

SPECIAL STUDY FIVE

POLITICAL CONDITIONS OF THE
DIVIDED KINGDOM

by LeRoy Riley

Solomon's death (930 B.C.) brought the collapse of David's empire, and was followed by the disruption of the United Kingdom of Israel and Judah. The long separation of Judah from the northern tribes made them think of Judah as almost a separate territory.

Delegates from all the tribes came together at Shechem to elect Solomon's successor. Despite their differences the Northern tribes were prepared to accept Solomon's son Rehoboam as king. That is, if he would agree to return to the terms of the ancient covenant which his father's oppressive measures had violated. These requests would have to be granted if unity was to be preserved. But Rehoboam refused to give in to their request and did not promise to alleviate any of the burdens that Solomon had placed upon them.

With this the northern tribes withdrew their support from Rehoboam and placed it in one of their own leaders, Jeroboam. Jeroboam was one of the leaders in stating terms of *allegiance* to Rehoboam. The delegates from the northern tribes proclaimed him king and he set up his capital there at Shechem.

Rehoboam tried to exercise authority over the rebellious tribes by sending the officer in charge of the delegates to them. They showed their rebellion further by stoning the officer to death.

Rehoboam was left with a tiny kingdom consisting of the small tribe of Benjamin on the north where Jerusalem was located and the tribe of Judah. He would have sent an army to try to regain the northern territory but the prophets of Judah would not let him. The division between the two parts of the nation had come to stay.

At the time of the division of the kingdom Shishak (Sheshonk) was king of Egypt. In the fifth year of the divided kingdom (925) Shishak mounted an invasion of Palestine. We have accounts of this invasion in I Kings 14-25, II Chron. 12:1ff and an Egyptian account preserved on a pylon of the temple of Omun at Karnak. The Biblical account concentrates on Shishak's appropriating the gold shields of the

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royal bodyguard. The Egyptian account gives a list of cities conquered in Asia of which about 120 are legible. A number of these are Israelite cities. The invasion covered both Judah and Israel, for the list included cities as far north as Megiddo and the Plains of Jezreel, and eastward across the Jordan. Both kingdoms suffered greatly because of the invasion.

In her weakened condition Judah could not think seriously of reconquering the northern tribes. But this did not lead her to make peace with Israel either. Instead it caused her to seek allies. She found allies in the kings of Damascus (Syria), the successors of Rezin who founded a dynasty there during the reign of Solomon. The son of Rehoboam, Abijah became king of Judah in 913 and reigned until 911. During his short reign he enlisted the support of Tabrimmon, king of Damascus, from about 911 to 890. The same agreement was renewed between their sons; Asa who reigned in Judah, from 911 to 870, and Benhadad I who reigned in Damascus from 890 to 841.

As a result of these alliances Israel had to watch both her northern and southern borders. If she tried to attack Judah she could expect an invasion from the north.

During the period of time in Israel, Jeroboam I died (910) and was followed by his son Nadab. Nadab's wicked reign lasted only one year. He was assassinated by Baasha who made himself king (909).

Baasha fortified the frontier town of Ramah as an outpost against Judah. Asa sent a message to Benhadad I, who responded by attacking Israel from the north. While Baasha was in the north fighting, Asa sent work parties to demolish the fortification of Ramah. They carried the material back to Benjamin where they built two fortifications for Asa.

Asa was also victorious in battle against an Egyptian named Zerah. It was not the strength of Judah that won the battle, but it was the Lord's might.

At the death of Baasha in Israel, civil war broke out. His son Elath ascended to the throne only to be killed by a captain in his army, Zimri. Zimri reigned for only seven days when he himself was besieged by Omri who was commander and chief of the army. Zimri committed suicide by burning the king's house over him. Omri reigned only eight years after his victory over Zimri, but during this time he was able to make Israel a stable country politically. His reign brought consolidation from within, victory over the other nations and

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alliances. These factors held true during the reign of the rest of his dynasty. One other outstanding achievement of his reign was the moving of the capital from Shechem to Samaria. Samaria could be more easily fortified than Shechem and was therefore a much better place for the capital to be located.

Omri's son Ahab followed his father as king of Israel. He proved to be one of the strongest kings politically that Israel was to have. He also proved to be one of the most wicked.

There was a friendship between Ahab and the new king of Judah, Jehoshaphat the son of Asa. This friendship caused a period of peace between Israel and Judah.

In order to cement an alliance with the king of Phoenicia, Ahab married his daughter, the wicked and idolatrous Jezebel. It was primarily her influence that caused the nation to fall into idolatry to the great extent that it did during this period.

Ahab was strong politically because of the army which he commanded. He is credited with a fighting force of 2,000 chariots and 10,000 men. The number of chariots was greater than any other king at this time. He went to battle on three different occasions with Benhadad, king of Syria from 890 to 841. He was successful in the first two, but lost his life in the third.

During his reign Moab was forced to pay tribute to Ahab.

In a complete contrast to Israel, Judah was experiencing a return to the Lord. Jehoshaphat, who reigned from 873 to 848, was noted for his godliness. He tried to get the people to know the law of the Lord on an individual basis and not just as a nation. As a result of his respect for God, the surrounding nations including the Philistines and the Arabians paid tribute to Judah. Obadiah the prophet was probably a young man during the reign of Jehoshaphat.

His friendship with Ahab of Israel proved to be his biggest mistake. On one occasion it almost proved fatal. Ahab made a great show of hospitality to Jehoshaphat during a visit to Samaria and then asked him to be his ally in a campaign to recover Ramoth-Gilead. Jehoshaphat suggested that God's will should be determined before a decision was made. Ahab agreed and asked his prophets for their advice. They prophesied success for the venture. But this did not satisfy Jehoshaphat, and he asked if there were not a real prophet of God there. Micaiah, a man of God, was sent for. He explained that God had put a spirit of delusion in the minds of all the prophets so

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that Ahab might be doomed. Ahab went ahead with the plan without the aid of Jehoshaphat and was killed.

The most lasting and probably the worst result of their friendship was that Jehoshaphat's son, Jehoram, married the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, Athaliah. She proved to be almost as wicked as her mother.

At the death of Ahab his son Ahaziah became king. The good feeling still held through his short reign.

During the reign of Ahaziah (853-852) the Moabites, who had been paying a tribute of 100,000 lambs and 100,000 rams, revolted. Ahaziah would have put down the revolt but he was severely injured when he fell through the lattice in his palace in Samaria. He sent messengers to inquire of Baalzebub, god of Ekron, whether he would live or not. Elijah intercepted them and prophesied that he would die. In his anger the king sent 50 men to capture Elijah, but they were consumed by fire.

When Ahaziah died (852) his younger brother Jehoram became king in Israel (he had the same name as the son of Jehoshaphat as a result of the friendship that existed between Jehoshaphat and Ahab). Before Jehoshaphat died his son, Jehoram, began to reign (853), taking over full control at the death of his father in 848. This resulted in a man named Jehoram reigning in both Judah and Israel.

Jehoram of Israel made war against Moab during the time when Jehoshaphat and his son were reigning together. Jehoram invited Jehoshaphat to join him in the war. Jehoshaphat accepted. They, with the help of Edom, went up through Edom to fight Moab. When the water failed Elisha told them to dig ditches and they did. Water came and the Moabites, at sunrise, seeing the reflection of the water, thought it was blood and rushed in for the kill, but were badly defeated in the ensuing battle.

Before Jehoshaphat died he gave his six younger sons gifts so that there would be no fighting among them over the throne. Despite this when Jehoshaphat died Jehoram had his six brothers killed.

The wickedness that came with his reign can be attributed to his wife's counsel. The decline that came with the idolatrous practices resulted in the revolt of Edom and the Levitical city of Libnah. *Obadiah* prophesied against Edom about this time.

Elijah denounced him for his wickedness, and God sent a plague upon Judah—especially upon the house of Jehoram. All but his youngest son Ahaziah (named after the oldest son of Ahab) were slain by the Arabians. Jehoram died a horrible death as a result of disease,

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but no one wept for him in Judah. *Obadiah*, a prophet of the Southern Kingdom, foretold Edom's downfall because of her war against God's people and the account may be read in II Chron. 27.

Ahaziah succeeded his father as king. He aligned himself with Jehoram of Israel. This proved to be a mistake. God commanded Elijah to anoint Jehu king over Israel. This commandment was fulfilled by Elisha, who sent a young prophet to Ramoth-Gilead, where Jehu was with his army, to carry out the command. The army proclaimed him king when they heard the news. Jehu slew Jehoram the king in Jezreel where he had gone after being wounded in a battle with Hazael of Syria. Ahaziah, king of Judah, had come up to see his wounded ally. He tried to escape from Jehu but was killed by one of Jehu's archers in the attempt. This action made Jehu king of Israel and left Judah without a king.

The death of Ahaziah (841) gave his mother Athaliah a chance at the throne. To become the ruler of Judah she killed all the rest of the royal family except the 6 month old son of Ahaziah who was protected by Jehoida, the priest, in the temple. Athaliah reigned only 6 years. In the 7th year there came a popular uprising led by Jehoida. He succeeded in putting the royal prince Joash on the throne.

During his reign (841-814) in Israel Jehu put down the worship of the idols brought in by Ahab and Jezebel. He also executed the judgment of God against the house of Ahab. For this God promised that his descendants would be on the throne to the 4th generation.

Despite the favor of God and his righteous actions he worshiped the calves set up by Jeroboam I.

Jehu was followed by his son Jehoaz who maintained the calf worship of Jehu his father. As a result of this apostasy God permitted the Syrians (probably during the last of Hazeal's reign) to inflict heavy defeats upon Jehoahaz's army. This continued until he had almost none left. God answered his prayer, but not during his life time. The answer came through the reigns of his son Jehoash and grandson Jeroboam II.

During the last part of the reign of Jehu (835-841) and during all of the reign of Jehoaz (841-798) Joash reigned in Judah. His reign was under the leadership of the godly high priest Jehoiada. But after the death of Jehoiada, Joash led the country into idolatry. When Zechariah, the son of Jehoiada, denounced his apostasy Joash had him murdered. After a long illness he was slain in his bed by his servants for the murder of Zechariah. *Joel* prophesied during this time.

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Amaziah succeeded his father as king of Judah (796). He was an idolator and worshiped in the high places of Judah. His first act as king was to put to death his father's murderers.

He hired 100,000 men of Israel to fight in his army for 100 talents of silver. A man of God warned him not to do this and he sent them home losing the 100 talents. The angered Israelites sacked cities of Judah as they went.

Amaziah took his army down to rebellious Edom and captured Selah. (This might be the stone city of Petra). He killed the inhabitants by throwing them from the cliffs. He brought back their gods and worshiped them.

He thought he was strong enough to take on Israel and challenged Jehoash, who became king at the death of his father in 798, to a fight. Jehoash accepted his challenge and came down and defeated Amaziah, destroying some of the fortifications of Jerusalem. (790)

With this defeat Amaziah went into hiding and his son Uzziah became king by appointment of the people.

Upon the death of Jehoash in 782 his son Jeroboam II began to reign in Israel. Both he and Uzziah in Judah experienced long reigns at this time. Jeroboam II reigned from 782 to 753, and Uzziah from 790 to 739. This was due to the decline of Assyria after the death of Adadnirari III, and the weakened condition of Damascus. *Jonah* prophesied against Ninevah at this time and their repentance probably caused them to restrain their actions against Israel.

Jeroboam II brought to a successful conclusion the wars which his father had carried on with Benhadad II of Damascus. He also restored territory east of the Jordan and as far south as the Dead Sea.

This success brought prosperity to the rich nobles of the land. This increase in wealth enabled the rich to have both summer and winter houses. Some of their houses were paneled with ivory, others were made of hewn stone. Drunkenness, licentiousness, and oppression went unrebuked by the religious hierarchy. *Amos* and *Hosea* were the only ones who could see and dared tell the need for repentance in Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II.

Uzziah also had a successful reign politically and economically. He recovered and fortified Elath on the Gulf of Akabah. He reasserted Judean supremacy over Philistine cities of the Mediterranean coast.

In Israel about the year 753 Jeroboam II died and his son Zechariah inherited the great kingdom of his father. But with everything going his way he had two strikes against him which he may not have known. The Lord had promised his great-great-grandfather Jehu that his sons

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would set on the throne to the 4th generation. His was the 4th generation. *Amos* had prophesied during the reign of his father Jeroboam II that the Lord would come against the house of Jeroboam with the sword. His third strike came when the second prophecy was fulfilled. It was fulfilled one year after Zechariah became king, when he was murdered by Shallum.

Shallum took the throne but reigned only one month when he too was killed. His murderer was Menahem. Menahem was able to stay on the throne 10 years by bribing Tiglathpileser III with money he took from the people.

He died a natural death and his son Pekahiah succeeded him in 742. Pekahiah reigned only two years when he was killed by Pekah.

Pekah began to reign in the last year of Uzziah's reign in Judah. Uzziah's son Jotham had reigned with his father during the last 11 years of his reign, and succeeded him.

Pekah was angered by the weakened condition of the country because of internal strife and the high tribute that was paid to Tiglathpileser III, king of Assyria. He made an alliance with the Gileadites to stop the encroachment of Assyria. To further accomplish his purposes he aligned himself with Rezin of Damascus against Jotham. The godly life of Jotham probably delayed the realization of this plot until Jotham's son Ahaz (who began his reign in 735 during the reign of his father) was on the throne. Pekah came and besieged Ahaz, killing many of his soldiers and taking many captives up to Damascus. They were unable to take Ahaz himself. Ahaz sent a message to Tiglathpileser III asking for help. The Assyrian king responded by sending an army, which destroyed Damascus and took many captive. The army also afflicted both Israel and Judah, even though they had come to defend Judah.

After the Assyrian army left Pekah was still on the throne in Israel, but not for long. Hoshea led a conspiracy against Pekah and killed him.

During the reign of Hoshea (732-722) Tiglathpileser III died. His death was the signal for Hoshea to make his move for independence from Assyria. Help was promised from Egypt, but it did not come. Shalmaneser IV succeeded Tiglathpilezer as king of Assyria and came against Samaria. He either died or abdicated the throne before the city fell. Sargon II took his place and in the third year of the siege he took the city. He took Hoshea prisoner and many of the people captive. They were deported to Assyria. Some remained and intermarried with the surrounding nations.

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With this captivity the nation of Israel came to an end. Judah would remain until 586 when they too would be captive of the Babylonians. Through the lives and deeds of the kings of both Judah and Israel we can see the political conditions under which the prophets of this time prophesied. This may help us to study their prophecies with better understanding.

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by Karen Riley

When God gave the law to Moses on Mount Sinai He clearly commanded in the second commandment "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image." God knew that the land into which the children of Israel were going was a land given to image worship. Archaeologists have found many figures of gods on stone monuments, small images in bronze, and clay plaques or figurines.

In Moses' second address to the people just preceding their entry into the promised land he made it plain that Israel was not to compromise with the natives of Canaan, but should drive them out or destroy them:

When the Lord thy God shall bring thee into the land whither thou goest to possess it, and hath cast out many nations before thee, the Hittites, and the Girgashites, and the Amorites, and the Canaanites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, seven nations greater and mightier than thou; and when the Lord thy God shall deliver them before thee; thou shalt smite them, and utterly destroy them, thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor show mercy unto them: neither shalt thou make marriages with them; thy daughter thou shalt not give unto his son, nor his daughter shalt thou take, unto thy son. For they will turn away thy son from following me, that they may serve other gods: so will the anger of the Lord be kindled against you, and destroy thee suddenly. But thus shall ye deal with them; ye shall destroy their altars, and break down their images, and cut down their groves, and burn their graven images with fire. Deuteronomy 7:1-5.

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Why was God so insistent that the Canaanites be utterly destroyed? According to what has been found by archaeologists, the Canaanites sacrificed their children to idols, their temples were places of vice, and their morals were so low that they would inevitably corrupt God's people.

Joshua led the children of Israel in the conquest of the land. But there seemed to be a weakening of zeal for the battle, after the immediate danger of the Canaanites was removed. They left the work of conquest unfinished, failed to carry out God's commission to utterly destroy the Canaanites, and began to make themselves at home in the land before it was really won.

They began to adopt the sanctuaries of the country as their own, instead of destroying them. They took part in the festivals of their neighbors and adopted their customs of worship. In many places Israelites could be found worshiping the local Baals, in whose honor harvest and autumn festivals were celebrated as thanksgiving for the crops.

By their altars to Jehovah the Israelites placed Asherah, the sacred tree, actually as a symbol of the goddess of this name. The stone pillars which the Canaanites had set up near their sanctuaries were also held in honor by the Israelites, and gradually the heathen ideas associated with these objects of worship found their way into the religious consciousness of the people. Sorcery, necromancy, and similar superstitions crept in.

During the time of the judges God let the surrounding nations oppress His people in hopes of returning them to Himself. The JUDGES and the prophets were the voices of God to call His people to repentance. The popular religion of this time was tinged by a pronounced heathenism, and had but little in common with the teaching of the law of God. But they claimed to worship Jehovah God, while in their hearts they had utterly disregarded all his commands.

The failure of Israel and their spiritual and moral decline was the direct result of their failure to obey God in these three ways:

- (1) Their failure to drive out the heathen (Judges 1:21,27,29,33).
- (2) Their idolatry (Judges 2:12,13).
- (3) Their intermarriage with the heathen (Judges 3:5,6).

Samuel, the last of the judges, was also a great prophet and a reformer. He brought the people together and tried to free them from the contamination of heathenism. But the people asked for a king, like the nations. God through Samuel warned them of what a king would do to them, but they refused to listen. God had Samuel to anoint Saul and then later David as kings of Israel.

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During the reign of David and his son Solomon the nation reached its highest peak, not only politically, but by bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Mt. Zion, and beginning the plans for the temple. The temple, as the dwelling place of God, was made the center of worship for the entire nation.

Solomon asked God for wisdom in ruling the people and was a wise and just ruler for many years. But his marriage to foreign women turned his heart away after their gods. He built a high place of worship for the pagan god Chemosh on the "hill that is before Jerusalem" (1 Kings 11:17), probably the Mount of Olives.

Upon the death of Solomon his son Rehoboam was proclaimed king of Judah, but it was necessary for him to go to Shechem to receive the allegiance of the ten northern tribes. Because he failed to reduce the oppression of his father, the ten northern tribes rejected him and set up Jeroboam as their king.

Rehoboam would have gone to war to bring the northern tribes back into subjection, but a prophet of God met him in the way and told him that this was of the Lord (1 Kings 12:24) and that he should not interfere. The division was beneficial in that the idolatry of the North did not so easily penetrate the Southern Kingdom of Judah and spared it from destruction for a time.

Jeroboam, fearing that if his people continued to go to Jerusalem to the temple to worship they might also return their allegiance to the ruler of Jerusalem, set up two national shrines in Israel. He had golden calves made and set up at Dan in the north and Bethel in the south. Dan was already a center of idol worship from the time of the Judges (see Judges 18). Bethel was considered a sacred spot because of the associations it had with Abraham and Jacob. Jeroboam violated the second commandment in setting up these golden calves, and this is continually referred to in further history of Israel as "The sin of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, which he made Israel to sin."

Jeroboam was probably acquainted with calf-worship during his stay in Egypt for archaeological discoveries show the presence of bovine worship in Egypt. The sacred bull was an object of worship, and also the sacred cow as a symbol of the goddess Hathor.

The setting up of the images encouraged the syncretism of heathenism and the worship of Jehovah God which had already gotten a good start. The leaders of Israel oppressed independent prophets but still the prophets continued to be a potent spiritual factor which the kings could not afford to ignore. Every one of the 19 kings of the northern kingdom followed the worship of the golden calf. Some also served Baal. *But no one ever attempted to bring the people back to God.*

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The reigns of Reoboam and Abijah, his son, in the southern kingdom of Judah were mostly bad years, as both kings and the majority of the people continued to worship idols. But with the coming of Asa to the throne about 912 B.C. a clean sweep was made of the Canaanite cults, and of the heathenism included in the worship of Jehovah at local shrines. The queen mother was deposed from her dignity because she maintained a shrine of her own with an image representing the Canaanite goddess Asherah. This reform continued through his reign of 41 years and through the reign of Jehoshaphat, 25 years. Jehoshaphat inaugurated a system of public instruction sending the priest and levites out to teach the people the "book of the law."

In Israel things went from bad to worse with the coming to power of the dynasty of Omri. Politically Omri was a good king, strengthening Israel both internally and with other nations. He renewed Solomon's policy of alliance with Phoenicia, confirming it by the marriage of his son, Ahab, to the daughter of the Phoenician priest-king, Jezebel. The religious consequences of this alliance were such that Omri is looked upon as a greater offender against Jehovah than any of his predecessors, surpassed only by his son Ahab.

It was common practice that a foreign princess who married the ruler of a neighboring state should have facilities for practicing her native religion in her new home. So as Solomon's many foreign wives had shrines provided for their native cults so also did Jezebel. But while the religious practices of Solomon's wives seem to have made little impact on the life of his subjects, Jezebel was plainly not content with maintaining a private shrine where she herself might practice her own religion. She appears to have organized the worship of Melquart on a fairly large scale and maintained a large staff of cultic officials, who enjoyed positions of influence at court.

Worship of Melquart is essentially Canaanite in character and its introduction into Israel led to a great revival of the old Canaanite worship of Baal and Asherah. Melquart was from one point of view the Tyrian counterpart of Baal and is called Baal throughout the Biblical narrative. There was a large amount of syncretism between the Tyro-Canaanite cult and Israel's religion, and a popular landslide away from the purest form of Jehovah worship. The prophets of God protested against this apostasy, but their protests were regarded as treasonable, because this apostasy enjoyed court patronage and at Jezebel's instigation many of these prophets were put to death.

Elijah was the leader of these protesting prophets. He appeared in court with his exceptionally powerful personality and proclaimed in the name of God that there would be a severe drought on the land. He

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then fled from the wrath of Jezebel, first to Transjordan and later to Phoenicia. At the end of three years he reappeared and led the people back to the worship of Jehovah, by the spectacular event on Mt. Carmel. Many prophets of Baal were put to death. Rain came to end the drought. Jezebel then threatened to serve Elijah as he had served the prophets of Baal and he fled to Arabia, where he talked to God and received fresh courage. He then returned to his homeland and continued to preach against the dynasty of Omri and Baalism.

Ahab made alliance with King Jehoshaphat of Judah and cemented the alliance matrimonially by giving his daughter Athaliah as wife to Jehoram, Jehoshaphat's son. This resulted in the introduction of Baalism to the southern kingdom. For at the death of good king Jehoshaphat, Jehoram became king of Judah. He and his son who followed him proved to be very wicked kings, probably due to the influence of Athaliah, at least in part. All this was taking place while *Obadiah* was God's prophet in Judah.

Elisha, the successor to Elijah, anointed Jehu to become the next king of Israel and to put an end to the house of Ahab. The army acknowledged Jehu as king, and helped him to slay both Jehoram, king of Israel (son of Ahab), and Ahaziah, king of Judah (son of Jehoram of Judah and Athaliah), who was visiting Jehoram at Jezreel. Jezebel was thrown from an upper window and killed. The sons of Ahab were put to death, and through Jehu's trickery all the followers of Baal were gathered and slain. The images of Baal were burned and the house of Baal destroyed. But Jehu allowed the calf worship to continue, and only slightly checked the idolatry of Israel.

Jehu had carried out Elisha's commission, but the manner in which he did it—wholesale massacres, and the treachery of the suppression of Baal-worship—was unpardonable, and a century later *Hosea* announced that retribution would fall upon the house of Jehu for the blood shed at Jezreel.

When King Ahaziah of Judah died as the result of the wound inflicted by one of Jehu's archers, his mother, Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, decided that the moment had come for her to seize power in Jerusalem. She was able to secure the support of the royal bodyguard and had all the royal family massacred. Only Ahaziah's six-month-old son Joash escaped her notice. He and his nurses were smuggled out of her way and the infant prince was brought up in the temple precincts.

The worship of Baal appears to have flourished in Jerusalem during Athaliah's six-year reign. In his 7th year Jehoida the priest led

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in a popular uprising, and succeeded in getting the royal bodyguard to transfer their allegiance from Athaliah to the young prince Joash. They guarded the temple as Joash was brought forth and proclaimed king of Judah. When Athaliah heard of the plot she came running into the temple crying "treason," but it was too late. She was taken outside the temple and immediately put to death.

The installation of Joash as king was marked by a return to God and a covenant between God and the king and the people. Since Joash was but 7 years old and had been raised by Jehoida the high priest, Jehoida remained a strong influence on his reign as long as Jehoida lived. He was able to break down the house of Baal and make repairs on the temple.

During this time the priests were held in high esteem. Temple services were regularly maintained and regarded as of great importance. About this time the prophet *Joel* came on the scene and from his book we gain further insight into the religious conditions of the nation. The locust plague which he describes had laid the land in devastation. The daily meal-offerings and drink-offerings had ceased because there was nothing to give for an offering. This seems to be regarded as the culminating point of the calamity—the rupture of fellowship between Jehovah and his people. But Joel's message is that formalism is not enough. It is not their abundance of offerings that God wants, but their hearts. They need to come to repentance. "Therefore also now saith the Lord, turn ye even to me with all your heart, and with fasting, and with weeping, and with mourning; and rend your hearts and not your garments, and turn unto the Lord your God." (Joel 2:12,13).

About this time or a little later *Amos* was sent to preach to the northern kingdom of Israel. Two kings had come to the throne since Jehu and now a third, Jeroboam II, was on the throne. He brought the kingdom of Israel to its greatest extent and apparently prosperous conditions existed. But this superficial prosperity was gained by depressing the status of the small independent peasants. The rich lived in ease and luxury on the wealth they had extorted from the poor, with no thought to what their present luxury would bring to pass. *Amos* rebuked them for their beds of ivory, summer and winter houses. Excavations of Samaria in 1931 uncovered numerous fragments of ivory inlay. Subjects portrayed in the reliefs included lilies, papyrus, lions, bulls, deer, winged figures in human form, sphinxes, and figures of Egyptian gods. Records also found show the payment of taxes in wine and oil. These are apparently the source of the wine which the ease-loving people of Samaria were drinking and the oil with which they anointed themselves.

Kirkpatrick says of this time:

Public and private virtues alike had decayed. The venality of the judges—that perpetual curse of Oriental countries—was notorious. The poor man need not look for redress in the courts where justice was openly bought and sold. Licentiousness of the grossest kind was unblushingly practiced. Tradesmen made no secret of their covetousness and dishonesty. Humane laws were openly ignored.

Yet the people were punctilious in their religious observances. But not only had Israel's religion become an external form of worship without those inward and practical virtues, but even the external forms themselves were corrupted by imitation of the old fertility cults of Canaan with its bluntings of their ethical perception. Ritual prostitution was practiced at the solemn festivals. No reproof was tolerated. There was callous indifference to the moral ruin of their country.

In the midst of all their moral depravity and failure to recognize Jehovah's character, they still claimed to be his people, and imagined themselves entitled to his favor. It must have been a rude shock to them to learn that because they were God's people he was going to punish them. "You only have I known of all the families of the earth; therefore I will visit upon you all your iniquities" (Amos 3:2). Judah and Israel were condemned "because they have rejected the law of Jehovah, and have not kept His statutes and their lies (the false gods which they have chosen) have caused them to err."

Hosea began to prophesy toward the end of Jeroboam's reign. The nation was still outwardly prosperous, but it had been practically deserted by Jehovah. It ascribed its blessings to the false gods it worshiped. It was ripe for punishment.

The kings and princes amused themselves with the peoples' misdoings instead of restraining them. The king was the intimate companion of 'scorners' who prided themselves on their cynical contempt for virtue and religion. There seemed to be nominal regard among the people for Jehovah, but in reality they had forgotten Him and abandoned themselves to licentious and degrading superstitions. When danger threatened they looked to Assyria or Egypt for help instead of turning to God in repentance. They persecuted and despised the prophets which were sent unto them.

Following the death of Jeroboam II, the nation of Israel fell into a state of anarchy. They were continually in a state of civil war, and had to pay tribute to Assyria.

RELIGIOUS CONDITIONS OF KINGDOM

Pekah decided that he would throw off the reign of the Assyrians and tried to get Syria and Judah to go along with him. When Ahaz, king of Judah, refused, Syria and Israel came to war against Judah. Although the prophet Isaiah warned him not to, Ahaz appealed to Tiglath-Pilezer for aid. This resulted in Judah being brought under the yoke to Assyria and not only having to pay tribute, but having to set up the altar of Ashur in the temple of God. Ahaz was a wicked king, accepting the religion of the Assyrians and even sacrificing his son to the pagan gods (II Kings 16:3).

Tiglath-Pilezer also crushed Israel, although they tried to appease him by assassinating Pekah and setting Hoshea on the throne. By continuing to pay tribute Israel gained a few more years, but it was only a matter of time until Hoshea too tried a bid at independence and was utterly crushed. After a siege of three years Samaria fell and all the principal citizens of Israel were carried away into captivity. The nations brought in to populate Israel also brought their own religions, but were also taught "the law of the God of the land" (II Kings 17:26). They intermarried with the people remaining and became known as the Samaritans after the name of the land (called Samaria by the Assyrians).

The self-chosen kings of Israel had led them astray. Their failure to let the Lord be the King had started them on the path away from God. Idolatry had been the direct result of the divided kingdom. Moral corruption was universal in the nation. The prophets had come and they had plead for the people to repent. God had sent nations, and plagues, to cause His people to repent. But they would not. The kingdom must be destroyed. There was not other choice. But God does not leave it at that. If the nation must die, it will rise again is the thought that he leaves with His people through the prophet *Hosea*:

I will go, says Jehovah, and return to My place, till they acknowledge their offence, and seek My face. In their affliction they will seek Me earnestly, saying, Come and let us return unto Jehovah: for He hath torn, and He will heal us; hath smitten and will bind us up . . . And let us press on to know Jehovah: His going forth is sure as the morning; and He shall come unto us as the rain, as the latter rain that watereth the earth (5:15- 6:3).

It took the severe punishment of the captivity to purge Israel from her idolatrous ways. But God did not forget His people in their captivity and does even today seek that all men might come to repentance and seek His face.