of configuration, one which seemed both practically and aesthetically, to offer them the greatest chance for security. The most elemental means open to them to achieve or maintain that condition has been the alliance. Although alliances may be used for other purposes beyond achieving equilibrium, they have always been used for that purpose.

Small Powers may also attempt to compensate for their weakness by emphasising their qualitative virtues. They may, for example, rely on the superiority of their statesmen

or soldiers to carry them through a crisis. (One needs to think only of modern Israel as an example). Or they may emphasise the modernity of their defenses or their equipment. In addition, they might provide proof of their determination to fight by supporting a heavy military budget. These kinds of actions do not constitute a policy: they are, rather, a preface to policy. They can influence, though they cannot determine, the fate of any particular policy choice. If concentration on improving internal strength and external reputation were enough by themselves to insure the security of a Small Power, a contradiction in terms would exist. The Small Power cannot determine its own fate by its own actions: it must seek external support. We need only to think of the mini-summit of 594/3 BCE, when ambassadors of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon met in Jerusalem to discuss plans for revolt. If aid is not necessary, a different political world would exist, composed entirely of equally powerful states. The assumption here is that a determination to build its own strength to a maximum level, while it may make the Small Power a less attractive target, is not enough by itself. Therefore, in speaking of policies available to compensate for weakness, policies referred to are primarily those by which the Small Power attempts to remove or isolate itself from power conflicts, or policies, in which it chooses to draw on the strength of others to ensure its own security.

#### **7.5. THE REPERCUSSIONS OF THE DISINTEGRATION OF THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE**

The late seventh century BCE is noted for its reshufflings in the international political sphere, and saw the collapse of the Assyrian empire after a hegemony of over 500 years. The subsequent power-struggle between the up-and-coming Babylonia and Egypt over inheritance of the now orphaned territories spreading from the Euphrates to Sinai, had serious repercussions on the network of international relations in the Ancient Orient. These repercussions are especially apparent in Eber-Nahar, the region between the Euphrates and the Sinai Peninsula, which was always sensitive to political changes in the east, because of her geopolitical position. Judah and her neighbours had enjoyed a temporary respite during Assyria's decline, but now again they became a bone of contention, this time between Egypt and Babylonia. Each of these countries considered herself Assyria's heir, and each wished to set up a sphere of influence in this buffer-state region.

The geopolitical plight of this buffer region swept what Malamat (1975:123) has termed "a most reluctant Kingdom of Judah", (like many of her neighbours) into the alternating open conflict and 'cold war' which ensued. The premise of this thesis agrees that Josiah did not necessarily believe the time was ripe for belligerence. Indeed, if outside factors were most influential throughout Judah's history, they became overwhelming in the two decades following the Battle of Megiddo, in 609 BCE, until, in 586 BCE the little kingdom finally succumbed to international machinations.

A wide range of sources for this tense period provides a particularly detailed insight into much of the political development and internal activities in Judah: besides the Books of Kings and Chronicles, these decades are illuminated by the Books of Jeremiah, Lamentations, Zephaniah, Habakkuk and their final years by the Book of Ezekiel. The contemporaneous epigraphical material in Hebrew is plentiful and varied, more so than in earlier periods, and the effects of the political-military events have been revealed in the archaeological excavations on numerous Judaeen sites (e.g. Megiddo, Lachish, Arad, Tel Miqneh, to mention but a few). As previously suggested, a proper perspective for evaluating the historical factors underlying the final fate of Judah, factors which determined the policies of its rulers, is to be obtained only from sources beyond Palestine, primarily the Neo-Babylonian Chronicles and, to a lesser degree, Egyptian documentation. The twining of biblical data with external sources, especially the detailed framework of dates they contain, enables a sort of micro-analytic study of this period.

### **7.5.1 Judah's Liberation from the Assyrian Yoke**

The beginning of Judah's liberation from the Assyrian yoke can be traced to the murder of King Amon (2 Kgs. 21:23), who had been loyal to his Assyrian overlords (2 Chron. 33:22-23). The *coup d'etat* of the court, the object of which was obviously political and anti-Assyrian, took place in the year 640-39 BCE. Perhaps the *coup d'etat* of the 'am ha-aretz' of Judah, in which all the conspirators against Amon (2 Kgs. 21:24) were put to death, came to forestall a retribution against Judah by the Assyrian king.

Samaria, an Assyrian province, may have joined this revolt, if the exile of foreign residents to Samaria by Ashurbanipal referred to in Ezra 4:9-10, came as a reaction to an uprising in that country, and if this incident can be relegated to the period under discussion.

It is not unlikely that the beginning of the Egyptian siege on Ashdod, the heart of an Assyrian province, belongs to this period. If the arguments can be proved, they confront us with a new Assyrian-Egyptian-Judaeen synchronisation and attest to increased military activity in Palestine in 640/39 BCE.

The first public appearance of the Kingdom of Judah on the stage of the new international struggle was at the Battle of Megiddo in 609 BCE. The stormy period in Judah between this year and the destruction of the Temple is mirrored in the Bible in 2 Kings and 2 Chronicles. However, new archaeological research in Palestine and surprising epigraphical discoveries clarify and illustrate even more the plot that unfolded on the eve of the fall of Judah.

The first discovery was the Babylonian Chronicle published by Gadd (1923), describing the years 616-609 BCE, which explains why Josiah attempted a stand at Megiddo against the powerful Egyptian army. The Battle is no longer a reckless adventurous step taken by Josiah, as was usually described by historians, but rather a bold decision based on far-reaching political and military considerations. The

Babylonian Chronicle proves that Assyria and Egypt, which until now had been arch-enemies, concluded a military mutual aid pact against Babylon and Media, which were overrunning Assyrian cities. In 610 BCE, a year before the Battle of Megiddo, the Babylonian army, with the help of the Umman-Manda, conquered a city of Haran and established control of the whole region as far west as the Euphrates. This constituted a threat to Syria. Egypt therefore sent aid to her Assyrian ally, the remnants of whose army was quartered in Syria. To Malamat (1950:219) it is clear that Josiah's attempt to detain the Egyptian army at Megiddo came to prevent that Egyptian military assistance. Josiah's action allies Judah with Babylon; perhaps it even signifies a phase of a broad strategic plan, a military alliance between Babylon and Judah.<sup>1</sup> In other words, the ascent of a 'Great Power' caused the small powers to become ambitious - or possibly, cautious. We have no specific information concerning such an alliance but additional support that it existed comes from the fact that when the Egyptian army under Pharaoh Psammetichus first rushed to the aid of the Assyrians, in 616 BCE, according to Gadd's Chronicle, that campaign was not actively opposed by Josiah throughout. The Egyptians surely must have passed through Palestine. The premise of this thesis concurs with Malamat (1950:219) that in 616 BCE Babylon was still beyond the political horizon of the Kingdom of Judah; her status changed completely when the Babylonian army neared the Euphrates.

Another factor which undoubtedly affected Josiah's decision in 609 BCE was Egypt's military weakness, so conspicuously demonstrated a short time previous to the Battle of Megiddo by the invasion of the Scythian tribes, which attacked the Egyptian border. These tribes together with the Babylonians conquered Haran in 610 BCE, and approached the Euphrates. While there is a lacuna in the Babylonian Chronicle (1.65), Malamat (1950:220) is certain we may assume that the Scythians continued their march west to Syria and Palestine, arriving in Philistia still during the reign of Psammetichus I as reported by Herodotus in Lewy (1924:23, cited by Malamat). It is conceivable that the success of the Scythians was due to the very unexpectedness of their attack. In the opinion of this thesis Josiah possibly incorrectly estimated Egypt's weakness, or strength. It appears that at that time the Scythians did not invade Judah. The threat of such an invasion is only implied in some prophecies. It has also been conjectured that a Scythian attack on Ashkelon preceded the Megiddo affair (cf. Spalinger, 1978c:49ff.). But the whole notion of a Scythian invasion of ancient Palestine at the time is problematic, as it is based solely on a late tradition found in Herodotus (Cogan & Tadmor 1988:301).

## **7.6. THE CHAIN OF EVENTS IN JUDAH'S FATE**

**7.6.1** The Battle of Megiddo, in 609 BCE, constituted the first chain of events in Judah's fate. Although technically this event occurred several years prior to Judah's

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<sup>1</sup> The Biblical story 2 Kgs. 20:12ff. pertaining to Hezekiah's reign, about Merodach Baladan testifies to a much earlier contact between representatives of Judah and Babylon (Malamat 1950:219).

direct involvement in the Egyptian-Babylonian conflict, Malamat (1990:68) suggests that Josiah's decision to halt Pharaoh Necho II, might possibly have been the budding bi-polar system which affected him. Malamat concedes, however, that although it is difficult to ascertain, (and at this point in time even more difficult to prove) it is nonetheless possible that Judah was somehow acting in concert with Babylonia to hinder this Egyptian aid.

Some important military advantages at Megiddo were on the side of Josiah:

- a) the initiative in offensive;
- b) opportunity for a swift surprise attack on an enemy far from his military bases of operation, and faced with the danger of being cut off from them.

Yet Josiah never could have taken this step had he not had a strong, trained army on which to depend. Unfortunately, we have no exact Biblical information on the Judaeen army under Josiah. We may assume, on the basis of his great political ability, and the organization of his kingdom in other categories, that Josiah fostered the development of the Judaeen army and raised it to a high level for military capacity. One should, however, be cautious in straying too far ahead in conjecturing that Josiah might have regarded himself as a second King David.

Malamat (1990:69) believes this daring military initiative at Megiddo was rooted in ideology, as it finds expression in the Book of Deuteronomy, Josiah's guiding light, and "confidently conjectures" that the initiative received the support and encouragement of the prophetic circles.<sup>2</sup>

#### 7.6.1.1 The Role of the Prophets

From the above statement we can appreciate, all the more, the deep foresight and realistic historical perspective of the prophetic circles in Judah, who had a genuine understanding of the international scene at the time. The great prophets of the day, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, (or Uriah, son of Shamaiah from Kiriath Yearim, who prophesied *'in words like those of Jeremiah'*, Jer. 26:20), unlike the false prophets, were entirely free of the 'establishment' line of thought, and were thus able to grasp the situation in more realistic terms. Their's was a sober and unbiased appreciation of the long-range welfare of the nation as opposed to the concerns of the establishment and its supporters, the false prophets, e.g. Hananiah, so focused on

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<sup>2</sup> Judging primarily by the style of inscription, Malamat believes we seem to have a prophetic-political text, where G-d speaks through his prophets, apparently encouraging Josiah to go to war against Egypt. To Malamat (1990:69) this is no king of flesh and blood, as both Aharoni and Yadin had assumed, but G-d speaking. This type of exhortation is repeated time and again, especially in the political prophecy of Ezek.30:22-26: *Therefore thus says the Lord God: Behold I am against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and will break his arms...I will scatter the Egyptians among the nations, and disperse them throughout the lands. And I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, and put my sword in his hand; but I will break the arms of Pharaoh... I will strengthen the arms of the king of Babylon, but the arms of Pharaoh shall fall; and they shall know that I am the Lord....'* The completions in lines 2 and 3 are based on what we know of the Battle of Megiddo in 2 Chron.36.

immediate and feasible interests. In Ezekiel's words, Egypt resembled 'a staff of reed to the house of Israel... when they leaned upon you, you broke' (Ezek. 29:6-7), and in her threats against Babylonia, but a 'paper tiger'; 'Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company' will be of no avail in battle (Ezek. 17:17). Ezekiel, distressed by Egypt's enticement of Judah, likened Judah to a harlot, whereas its lover, Egypt, could only tempt but could not sustain (Ezek. 16:26; 23:8; 21; 27). Foreign policy, indeed International Relations as such, were likened in prophetic imagery, especially that of Ezekiel, to prostitution. On the other hand, Jeremiah, who regarded Nebuchadnezzar as 'G-d's chosen rod' (of chastisement) realised that the opportune moment had passed: now only voluntary submission to the Babylonian could save Judah. The choice was 'the way of life and the way of death' (Jer. 21:8-9).

The premise of this thesis concurs with Malamat (1990:71) who rejects the widely accepted assumption that the prophets' outspoken stands were merely the machinations of later redactors, to make them conform with the outcome of events. On the contrary, he believes their orientation as expressed in the Biblical sources, reflects the reality of their views.

In the view of this thesis Ezekiel would have lived in Babylon and thus his words were written looking back, whereas Jeremiah was alive at the time Josiah lived.

In modern times, these prophets served, *with due recognition of far more profound motives*, as analysts and commentators, quite independent of official policy and general consensus. Malamat (1990:71) avers that in doing so they played an active role in the acute issue of foreign political orientation, which had gradually intensified the polarity between the pro-Egyptian and pro-Babylonian factions. Thus polarity crossed lines, from the royal court, onward through state officials and priestly circles, and finally down to the masses. Likewise, political orientation and ideology proved the main bone of contention between the true and false prophets. Indeed small states in general are more preoccupied with external than domestic affairs, a phenomenon known as '*Das Primat der Aussenpolitik*'.

#### **7.6.1.2 Death of Josiah**

The death of Josiah at Megiddo in 609 BCE put an effective end to the Judaeen prosperity of the Judaeen kingdom and dispelled all hopes for restored grandeur. The background of Josiah's clash with Necho II lies in the geopolitical developments previously noted. In the rivalry between Judah and Egypt over the formerly Assyrian territories in Palestine, Psammetichus I (664-610 BCE), Necho's father, had held a clear advantage in time. At least as early as 616 BCE Megiddo must have become a logistics base for the Egyptian forces on the march to the Euphrates, in support of their newly-made allies, the Assyrians; it was undoubtedly such a base in 610 BCE and, again, in 609 BCE. Josiah was able to launch his annexation policy only after initiating his reform (around 628 BCE; cf. 2 Chron. 34-6) and when the Assyrian supremacy had collapsed. It is quite plausible to assume that Josiah seems to have gained control solely over the former Assyrian province of Samaria and to have established a corridor reaching the coast in the northern Shephela, as possibly witnessed by the Hebrew epigraphic finds at Mesad Hashavyahu.

The woeful results of the battle of Megiddo led to rapid political fluctuations in Judah; and from then till the Destruction of the First Temple in 586 BCE (a mere score years) the rulers of Judah changed loyalties, to either Egypt or Babylonia, no less than six times! The international scene at this time demanded extreme skill in manoeuvring, and the kings of Judah were repeatedly forced to come to terms with kaleidoscopic situations and astonishingly frequent political dilemmas of a most fateful order. The first exigency was the selection of a successor to Josiah, who apparently had not seen a need to designate his heir.

Even though Josiah's attempt failed, and a full-scale battle was precluded by the king's fatal wound at the beginning of the fighting, this event at Megiddo in 609 BCE may be regarded as the only example in Israel's history of aggressively attacking the army of a major world power (2 Kgs. 23:29-30 and, with some changes, 2 Chron. 35:2-24). Necho removed Josiah's successor, Jehoahaz (who, it seems, was anti-Egyptian), from the throne of Judah, which he had occupied for only three months, and set up in his place the pro-Egyptian Jehoiakim, who remained loyal to Egypt until his death (2 Kgs. 23:33-35). Installing Jehoiakim on the throne, a loyal scion of the pro-Egyptian faction of the Davidic dynasty, as an Egyptian vassal, served their mutual interest: Jehoiakim's claims as legitimate heir to the throne were realised at the same time that he became Necho's vassal and loyal ally. Perhaps a similar miscalculation was made by their western neighbours. Herodotus (ii. 159) relates that after the Battle of Megiddo (erroneously he calls it Migdol) Necho conquered Gaza. This conquest is affirmed in the Bible (Jer. 47:1). It apparently was accomplished by the Egyptian army returning from Mesopotamia. The other Philistine cities, such as Ashdod and Ashkelon, certainly surrendered, as proved by an Aramaic papyrus. The sequence of events therefore show that the Judaeans miscalculated the actual Egyptian strength, and paid a dear price for their premature anti-Egyptian policy.

In concurrence with Malamat (1990:69,70) the failure at Megiddo should not, a priori, be considered a suicidal undertaking, as is so often done, but rather a carefully calculated political move within the international power game. Whilst the death of Josiah effectively ended the renewed prosperity of the Judaeian kingdom, Judah persisted in an anti-Egyptian policy, as witnessed by the enthronement of Jehoahaz, Josiah's younger son, (contrary to the principle of primogeniture), due to the intervention of the anti-Egyptian *am ha-arets*. Judah's territory was once again 'cut down to size', reduced to its minimal dimensions. Egypt now controlled the entire region west of the Euphrates, or, in Biblical phraseology, *'from the Brook of Egypt unto the river Euphrates, all that pertained to the king of Egypt'* (II Kgs. 24:7). But its hegemony was shortlived.

### 7.6.1.3 Josiah's Successors

The first decisive step in Judaeian foreign policy, was the selection of Jehoahaz to succeed Josiah. Jehoahaz was 23 years old at his accession, his brother Jehoiakim 25. That this was an exceptional occurrence seems borne out by the specific Biblical reference to his anointment as king and perhaps by the name change from Shallum

(Jer. 22:11, cf. 1 Chron. 3:15)<sup>3</sup> to the significant throne-name Jehoahaz (i.e. "YHWH has taken hold of"), like other name changes (such as Eliakim to Jehoiakim, or Mattaniah to Zedekiah), which also were prompted by unusual circumstances of accession. The enthronement of Jehoahaz was thus a sort of minor *coup d'état*, occasioned by the intervention of the 'am ha-aretz', the people of the land (2 Kgs. 23:30; 2 Chron. 36:1) whose influence was tangible whenever the natural succession of the Davidic line was at stake. The political significance of the step is made clearer by the intense anti-Egyptian attitude of the *am ha-aretz* during this period, which undoubtedly affected Josiah's policy.

Jehoahaz was the son of Hamutal, daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. Jehoiakim's mother was Zebidah, daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah. According to the CAH (Vol. III Part 2, 1991:392) the 'people of the land' (2 Chron. 36:1) selected Jehoahaz to follow Josiah on the throne. Whether or not Jehoahaz instituted any action against the Egyptians, or whether Josiah's opposition to Necho had drawn the latter's critical attention to Judah is not clear. But it appears that Necho was not satisfied with the people's choice of king, and he is said to have deported Jehoahaz, first of all to Riblah, and then to Egypt, placing Eliakim (Jehoahaz's half-brother) on the throne, and changing his name to Jehoiakim, involving a substitution of the divine name YHWH for the more general element *el*. The change of name was probably aimed at establishing his legitimacy in the eyes of the people, in spite of his subservient position as a vassal of Necho.

It becomes apparent that Jehoahaz was chosen because his mother, Hamutal, daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah (2 Kgs. 23:31), traced her lineage to the rural nobility of Judah, and thus to the *am ha-aretz*. Similarly, eleven years later, Nebuchadnezzar enthroned Zedekiah, son of the same mother, who therefore also must have represented the anti-Egyptian faction of the Davidic house. On the other hand, the notables of Judah probably loathed the maternal lineage of Jehoiakim, since his mother, Zebudah (Zebidah), daughter of Pedaiah, originated from Rumah (2 Kgs. 23:36) in the Beth Netophah Valley in Galilee. Jehoiakim's wife (mother-to-be of his heir), Nehushta, daughter of Elnathan (2 Kgs. 24:8) was chosen from among the Jerusalem nobility, rather than from the *am ha-aretz*. Despite the defeat at Megiddo, the leadership of Judah continued its anti-Assyrian policy, adopted prematurely at the cost of independence. Three months after his accession, Jehoahaz was summoned to Necho's headquarters at Riblah, in the land of Hamath in central Syria. According to Malamat (1979:207) his destiny from the beginning seemed so uncertain that Jeremiah proclaimed: '*He shall no more see his native country*' (Jer. 22:10-12; cf. Ezek. 19:1-4). Jehoahaz was indeed deposed and exiled to Egypt, probably because of pressure from his brother Jehoiakim (also indicated in 1 Esdras 1:36), who sought recognition of his rights as firstborn. Necho punished Judah, apparently in concurrence with Jehoiakim, by imposing a levy of the anti-Egyptian *am ha-aretz* (2 Kgs. 23:35) rather

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As shown in the dirge over the king's misfortune in Jer. 22:10-12, and by the Davidide genealogy in 1 Chron. 3:15, "*The sons of Josiah: the firstborn, Johanan; the second, Jehoiakim; the third, Zedekiah; the fourth, Shallum*".



than upon the Temple or the palace treasury in Jerusalem; the latter was hardly affected and the king of Judah still had means to erect luxurious royal buildings. Jehoiakim seems to have ascended the throne in Tishri, 609 BCE, reigning for eleven years until the winter of 598 BCE, although he himself and his circle of followers may have calculated his regnal years from the death of Josiah, entirely disregarding the regency of Jehoahaz. Thus, according to Malamat (1975:128), in spite of the defeat at Megiddo, the Judaeen leadership is seen to have continued its anti-Egyptian line, a policy rather premature in the circumstances. It is clear that the summer and autumn of 609 BCE were, therefore, days of great turmoil in Judah, in view of the political vicissitudes and three kings rapidly succeeding each other under extraordinary circumstances.

The dominance of Egypt in the latter part of the 7th century BCE is illustrated by the discovery at Arad of an ostrakon inscribed in the hieratic script, and another in Hebrew script [Arad ostrakon 34]. Though there are no precise data bearing on the extent of the territory controlled by Judah at this time, the dominance of Egypt suggests that the larger area embraced by Josiah had been once more reduced to what it had been before his time.

### 7.6.2 The Battle of Carchemish

If the tragedy of Megiddo in 609 BCE was the first fateful event, the second one occurred four years later, in 605 BCE, when Egypt was resoundingly defeated by Nebuchadnezzar, in the Battle of Carchemish on the Euphrates. Babylonian military superiority determined the power set-up in the Near East for years to come, and sealed the fate of Syria and Palestine and, of course, Judah.

The period 609-605 BCE, in which the fate of the Near East was determined, is for the main part an unknown chapter. It seems that the Egyptians kept a firm hold on Eber-Nahar and the Euphrates frontier. But in 605 BCE the Egyptian army suffered a decisive defeat at Carchemish, inflicted by the Babylonians. This constituted a major change for Syria and Palestine, as foreseen by many Judaeen leaders, including Jeremiah. (Cf. Jeremiah's various prophecies. He dedicated a special prophecy to the Battle of Carchemish [ch. 46] and apparently wrote under its influence chapter 25 "*in the 4th year of Jehoiakim*", which lists many nations, especially Eber-Nahar, that accepted Babylonian sovereignty.)

Nebuchadnezzar, who led the Babylonians at Carchemish while still the crown prince, pursued the Egyptian army as far as Pelusium on the Egyptian border (cf. Josephus Ant.x.6,1), and took captives from Judah, Phoenicia, Syria and the Egyptian border region. These captives, along with the war booty, were brought to Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar's lieutenants; he himself had to hurry back because of his father's death. Information from Josephus, quoting Berosus, is reaffirmed in the Book of Daniel, which opens with a description of the siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar "*in the third year of Jehoiakim, king of Judah*", which is 605 BCE. In Daniel 1:1ff. we learn that a number of inhabitants of Judah, Daniel and his friends among them,

were exiled. But Judah, unlike the other parts of the country, was not conquered then, as testified by Josephus Ant. x. 6,1. Its king was not exiled. Otherwise, this exile would have been explicitly stated. It only says: "*And the Lord gave Jehoiakim, king of Judah, into his [Nebuchadnezzar's] hand*". Perhaps he was thrown in chains to be sent to Babylon, if the story in 2 Chronicles 36:6 belongs to this and not some later event. Berossus, quoted by Josephus (*Contra Apionem* I. 135-6) speaks of the transportation of Jewish, Phoenician, Syrian and Egyptian prisoners to Babylonia; and the Biblical book of Daniel, if it is taken to be following the Judaeon (autumn-autumn) dating system, assigns to this year (604 BCE) a siege of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar followed by the aforementioned deportation to Babylon. Josephus elsewhere states that, following the battle of Carchemish, Nebuchadnezzar 'took' Syria as far as Pelusium (in the north-east Delta), but he goes on specifically to exclude Judah from this conquest. Thus, though Josephus cannot be regarded as a particularly significant witness for this period, the occurrence of a Babylonian siege of Jerusalem in 605 BCE remains to be demonstrated. It must be noted, however, that the majority of scholars consider the Book of Daniel to be a historically unreliable compilation of the 2nd century BCE, though this is not a universally held view (CAH Vol. III 1991:395-398).

#### 7.6.2.1 Jehoiakim/Jehoiachin

The problem of Nebuchadnezzar's campaigns in Palestine is complicated especially because of the absence of Babylonian military sources comparable to the Assyrian Annals. The Bible gives detailed information only on the two campaigns which resulted in the "exile of Zedekiah" in 586 BCE. However, the Bible hints at other campaigns motivated by Judaeon revolts. Between the first Babylonian invasion in 605 BCE and the siege of Jerusalem in the days of Jehoiachin, there was undoubtedly another campaign, as attested in 2 Kings.24:1-2.

*"In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant three years; then he turned and rebelled against him. And the Lord sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the Lord, which he spoke by his servants the prophets".*

These lines, however interpreted, signify a military campaign in 603/2 BCE. If the text refers to a revolt plotted by Jehoiakim 599/8 BCE, a campaign of subjugation preceded it by three years; if we suppose that the author counts the period of subjugation from 605 BCE, a campaign was conducted three years later to subdue the revolt. However, the above text also clarifies the invasion into Palestine in this period. According to Malamat (1950:222,3) the Chaldaean column that penetrated Judah from the north and west encouraged Judah's eastern neighbours to attack her from the east and south (instead of 'Aram' we should read 'Edom'<sup>4</sup>).

<sup>4</sup>

Misreading by a *resh* instead of a *daled* has occasioned some people to read *Aram* instead of *Edom*.

Malamat notes that the chronology he employs is reckoned on an autumnal calendar beginning on 1 Tishri, and not the spring calendar accepted by a majority of scholars, which was in general use in Babylonia. Other scholars, *inter alia* Cazelles (1983:427-35), and Cogan & Tadmor (1988:315 ff.) have offered the opposite view. But this thesis concurs with Malamat's (1990:77) observation to his series since 1956 on chronology, in which he has sought to demonstrate the preference of this Tishri reckoning. He emphasises that it is "international politics and grand strategy, involving the various actors with which we are concerned" rather than exact dates.

#### 7.6.2.2 Babylonian Subjugation of Judah

Judah was reluctantly embroiled into the ensuing confrontation that erupted between the Neo-Babylonian empire and Egypt in the summer of 605 BCE, following the striking victories of Nebuchadnezzar, toward the end of the seventh century BCE, at the decline of the mighty Assyrian empire.

Whereas previously Egypt had long abandoned its 'Ostpolitik', the Pharaohs of the 26th dynasty in Egypt (Psammetichus I, Necho II, Psammetichus II, Hophra) were now renewing intervention in Asia, as the occasion arose. These two powers were a keen and novel political phenomenon in the Near East. North of Judah, the up-and-coming Neo-Babylonian, or rather Chaldaean empire, had become a decisive military and political factor in Mesopotamia. The struggle between the two powers alternated from open military conflict, to 'cold war'. The small state of Judah, located at the particularly sensitive crossroads linking Asia and Africa, was influenced more than ever before by the international power system, now that the kingdom's actual existence was at stake. Utilising contemporary terminology, Malamat (1990:67) states that in Political Science terms, Judah was now poignantly caught up in a bipolar system, meaning that the exclusive control of international politics was concentrated in two powers, (viz. Egypt and Babylonia) solely responsible for preserving peace or making war.

The date of the Babylonian subjugation of Judah is not exactly known, (and is disputed) but it appears that Judah held out for another two years after the Battle of Carchemish, surrendering only in the winter of 603 BCE, despite Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Ashkelon a year earlier. The imminent threat of Babylon caused Egypt to try and bring Judah back into its fold, which would again entail direct military confrontation between Egypt and Babylonia.

Babylonia soon subjugated Judah. Even Nebuchadnezzar's Chronicle, (BM 21946, lines 1-23) recording his annual military campaigns to the west from 605 to 601 BCE, remains vague as to the precise date, since it fails to specify the names of the tributary kingdoms (except Ashkelon). Some scholars, relying on evidence in the opening of the book of Daniel and in Josephus (quoting Berossus), surmise that Judah was conquered immediately after the battle of Carchemish. Malamat (1975: 129f, and note 15) believes it is difficult, however, to accept the chronological veracity of these traditions, unsupported by the Babylonian Chronicle. Others maintain that Judah surrendered either the following winter, thereafter Nebuchadnezzar returned to the west to collect tribute, or the winter thereafter, when already king of Babylon, he

conquered Ashkelon in the month of Kislev, the first year of his reign (December 604 BCE). The latter date coincides with the ninth month of the fifth regnal year of Jehoiakim, when a general fast-day was proclaimed in Jerusalem (Jer. 36:9ff.) and an emergency session of ministers convened. Jeremiah's forecast of national doom, whose intrinsic drama can now be more fully appreciated by virtue of the Babylonian Chronicle, was brought to them. But the stubborn Jehoiakim dismissed Jeremiah's warning - *'the king of Babylon shall surely come and destroy this land'* (Jer. 36:29) - and burned the prophet's scroll, emphasising Judah's tenacious determination to remain free of Babylonia (Malamat 1979:208).

This thesis believes that Judah seems to have surrendered only in the autumn or winter of 603 BCE, during Nebuchadnezzar's campaign in his second regnal year, which was undoubtedly conducted to the west. The Babylonian king started out in the month of Iyyar, with "a mighty army" supported by siege towers, in anticipation of strong resistance. Although the continuation of the Babylonian tablet is damaged, Malamat (1979:208,9) is of the opinion we can nevertheless assume that Nebuchadnezzar intended to subdue all Philistia and gain control of Judah, in preparation for his ultimate objective, the defeat of his rival, Egypt. If this surmise is correct, the missing portion of the tablet would have recounted first the conquest of a specific Philistine city, such as Ashdod, Ekron or Gaza (cf. Jer. 25:20; 47:5; Zeph. 2:4), then the surrender of Jehoiakim (cf. 2 Chron. 36:6-8 and Dan. 1:1-2, which seem to refer to this event). Moreover, this proposed dating for the subjugation of Judah accords well chronologically with the circumstances leading to Jehoiakim's rebellion against Babylonia. According to 2 Kings 24:1, Jehoiakim was a vassal of Nebuchadnezzar in Babylonia for three years; in other words, he three times paid annual tribute. If he made his first payment in the fall or winter of 603 BCE, the third instalment fell due in the fall or winter of 601 BCE, during the expedition in Nebuchadnezzar's fourth regnal year.

### **7.6.3 The Babylonian Attack on Egypt**

In 601/600 BCE the third fateful event occurred in the Judaeen ongoing drama, when, in Kislev (December) 601 BCE the Babylonian king ambitiously attacked Egypt. This event is recorded in the Wiseman Chronicle. The official historical record conceals neither the Babylonian shortcomings during this campaign, which led to heavy losses on both sides, nor the subsequent, empty-handed Babylonian retreat. In concurrence with Malamat (1990:72) this thesis believes it was this Babylonian failure which, presumably exploited by Egyptian propaganda, encouraged the Judaeen leadership to rebel and defect to the Egyptian camp. For the next two years the Babylonians were unable to retaliate against Judah, and they concentrated on recouping their strength, and above all re-equipping the chariot force.

#### **7.6.3.1 The Polarity between the Pro-Babylonian and Pro-Egyptian Factions**

Egypt was vitally interested in nurturing and supporting the uprising of the peoples in Palestine against Babylonian rule, and thereafter the polarity between the pro-

Babylonian and pro-Egyptian factions gradually intensified. Unlike the "true" prophets, who saw Egypt as a "broken reed", (Ezek. 29:7-8) many of Judah's leaders placed their faith in the futile Egyptian promises of military assistance. That other states in Palestine also sought Egyptian aid against Babylonia, is recorded in an Aramaic letter from Saqqara (Memphis) in Egypt. In this letter, a ruler from Gaza, Ekron or Ashdod, approaches Pharaoh for urgent military assistance against the impending Babylonian onslaught. If this supposition is correct, the document concerns one of the Babylonian expeditions against Philistia, either in the summer of 603 BCE, or the winter of 601-600 BCE.

The papyrus mentioned previously lacks details of the author's origin and the actual event mentioned in the letter. Nonetheless the premise of this thesis is in agreement with Malamat's viewpoint (1950:222) that the document established the route of the Babylonian army through Palestine along the *Via Maris*, and the importance of Afek as a military stopover, probably because of the nearby plentiful water supply and its strategic position between the Yarkon river and the mountains. Afek was obviously the base of operations for the Babylonian attack in Judah and the Palestine cities. Malamat believes the Aramaic letter fits the historical circumstances of 599/8 BCE - the Babylonian campaign which led to the "exile of Jehoiachin". It cannot apply to the events of 605 BCE, because it is unreasonable that a Philistine city would request military aid from the Pharaoh after his utter rout at Carchemish. It is not impossible, either, avers Malamat, that it refers to the Babylonian campaign of 603/2 BCE, as held by Ginsberg (1948:111). But its contents fit the pattern of the campaign in the time of Jehoiachin as told in the Bible. A later date is unacceptable because the cities of Philistia ceased to play an active role in the political arena and were not even mentioned among Judah's neighbours conspiring to revolt in the time of Zedekiah in 594 BCE (Jer. 27).

The abortive campaign against Egypt prevented the Babylonians from taking action against Jehoiakim's insolence for the next two years. In his fifth regnal year (600/599 BCE), Nebuchadnezzar stayed at home to rehabilitate his chariot force, and in the winter of 599/8 BCE only made raids against the Arabian tribes (ANET:564). These raids and the vast spoils captured by the Babylonians seem to be echoed in Jeremiah's oracle on "*Kedar and the kingdom of Hazor which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon smote*" (Jer. 49:28-33). For the time being, therefore, Nebuchadnezzar was forced to resort solely to punitive measures against Jehoiakim, employing Chaldaean garrisons, stationed in the west, as well as "*bands of Aramaeans (some read here Edomites), and bands of Moabites, and bands of Ammonites*" (2 Kgs. 24:2).

The CAH (Vol. III 1991:399,400) notes that in the Bible (2 Kgs. 24:2) Judah suffered raids from Chaldaeans, Aramaeans, Moabites and Ammonites, (*the Syriac [Peshitta] and Arabic versions read 'dm', 'Edom', in place of 'rm', 'Aram', which is a reasonable alternative, but one best rejected pending better manuscript evidence*) the Chaldaean and Aramaean elements perhaps stemming from Babylonian garrison troops together with local contingents raised in the former area of Aram. The disturbance caused by these Babylonian and Aramaean raiding parties seems to have

been sufficiently severe in the rural areas to have forced the Rechabites,<sup>5</sup> whose rigid vows normally restricted them to living in tents, to come into Jerusalem for protection (Jer. 35:1-18). The Moabites and Ammonites might have suffered raids from the roused bedouin Arabs and have been seeking gains in Judah to compensate for losses on their eastern margins. This is again a largely speculative reconstruction, but the fact of eastern incursions is illustrated by a reference in the Arad Ostrakon of about this date to the threat of an Edomite attack on Ramat-Negeb, probably modern Khirbet el-Gharra, a little over 24 km to the south-west of Arad, on what was presumably the southern border of Judah. This ostrakon, of which the obverse is largely effaced, is a letter addressed to someone named Eliashib, very likely the official of this name who held an administrative position in the town at least 30 years before, when Josiah commenced his cultic reforms. A roughly contemporary reference in Jeremiah 2:10 to the 'isles of Kittiyim' suggests that the meaning had shifted by this time to the Mediterranean in general, and since the employment of Aegaeen mercenaries was a long-standing practice in Judah, and the Egyptians were using Greek and related troops at this time, it is reasonable to see these Kittim as mercenaries of this type engaged by Jehoiakim to help to guard his borders.

These events seem to be reflected in Jeremiah's reference to the Rechabites seeking sanctuary in Jerusalem "*for fear of the army of the Chaldaeans and the army of the Aramaeans*" (Jer. 35:1,11) and in Zephaniah's wrathful charges against Moab and Ammon who "*have taunted my people and made boasts against their territory*" (Zeph. 2:8-10). Malamat surmises (1979:209) that if the Septuagint version of 2 Chronicles 36:5 is historically reliable, ("*Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem...*") then the incursion into Judah also included contingents from Samaria, implying that this region, previously annexed by Josiah, had, in Jehoiakim's time, once again been cut off from Judah by the Babylonians. No sporadic disorganized bands attacked Judah, but military units and auxiliary forces regularly incited by Nebuchadnezzar, prepared Judah for the decisive strike a year later.

### 7.6.3.2 The Results of Nebuchadnezzar's Policy

It could be that in 601 BCE, three years later (counting by the inclusive system), knowledge of a Babylonian set-back at the hands of the Egyptians encouraged Jehoiakim to rebel. If this is a correct reconstruction, Jehoiakim then enjoyed a respite from the Babylonians lasting more than a year, for Nebuchadnezzar's encounter with the Egyptians took place in the winter of 601-600 BCE. He spent the year 600/599 BCE rearming in Babylonia, and did not return to the west until November-December 599 BCE. On this latter expedition he deployed his forces into the desert,

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<sup>5</sup> Bright (1981:246) notes that the Rechabites were apparently a Kenite clan (1 Chron. 2:55) whose leader Jonadab is credited (2 Kgs. 10:15-17) with physical participation in the revolution brewing in the house of Omri in Israel. A century and a half later (Jer. 35) Rechabites were still pledged by a Nazirite vow. (On primitivistic tendencies in Israel, cf. Albright 1935:421-32.) They totally rejected the new order in Israel, both the agrarian life with all it entailed, and the disintegration of ancient patterns.

concentrating on the neutralization of Arab tribes, from whom plunder, including divine images, was taken. It may be that these activities set up a chain of disturbances which resulted in raiding parties moving against those areas not in a position to claim Babylonian protection (see Babylonian Chronicle 5 rev.6-10 and cf. Jer. 49:28-33; CAH, Vol.III 1991:398).

The results of Nebuchadnezzar's policy were soon apparent. Judah's new national leaders, lacking experience, (no doubt with Egyptian encouragement) embarked on dangerous political adventures. Such an adventure was the revolt planned in the early years of Zedekiah's reign (probably 594 BCE), when representatives from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon met secretly in Jerusalem (Jer. 27:3). The Philistine cities were conspicuously absent. They had probably been made a Babylonian province in the meantime, as mentioned above.

Ginsberg (1950:363) notes that when King Jehoiakim of Judah rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar, the new lord of the Fertile Crescent, in 600/599 BCE, his fellow-vassals on the east and south preferred to fight for the continuation of Babylonian domination rather than for its overthrow (2 Kgs. 24:2). The reason was obvious. In the event of the former they would be able to retain whatever portion of the territories seized from them by Josiah which they had regained after his death, and to recover the remainder and much more. In the event of the latter, however, they could hardly doubt but a successful Jehoiakim would endeavour to duplicate in some measure his father's feat. It seems possible they attained all their objectives. If Judah had not been expelled from the land of Gad before, it certainly was now, and it lost the Negev into the bargain. In the latter case the beneficiaries were the Edomites. For while we do not know just what the official status of the Negev was immediately after 598 BCE, we do know that by the second century BCE the entire area was known as Idumaea and its inhabitants were (exclusively?) heathen, until forcibly converted to Judaism by John Hyrcanus ca. 125 BCE. So whether the Negev was handed to the Edomites or made a separate province, they must in any case have been in a position to begin infiltrating and encroaching upon Jewish pastures, cisterns, springs, etc., practically without delay.

It had, therefore, been worth Judah's eastern and southern neighbours' while to help Nebuchadnezzar in 600-598 BCE. But having gained the objectives of that collaboration, they were now free to think about ways and means of getting rid of the Babylonian yoke. It was to discuss these that they and the Phoenician states of Sidon and Tyre sent delegates to Jerusalem early in the reign of Zedekiah (Jer. 27:1ff.). When, however, Judah revolted for the last time in the 9th year of Zedekiah (589 BCE), the Phoenicians and Ammonites were with her, but the Edomites (and Moabites?) were not. Ginsberg's view (1950:365) seems eminently reasonable, viz. that the Ammonites were not either, and that all of the Transjordan states assisted Nebuchadnezzar from the start, as in 600-598 BCE. But if they had, Jews would not have found refuge from the Chaldeans in these countries (Jer. 40:11-12). They would have been either slain or enslaved upon arrival.

In the last stages, it is true, little Edom rushed to the aid of the victor (for there is nothing new under the sun); and since Zedekiah's very next step, if he had won his independence from Nebuchadnezzar, would certainly have been the recovery of the Negev (a historical and vital part of the kingdom of Judah). But so long as a still powerful Judah lay between the Edomites and the Babylonians the former naturally deemed discretion the better part of valour. Ginsberg theorises that for analogous reasons of geography and relative strength, the Moabites - supposing that they had desired to help the Chaldeans out of spite against the Ammonites (who in the course of centuries had absorbed most of what was originally Moabite territory) - had no choice but to remain neutral until Nebuzaradan's troops had all but disposed of their northern neighbours.

#### 7.6.4 The Babylonian Siege of Jerusalem 598/597 BCE

The fourth turning point in Judah's destiny was the Babylonian siege of Jerusalem. In the winter of 598/97 BCE Nebuchadnezzar struck at Judah. The state of affairs coincides with the Biblical text describing the siege of Jerusalem in Jehoiachin's reign in 598 BCE:

*"At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against Jerusalem and the city was besieged. And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city and the servants did besiege it" (2 Kgs. 24:10-11).*

This supports the hypothesis that first the vanguard of the Babylonian army went up to Jerusalem to surround and cut off the city and that later Nebuchadnezzar himself arrived with his main forces. Only this event brought Jehoiachin to surrender. As for the hope of aid from Egypt, the Judaeans, like the Philistine cities, were surely disappointed with the historical reality (cf. 2 Kgs. 24:7).

In the winter of 598/7 BCE, his seventh regnal year, Nebuchadnezzar struck at Judah in a show of strength that also served as a warning on Egypt and her allies. The Biblical account of Jerusalem's surrender under Jehoiachin has been fully borne out by the Babylonian Chronicle:

*"In the seventh year, the month of Kislev, the king of Akkad [i.e. Nebuchadnezzar] mustered his troops, marched to the Hatti Land [i.e. Syria-Palestine], and encamped against the city of Judah [i.e. Jerusalem], and on the second day of the month of Adar he seized the city and captured the king [i.e. Jehoiachin]. He appointed there a king of his own choice [i.e. Zedekiah], received its heavy tribute and sent [them] to Babylon" (BM 21946, rev.lines 11-13).*

It is believed that the precise date of the conquest of Jerusalem is 2 Adar (16 March, 597) and the almost simultaneous replacement of the Judaeian ruler serves now as a chronological reference point for this entire period, as well as for the clarification of the reckoning of the regnal New Year in Judah. Because of this date, moreover, the actual course of the siege of Jerusalem and the resulting exile can be more fully appraised.



In the month of Kislev, Nebuchadnezzar marshalled his troops and set out from Babylon for Jerusalem, a 1,600 kilometer march. Malamat (1979:210) has deduced that the march required at least two months, on the assumption of an average daily advance of 25 kilometers, and this would have brought him to Jerusalem during the month of Shebat, shortly before the city's surrender. By then, since Jerusalem was already under siege by Nebuchadnezzar's 'servants' (to be inferred from 2 Kgs. 24:10-11), Malamat says we must assume that Babylonian, as well as other forces, were stationed in the west. The entry in the Babylonian Chronicle for the previous year suggests this, reporting merely that Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon and thus implying that most of his army was left behind to reinforce the garrison in the west. The premise of this thesis agrees with Malamat's scenario that it therefore seems likely that when the king of Babylon suddenly appeared at the head of his crack troops before the gates of besieged Jerusalem, frustrated by the lack of Egyptian aid (cf. 2 Kgs. 24:7), the spirit of the defenders failed and Jehoiachin and his retinue were forced to give themselves up.

#### 7.6.4.1 The Fate of Jehoiakim

Miller & Hayes (1986:408) observe that there are diverse traditions about what happened to Jehoiakim:

- a) 2 Kings 24:6 reports that he slept with his fathers, thus implying that he died a natural death.
- b) 2 Chronicles 36:6, on the other hand, says Nebuchadnezzar bound him in fetters to take him to Babylon.
- c) The Lucianic recension of the Greek for both 2 Kings. 24:6 and 2 Chronicles 36:8 reports that he was buried in the Garden of Uzzah, outside the wall of Jerusalem. (see 2 Kgs. 21:18, 26).
- d) Finally, Josephus has Jehoiakim killed by Nebuchadnezzar after Jerusalem fell (Ant. X. 96).

Miller & Hayes feel that 2 Kings 24:6 is probably the more reliable. Jehoiakim must have died in office, still anticipating the arrival of the Egyptians, but "*the king of Egypt did not come again out of his land*" (2 Kgs. 24:7). Upon the arrival of Nebuchadnezzar on the scene, "*Jehoiachin, the king of Judah gave himself up to the king of Babylon, himself, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his palace officials*" (2 Kgs. 24:12).

To the CAH Vol III (1991:400) it seems that Jehoiakim did not himself have to contend with the results of his defection from Babylonian control, for he died, probably in December 598 BCE, before Nebuchadnezzar could bring retribution upon him. It was about this time in fact that, according to the Babylonian Chronicle, Nebuchadnezzar mustered his army and set out for Khatti, where he laid siege to 'the city of Judah (*al ia-a-hu-du*) i.e. Jerusalem. The defender was now Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin, who surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar on 16 March 597 BCE (2 Adar), only a little over 3 months after becoming king. Since the Babylonian army is unlikely to have reached Jerusalem before mid-January, the siege must have been relatively

short, a fact which accords with the comparatively mild treatment meted out to Jehoiachin and his court. Apparently no great damage was done to the city, but according to 2 Kings 23:12-16 Jehoiachin was deported to Babylon together with his family and several thousand men, ranging from the leaders (both secular and religious) of the kingdom to skilled craftsmen. A substantial amount of loot was taken from the Temple and the royal palace. Among the deportees was Ezekiel, whose prophetic messages to his fellow deportees are known from the book bearing his name. Nebuchadnezzar replaced Jehoiachin with his uncle Mattaniah, a half-brother to his father, whose name was changed to Zedekiah (2 Kgs. 24:17; 2 Chron. 36:10). The Babylonian Chronicle (5 rev. 12-13) says more briefly that Nebuchadnezzar seized the king, appointed a substitute of his own choice, and took heavy tribute.

Since Jehoiachin surrendered on the second of Adar after a reign of only three months (2 Kgs. 24:8; according to 2 Chron. 36:9 three months and ten days), his father must have died at the end of Marchesvan, 598 BCE. By this time Jerusalem was in all probability already under siege, which may explain the various versions concerning the strange circumstances of the death and interment of Jehoiakim. Although 2 Kings 24:6 describes his demise in unusually general terms, Malamat (1979:210) is at pains to point out that the Septuagint (Lucianic recension) here and in 2 Chronicles 36:8 records that he was buried in the Garden of Uzzah (as were his forebears Manasseh and Amon; 2 Kgs. 21:18, 26), outside the walls of Jerusalem. Burial here, certainly lack-lustre because of the heavy siege, may be what Jeremiah meant when he prophesied the king's ignoble end: "*He shall be buried like the burial of an ass drawn and cast beyond the gates of Jerusalem*" (Jer. 22:19; cf. 36:30). Although the king's behaviour deserves this prophetic vision of his final lot (in contradistinction to his condemnation of Jehoiakim, cf. Jeremiah's consoling words about Zedekiah, conditional upon the latter's submission to divine command; Jer. 34:4-5), we should not exclude the possibility that the utterances about Jehoiakim's death and burial echo actual events (cf. the prophecies about the destiny of Jehoahaz and Jehoiachin; Jer. 22:10-12; 24:30). In any case, Jeremiah (22:13-17) as well as the author of the book of Kings (2 Kgs. 24:1-4), disparages Jehoiakim, for both his foreign and his domestic policy, which led him to oppress the populace in order to erect splendid royal edifices, and to condemn and mercilessly pursue his opponents (he executed the prophet Uriah and sentenced Jeremiah to death; Jer. 26; cf. 36:26; Malamat 1979:211).

#### **7.6.4.2 Jerusalem Summit**

In 597 BCE, after Nebuchadnezzar had quickly returned to Babylon, as was his custom after completing a campaign, a six-nation conclave was held in Jerusalem (Jer. 27:3). Representatives from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon gathered in the Judean capital to discuss possible plans and to co-ordinate strategy (Jer. 27:3). The absence of any representatives from Philistia suggests that this area was under strong Babylonian control. Apparently the Transjordanian and Phoenician ambassadors discussed with Zedekiah the prospects of a united revolt to take place two years later, in conjunction with a simultaneous rebellion being planned by states in the east that were subject to Babylon. Jeremiah's pro-Babylonian stance is evident throughout

Jeremiah 27:3-22. One can but wonder whether the various states sent their envoys to Judah to discuss anti-Babylonian measures, or whether they all went to Judah because it was regarded as the strongest state; or whether Judah herself called the meeting. Whether Zedekiah initiated the meeting and what his stance on the planned rebellion was, remain unknown.

Jeremiah vigorously opposed the conclave and picketed the meeting. The prophet Hananiah spoke out in Jerusalem promising that the yoke of the king of Babylon would be broken in two years and that King Jehoiachin and the exiles would soon return (Jer. 28:1-4). Hananiah and Jeremiah represent the two opposite political poles of the day. The question is not who was right, but who could be and would be the most persuasive orator. The rest was up to the king and the people. History has shown us which of the two prophets judged the situation correctly. The outcome of this difference of opinion is judged in retrospect, and makes Hananiah a false prophet.

#### **7.6.4.3 The Elamite Factor**

In Nebuchadnezzar's 9th and 10th years (596/5 and 595/4 BCE), trouble did break out in the east. Although the Babylonian Chronicles are fragmentary at this point, they refer to a movement by the king of Elam against Nebuchadnezzar in the king's 9th year. Elam may have been influential earlier in the call of the planning meeting held in Jerusalem to plot revolt in the west (see Jer. 49:34-38). It is not impossible that the outcome of this conclave is one of those examples in history where a "weaker" neighbour/enemy was attacked to regain a measure of importance in the eyes of the *own* people and surrounding peoples who might begin to harbour any ideas of rebelling, or of aggression. The Elamite advance was met by a Babylonian response and the Elamites fled. In his 10th year Nebuchadnezzar remained most of the year in Babylonia, where he had to put down a local rebellion which broke out in December 595 BCE and involved elements in his own army. Later in the year he marched to the west and collected tribute (ABC 102). According to Miller & Hayes (1986:410) so far as is known, none of the nations that sent representatives to the Jerusalem conference rebelled during Babylonia's troubles in 596-594 BCE.

Miller & Hayes (1986:410) note that in Zedekiah's 4th year (594-593 BCE) we hear of a trip of the Judaeen king to Babylon (Jer. 51:59). Such a trip undoubtedly had a political purpose: to offer to Nebuchadnezzar assurances of Judaeen loyalties in light of the recent uprisings.

#### **7.6.4.4 The Second Egyptian Revolt**

In Egypt, meanwhile, Psammetichus II (595-589 BCE) had succeeded Necho II. Two events in this pharaoh's reign had enormous impact on Judaeen politics and tipped the scales toward a second revolt against Babylonia:

- a) The pharaoh carried out a successful campaign against Nubia. The Egyptian army marched south, apparently encountered no overwhelming opposition, and returned home victorious in 592 BCE (Herod. 2, 161). The pharaoh sought to make the most of this victory to counter Egyptian lack of success against Babylonia.

- b) In 591 BCE, shortly after the return from Nubia, Psammetichus went on a victory tour of Palestine (Rylands IX papyrus).

Two factors about the Rylands text are noteworthy and its interpretation must be taken into consideration. First, the text presents the expedition to Palestine as if it was fundamentally a religious, festive occasion. Second, the focus in the narrative is on Pediese the priest and his fate and meaning. The premise of this thesis believes this should not be regarded as a political manoeuvre. It is also possible that it was thus presented to pacify Babylonia. The visit of Psammetichus II to Palestine must, however, be seen as more than a triumphant religious procession. After all, at least some Babylonian troops were stationed in the area and the states of Syria-Palestine were committed to Nebuchadnezzar by treaty. Such a visit by a long-standing anti-Babylonian power could not help carrying political and military implications. Psammetichus' visit must have been seen as Egypt's reassertion, even if somewhat ceremonial, of its claims over Syria-Palestine.

#### **7.6.4.5 The Significance of the Exile of Jehoiachin**

The destruction of Judah through its conquest during the reigns of Jehoiachin and Zedekiah has been widely discussed by historians. Yet they have usually (and possibly unjustifiably) emphasised the final destruction. There is an essential difference between the two phases of conquest. The Babylonian campaign of 589/6 BCE resulted in the physical destruction of Judah, but the community was destroyed ten years previously by the exile of masses of its population. Even the authors of the Bible considered the exile of Jehoiachin the decisive event of the period, as is demonstrated by their beginning of a new count of years with it (cf. Ezek. 1:2 and other places in this book, and 2 Kgs. 25:27). Likewise, the Biblical statistics of the various exiles reflect the decisive part played by the exile of Jehoiachin (cf. statistics of Jer. 52:28-32 and below). In this exile ten thousand men were banished from Palestine, together with their families - about 30,000 people, most of them from Jerusalem, and the others from the Shephelah and Negev (cf. Jer. 13:18-10; these lines refer to the time of Jehoiachin). The various statistics for the exile of Jehoiachin contradict one another, but Malamat (1950:223-4) suggests they can be summarised as approximately ten thousand (cf. 2 Kgs. 24:14-16). If this latter Bible source is reliable, the "soldiery" can be identified with the army, the regular army at the time numbered seven thousand, and the auxiliary, if it can be identified with "the craftsmen and artisans", numbered a thousand, that is the seventh of the regular army. To these figures must be added several battalions left behind by Nebuchadnezzar and a large host of volunteers that were mobilized during the war. The premise of this thesis is that it is not necessary to accept a new count *per se*. Conceivably the Biblical writers merely wanted to indicate how long the exile had lasted before a certain event, or the following important event pertained to the exiled Judaeans, took place.

The true significance of the exile of Jehoiachin is measured not by a quantitative standard but rather by a qualitative one. The ruling classes and elders of the state were exiled; the royal family and ministers, the wealthy and aristocratic, the priests and prophets, and, above all, the soldiery, craftsmen and artisans (2 Kgs. 24:14-16;

Jer. 24:1; 27-20; 29:1-2). This last group constituted the army and its suppliers, therefore their members are of particular importance.

Deportees also included the religio-spiritual-politico leadership, priests and prophets (Jer. 29:21ff.), among them the prophet Ezekiel. Jeremiah's vision of the two baskets of figs thus justifiably equates Jehoiachin's exile with the "good figs" (Jer. 24, esp. v. 5).

Na'aman (1993:104-119) believes that we can now reasonably reconcile the seeming Biblical contradiction concerning the number of deportees and dates of deportation during Jehoiachin's time by assuming two consecutive stages. (Cf. Malamat 1956:253f.; 1975:133f., and 1979:211).

- a) The first stage is probably represented by the list of deportees in Jeremiah 52:28 (which seems to be based on an official record), according to which, 3,025 "Judaeans" were carried off in Nebuchadnezzar's seventh year. This apparently limited deportation comprised the provincial elements of Judah, outside the capital, captured either during the siege of Jerusalem or immediately after its surrender (and cf. the allusion in Jer. 13:18-19).
- b) The subsequent and major exile described in 2 Kings 24:12 included the higher echelons of Jerusalem, headed by King Jehoiachin and his retinue, along with thousands of the city's defenders. The city fell on 2 Adar, and since organizing such a mass deportation took several weeks it must have occurred by the time Nebuchadnezzar's eighth regnal year began (2 Kgs. *loc. cit.*) on 1 Nisan, 597 BCE. Further, 2 Chronicles 36:1f. ("*when the year was expired*") also indicates that Jehoiachin's exile took place at the time of the civil New Year (Nisan). The assumption of a two-phase exile may also serve to resolve the discrepancies in the numbers of deportees listed in 2 Kings 24 - 10,000 men in one case (v. 14), and 7,000 in the other (v. 16), to each of which must be added 1,000 armorers and sappers, the auxiliary technical personnel. The number 7,000 might refer to the later main deportation and the figure 10,000 to the total, including the 3,000 captives from the first stage.

Indeed the exilic community itself considered the first deportation the decisive event in the progressive disintegration of the land of Judah. Whereas the prime calamity at the end of Zedekiah's rule was the complete devastation of many Judaeans cities, above all Jerusalem (cf. Jer. 34:7; 44:2), the surrender of Jehoiachin had virtually saved the country from total physical destruction at that particular time. Although the archaeological evidence of the partial destruction of certain sites in the time of Jehoiachin, such as Tell Beit Mirsim and, in particular, Lachish, is questionable, some outlying districts can be presumed to have been taken away from the Judaeans kingdom, probably at its northern rather than its southern perimeter as is generally assumed. In fact, Nebuchadnezzar may have annexed Benjamin later to the province of Samaria and thus saved the area from destruction a decade later, during the period of the final disaster. Certain notables of Benjaminite origin were actually deported, however, such as the forebears of Mordechai, even though his family was exiled from the capital, Jerusalem (Esther 2:5-6).

#### 7.6.4.6 Nebuchadnezzar's Policy on Exiling

Nebuchadnezzar's policy of exiling was short-sighted and dangerous from our view point.

- a) He left the country without authoritative political defense, thereby exposing it to political adventurers and charlatans.
- b) By exiling the property owners, he sowed economic and social confusion.
- c) Moreover, the absence of a fighting class and craftsmen prevented the state from ensuring internal and external security and rebuilding its fortresses.
- d) These factors prevented the healing of Judah's physical wound and left her a useless tool. The healing of the emotional and spiritual wound would come only from the Exile in Babylonia.

Bereft of its experienced, authoritative political leadership, the country was becoming prey to unreliable and adventurous elements. After the land owners and property owners were exiled ("*none remained, except the poorest people of the land*", 2 Kgs. 24:14), social and economic instability prevailed. By carrying off the bulk of the army, its ordnance and fortifications experts, Nebuchadnezzar rendered Judah incapable of restoring its former strength and security. But it should be noted that a new dimension to the concept "people" or "chosen people" developed, and a new concept of a strong and secure people emerged. Strength and security became a spiritual dimension.

#### 7.6.5 Inexperienced Leadership

The fifth stage in the tragedy of Judah was the lack of experienced leadership and the fact that they were saddled with a puppet king, Zedekiah. Judah soon became entangled again in international intrigue. The new king and last monarch of Judah, summoned, (or was forced to summon from either his advisers or the circumstances which prevailed) to Jerusalem an anti-Babylonian conference of delegates of petty kingdoms in the year 594/93 BCE, thus rebelling against the power which had enthroned him. This step was paradoxical to his own personal interest.

Nebuchadnezzar designated Zedekiah, the third son of Josiah, as the king of Judah (2 Kgs. 24:17; 2 Chron. 36:10). He was Jehoahaz's brother by blood (cf. 2 Kgs. 23:31; 24:18), whom 'the people of the land' once vainly supported. Although Zedekiah was Nebuchadnezzar's appointee, it is understandable that 'the people of the land' set their hope on him to restore their nationalistic policy which was frustrated by Necho. We learn of the situation from the impressive presence of 'the people of the land' in Jerusalem, when it was besieged again by the Babylonians in the time of Zedekiah (2 Kgs. 25:3, 19; Jer. 34:19; cf. 2 Kgs. 25:12).

Ezekiel (22:19-22) also mentions the gathering of 'the people of the land' in Jerusalem at that time. However, according to his view, they were gathered to Jerusalem by YHWH to be punished. His equation of 'the people of the land' with 'the inhabitants of Jerusalem' (12:19) shows that 'the people of the land' became the dominant power

in the capital city at last. But both Jeremiah (37:2) and Ezekiel (7:27; 22:23-31) directed their severest attacks against 'the people of the land' as well as the other national leaders. These prophetic words testify to the tragic fact that, the fanatical pursuit of nationalism by 'the people of the land' in the last days of the kingdom of Judah, only served to contribute to the disastrous end of their country (Ishida 1975:38).

#### **7.6.5.1 The co-existence of Two Davidic Monarchs**

As stated previously, the "king of his liking" whom Nebuchadnezzar placed on the Judaeen throne was Mattaniah, an uncle of Jehoiachin, who bore the throne name Zedekiah (2 Kgs. 24:17) He ascended the throne in 597 BCE and ruled for eleven years.

Miller & Hayes (1986:409) note that the capture of Jerusalem and the exile of Jehoiachin left the people stunned and polarized. There were possibly a majority who could not believe that this had really happened, that Jerusalem, YHWH's city, had been taken. YHWH had stepped in before, at the last moment, and saved the city during Hezekiah's reign. Moreover, the Zion theology proclaimed the inviolability of the city (Ps. 46; 48; 76). Surely the capture had been only a historical accident. In short, there were hopes, encouraged by prophetic announcements, that the whole bad dream would be reversed in the future and Jehoiachin and the exiles would return. This thesis cannot conjecture as to why the Almighty decided the time had come to chastise the children of Israel. Conceivably in His infinite wisdom He felt enough was enough. More probably it was the confluence of politico-historical events in the Ancient Near East at that juncture.

Feelings were partially polarized around the figures of Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. Dates are frequently given with references to Jehoiachin's exile (see Ezek. 1:2; 2 Kgs. 2:27) suggesting that many still considered him the real king and looked forward to his release and reinstatement, despite the fact that he was regarded as evil. Zedekiah had been put on the throne by a foreign monarch, not installed by his own people. On the other hand, Jehoiachin was considered totally unacceptable by Jeremiah (Jer. 22:24-30, referred to here as Coniah). One cannot be sure whether Jeremiah did not accept Zedekiah's appointment only because Nebuchadnezzar had appointed him, or whether because Zedekiah did not support Jeremiah's party. Jeremiah and the parties in Judah (one faction supporting Zedekiah, the other supporting Jehoiachin as the legitimate ruler) were also divided over what course of action to take, whether to continue hoping in Egypt or to submit completely to the Babylonians. In all of this, Zedekiah seems to have lacked full control over his own people and to have vacillated in his actions or to have been forced into positions he would rather not have taken. Here again, one can only conjecture whether Zedekiah was simply not interested, or whether he had read what was written on the wall. In addition, many of the seasoned Judaeen diplomats and officials were in exile, and no longer present to offer advice.

These obstacles to Judah's recovery were increased by the co-existence of two kings of the Davidic line, which raised the problem of the royal succession in Judah, and creating confusion within the kingdom and undermining government authority. One

can only conjecture whether there was a general feeling that the rule of the Davidides had run its full course. The writer of this thesis feels that the luckless Zedekiah deserves our pity! The Biblical sources, now reinforced by the Babylonian Chronicle (Ezek. 17:12-14; cf. Ant. X, vii, 1), tell us that Zedekiah was enthroned by Nebuchadnezzar himself in a coronation that included a ceremony and an oath of allegiance to the suzerain, typical of the somewhat earlier Assyrian vassal treaties made with the subject states in the west. The vassal ruler was adjured not only by the suzerain's gods, but by his own as well, in the case of Judah, by YHWH (cf. Ezek. 12:19-20; 2 Chron. 36:13). What a contradiction! Adjured by YHWH, yet he refused to accept this god! Furthermore, the frequent diatribes of Jeremiah and Ezekiel against Zedekiah for breach of fealty, as well as the Babylonian vengeance against the renegade Judaeon king, accord with the curses and punishments that the extant vassal treaties from the Ancient Near East meted out to a rebel (Malamat 1979:213).

Although Zedekiah was duly and properly installed as king by Nebuchadnezzar, his exiled nephew, Jehoiachin, was not divested of his royalty, but enjoyed special status at the Babylonian court. The so-called Weidner Tablets, discovered at Nebuchadnezzar's palace, which list food rations for the various exiles (cf. 2 Kgs. 25:30), testify to this. Jehoiachin is mentioned in four documents as the "King of Judah" and in one of them, which is dated, the thirteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar (592/1 BCE), he is referred to when Zedekiah was, in fact, in power.<sup>6</sup> Malamat (1979:213) correctly cautions us not, however, to conclude from this that Jehoiachin actually remained king *de jure* of Judah, nor that Zedekiah was only regent or *locum tenens*, but rather that he may have been regarded as titular head of the Jewish diaspora in Babylonia. Other exiled kings at the Babylonian court also retained their royal titles, and were perhaps to be used, *inter alia*, as a trump card against the new rulers appointed by Nebuchadnezzar. It is the opinion of this thesis that such kings were served as, and used by, the Babylonians as knowledgeable advisors on their home affairs.

Another factor which added confusion and divided the nation was the question of the legitimacy of the royal succession in Judah. In addition to inscriptions discovered in Nebuchadnezzar's palace in Babylon, which mention Jehoiachin in 592 BCE, some years after his exile, with his official title "king of Judah", there is epigraphical evidence from Palestinian excavations (Beth Shemesh, Tell Beth-Mirsim, Lachish and Tell en-Nasbeh). They affirm Jehoiachin's royal status during his exile. This sheds light on a new trend in Nebuchadnezzar's policy toward conquered lands. He appointed a new king in place of the rebellious one, but left the latter his royal status while in exile, apparently as a threat to his successor in the conquered land. Possibly this was to add weight to discussions concerning subjugated lands because these decisions were taken in conjunction with the "kings-in-exile". It would appear to be

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See E.F. Weidner, *Melanges syriens offerts a R. Dussaud*, II, Paris 1939:923-935; and cf. Albright BAR 5,1945:49-55, cited in Malamat 1979:351.



a case of playing the blaming game. This however clarifies somewhat Zedekiah's paradoxical and hesitant conduct, which eventually brought him to revolt against the power by whose grace he ruled. His opponents in Judah, on the one hand, and Nebuchadnezzar on the other, were threatening him by pointing out their "alternative", the royal Jehoiachin. Once again one needs to pity Zedekiah, who was receiving advice from a Davidide! Hananiah, boldly proclaimed that "two years hence" the exiles would be returned to Judah and Jehoiachin reinstated (Jer. 28:1-4). Jeremiah in contrast emphatically rejected this, and retained his allegiance to Zedekiah through the darkest hours of the crisis (cf. Jer. 38:14-26). In Lamentations 4:20 we can observe that recognition of Zedekiah's rule persists after the destruction of Jerusalem in the dirge for the king of Judah:

*"the breath of our nostrils, the Lord's anointed, was taken in their pit, he of whom it is said: 'under his shadow we live among the nations'"*.

Little is known of the earlier years of Zedekiah's reign. Two Kings 24:17-20 states that he was 21 years old when he became king, and that he reigned 11 years (597-586 BCE), during which time he merely continued in the heterodox policies of his nephew (cf. Jer. 52:1-3), which were, in the international circumstances, foolish and even hazardous. Mention has already been made of the point that during his reign he was, according to Jeremiah, visited by emissaries from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon (Jer. 27:3), and whose aim seems to have been to enlist his participation in a rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar. The year by year record provided by the Babylonian Chronicle reports that in his campaign of 597/6 BCE Nebuchadnezzar came only as far west as Carchemish; that he was engaged at home in late 595 BCE, but that he came to Khatti in 594 BCE, where he received tribute from unnamed kings, and that at the end of the same year he mustered his army and marched again to Khatti (Babylonian Chronicle 5 rev. 14-26). This concludes the material supplied by the Babylonian Chronicle tablet which covers the ten years, 605 - 595 BCE. Since the following tablet has not been recovered, and there is indeed no other extant tablet of the series until the year 556 BCE, this valuable source of evidence now fails (CAH Vol.III, 1991:401).

That there was contact between Jerusalem and the exiles in Babylon is shown by a letter addressed by Jeremiah to the exiled Jewish elders, priests, prophets, and people there, urging them to resign themselves to a long exile, and to make the best of it (Jer. 29). Though there is thus no indication of overt dissident activity on the part of Zedekiah at the beginning of his reign, he is indeed said to have visited Nebuchadnezzar in Babylon in 594 BCE (Jer. 51:59). According to 2 Kings 24:20 he did eventually rebel against the king of Babylon, presumably a few years later. The narrative goes on to say that on the 10th day of the 10th month of Zedekiah's 9th year Nebuchadnezzar brought his entire army to Jerusalem, which he besieged with the aid of a surrounding siege wall (2 Kgs. 25:1; Jer. 52:3-4 and 39:1). If this date is reckoned according to the Tishri-Elul year, which was normally used for Judah in Kings, the day referred to would have been 11 July 588 BCE (*10 Tammuz 588 BCE, assuming Thiele's assignment of years, 1 Tammuz being 2 July 588 BCE*); but if, as

is perhaps more likely in view of the recent subservience to Babylon, the Babylonian Nisan-Adar year is assumed, the day would have been 5 July 587 BCE. This would also accord with the timing of Nebuchadnezzar's later recorded campaigns to the west. A respite in the siege seems to have been occasioned by the entry of an Egyptian army into Palestine. This episode is unknown in extra-Biblical sources (CAH, Vol. III 1991:402,3).

#### 7.6.5.2 The Last Jerusalem Conspiracy

According to the Babylonian Chronicle, on the eve of the Jerusalem conspiracy, the Babylonian empire was beset by serious domestic and foreign problems (see Chapter 2) which gave the nations in the west the chance to rebel. In 596/5 BCE the king of Elam attacked Babylonia, but was roundly defeated, and was the inspiration for Jeremiah's invective against "*Elam, in the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah*" (Jer. 49:34ff.). In the winter of 595/4 BCE an insurrection broke out even in Babylonia proper, but Nebuchadnezzar was able to quell it and depart immediately thereafter for a brief campaign to the west. Less than a year later (December 594 BCE) he set out once again for the west, an episode mentioned just before the Chronicle breaks off. In concurrence with Malamat, (1979:214) this thesis avers that if we assume correctly that the rebellion in Jerusalem started a few months later in the course of the following summer, then this last Babylonian campaign could not have been very impressive, or might even have failed, thus aggravating the ferment in the west. During his fourth regnal year, Zedekiah is said to have gone to Babylon, or at least to have sent his 'quartermaster' (Jer. 51:59). We do not know, however, whether this occurred before or in connection with Nebuchadnezzar's campaign to the west, or, conversely, whether this step was necessitated by the Babylonian response to the conspiracy against them.

The schemes in Judah (subversive from the Babylonian viewpoint, gamesmanship in the eyes of the Judaeans) were no doubt, once again, fomented by Egyptian intrigue. The immediate cause of the anti-Babylonian alliance, however, was not, as is often assumed, Pharaoh Psammetichus II's ascent to the throne, since his reign now appears to have started in 595 BCE not 594 BCE, more than two years before the Jerusalem plot. During his third year (593 BCE), Psammetichus II was engaged in a successful campaign in Nubia, probably with foreign mercenaries participating, including troops from Judah. During his fourth year (592 BCE) he set out for Haru, i.e. Palestine and the Phoenician coast. The Egyptian sources make it clear that this expedition was essentially a pilgrimage, complete with priests, to holy sites in this area, perhaps including the Jerusalem Temple. Presumably the aim was to impress the small powers in the area. Greenberg (1957:304-9) however, explores the possibility of this expedition in Palestine as arousing Zedekiah to open rebellion against Babylonia.

Psammetichus II's appearance in Asia certainly had strong diplomatic repercussions and undoubtedly stoked the latent anti-Babylonian sentiments smoldering within the Judaeans leadership. Redford (1992:464) notes what ensued was a triumphal progress by king, court, priests and army to the cities of Philistia and Judah, and in the event it was unchallenged by Babylon. Psammetichus undoubtedly pursued the route of so

many of his predecessors, and continued on up the coast of the Phoenician cities of Byblos and Tyre. His aim must have been to lift the spirits of the anti-Babylonian resistance and to cement alliances, rather than to collect tribute; and in this he must have been signally successful. The loyal Phoenician cities were to supply timber for ships, as they had since time immemorial. Judah was to be the centre of the opposition to Nebuchadnezzar and, with a victorious Egypt behind it, could, not unrealistically, hope for success. Even in Babylon the Judaeans were asking the prophet Ezekiel when they were to go home. Optimistic predictions were rife in the exile community that Babylon's fortunes were about to decline, and that the exiles would soon be released. Even though what Redford (1992:464) terms "Jeremiah in his maverick fashion" continued to excoriate any majority sentiment that held out hope, he too was driven by the experience of Babylonian barbarity to damn to eventual doom this equivocal instrument he had conceived the Lord G-d as wielding against his chosen people. The news of this victory, remembered long afterward for generations, must have had an electrifying effect on the Near East, and especially on Judah. The preceding year Nebuchadnezzar must have got wind of Zedekiah's deliberations with the surrounding states of the south Levant, for he summoned the Judaeans king and some of his ministers to Babylon for a dressing down. But they were not detained, and returned to Jerusalem in time to hear of the Egyptian victory. Moreover, Psammetichus II for all his frailness, seemed intent on pursuing an active policy toward western Asia. No sooner had he returned from Nubia(593 BCE) he laid plans for a similar expedition in the north.

In the last decade of the kingdom of Judah, from the first Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem till its final fall, the Bible relates only one incident of international relevance, namely the anti-Babylonian 'conference' summoned by Zedekiah (Jer. 27:2; 2 Kgs. 24:2). But besides the states participating in the plot (which conspicuously omit the Philistine cities, who were already for some time Babylonian provinces) little is known of the particular circumstances leading to the convening of the conference, of the consequences thereof, nor even its precise date. Malamat (1975:139) notes that in the Book of Ezekiel (22:1) there is correspondence in dates, hitherto unnoticed. Is this merely coincidental, or, as in Ezekiel's other chronological notations, is there some underlying significance? Though the object of the enquiry of the elders of Israel is not specified here, as in other cases where the leadership sought divine tidings, it certainly concerned some pertinent national issue. Freedman & Redford (1970:469f., 480) have connected it with the hopes for redemption raised among the exiles by the campaign of Psammetichus II to Asia, which they date in 591 BCE. But Malamat feels this latter dating is spurious.

The dates in Ezekiel are significant for a historical interpretation of many of the prophetic messages to which they are attached, especially those in the complex consisting of oracles against foreign nations in chapter 25-32. Ezekiel 21:23-27 rules out active loyalty to Nebuchadnezzar (à la 600-598 BCE) on the part of the children of Ammon, and for non-quibblers it rules out even their outward loyalty. Ginsberg (1950:366) correctly observes that if Nebuchadnezzar had merely suspected their

intentions, he would not have contemplated first frittering away his energies on a siege of Rabbah while neglecting Jerusalem, about whose intentions there was no doubt. After all, there can not have been any question of forestalling a sudden attack by the Ammonite dwarf upon the Babylonian giant.

Already in a previous study Malamat (1968:152) noted that the dates in Ezekiel, besides being of intrinsic value, are 'Judah-centric', that is, they are oriented upon events which took place at home, in Palestine. He thus believes that the chronological notations heading oracles of doom on Egypt correspond with the despatch and subsequent failure of the Egyptian expedition to Judah during the final Babylonian siege of Jerusalem in the spring of 587 BCE (1975:141). In view of Malamat's reasoning against Freedy & Redford (above) and private correspondence with the writer of this thesis with Prof. Kitchen in 1991, the opinion of Malamat will be accepted in the premise of this thesis. Ezekiel's harsh oracle of doom on Jerusalem and its Temple (Ezek. 8-11) should have served to preclude any illusions among the Judaeen leadership as vain, whether in Jerusalem or in exile, which may have been raised by Pharaoh's campaign. The appearance of Psammetichus II in Kharu certainly had diplomatic overtones and undoubtedly fanned the anti-Babylonian sentiments already held by many local rulers, including the King of Judah.

Psammetichus II fell ill in 591 BCE, after his return from his Palestinian expedition. After a lingering, progressively worsening condition he died in February 589 BCE, and was succeeded by his son Hophra (Gr. Apries). Redford (1992:465) believes that if Zedekiah had been chastened by his interrogation in Babylon and the fatal sickness of Psammetichus II, the prospect of the victories of the latter's energetic heir must have quickened his pulse and encouraged him in his last and fateful decision. Redford assumes that probably before the summer of 589 BCE had come to an end, Zedekiah had formally renounced any allegiance to Babylon. He may have reaffirmed at his meeting with Nebuchadnezzar (Freedy & Redford 1970:480, and n.100). The die was cast. In the succeeding months Nebuchadnezzar proved once again that in strategic concept and daring tactics alike he surpassed his contemporaries. Babylon may well have recouped its losses from the rebellion of 595 BCE, but as the Babylonian Chronicle covering the years from 594 BCE has not yet been found it is impossible to say. But it was only after the ambitious Hophra had acceded to the Egyptian throne (in early 589 BCE and not 588 BCE) that Judah openly rebelled, thus goading Babylon to war. Hophra's dash and energy seemed more than to offset any advantage Nebuchadnezzar may have gained.

## **7.6.6 The Judaeen Rebellion and the Fall of Jerusalem**

### **7.6.6.1 Contributing causes to Zedekiah's Revolt**

Two factors must be seen as contributing causes to Zedekiah's revolt:

- a) Nebuchadnezzar apparently had not put in an appearance in Syria-Palestine since 594 BCE. The Babylonian Chronicle reports that in his eleventh year (594-593 BCE) Nebuchadnezzar mustered his army and marched to Hatti; no

details about this western campaign are provided. As we have noted, even prior to this date, Nebuchadnezzar was fairly consistently occupied in the east.

- b) Psammetichus II's triumph in Nubia must have stirred the hopes of Judaeen circles who still believed that Egypt could offer military salvation. Undoubtedly a large portion of the Judaeen leadership held this view. Likewise, the visit of Psammetichus II to Palestine and his "triumphant tour" in the area must have fed the fires of revolt. It is not out of the question that Psammetichus actually may have visited Jerusalem, conferred with Zedekiah and entered into a treaty with him (Miller & Hayes, 1986:413). It cannot be determined when this negotiation took place. It may have been that it was these Egyptian negotiations, therefore, which led to the breaking of Zedekiah's treaty with Babylonia (Ezek. 17:13-21). At any rate, Zedekiah was clearly relying on Egyptian aid in his endeavours. Among the ostraca discovered at the site of Lachish was a letter mentioning the visit to Egypt of Conia son of Elnathan, a general in the Judaeen army (ANET:322, ostrakon III) possibly to conduct negotiations for assistance.

Some time very late in the 590s or early in the 580s, Judah rebelled against Babylon, a move presumably symbolized by Zedekiah's failure to render annual tribute (2 Kgs. 24:20b). The account in 2 Kings offers no explanation for the rebellion, nor does it provide any clues about why the Judaeen political hierarchy thought it had a chance to succeed. In fact, this account moves quickly to the final days of the two-year Babylonian siege of Jerusalem.

In 589 BCE, on the eve of the great invasion of the Babylonian army which was to put an end to the kingdom of Judah, Judah was unprepared politically, militarily and morally to accomplish the great task she had set herself. When the Babylonian army arrived, she saw all her diplomatic achievements, involving military aid from her neighbours, vanish into thin air. The auxiliary troops sent by Egypt in one instance do not alter the fact that Judah was completely abandoned in her war with the mighty Babylonian army. From a military point of view, Judah was less prepared in 589 BCE than ten years previously, when she had at her command strong fortresses, able experienced officers, and military experts and engineers who had since been exiled. Once again we have to ask why Zedekiah did, or, how Zedekiah could, have so utterly misread the situation. Were there expectations of foreign aid, based on empty promises? Or did Egypt present a flair of power that it did not possess? Alternatively, was Zedekiah an inexperienced statesman, hungry after power? One can only imagine the frustration of Jeremiah, who was obliged to watch the catastrophic steps taken by Zedekiah.

When Nebuchadnezzar finally struck in the winter of 589/8 BCE Judah had to stand up singlehanded to the overwhelming might of Babylonia. There were many factors which militated against Judah:

- (i) Diplomatic efforts to achieve an anti-Babylonian bloc had come to nothing and Egyptian support was so minimal that Judah was virtually isolated in her hour of peril (cf Lam. 1:2,7).

- (ii) As stated, Judah was also less capable militarily of withstanding the Babylonian onslaught than she had been a decade earlier, when she had select troops to deploy. It appears that Nebuchadnezzar's deportation of the cream of the army ten years before was now paying dividends.
- (iii) The morale of the nation was undermined by the unresolved issue of: total war with Babylonia or surrender.

Amongst those who opted for surrender were Jeremiah and several military figures, who were convinced of the futility of armed confrontation. Given such prodigious obstacles, Jerusalem's ability to endure so long and so arduous a siege is all the more remarkable. The siege persisted for a year and a half, reckoning Zedekiah's regnal years from Nisan. If we adopt the autumnal Tishri-calendar that Malamat (1968:150ff.) prefers, it lasted a full year longer.

Whereas the books of Kings (2 Kgs. 24:10ff.) and, more significantly, Jeremiah (39) and Ezekiel (8-11) provide detailed accounts of the final struggle of Jerusalem, they do not specify what happened in the rest of Judah. Only an incidental remark is made about two Judaeen cities, Lachish and Azekah, (Tell Zakariyeh), which were in their turn to become battlegrounds, *'for these alone remained of the cities of Judah as fortified cities'* (Jer. 34:7). These words, to be ascribed to the first year of the siege of Jerusalem, prior to the despatch of the Egyptian relief force (when Jeremiah still enjoyed freedom of movement and retained a flicker of hope for Zedekiah; Jer. 34:1-5; 21-22), testify to the speed with which the Babylonians had overrun Judah, except for these two cities, which managed to maintain communication lines to the capital from the south-west. The lack of Biblical data for the rest of the country is offset to some extent, however, by archaeological and Hebrew epigraphical evidence from several Judaeen sites, which highlight the drama of the close of the First Temple period.

Miller & Hayes (1986:413) observe that no evidence exists to suggest that Judah's uprising was coordinated with any country other than Egypt. Neither does there appear to have been any broad move of insurrection against Babylonia in Syria-Palestine at the time or a united anti-Babylonian front in Judah. Of the other states in the region, only Ammon (see Ezek. 21:18-23) and Tyre, which was subsequently placed under a 13-year siege by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezek. 26-28; 29:17-20), rebelled. Likewise, elements of the population, including Jeremiah and his followers and associates, strongly opposed rebellion. One of the Lachish ostraca can be interpreted to suggest that there was dissension and tension even in the military over the best attitude to take toward Babylonia (ANET:322, ostrakon VI).

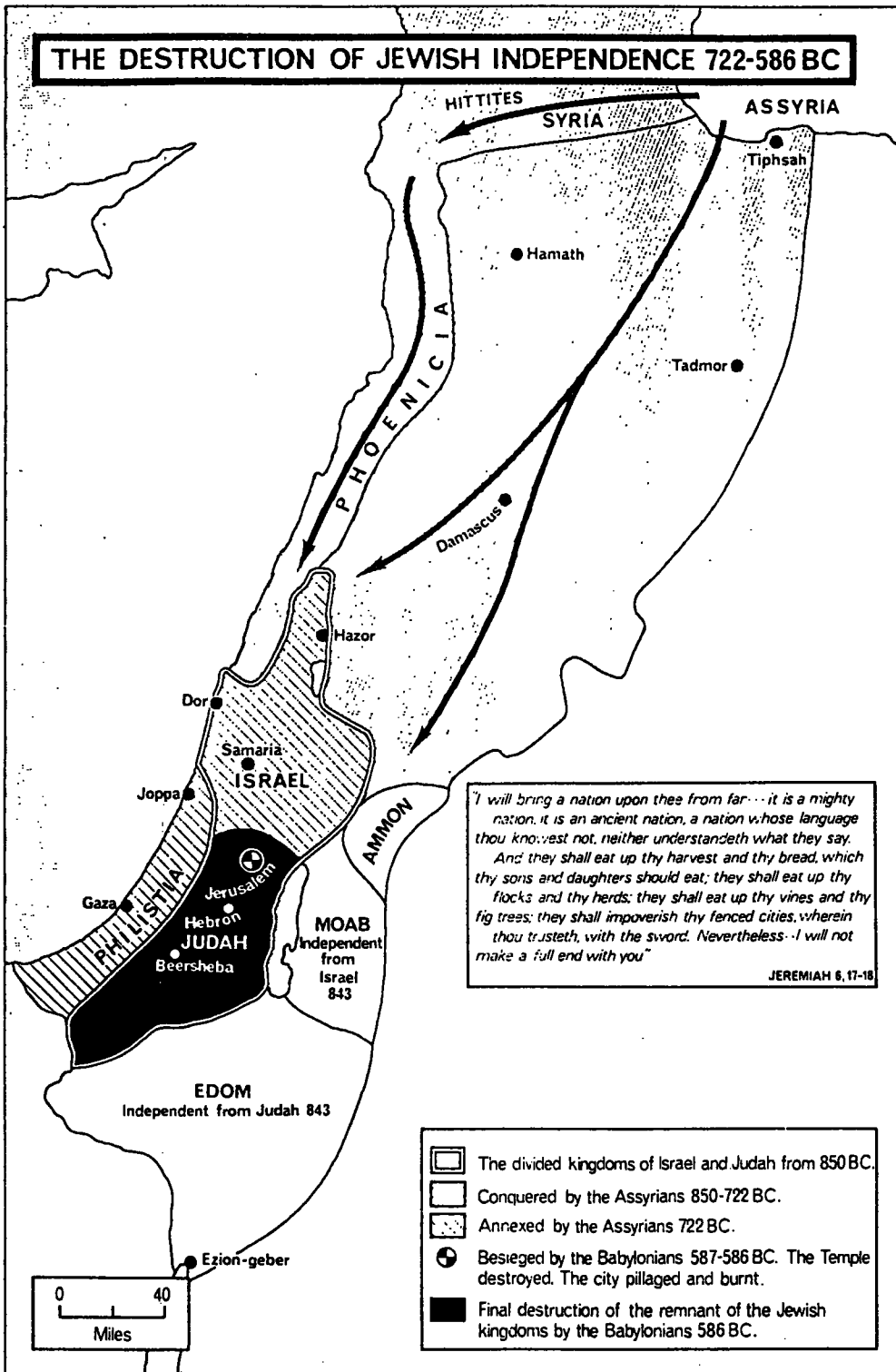
It was probably in the late autumn of 589/8 BCE that Nebuchadnezzar made his move. The Babylonian forces marched to central Syria, and Nebuchadnezzar set up his headquarters at Riblah (cf. Jer. 39:5), from where he intended to direct operations. The army was divided, one column dispatched to Lebanon to counter Hophra's move along the coast, and the other sent to invest Jerusalem to destroy once and for all Egypt's buffer on its northeast border (see Freedy & Redford 1970:481 ff.; and Miller & Hayes 1986:472ff.). Nebuchadnezzar's efforts were indecisive along the

Phoenician coast. Although he claimed to have rid the country of "the enemy" (Egyptians), and to have brought timber for construction work in Babylon, he was forced to lay siege to Tyre, an action that tied down part of his forces in a protracted and fruitless investment (see Josephus *Contra Apionem* 1,21; ANET:2, 307). Moreover, Hophra's fleet could operate at will along the coast and bring aid to the beleaguered city.

The expeditionary force sent to Judah seems at first to have experienced equally slow going. Zedekiah was able to send word to Egypt before the Babylonian forces closed in and surrounded the city in January 588 BCE. The Lachish Ostraca provide a vivid picture of the confusion and despair that attended the event.

While the siege of the city was under way, Hophra (589-570 BCE) the new Egyptian pharaoh, sent an Egyptian army into Palestine, causing the Babylonians to lift the siege temporarily (Jer. 37:1-10). It is impossible to know how seriously Hophra took his commitment to Judah. Classical sources note that he fought against Tyre and Sidon and defeated the armies of Cyprus and Phoenicia (Herod. 2,161). This would suggest that Hophra was more concerned with naval exploits and Mediterranean trade than with aiding landlocked Judah (Miller & Hayes 1986:413,4).

The Babylonian forces quickly withdrew from Jerusalem and sped westward into the coastal plain. Their march was apparently so swift and their front so intimidating that Hophra, with the limited number of troops he had brought, saw neither the opportunity of marching up-country to Jerusalem, nor any realistic chance of overcoming the enemy in an open battle. The Egyptians withdrew "ignominiously", according to Redford (1992:466). The opinion of this thesis, however, suggests this might have been a sagacious and self-preserving tactic. City after city in the Shephelah capitulated, until only Lachish and Azekah remained to hold out, and the Babylonians resumed their siege of the capital. Jerusalem's fate was sealed. The prophetic outbursts became shrill and the optimists were gone.





### 7.6.6.2 The Siege of Jerusalem

Adopting a Tishri-calendar for the regnal year in Judah, the siege of Jerusalem started on 10 Tebeth, in Zedekiah's ninth regnal year (2 Kgs. 25:1; Jer. 52:4; Ezek. 24:1-2), and ended with the Destruction of the Temple on 7 (or, according to another version, 10) Ab, the eleventh year of the king of Judah and the nineteenth of Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kgs. 25:8-9; Jer. 52:12). In absolute dates, the siege lasted from 15 January 599 BCE until 14/17 August, 586 BCE. The book of Kings focuses only on the final phase of the battle of Jerusalem and the destruction of the city (2 Kgs. 25:1-22; Jer. 52:4-27), but many details of the actual course of the siege can be gleaned from the prophecies of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

Faced with the enemy's threat, the king of Judah sent envoys to Egypt in order to enlist military aid, especially chariotry, as Ezekiel recounts (17:15) and possibly one of the Lachish letters ("*the commander of the army, Coniah, son of Elnathan had come down in order to go to Egypt*", Ostrakon no.3, lines 14ff.). Though the Pharaoh was slow to respond, an Egyptian relief force did in fact compel the Babylonians to raise the siege of Jerusalem temporarily (Jer. 37:5; 11). This "relief" probably only served to lengthen the Babylonian siege and the final destruction of Jerusalem. Nonetheless, this temporary relief led to a false sense of security in the capital, which Jeremiah quickly warned against (Jer. 38:2,3). The citizens went so far as to renege on the covenant made early in the siege for the manumission of slaves, an extreme measure probably intended to reinforce the city's potential defensive power (Jer. 34, esp. vv 21-22; see too Malamat 1968:152f.). The Egyptian task force, however, was too frail to be of any real consequence (Ezek. 17:17; 30:20-26; cf. Lam. 4:17). Ezekiel's prophecies of doom concerning Egypt (Ezek. 29), headed by chronological superscriptions, imply that the abortive Egyptian operation took place in the spring of 587 BCE. Hophra's intervention occurred, therefore, only a year after the investment of Jerusalem; but even though it failed and the noose was newly tightened around the capital, the city's staunch defenders were able to hold out for more than a year.

Although the military was committed to carrying on the war and treated dissidents as traitors (cf. Jer. 38:4; ANET:2, 322), there was now no real hope unless Egypt would venture to try again. The Transjordan states were much too small to provide effective help (which proves the premise this thesis has conjectured on the efficacy of small states in a major power confrontation), although they did offer sanctuary to fugitives from Judaea (see Jer. 40:11 and Noth 1959:292). In the final act of the unfolding drama they stood aloof. Zedekiah in desperation manumitted all the slaves, probably to raise new levies (Malamat 1968:153 dates the manumission before Hophra's countermove), and consulted Jeremiah for political advice. But to no avail. Large numbers of the population continued to defect to the Babylonians, and as time passed famine and plague gripped Jerusalem. When the Egyptian diversion was ended, the Babylonians once again tightened the siege of Jerusalem, at the same time presumably moving to occupy the strategic points of the kingdom. It seems that, apart from Jerusalem, the best defended cities in Judah were Azekah, about 30 km to the south-

west, and Lachish, some 20 km further off. This is suggested by the statement of Jeremiah that toward the end of Zedekiah's resistance only these two cities remained untaken among the strongholds of the kingdom (Jer. 34:6-7). This situation is partially illustrated by a group of inscribed ostraca, found in or near a side chamber of the main gate at Lachish, in a burnt layer associated with the final destruction of level II in 586 BCE.

Because the battle of Jerusalem was such a formidable challenge to Nebuchadnezzar, he enlisted his best commanders (Jer. 39:3,13) who, years later, served in high positions in the Babylonian empire (such as Nergal-Sarezzar, who was to become king of Babylon, if only briefly). He also employed the most advanced techniques of siege-warfare of his day, throwing dykes around the city, raising ramps up to the walls, and using battering rams to breach the walls (2 Kgs. 25:1; Jer. 32:24; 33:4; Ezek. 4:1-2; 17:17; 21:27). The historical corpus of Mesopotamia texts has long familiarized us with the sophisticated siege equipment the Assyrians and Babylonians could bring to bear on a city; and these techniques employing towers, siege mounds and battering rams had long since passed to the west, as the Piankhy stela indicates. We may well imagine that in the spring of 586 BCE mounds began to rise against Jerusalem's walls, probably on the north or west (perhaps both). Here the lie of the land beyond the fortifications was not precipitous, thus favouring the attack of siege engines. Despite all these sophisticated siege techniques, the Bible implies that the major cause of the fall of the city was the devastating famine which plagued the inhabitants (2 Kgs. 25:3; Jer. 52:6 and cf. Jer. 37:21; Ezek. 5:10; Lam. 4:4-10), whose number was probably swollen early in the Babylonian invasion by refugees from the countryside who sought safety within the capital. The end came some eighteen months into the renewed siege. Aided by famine, which weakened the defenders, the Babylonians launched a concerted attack in the summer months, perhaps in the vicinity of the reservoirs later to become the pool of Bethesda, north of the temple and palace. (On the hasty quarrying and defenses thrown up by the defenders of the city on the north and west, see Tushingham 1979:53-54).

Finally on the ninth day of the fourth month of Tammuz in Zedekiah's eleventh regnal year (18 July, 586 BCE), the wall of Jerusalem was breached (Jer. 39:2; 52:507; and, the month omitted, 2 Kgs. 25:3-4), probably on its northern side, topographically the most vulnerable flank of the city. Penetration of the city from this direction is also implied by Zedekiah's position at the Gate of Benjamin during a critical stage of the siege (Jer. 38:7) and by the gathering of the Babylonian officers upon the breach of the wall at the 'Middle Gate', both in the north of the city. During the daylight hours of July 18 the wall was breached and the attackers entered the city, the Babylonian command immediately occupying the 'Middle Gate'. The defenses collapsed, and the Judaeen government disintegrated. This, according to the Babylonian calendar, and assuming Zedekiah's first full year to have begun in Nisan 596, would have been on 18 July 586 BCE (Dates from CAH Vol. III, 1991:407, confirmed by Malamat in all cases).

Some of Jerusalem's inhabitants in fact had yielded to the enemy during the final year of the siege, and these deserters are probably among the 832 captives listed in Jeremiah 52:29 as exiled "from Jerusalem" in Nebuchadnezzar's eighteenth regnal year, while the city was still under siege. Analogous to the exile under Jehoiachin, this small-scale deportation may reflect a preliminary wave, followed after the fall of Jerusalem by a mass exile in Nebuchadnezzar's nineteenth year (2 Kgs. 25:8; Jer. 52:12). Although the Bible does not mention the total number of deportees, it does suggest a multitude: "*now the rest of the people that were left in the city...with the remnant of the multitude did Nebuzaradan...carry away*" (2 Kgs. 25:11; Jer. 39:9; 52:15). Among the captives were the higher officialdom, high priesthood, and the army command, whose punishment was far more severe than it had been in the days of Jehoiachin, for they were executed at Riblah, Nebuchadnezzar's headquarters in central Syria (2 Kgs. 25:18-21; Jer. 39:6; 52:10; 24-27; Malamat 1979:219,20).

Under cover of darkness Zedekiah and his retinue fled through the southern accesses of the city, by way of the King's Gardens near the Siloam Pool, in an attempt to escape to Transjordan. That same night the king, his family and remnants of the army fled via the gate of the south of the original City of David into the Kidron Valley, and thence into the Judaeen desert. They did not make for Egypt: every avenue of access to the Sinai was cut off. Instead they made for the Jordan valley and the hills of Ammon beyond, where Ba'alis, the Ammonite king would undoubtedly have offered refuge. But it was not to be. The Babylonians pursued the royal party, capturing them near Jericho, and transported them to Nebuchadnezzar's headquarters in Syria. There Zedekiah was blinded and his family executed. One month later Jerusalem went up in flames and its population and wealth carried captive. The writer of this thesis would venture the comment that Zedekiah's physical blindness paralleled the metaphorical blindness that plagued him all along.

#### **7.6.7 Destruction of the Temple**

An interim administration was established until Nebuchadnezzar in Riblah gave instructions. About a month later Nebuchadnezzar sent one of his senior officers, Nebuzaradan, to Jerusalem to complete the neutralization of the city. This officer is said to have burned down the Temple, the royal palace, and 'all the houses' of Jerusalem, and to have broken down the walls round the city (2 Kgs. 25:8-12; Jer. 39:8-10; 52:12-14; 2 Chron. 36:19-21). Nebuzaradan is said also to have removed the cultic equipment to Babylon, some of it in the form of scrap metal, and a quantity of gold and silver (2 Kgs. 25:13-17; Jer. 52:17-23). He is said moreover, by CAH Vol. III (1991:408), to have arranged further deportations, amounting to the 832 souls who had remained in the city, and also of the remaining skilled workers or artisans.

Tangible evidence of the catastrophe which befell Jerusalem has been disclosed by the archaeological excavations both in the Upper City and on the eastern slopes of the southeastern hill of Jerusalem, where traces of once-demolished buildings have been uncovered. The destruction in the latter region was so all-encompassing that

Nehemiah, a century and a half later, was forced to abandon the ruins and leave the ravaged area outside his newly erected city wall (cf. Neh. 2: 12-14). In the Upper City, at the northern defense line (south of the Street of the Chain), the burnt remains at the foot of a tower and finds of several arrowheads point to the violent battle with the Babylonians, who had attempted to break through from this direction. It should be noted, however, that a significant remnant must have remained, if we read Ezra-Nehemiah correctly.

Nothing is known what happened to the Ark of the Covenant. In the absence of better evidence, the most likely reconstruction remains is that Manasseh removed the Ark from the Temple, Josiah replaced it, and it stayed there until it was removed by the Babylonians in 586 BCE and was perhaps broken up for the sake of the gold with which it was overlaid and decorated.

The fact that the children of Ammon were in open revolt against Babylon at the same time sheds a new light on some facts. First of all, it makes some sense of Zedekiah's flight *'by the way of the Arabah'* or Jordan valley, when Jerusalem became untenable (2 Kgs. 25:4-5; Jer. 39:4-5; 52:7-8). Once over the Jordan River he would be on Ammonite soil, where, in modern parlance, he could set up a Jewish Government-in-Exile. He was overtaken in the plains of Jericho, before he could ford the stream. But another scion of the house of David, *"Ishmael son of Nethaniah, son of Elishama, of the royal seed and (of) the magnates of the king"* (Jer. 41:1), did find refuge with Ba'alis, the king of the children of Ammon. Ginsberg (1950:366) regards it is the most natural thing in the world that the king of the still unoccupied rebel country should have encouraged the pretender to the throne of the occupied one, to assassinate Gedaliah, the collaborationist governor, as well as the Chaldaean officials or soldiers whom the conquerors had stationed at Mizpah, and anybody suspected of sympathising with Gedaliah (Jer. 40:1-41:10). In his view Ishmael was a mere hireling, or was only gratifying a petty jealousy of Gedaliah, without any hope of restoring the Davidic kingdom. This thesis would further concur with Ginsberg (1950:367) "that Ba'alis (like modern commentators) was so silly as to think that Nebuchadnezzar would only punish Ishmael and his countrymen but would reward Ishmael's instigator and the latter's countrymen with a slice of Judah - *credat Judaeus Apella*" (tr: "only the Jew [or let the Jew] would believe this!")

It is tempting to theorise that had the Jewish leaders in Gedaliah's entourage followed the advice of Jeremiah 40 and stayed put, another Judaeian might have been appointed in Gedaliah's stead, and some sort of autonomous Jewish community might have survived in Palestine. However, the group around Mizpah migrated instead to Egypt. Consequently we only hear of a punitive measure, which was inevitable after Ishmael's anti-Chaldaean exploit, but not of subsequent gestures of conciliation on the part of the Babylonians. The punitive measure in question is the deportation of the year 582 BCE (Jer. 52:30). It may have followed very shortly upon the offense, since we are not told in what year Ishmael committed it (but only the month - Jer. 41:1). For all we know, some of the Judaeian sites which archaeological exploration has found to

have been abandoned ca. 600 BCE, were only depopulated at this time (not already in 587 BCE).

#### 7.6.7.1 Lachish Ostraca

The most significant collection of Hebrew documents for this period are the ostraca from Lachish, Level II and Arad, Level VI. The Lachish ostraca are mainly letters (or copies thereof) dispatched to Joash, apparently the last commander of the city's garrison. Since they were found in the destruction layer of the city-gate, they can be dated to the eve of the fall of Lachish. Malamat notes (1979:216) that although the letters do not explicitly mention the Babylonian invasion, they do attest the "feverish activity" in the southwestern part of the country - urgent orders, inspection of military guards, and installation of communication signal systems. Like the Bible, they also reflect the opposition and tension between activist leadership in the capital and the army in the outlying districts, as well as some prophets, who advocated appeasement, thus creating a situation destined *'to weaken the hands of the soldiers...and the hands of the nation'* (Ostrakon no.6, line 6; cf. Jer. 38:4). These documents record a relatively early stage of the war, when the central government and high command in Jerusalem were still in full control of the situation, the military services were functioning normally, and communication between the capital and the southwestern front was still intact. Another letter, however, attests a genuine state of emergency and might have been written after the fall of Azekah (Ostrakon no.4, lines 10-13).

However, the fact remains that the Babylonian, as well as the Biblical sources, know of no other city being taken by siege at this time (Aharoni 1975:59). We can cite the destruction of Ashkelon in 604 BCE and the evidence of conquest of other places in 603 BCE, as well as the conquest of Jerusalem itself. If the Babylonian army had conducted a major siege against Lachish during *any* year covered by the Chronicle texts, adds Aharoni, we would expect that the fact would be recorded. The bald fact, however, is that from ca. 594 BCE till the fall of Judah under Zedekiah, we have no clear testimony about what was going on in the Levant. Aharoni, therefore, believes it is impossible that such a destruction of Lachish during the reign of Zedekiah could possibly have occurred without the slightest hint from Biblical records. He does not believe this is merely an argument from silence; we are aware there was a great deal of political turmoil at this time. In spite of his vacillations under the influence of the pro-Egyptian party Zedekiah had somehow managed to maintain his vassal relationship with Babylon intact until the eve of the final debacle. For the devastation of Lachish in 587 BCE we have Stratum II with its Lachish letters. In concurrence with Aharoni this thesis believes it would have been impossible, if Lachish was destroyed in 597 BCE, for the depleted kingdom of Judah under Zedekiah to have accumulated the resources to rebuild such an impressive scale by Stratum II in such a short time. The Egyptians weren't in the habit of providing Judah that kind of logistic aid, and anybody familiar with the Biblical record of Zedekiah's reign must regard the possibility that he might have mustered the strength in manpower and supplies for such a project as being beyond comprehension.

#### 7.6.7.2 Transjordan and Edom

It should be noted that archaeological exploration has established that Transjordan was also largely depopulated in the sixth century BCE and, with the apparent exception of Edomite Elath, very early in the sixth century BCE. Not only that, but again with the exception of Elath, (Ginsberg 1950:368) sedentary occupation of Transjordan south of the Jabbok was almost completely interrupted from the early sixth to the early third centuries BCE. In other words, the Arabs of the desert to the east, who are known from Ashurbanipal's annals to have attempted to overrun Transjordan around the middle of the seventh century BCE, succeeded in doing so early in the sixth. By virtue of the Jewish deportations in 587 and 582 BCE, (undoubtedly by Nebuzaradan) a vacuum was created in Transjordan through devastating punitive action, and in effect sucked the people of the east into the land of Ammon and its neighbours. It is well known that the steady penetration of the Negev by Edomites was due, at least in part, to Arab pressure in their rear. But Bartlett (1982:15) suggests this penetration is exaggerated, and feels the settlement of Edomites west of the Wadi Arabah probably took place over several centuries. The Edomites probably had enough in common with tribes of the border country of southern Judah (the Kennites, Jerahmeelites, Kennizites) to make movement and intermarriage easy. Certainly the editor of Genesis 36 could draw on names from this region when compiling his lists of 'Edomite' clans.

Just how sharply the boundary line was drawn between land that was distinctively Judahite, and land that was distinctively Edomite, is not very clear (Bartlett 1982:16). There are probably no sharply defined borders, but rather a border zone in which the population might be mixed, and in which Edomite troops might be expected to operate. That Nebuchadnezzar despatched Chaldaean troops with local Syrian, Ammonite and Moabite reinforcements makes good sense. The Edomites, however, were probably too far south and too inaccessible to be easily available to him. There is no independent evidence of Moabite and Ammonite activity against Judah at this time, though such activity would not be out of keeping with the Ammonite attack on Gadite towns mentioned in Jeremiah 9:1ff. On the basis of what little evidence we have, it seems most likely that the population of the towns and settlements in the border country between Arad and the Beer Sheba region in the late seventh and early sixth centuries BCE was partly Edomite in origin. There is no evidence for any besieging and capturing of cities of the Negev in 597 BCE and 587 BCE, either by the Babylonians or by the Edomites (who would have little interest in destroying places with a partly Edomite population). And further, as Bartlett correctly deduces (1982:18), there is no firm evidence that the Edomites proceeded to settle themselves further north on any great scale the moment Jerusalem fell. It took another two or three hundred years for the region between Arad and Beth-Zur to become known as Idumaea.

**a) Arad Documents and Edom**

Unlike those of Lachish, the documents from the border fortress of Arad are essentially administrative, but found with these were several letters from the archive of Eliashib, son of Oshiahu, probably the fortress commander. They

generally deal with supplying provisions, mostly of the Kittiyim, possibly mercenaries of Greek and Cypriot origin serving in the Judaeen army. A most instructive letter orders, in the name of the king, the urgent dispatch of soldiers to the Edomite border to forestall an expected enemy invasion. Although an Edomite attack on Judah could easily have coincided with the Transjordanian incursions just before the first Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in 598/7 BCE, such an attack is more readily understandable in the context of the last Babylonian war. It also seems that the repeated wrath against Edom in Biblical books was caused by the Edomite role in the final destruction of the Judaeen kingdom (cf. Jer. 49:7-22; Ezek. 25:12-14; Obad. 1:10-14; Joel 4:10; Ps. 137:7; Lam. 4:21-22). Myers (1971:386) cautiously suggests that the Edomites might have rendered some assistance, directly or indirectly, to the Babylonian invaders, whilst Bright (1981:329) speaks of the Edomites finally coming in on the Babylonian side. Cresson (1972:143) goes further and states categorically that the Edomites participated with a vindictiveness and fury in the 587 BCE destruction of Jerusalem. Historical evidence makes it difficult to explain the intense hatred of the Jews for Edom unless the Edomites did actively participate in the destruction of the Temple. However, in concurrence with Bartlett (1982:23) this thesis believes that Edom has probably been falsely maligned in the Bible. See, for example, Lamentations 4:21: "*...O daughter of Edom, he will punish, he will uncover your sins*"; and similarly Isaiah 34 which lyricises over the sword which will descend in judgement upon Edom - but there is no mention of Edom's crimes. Joel 4:19 declares:

*"Egypt shall become a desolation  
and Edom a desolate wilderness,  
for the violence done to the people of Judah"*

But both Egypt and Edom were traditional enemies, and earlier prophecies about the day of YHWH (for Egypt, cf. Ezek. 29:10,12; 32:15; and for Edom, Ezek. 35:3,4,7,9,14,15) why Edom took revenge and how grievously acted against Judah are not specified. Two Kings 2:12-14 talks of the gloating, rejoicing and boasting of Edom, but they refer more to the attitude of Edom, rather than actual actions. The roots of Judah's hatred for Edom go back to the monarchic period; the Davidic conquest of Edom and Edom's later successful fight for independence left a legacy of bitterness, which turned Edom into the archetypal enemy of Judah. When Judah fell to the Babylonians, while Edom remained unscathed, it was inevitable that Edom should come in for harsh language. And naturally, such an enemy on Judah's borders, which coveted the land, would gloat over Judah's distress, kill fugitives, join in the looting and eventually be blamed for the most painful catastrophe of all, the burning of the Temple (Bartlett 1982:23). In point of fact the only firm piece of evidence is that some Judaeen refugees found sanctuary in Edom.

### 7.6.7.3 Archaeological Evidence

The outcome of the final struggle with the Babylonians, and the extent of the devastation of Judah, are vividly illuminated by the archaeological excavations. While these excavations demonstrate that most of the fortress cities had begun to decline in an earlier era, there is unequivocal evidence that numerous sites in various parts of Judah were totally destroyed at the very end of the First Temple Period: Lachish, Tell Beit Mirsim, Beth-Shemesh and Gezer on the border of the western slopes of the hill country and the Shephelah; Beth-Zur, Khirbet Rabud (apparently the site of Debir), Ramat Rahel, and, above all, Jerusalem in the mountain region. Apparently Arad, Tel Malhata and Tel Masos on the southern fringes, even remote En-Gedi on the Dead Sea were not spared. Thrust into the city walls of En-Gedi were packs of arrows of the type used by the Babylonian army, living proof of the fierce battles this site had witnessed (Malamat 1979:217).

Totally different, however, was the situation north of Jerusalem, where the Benjaminites settlements seemed to have fared much better. Malamat (1979:352,n.40 and 1950:226f.) presumes that the district of Benjamin surrendered to the Babylonians and was thereby spared destruction. It has long been doubtful whether the archaeological evidence from Bethel and Mizpah (Tell en-Nasbeh) means that these places were destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar rather than at the end of the sixth or the beginning of the fifth century BCE. This may also apply to Ramah, headquarters of Nebuzaradan, the Babylonian commander during the final phase of the siege of Jerusalem, and a way-station for Judaeans going into exile after the fall of their capital (Jer. 40:1).

### 7.6.7.4 Mizpah

Whichever the case, after the destruction of the kingdom this area became the center of the remaining population, with Mizpah the seat of Gedaliah, the Babylonian-appointed governor of Judah (cf. Neh. 3:7 on the continuation of Mizpah as the governor's seat right into the Persian period). An incident involving the prophet Jeremiah is instructive. During a temporary pause in the siege of Jerusalem, because an Egyptian relief force had arrived, the prophet, probably not unlike other inhabitants of the capital, tried to make his way to the land of Benjamin. Since Benjamin might by then have been under Babylonian control, such a move was bound to be called desertion to the enemy, exactly the accusation made against Jeremiah by the officer in charge of the Gate of Benjamin: *'You are deserting to the Chaldeans'* (Jer. 37:11ff.).

The list of exiles returning from Babylonia (Ezra 2:21-35; Neh. 7:25-31) provides further evidence that Benjamin escaped destruction. According to the list, the first returnees settled mainly in Benjaminites towns, which indicates that they were not in ruins. Malamat (1979:218) believes special attention should be paid to the three Benjaminites cities listed in the Shephelah: Lod, Hadid and Ono. Situated as they were near the *Via Maris*, the vital route used by the Babylonian forces, they had no chance whatever to withstand the enemy and probably surrendered without a struggle. Besides Benjamin, the only localities mentioned in the list are the cities of Bethlehem



and Netophah. As for the latter, it is of particular interest that the only army officers to join Gedaliah in Mizpah, whose place of origin is stated explicitly : Seriah son of Tanhumeth and the sons of Ephai and their men who are all from Netophah (2 Kgs. 25:23; Jer. 40:8). From this we can conclude that the Judaeen army in this area had not been completely disbanded nor exiled to Babylon. The same may perhaps be said for Bethlehem, which apparently was not depopulated and after the Destruction of Jerusalem continued to be an important transit station on the road to Egypt (Jer. 41:17). There thus remained throughout Judah proper population pockets neither destroyed nor destined for exile.

Unlike the testimony like that of Josephus' *Wars*, along with the Massada discoveries and the Judaeen Desert cave material, which illuminate the end of the Second Commonwealth and the Bar Kochba Revolt, we may never know the whole dramatic story of the tribulations of the rebels and refugees after the fall of Jerusalem. Instead, Jeremiah 40 presents us with the epilogue to the catastrophe, allowing us to glance at the surviving population gathered around Gedaliah, son of Ahikam, who tried to restore the last vestiges of the community. But the assassination of Gedaliah and the annihilation of the Babylonian garrison at Mizpah (Jer. 41: 3) shattered all hope of a resurgence of the Jewish community from within. Now the aspiration and yearning for national revival turned toward the Jewish diaspora in Babylonia.

Tragically, with the conquest of Jerusalem and the cessation of the Davidic monarchy, Judah was divested of her polity, but the drama had not yet come to a close. Surviving remnants of the army and populace sought sanctuary across the Jordan River (Jer. 40: 11), or possibly in hideouts and caves in the hills and wilderness of Judah, as happened in the events surrounding the Destruction of the Second Temple. Epigraphical and archaeological discoveries and Biblical evidence give support about this suggestion. Such refugees, seeking shelter from the enemy, might well have left behind the Hebrew graffiti in a cave near Khirbet Beit-Lei, east of Lachish, where the names of Judah and Jerusalem appear with words of prayer. The pottery and a Hebrew papyrus discovered in the caves at Wadi Muraba'at near the Dead Sea, indicate that the fugitives found refuge not only at the end of the Second Temple Period, but also during the seventh, and apparently, the beginning of the sixth century BCE. It has been observed that in the Wadi-ed-Daliyeh caves northeast of Ramallah, several potsherds from Late Iron Age II, alongside papyri from the end of the Persian period, were discovered, dating to about the time of the Destruction of the First Temple. Perhaps they hint of the final tragedy discovered.

## 7.7 CONCLUSION

The summer and autumn of 609 BCE were days of turmoil in Judah. As has been noted several factors were in Judah's favour:

- a) Pharaoh Necho II, recently enthroned, was not yet experienced;

- b) The Egyptian army was far from its base when the Judaeans launched their surprise attack near Megiddo. Being far away from the Egyptian army should have given Judah the advantage.
- c) A crucial factor, generally overlooked, is that only a half year previously the Egyptians had sustained a setback in the Euphrates region by the up-and-coming Babylonians. This is a rare example of bold military initiative taken by a relatively small state, Judah, against the army of the biggest power of the day, the 26th dynasty of Egypt. This thesis agrees with Malamat (1990:68) that, if correct, this could mean in these circumstances, there wasn't a battle, but another reason for the fatal encounter.

The Egyptians remained in Palestine, receiving tribute from Judah (2 Kgs. 23:35) and also in Syria. Egypt now controlled the entire region west of the Euphrates, or, "*from the Brook of Egypt unto the river Euphrates, all that pertained to the king of Egypt*" (2 Kgs. 24:7). But its hegemony was short-lived. In 607 BCE, when the Babylonians attempted to seize the western bank of the Euphrates, they were repelled by the Carchemish-based Egyptians, but in 605 BCE Nebuchadnezzar, while still heir-apparent, defeated the Egyptians in the famous battle of Carchemish, and routed the remnants of their forces in the land of Hamath. This battle, which resounds in the prophecies of Jeremiah 46:2-12, and in Josephus (Ant. X, vi. I; xi, I), as well as in Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian Chronicle, determined the future of Syria and Palestine. The Babylonian Chronicle 4 (A 25, 19, 97-8) states that in 606 BCE Nabopolassar had an encounter with them on the Euphrates, and that at the beginning of 605 BCE they defeated the Babylonian garrison at Quramati, probably on the great bend of the Euphrates. This action seems to have prompted the energetic crown prince, Nebuchadnezzar, to muster the Babylonian army and, leaving his father in Babylon, to lead a punitive campaign to the west, where he defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish, and the fleeing remnant at Hamath. Nebuchadnezzar's military operations were interrupted by the death of Nabopolassar, but after he had assumed the throne in Babylon, he returned in the autumn and 'marched about victoriously in Khatti', finally returning with booty to Babylon in early 604 BCE. 'Khatti' was not a precise term, referring in the 1st millennium mainly to north Syria, but the fact that later in this document is treated as including Judah suggests that Nebuchadnezzar's victorious march may have extended into Palestine.

Undoubtedly the duality of kingship during the last decade of the First Temple Period caused dissension in Judah, creating factions, of which one supported Zedekiah and the other, Jehoiachin, as the legitimate ruler, with the hope of his return to power. The question of legitimacy of royal succession seems to have been a bone of contention between the "true" and "false" prophets in the overall political and ideological controversy over relations with Babylonia, which raged within the prophetic circles.

Beyond the ideological controversy, however, the fact that Zedekiah ruled under foreign tutelage, contrary to the natural succession (unlike his step-brother Jehoiakim), and the threat of an alternative represented by Jehoiachin, bespoke

pressure on Judah's last king and restricted his ability to manoeuvre. In addition, according to Malamat (1979:214) the king's vacillating personality reduced him to hardly more than a puppet in the hands of his own ministers, as he himself confesses: *'for the king can do nothing against you'* (Jer. 38:5). This explains Zedekiah's paradoxical conduct in rebelling against the very power by whose grace he ruled Judah; by repudiating his own interests he nailed down his own coffin and that of his kingdom.

The leaders of Judah nonetheless failed to understand, either then or later, the shift in the balance of power on the international scene, and adopted a high-risk policy, with fatal consequences. In contrast Jeremiah had no shred of doubt. He was a man of stature and was gifted with prescience and historical insight. Shortly after the battle of Carchemish, the prophet was already expressing his stern belief that Nebuchadnezzar would rule over Judah and all of Hither Asia (Jer. 25:1-14). For him, the salvation of the nation lay solely in voluntary submission to Babylonia, a belief to which he clung until the end (Jer. 21:8-9; 38:2ff.). How tragic for Jeremiah that he was forced to spend his final days in Egypt!

If we consider then the foreign policy of the two final decades of the Kingdom of Judah it becomes abundantly clear that at this junction Judah's plight was extreme:

- (i) Politically, her diplomatic efforts to achieve an anti-Babylonian front had collapsed, and the frailty of Egyptian support left her virtually isolated.
- (ii) Militarily, the Babylonian subjugation a decade earlier had deprived her of the cream of her fighting potential.
- (iii) Internally, the nation was divided over the dilemma of facing Babylon or giving in to fate.

But the stand of the political leadership, which had inevitably drawn Nebuchadnezzar to the gates of Jerusalem once again, now spurred the remarkable resistance which enabled the city to withstand the two and a half years of siege prior to its fall. In the final analysis, the policy advocated by the 'true' Prophets, Jeremiah and Ezekiel, could have steered Judah clear of the maelstrom which, as we know, did engulf her.

## **CHAPTER 8**

### **CONCLUSION**

#### **8.1 INTRODUCTION**

It is hoped that this thesis has satisfied Elton's criteria stated in the first chapter: that it has been honest and exhaustive, and has asked (and answered) the correct questions in the contextual problems.

It is likewise hoped that several myths have been dispelled, among others that empires like Assyria could imagine to exist forever; that cult aberrations in Judah were imposed by imperial decree; and that Egypt's aims were belligerent, not peaceful and commercial.

#### **8.2 CHAPTER 2 - JUDAH AND HER NEIGHBOURS: THE GEOPOLITICAL REALITIES**

In Chapter 2 the aim was to place Judah within the global context within that period. Although, as has been demonstrated, 689-627 BCE is characterised as a period of political weakness and disunity in Babylonia, at a time when the land was dominated by its northern neighbour, Assyria, it was also a period of internal vigour and a turning point in Babylonia's existence. This led to the founding of the Neo-Babylonian kingdom of Nabopolassar. The leaders of Judah failed to understand the shift in the balance of power on the international scene, and from 609 BCE adopted a high-risk policy, with fatal consequences. Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Egypt was the zenith of Babylon power in the Levant, and the nadir of kingship in the Saite Period of Egypt.

#### **8.3 ROLE OF THE MONARCHY**

This thesis has endeavoured to trace in Chapters 3-6 how the monarchy came to dominate the social life of the nation. The commanding social role of the monarchy in the economic and cultural life of the people was discussed and analysed. While it was not an initial aim it became clear that economically the monarchy shifted the decentralised subsistence agriculture toward surplus production for the support of the monarchy. Culturally, the monarchy legitimated its social role through an official cult which presented the king as the divinely chosen earthly representative of YHWH, the true owner of the land and sovereign of the people. The social dominance of the monarchy carried a high price, however.

### **8.3.1 Chapter 3 - Manasseh**

In Chapter 3 the reprobate King Manasseh was analysed. It is tolerably certain that religious standards never fell so low as in the days of Manasseh and his short-lived son, Amon. However, the fact that we know of no prophetic activity in Manasseh's reign allows us to conclude that there were no major crises, nor any real options in foreign policy to preach about.

This thesis believes that the historical traditions of Manasseh that were known to the composers of the Biblical works of history, must have censored and shortened them drastically, in order to justify his success as a king and his long rule, the longest of all the Judaeen kings. The thesis has showed how the Biblical author succeeded in uniting both the theme of idolatry by Manasseh, and the disobedience of the people, and so succeeded in smoothing away the problem that Judah, rather than Manasseh, would pay the penalty for the king's idolatry. After the death of Manasseh the possibilities of rebellion began to re-awaken.

### **8.3.2 Chapter 4 - Amon**

The laconic report of a major crisis in the history of Judah has given rise to much scholarly debate as to the background of the murder of the king. Current opinion favours viewing this episode as an attempt against Ashurbanipal by anti-Assyrian elements, with the 'people of the land' representing those forces who wished to prevent a military encounter with Assyria. Amon's yielding to the foreign cult shows his submissiveness to the Assyrian rule, and it is therefore possible to conjecture that the Egyptians urged the conspirators to murder the pro-Assyrian king. This thesis believes that as matters stand at present, the reasons for Amon's murder remain elusive, and the question should, therefore, be left open.

### **8.3.3 Chapter 5 - Josiah**

Josiah is the only monarch who meets the requirements for a righteous monarch as defined in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. He commenced his reign in a world in which Egypt was beginning consciously to reassert its hegemony in the traditional regions of its interest along the Levantine coast. In subsequent years Egypt occupied itself with reinforcing its status in the evacuated regions and with military assistance to Assyria. Consequently, therefore, Judah enjoyed a good measure of independence, despite being formally subordinate to Egypt.

The author of the Book of Kings emphasised the scope of Josiah's actions in the fields of religion and cult, which won him an unprecedented favourable evaluation. Without doubt the years of Josiah's reign constitute an important starting point for the study of developments in Jewish religion, cult, law and literature, and have therefore gained the attention of a considerable number of scholars, starting in the earliest days of Biblical research. The scarcity of Biblical data invited a wide variety of opinions concerning the extent of the kingdom, its internal structure, economy, etc. Therefore the thesis offered many scholarly opinions, in order to present a balanced viewpoint. A paucity of information cannot, however, be automatically and artificially assumed

that there was a 'conspiracy' by the Biblical redactors. And a lack of archaeological evidence does not mean evidence of lack.

Josiah's political, military and economic weakness can be fully explained by the disastrous results of Sennacherib's campaign of 701 BCE. The thesis believes that the significance of "**his eighteenth year**" has been adequately demonstrated.

The thesis has drawn attention to Josiah's attack on Necho at Megiddo in 609 BCE (if an attack is accepted) which must be regarded as extraordinary. Egypt's defeat in 610 BCE at the hand of the Babylonians forced a reversal of policy by Josiah. His attempt to detain the Egyptian army at Megiddo was to prevent that Egyptian military assistance. Josiah's action thus allies Judah with Babylon. Perhaps it even signifies a phase of a broad strategic plan, a military alliance between Babylon and Judah. Up to 609 BCE Judah had maintained her independence from Egypt, and no tribute seems to have been paid to Psammetichus. After Josiah's switch in 609 BCE such was not to be the case. Although the new policy of Josiah can now be seen to have been correct (in the light of Babylon's eventual conquest of Syro-Palestine), it was premature of Josiah to expect that Egypt could be stopped, at least by him. It is significant that Necho did not bother to reorganize the Judaeen monarchy after his victory over Josiah. Studying the history of Josiah from an overall historical perspective, it seems that the following evaluation is acceptable: even though his modest political and territorial achievements were wiped out by his death, his actions in the areas of religion and cult remained engraved in the hearts of his people for generations, and exerted considerable influence on the development of Judaism during the Babylonian exile and the Post-exilic period.

#### **8.4 Chapter 6 - CULTIC REFORMATION AND CULT CENTRALIZATION**

In Chapter 6 the thesis endeavoured to analyse Josiah's cultic reformation and cult centralization. Josiah's cultic reform was without a doubt the most thorough-going in Judah's history. The Biblical historiographer appears to believe that Josiah's reform actions were the *raison d'être* for the entire purification venture. This so overshadowed all of Josiah's other royal acts, they tell virtually nothing else about him. Certainly the Josianic covenant can rightly be seen as a new departure in the history of Judah. For the first time, a Book of Teaching is set as the constitutive base of the community of Judah, and with this act the first steps were taken to collect and codify Israel's legal and literary heritage. Consequently, the emergence of Deuteronomy into the public realm marked the beginnings of the Pentateuch.

Care was taken in the thesis to trace the development of historico-biblical criticism, and the consequences. Oestreicher's 1923 hypothesis, that political concerns generated Josiah's reforms, prompted nearly fifty years of debate, which by the end of the 1960's had produced a strong consensus that the deuteronomic religious reformation was part of a more general rejection of Assyrian imperial authority. The

consensus was broken, however, by two dissertations which appeared almost simultaneously at the end of the 1960's, John McKay and Mordechai Cogan.

Cogan attacked the standard assumption that Assyria imposed worship of imperial gods on all its subject peoples. His reading of the Assyrian sources revealed no religious impositions on vassals, neither sacrificial dues required nor religious symbols erected. Cogan differed with McKay, however, on the aspect that Hezekiah's and Josiah's religious reforms were indicative of nationalistic assertiveness against Assyria, arguing that Assyria had long since lost imperial influence in the West by the time of Josiah's reign. Hezekiah is, after all, the only Judaeen king whose rebellion against Assyria is attested in both biblical and Assyrian texts.

McKay closely examined the cultic innovations from Ahaz to Josiah. On the basis of the biblical texts he came to the conclusion that there was no reason to believe that the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah were designed to expel Assyrian deities from the Judaeen cult. McKay drew on religious-historical evidence from Northwest and East Semitic cultures to argue that the various deities worshipped in Judah during the period of Assyrian domination lack the definitive aspects of the Assyrian gods, and generally exhibit the characteristics of popular Palestinian paganism. He saw a correlation between the cultic reforms of Hezekiah, Manasseh and Josiah on the one hand, and the rising and falling hopes of independence from Assyria on the other.

Accepting the findings of Cogan and McKay, the thesis further investigated their hypotheses, and came to the conclusion that there is no reason to assume that Josiah's attitude towards Assyria was any more hostile than that of his grandfather, Manasseh, in light of the latest evidence of Assyria's indifference to the religious policies of its vassals. Foreign policy was a matter of political reality, not ideology, and his decisions were conditioned by the realities of power politics. The view of a monolithic Assyrian imperialism holding sway and enforcing its religious tenets over all the peoples of the Ancient Near East is undocumented, and unfounded. The importance of the reforms is that they clearly signified the fact that it produced the book used by Josiah himself, and later edited the most authoritative account of the reformation that we possess. At the primary level the reform of what had been a cultic amalgam, was quite obviously a facet of resurgent nationalism. Essentially an affirmation of Judah's official theology, it was accompanied by heightened stress on Jerusalem, YHWH's choice of Zion as the seat of his rule and the one legitimate national religious centre.

## **8.5 Chapter 7 - JUDAH'S FOREIGN POLICY IN ITS FINAL TWO DECADES**

In Chapter 7 the final two decades of the Judaeen kingdom and the tragic outcome, the destruction of the Temple and the exile of its people, were analysed. As has been shown, the disastrous outcome at Megiddo led to radical political fluctuations in Judah, which led to alternate subjugation by, and rebellion against, each of the major

powers, Egypt and Babylonia. Inexperienced leadership, the dual-existence of two kings and the unwise foreign policy choices led Judah into the maelstrom.

The difference between the policy of Nebuchadnezzar in Judaea, with that of Necho, are of crucial importance. Judah's plight was extreme. Politically her diplomatic efforts to achieve an anti-Babylonian front had collapsed, and the frailty of Egyptian support left her virtually isolated. While Judah revolted against both Egypt and Babylon, the treatment shown by Nebuchadnezzar to Jehoiakim was considerably more harsh than that shown by Necho. Aside from the small tribute imposed by Necho on Judah, the state was left alone. Nebuchadnezzar, on the other hand, devastated the Judaeian kingdom, and deported the king himself.

*"And he burned the house of the Lord, and the king's house and all the houses of Jerusalem. And the rest of the people who were left in the city and the deserters who had deserted to the king of Babylon, together with the rest of the multitude, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard carried into exile. But the captain of the guard left some of the poorest of the land to be vinedressers and ploughmen" (2 Kings 25:9-12).*



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