

V

History of Old Testament Times, Part II

FROM JEROBOAM I AND REHOBOAM
THROUGH SIMON MACCABEUS

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The history of Israel and of the OT times which is under consideration in this chapter is quite extensive and considerably involved. First, it covers a period of approximately eight hundred years, from 930 B.C. until about 135 B.C. This eight hundred years is filled with many leading persons, important events, and complex problems. Many transitions of power take place in the Middle East and among the Hebrews during this period. The sources which tell about this era are quite extensive and also varied in nature. There are the historical sources, which include 1 and 2 Kings, 1 and 2 Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. Further, the prophetic literature was all composed during this time and reflects much historical, social, and religious information concerning the people and the nations.

One of the most complex problems concerns the chronology of events, especially of the divided kingdom period. History and chronology are inseparably connected because there cannot be accurate history without an accurate placing of persons and events in the proper sequence. The chronological problems are too involved to be treated in this brief

study. (For a more detailed study of these problems cf. Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* [Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.]. The author has adopted, with some modifications, the dates settled upon by Thiele.)

The OT times under consideration in this study may be logically divided into at least six distinct periods:

- I. The divided kingdom, 930–722 B.C.
- II. The monarchy of Judah, 722–586 B.C.
- III. The Babylonian captivity, 586–539 B.C.
- IV. Restoration and resettlement under the Persians, 539–333 B.C.
- V. The Hellenistic period, 333–165 B.C.
- VI. The Maccabean period, 165–135 B.C.

THE DIVIDED KINGDOM (930–722 B.C.)

Background of the Division

Throughout its history as a nation, Israel had been plagued by divisions. In the wilderness Moses had to contend with those of other tribes such as Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, who were jealous of his authority (Num. 16–17). During the time of Joshua the tribes of the sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh, complained about the division of the land and were ambitious for more territory (Josh. 17:14–18). The period of the judges reflects an increase in division among the tribes. The men of Ephraim “did chide sharply” with Gideon, who was of the tribe of Manasseh (Judg. 8:1, KJV). There was violent combat between Abimelech and the men of Shechem (Judg. 9:22–57). Civil war took place between Jephthah and the men of Ephraim, during which the famous password “Shibboleth” came into existence (Judg. 12:1–6). An extensive civil war took place between the tribe of Benjamin and the rest of the tribes, which almost resulted in the annihilation of the tribe of Benjamin (Judg. 19–21).

Unity, to some extent, was achieved under Saul during the early part of his reign. However, when he grew hostile

to David and forced him to flee, a division arose between Judah and Israel. This division was quite apparent during the early years after Saul's death. David reigned for seven and one-half years over the house of Judah while Ishbosheth, a son of Saul, was king over Israel. Second Samuel 3:1 states, "There was a long war between the house of Saul and the house of David; and David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker." During the middle part of David's reign he was considerably successful in uniting all the people of Israel into the united kingdom. However, his rebellious son, Absalom, stole the hearts of the men of Israel and led a rebellion which forced David out of Jerusalem and resulted in a great battle which culminated in the death of Absalom. When David returned to Jerusalem, a dispute arose between Israel and Judah, which clearly indicates that a basic division was present between them even at a time of comparative unity (2 Sam. 19:40-43).

In David's final years he united and solidified the kingdom and attempted to pass it on to Solomon in this fashion. However, the smooth transition of power into Solomon's hands was marred by the unsuccessful attempt of David's son, Adonijah, to usurp the throne. After Solomon gained the throne and punished those responsible for the usurpation, he proceeded with the blessings of God to unify and expand the kingdom. Under him the Hebrew nation reached its golden age, when it had its greatest unity, geographical extent, and political impact on the Near East. Solomon's hard driving and ambitious policies created enemies, and his sins in loving many foreign women and in building high places for his wives' pagan gods alienated God's blessings from him and his posterity.

God made use of one of Solomon's adversaries, Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. God sent the prophet Ahijah to inform Jeroboam that he would rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon and give Jeroboam ten tribes (1 Kings 11:26-40). God promised to leave the tribe of Judah to the descendants of Solomon for David's sake. Solomon sought to kill Jeroboam, but Jeroboam fled to Egypt.

After Solomon's death, Rehoboam, his son, reigned in his

stead. Jeroboam, who had been a labor force leader for the house of Joseph, returned from Egypt and came with all the assembly of Israel and requested Rehoboam to reduce the heavy taxes and labor service which had been required under Solomon. Rehoboam, rejecting the wise counsel of the old men and following the foolish counsel of the younger men, threatened to make their burdens heavier. First Kings 12:15 says that this was brought about by Jehovah that he might establish his word which he spoke by Ahijah. Upon hearing Rehoboam's threat, the men of Israel said, "What portion have we in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse. To your tents, O Israel! Look now to your own house, David" (1 Kings 12:16). Rehoboam attempted to gather an army to prevent the secession of the northern kingdom, but God forbade him to do so by his prophet Shemaiah. Thus the kingdom was divided into two kingdoms never to be reunited as an earthly kingdom under a monarch of the house of David.

Jeroboam's Apostasy

God had promised Jeroboam, when he indicated that he would give him the kingdom:

If you will hearken to all that I command you, and will walk in my ways, and do what is right in my eyes by keeping my statutes and my commandments, as David my servant did, I will be with you, and will build you a sure house, as I built for David, and I will give Israel to you.

1 Kings 11:38

However, Jeroboam refused to walk in God's commandments. He reasoned that if the people continued to sacrifice at Jerusalem they would turn again unto Rehoboam. Therefore, he led North Israel in committing four basic apostasies. First, he changed the object of worship from the Lord Jehovah, who had commanded that no graven images should be made, and commanded the people to look upon two calves of gold, which he made as their gods. Second, he changed the place of worship from Jerusalem, where the Lord had caused his name to dwell, and urged the people to worship in Bethel and Dan, where he placed the golden

calves. Third, he expelled the Levites from priestly service and made priests from among all the people that were not of the sons of Levi. Fourth, he changed the time of worship from the three annual occasions when all men were to gather at the place where God caused his name to dwell and instead ordained a feast in the eighth month on the fifteenth day of the month.

Jeroboam continued in his sinful ways for the rest of the twenty-two years which he reigned. God indicated that he would give Israel up "because of the sins of Jeroboam, which he sinned and which he made Israel to sin" (1 Kings 14:16). This phrase became Jeroboam's epitaph and the epithet which was attached to nearly every king of Israel that followed him. It is said of nearly every one of the kings of Israel that he walked in the sins of Jeroboam which he sinned and which he made Israel to sin. It is no wonder that eventually it became necessary for God to destroy the northern kingdom and send them into Assyrian captivity.

Synchronistic History of the Two Kingdoms

The southern kingdom of Judah and the northern kingdom of Israel thus existed side by side for approximately 208 years (930–722 B.C.). Sometimes they warred against each other. On other occasions they were indifferent toward each other and concerned with internal matters or affairs with other nations. On a few occasions they were allied against a common foe. The main source of information about the northern kingdom and the interrelationship of the two kingdoms is the synchronistic history recorded in 1 Kings 12–22 and 2 Kings 1–25. Some information is reflected about the period from Joel, Jonah, Amos, Micah, Hosea, and Isaiah. The books of Kings are a synchronistic record which attempts to relate the history of Israel and Judah alternately, covering the same general period. The subject matter constantly shifts back and forth from Judah to Israel and from Israel to Judah. This synchronistic record attempts to tie the history of the two kingdoms together by indicating the year of the king of Judah when a king of Israel began to reign, and vice versa. Due to the nature of a

synchronistic history, the books of Kings are somewhat complicated to follow and outline. A general outline which may be helpful follows:

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| 1 Kings 12-14 | The acts of Rehoboam of Judah and Jeroboam of Israel. |
| 1 Kings 15-16 | The acts of Abijah (Abijam) and Asa, kings of Judah; and Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Tibni, Omri, kings of Israel. |
| 1 Kings 17-22 | The acts of Ahab, the king of Israel; the acts of Elijah, the prophet of God, and partially of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah. |
| 2 Kings 1-8 | The acts of Ahaziah and Jehoram, kings of Israel; Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, and Ahaziah, kings of Judah; and some of the acts of Elisha, the prophet. |
| 2 Kings 9-14 | The acts of the dynasty of Jehu including his sons Jehoahaz, Jehoash, Jeroboam II of Israel; and the acts of Athaliah, Joash, and Amaziah of Judah. |
| 2 Kings 15-17 | The acts of Uzziah (Azariah), Jotham and Ahaz of Judah; and Zechariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, Hoshea, of Israel, and the fall of Samaria (722 B.C.). |
| 2 Kings 18-20 | The acts of Hezekiah, king of Judah. |
| 2 Kings 21 | The acts of Manasseh and Amon, kings of Judah. |
| 2 Kings 22-23 | The acts of Josiah and Jehoahaz, kings of Judah. |
| 2 Kings 24-25 | The acts of Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, and Zedekiah, kings of Judah; and the fall of Jerusalem (586 B.C.). |

Second Chronicles 10-36 gives the history of Judah alone, both during the divided kingdom (930-722 B.C.) and the time of the monarchy of Judah (722-586 B.C.). The northern kingdom, Israel, is only mentioned occasionally when there is a direct contact between the two kingdoms. Consequently, the book of 2 Chronicles is easily outlined accord-

ing to the reigns of the respective kings of Judah. These kings are the direct descendants of the house of David and of course are therefore in the direct ancestral line of Christ. A brief outline of 2 Chronicles and the kings of Judah follows:

- 2 Chronicles 10–12 Reign of Rehoboam (930–913 B.C.)
- 2 Chronicles 13 Reign of Abijah (913–910 B.C.)
- 2 Chronicles 14–16 Reign of Asa (910–869 B.C.)
- 2 Chronicles 17–20 Reign of Jehoshaphat (869–848 B.C.)
- 2 Chronicles 21 Reign of Jehoram (848–841 B.C.)
- 2 Chronicles 22 Reign of Ahaziah and the usurpation of his mother, Athaliah (841–835 B.C.)
- 2 Chronicles 23–24 Reign of Joash (835–796 B.C.)
- 2 Chronicles 25 Reign of Amaziah (796–767 B.C.)
- 2 Chronicles 26 Reign of Uzziah (Azariah) (767–739 B.C.)
- 2 Chronicles 27 Reign of Jotham (739–731 B.C.)
- 2 Chronicles 28 Reign of Ahaz (731–715 B.C.)
- 2 Chronicles 29–32 Reign of Hezekiah (727–699 or 715–686 B.C.)
- 2 Chronicles 33 Reign of Manasseh and Amon (698–642 or 686–642 B.C.)
- 2 Chronicles 34–35 Reign of Josiah (640–609 B.C.)
- 2 Chronicles 36 Reign of Jehoahaz (609 B.C.), Jehoiakim (609–598 B.C.), Jehoiachin (598–597 B.C.), and Zedekiah (597–586 B.C.)

Judah during the Divided Kingdom

The kingdom of Judah, for its entire existence, was under the leadership of only one dynasty, the house of David. Most of these descendants of David, however, did not follow the Lord with all their heart but sinned and led their people into sin. Since the inspired record centers the history of the kingdoms around their kings, the best way to summa-

alize the highlights of the period is to summarize the reign of the king.

Rehoboam, 930–913 B.C. This son of Solomon reigned seventeen years. His foolish decision to increase the burdens of the people led to the division of the kingdom. After having been forbidden by God to fight against the northern tribes, Rehoboam proceeded to build the defenses of Judah. He fortified many strongholds and placed provisions, weapons, and soldiers in them. As a result of Jeroboam's changing the priesthood, many of the priests and Levites who were in the northern kingdom came to Judah and Jerusalem and became a part of the southern kingdom. However, Rehoboam also forsook the law of Jehovah and did that which was evil because he did not set his heart to seek the Lord. He allowed the people of Judah to build high places for pagan worship practices and he also allowed the Sodomites to continue in the land. Because of the sins of Rehoboam and of Judah, God sent against them Shishak, the king of Egypt, who took away the treasures of the house of the Lord and of the king's house. Shishak or Sheshonk I has left an inscription at Karnak which confirms his raid into Judah and the extracting of tribute from the land (See James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 263-64). Rehoboam humbled himself, and the Lord turned his wrath and did not completely destroy him. However, there was continual war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam throughout his reign (1 Kings 12–14; 2 Chron. 10–14).

Abijam or Abijah, 913–910 B.C. Abijam or Abijah succeeded Rehoboam. He reigned only three years. War continued between Jeroboam and him, with Abijah prevailing because Judah relied upon the Lord. However, on the whole, he walked in the sins of his father and his heart was not perfect with Jehovah (1 Kings 14:31–15:8; 2 Chron. 13:1-22).

Asa, 910–869 B.C. Abijah's son Asa became the third king of Judah. He came to the throne in the twentieth year of Jeroboam and reigned forty-one years over Judah. Asa is the first of four righteous, reformer kings who reigned over Judah. He "did what was right in the eyes of the Lord" (1 Kings 15:11). He removed the altars and the high places

and ordered Judah to seek the Lord and to keep the law. He attempted to eradicate pagan worship in Judah. He also built fortified cities and strengthened the army. The Lord blessed him with peace and prosperity at the beginning of his reign. Later he engaged in war with the Ethiopian army and was victorious due to a prayer of reliance on God. After a further warning from the prophet of God, Asa put into effect even greater reforms. He put the Sodomites out of the land and removed all the idols and abominations. The Scripture says, “. . . the heart of Asa was perfect all his days” (2 Chron. 15:17). His reform included not only Judah and Benjamin but those that sojourned with them from Ephraim, Manasseh, and Simeon and all who desired to seek the Lord. Toward the end of Asa’s reign there was war between Judah and the northern kingdom with Baasha as their king. Asa obtained the assistance of Benhadad, the king of Syria, against Baasha. For this he was rebuked by Hanani, the seer. The end of Asa’s reign was marred by his reliance upon Syria and physicians, instead of upon the Lord, and by his putting Hanani in the prison house (1 Kings 15:8-24; 2 Chronicles 14-16).

Jehoshaphat, 869-848 B.C. After Asa’s death Jehoshaphat ascended the throne as the fourth king of Judah. He was contemporary with the wicked king of Israel Ahab, beginning his reign in the fourth year of Ahab. Thiele proposes that he was coregent with Asa for about four years. Jehoshaphat was also a righteous and good king. He removed the remnant of the Sodomites. He sent circuit teachers with the book of the law throughout all the cities of Judah to teach the people. The Lord caused the nations to respect him and gave him peace. The Philistines and Arabians brought him tribute.

Jehoshaphat’s great mistake was to make peace with the king of Israel and to confirm this by taking Ahab and Jezebel’s daughter, Athaliah, as a wife for his son, Jehoram. The sins of Ahab, Jezebel, and their daughter Athaliah brought much grief to the kingdoms of Israel and Judah in later years. Due to this alliance with Ahab, Jehoshaphat later joined him in battle against Syria. The Lord was

against this battle, as indicated by the prophet Micaiah, and it resulted in death for Ahab and in defeat for Jehoshaphat. The prophet Jehu rebuked Jehoshaphat for helping the wicked Ahab and loving those that hate the Lord. Following this, Jehoshaphat returned to his reforms, going to the people from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim and bringing them back to the Lord. He set judges in the land and warned them to judge according to the standard of the Lord. At the end of his reign, because of his reliance upon the Lord and his prayer for the Lord's help against the Moabites and the Ammonites, the Lord gave him victory over these enemies. Jehoshaphat continued his alliance with the house of Ahab by assisting Jehoram, king of Israel, in an expedition against the Moabites and their king, Mesha. They were successful in subduing the Moabites this time, but later Mesha successfully rebelled against Israel and erected the Moabite Stone to tell of his success. (See Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 320-21.) Evidently, in his last years his own son, Jehoram, joined him as coregent (1 Kings 22:41-50; 2 Kings 3; 2 Chron. 17-20).

Jehoram, 848-841 B.C. Judah's fifth king, Jehoram, the son of Jehoshaphat, married Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel of the northern kingdom. Unfortunately, he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, as did the house of Ahab because he had the daughter of Ahab as his wife. He made high places in the mountains of Judah and caused the people of his kingdom to commit spiritual adultery. The subject kingdoms of Edom and Libnah successfully revolted against him. During his reign, and because of his sins, the Philistines, the Arabians, and the Ethiopians raided Judah and carried away the substance of the king's house, along with his sons and his wives. A written message came to Jehoram from Elijah rebuking him for his sins and pronouncing his death by means of a disease of the bowels (2 Kings 8:16-24; 2 Chron. 21).

Ahaziah, 841 B.C. The son of the wicked Athaliah, Ahaziah, reigned only one year as the sixth king of Judah. He also was an unrighteous king who walked in the way of the house of Ahab, his grandfather. Second Chronicles 22:3

affirms, "his mother was his counselor in doing wickedly." He continued in alliance with his uncle Jehoram, king of Israel, and went to war with him against Hazael, king of Syria. His death came through the providential working of God to fulfill the prophecies he had made through Elijah against the house of Ahab. Ahaziah went to visit Jehoram, king of Israel and son of Ahab, because he was sick. It was at this time that God raised up Jehu to annihilate the dynasty of Omri and Ahab and to become king of Israel. Conveniently, Jehoram and Ahaziah were together at Jezreel when Jehu came. Jehu smote both kings at the same time and proceeded to destroy all of the house of Ahab (2 Kings 8:24-9:29; 2 Chron. 22:1-9).

Athaliah, 841-835 B.C. When Athaliah, the wicked daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, saw that her son Ahaziah had been killed, she destroyed all the seed royal and usurped the throne of Judah. It may be recalled that Athaliah's husband had been Jehoram, king of Judah. Again through God's providence Jehosheba, daughter of King Jehoram and wife of Jehoiada the priest, hid Joash, the son of Ahaziah, so he would not be slain (2 Kings 11:1-3; 2 Chron. 22:10-12).

Joash, 835-796 B.C. Jehoiada and his wife hid Joash (or Jehoash) securely for six years. When the lad was seven years old, Jehoiada, with the assistance of captains, nobles, and the people in general, broke down the house of Baal, slew Athaliah, and made Joash king. During his minority and while Jehoiada was priest and his instructor, he did what was right. A reform was instituted and the breaches of the house of the Lord were repaired. However, after the death of Jehoiada, Joash forsook the house of the Lord and served idols. He would not listen to the prophets of God. He forgot the kindness of Jehoiada and consented to the stoning of his son Zechariah. Because of his sins, the Lord allowed the army of the Syrians to sack Judah. They left Joash severely wounded, whereupon his servants conspired against him and slew him on his bed (2 Kings 11:4-12:21; 2 Chron. 23-24).

Amaziah, 796-767 B.C. Amaziah, who succeeded his father Joash, is described as doing right, but not with a perfect

heart. He slew those who had assassinated his father. Amaziah organized an expedition against Edom and hired mercenaries from Israel to assist him. However, a man of God rebuked him for aligning himself with Israel, and he forfeited a hundred talents of silver to the mercenaries rather than go against the prophet and the Lord. He recognized, as the prophet said, that "the Lord is able to give you much more than this" (2 Chron. 25:9). He had a successful campaign against the Edomites. He sinned, however, in bringing back the gods of Seir, setting them up to be his gods, and rejecting the counsel of God's prophet. He challenged Jehoash, king of Israel, to battle but was defeated, and Jehoash broke down the wall of Jerusalem and carried away treasures and hostages. Amaziah's end came when a conspiracy was made against him and he was slain at Lachish (2 Kings 14:1-20; 2 Chron. 25).

Azariah or Uzziah, 767-739 B.C. In the twenty-seventh year of the reign of Jeroboam II, king of Israel, the people of Judah made Azariah king in the place of his father, Amaziah. Thiele postulates that Azariah had a coregency with his father from 791 to 767 B.C. His character description credits him with doing what was right and setting himself to seek God. Because of this, God made him prosper. He engaged in war with the Philistines and the Arabians and received tribute from the Ammonites. He fortified Jerusalem and made engines to shoot arrows and stones. He built a great army and expanded the southern kingdom to the greatest extent that it had been since the time of Solomon. However, he sinned by burning incense upon the altar of incense and became a leper (2 Kings 14:21-15:7; 2 Chron. 26).

Jotham, 739-731 B.C. It is possible that Jotham was coregent with his father Azariah during his leprous years, 750-739 B.C. Generally, Jotham did good. However, the high places were not removed. He engaged in building and fortifying activities and defeated the children of Ammon, exacting tribute from them. The Syro-Ephraimitic War seems to have begun while Jotham was still reigning, for the Lord sent Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, against Judah in Jotham's days (2 Kings 15:37-38; 2 Chron. 27:1-9).

Ahaz, 731–715 B.C. Ahaz, the twelfth king of Judah, reigned alone sixteen years, after a coregency with his father, Jotham, 735–731 B.C. Ahaz displeased God and walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, engaging in child sacrifice and idol worship. Rezin, king of Syria, and Pekah, king of Israel, warred against him with the intent of placing the son of Tabeel on the throne in his stead (Isa. 7:1-9). They killed many in Judah and carried a great multitude captive. In order to retain his throne, Ahaz became tributary to Tiglath-pileser III, king of Assyria. In response, Tiglath-pileser III came against Syria and Israel, captured Damascus and a number of cities of Galilee, and carried many captive to Assyria. Ahaz had a pagan altar built in Jerusalem and offered sacrifices upon it. Isaiah had an encounter with Ahaz concerning the outcome of the Syro-Ephraimitic War and prophesied the destruction of these two kingdoms (2 Kings 15:38–16:20; 2 Chron. 28).

Hezekiah, 727–698 or 715–686 B.C. Hezekiah was the last king of Judah during the divided kingdom. In the fourth year of his reign, Shalmaneser V, king of Assyria, besieged Samaria. In his sixth year, or 722 B.C., Samaria fell, and the northern kingdom was carried into captivity and ceased to exist as a kingdom. More will be said of Hezekiah, but the fall of Samaria brings to an end the period of the divided kingdom.

Israel during the Divided Kingdom

Unlike the southern kingdom of Judah, which was ruled by only one dynasty, the dynasty of David, the northern kingdom, Israel, had frequent changes in dynasties. Also, whereas Judah did have some good kings who served as righteous reformers, the northern kingdom was without any kings who did right in the eyes of the Lord. It is said of nearly every king of the northern kingdom that he followed in the sins of Jeroboam and the ways in which he caused Israel to sin.

The dynasty of Jeroboam I. This dynasty consisted of the reign of Jeroboam I, 930–909 B.C., and his son Nadab, 909–908 B.C. As noted above, Jeroboam I led the rebel-

lion against Rehoboam. God established him as king, but Jeroboam I turned and sinned grievously against God, leading his kingdom into apostasy. Because of his sins God indicated he would sweep away the house of Jeroboam I. Nadab, his son, came to the throne but reigned only two years and "walked in the way of his father, and in his sin which he made Israel to sin" (1 Kings 15:26). Baasha conspired against him and assassinated him. He then fulfilled God's promise against the house of Jeroboam I by killing all of the house of Jeroboam.

The dynasty of Baasha. God exalted Baasha to punish the house of Jeroboam and allowed him to reign twenty-four years (908–885 B.C.). However, Baasha also proved wicked and walked in the way of Jeroboam I to provoke the Lord to anger. He engaged in war against King Asa of Judah but was unsuccessful. Because of his sins God decreed that he would make his house like the house of Jeroboam I. He was succeeded by his son, Elah, for two years (885–884 B.C.). Zimri, the captain of half his chariots, conspired against him and killed him.

Period of civil strife. Zimri was able to assume power for only seven days. He completely destroyed the house of Baasha, fulfilling God's plan. When the people heard of the assassination of Elah, they made Omri, who was serving as the captain of the hosts, king over Israel. He besieged Zimri in Tirzah and took the city, whereupon Zimri burned down the king's house. About the same time another segment of the people exalted Tibni and followed him as king. For a period of four years (884–880 B.C.) the northern kingdom was divided between these two. However the people who followed Omri prevailed over Tibni and his followers, and Omri became the sole ruler for eight years (880–873 B.C.).

The dynasty of Omri. Omri bought the hill Samaria and built the city here. Scripture does not give much information about his reign. However, he did establish a dynasty that consisted of the reigns of himself, his son, Ahab (twenty-two years), his grandson, Ahaziah (two years), and his grandson, Jehoram (twelve years). He made an impression upon the Assyrians, for a number of times in the annals of

the Assyrian kings they call the land of Israel *Bit Huumria* (Omri-land) well over a century after the death of Omri. Omri acted more wickedly than the kings before him and walked in the sins of Jeroboam I.

Omri's son, Ahab, succeeded him and reigned approximately 873-853 B.C. He was more sinful than any of the kings before him and probably after him. He married Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians. Together they engaged in and promoted Baal worship extensively. The prophet Elijah was contemporary with them and opposed their sinful practices. Jezebel sought to kill Elijah, but God protected him. He confronted the prophets of Baal and slew 450 of them. When Jezebel treacherously killed Naboth so Ahab could take his vineyard, Elijah met Ahab at the vineyard and indicated that, as the dogs had licked the blood of Naboth, so they would lick Ahab's blood, and they would eat Jezebel. Ahab warred with Benhadad, king of Syria, on several occasions. However, about 854 B.C. when both kingdoms were threatened by Shalmaneser III, king of Assyria, they joined forces with ten other kings of the region to fight him at the battle of Qarqar (see Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 278-79, and W. W. Hallo, "From Qarqar to Carchemish," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 23:2 [1960], 33-61). Though this battle is not mentioned in the Bible, it is most significant for biblical history. The Assyrian records indicate that it was in the sixth year of Shalmaneser III. The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III and other Assyrian records indicate that Jehu had become king of Israel and paid tribute to Shalmaneser III in the eighteenth year of Shalmaneser's reign, which evidently was the first year of Jehu's reign. Thus, since only the two-year reign of Ahaziah and the twelve-year reign of Jehoram (which together probably covered approximately twelve calendar years) came between Jehu and Ahab, the battle of Qarqar must have been about the last year of Ahab's reign. Thus, with the last year of Ahab's reign reckoned at about 853 B.C. and the first year of Jehu's reign at about 841 B.C., it is possible to arrive at the approximate dates of all the kings of Israel. Ahab

continued his sinful ways in his last year by warring against Syria, rejecting the counsel of Micaiah, God's prophet, and putting him in prison. Ahab was slain in this battle, and the dogs licked his blood (1 Kings 16:29-22:40).

Ahab's son Ahaziah (853-852 B.C.) succeeded his father as king of Israel. He continued the sinful ways of his father, his mother, and Jeroboam I. He sent messengers to inquire of Beelzebub, the god of Ekron, concerning his sickness. After consuming two companies by calling down fire from heaven, the prophet Elijah accompanied the third company to Ahaziah, rebuked him for his sins, and prophesied his death.

Ahaziah's brother Jehoram succeeded him and reigned 852-841 B.C. The Scripture indicates that, while he was not as wicked as his father and mother, he continued in the sins of Jeroboam I. Many of the activities of the prophet Elisha seem to have occurred during his reign. Jehoram was contemporary with Jehoshaphat and Jehoram of Judah and continued the alliance that Ahab had made with Judah. His sister Athaliah was married to Jehoram of Judah. Therefore, he was joined by Jehoshaphat in a successful expedition against Mesha, king of the Moabites. At the close of his reign Ahaziah, Jehoram's nephew and the son of Jehoram and Athaliah, became king of Judah. They joined in battle against Hazael, king of Syria, at Ramoth-Gilead. In this battle Jehoram of Israel was wounded. While he was recuperating, Ahaziah came to visit him. At this time God (through the work of Elisha) raised up Jehu to fulfill his prophecies against the house of Ahab. Jehu was proclaimed king by the other officers of the army. He came to Jezreel, met Jehoram and Ahaziah, and slew them both. He proceeded to destroy the entire house of Ahab, thus bringing to an end the dynasty of Omri and Ahab in the northern kingdom and removing the king from the throne in Judah at the same time.

The dynasty of Jehu. Having annihilated the house of Ahab, Jehu reigned over Israel for twenty-eight years (841-813 B.C.). He had Jezebel thrown out a window, and she was trampled by the horses. He proceeded to entrap and

destroy a multitude of Baal worshipers and to destroy Baal worship out of Israel. While he removed many of the sins of Ahab and Jezebel, he did not depart from the sins of Jeroboam I, but maintained the golden calves in Bethel and Dan. He did not walk in the law of the Lord, but because of his faithfulness in executing God's will against the house of Ahab, God promised to allow his sons to the fourth generation to sit on the throne of Israel. Jehu is the only king of the Hebrew people represented pictorially in extant material. He is pictured on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III, bowing before Shalmaneser to present tribute, apparently during the first year of his reign (841 B.C.).

The reigning descendants of Jehu were Jehoahaz (813-798 B.C.), Jehoash (798-781 B.C.), Jeroboam II, perhaps a coregent (792-781 B.C. and sole king 781-753 B.C.), and Zechariah, who ruled for less than a year about 752 B.C. It is said of each of these that he did evil and followed in the sins of Jeroboam I, the son of Nebat. The only one of these kings who was really significant is Jeroboam II. According to a prophecy made by Jonah, he extended the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath unto the Sea of the Arabah (2 Kings 14:25). The book of Amos reflects that Israel was experiencing tremendous prosperity under the reign of Jeroboam II. The dynasty of Jehu came to an end when Shallum conspired against Zechariah, killed him, and reigned in his place, thus fulfilling the word of the Lord that the sons of Jehu to the fourth generation would sit upon the throne of Israel.

The final period of anarchy. Shallum could maintain the throne for only the space of a month during 752 B.C. Menahem killed him and assumed the throne. Menahem reigned from 752-742 B.C. Pekahiah, his son, replaced him and reigned for two years (741-739 B.C.). There is a chronological difficulty in the dating of Pekah's reign. Thiele postulates that there was a division in the northern kingdom at this time and that Pekah exercised a rival reign in Gilead east of the Jordan, beginning the same year that Menahem assumed the throne in Samaria. Other theories have been proposed (see Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the*

Hebrew Kings, pp. 122ff.). If this is the case, he would have been in contention for kingship 752–739 B.C. and would have exercised complete kingship 739–731 B.C. Pekah, in league with Rezin of Syria, attempted to fight against Ahaz of Judah. However, Ahaz secured the aid of Tiglath-pileser III, king of Assyria, who took many Syrians and Israelites of the region of Galilee into captivity. The last king of Israel, Hoshea (731–722 B.C.), was placed on the throne of Israel by Tiglath-pileser III according to his annals. (See Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 283–84.) Shalmaneser V found Hoshea conspiring with So (Siwa), king of Egypt. He besieged Samaria for three years. Samaria fell in 722 B.C. to the Assyrians, who were now led by Sargon II. Many of Israel were carried captive and transported into cities of Assyria. Thus the sinful ways of Jeroboam I, the son of Nebat, which were imitated by every king of Israel, finally resulted in the destruction of the northern kingdom.

The Prophets and the Divided Kingdom

The prophetic movement had been developing among the Hebrew people at least since the time of the judges. During the divided kingdom the prophets came to be more and more significant in the history and literature of the Hebrews. A number of prophets are mentioned who have left no written messages, except the part they may have played in recording the historical books. Ahijah the Shilonite guided Jeroboam I in rebelling against Rehoboam and condemned him when he sinned. Shemaiah commanded the authority to restrain Rehoboam from battle with Israel and to rebuke him for his sins. Iddo, Hanani, Jehu ben Hanani, and Azariah ben Obed all moved freely about the courts of the kings and performed their functions in an authoritative manner.

The two most prominent prophets were Elijah, who was contemporary with Ahab, and Elisha, his successor, who was contemporary with Jehoram and Jehu. Many stories are related of the outstanding exploits of these two prophets. They were held in high respect and exercised tremendous authority.

The prophets of the most enduring influence left written

accounts of their messages. The earliest one certainly known is Jonah, who preceded or was contemporary with Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:25). (Some scholars date Joel earlier, but the book of Joel contains no specific date, and the evidence is indefinite.) The book of Jonah is not really prophetic in nature but is historical and biographical in that it tells of Jonah's mission to warn Nineveh of her forthcoming destruction and of Jonah's own reactions.

Next, the book of Amos specifically dates this prophet in the days of Uzziah, king of Judah, and in the days of Jeroboam, king of Israel (Amos 1:1). Amos was from Judah, but the Lord sent him to the northern kingdom to rebuke Israel for their sins. The prophet Hosea enjoyed a lengthy ministry, which began in the days of Jeroboam II, king of Israel, and Uzziah, king of Judah, and continued through the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah (Hos. 1:1). The message of Hosea is also directed to the northern kingdom. It compares their heinous sins with the repeated adultery of Hosea's wife, Gomer. The time of Isaiah's ministry was almost identical to Hosea's, beginning in the year that Uzziah died and continuing well into Hezekiah's reign, if not beyond (Isa. 1:1; 6:1). Isaiah served as a prophet in the court of the kings of Judah, rebuking sins on the one hand and prophesying hope and bright prospects on the other. The prophet Micah seems to have been a younger contemporary, since he dates his ministry in the days of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah. Micah uttered messages concerning things he saw about both Samaria and Jerusalem.

THE MONARCHY OF JUDAH (722-586 B.C.)

During the time of Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 B.C.), both Israel and Judah became tributary kingdoms to the Assyrians. Judah voluntarily became tributary when Ahaz paid tribute to Tiglath-pileser III so he would war against Pekah, king of Israel, and Rezin, king of Syria, who were making war in league against Judah. Israel became subject as a result of Tiglath-pileser III's victorious conquest of the

land, which resulted in his placing Hoshea on the throne of Israel. When Hoshea and Israel conspired with Egypt against Assyria, Shalmaneser V began war against Israel. His successor, Sargon II, destroyed Samaria and carried many of the northern kingdom into captivity. (See Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 284ff.) Thus the kingdom of Judah was left as the only Hebrew kingdom. Hezekiah was only in the fourth year of his reign when the siege of Samaria began, and the northern kingdom fell in the sixth year of his reign. The alliance between Judah and Assyria seems to have been in force, though the change in kingship, both in Assyria and in Judah, may have left many matters unclear.

Hezekiah and the Assyrians

Scholars differ widely on exactly when Hezekiah began his reign in Jerusalem. They are generally agreed that he reigned 727–698 B.C., 715–686 B.C., or somewhere in between. (See Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, pp. 132ff.) At any rate, Hezekiah came to the throne about the time of the collapse of the northern kingdom. He departed drastically from the policies of Ahaz, his father, and started a major religious reform in Judah. He even extended this reform to the remnant of the northern kingdom and involved many of them in the renewed and refreshed worship of Jehovah. Naturally, this meant disposing of the idols and altars, which included the one his father, Ahaz, had erected after his alliance with Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria. This also signified that Hezekiah was rebelling against Assyria. The Assyrian King, Sargon II (722–705 B.C.), was busily engaged in quelling a rebellion in the Babylonian area, which was being led by Merodach-baladan II. Some of the facts seem to indicate that there was an agreement between Merodach-baladan II and Hezekiah to rebel simultaneously on opposite fronts of the Assyrian Empire. At any rate, Hezekiah was free to carry out his reforms in Judah for the early part of his reign because the Assyrians were busy fighting on their eastern front. However, Hezekiah anticipated eventual reprisals by the Assyrians and prepared for siege by building a tunnel to

bring water into the city. In 701 B.C., Sennacherib, king of Assyria (704–681 B.C.), came against Judah. He claims in his annals that he laid siege to forty-six of the cities of Judah and to many small villages in their vicinity. He says that he shut up Hezekiah in Jerusalem like a bird in a cage. However, his annals do not claim ultimate victory, and the biblical record indicates that the Lord intervened through his angel and caused Sennacherib to flee from Judah. Hezekiah seems to have been able to reign fifteen more years after his sickness with peace, prosperity, and continued religious reforms.

The Wicked Manasseh

Wicked Manasseh reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem 697–642 B.C. He completely reversed the reforms of his father, Hezekiah, and was more wicked than any of the other kings of Judah. He encouraged Baal worship and worshiped all the hosts of heaven. He practiced sorcery and enchantments and passed his children through the fire, as well as other sinful things. He is charged with shedding much innocent blood in the city, and the ultimate fall of Judah must be laid at his feet because of his sins and the innocent blood that he shed.

Manasseh also returned to a tributary relationship with Assyria under Sennacherib, Esarhaddon (680–669 B.C.), and Ashurbanipal (668–630 B.C.). Both Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal recorded in their annals that Manasseh was forced to provide assistance in their Egyptian campaigns and to furnish building materials and labor for construction activities at Nineveh. Second Chronicles 33:11 mentions that Manasseh was placed in chains and carried to Babylon by the Assyrians. However, he was allowed to return to Jerusalem later and manifested some penitent attitude afterwards. But the wickedness he had encouraged was so prevalent among the people that no change was made in the sinful direction of the land.

Amon, his son, succeeded him for only two years (742–740 B.C.). He continued the evil ways of his father. His servants conspired against him and assassinated him.

The Reforms of Josiah

At this point God raised up king Josiah, of whom he had prophesied to Jeroboam I. Josiah was only eight years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-one years in Jerusalem (640–609 B.C.). When he was sixteen years old, he began to seek after God. In the twelfth year of his reign he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the idolatrous images and worship places. He even carried his reform into the areas of Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon, and Napthali in North Israel. In the eighteenth year of his reign he started repairing the house of the Lord. In the process of cleaning and repairing it, Hilkiyah the high priest found the book of the law. He gave it to Shaphan the secretary, who read it and then brought it to King Josiah. After hearing it and checking with the prophetess Huldah, Josiah launched an extensive effort to keep the law contained in the book. He gathered the elders and the inhabitants of Judah and Jerusalem and read the contents of the book to them. They made a covenant to keep the commandments of the Lord. He intensified his efforts to purge the land of Baal worship and the worship of the hosts of heaven. He broke down the houses of the Sodomites. He fulfilled God's prophecy found in 1 Kings 13:1-3 by breaking down the altar that Jeroboam I had erected in Bethel. He caused the people to keep the Passover in a manner that had not been observed since the days of Samuel.

Josiah was, no doubt, aided and encouraged in his reform by the prophet Jeremiah. God raised up Jeremiah to be a prophet in the thirteenth year of the reign of Josiah. Thus for eighteen or nineteen years Jeremiah was busy preaching against the sins of the people and urging them to repent while Josiah was administering his kingdom and reform.

However, in spite of all the efforts of Josiah, Jeremiah, and other righteous men of the period, it seems that the reforms were only surface in nature. It was impossible for Josiah to legislate righteousness. For the most part, the hearts of the people of Judah and Jerusalem had not been changed from the ways they had learned under sinful Manasseh.

Therefore, when Josiah was killed at Megiddo in an attempt to keep Pharaoh-necho, king of Egypt, from assisting the Assyrians against the Babylonians, and was succeeded by his sons, they almost immediately forgot their father's reforms and returned to the wicked ways of the nation before him. Jeremiah, under the successors of Josiah, became a persecuted and hounded prophet who saw his nation die before his eyes in spite of his pleading and preaching with tears and many sacrifices for them to repent.

The Fall of Assyria and the Rise of Babylon

One of the reasons Josiah was able to carry out his reforms is that Assyria was in the process of being overthrown by Babylon during the same years that Josiah and Jeremiah were pushing reform in Judah. According to the Neo-Babylonian chronicles (see D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings*), Nabopolassar ascended the throne of Babylon in 626 B.C., one or two years after Josiah began his reforms and Jeremiah was called to be a prophet. The Babylonians had forced the Assyrians to withdraw from there. For several years there were insignificant encounters between the Babylonians and the Assyrians, as Babylon was gaining in strength. In 615 B.C., the Babylonians were confident enough to besiege Asshur, a chief city of Assyria. In 614 the Babylonians were assisted independently by the Medes, who captured Asshur. In 612 the Babylonians besieged Nineveh and brought about its fall. The Assyrian king, Assur-uballit, assumed the rule of Assyria and set up his headquarters at Harran. In the meanwhile, the Babylonians, under Nabopolassar, continued to subdue various areas that had formerly been a part of the Assyrian Empire. In 610 B.C. the Babylonians with the Medes captured Harran. In 609 Assur-uballit was joined by Pharaoh-necho of Egypt in an attempt to retake Harran, but they were unsuccessful. Finally, Babylon gained undisputed control of the Fertile Crescent through a decisive victory over the Egyptians at the Battle of Carchemish in 605. This victory was led by the crown prince, Nebuchadnezzar II. While he was following up on this victory and conquering

all of the Syrian-Palestinian area he received word that Nabopolassar had died, and he returned to Babylon to ascend the throne as the new king.

The Decline and Fall of Judah and Jerusalem

While Babylon was struggling to gain control of the Fertile Crescent against dying Assyria and the aspiring Egyptians, there developed in Judah two opposing parties in terms of their foreign policy with regard to these nations. In 609 B.C. Pharaoh-necho had killed Josiah, and the Jewish people placed his son Jehoahaz on the throne in Jerusalem for three months. Pharaoh-necho made Judah tributary to him, deposed Jehoahaz, and put Jehoiakim (608–598 B.C.) on the throne. Then, according to Daniel 1:1, in the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem, took part of the vessels of the house of God and certain fine young men of the seed royal and of the nobles, including Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah to Babylon for training and as hostages. The one party in Judah wanted to make alliance with Egypt, and the other wanted to submit to Babylon. Jeremiah was caught in the middle of this dilemma. He knew by revelation from God that the only way for Judah to survive was to submit to Babylon. However, the other party considered him a traitor when he urged such action.

The Egyptian party prevailed, and after serving Babylon three years Jehoiakim rebelled. Nebuchadnezzar II came again against Jerusalem and accomplished the second exile about 597 B.C., deporting Jehoiakim to Babylon. Jehoiakim's son Jehoiachin had been on the throne only three months and ten days when Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem. He took Jehoiachin, his mother, and others, including Ezekiel, into captivity.

Nebuchadnezzar II made Zedekiah, another son of Josiah, king in Jerusalem. He reigned for eleven years (597–586 B.C.). He was extremely weak, and though he seemed to want to listen to Jeremiah, the Egyptian party prevailed over him and he rebelled against the king of Babylon. Therefore, Nebuchadnezzar II laid siege against Jerusalem in the ninth

year of the reign of Zedekiah and continued until the eleventh year. Finally, the city was taken and destroyed, including the great temple. Many of the people were killed. Zedekiah's sons were slain before his eyes and then his eyes were put out. Jeremiah was given a choice of going to Babylon or staying in the land, and he chose to stay. Thus Judah was carried away captive because of her transgressions.

THE BABYLONIAN CAPTIVITY (586–539 B.C.)

The Length of the Captivity

One of the problems concerning the captivity or exile is its exact length. According to Jeremiah 25:10-14, the captivity would last seventy years. The writer of Chronicles indicates that Jeremiah's prophecy was fulfilled and that the land enjoyed seventy years of sabbath keeping (2 Chron. 36:20-23). However, the biblical sources do not indicate exactly when this period started and when it ended. At any rate, there are two seventy-year periods that quite adequately fulfill what may be called a seventy-year captivity. The first time that Nebuchadnezzar subjugated Judah and carried away some of the nobles was approximately 605 B.C., the fourth year of Jehoiakim when the prediction in Jeremiah 25 was given. It is not known exactly when Zerubbabel and Jeshua arrived in Palestine with the first Jews who returned under the edict of Cyrus, but it must have been about 536 or 535 B.C. This would give one possible seventy-year period for the captivity. Another way of calculating the captivity would be from the destruction of the temple until it was rebuilt. The temple was destroyed in 586 B.C., but due to various delays, even after many returned from captivity, it was not completed until the sixth year of the reign of Darius I, king of Persia, in 516 B.C. Either way, Jeremiah's prophecy of seventy years of captivity would be fulfilled.

The Captives of the Mesopotamian Area

Daniel and his friends. The book of Daniel provides the only direct source of information about these captives. Critics have attempted to undermine the historicity of the

book of Daniel. However, much archeological evidence of recent years gives reason to have confidence in the history of Daniel. In the third year of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar II besieged Jerusalem. He carried back to Babylon part of the vessels of the house of God and certain of the finest young men from the seed royal and the nobles. This account from Daniel 1:1-7 agrees with other information from 2 Kings 24:1-7, Jeremiah 35:11, as well as the information obtained from the Babylonian chronicles and the Aramaic papyrus from Saqqarah. (See Charles F. Pfeiffer, *The Biblical World*, pp. 133-37.)

Among those carried away were Daniel, Hananiah or Shadrach, Mishael or Meshach, and Azariah or Abednego. According to Daniel 1, these purposed not to defile themselves with the king's dainties and his wine. They fared better on their diet of water and vegetables than those on the royal diet and were found to be superior to all the others. In the second year of Nebuchadnezzar II's reign, he had his dream concerning the golden image, which Daniel interpreted. As a result, Daniel and his friends received high appointments in the land. Chapter 3, however, tells of the severe trial by fire that Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego had to face. Through God's blessings and their faith they overcame the fiery furnace and were promoted by Nebuchadnezzar II. Chapter 4 tells how Daniel interpreted another dream of Nebuchadnezzar II, which was fulfilled when the haughty king went temporarily mad, in order that God might humble him. After mentioning these four events under the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II, the history skips over all the intervening period of the captivity until the last year, 539 B.C. Chapter 5 tells of the feast of Belshazzar and the handwriting on the wall, which was interpreted by Daniel and came to pass that night. The rest of the book of Daniel concerns events and prophecies of Daniel under Persian rule.

Jehoiachin and the deportation. According to the Babylonian chronicles, in 601 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar fought against the Egyptian army of Pharaoh-necho II. This battle resulted in great losses to both armies and in virtual defeat

for Babylon. Evidently this encouraged the Egyptian party of Judah to rebel against Babylon. For some time the Babylonians were busy elsewhere, but in 598/97 they came to hold Judah in account for the rebellion. About this time Jehoiakim died and Jehoiachin reigned for three months. Then Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem and carried Jehoiachin, his mother, his servants, his princes, his officers, and others captive to Babylon. Second Kings 24:10-16 reports that this captivity included the chief men of the land, including the smiths and craftsmen. Only the poorest of the people were left in Judah. Nothing definite is known about these captives. After Jehoiachin had been in captivity thirty-seven years, Evil-merodach, king of Babylon, brought him out of prison and gave him a more exalted position. He provided him with finer garments and with a regular allowance for the rest of his life. This is confirmed by a clay tablet found near the Ishtar Gate of Babylon. The tablet, which dates from the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II, lists Jehoiachin as king of Judah and indicates that he, along with five other royal princes, received rations of barley and oil. The Babylonians thus continued to regard him as the legitimate king of Judah.

Ezekiel and his fellow captives. Judging from the fact that Ezekiel dates his activities from the beginning of the reign of Jehoiachin, it seems probable that he and the other captives were brought to the river Chebar about the same time that Jehoiachin was carried to Babylon. These, then, must have been some of the chief men of the land and the leaders of the people. According to various references in Ezekiel and to information recorded in Jeremiah 29, some false prophets tried to deceive the people into thinking that they would return from captivity very soon. The task of Ezekiel and Jeremiah was to convince these people that they should settle down, build houses, engage in agriculture, and continue family life in that place, because the captivity was going to be long and Jerusalem was going to be completely destroyed in a few years. Thus Ezekiel portrayed the siege and destruction of Jerusalem and in other ways encouraged the people to recognize their sins and to repent. From

Ezekiel 8:1 and 20:1, it is evident that the Jewish community in exile recognized elders or leaders and that these had gatherings and gave counsel and leadership to the people. From the fact that they sought guidance from Ezekiel it may be assumed that they continued to hear the word of the Lord, both from his prophets and from the reading of the law. As some have inferred, the synagogue may well have had its beginning in the very type meetings mentioned in Ezekiel.

Jeremiah and the People Left in Judah

The great prophet Jeremiah saw his nation reject the reform which he preached and which King Josiah instituted. He saw Nebuchadnezzar II invade the land of Judah and carry away some of its people on at least five different occasions. In spite of his inspired counsel, he saw the Egyptian party persuade Jehoiakim and later Zedekiah to rely on Egypt and rebel against Babylon, which brought further repression from Babylon. Finally, in 588 B.C., he saw Nebuchadnezzar II march into the land and begin a three-year siege of Jerusalem, which ended with the total destruction of the city and the temple in 586 B.C. Zedekiah was taken to Nebuchadnezzar II at Riblah. There his sons were killed before his eyes, his eyes were put out, and he was carried captive to Babylon. Many of Zedekiah's officers were killed. According to Jeremiah 52:29, an additional 832 persons were carried into captivity. Only the poorest of the land were left to be vinedressers and husbandmen.

Nebuchadnezzar II gave charge concerning Jeremiah that his soldiers should look well to him and do him no harm. He was freed after being carried to Ramah with the other captives and was given free choice to go on to Babylon or to return to Judah. Jeremiah chose to go back with Gedaliah, whom the Babylonians had appointed governor, to be among the people that were left in the land. Gedaliah set up his headquarters at Mizpah and attempted to reorganize the community under Babylonian rule. However, Baalis, king of Ammon, sent Ishmael to assassinate Gedaliah, which eventually he did. The people, now led by Johanan, were

fearful of what the Babylonians might do and wanted to flee to Egypt. Jeremiah urged them to remain in the land, but Johanan and the people took the prophet and Baruch into the land of Egypt.

The Exiles in Egypt

No specific source gives systematic information about the exiled Jews in Egypt. However, many allusions and prophecies concerning the Jews going to Egypt and being in Egypt are made in the Scriptures. The most specific information concerns the Jews who brought Jeremiah to Egypt and settled in Tahpanhes, Migdol, Memphis, and the country of Pathros.

Jeremiah 44 indicates that they burned incense to the queen of heaven and committed abominations against the Lord in these places. Later history testifies clearly to the fact that many Jewish exiles did live and develop communities in Egypt.

The Elephantine Papyri give positive evidence of a Jewish settlement on this island at the first cataract of the Nile at the close of the fifth century B.C. Josephus refers to Jewish communities in Egypt, and it is certainly known that during the Hellenistic period the Jews constituted a large part of the population of Alexandria.

The evidence is conclusive that the Babylonian and Assyrian captivities caused the Jewish people to be scattered in all directions, so that by NT times there were Jewish communities in every major city and country of the Roman Empire. The captivity served a definite purpose in bringing what Scripture calls "the fullness of time." Through the Jewish exiles, people throughout North Africa, Western Asia, and Europe became acquainted with monotheism and the OT. In every major city there were synagogues, which served as a good medium for the preaching of the gospel and the establishment of the church.

Further, the captivity served as had no other act of God to help turn the Jewish people, especially those who returned from captivity, from idolatry and to the worship of Jehovah alone.

THE RETURN AND RESTORATION (539–333 B.C.)

The Decline and Fall of Babylon

During Nebuchadnezzar II's long reign of forty-four years, the Babylonian empire was strong and firmly in control. However, his son, Evil-merodach (562–560 B.C.), reigned only two years. In all likelihood he was assassinated by his successor, Nergal-shar-usur (Neriglissar, 560–556 B.C.), who died within four years and left a minor son, Labashi-Marduk, on the throne. This son was quickly removed by Nabonidus, who reigned 556–539 B.C. Nabonidus seemed to have forgotten the affairs of the kingdom in his fanatical devotion to the moon god, Sin. Because of his neglect of the traditional Babylonian religion, the priests of Marduk became hostile to him. Around 549 B.C. he transferred his residence from Babylon to the Oasis of Teima in the Arabian Desert southeast of Edom. The affairs in Babylon were left in the hands of the crown prince, Belshazzar.

In the meantime, Cyrus the Persian had rebelled against the Median king, Astyages, and by 550 B.C. had seized the vast Median Empire. He continued the expansion of this empire until finally he confronted Babylonia and overthrew it with the conquest of the city of Babylon in 539 B.C.

Cyrus' Policy and Edict of Restoration

In 538 B.C. Cyrus issued a decree which provided for the restoration of the Jews in exile to their homeland, the rebuilding of the temple, and the revival of Jewish worship. (See Ezra 1:1-4; 6:1-5.) This decree is in harmony with the general policy of Cyrus, which has been confirmed by archeology. (See Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 312ff.) Cyrus reversed the deportation policy of the Assyrians and Babylonians. He allowed and assisted the people to resettle in their own homeland if they desired.

The restoration of the Jewish captives and the life of the Jews under the Persian Empire may be briefly outlined as follows:

I. The biblical period, 539–423 B.C.

A. The first return to the rebuilding of the temple, 539–515.

- B. A blank page in Jewish history, 515–485.
- C. Esther, the Jews, and related events, 485–465.
- D. The restoration under Ezra and Nehemiah, 458–423.

II. The nonbiblical period, 423–333 B.C.

The First Return to Rebuild the Temple

Cyrus placed Sheshbazzar in charge of the first party of Jews to return to the land and allowed him to take back many of the spoils that Nebuchadnezzar II had removed from Jerusalem. Very little is said of the activities of this first group of returnees. Ezra 5:16 credits Sheshbazzar with laying the foundations of the house of God in Jerusalem. However, the book of Haggai makes it clear that the first returning Jews became involved in their own activities and did not complete the temple. In part, this was caused by opposition from adversaries, but the details of this are shrouded in the problem of understanding Ezra 4.

At any rate, the temple lay incomplete until 520 B.C. when the prophets Haggai and Zechariah urged Zerubbabel, the governor, and Jeshua, the priest, and the rest of the people to resume work on the house of God. They obtained authorization from the Persian authorities and proceeded with the work. They finished the temple in the sixth year of the reign of Darius I, king of Persia, about 516 B.C. They dedicated the house of God with great sacrifices and the observance of the Passover.

The period from 515 to 458 B.C., when Ezra led a group of the Jews back to Palestine, is a blank in the history of the Jews in Palestine. Almost nothing is known of events that transpired in Palestine between the time of Zerubbabel and Ezra. Scholars have made many conjectures and speculations based on vague references and theories concerning the books of Joel, Malachi, Zechariah, and others. However, there are no certain facts about this period. Perhaps some day archeology will bring forth evidence that will help to clarify this period in history.

Esther and the Jews in Persia

The events of the book of Esther take place in the

days of Ahasuerus. He is usually equated with Xerxes I (486–465 B.C.). If this identification is correct, then the book of Esther provides the only concrete information concerning the Jews during the silent or blank period of history mentioned above. The central message of the book of Esther is concerned with how this young Jewish heroine came to be queen, in order that she might save the Jewish people from annihilation at the hands of Xerxes I's cruel minister, Haman. Through Esther's intervention and influence Haman was overthrown, Mordecai, her elder cousin, was exalted, and the Jews were allowed to defend themselves against those who would destroy them; thus they were preserved from annihilation.

The Restoration under Ezra and Nehemiah

Considerable debate exists among scholars as to the exact dates when Ezra and Nehemiah lived and worked and as to whether they were contemporaries. The present author believes that both of them led movements of returned captives to Palestine during the reign of Artaxerxes I (465–424 B.C.; see John Bright, *A History of Israel*, pp. 392ff.). Accordingly, Ezra came to Jerusalem in the seventh year of Artaxerxes I, or about 458 B.C. Ezra's primary goal was to restore the understanding and practice of the law among the Jews. Very few details of his work are given. Emphasis is placed on his letter of authority from Artaxerxes, the journey from Babylon to Jerusalem, Ezra's penitent prayer for the Jewish nation, and the people's repentance expressed mainly in abandoning their mixed marriages.

In the twentieth year of Artaxerxes I or about 445 B.C., Nehemiah heard of the desolate state in Jerusalem and began seeking permission to come to the aid of the beloved city. He obtained permission from Artaxerxes I, gathered a group to accompany him back to the city, and made that perilous journey. The story of Nehemiah and his work is one of great faith and perseverance. In the face of great hardship and much opposition he manifested the qualities of an outstanding leader and successfully completed the task

of rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem and making it a protected and defensible city once again. Then he and Ezra joined in reading the law of Moses to the people, observing the Feast of Tabernacles, and in making a public confession of sin, with the people making a covenant to keep the law. This resulted in the resumption of the temple service, the separation of Israel from the mixed multitude, the forbidding of Sabbath violation, and the condemnation of mixed marriages.

The Last Century of Persian Rule

The inspired biblical history of Israel ends with the work of Ezra and Nehemiah, at approximately the end of the reign of Artaxerxes I about 424 B.C. The next ninety years, 423–333 B.C., during which the Jews continued to live under the Persian Empire, is a period of almost total obscurity. The Elephantine texts shed some light on the Jewish settlement at the first cataract of the Nile. However, of the Jews in Palestine and in the rest of the Persian Empire very little is known.

ISRAEL UNDER HELLENISTIC RULE (333–165 B.C.)

The Conquest by Alexander the Great

Beginning with Darius I, the Persians had attempted to expand their empire to include Greece and had engaged in wars against Greece. However, these actions by the Persians only resulted in the eventual unification of the Greeks and in creating a strong desire to defeat Persia. Finally, about 336 B.C., Alexander succeeded his father, Philip, when he was but twenty years of age, unified the Greek city states, and planned the conquest of Persia. In 334 he crossed the Hellespont and marched to meet the Persians. He defeated Darius III at the Granicus River in Asia Minor and at Issus in Syria in 333. From there he proceeded to take Tyre and Gaza after extended sieges. According to Josephus, he marched to Jerusalem and was welcomed by the priests and people (*Antiquities XI, 8, 4*). Thus Palestine and the Jews in it came to be under the control of Alexander the

Great. Of course, Alexander proceeded to Egypt, then turned to the Persian front and defeated Darius III at Arbela in 331 B.C., thereby gaining control of the Persian Empire. He continued expeditions into Media and into India. After gaining military control of all this territory, he inaugurated policies which led to the Hellenization of the Near East and Egypt. He encouraged the merging of society, socially and commercially. He married a Persian princess and urged his men to take Persian wives. Through the providence of God, the Greek language and culture became widely adopted throughout his empire.

Alexander became ill with malaria, and due to a generally weakened condition he died in 323 B.C. His kingdom was divided among four of his generals. Cassander obtained Macedonia, Lysimachus became ruler over Asia Minor, Ptolemy I gained control of Egypt, and Seleucus I ruled over Syria and Mesopotamia.

The Jews under the Ptolemies

For some years there was contention between Ptolemy I and Seleucus I for the control of Palestine. After various maneuvers, Ptolemy I was successful and Palestine came to be under the control of this dynasty until about 198 B.C. Ptolemy I placed his capital in the new city of Alexandria and it soon became one of the great cities of the world. Under him many Jews were settled at Alexandria, and this city became the center for the Hellenistic, Jewish influence. Some time during the middle of the third century B.C. the Hebrew Bible began to be translated into Greek under the influence, most likely, of Ptolemy II Philadelphus. Various other evidences indicate that Jewish communities flourished in Egypt. However, concerning the fortunes of the Jews in Palestine during this period of time, we know very little.

From 204 to 198 B.C. there was war between Ptolemy V and Antiochus III of the Seleucid Empire. Finally, Antiochus III gained control of Palestine and the Jews' fate fell into the hands of the Seleucid rulers.

The Jews under the Seleucids

From 198 to 165 B.C. Palestine was under the control of

the Seleucid rulers. In 175 Antiochus IV Epiphanes began to rule. He instituted policies aimed toward the Hellenization of the Jews. He attempted to force them to sacrifice to idols, to profane the Sabbath, to cease circumcision, and to do many other things contrary to Jewish practice. In 169 he plundered Jerusalem. Then in 167 he returned, burned it, tore down some of its houses and walls, and finally erected a desolating sacrilege on the altar of burnt offering. Some Jews happily associated themselves with this new Hellenization, but most resisted. Many chose to die rather than to yield to the oppressive policies of Antiochus IV. The desperate Jews were urgently in need of brave leaders, which they found in Mattathias and his sons.

THE MACCABEAN PERIOD (165–135 B.C.)

In the process of the oppression by Antiochus IV, the king's officers, who were enforcing the Hellenization policy, came to the city of Modein to make the people there offer sacrifice. However, they were opposed by a priest named Mattathias. When a Jew came forward in response to the order by the king's officer, Mattathias ran and killed him upon the altar. He also killed the king's officer, who was forcing them to sacrifice, and tore down the pagan altar. He and his sons fled to the hills and many Jews began to follow them.

Mattathias had five sons whose names were John, Simon, Judas, Eleazar, and Jonathan. These were all able men and they were joined by many other Jews dedicated to their religion and to freedom.

Mattathias, his sons, and other dedicated Jews carried on a guerrilla warfare against the Syrian army for a good while. At first they did not fight on the Sabbath and were attacked on that day with about a thousand being killed. Afterward the policy was changed, so the Jews could defend themselves on the Sabbath. Then Mattathias and his army went about and tore down the altars, slew apostate Jews, and circumcised many in the land. Mattathias became ill and died in 166 B.C. Before he died, he appointed Judas, who is also called Maccabeus, as the general to lead the army.

Judas Maccabeus, 166-161 B.C.

With Judas as the leader, the Jews proceeded to defeat the Syrians in one battle after another until finally they were able to reenter Jerusalem. Here they cleansed the sanctuary and rededicated it. This rededication took place in an elaborate festival which lasted eight days in the month Chislev, equivalent to our December, in the year 164 B.C. This is the feast referred to in the New Testament in John 10:22 as the Feast of Dedication. Today it is commonly called the Hanukkah Festival. Judas continued to strengthen the Maccabean kingdom until his death in 161 B.C. However, his death came in a fierce battle and defeat for himself and his troops against the Syrian army led by Bacchides. Such a tragic defeat threatened to bring an end to the Maccabean revolt.

Jonathan, a brother of Judas, was selected as his successor, although the Syrians had essentially regained control of the land. The period from 160 to 153 B.C. is quite obscure. However, it must have been a very important period for the reinvigorating of the Maccabean party, for at its end Jonathan and the Maccabean party were in control of Judea. The Graeco-Jewish party had no real root among the people. The Seleucid government itself had become weak and could no longer force upon the Jewish people a Hellenistic government, but were obliged to do all in their power to conciliate and win the favor of the Maccabean party. By 153 B.C. Jonathan was again able to gain control of Jerusalem. Because of a division in the Syrian rulers, Jonathan was able to play one against the other and gain further strength for himself and the Maccabean kingdom. By various political maneuvers and some successful military tactics, Jonathan gained a great extent of independence from the Seleucid kingdom. Finally, however, Jonathan was outmaneuvered by a Seleucid leader named Trypho and was made a prisoner. Later Trypho had Jonathan murdered and proceeded in his attempts to overthrow the Maccabean kingdom. Concerning Jonathan's accomplishments, Schurer observes:

By the heroic deeds and successes of Jonathan, the Maccabean party had passed out far beyond its original aims. It had not at

first intended to strive for anything more than the restoration of the Jewish worship, and the securing of the free exercise of the Jewish religion. But even Judas, when he had attained this end, did not rest satisfied therewith. He and his party then wished also to gain the supremacy in the control of home affairs. In the time of Jonathan this end was completely won. By Jonathan's appointment as high priest the ruling power was placed in the hands of the Maccabean party, and the Hellenistic party was driven out. But even this no longer seemed sufficient. Favorable circumstances—the weakness of the Syrian Empire—tempted them to strive after thorough emancipation from the Syrian suzerainty. The last acts of Jonathan were important steps in this direction.

Emil Schurer, *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus*, (New York: Schocken Books, 1961), p. 57.

Jonathan was succeeded by his brother Simon, who reigned 142–135 B.C. The significance of the reign of Simon is that he completed the work of Jonathan and made the Jewish people completely independent of the Syrian or Seleucid Empire. After Trypho's deceptive and hostile acts resulting in the murder of Jonathan, Simon turned his support to the Syrian ruler Demetrius, having exacted the promise from him that he would recognize the freedom of the Jews and exempt them from tribute. Simon then proceeded to take the Syrian fortresses at the city of Gazara and the citadel of Jerusalem. Since the Syrian kings were divided and not in a position to give real attention to events in Judea, Simon's rule proceeded in undisturbed prosperity and peace for the Jews. In September 141 B.C., a great assembly of the priests, the people, and the princes of the people, and the elders of the land decreed that Simon should be high priest, military commander, and civil governor of the Jews until there should arise a faithful prophet (1 Maccabees 14:41-43). However, toward the end of Simon's reign the Syrians again turned their attention toward Judea and attempted to overthrow Simon. But by this time he was strong enough to maintain his position and the position of Jewish independence. Unfortunately, intrigue from within by his own son-in-law, Ptolemy, led to his assassination in February 135 B.C.

Thus the last of the sons of Mattathias was killed.

A new phase of the Maccabean kingdom began with John Hyrcanus, the third son of Simon, who assumed the position of his father, which had been declared hereditary. Through negotiations, military feats, and the weakness of the Syrians, he and his successors were able to maintain the shaky Maccabean kingdom until Palestine was conquered by the Romans in 63 B.C.

The Maccabean period contributed tremendously to the fullness of time and to the development of Jewish practices, concepts, and attitudes. Principally, a new nationalistic spirit was developed during this period and a sharpened, though diversified, messianic hope. Also the Jewish sects of the Pharisees and Sadducees seemed to have gained clear, distinct existences during this period.

Conclusion

The preceding survey of the history of the Jewish people is highly selective and very abbreviated. However, it does serve to show that God acted in the history of this nation as in the history of none other. The principal purpose for his actions was for the redemption, not of Israel alone, but for all the world through Jesus the Christ, whom he brought into the world through the Jewish people. God overruled the actions of the Jews, as well as the actions of the neighboring nations, to lead to the development of the fullness of time for the sending of the Redeemer.

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