

CHAPTER 3

HISTORIC OVERVIEW

3.1 Historic Overview, Omri to the Assyrian Exile (885-876 BCE)

The primary sources of information for this Historic Overview are the historic books of Kings and Chronicles found in the Bible. Another source of information for this overview was a paper on The Divided Monarchy (Horn 1988:109-150).

Specific archaeological finds that relate to material covered in this overview will be discussed in other sections of this dissertation. The writer will give references to acknowledge where this information can be found.

Omri (885-876 BCE) founded a new dynasty of four kings who successively occupied the throne over a period of 44 years (885-841 BCE). In the beginning Omri had to fight another contender for the throne, Tibni, who seems to have had a considerable following. Only after four years of internal strife was Omri able to assassinate Tibni and his followers (1 Kings 16:21-23).

Omri's 12 year reign was politically very important. He moved the capital from Tirzah to Samaria. By selecting this strategic site for his capital, Omri did for Israel what David had done more than a hundred years earlier in selecting Jerusalem. Samaria was built on a 400-foot-high hill situated in a cup-like plain; it could be easily defended. It appears never to have been taken by force of arms; in the end, it surrendered only for lack of water or

food. Excavations at Samaria have verified that fact (see Samaria under Sites). The site had been uninhabited before Omri's time. With the transfer of his capital from Tirzah to Samaria, Omri began an extensive defense-building operation, which his son Ahab completed. Whether Omri himself had military encounters with the Assyrians to the east is unknown. The Assyrian records for the next 100 years refer to Israel as "the land of the house of Omri," even long after Omri's dynasty had vanished. Omri's personality, political success and business enterprises made him famous, not only in the eyes of his contemporaries, but to later generations as well.

Omri established cordial relations with his Phoenician neighbors and married his son Ahab to Jezebel, daughter of the king of Tyre. This alliance resulted in an increase of the worship of Baal and Asherah in Israel (1 Kings 16:25). He also granted economic concessions to Damascus and allowed Syrian traders to operate shops in Samaria's bazaars (1 Kings 20:34).

Omri was also successful in subduing Moab and making it an Israelite vassal. The lengthy inscription on the Mesha Stele (also known as the Moabite Stone) confirms this. Mesha, king of Moab, states that "Omri, king of Israel had oppressed Moab many days, for Kemosh was angry with his land." The value of the possession of Moab for Israel can be deduced from the tribute paid by Moab to Omri's son Ahab. It is said to have amounted to "a hundred thousand lambs, and the wool of a hundred thousand rams" (2 Kings 3:4). More information on the Moabite Stone can be found in this dissertation in Chapter 4, Section 4.5.3, Inscriptions and Literacy.

ISRAEL: AHAB (876 BCE-853 BCE)

In 876 BCE, Omri was succeeded on the throne of Israel by his son Ahab. A morally weak ruler; Ahab had neither the strength nor the character to resist his Phoenician wife Jezebel, who was determined to make her own religion supreme. Jezebel employed hundreds of prophets of Baal and Asherah to set up this cult in Israel. More information on these gods is found in Chapter 3, Temples, Gods, and Cult Objects. The great increase in the worship of Baal and Asherah lead to a religious crisis (1 Kings 18:4, 19) in which worshippers of Yahweh were persecuted and killed. In the midst of this tragic situation, two great prophets, Elijah and Elisha came to Israel.

Elijah stands out in the fight for the survival of Yahwism. A three-and-a-half-year drought, predicted by the prophet as a judgment of Yahweh, brought Ahab's land close to economic ruin. The drought ended when Elijah was victorious over the priests of Baal on Mt. Carmel in a contest between the power of Yahweh and Baal (1 Kings 18:17-40). This, however, did not stop the worship of Baal in Israel. It is interesting to realize that Ahab did NOT give "Baal" names to his children Ahaziah, Joram, and Athaliah. The ostraca found during the excavation of Samaria indicated that the use of personal names connected to Baal at this time was common. Some of these name were: Abibaal, Baala, Baalzamar and Baalzakar.

Ahab was known for his "ivory house" (1 Kings 22:39; Amos 3:15). Numerous beautifully carved ivory plaques found in the excavations of Samaria (see under Sites, "Samaria") reveal that the interior of his palace and some of its furniture were probably paneled with ivory. The designs of these ivory plaques are similar to those found in ivory

decorations discovered in the ruins of ancient palaces in Syria and Assyria. As a warrior, Ahab was moderately successful. Twice he defeated the Syrians. These victories gave him great economic gain in Damascus (1 Kings 20:21, 34). He became one of the most powerful rulers west of Assyria.

When the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III advanced against Ahab's old enemy Syria, Ahab this time joined Syria and other allies to make common cause against the Assyrians. Ahab mustered the greatest number of chariots of any of the allies. This is at least according to Shalmaneser III, in a list of his opponents in the battle of Qarqar in northern Syria.

This list of Shalmaneser's was found on a Stele discovered at ancient Kurkh in Iraq. It stated that of the 3,940 enemy chariots fighting against the Assyrians, 2,000 belonged to Ahab; the other ten allies had mustered altogether only 1,940 chariots. Of the 52,000 foot soldiers arrayed against the Assyrians, Ahab furnished 10,000 (Mitchell 1988:44-45). More information regarding this battle can be found in this dissertation in Chapter 4, Section 4.5.2.4, under Kurkh Stele.

When the Battle of Qarqar had checked Shalmaneser's advance, Ahab, conscious of his strength, immediately turned against Syria. His aim was to regain possession of the Transjordanian city of Ramoth-Gilead, but his army was beaten and he died in the battle (1 Kings 22).

ISRAEL: AHAZIAH (853 -852 BCE)

Ahab was succeeded by his son Ahaziah (853-852 BCE), the third ruler of the Omride dynasty in Israel. His reign was short and he had no son to follow him. Ahaziah was

succeeded on the throne by his brother Joram (852-841 BCE), the last of the Omrides. During Joram's reign, Mesha king of Moab rebelled. Israel joined forces with Judah and Edom to fight against his army and Mesha reestablished his control over Moab (2 Kings 3:4-27). The Moabite Stone recorded this victory. More information on the Moabite Stone can be found in this dissertation in Chapter 4, Section 4.5.3, Inscriptions and Literacy.

ISRAEL: JORAM (852 -841 BCE).

Joram also fought several wars against the Syrians. Twice the prophet Elisha prevented him from meeting a disastrous situation (2 Kings 6 and 7). Like his father Ahab, Joram attempted to regain the Transjordanian city of Ramoth-Gilead from the Syrians, but he too failed in the efforts. Wounded by Hazael of Syria, Joram went to the city of Jezreel to recover. There he was killed by one of his army commanders, Jehu, who proceeded to wipe out all members of the royal house of Omri, including Jezebel, the Phoenician queen mother. Jehu then took the throne himself (2 Kings 8:28-29, 9:24-10:17). This writer was privileged to work on the excavation of Tell Jezreel in 1990.

ISRAEL: JEHU (841-814 BCE)

Jehu ruled from 841 to 814 BCE and he abolished Baal worship. This was given great approval by the prophet Elisha. A promise was made that his descendants would sit on Israel's throne to the fourth generation (2 Kings 10:30). Accordingly, his dynasty reigned over the country for about 90 years. Jehu however did not stop Jeroboam's calf worship, and his reform was, as a result, considered incomplete (2 Kings 10:31). Jehu voluntarily became a

vassal of the Assyrian monarch Shalmaneser III. He began paying tribute to Assyria as soon as he ascended the throne in an effort to secure Assyrian help against Israel's chief enemy, Hazael of Syria. This vassal relationship is depicted on the side of Shalmaneser's Black Obelisk, now in the British Museum, which Austen Henry Layard discovered in 1846 at Nimrud (see in this dissertation under Inscriptions and Literacy, Chapter 4).

ISRAEL: JEHOAHAZ (814-798 BCE)

When Jehu died in 814 BCE, his son Jehoahaz ascended the throne of Israel (814-798 BCE). The 17 years of Jehoahaz's reign were marked by continual wars against the Syrians, who oppressed Israel, first under Hazael and later under Hazael's son Benhadad III (2 Kings 13:1-3). Israel lost much of its territory and its army in these wars. It was left with only 10 chariots, 50 horsemen and 10,000 foot soldiers (2 Kings 13:7). In 2 Kings 13:5 it is stated that a "savior" came and freed Israel. Although the savior is not identified, it could have been Adad-nirari III, king of Assyria or Jehoahaz's son Joash.

ISRAEL: JOASH (798-782 BCE)

Jehoahaz died in 798 BCE. He was succeeded by his son Joash. Joash is listed by Adad-nirari III as having paid tribute to Assyria (Pritchard 1973a:190). This freed him to fight the Syrians. Joash defeated the Syrians three times and recovered all the territory that was lost by his father (2 Kings 13:25). Challenged by Amaziah of Judah, Joash was unwillingly forced to fight his southern neighbor in the first war in 100 years between the two nations. Joash defeated Amaziah at a battle fought at the city of Beth-

Shemesh, following this victory he continued to Jerusalem. Here he broke down part of the city's defenses, took royal treasures from the Temple, and some hostages back to Samaria (2 Kings 14:8-14).

ISRAEL: JEROBOAM II (793-753 BCE)

In looking at the chronological data there was a co-regency between Joash and his son Jeroboam II for about 12 years. Jeroboam ruled lasted for 41 years (793-753), including the 12 years of co-regency with his father (2 Kings 14:23-29). He regained so much lost territory for Israel, excluding that held by the kingdom of Judah, that his kingdom was almost as large as the empire of David and Solomon. He restored Israelite rule over the coastal and inland regions of Syria to the north. He conquered Damascus, Hamath, and occupied Transjordan south to the Dead Sea. This probably means that he made Ammon and Moab vassals to Israel. These gains seem to have also been due to the fact that Assyria was suffering a period of political weakness during this time.

During the reign of Jeroboam II, two prophets, Amos and Hosea, arose in the northern kingdom. Their messages are found in individual books under their names in the Bible. Amos came from Tekoa in Judah. He felt called by God to go to the north and raise his voice against the evils in that kingdom. Amos brought reproof and denounced the actions of the people. His messages were often delivered in Bethel (Amos 7:10-13), one of the sanctuary cities of the northern kingdom. Amos warned that only complete repentance by the king and the people and a turning again to Yahweh, whom they had forsaken, could avert the approaching catastrophe.

Hosea, a citizen of the northern kingdom, began denouncing the evils of his nation and at times he spoke of those committed by Judah. The vices he identified are similar to those mentioned by Amos. He also emphasized the worship of foreign gods, especially Baal. Unlike Joash, Jeroboam II made no provision to guarantee continuity of rule, and his kingdom broke up almost immediately after his death. His son Zachariah reigned for only six months (753-752 BCE), and then fell victim to a murderous plot (2 Kings 15:8-12). This brought to an end the 90-year dynasty of Jehu.

JUDAH, KINGS

Here it is appropriate to turn to list the kings of Judah during the relevant time periods.

JUDAH: ASA (911-869 BCE)

In 913 BCE, Solomon's son Rehoboam was succeeded by his son Abijam (Abijah), who reigned only till 911 BCE. Abijam fought several wars with Israel and had all the same vices as his father, Rehoboam (1 Kings 15:1-8; 2 Chronicles 13:1-14:1). With the accession of Abijam's son Asa, once more a good king, like David, ruled Judah (911-869 BCE). Asa banished all the male prostitutes from his realm and suppressed idol worship. He also removed his Ammonite grandmother (Solomon's widow) from influence at court because she had erected an image for Asherah (1 Kings 15:10-13).

The first years of Asa's reign, which he devoted to religious reforms, were peaceful. But later Asa was attacked by the Cushites under Zerah, probably Ethiopians

from the eastern shore of the Red Sea (2 Chronicles 14:9-14).

Then about 895 BCE King Baasha of Israel occupied part of northern Judah. Asa appealed to Ben-Hadad, king of Aram to assist him in fighting King Baasha of Israel who was threatening Judah.

Ben-Hadad, opened a northern front against Israel, invading and capturing Ijon, Dan, Abel Beth Maacah, Kinnereth, and other cities, all of which were located in the Rift Valley north of the Sea of Galilee (1 Kings 15:16-22; 2 Chron. 16:1-6). Because of Ben-Hadad's attack, Baasha had to abandon his southward expansion plans, and Asa was able to push their common border northward. The resulting boundary, which left Bethel in Israel to the north and Mizpah and Geba in Judah to the south formed the traditional boundary between the northern and southern kingdoms until the fall of the north in 722 BCE. He appointed his son, Jehoshaphat as co-ruler in 869.

JUDAH: JEHOSEPHAT (872-848 BCE)

Jehoshaphat continued the religious reforms of his father. Although Jehoshaphat failed to remove all pagan high places, he directed the Levites and priests to travel throughout the country and teach the law (2 Chronicles 17:7-9). Jehoshaphat also ended the long feud between Judah and Israel by allying himself with the Israelite dynasty of Omri. He gave his son, Jehoram, in marriage to Athaliah, the daughter of King Ahab of Israel (2 Kings 8:8, 26). This was a union that opened again the door to Baal worship in Judah. Jehoshaphat assisted the northern kings in their military campaigns. With Ahab he fought against Ramoth-Gilead (1 Kings 22:4-33; 2 Chronicles 18:28), and with

Joram of Israel he fought against Moab (2 Kings 3:4-27). He also fought a strong confederacy of Edomites, Moabites and Ammonites (2 Chronicles 20:1-30). The Philistines and Arabs sought his friendship. He tried to revive Solomon's Ophir expeditions, but this effort failed when Jehoshaphat's ships were wrecked at Ezion-Geber (2 Chronicles 20:35-37).

JUDAH: JEHORAM (854-841 BCE) (2 Kings 8:16-24)

Israel's kings during this time were Ahaziah and Joram. Jehoram of Judah took the throne and was influenced by Athaliah, his idolatrous wife was from Israel. Jehoram encouraged Baal worship in Judah (2 Kings 8:18). He fought unsuccessful wars with the Philistines and Arabs (2 Chronicles 21: 116-17). He lost Edom, which became independent again. In the end, he died of an incurable disease, as the prophet Elijah had predicted (2 Kings 8:16-24).

JUDAH: AHAZIAH (841 BCE)

Israel's king during this time was Joram. Ahaziah, king of Judah, followed the corrupt ways of his father and his mother Athaliah. He joined his uncle Joram of Israel in an unsuccessful war against the Syrians (2 Kings 8:26-29). On a visit to Joram of Israel, Ahaziah was wounded in a coup d'etat. The coup brought an end to the reign of Joram of Israel and to the Omride dynasty. Ahaziah fled to Megiddo but soon died there from his wounds (2 Kings 9:14-28; 2 Chronicles 22:1-9). About this time, a religious center flourished at Kuntillet 'Ajrud. That was a site halfway between Beersheba and Elath (about 40 miles south of Kadesh-Barnea) in the Sinai desert. There is important

information about this site in this dissertation under Sites and under Inscriptions 4.5.7.7.

JUDAH: QUEEN ATHALIAH (841-835 BCE)

Israel's king during this time was Jehu. Athaliah's six-year rule marked the only interruption in the direct line of Davidic rulership in the kingdom of Judah. A daughter of the cruel and unscrupulous Queen Jezebel of Israel, Athaliah tried to exterminate all of the royal seed in Judah so that her own rule might be assured. However, the infant prince Jehoash/Joash was rescued by the high priest (2 Kings 11:1-3).

JUDAH: JOASH/JEHOASH (835-796 BCE)

These two names are used interchangeably in the Bible. Joash/Jehoash ruled 835-796 BCE. Israel's kings who ruled during this time were Jehoahaz (son of Jehu) and for two years, Joash (having the same names as Joash/Jehoash of Judah). When he was seven years old, Jehoash of Judah was crowned king of Judah. Athaliah was killed (2 Kings 11:4-21). As long as the young king allowed Jehoiada, the high priest, to guide his affairs, he acted piously, removing Baal worship and promoting extensive Temple repairs (2 Kings 12:1-16; 2 Chronicles 24:1-14). After Jehoiada's death, however, Jehoash became indifferent, and had his benefactor's son Zechariah stoned to death for reproving him because of his evil deeds (2 Chronicles 24:15-22). When Hazael of Damascus marched against Jehoash he bought the Syrians off with some of the Jerusalem Temple treasures. This action of cowardliness, his murder of Zechariah, and the negative reaction from the people towards his religious and domestic policies brought strong opposition to Jehoash.

He was finally assassinated by his own servants and buried in the city of David (2 Kings 12:17-21; 2 Chronicles 24:25).

JUDAH: AMAZIAH (796-767 BCE)

Israel's kings during this time were: Joash and Jeroboam II. Amaziah king of Judah (796-767 BCE), was Jehoash's son. He first disposed of his father's murderers and then consolidated his own position as ruler. He made an unsuccessfully attempt to regain the area of Edom, which had formerly belonged to Judah. He also hired 100,000 mercenaries from Israel, but later let them go under the direction of "a man of God." With his own Judahite forces he was victorious over the Edomites and conquered their capitol, Sela (Petra). The discharged and angry mercenaries from Israel looted the cities of northern Judah on their way back to their own homeland.

Amaziah's next challenge was to conquer Israel and he challenged Joash. This proved to be disastrous as he was completely defeated and humiliated. Amaziah rejected Yahweh and took on "the gods of the men of Seir [Petra]." He lost the confidence of his people who rose up against him in open revolt. He fled from his pursuers and finally came to Lachish, where he was assassinated (2 Kings 14:1-20; 2 Chronicles 25:1-28).

JUDAH: UZZIAH (AZARIAH) 790-740 BCE

Israel's kings that ruled during this time were: Jeroboam II, Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah and Pekah. Uzziah, king of Judah, was also known as Azariah. His reign was upright, successful and prosperous. He promoted the economic development of the country (2

Chronicles 26:10). With his army he waged successful campaigns against the Philistines and Arabs (2 Chronicles 26:7). He recovered Elath (Ezion-Geber) at the Gulf of Elath (2 Kings 14:22) and probably also Edomite territory lying between Judah and the gulf. The Ammonites decided to buy Uzziah off with gifts (2 Chronicles 26:8). During Uzziah's reign a severe earthquake apparently occurred, for it was remembered for centuries and was referred to by later writers (Amos 1:1; Zechariah 14:5).

During Uzziah's reign, both Egypt and Assyria were politically weak, which helped Uzziah as well as Jeroboam II of Israel to make their nations prosperous and powerful. In 750 BCE, the realms of the two kingdoms approximated the area that David and Solomon had ruled over. This period of prosperity was not to last. In 745 BCE, a strong Assyrian king, Tiglath-Pileser III, ascended the throne. His rule marked the rebirth of the Assyrian empire and the beginning of a rapid decline in the power of both Israel and Judah.

JUDAH: JOTHAM

Jotham was co-ruler under Uzziah from 750 to 740 and continued after until 731 BCE. From 735 to 731 BCE, he co-ruled with his son Ahaz. Israel's kings during this general time were Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hoshea.

Uzziah had contracted leprosy as a punishment for illegally entered the Temple of Yahweh to offer incense (2 Chronicles 26:16-20). His son Jotham was then appointed co-regent (2 Kings 15:5), a wise move to guarantee the continuity of the dynasty. Uzziah was quarantined during the rest of his life and given a separate burial when he died.

In 1931, a square stone slab, 14 inches (35 cm) was discovered in Jerusalem. One side of the slab, mentioning Uzziah was found in the collection of the Russian Archaeological Museum on the Mount of Olives at Jerusalem. The stone slab is now in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. It contains the following inscription in Aramaic: "Hither were brought the bones of Uzziah, king of Judah, do not disturb" (McCarter 1996:133).

Uzziah's son Jotham reigned in Judah for nearly 20 years (750-731 BCE) including 12 years when he ruled for his leprous father Uzziah. He was a good ruler. Three contemporary Hebrew prophets, Isaiah, Hosea and Micah, possibly had influence on him. During his reign, Rezin II of Syria and Pekah of Israel (2 Kings 15:37), made an unsuccessful attempt to invade Judah. Following this Jotham appointed his son, Ahaz as co-regent. A Hebrew seal, found by Nelson Glueck during the excavations at Tell el-Kheleifeh, at the Gulf of Elath, in 1940, carries the inscription, "Belonging to Ytm." The identification of the owner of this seal with King Jotham was first made by Glueck and was endorsed by William F. Albright as "almost certain" (Glueck 1993: 868-869).

JUDAH: AHAZ 735-715 BCE

Ahaz was co-ruler under Jotham from 735 to 731 BCE. After that, Ahaz continued ruling on his own until 715 BCE. Israel's kings were Pekah and Hoshea. Ahaz did not listen to the prophets. He imitated the cult and worship practices of the northern kingdom: He walked in the way of the kings of Israel, caused his son to "pass through the fire" and sacrificed and burned incense on high places under every green tree (2 Kings 16:3-4).

When Judah was attacked by Rezin II of Syria and Pekah of Israel, the encounter was referred to as the Syro-Ephramimite war. The prophet Isaiah offered divine help to King Ahaz (Isaiah 7:3-13). Ahaz rejected the prophet's offer and turned instead to Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria. Ahaz bought his help with treasures from the Temple of Yahweh and from his own palace (2 Kings 16:7-8). When Tiglath-Pileser conquered Damascus (Syria), Ahaz was part of the Assyrian associates.

In Damascus Ahaz absorbed the Assyrian mode of worship and immediately proceeded to introduce it into his own kingdom. From Damascus, Ahaz sent instructions to Jerusalem to have an altar made, like the Assyrian one he had seen in Damascus. This new altar replaced the one Solomon had set up for burnt offerings. It was kept in use (2 Kings 16:10-16).

JUDAH: HEZEKIAH

Hezekiah was the son of Ahaz and became co-ruler of Judah with his father from 729-715 BCE. He took on full rule after his father died in 715 BCE and ruled Israel until 686 BCE. Hezekiah's son, Manasseh, was co-ruler with him from 696-686, and then continued to rule until 642 BCE

Hezekiah's reign is described in 2 Kings 18-20, Isaiah 36-39 and 2 Chronicles 29-32. Information is given in Jeremiah 26:17 concerning the prophet Micah in Hezekiah's time. The inscriptions of Sargon II and Sennacherib of Assyria provide extra-biblical source material for the Assyrian campaigns and Hezekiah's involvement.

Hezekiah is described in the Bible as a good ruler who initiated a series of important religious reforms when, as sole ruler; he had the authority to do so. These reforms

included abolishing illegitimate sanctuaries and destroying cult objects throughout the country (2 Kings 18:3-4) thus centralizing worship in the Jerusalem Temple.

Much was written about Hezekiah in the book of Isaiah and information was also recorded in the book of Second Kings. Hezekiah established control over areas of Philistia; strengthened the national defense system, especially of Jerusalem; and promoted trade and agriculture (2 Kings 18:8; 2 Chronicles 32:28-29). Hezekiah was responsible for the digging of a 1,749 foot-long tunnel in Jerusalem from the Gihon Spring in the Kidron Valley to a lower pool inside the city (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chronicles 32:4, 30).

Hezekiah continued to pay tribute to the Assyrians as his father had done. In one of Sargon's inscriptions, Judah's tribute is listed with tribute sent by Philistia, Edom and Moab. During the reign of Sargon II, Judah apparently had no serious problems with the Assyrians, unlike the Philistines against whom Sargon II directed three military campaigns. Sargon conquered Gaza in 720 BCE. He then attacked and conquered the Philistine cities of Ekron and Gibbethon, these are depicted on reliefs discovered in Sargon's palace at Khorsabad. His conquest of Philistine Ashdod is known from Sargon's Annals as well as three fragments of a victory monument set up by the Assyrian king in Ashdod itself. Isaiah 20:1 gives reference to Sargon's campaign against Ashdod.

Further information can be obtained on this subject from Siegfried H. Horn's article titled, "The Divided Kingdom of Judah and Israel" in the book, Ancient Israel (Horn 1988:109-150).