

I & II KINGS

BIBLE STUDY TEXTBOOK SERIES

I & II KINGS

By

James E. Smith

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**TO
FRED AND THELMA SMITH**

My Parents

in the flesh and in the faith

**who instilled within the hearts
of four young men a deep and
abiding love for the Word of Truth
and the Church of Christ.**

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PREFACE

Can one learn from history? Does history have meaning? Some say not. "Little more than the register of the crimes and follies and misfortunes of mankind" declared Edward Gibbon. It is, to quote Shakespeare, "a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." With these evaluations of the significance of history the Biblical historians would sharply differ. For them history was not the assembling of interesting tales or the chronicling of facts and dates in neat and precise chronological sequence. In their view history was not cyclical, following the patterns of the celestial bodies or the rhythm of nature. History had a starting point—creation; and a *terminus ad quem*—the *eschaton*, the day of the Lord. The historians of Israel are to be numbered among those who believe that the facts of the past, once gathered and collated, can be interpreted. From them lessons can be learned which men neglect to their own peril.

What is the task of the historian? Perhaps the best answer to this question was given by Macaulay.¹ It is the task of the historian

to make the past present, to bring the distant near, to place us in the society of a great man or on an eminence which overlooks the field of a mighty battle, to invest human flesh and blood with reality, to call up our ancestors before us with all their peculiarities of language, manners and garb, to show us over their houses, to seat us at their tables, to rummage their old fashioned wardrobes, to explain the uses of their ponderous furniture . . . to extract the philosophy of history, to direct our judgment of events and men, to trace the connection of causes and effects, and to draw from the occurrences of former times general lessons of moral and political wisdom.

The Biblical historians do this and more. They add the God-dimension to history. Behind all the crises and decisive events of the past was God, carefully and graciously working out His

¹ Cited in Robinson, BG, p. 14.

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divine purpose.

The average Christian finds the Old Testament historical books a bit difficult to master. The names are hard to pronounce and remember, the narrative is often tedious and repetitious, the accounts gruesome and vulgar. Yet here is the irrefutable record of God's faithfulness in dealing with an apostate and faithless people. These books—especially Kings—form the background for the Old Testament prophets without whose testimony no man could intelligently confess that Jesus was Christ (Messiah). Thus it is imperative that the Christian diligently digest the narratives of Old Testament history. The present work is offered in an attempt to ease the digestion process and thereby prevent spiritual indigestion.

In this work, the format of the author's earlier commentary on Jeremiah (*Bible Textbook Series*, 1972) has been followed. Each major section of the book is introduced by a paragraph designed to give an overview of the entire section. This is followed by the author's own translation of the text and comments thereon.

The material here treated is divided into twenty-five chapters. A review section has been included at the end of each chapter except chapters one and five. Chapter one is introductory to the entire study; chapters five and six are properly studied together and hence the review section appears at the end of the later chapter. The review sections are divided into two parts: (1) facts to master; and (2) questions to ponder. The student who wishes to master this portion of God's Word should make sure he can identify *every* person, place, term or object in the facts to master. The questions to ponder are intended more for class discussion and often do not lend themselves to definitive answers.

In preparing this commentary on Kings the author is indebted to those scholars of the past who have treated this same material. Of the older works, the commentaries on the books of Kings by Hammond and Rawlinson in the *Pulpit Commentary* were most helpful. In general these two scholars are conservative, but their comments on the chronological passages

P R E F A C E

in Kings are antiquated and needlessly skeptical. At times, however, the work of these two fine scholars has been paraphrased on the pages which follow.

Of the more recent works on Kings, the most thorough study is that of Gray in the Old Testament Library series. Liberal to the core, Gray nonetheless incorporates a wealth of linguistic and archaeological insights into his comments. A liberal Jewish commentary on I Kings by Leo Honor in the Jewish Commentary for Bible Readers series also proved beneficial. These two works have been cited frequently.

To condense footnotes as much as possible, a system of abbreviations has been employed. The abbreviations are listed in alphabetical order together with relevant bibliographical information at the end of the volume.

A special word of thanks is in order to those who assisted in the preparation of the manuscript of this book: to Rachel Smith and Brenda Holloway who labored faithfully on the typing; to Ed McKinney who spent many hours checking out the Biblical references.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION TO KINGS

To those who live in a twentieth century western democracy the Book of Kings is strange terrain. It is hard to imagine what life under an Oriental monarchy would have been like. When one tries to immerse himself in the study of this portion of the Word of God, he is quite likely to experience a certain amount of culture shock. The names are strange. The customs are sometimes perplexing, often times shocking. The language is sometimes distasteful, if not uncouth. But the monarchy period is crucial in the unfolding story of redemption. The Book of Kings is pivotal in the library of sacred literature. Therefore, the culture gap must be bridged and the contents of this book mastered if one is going to show himself approved as a student of God's Word.

Before undertaking a study of the text of Kings, certain preliminary matters must be discussed. It is essential that one know something of the book as a whole before he attempts to master the specific material which it contains. In this introduction seven items of importance are treated: (1) the history, (2) authorship, (3) literary sources, (4) content, (5) credibility, (6) purpose, and (7) background of the Book of Kings.

I. THE HISTORY OF THE BOOK OF KINGS

Every book of Scripture has its own unique and special history. The book came into being at a given point in history, and from that moment of birth the biography of that book commenced. The Old Testament books were first preserved and cared for, copied and translated by pious Jews. These books were then appropriated by the fledgling church which regarded them with a sanctity equal to that of the Jews. The focus in this section is upon the *external history* of the Book of Kings. Six topics need attention: (1) the date, (2) the title, (3) the division, (4) the canonization, (5) the text, and (6) the placement of the Book of Kings.

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A. THE BIRTHDAY OF A BOOK

The language of Kings belongs unmistakably to the period of the captivity. Many words and phrases appear in the book which do not elsewhere occur in Scripture until the time of the captivity.¹ Such words and phrases as have been adduced to prove a date *later* than the captivity period can be shown in almost every instance to have been in use during that time or even earlier.² A close resemblance between the language of Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Kings is evident. Hence, a general consensus among Hebrew scholars exists as to the date for the writing of Kings. Almost all critics assign the work on linguistic grounds to the sixth century B.C.³

From the standpoint of *content* the date of writing can be securely ascertained. The book must have been written between 562 B.C. when Jehoiachin was released from captivity, and 539 B.C. when Babylon fell.

The book in its present form could not have been published prior to 562 B.C., for the accession of Evil-merodach and subsequent release of king Jehoiachin are mentioned (II K 25:27). The book could not have been published after 539 B.C., for it is inconceivable that the author would have omitted reference to the return to Palestine during the reign of Cyrus the Persian. Thus, on the basis of content a date of about 550 B.C. for the publication of the book as it exists today is generally adopted. If the last four verses of Kings be regarded as an historical appendix, then the remainder of the content could have been penned as early as 580 B.C.

B. THE SEARCH FOR A NAME

The ancients were not nearly so interested in titling their

¹ Rawlinson (BC, p. 469, n. 2) gives an extensive list.

² *Ibid.*, p. 469, n. 3.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 470.

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literary productions as are modern publishers concerned with capturing a market for their product. In the history of the book now called *Kings*, one finds several changes in the way the book was cited.

It is doubtful that the author of this book put any title over his work. Perhaps it was many years after his death before the book came to be commonly referred to as *Kings*. This title is most appropriate because the book treats of the kings of Israel and Judah from the accession of Solomon to the Babylonian exile.

In the middle of the third pre-Christian century, the Old Testament was translated into the Greek language. The Greek translators—or those who copied their work—dubbed this book *Kingdoms*. While the appropriateness of this title was questioned by the Christian scholar Jerome, *Kingdoms* seems also to be a useful designation for the book in that it contains for the most part the history of *two kingdoms*.

When the Old Testament was translated into Syriac in the second Christian century, this title was appended to *Kings: The Book of the Kings who Flourished Amongst the Hebrews, Containing also the History of the Prophets who Flourished in their Times*. This title, though somewhat cumbersome, is more accurate than the simple title *Kings*, for in large measure these books do in fact relate the history of the prophets.

A curious title for I Kings appeared in the Arabic version: *The Book of Solomon*. Certainly in the first eleven chapters, Solomon is the most prominent character. But this title seems to be inappropriate for the work as a whole.

Origen, the great church father of the third Christian century, represented what is today called *Kings* as being designated by the initial Hebrew words, *vehammelech david* ('now king David'). The Hebrews frequently called their books by the first word or phrase rather than by a separate title. Just how old this custom was of citing *Kings* by the first two words in the book cannot be ascertained.

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C. AND THE ONE BECAME TWO

The two books of Kings—the eleventh and twelfth books of the English Bible—were originally one book. The division of Kings into two books of twenty-two and twenty-five chapters respectively was introduced by those scholars who translated the Old Testament into Greek in the third pre-Christian century. The reason for this division is very simple. Ancient Hebrew manuscripts contained no vowels. A Greek translation in which vowels were written required almost twice as much space as the Hebrew text which was being translated. While it was possible to contain the entire *Hebrew* book of Kings on one standard-size roll, two rolls would be required for the Greek translation.

The Greek translators divided the Book of Kings at a most unfortunate point—right in the middle of the reign of Ahaziah of Israel and of the ministry of Elijah. This arbitrary and artificial division of the material in the book might at first thought appear to be nothing more than a stupid blunder. But perhaps there was purpose in this madness. It may be that those who first instituted the bipartite arrangement desired to demonstrate the essential unity of I and II Kings.⁴

In the fifth century A.D., Jerome set out to translate the Old Testament from the Hebrew into Latin. He noted in his preface to Kings that the Hebrew manuscripts of his day constituted a single continuous work entitled, *The Book of Kings*. But since the earlier Latin versions had been translations of the Septuagint, Jerome felt he must follow the familiar arrangement of the Greek version. Thus, in the influential Vulgate version, the Book of Kings appeared as two books.

In the Greek translation (third century B.C.) and the Latin translation of Jerome (fourth century A.D.), Samuel and Kings are treated as one continuous history in four volumes. These volumes were designated as First, Second, Third, and

⁴ Harrison, IOT, p. 719.

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Fourth *Kings* or *Kingdoms*.

Early Hebrew Bible	Greek Version	Latin Version	English Version
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Samuel	I Kingdoms	II Kingdoms	I Kings	II Kings	I Samuel	II Samuel
Kings	III Kingdoms	IV Kingdoms	III Kings	IV Kings	I Kings	II Kings

Two Books Placed Among the Prophets	Four Books Placed with Historical Books	Four Books Placed with Historical Books	Four Books Placed with Historical Books
-------------------------------------	---	---	---

Palestinian Jews resisted the innovations of the Septuagint or Greek Old Testament. For more than sixteen hundred years they refused to adopt the chapter and verse and book divisions of that version.⁵ However, the frequent religious controversies between Jews and Christians necessitated ready reference to the Scriptures. About the middle of the fifteenth century of the Christian era, the Jews began to utilize the reference system which had long been employed by Christians. In the printed edition of the Hebrew Bible published by Daniel Bomberg in 1516-17 this footnote is found: "Here the non-Jews begin the fourth book of Kings." From that day forward the Jews accepted the division of Kings into two books.

⁵ Josephus and the Talmud visualize Kings as one book.

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D. AN ADDITION TO THE SACRED SHELF

How did Kings come to be recognized as sacred Scripture? When did this recognition take place? It is not possible, of course, in these brief introductory paragraphs to deal with all the questions related to the subject of canonization. However a few broad statements in this area would seem to be in order.

1. It would appear from Joshua 24:25-26 and I Samuel 10:25 that the historical materials of the Old Testament were recognized immediately as being of divine authority.

2. This recognition came to these books because of the acknowledged status of the authors. They were known to have been written by men who held the office of prophet. The four books of Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings are to this day regarded by Jews as prophetic books.

3. The historical books were a further extension of the historical materials of the Pentateuch, the foundational document of Old Testament religion.⁶ The Pentateuchal precedent of historical narrative describing gracious acts of God in the distant past suggested the appropriateness of historical narrative of the more recent past in the divine library.

4. The historical books describe the dealings of the Lord with His chosen people. These books demonstrate how God was completely faithful to all of His promises, and how His people time and again failed to measure up to covenantal expectations. It was essential that these books be in the sacred canon to provide the theological vindication for the national tragedies which befell the Jews during the sixth century before Christ.

5. These books are written in the spirit of the Law and the prophets.

6. The obvious continuity between the historical books, especially Joshua through Kings, argued for the preservation of the whole. Each writer seems to have been conscious that he was continuing and completing the work of his predecessor.⁷

⁶ A point stressed by Kline, SBA, pp. 53-57.

⁷ This argument is developed at length by Harris, ICB, pp. 167ff.

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The canonicity of one involves the canonicity of all.

For these reasons the historical books, including Kings, were recognized for what they in fact were, the Holy Spirit-Inspired record of the history of Israel. So far as this writer is aware, the canonicity of the Book of Kings was never challenged in Jewish circles or in the Christian church.

E. A BOOK FAITHFULLY COPIED

The Hebrew text of Kings is in remarkably good condition. Scholars find it necessary to propose emendations to the text only in very rare instances. Such problems⁸ as do exist are for the most part only of academic interest and do not affect the sense of the passage. There is no ground for suspecting that any extraneous material has been interpolated into the text. Nor is there any reason to think that any portion of the original history has fallen out of the text during the long centuries of handwritten transmission.

The earliest complete manuscript of Kings dates to the first half of the tenth century A.D. This manuscript is known as the Aleppo Codex. The text as printed today in Kittel's *Biblia Hebraica* (the standard scholarly edition of the Hebrew text) is based on the Leningrad Codex which dates to about A.D. 1000. Fragments of Kings were found among the so-called Dead Sea Scrolls.⁹ These fragments are so small that they have only limited value in the textual criticism of the book.

The Septuagint (Greek) version of Kings does present some

⁸ Rawlinson (BC, p. 475) lists four verses where he feels there have been short omissions through the carelessness of the scribes. The same author lists a handful of passages where a single letter appears to have dropped from a word, or where two similar letters have been confused. Other authorities, however, do not agree with Rawlinson that these citations are in fact examples of textual corruption.

⁹ From Cave 5 three fragments of Kings on leather were found containing parts of fourteen verses in I Kings 1. These fragments are dated to about 110 B.C. Twenty-four fragments of the book on coarse papyrus were found in Cave 6. Several of these contain only a single word or parts of a word or two.

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problems. Differences between the Hebrew and Greek text is particularly noticable in I Kings 3-12. These differences can be summarized as follows:

1. At times the Septuagint has additional material which is not represented in the Hebrew text. The most significant addition occurs in I Kings 12 where the Greek translators have interpolated what appears to be a second account of the disruption of 931 B.C. This material violently intrudes into the narrative as it appears in the Hebrew. It is an apocryphal addition which partly repeats and partly contradicts the earlier, standard account of the disruption. No scholar argues for the authenticity of this insertion. Apparently the Greek translators felt free to occasionally make these apocryphal amplifications which they wove together from Scriptural facts and traditions current in their own day.

2. In places the Septuagint rearranged the materials within Kings. This is most clearly evident in the closing events of Ahab's reign.¹⁰ In the Hebrew text the events are found in this sequence: (1) Elijah's flight to Mt. Horeb (chap. 19); (2) the Aramean siege of Samaria (chap. 20); (3) the Naboth vineyard incident (chap. 21); and (4) the campaign to recover Ramoth-gilead from the Arameans (chap. 22). In the Greek version, however, the vineyard incident is narrated *before* the siege of Samaria. This leaves the account of the Aramean siege of Samaria side by side with the account of Ahab's final campaign against the Arameans.

It is not possible here to deal with all the problems of the relationship between the Hebrew text and the Greek translation of Kings. Certainly the Greek version is indispensable for textual studies in Kings. At times this version offers valuable insight regarding the original Hebrew text. Some of the Dead Sea fragments of Kings seem to be closer to the readings of the Septuagint than to that of the standard (Masoretic) text.

¹⁰ Also within I Kings 3-12 the Greek version at times represents a different grouping of verses.

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Scholars are currently reassessing the relationship between the Septuagint and the Masoretic Hebrew text. Though studies continue in this area, it may cautiously be set forth that the standard Hebrew text will probably continue to be regarded as the best text of the Book of Kings.

F. PART OF A SERIES

Those who translated the Old Testament into Greek apparently regarded Kings as a unity with Samuel. The latter book was divided and called I and II *Basileiai* (reigns, dynasties, kingdoms), while the former was divided and called III and IV *Basileiai*. Certain manuscripts of the Septuagint carry II *Basileiai* (II Samuel) forward to what today is designated as I Kings 2:11; other Greek manuscripts divide between Samuel and Kings at I Kings 2:46 (the establishment of Solomon's throne).

In the Greek version, Kings immediately precedes I and II *Paraleipomenon* (Chronicles). From this it can be seen that the placement of Kings in the English Bible follows the arrangement of books in the ancient Greek version which was so popular in the early church.

In the Hebrew Bible, Kings is the fourth book of the second division of the Jewish canon, the so-called Former Prophets. That Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings would be classified as prophetic books is indicative of the Jewish tradition that these books are products of men who were prophets and that they reflect a prophetic outlook on history. In the Talmudic listing of books and in the modern Hebrew texts, Kings follows Samuel and precedes Isaiah, the first book of the Latter Prophets.

From this it can be seen that the books of Kings follow the books of Samuel in both the Hebrew and the Greek arrangement. The same is true in all ancient versions. This is the case simply because Kings is obviously the sequel to Samuel. In fact it is even possible that the first two chapters of Kings were originally the end of Samuel.

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While in general it can be said that Kings belongs after Samuel, the exact relationship of these historical books to one another remains unclear. Certainly Kings breathes the same spirit as Joshua, Judges and Samuel, and together they form a closely connected series. But were these books originally *planned* as such a series? Were they once four parts of one large work all edited by the same hand? These are questions which cannot be answered definitively.

A popular position today is that Kings was never intended to be a distinct book, but was simply part of a massive history covering the period from the entrance into Canaan until the release of King Jehoiachin. Deuteronomy is viewed as the introduction to this historical work, and the entire corpus is dubbed The Deuteronomistic History.¹¹ In favor of this theory the following points are made:

1. The continuity in the narrative of Joshua-Kings is obvious after even the most casual reading.

2. The theology of these four books is uniform.

3. A general resemblance in style in these four books can be observed. In each of these books one can see the tendency to punctuate the history at significant crises with passages reflecting the style and theology of the Book of Deuteronomy. These punctuating passages are sometimes in narrative form,¹² sometimes in the form of speeches¹³ which anticipate the next phase of the unfolding drama.

4. One can also point to the employment of a certain number of common words and phrases in these four books.

5. Throughout Joshua-Kings the emphasis is on covenant renewal at significant junctures in the history.¹⁴

6. The unity of Joshua-Kings is further indicated by overlaps

¹¹ This is the thesis of the German critic Martin Noth. The Canadian conservative scholar R. K. Harrison has also argued for a single author for Joshua through Kings.

¹² E.g., Judges 2:11—3:6; II Kings 17:7ff.

¹³ E.g., Joshua 23-24; I Samuel 12; I Kings 8:14ff.

¹⁴ Joshua 24; I Samuel 7:3-9; II Samuel 7:8-16. Covenant renewal is *implied* in the introductions to the deliverances narrated in Judges.

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in subject matter. Joshua 23-24 anticipates the problems of the Settlement period. The Philistine oppression, in which Judges climaxes, is still the theme in I Samuel. I Kings continues the theme of the establishment of a hereditary monarchy under the house of David, which is the subject of II Samuel 7:28.

Now, certainly there is continuity between Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings. But was it the original intention of the several distinct authors to pen continuations of the previous history? Or did this continuity become manifest only after the work of the final editor, Ezra? Certainly similarities in style can be observed in these books. But these similarities are regarded by the best Hebraists as slight, not exceeding that of other works which are confessedly by different authors (e.g., Psalms). The common words and phrases are not sufficiently peculiar nor sufficiently numerous to prove identity of authorship.¹⁵

On the other hand, Kings has several distinctive features which clearly distinguish it from the books of Samuel. In Kings one finds (1) numerous references to the book of the Law; (2) disapproval of high place worship; (3) precise dating; (4) allusion to sources; and (5) the title "king" prefixed to the names of monarchs. None of these elements appear in the books of Samuel, or else appear only rarely. Many characters, already well-known from Samuel, are introduced in Kings with a descriptive epithet as if previously unknown.¹⁶ Thus while the division between I and II Kings is artificial, the division between Samuel and Kings is real.

The main argument for the continuity between Samuel and Kings is based on the character of the first two chapters of the latter work. It has been argued that the break at the end of II Samuel is completely arbitrary. Such an arbitrary conclusion to II Samuel must have been *planned*, argues Harrison,¹⁷ to insure the continuity between Samuel and Kings.

¹⁵ Rawlinson, BC, p. 468, n. 4.

¹⁶ E.g., Joab *the son of Zeruiah*; Nathan *the prophet*; Abiathar *the priest*; Zadok *the priest*; Benaiah *the son of Jehoiada*; Bathsheba *the mother of Solomon*; Abner *the son of Ner*.

¹⁷ Harrison, IOT, p. 719.

RELATIONSHIP OF SAMUEL, KINGS AND CHRONICLES

I Samuel 31 Chapters	Reign of Saul	II Samuel 24 Chapters	I Kings 22 Chapters	II Kings 25 Chapters	
Judgeship of Samuel		Reign of David	Reign of Solomon	Reigns of the Kings of Israel and Judah	A P P E N D I X
1-7	8-30	1-24	1-11	12-22	25: 27-30
I Chron		I Chronicles 29 Chapters		II Chronicles 36 Chapters	
G e n e a l o g i c s		Reign of David	Reign of Solomon	Reigns of the Kings of Judah	A P P E N D I X
1-9		10-29	1-9	10-36	36: 20-23

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The similarities between the first two chapters of Kings and the Book of Samuel cannot be denied. It is possible that I Kings 1-2 originally served as the conclusion to Samuel. If so, it was probably the final editor of the Old Testament, Ezra the scribe, who relocated them in order to underscore the continuity in the Old Testament history. Had the author of Kings himself simply copied the conclusion of Samuel, one would expect to find the same material still at the conclusion of the earlier book. Still another way of accounting for I Kings 1-2 would be that the author of Kings secured this material from the same *sources* utilized by the compiler-author of Samuel.

The period of history covered by the two books of Kings is parallel to that covered by the single book of II Chronicles. The Chronicler devotes nine chapters to the reign of Solomon; Kings gives him eleven chapters. During the Divided Monarchy period, Kings treats the reigns of the monarchs in both Israel and Judah; Chronicles focuses entirely on the kings of Judah, only mentioning the Northern kings incidentally.

II. THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE BOOK

It has been established on the basis of both contents and literary characteristics that the Book of Kings emanates from the sixth century B.C. The author of the book is not known for certain. Jewish tradition assigned the book to Jeremiah the prophet. The Talmud states: "*Jeremiah wrote his book and the Book of Kings and Lamentations.*"¹⁸ In this section the arguments for and against the traditional Jewish view will be examined together with the critical views of the origin of the book.

A. THE CASE FOR JEREMIANIC AUTHORSHIP

In favor of the Jewish tradition regarding the authorship of

¹⁸ *Baba Bathra* 14b.

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Kings, the following points can be made:

1. A remarkable affinity exists between the language of Kings and that of Jeremiah. Even those who reject the Jeremianic authorship of the book are forced to acknowledge this correspondence. They must conclude that the anonymous author was a pupil and imitator of Jeremiah, or at the least that he had the writings of Jeremiah before him. A rather impressive list of verbal similarities between the Book of Jeremiah and the Book of Kings has been compiled by Havernick.¹⁹ The following selective list of similar expressions is based on the work of Havernick:

LANGUAGE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN JEREMIAH AND KINGS	
KINGS	JEREMIAH
<p><i>"they would not bear, but barded their necks" (II K 17:14).</i></p> <p><i>"and they followed vanity and became vain" (II K 17:15).</i></p> <p><i>"till He had cast them out of His sight" (II K 17:20).</i></p> <p><i>"there shall not fail thee a man in My sight to sit on the throne of Israel" (I K 8:25).</i></p> <p><i>"that whosoever bears of it, both his ears shall tingle" (II K 21:12).</i></p> <p><i>"therefore My wrath shall be kindled against this place, and it shall not be quenched" (II K 22:17).</i></p> <p><i>"Turn ye from your evil ways" (II K 17:13).</i></p> <p><i>"and I will stretch over Jerusalem the line of Samaria" (II K 21:13).</i></p> <p><i>"they shall be for a prey and for a spoil" (II K 21:14).</i></p>	<p><i>"yet they bearkened not to Me, nor inclined their ear, but barded their neck" (7:26).</i></p> <p><i>"and have walked after vanity and are become vain" (2:5).</i></p> <p><i>"and I will cast you out of My sight" (7:15).</i></p> <p><i>"David shall never want a man to sit on the throne of the house of Israel" (33:17).</i></p> <p><i>"that which whosoever bears, his ears shall tingle" (19:3).</i></p> <p><i>"and My fury shall be poured out upon this place . . . and it shall not be quenched" (7:20).</i></p> <p><i>"Turn ye now every one from his evil way" (18:11; 25:5; 35:15).</i></p> <p><i>"He has stretched out a line" (Lam. 2:8).</i></p> <p><i>"they shall be for a spoil . . . and for a prey" (30:16).</i></p>

(Continued on next page)

¹⁹ The list is reproduced in Rawlinson, BC, p. 471.

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(Continued from previous page)

LANGUAGE SIMILARITIES BETWEEN JEREMIAH AND KINGS	
KINGS	JEREMIAH
<p><i>"Manasseh shed innocent blood"</i> (II K 21:16; 24:4).</p> <p><i>"all the people from the least to the greatest"</i> (II K 23:2; 25:26).</p> <p><i>"to read words in the ears of all the people"</i> (II K 23:2).</p> <p><i>"with all the heart and all the soul"</i> (II K 23:3,25).</p> <p><i>"they that burnt incense to all the host of heaven"</i> (II K 23:5).</p> <p><i>"Topheth, which is in the valley of the children of Hinnom"</i> (II K 23:10).</p>	<p><i>"and for to shed innocent blood"</i> (22:17).</p> <p><i>"and all the people from the least to the greatest"</i> (42:1,8; 44:12; 8:10).</p> <p><i>"read in the roll . . . in the ears of all the people"</i> (36:6,10,13).</p> <p><i>"with my whole heart and with my whole soul"</i> (32:41).</p> <p><i>"they burnt incense to all the host of heaven"</i> (19:13).</p> <p><i>"Topheth, which is in the valley of the son of Hinnom"</i> (7:31).</p>

2. The non-mention of Jeremiah in the account of the last days of Judah as recorded in the Book of Kings is another point of importance. The prophet is mentioned twice in the Chronicler's account (II C 35:25; 36:12).²⁰ The role which Jeremiah played during those crucial days was so significant that it is hard to conceive of any impartial, not to mention pious and prophetic, historian ignoring both his name and his work. One can only conclude that the great prophet deliberately omitted his own name for the sake of modesty and because his own story was told in the biographical accounts being penned by Baruch.

3. Critics who have rejected the traditional belief that Jeremiah authored Kings have not been able to propose any more likely candidate for authorship. Among those who do try to connect some name (other than Jeremiah) with the book, Ezra is most frequently mentioned. But is it really likely that Ezra, who no doubt authored Chronicles, would compose two books relating to nearly the same period?

²⁰ The important place of Jeremiah in the history of the closing days of Judah is abundantly illustrated in Josephus' reconstruction of the history of the time (*Ant.* X, 5-9).

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4. One other argument frequently advanced by those sympathetic to the traditional view regarding the authorship of Kings needs to be analyzed. The contention is made that Jeremiah 52 was lifted in toto from Kings and appended to the Book of Jeremiah. This proves, so the argument goes, that at an early age Jeremiah was thought to be the author of at least the last chapter of Kings. Since the last chapter cannot be divorced from the former chapters, Jeremianic authorship of the whole of Kings is attested. On the surface this argument seems quite cogent. However, the following difficulties arise:

a) Jeremiah 52 contains information not contained in Kings, e.g., 52:10, 19-23, 28-30.

b) Certain words are spelled differently in Jeremiah 52 as compared with Kings. While most of these spelling differences are obvious only in the Hebrew, at least one is clear in the English text. In II Kings 24:11 the name of the king of Babylon is spelled *Nebuchadnezzar* while in Jeremiah 52 the spelling *Nebuchadrezzar* is used.²¹

c) It would seem that in Jeremiah 52:28-30 the Babylonian system of counting the years of Nebuchadnezzar is employed, whereas in Kings the Palestinian system is used. It would be difficult to imagine one author using two different dating systems for the same king.

d) Even if one were to conclude that the differences between II Kings 25 and Jeremiah 52 are not such as to preclude their having been written by one author, there yet remains one stubborn fact. The last line of Jeremiah 51 declares, "*Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.*" The most obvious implication of this statement is that what follows (i.e., Jeremiah 52) is *not* written by Jeremiah.

e) Finally there would seem to be a logical fallacy of circular reasoning to this whole line of argument. Some writers argue for the Jeremianic authorship of Jeremiah 52 on the basis that the chapter was borrowed from Kings. Then they turn

²¹ This spelling difference can be seen in KJV, RSV, and ASV, but not in NASB.

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around and argue for the Jeremianic authorship of Kings on the basis that one chapter of Kings has been appended to the Book of Jeremiah.

The views of two eminent conservative scholars as to the relationship of II Kings 25 and Jeremiah 52 must be noted. E. J. Young²² argued that both chapters were abstracts from a larger work *of which Jeremiah was not the author*. Gleason Archer²³ has also suggested that *Jeremiah was not the author of II Kings 25*. In his view, Jeremiah composed everything in the book except this final chapter which seems, he thinks, to have been written in Babylon rather than Egypt where Jeremiah spent his last days. If these scholars are right, then Jeremiah 52 has no value as supporting evidence for the Jeremianic authorship of Kings.

In all due respect to the brilliant work of Young and Archer, the argument against the Jeremianic authorship of II Kings 25 appears to be weak. Their position is supported entirely by the occurrence throughout Kings of the phrase "*unto this day*" which indicates the *pre-exilic* perspective of the author. But is the phrase "*unto this day*" to be attributed to the author of the book or to the *pre-exilic sources* which he used? And even if one insists that the phrase must properly be assigned to the *author*, is it not true that Jeremiah lived and ministered for some forty years *before* Jerusalem fell? Could it be that he wrote the entire book up to II Kings 25 during his long ministry and then added the final chapter (at least through verse 26) after he had lived through those experiences?

B. THE CASE AGAINST JEREMIANIC AUTHORSHIP

Most modern scholars reject the tradition that Jeremiah authored Kings. Weiser feels that Jeremianic authorship "cannot

²² Young, IOT, p. 200. So also Keil.

²³ Archer, SOTI, p. 277.

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stand up to a scientific examination.”²⁴ Williams remarks: “Clearly Jeremiah’s style differs from that of Kings.”²⁵ Even conservative writers like Waite and Young prefer to assign Kings to “an unknown author” albeit, “doubtlessly a contemporary of Jeremiah.”²⁶

Against the Jeremianic authorship the following points are made:

1. Jeremiah would have been too old to write the Book of Kings as it now stands. His ministry began in the thirteenth year of Josiah, 627 B.C. The Book of Kings in its present form could not have been completed prior to 562 B.C., or sixty-six years after the call of Jeremiah. If Jeremiah was about twenty at the time of his call, he would have been about eighty-six in 562 B.C. Young calls this “the principal objection” to Jeremianic authorship.²⁷

In response to this objection the following points need be noted:

a) Jeremiah *may* have been younger than twenty at the time of his call. This would mean he would be at least a few years younger than eighty-six in 562 B.C.

b) Then too, is it so incredible that a work like Kings could be written by an octogenarian? What of Churchill’s monumental *A History of English Speaking Peoples*?

c) It is also possible that whereas Jeremiah wrote the main body of Kings, the final paragraph which carries the history down to 562 B.C. was appended by someone else. If this be allowed, no *chronological* difficulty exists regarding Jeremiah’s authorship, for the main body of Kings concludes with the events of 582 B.C. when Jeremiah would have been less than sixty-five years of age.

2. The second alleged problem relating to Jeremianic authorship is *geographical* in nature. Some scholars contend that

²⁴ Artur Weiser, OTFD, p. 171.

²⁵ Jay Williams, UOT, p. 177.

²⁶ J. C. J. Waite, NBD, p. 697.

²⁷ Young, IOT, p. 200.

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Kings was written in Babylon, a place to which Jeremiah, so far as is known, never traveled. The evidence which is supposed to demonstrate a Babylonian place of origin for the book is as follows:

a) The author was familiar with what transpired in the court of Evil-merodach in Babylon.

b) Kings contains no reference to the remnant of Jews which fled to Egypt sometime after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.

c) In I Kings 4:24 the region *west* of the Euphrates river (i.e., Syria-Palestine) is referred to as being (literally) "*beyond the river.*"²⁸ Therefore the writer must have been *east* of the Euphrates (i.e., in Mesopotamia).

The arguments respecting the alleged Babylonian derivation of Kings are easily met. With respect to the author's knowledge of affairs in the court of Evil-merodach: The argument *assumes* that the author of the main body of the book also wrote the concluding paragraph, an assumption which in the light of the conclusions of Deuteronomy and Joshua is unwarranted. Even if this paragraph came from the pen of the author of the body of Kings, it would prove nothing as to his whereabouts. Communication in the ancient world was more rapid than one might imagine. News of Jehoiachin's release could easily have reached the ears of an author living in distant Egypt.

With regard to the non-mention of the flight of the Jewish refugees to Egypt: Elsewhere the present writer has argued that as much as five years elapsed between the fall of Jerusalem and the flight to Egypt.²⁹ The main body of the Book of Kings may have been written during that five year interval. The author may have penned this last line at the very time the remnant emigrated to Egypt: "*Then all the people small and great and the captains of the forces arose and went to Egypt; for they were afraid of the Chaldeans*" (II K 25:26). Another possibility is that considerations of subject matter caused the author to

²⁸ In KJV the phrase is erroneously translated "*on this side of the river.*"

²⁹ Smith, JL, pp. 33-34.

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refrain from reporting on events in Egypt. He was concerned in this book to narrate the history of the *monarchy*. Furthermore, the information concerning the Jews in Egypt would be narrated as part of Jeremiah's own biography (Jer. 43-44).

With regard to the argument based on I Kings 4:24: In the period of the Babylonian and Persian empires and possibly throughout Old Testament history the phrase "*beyond the river*" seems to have been a designation for the area west of a river regardless of the geographical vantage point of the author. '*Abhar nahara* ("*beyond the River*") became a *technical designation* for the area west of the Euphrates. In Ezra 8:36 this language is used by a Jew recently returned from Persia. Therefore, the phrase "*beyond the river*" in reference to Syria-Palestine is not conclusive proof as to the geographical whereabouts of the author. With the collapse of this argument the whole contention that the author of Kings *must* have lived in Babylonia is shown to be an unsupported speculation.

The present writer feels that the Jeremianic authorship of Kings is highly probable, but that the matter cannot be proved conclusively. After all, if Kings was compiled by one who was a prophet who lived in the sixth century as all scholars concede, who better than Jeremiah could be nominated for the honor of having contributed this book to the sacred canon?

C. CRITICAL VIEWS REGARDING AUTHORSHIP

According to Bible critics the history of the composition of Kings is quite complex. To understand their position regarding Kings, one must know what they say regarding the authorship of Deuteronomy. The majority of modern critics deny that Moses wrote Deuteronomy. This document—D as they call it—came into existence in the seventh century B.C., over seven centuries *after* the death of Moses. The historical books of the Old Testament are supposed to reflect the attitudes of the "Deuteronomistic School" which produced the Book of Deuteronomy.

Almost all scholars assume a double D-redaction of the

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Book of Kings.³⁰ D-redactors would be men who accepted the philosophy of Deuteronomy. One such redactor or editor issued the first edition of Kings sometime shortly before the death of Josiah.³¹ The second D-redaction—the Book of Kings as it is presently known—was then issued about 550 B.C.

Now the gap between conservative and critical Bible scholars with regard to the origin of Kings is not nearly so great as with other Old Testament books. Conservative scholars would agree on the date suggested for the final edition of Kings. Furthermore, conservative scholars can concede without any compromise the “Deuteronomistic flavor” of Kings. Certainly Kings reflects many of the viewpoints of Deuteronomy,³² because that book contains the God-given prophetic anticipation of the very days described in Kings. Most conservative scholars would probably reject the notion of an early “redaction” of Kings near the time of Josiah simply because the evidence for such a redaction seems insufficient.

D. THE CASE FOR SINGLE AUTHORSHIP

That the book of Kings should be regarded as the product of a single author can be seen from the following considerations:

1. All through the book the same literary plan is followed. The author follows throughout the principle of treating with great fullness the parts of the history theocratically of most importance.

2. A general uniformity of style and language is evident throughout the book with two exceptions. Some slight irregularities are observable in I Kings 1 where peculiarities of diction

³⁰ Snaith, OTMS, p. 102.

³¹ Robert Pfeiffer, IOT, p. 378. However, other capable scholars (e.g., Bentzen) insist it was published shortly *after* the death of Josiah.

³² Harrison (IOT, p. 732) points out this *difference* in emphasis between Deuteronomy and Kings: In Deuteronomy Moses stresses that lessons can be learned from history; but in Kings, God has an absolute standard by which to judge men. That standard is the covenant ideal by which the deeds of men and nations are assessed. For this reason Harrison shies away from ascribing the term “Deuteronomistic” to Kings.

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more like that found in the Book of Samuel are found.³³ Also in II Kings 4:1-37 and 8:1-6 some remarkable Aramaic forms occur. It would appear here that the author of Kings has preserved unaltered an ancient document from the Northern Kingdom where Aramaic had a greater impact upon the language.

3. Certain peculiarities of thought and expression appear throughout the books of Kings. A partial list of these follows:

a) The formulas by which the reigns of kings are introduced and closed are essentially uniform throughout the book. The formula for the close of reigns runs as follows: "*And _____ slept with his fathers, and was buried _____; and _____, his son, reigned in his stead.*" The ordinary formula at the commencement of a reign is, during the existence of the two kingdoms, "*In the _____ year of _____, King of Israel (or Judah), began _____ King of Judah (or Israel) to reign over Judah (or Israel); _____ years old was he when he began to reign, and he reigned _____ years in Jerusalem (or Samaria).*" After the captivity of Israel the formula for Judah becomes simply: "*_____ was _____ years old when he began to reign, and he reigned _____ years in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was _____, the daughter of _____.*" This last clause is also a part of the formula in the case of the kings of Judah before the Israelite captivity.

b) The formulas which describe the sinfulness of the Northern kings are similar throughout the Divided Monarchy period: "*He did evil in the sight of the Lord, and walked in the way of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, and in his sin wherewith he made Israel to sin;*" or, "*he did evil in the sight of the Lord, he departed not from all the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin.*"

c) One sees uniformity of expression also in those formulas which stress the exceptions to the ordinary goodness of certain kings of Judah: "*Nevertheless the high places were not taken away; the people offered and burnt incense yet in*

³³ See Rawlinson (BC, p. 466, n. 1) for the four peculiarities in this chapter.

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the high places."

d) Allusions to the Law of Moses appear throughout Kings.³⁴

e) God's choice of Jerusalem and of David is reiterated again and again.³⁵

f) The constant use of the phrase "*man of God*" also indicates the unity of the book. This expression occurs in Kings at least fifty-three times, and is found in twelve different chapters.³⁶

g) Still another evidence of the unity of Kings is the habit of the author of prefixing the name "King" to the names of the monarchs.³⁷

h) Still another habit of the author is that of making repetitions for the purpose of adding some minute point or points to what he already has said.³⁸

Thus it would appear that the Book of Kings was written by a single author living in the mid-sixth century. Jeremiah of Anathoth would seem to be the most likely candidate for this honor.

III. THE SOURCES OF THE BOOK

Since Kings covers something like four hundred years of history, the book is obviously and necessarily a compilation from other sources. More than thirty times the author refers to his three basic documents: (1) the book of the acts of Solomon; (2) the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah and (3) the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. It is necessary

³⁴ See I Kings 2:3; 6:12; 8:58, 61; 9:4, 6; 11:2, 38; II Kings 10:31; 11:12; 14:6; 17:13, 15, 34, 37; 18:6; 21:8; 22:8; 23:3, 21, 25.

³⁵ See I Kings 8:16, 29; 9:3; 11:36; 14:21; 15:3, 4; II Kings 20; 21:4, 7.

³⁶ By way of contrast, "*man of God*" is used five times in only two chapters of Samuel, and six times in only four chapters of Chronicles.

³⁷ The author has used this prefix seventy-four times in twenty-five chapters. In Samuel "King" is prefixed eighteen times, and in Chronicles, thirty-six times.

³⁸ E.g., I Kings 6:10, 22; 15:6; 16:7 etc.

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here to discuss the nature, origin, content and usage of these known sources as well as to raise the question as to whether the author may have utilized other sources which he fails to identify by name.

A. THE NATURE OF THE SOURCES

What was the character of these sources? From the way in which they are cited one can infer that they were separate and independent works. Further, one can infer that they contained more extended accounts of the reigns of several of the kings.³⁹ But the big question is this: Were these “chronicles” official state papers—public archives prepared by crown officers? Or were they private memoirs of different prophets?

1. *The official annals view.* The view that the chronicles of the kings of Israel and Judah were state documents is supported by many scholars.⁴⁰ In Judah an officer known as the “recorder” held cabinet rank. It was perhaps his job, among other things, to serve as a court historian. Certainly one can point to the existence of court historians in other monarchies of the ancient Near East. Furthermore, the very names of these documents—chronicles of the kings of Israel (or Judah)—would seem to point in the direction of their being official state papers.

On the other hand, a formidable number of arguments against the “official document” view can be assembled.

1. It is far from certain that the “recorder” or remembrancer (Heb., *mazkir*) in Judah was a court historian. He is never associated with public records. He appears rather as an adviser to the king, perhaps the one who reminded the king of state affairs which needed attention (cf. II K 18:18, 37; II C 34:8). Furthermore, no trace of any such state functionary in the Northern Kingdom of Israel is attested. Finally, if one could

³⁹ This is evident by the use of the phrase “*the rest of the acts*” which is used when these sources are cited.

⁴⁰ E.g., Gleason Archer, SOTI, p. 277; Szikszai, IDB, K-Q, p. 34.

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prove that the *mazkir* were a court historian, that in itself would not prove that the author of Kings had made use of his work.

2. Even though David instituted the office of state scribe (II S 8:17), yet his history was recorded by prophets (I C 29:29). Had any such officer in charge of recording history existed, David's history would surely have been recorded by him.

3. State archives could hardly have escaped the sack of Samaria and burning of Jerusalem (cf. II K 25:9). All *public* records must have perished. Yet the books cited in Kings seem to have been available to the author and his readers after the destruction of Jerusalem.

4. The tone and language of the material taken from these sources would seem to weigh against the supposition that they were the records of court historiographers. These sources apparently recorded the sins of the various kings—their conspiracies, murders, and other shameful acts. Is it likely that such things would have been recorded in the official state documents? (cf. II C 36:8).

2. *The prophetic memoirs view.* In the light of these observations the only conclusion that seems to be justified is that the author of Kings made use of documents compiled by the *prophets* rather than by the politicians. Now it may well be, as Eissfeldt⁴¹ has argued, that these prophetic documents were based on official governmental records. Yet the documents themselves were not official, but were private publications since it is presupposed that they can be consulted by anyone.

That the prophets did act as historians can easily be established. In the Book of Chronicles several prophets are explicitly said to have written the history of certain kings. In fact, it is not too much to say that for the prophetic office, the tracing of God's hand in past history was just as essential as predicting future divine visitations. Prophets regarded the composition of theocratic history as one of their main duties.⁴²

⁴¹ Eissfeldt, OTI, p. 286.

⁴² See II Chronicles 26:22; Isaiah 36-38; Jeremiah 39-43.

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B. THE ORIGIN OF THE SOURCES

Which prophets wrote the documents known as “the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel” and “the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah”? It is not always possible to tell. But by analyzing the parallel passages in Chronicles, a few clues emerge. In I Kings 11:41 the author refers to the book of the acts of Solomon. After the parallel passage in Chronicles the following citation appears:

Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, first and last, are they not written in the book of Nathan the prophet, and in the prophecy of Ahijah the Shilonite, and in the visions of Iddo the seer against Jeroboam the son of Nebat? (II C 9:29)

This would suggest that the book of Solomon, if not identical with the writings of Nathan, Ahijah, and Iddo, was at least based on their writings.

For the reign of Rehoboam, the author of Kings cites the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah (I K 14:29). Parallel passages in the Book of Chronicles indicates that Shemaiah and Iddo were the prophets who recorded the history of Rehoboam’s reign.

The Chronicler frequently cites two sources in his work: (1) the book of the kings of Israel and Judah (II C 16:11, etc.); and (2) the book of the kings of Israel (II C 20:34). These may be identical with the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel (or Judah) so often quoted in the Book of Kings. It does not seem that the author of Chronicles borrowed directly from the Book of Kings as it appears in the Old Testament. Rather it would appear that both Kings and Chronicles utilized the same primary sources, viz., the prophetic memoirs relating to the reigns of the various kings.

C. ANALYSIS OF THE SOURCES

It is impossible to know exactly what the book of the acts of Solomon was, for it has long since passed out of existence. From

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the material in Kings which obviously came from it, one would conclude that it was more or less an intimate description of Solomon and a report on his reign. The most part of the first eleven chapters of Kings is based on this ancient work. This source seems to have been an amalgam composed of extracts from state and Temple records, popular stories about Solomon's wisdom and wealth, dream accounts which are essentially autobiographical in character, and various lists. That this source was not entirely pro-Solomon is indicated by the content of I Kings 11 which tells of Solomon's apostasy and troubles.

The book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel is not to be confused with the biblical Book of Chronicles. This source is cited seventeen times by the author of Kings. The first citation comes at the conclusion of the reign of Jeroboam I (I K 14:19), and the last at the conclusion of the reign of Pekah (II K 15:31). The following citations reveal the kind of information which this document contained:

Regarding Jeroboam: "*how he warred and how he reigned*" (I K 14:19).

Regarding Zimri: "*the conspiracy which he made*" (I K 16:20).

Regarding Ahab: "*the ivory house which he built, and all the cities that he built*" (I K 22:29).

Regarding Joash: "*the might with which he fought against Amaziah king of Judah*" (II K 13:12).

From these citations it would seem to be a reasonable inference that this document was annalistic in nature and most probably contained all the memorable events of the reign of every king and *perhaps* a prophetic evaluation of his religious policy.

The third named source is the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah. It is first mentioned with reference to the reign of Rehoboam (I K 14:29), and last cited in connection with Jehoiakim (II K 24:5). In all, this source is cited fifteen times in Kings. The lack of citation in reference to the kings Ahaziah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah can easily be explained.

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Because of the circumstances of the deaths of these kings the entire concluding formula (in which the reference to sources is contained) does not appear. The content of this source can be deduced from some of the references to it:

Regarding Asa: "*all his might, and all that he did, and the cities which he built*" (I K 15:23).

Regarding Jehoshaphat: "*his might that he showed, and how he warred*" (I K 22:45).

Regarding Hezekiah: "*all his might, and how he made a pool, and a conduit, and brought water into the city*" (II K 20:20).

Probably neither of the books cited as sources by the author of Kings was a narrative work compiled according to a comprehensive plan. Rather they appear to have consisted of random notes pertaining to the reigns of the various kings and perhaps the ministries of the prophets as well.

D. THE QUESTION OF ADDITIONAL SOURCES

What of other sources used by the author besides his three main sources? Szikszai⁴³ confidently names six additional sources which the author must have employed: (1) a Davidic court narrative; (2) an Elijah source; (3) and Elisha source; (4) an Ahab source; (5) an Isaiah source; and (6) a prophetic source. All of these were incorporated into the original Book of Kings alongside the accounts from the three named sources. Dogmatism is, of course, out of the question on a matter like this. However, if the three *named* sources were in reality private prophetic memoirs as has been argued above, might they not have included much if not all of the material which Szikskai attributes to these hypothetical sources? Since the author did mention *three* sources rather frequently, one would expect

⁴³ IDB, K-Q, p. 32.

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that he would have made mention of other sources too had he used them.⁴⁴

E. THE USAGE MADE OF THESE SOURCES

The author does not claim that he has drawn his material from these sources, but only refers his readers to them for further information. Still it is a reasonable assumption that his own history derived from these sources. That such was the case is conceded by all scholars. The author seems to have functioned *mainly* as a compiler rather than a composer. His genius was in selecting and arranging the material and inserting the necessary connecting links.

At times the author slightly modernized the material in the sources before him so as to make the narrative more understandable to the people of his own day.⁴⁵ But he did not recast the entire history as a modern historian might have done. He sewed together rather than wove together his sources.⁴⁶ He used his sources almost verbatim. That such is the case is proved by the following considerations: (1) He retained certain forms which in his day would appear to have been obsolete; (2) he includes a number of statements which were inappropriate in the post-exilic period;⁴⁷ (3) he extracted without alteration either from the Book of Isaiah or from the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah the account of the reign of Hezekiah;⁴⁸ and (4) he apparently made verbatim extracts from the same

⁴⁴ Keil (BCOT, p. 13) forcefully makes this point: "The assumption that there were other sources still, is not only sustained by no historical evidence, but has no certain support in the character or contents of the writing before us."

⁴⁵ E.g., "Samaria" (I K 13:32); "As yet" (II K 13:23).

⁴⁶ Robinson, BG, p. 26.

⁴⁷ Rawlinson (BC, p. 474, n. 11) provides a list. The most obvious example is the phrase "*unto this day*" which in most cases cannot refer to the period of the captivity (when Kings was written), but must belong to the period when the Southern Kingdom was still in existence and the Temple still standing.

⁴⁸ Compare Isaiah 36-39 and II Kings 18:13—20:19.

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authority which was utilized by the author of Chronicles.”

The historian did not “sew” his sources together at random. He exercised his choice, and that choice was controlled immediately by his outlook and attitude, and ultimately by the Holy Spirit. The author saw a pattern running through the events of the past, and he shaped and stressed his sources so as to emphasize that pattern.

IV. THE CONTENT OF THIS BOOK

The content of any book can be analyzed from several different standpoints. In a historical work it is important to note the range of the material—the amount of time covered. An analysis of the types of literature found in the book and the style of writing employed is also useful. These points must now be taken up.

A. CHRONOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

The Book of Kings covers about four centuries of the history of Israel, from just before 971 B.C. to just after 562 B.C. Excluding that material which appears as an appendix at the end of the concluding chapter, Kings covers the story of God’s people from the accession of Solomon to the destruction of Jerusalem. At the beginning of Kings the Temple is being *built*; at the conclusion, it is being *burnt*.

The monarchy or crown period covered by Kings may be further subdivided into three divisions: (1) Solomonic Kingdom, (2) the Sister Kingdoms, and (3) the Surviving Kingdom. The following chart illustrates the way the author of Kings has allocated his material to these three periods.

“ This would account for the verbal similarity between much of Chronicles and Kings.

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ALLOCATION OF MATERIAL IN KINGS		
Solomonic Kingdom	Sister Kingdoms	Surviving Kingdom
40 Years	210 Years	136 Years
971-931 B.C.	931-722 B.C.	722-587 B.C.
David to Solomon	In Judah Rehoboam to Ahaz In Israel Jeroboam to Hoshea	Hezekiah to Zedekiah
11 Chapters	28 Chapters	8 Chapters
I Kings 1-11	I Kings 12 – II Kings 17	II Kings 18-25

A brief survey of the three major historical periods covered in Kings would seem to be in order.

1. *I Kings 1-11.* The first major section of Kings is concerned with the last third of the United Monarchy—the forty-year reign of Solomon. The glory of this reign is elaborately depicted, probably on account of its typical significance. The successful wars of David recorded in II Samuel were the prelude to the eventual victory of God's kingdom. So also the peaceful reign of Solomon foreshadowed the glory and blessedness which awaited the people of God under that One who was greater than Solomon.

2. *I Kings 12—II Kings 17.* The largest section of Kings—twenty-eight chapters—deals with the 210 years of the Divided Monarchy. This is admittedly the most difficult part of the book both for the scholar and the average reader. Here the author faced the problem of weaving together the history of the nineteen kings of Israel and the twelve contemporaneous kings of Judah. At times he even had the problem of the contemporaneous kings in the North and in the South having the same name. It was a monumental task which the author faced! One may be critical of how he handled the material, but it is difficult to conceive of how this period could have been narrated

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in any more readable way.

3. *II Kings 18-25*. The final eight chapters of the book are devoted to the history of Judah after the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C. The emphasis here is on the two grand reformations launched by Hezekiah toward the end of the eighth century and by Josiah toward the end of the seventh century B.C. Sandwiched between these two reformations is the godless reign of Manasseh, the most wicked king who ever sat on the throne of David. This section, and indeed the entire Book of Kings, reaches its climax in the detailed description of the disastrous fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.

4. *The appendix (II K 25:27-30)*. The last four verses of Kings have been referred to as an appendix to the book. That is an appropriate description of these verses if one is thinking in terms of authorship. This section was probably not written by the one who wrote the bulk of the book. However, from the standpoint of content, these verses are an integral part of the book. The Jehoiachin account brings the history of the kings to a close on a note of hope. God would not abandon His exiled people. The release of King Jehoiachin in 562 B.C. was a pledge of the ultimate release of Israel which the author of this book never lived to see. The last verses also intended to say in effect, God has not totally rejected the Davidic line.

B. FORM ANALYSIS

Kings does not manifest the variety of literary forms which other Old Testament books display. The book is almost entirely written in prose.⁵⁰ Most of the material falls into the broad category of narrative. But within that narrative one finds incorporated a number of other types of literature, prominent among which is the speech form.

1. *Types of narrative in Kings*. Biblical historical narrative

⁵⁰ The RSV prints only three passages in poetic verse.

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differs quite radically from the first person account of the king that was the dominant form elsewhere in the ancient Near East. In Kings it is *conversational narrative* that is prominent. The direct speech of the various characters lends life and adds color to the narrative. At times the author of Kings utilizes *reportorial narrative* in which he simply reports on the actions of the characters in the story. In *prophetic narrative* the focus is on a particular prophet-hero and the events of his ministry. Since this material contains miraculous elements, modern critics are prone to classify prophetic narrative as legend.

Two other types of narrative can be identified in Kings. *Dream narrative* by its very nature must be based ultimately upon autobiographical accounts. The classic dream account in Kings is that of Solomon at Gibeon (I K 3:4-15). A second dream experience of Solomon is related in I Kings 9:1-9. Other types of revelational accounts are akin to the dream narrative in that they relate matters which were experienced by only one man. The angelic visitation to Elijah under his juniper tree (I K 19:5, 7) and the subsequent theophany at Horeb (I K 19:9-18) fall into this category. Those passages which commence, "*the word of the Lord came*" are of this nature. So also the vision of Micaiah (I K 22:17, 19-22).

Throughout Kings there are passages in which the author reflects upon the history he is relating and interprets it in the light of his overall theme. Modern scholars refer to this material as the Deuteronomistic Framework. Perhaps a more accurate designation would be *historical exposition*. It is this element that gives continuity or flow to the book and which sets it apart from being merely a compendium of data.

2. *Types of speeches in Kings*. Next to narrative, speeches take up the most space in the Book of Kings. Several types can be identified in the book. In a *political speech* the conduct of present leaders is condemned, and the devastating consequences of their actions are graphically depicted. A beautiful example of such a speech is found in II Kings 18:18-35 where an Assyrian envoy engages in psychological warfare aimed at the beleaguered citizens of Jerusalem. The *farewell speech* form is represented

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in David's last words to Solomon (I K 2:1-9). The *messenger speech* is always introduced by "*Thus says so and so.*" Benhadad sent messengers to Ahab to make known his demands (I K 20:2, 3, 5-6) and later to present his petition (I K 20:32). Hezekiah sent messengers to seek the aid of Isaiah (II K 19:3-4). Letters sometimes accompanied the messengers (II K 19:9-14).

For the purposes of literary analysis, a *sermon* can be defined as a speech about God or religious matters. It will usually, but not always, contain an exhortation. Solomon's opening remarks at the dedication of the Temple might be classified in the broad sense as a sermon (I K 8:15-21) in which the king praised God for having been faithful to His promises. The *royal petition* was directed by a subject to his king. Examples of this kind of speech couched in formal court etiquette, abound in Kings. Perhaps the best examples are to be found in I Kings 1—the speeches of Bathsheba (1:17-21) and Nathan (1:24-27). In the *directional speech* a superior gives instructions, usually couched in the imperative mood, to an inferior. David's instructions concerning the anointing of Solomon is a case in point (I K 1:32-37).

The *prophetic oracle* is always in poetic verse, and is usually introduced with "*Thus says the Lord*" (the so-called messenger formula). Only one true prophetic oracle is to be found in Kings, that of Isaiah the prophet (II K 19:21-28). But prose summarizations of numerous prophetic oracles are found in abundance in the book.⁵¹

Prayers are speeches of a special kind. By definition any statement, comment or petition directed to God is prayer. At a number of spots the author has incorporated prayers into his narrative. The longest is that of Solomon at the Temple dedication (I K 8:22-61). At Gibeon (I K 3:6-9) Solomon offered a prayer of petition to the Lord in which he reminded God of his former gracious acts and then made this the ground of his petition for wisdom. Other prayers of petition which are summarized in Kings are: Elijah's prayer on Mt. Carmel (I K

⁵¹ I Kings 11:31-39 (Ahijah); 12:21-24 (Shemaiah); 13:2; 14:7-16 (Ahijah); 16:2-4 (Jehu); 20:13-14, 22, 28; 21:17-19, 21-24 (Elijah); etc.

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18:36-37), under the juniper tree (I K 19:4), and atop a hill near Samaria (II K 1:10, 12). One prayer is attributed to Elisha (II K 6:17-18). Two beautiful prayers are placed on the lips of good king Hezekiah (II K 19:15-19; 20:2-3).

3. *Other types of literature.* Besides the narratives and speeches, other types of literature are found in the book. These are:

a) *Ancient poems.* The short poem spoken by Solomon at the dedication of the Temple is regarded even by critical scholars as being very early (I K 8:12, 13). The Septuagint translation records the tradition that this poem was taken from "The Book of the Song," whatever that might have been. It is more likely, however, that these verses were found in the book of the acts of Solomon which the author of Kings acknowledges using. The other important poem in Kings is Isaiah's taunt-song against Assyria (II K 19:21-28). The taunt-song was a form of satire and invective used by the prophets against foreign enemies.

b) *Lists.* From his source, the book of the acts of Solomon, the author has taken the list of Solomon's court officials (I K 4:1-6) and administrative officers (I K 4:7-19).

c) *Chronological notices.* The author of Kings was interested in and concerned about dates. He indicates in I Kings 6:1 the number of years which elapsed between the Exodus from Egypt and the construction of Solomon's Temple. In the period of the Divided Monarchy he painstakingly synchronizes the reigns of the various kings of Israel and Judah.

d) *Obituaries.* At the conclusion of the reigns of most of the Kings, a brief note is appended which, for want of a better term, may be called an obituary.

e) *Fable.* One bona-fide fable is recorded in Kings. It is found in a message which Jehoash of Israel sent to Amaziah of Judah (II K 14:9).

f) *Building specifications.* For the specifications regarding the Temple and its furnishings (I K 6-8), the author is indebted to his source, the book of the acts of Solomon. Those prophets who composed this source may in turn have taken

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this material from some Temple chronicle.

g) *Letters*. The origin of the letter form can be seen in II Kings 19:9-14. This passage speaks of the messengers of the Assyrian king who were told, "*Thus shall you say to Hezekiah*"; but according to verse 14, a letter containing the message was handed over by these messengers at the same time. From this it can be seen that the letter in the ancient Near East was an extension of a messenger's oral communication. The written form served the purposes of attestation, examination, and preservation.⁵² In Kings one finds excerpts or summaries of letters written from the king of Aram to the king of Israel (II K 5:5-6); from Jehu to the rulers of Samaria (II K 10:2-3); and of Jezebel to the elders of Jezreel (I K 21:8-10).⁵³

C. STYLISTIC ANALYSIS

The author of Kings has thoughtfully constructed his history by careful extracts from his written sources. Kings is not a free and original composition, and yet the author was not *merely* a compiler. The book is more than a collection of extracts, just as an automobile is more than the sum total of the various parts out of which it was constructed. Certainly the author wrote the history of his own times. For those centuries which preceded, the author has demonstrated his skill by producing a carefully planned unity.

1. *An overview of Kings*. For the most part the style of writing in Kings is level and uniform and without pretension. Occasionally the author of Kings rises to great literary heights.⁵⁴ But the general format has a rather dampening effect upon the style of the book as a whole. The average reader probably finds the review of the various kings somewhat dull and unproductive.

⁵² Fohrer, IOT, p. 84.

⁵³ Letters are probably involved, though not explicitly mentioned, in I Kings 5:1-9 and 15:18-19.

⁵⁴ E.g., I Kings 19:11, 12; II Kings 19:21-31.

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But in fairness to the author it should be said that highly complex material is being discussed, material which does not lend itself well to simple treatment. Regardless of its literary demerits, Kings provides a great deal of highly important information within a very few pages.

The mantle of gloom has been thrown over the whole history recorded in Kings. This pervading spirit of deep melancholy is not thrown off even when the most pious monarchs are its subject. From this Rawlinson⁵⁵ draws a most interesting inference:

The tone of the work thus harmonizes with that of Jeremiah's undoubted writings, and furnishes an additional argument in favor of the prophet's authorship.

The author shows particular ability in his treatment of the Divided Monarchy. Here he keeps the history of the two kingdoms running parallel, alternating between Israel and Judah. His methodology is logical and systematic if not imaginative. West⁵⁶ has the most colorful description of the author's treatment. It was written, it seems, after the fashion of a man walking, advancing first one foot and then the other. The author carries forward the history of one kingdom for a number of years, then turns to the other kingdom and traces its history up to and beyond that point, then returns to the former, and so on.

The plan of the book is prevailingly chronological, although occasionally the material is arranged topically. The *topical* arrangement is readily apparent in II Kings 2:1—8:15 which treats the ministry of Elisha.

The author's own original composition in the Book of Kings is somewhat meager. He composed the "framework" of the book—the formulas at the beginning and end of the various reigns. In II Kings 17:7-41 he gives his own inspired explanation

⁵⁵ Rawlinson, BC, p. 478.

⁵⁶ West, IOT, p. 196.

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as to why the kingdom of Israel was destroyed and carried away captive. The remarks regarding the reign of wicked king Manasseh (II K 21:7-16; 23:26, 27; 24:3, 4) are also likely to have been composed by the author himself. Finally, the author himself composed the accounts of the last two kings of Judah, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah (II K 24:8—25:26).

2. *The framework of the book.* One distinctive feature of Kings is not pleasant to the modern reader. The reigns of many of the kings are introduced and concluded with a somewhat stereotyped formula. Some parts of the "framework" as it is called appear in connection with the earliest kings.⁵⁷ But the complete formula does not appear until it is introduced in the case of Rehoboam, first king of the Divided Monarchy period (I K 14:21-31).

The introductions to the various kings usually consist of the following elements: (a) a synchronistic dating of the king's accession in terms of the reigning king in the sister kingdom; (b) the king's place of residence; (c) the length of his reign; (d) an evaluation of his religious attitude. In addition, the formula for the kings of Judah adds (e) the king's age at his accession; and (f) the name, and occasionally the home of the king's mother.

The conclusion part of the framework usually contains: (a) a reference to the historical sources, frequently with observations concerning the content of those sources; (b) mention of the king's death and (c) place of burial; and (d) the name of his successor.

Sometimes part of the stereotyped formula is missing because of the nature of a particular king's accession or death. In the case of Joram and Ahaziah who were murdered, the concluding formula is missing. Hoshea, Jehoahaz of Judah, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah were all violently deposed, and for this reason no concluding formula appears for them. On the other hand, no introductory formula is used for King Jehu who came to the throne in a rebellion. For the usurper Athaliah of Judah, both introductory and concluding formulas are missing.

⁵⁷ Cf. I Kings 2:10-12; 11:41-43; 14:19-20. Part of the introductory formula appears for Solomon as early as 3:2-3.

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D. THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Perhaps the most significant part of the concluding formula for the various kings is the judgment which the author pronounces concerning the monarch's religious policy. Without equivocation, Kings condemns the religious shrines founded by Jeroboam I in the Northern Kingdom (cf. I K 12:26-33). The worship at these shrines is stigmatized throughout the book as the "*way of Jeroboam*" or "*the sin which he (Jeroboam) committed, making Israel to sin*" (cf. I K 15:26, 34; 16:19). Thus all the kings of Israel are condemned in Kings for not doing what was right in the sight of the Lord (cf. I K 15:26, 34; 16:25). Even Shallum, who reigned but one month, falls under the negative criticism of the author for his religious policy! The condemnation also falls on Jehu, the greatest partisan of Yahweh in the North (II K 10:29-31), though it is tempered a bit as it is also in the case of Jehoram (II K 3:2) and Hoshea (II K 17:2).

The author's evaluation of the religious policy of the kings of Judah is only slightly less condemnatory. Judgments unqualifiedly appreciative appear only for Hezekiah (II K 18:3-7) and Josiah (II K 22:2). Favorable decisions were rendered for Asa (I K 15:11-14), Jehoshaphat (I K 22:43), Jehoash (II K 12:2-3), Azariah (II K 15:3-4), and Jotham (II K 15:34-35). The other twelve kings of Judah are condemned as having done evil (cf. II K 8:18, 27; 21:2, 20).

The most severe denunciation is reserved for those kings who tolerated or encouraged the worship of foreign gods. Ahab of Israel was apparently the first king to actively pursue Baal worship (I K 16:31-33), and in this digression he was followed by his son Ahaziah (I K 22:53). In Judah, Jehoram and Ahaziah, both of whom were related to kings in the North through marriage, also are condemned for pagan worship (II K 8:18, 27). Three other kings of Judah—Ahaz, Manasseh and Amon—are also said to have pursued a pagan course (II K 16:2-4; 21:2-9, 20-22).

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V. THE CREDIBILITY OF THE BOOK

Can the information in the Book of Kings be accepted as authentic, sober history? For the most part the credibility of the book has not been questioned. Even radical critics are forced to concede the historical character of the several kings, the reality of most events, and the accuracy of the representations of neighboring nations. The constant allusion to the prophetic annals which were written by contemporaries of the events narrated is a sure pledge of the historical fidelity of the accounts which have been taken from them. For the believer, two lines of evidence support the credibility of Kings—New Testament citations and archaeological confirmations. At the same time there are two particular areas where the credibility of the book has been challenged.

A. NEW TESTAMENT CITATION

Christ and the apostles refer to the events of Kings, including the miraculous portions, as being factual. The following chart sums up the New Testament evidence in this regard.

NEW TESTAMENT CITATION OF KINGS		
NT References	Description of Event	OT References
Matthew 6:29	Solomon in all his glory	I Kings 1-11
Matthew 11:14; Luke 9:8	Elias=Elijah	I Kings 17- II Kings 2
Luke 4:25-26	The famine in Israel for 3½ years; Elijah's visit to Sarepta=Zarephath	I Kings 17
Luke 4:27	Cleansing of Naaman	II Kings 5
Luke 9:54	Elijah calling down fire	II Kings 1
Acts 7:47	Solomon building the Temple	I Kings 6
Romans 11:2-4	7,000 who had not bowed the knee to Baal	I Kings 19:10, 18

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NEW TESTAMENT CITATION OF KINGS		
NT References	Description of Event	OT References
Hebrews 11:35	Women received their dead raised to life again	I Kings 17:17-24; II Kings 4:18-37
James 5:17	Elijah prayed for famine and later for rain	I Kings 17:1 I Kings 18:41-45
Revelation 2:20	Jezebel	I Kings 19:1, etc.

B. ARCHAEOLOGICAL CONFIRMATIONS

The history of Kings time and again has been confirmed by the monuments of antiquity and profane historians. A few of the remarkable and minute corroborations of the book are listed below.

1. Discoveries relating to the reign of Solomon. While little direct archaeological data pertaining to the reigns of Saul and David have been forthcoming, a good deal of material from the reign of Solomon has been unearthed. Solomonic stables have been discovered at Hazor and Tell el-Hesi (cf. I K 9:19; 10:26). Numerous discoveries in Syria and Palestine have enabled scholars to form a fairly good idea of the appearance of Solomon's Temple and especially of its ornamentation. Nelson Glueck believed for many years that he had found a Solomonic blast furnace at Ezion-geber. However, the structure was later identified as a fortified storehouse, albeit still Solomonic in date.

2. Discoveries relating to the Divided Monarchy. Pharaoh Shishak left an account of his invasion into Palestine on the walls of a temple in Karnak. This account mentions the names of many towns in both Israel and Judah which the Pharaoh claims to have captured (cf. I K 14:25ff.).

In the Assyrian annals the names of several kings of Israel are mentioned. Shalmaneser III refers to *Ahab* as one of the combatants in the battle of Qarqar (853 B.C.). *Jehu* paid tribute

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to the same king in 841 B.C. Adad-nirari III makes mention of *Jehoash* of Israel and Samaria. This is the earliest reference to the capital of Israel outside the Bible. Tiglath-pileser III refers to the reception of tribute from *Menahem*. The same Assyrian mentions the fall of *Pekah* and the elevation of *Hoshea* to the throne of Israel. Sargon II tells of carrying off 27,290 people captive at the time Samaria was captured.

In the Assyrian annals references to kings of Judah can also be found. The first reference to a king of Judah by name is found in the inscriptions of Tiglath-pileser III where *Azariah* (Uzziah) is mentioned. The same Assyrian refers to *Ahaz* under his full name of Jehoahaz.

The names of several kings of the Divided Monarchy period have turned up on seals found in Palestine. These include the names of Uzziah, Jotham, and Ahaz of Judah; and Jeroboam II of Israel.

Of all the excavations in Palestine, the work of Harvard University at Samaria has been most productive of information regarding the Northern Kingdom. In one building some seventy ostraka were found, all containing dockets originally attached to shipments of wine and oil to the palace. These ostraka contain a great many place-names and personal names from the eighth century B.C. and therefore are of enormous value geographically and linguistically. Another remarkable discovery at Samaria was the many pieces of carved ivory inlay, used for the decoration of costly wooden furniture (cf. I K 22:39; Amos 3:15).

The most valuable inscription ever found in Palestine remains the Mesha Stone, discovered in 1868 at Dibon in Moab. The text contains some thirty lines and throws considerable light on the history of eastern Palestine in the ninth century B.C. (cf. II K 3:4ff). Mention is made of *Omri* of Israel in this inscription.

3. *Discoveries relating to the Judaeian period.* Archaeological material for the study of Judah after 722 B.C. is abundant. Assyrian inscriptions by Sargon II and Sennacherib record various invasions of Judah and mention specifically king *Hezekiah*. Esarhaddon in his annals mentions *Manasseh* as a

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tributary. An Assyrian tablet published by Gadd in 1923 has clarified the political significance of Pharaoh Necho's northern campaign of 609 B.C. to which reference is made in II Kings 23:29ff.

Of the inscriptions found in Palestine, the Siloam inscription must rank as one of the most important. This inscription undoubtedly comes from the reign of Hezekiah about 700 B.C. It refers to the excavation of the water tunnel mentioned rather indirectly in II Chronicles 32:3-4. Perhaps an even more sensational discovery was made in Lachish in 1935. More than a dozen ostraka were found in the debris of the last destruction of the city by the Chaldeans in 589 B.C. The documents were part of a military correspondence between the commander of the garrison at Lachish and his superior in Jerusalem. The letters date from the days of Jeremiah and offer a remarkable supplement to the picture of conditions in Judah which is found in his book, and less directly, in Kings.

Many shorter inscriptions have also been found in Judah. The seals of King Jehoiachin and of other high officials mentioned in Scripture have been found.⁵⁸

Jehoiachin is also alluded to in the Babylonian Chronicle and his successor, *Zedekiah*, is mentioned by name. Texts found in Babylon refer to the release of Jehoiachin from captivity and the rations which he and his sons subsequently received.

To summarize the evidence above: Of the forty kings of Israel and Judah who are named in the Book of Kings, fifteen are explicitly named in the inscriptions thus far unearthed by archaeologists.

C. THE MIRACULOUS ELEMENT

Modern critics are prone to question the reliability of the miraculous portions of the Bible. In Kings the focus of attack is

⁵⁸ E.g., the seals of Shebna, Jaazaniah and Gedaliah.

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on the Elijah-Elisha narratives. The accounts of these prophets, permeated as they are with the miraculous, are thought to be collections of traditions made many years after the deaths of these men of God.⁵⁹ The material is branded as "legendary."

It is, of course, a gratuitous assumption that these accounts were collected by someone years after the deaths of the prophets. The probability is quite the reverse. Prophets were themselves the historians of Israel. It would only be natural that at the end of an illustrious prophet's life, the chief activities of his ministry should be put on record either by his successor or by one of his close disciples.⁶⁰ As for the miracles recorded in these chapters, they certainly have the air of descriptions derived from eye-witnesses. These events are described in minute circumstantial detail.

D. PROBLEMS IN CHRONOLOGY

Two kinds of chronological figures are found in Kings. For most kings an absolute figure of the total number of years of reign is given. During the period of the Divided Monarchy, the author has employed what has been called "the synchronistic interrelating method" for establishing the data of the kings of Israel and Judah. One example of this method at this point will suffice: "*Now in the eighteenth year of king Jeroboam the son of Nebat, Abijam began to reign over Judah*" (I K 15:1). Already in the second Christian century evidence exists that the devout and scholarly Jewish rabbis were fully aware of a number of apparent discrepancies in the figures as they stand in Kings.

The criticism of the chronology in the Book of Kings has gone through three stages. In the nineteenth century almost to a man the critics maintained that the chronological data in Kings was completely worthless. Further study led scholars to conclude

⁵⁹ Kuhl (OTOC, p. 150), however, concedes that the Elijah-Elisha materials are very old, dating to 800 B.C. soon after the deaths of the prophets.

⁶⁰ Rawlinson, BC, p. 479.

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that the *absolute figures* (total number of years that a king was said to reign) were correct; but the synchronist figures were at the same time regarded as an artificial calculation of the author. But then came the discovery of the library of Ashurbanipal which contained Assyrian literature dating back to the beginning of the second millennium B.C. (the time of Abraham).⁶¹ Among this literature were documents using the same system of synchronization as was used in Kings. This and other archaeological discoveries forced a complete turn around of critical opinion. The synchronist system of Kings has now been studied in the light of these discoveries and has been pronounced "old and basically reliable."⁶²

Those who study the Hebrew monarchy owe an incalculable debt to the Seventh-Day Adventist scholar Edwin Thiele who has done such painstaking work on the chronological data of this period. His *Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings* first published in 1951 was soon adopted by most Evangelical Old Testament scholars as the authoritative work in this very difficult field. Thiele was able to resolve satisfactorily almost all the problematical issues raised by the chronological notations in Kings. His work is firmly grounded in the computational methods known to have been used by ancient scribes. In the present work, the conclusions of Thiele have been followed except for the period 750-715 B.C. and for the date of the fall of Jerusalem.

1. Problems in the chronological notations. Basically, the problems in the chronological notations are three in number. First, what appear on the surface as discrepancies exist between the synchronist data and the absolute regnal years of the individual kings which the author elsewhere gives. For example, Omri is said to begin to reign in the thirty-first year of Asa (I K 16:23). He reigned twelve years. But this twelve year reign is said to end in the thirty-eighth year of Asa (I K 16:29) which

⁶¹ The discovery of the library came between 1848 and 1876. Selections of this material can be found in ANET, pp. 272-74; 301-303.

⁶² Eissfeldt, OTL, p. 283.

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would indicate a reign of only eight years.

Another type of superficial discrepancy sometimes exists between the regnal years and/or the synchronistic years and the established dates of Babylonian and Assyrian history. For example, the period from the revolution of Jehu to the fall of Samaria according to Assyrian chronology is a hundred twenty years. But when one adds up the regnal years of the kings of Judah for this period he exceeds this figure by forty-five years!

Still another problem appears in that the sum of the regnal years for the kings of Israel for a given period fails to tally with the years of the Judaeen kings of the same period. The following examples will illustrate:

IN JUDAH	NOTES	IN ISRAEL
REHOBOAM to AMAZIAH adds up to 95 years	Both of these kings began to reign the same day Both of these kings died the same day ←—————→	JEROBOAM to JEHORAM adds up to 98 years

Here it is obvious that a three year difference in the figures exists. A bigger difference occurs in the problematical period from the revolution of 841 B.C. to the fall of Samaria.

IN JUDAH	NOTES	IN ISRAEL
ATHALIAH to HEZEKIAH Year 6 adds up to 165 years	This queen of Judah and king of Israel began to reign the same day The City of Samaria fell in the sixth year of Hezekiah (II K 18:10) ←—————→	JEHU to FALL OF SAMARIA adds up to 143 years

2. *Principles for dealing with royal chronology.* The chronological problems of Kings disappear for the most part when certain facts and principles are observed.

a) The parallel Assyrian data has forced recognition of

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the possibility of coregencies in both kingdoms. Coregencies are specifically indicated only on two occasions (I K 1:34, 35; II K 15:5). But apparently coregency was the ancient means of guaranteeing succession and thus was quite common. Furthermore, it is now recognized that the years of a coregency would be reckoned in the total number of years attributed to both kings. Thus if a father and son shared the rule for ten years, that ten years would be counted in the total number of years of both kings' reigns.

b) Differences also existed in the way of reckoning the regnal years in the two kingdoms. In one system—the so called accession year method—the remainder of the calendar year in which a king was crowned was called his accession year and was not counted as part of the numbered years of his reign. In the non-accession year method of counting, the remaining months of that coronation year were counted as year one. The second year of the reign began on New Years day.

c) To further complicate this whole matter, the two kingdoms were not consistent in the use of one or the other of these systems of reckoning regnal years. Those who have made the most careful study of these matters feel that Israel switched from the non-accession to the accession year method of counting sometime about 800 B.C. Judah utilized the accession year system throughout its history except for the half century from 850 to 800 B.C. The reason for the switches in both kingdoms is obscure.

d) Another factor which helps account for some of the difficulties in the figures in Kings is that different calendars were used in the kingdoms. The Northern Kingdoms began the new year in Nisan (spring), the first month of the religious year. Judah, on the other hand, began the year in Tishri (fall). Why this difference existed it is impossible to know. Nevertheless, it must be taken into account when there appears to be a one year discrepancy in the figures of the two kingdoms.

e) One must always remember that chronology is a branch of historical science and as such is subject to constant revision. Even among conservative scholars there is not always agreement.

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Thiele dates the disruption of the kingdom in 931 whereas Payne concludes it was in 930 B.C. Archer appropriately observes: "A certain amount of flexibility must always be preserved and appropriate adjustments made as new evidence comes in."⁶³

f) Those problems that still remain when all the above factors have been taken into consideration are few in number. Nonetheless, problems *do* exist. Perhaps some of *these* figures were accidentally altered in the course of the centuries during which this book was copied by hand. The present writer is convinced by the overwhelming weight of the evidence that the Scriptures are inspired of God *and inerrant in the autographs*. No *real* error or discrepancy could have existed in the *original* manuscripts. Even though there are Biblical difficulties which cannot be satisfactorily solved *for the present*, this writer is not inclined to abandon the Biblical *doctrine* of inerrancy.

3. *The problem of the accession ages of certain kings.* Another problem area in the Book of Kings concerns the ages of the kings at the time of their accession. The age at which some of the kings took the throne seems to place their births too early in their fathers' reigns. When the figures are carefully analyzed it appears that Josiah was born when Amon was sixteen, and Jehoiakim to Josiah at age fourteen. Some have alleged that Hezekiah was born to Ahaz at age eleven!

Now in Eastern lands young people seem to mature faster and marry earlier than in Western lands. It was particularly important for kings to marry and procreate as soon as possible so as to preserve the dynasty. The birth of a child at age sixteen or fourteen does not appear to be impossible. The conclusion that Ahaz was only eleven when Hezekiah was born depends on the way II Kings 16:2 and 18:2 are interpreted. Certainly it is not a *necessary* inference that Ahaz became a father at such a young age. The fact of coregencies with regard to both

⁶³ Archer, SOTI, p. 280.

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Ahaz and Hezekiah plays havoc with any attempt to dogmatize here. See comments on these verses for further discussion.

VI. THE PURPOSE OF THE BOOK

Why was Kings written? One can only look at the book as it has come down to the present—the points of emphasis and the omissions—to make this determination. It would seem that the author had at least seven aims. His purpose was (1) historic; (2) didactic; (3) polemic; (4) Davidic; (5) prophetic; (6) priestly; and (7) evangelistic.

A. THE HISTORIC PURPOSE

That the Book of Kings is intended to be an historical account of the kings of Israel and Judah is obvious. The book has been properly classified as one of the historical books of the Old Testament and has its proper place alongside the books of Samuel. At the time Kings was written no comprehensive treatment of the monarchy period had ever been undertaken. A number of private documents written by prophets and dealing with particular kings were available. For the period of Saul and David the great Book of Samuel had been published. But nothing comparable had been produced for the long and important period from Solomon to the exile. In hindsight it is now obvious that God wanted His people to have an inspired and trustworthy history of Abraham's descendants from the call of that great patriarch out of Ur of Chaldees to the return of his sons from bondage in the same geographical area. To this end the Holy Spirit inspired a godly prophet to pen the important link in this historical chain known as Kings.

The historical importance of the Book of Kings is also seen in the fact that it contains the only account of Israel. The Book of Chronicles gives no separate history of the Northern Kingdom.

The Old Testament historical writings are somewhat unique

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in the literature which has come down from ancient (pre-classical) times. The Israelites were the first people of antiquity to develop a true historiography. Annalistic writing is attested in Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia; but only the Hittites among the Gentile nations attempted historical writing.

All the difference in the world exists between the Holy Spirit-Inspired history of Israel and that history which was recorded on the monuments of other peoples in antiquity. Years ago the great Orientalist Layard commented on the difference:

In the first place, the care with which the events of each king's reign were chronicled is worthy of remark. They were usually written in the form of regular annals, and in some cases, as on the great monoliths at Nimroud, the royal progress during a campaign appears to have been described almost day by day. We are thus furnished with an interesting illustration of the historical books of the Jews. There is, however, this marked difference between them, that while the Assyrian records were nothing but a dry narrative, or rather register, of military campaigns, spoils, and cruelties—events of little importance but to those immediately concerned in them—the historic books of the Old Testament, apart from the deeds of war and blood which they chronicle, contain the most interesting of private episodes, and the most sublime of moral lessons. It need scarcely be added that this distinction is precisely what we might have expected to find between them, and that the Christian will not fail to give it due weight.⁶⁴

B. THE DIDACTIC PURPOSE

The historians of Israel were prophets. History in their hands had "purpose," i.e., religious aim. What they wrote was ecclesiastical or theocratic rather than civil history. Hebrew antiquity knows no secular historian. The religious orientation of the author of Kings helps to explain several features of the

⁶⁴ Layard, DRNB, p. 539.

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book. This interest in things religious explains, for example, the prominence given to Elijah and Elisha and the rather frequent insertions of prophetic interpretations of various crises in the histories of Israel and Judah. The author's religious outlook is also seen in his constant reference to the Pentateuch and to the previous history of the nation, as well as in his constant comparison of each king with the king "after God's own heart."

Kings is a historical archipelago. The author never intended this book to be merely the cold recitation of facts. He intended rather to teach important theological and practical truths here. This is history written, not from a civil, but from a religious point of view. Events which an ordinary historian would have considered of great consequence are passed over or only briefly alluded to. The military history of the two kingdoms for the most part is omitted. Thus the author completely ignores that crucial battle of Qarqar (853 B.C.) in which king Ahab and his confederates were able to turn back the advancing Assyrian armies.

The author, aided by the Holy Spirit, could see the hand of God at work in the period of the monarchy. He saw history as theonomous, i.e., governed by God. It was spiritual rather than political lessons that he was trying to teach. For this reason he especially focuses his attention on the two crisis periods, the reigns of Ahab in the North and Hezekiah in the South. Also for these reasons he gives considerable attention to the three theocratic institutions which symbolize the presence of God among His people—the Temple, prophetism and the Davidic dynasty.

It was clearly not the objective of the author of *Kings* to narrate the naked facts of monarchical history. Still less was it his intention to glorify Israel's heroes out of nationalistic motives. Rather it was his purpose to demonstrate that the rise and glories, the decline and fall of the Hebrew kingdoms were causally related to the piety and faithfulness or the irreligion and idolatry of the kings and their subjects. Writing during the captivity, the author attempts to demonstrate that the

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miseries of invasion, the destruction of the Temple, the overthrow of the monarchy, and the deportation to foreign soil were judgments of God upon their sins, the bitter fruits of national apostasy. The nation, having rejected her divine King, attempted to govern herself and failed utterly. That is the message of Kings.

Perhaps the most prominent feature of Kings is the way in which the author assesses the significance of the individual kings according to their religious policies, not political achievements. The religious orientation of the author helps to explain the prominence given to certain kings and the almost total disregard for others. Actually, most of the space in Kings is devoted to six kings. To Solomon the author devotes eleven chapters. Considerable space is also devoted to Jeroboam (I K 12:25—14:20), Ahab (I K 16:29—22:40), Jehoram (II K 3:1—9:26), Hezekiah (II K 18-20) and Josiah (II K 22-23). These kings were chosen for special attention, not because of their political significance, but because they are “pivots on which theocratic history moves.”⁶⁵

C. THE POLEMIC PURPOSE

The building of the Temple was of immense significance to the author of Kings. This is immediately evident in the amount of space devoted to the construction of this holy edifice and the furnishings thereof. Furthermore, before the Temple was built the author of Kings viewed the various “high places” or worship centers with tolerance; but after the Temple was dedicated, he brands those high places as illegitimate (cf. Deut. 12:5-14). Throughout the book one finds reference to the failure of even some of the better kings to remove those high places. The author is obviously committed to the concept of a centralized sanctuary as the only legitimate spot from which to conduct formal worship. God had chosen Jerusalem and its Temple as

⁶⁵ Rawlinson, BC, p. 466.

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the spot at which He would manifest Himself.

Not only does Kings polemicize against the high places, the book also attacks the infiltration of Baal worship into the kingdoms. It was his concern about the deteriorating effect of Jezebelian Baalism that caused the author to devote so much space—one third of his material—to the ministries of Elijah and Elisha. To the author of Kings, Elijah's contest on Mt. Carmel was a pivotal event in Israel (Northern Kingdom). From that point on his interest shifts from the nation, and the spotlight of attention focuses on Elijah and Elisha and their efforts to build up the remnant in Israel. The name of the king is frequently suppressed in this section of the book. The author abandons the chronological order of presentation. Spiritual considerations override those of chronology.

In addition to his attack on the high places and Baal worship, the author of Kings lashes out again and again against the established, state-controlled worship of Yahweh in the North. For the Northern Kingdom the decisive sin was that of Jeroboam in setting up the golden calves at Bethel and Dan and instituting all the other features of this apostate worship. Jeroboam was the prime example and prototype of the godless king of the North. Every subsequent king in the Northern Kingdom is described as walking in the sins of Jeroboam. The divine sentence against that kingdom was pronounced at the time of Jeroboam's defection. But the execution was delayed because of individual kings like Ahab (I K 21:29), Jehu (II K 10:30) and Jeroboam II (II K 14:26f.) in whom God found *some* redeeming qualities.

Did the author of Kings accomplish his polemic purpose? When Jerusalem fell and the Jews were carried away to Babylon, the religion of Yahweh was put to its most severe test. Ancient mentality regarded the fall of a nation tantamount to a discrediting of that nation's gods. This, together with the fact that in Babylon the Jews were thrown into a seductive pagan environment, indicates the gravity of the situation. The Book of Kings was one of the tools used by the prophets to help the people put all of their history—including the captivity—in proper perspective. By studying Kings the exilic Jews began to see that their

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one hope lay in strict obedience to God and observance of the Law. The fact that the Jews were well cured of their paganism when they returned to Palestine would seem to indicate that this book had very great influence upon their thinking.

D. THE DAVIDIC PURPOSE

In Kings the chief concern is Davidic monarchy. Kings of Israel are treated as a matter of secondary interest. To the author of this book, David was a God-fearing, ideal king (I K 11:33, 38; 14:8). He is the standard by which all the Southern kings are measured.⁶⁶

The glorious promise of II Samuel 7:12-16 forms—in the words of Keil—the red thread which runs through the history of the kings from Solomon to the exile. It is the author's intention to show in the history of the kings how the Lord fulfilled this gracious word. He first shows how God chastised the seed of David and snatched away from them the larger portion of the kingdom. But the descendants of David continued to transgress the conditions of the sacred covenant of II Samuel 7, and so God cast them off. Only the reform efforts of three or four godly rulers postponed temporarily this tragic judgment. It was "*for the sake of David My servant*" that God exercised such patience with Judah.⁶⁷

E. THE PROPHETIC PURPOSE

The author of Kings viewed the roles of the prophets as crucial in the history both of Israel and Judah. The teaching and activity of these servants of God exerted an important influence upon the history of the theocracy. Owing to them, the apostasy of

⁶⁶ I Kings 15:11; II Kings 14:3; 16:2; 18:3; 22:2.

⁶⁷ This phrase occurs in I Kings 11:13; II Kings 8:19; 19:34; 20:6. The same basic thought, though not precise words, occurs in I Kings 11:12 and 15:4, 5.

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the people was without excuse. By dwelling on the prophets the author shows that the guilt of the people was intensely aggravated—the destruction of Jerusalem and the captivity were justified in spite of God's promise to David. The accounts of the prophets are the spiritual leaven which pervades this portion of the Word of God. This prophetic activity stamped upon the Israelite monarchy the character of the theocracy or divine rule in Israel.

F. THE PRIESTLY PURPOSE

Scholars generally refer to Chronicles as *priestly* history and to Kings as *prophetic* history. In general this distinction is useful. But nonetheless, a major theme in Kings is the significance of Jerusalem, the place chosen by God as the site for His Temple. In the several chapters devoted to the reign of Solomon, for example, the most important single theme is the building of the Temple (I K 6:1-38), its furnishings (I K 7:13-51), and dedication (I K 8). Thirty-eight verses describe the building of the Temple; only twelve verses treat all the other building accomplishments of Solomon.

Throughout the history of Judah events associated with the Temple receive a disproportionate amount of attention. The cultic innovations of Ahaz are noted (II K 16:10-18). The appropriation of Temple treasure for foreign tribute never fails to be mentioned.⁶⁸ While Hazael's invasion of Judah gets only scanty reference (II K 12:17), Joash's reform of Temple finances is treated at length (II K 12:4-16).

Attention given to *priests* in Kings is not insignificant. In the opening chapters Zadok and Abiathar, men who apparently shared the high priesthood, play significant roles. Jeroboam is condemned for having departed from the Pentateuchal stipulations in making priests of the very lowest classes of

⁶⁸ See I Kings 14:26-28; 15:18; II Kings 12:18; 14:14; 18:16; 24:13; 25:13-17.

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society (I K 12:31; 13:33). Jehoiada the high priest during the minority of Joash (c. 835) is a great hero in Judah's history, as is Hilkiah about two centuries later. The priestly interest of the author of Kings has not heretofore been sufficiently emphasized. Perhaps this emphasis suggests that the author of the book was a priest! (cf. Jer. 1:1).

G. THE EVANGELISTIC EMPHASIS

It was the goal of the author of Kings not merely to report events of the past, but to give an evaluation and criticism of the past as an admonition for his contemporaries. By retelling the apostasy and ensuing trials and visitations, Kings called men to repentance, conversion and total commitment.

VII. THE BACKGROUND OF THE BOOK

In the Book of Kings one finds the monarchical institution in full bloom. It is everywhere taken for granted that Israel and Judah should be ruled by kings. It was not always so among the people of God. How did Israel come to have a king? What was the previous history of kingship in the Old Testament?

A. ANTICIPATIONS OF KINGSHIP

From the very earliest period there existed in Israel the expectation that some day the nation would be ruled by a king. Part of the promise made to Abraham was that "*kings shall come forth from you*" (Gen. 17:6, 16). The same promise was repeated to Jacob (Gen. 35:11). Moses was confident that Israel would some day have a king, and so in Genesis 36:31 he comments: "Now these are the kings who reigned in the land of Edom *before any king reigned over the sons of Israel.*" Mosaic provisions for the regulation of the future kingship are

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set forth in Deuteronomy 17:14-20.

During the Settlement period (time of the Judges) attempts were made to appoint a king. The crown was offered to Gideon, but he rejected it with the comment: "*the Lord shall rule over you.*" (Jud. 8:23). Nevertheless, Gideon seems to have been a king in everything but name.⁶⁹ His son Abimelech actually was recognized as king over the region around Shechem. His rule lasted three years (Jud. 9:22).

One purpose for the writing of the Book of Judges was to depict how urgently Israel needed a king. To the history of the Judges, the author appended two accounts⁷⁰ which reflect the lawlessness of this period of Bible history (Jud. 17-21). Here he relates black tales of idolatry, lust, rape, civil war and various other heinous crimes. Four times in these chapters the author drives home his point: "*In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did what was right in his own eyes.*"⁷¹

B. THE PHILISTINE OPPRESSION

Chronologically, the last oppression recorded in the Book of Judges is that of the Philistines (Jud. 13-16). Samson (c. 1069-1049 B.C.) inflicted heavy casualties on these mighty plains people; but he was unable to break their strangle grip on Israel. In the battle of Aphek (c. 1067 B.C.) the ark of God was captured and the national sanctuary at Shiloh was destroyed (I S 4). Finally, after about twenty more years of humiliation at the hands of the Philistines, the people were ready to heed Samuel's call for national repentance. The people assembled *en mass* at Mizpah to publicly recommit themselves to the Lord. While this revival was in progress, the Philistines attacked.

⁶⁹ He had many wives (Jud. 8:30), and introduced certain cultic innovations (Jud. 8:27). It seems to have been taken for granted that his seventy sons would attempt to rule the nation after his death (Jud. 9:2).

⁷⁰ The Book of Ruth originally formed a third appendix to Judges.

⁷¹ Judges 17:6; 18:1; 19:1; 21:25.

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Because of the intercessory prayer of Samuel, God intervened on behalf of His people. The Philistines were driven out of Israel never to return during the days of Samuel (I S 7:13).

C. THE REQUEST FOR A KING

Only about five years after the great victory at Mizpah, the elders of the tribes met with Samuel and requested that he anoint a king. Their reasons were quite practical, if not spiritual. (1) Samuel was old and his sons were dishonest; (2) they wanted to be like all the nations; and (3) they wanted a leader in battle (I S 8:5, 20).

Samuel was displeased with the request and took the matter to the Lord in prayer. The prophet was instructed to warn the elders about the nature of kingship. If they still persisted in their demands, Samuel was to comply. The sin of the people was not in having a king, but in prematurely asking for one. Their request cast aspersions on the way God had been governing them through the Judges.

The Lord directed Samuel to anoint Saul the son of Kish as Israel's first king. The initial anointing took place privately at Ramah (I S 10:1); then at Mizpah, scene of Samuel's greatest triumph, Saul was dramatically introduced to the nation and publicly anointed (I S 10:17-27). It was not, however, until after Saul proved his leadership in the rescue of Jabesh-gilead that he won universal acceptance among the people. After that successful campaign, Samuel directed the people to assemble at Gilgal to "*renew the kingdom*" (I S 11:14). This Gilgal assembly marked the end of the period of the Judges and the actual beginning of the monarchy.

D. THE REIGN OF SAUL

Actually not much information is contained in the Scriptures about the reign of Saul. He was able to drive the Philistines

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out of the land (I S 13-14). But during this effort Saul transgressed the instructions of Samuel, and the prophet announced that Saul's dynasty had been rejected by God. On a subsequent occasion—perhaps some years later—Saul disobeyed a prophetic commission to exterminate the Amalekites. Again Saul was disobedient, and Samuel announced that God had rejected Saul as king (I S 15).

E. DAVID'S RISE TO POWER

David's rise to power began with a visit from the aged Samuel and a private anointing (I S 16:1-13). From that point on "*the spirit of God came mightily on David*" (I S 16:13) and "*the spirit of the Lord departed from Saul*" (I S 16:14). The turning point in the Book of I Samuel occurs precisely at this point.

David served while a youth in the court of Saul, and even as the king's armor-bearer (I S 16:19-23). Subsequently David proved his military prowess by single-handedly defeating Goliath (I S 17) and by leading first smaller and then larger units of the army (I S 18:5-9, 13-16). As David's success became more obvious, so also did Saul's jealousy. Various attempts were made on David's life (I S 18:10-12; 19:8-10). An order was issued for David's arrest and execution, but with the help of Michal, his wife, David was able to escape (I S 19:11-17).

David tried to rejoin Saul's court (I S 20), but found the hatred of the king implacable. He was then forced for some time to live the life of an exile and outlaw. On three occasions Saul mobilized the army in an all-out effort to apprehend David (I S 23, 24, 26). These efforts narrowly failed. David ended this phase of his life in the service of a foreign king, Achish of Gath (I S 27:1-12).

F. THE REIGN OF DAVID

Saul met his end in the course of a desperate battle against the

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Philistines at Mt. Gilboa (I S 31). David was thereafter almost immediately recognized as king by his own tribe of Judah. He ruled over Judah for more than seven years in Hebron. The other tribes were reluctant to give allegiance to any sovereign, but gradually joined the cause of Ishbosheth, a son of Saul. When Ishbosheth met with a tragic death, the tribes had no recourse but to acknowledge David as king.

David initiated his reign over the united tribes by the successful capture of the Jebusite stronghold of Jerusalem (II S 5:6-9). He thereafter immediately faced a serious invasion threat from the Philistines. In two dramatic battles David defeated these old enemies. He then went on the offensive. Over the course of his reign, he successfully defeated Edom, Moab, Philistia, Ammon and several of the Aramean states to the north. At the end of his reign the borders of Israel extended from the Euphrates river in the north to the river of Egypt in the south.

David's accomplishments were considerable in areas other than military conquest. With his prolific production of psalms and hymns, David launched a great age of literature in Israel. He invented new musical instruments. He centralized the worship of God in Jerusalem. He prepared for the building of the Temple by gathering enormous amounts of gold, silver and construction materials.

David had his failings and paid dearly for them. His adultery with Bathsheba and subsequent murder of Uriah are well known. David also failed as a father to properly discipline his family. Because of this, he saw one son slain and another become a bitter and powerful adversary. In his last days David experienced rebellions led by his son Absalom and by a certain man named Sheba. The rather pathetic picture of David's last days is continued in the opening chapter of Kings.

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SYNOPSIS OF PART ONE – THE SOLOMONIC KINGDOM									
I KINGS 1-11									
THE REIGN OF SOLOMON									
971-931 B.C. 40 YEARS									
1:1 SOLOMON'S WARRANT	3:3	3:4 SOLOMON'S WISDOM	4:34	5:1 SOLOMON'S WORK	7:51	8:1 SOLOMON'S WEALTH	10:29	11:1 SOLOMON'S WICKEDNESS	11:43
Chapter Two Coronation	Chapter Four Government	Chapter Five Temple Work	Chapter Six Other Work	Chapter Seven Communication	Chapter Eight Glory	Chapter Nine Transgression and Trouble			
Chapter Three Establishment									

CHAPTER TWO

SOLOMON'S CORONATION

I Kings 1:1-53

The passing of a powerful monarch was always a crucial time in ancient empires. This was particularly the case when David died. Monarchy was relatively new in Israel and no long-established tradition of succession existed to guide the nation through the transfer of power. It would seem that the people expected David to nominate his successor (1:20); but the tribal elders reserved for themselves the right of final endorsement.¹ Though David had privately tapped Solomon to succeed him, he does not appear to have made any public, formal announcement of his decision. This left the door open for Adonijah, David's eldest son, to make a bid for the throne. The first two chapters of Kings relate how the efforts of Adonijah were foiled and how Solomon was anointed and established as the third king of the United Kingdom. Details concerning the last days of David have been included for the purpose of (1) closing the account of David's reign; (2) setting the stage for the dramatic coronation of Solomon; and (3) providing an explanation for the bold moves made by Solomon at the outset of his reign (chap. 2).

The material contained in chapter one lends itself to the following analysis: (1) the conspiracy of Adonijah (1:1-10); (2) the countermeasures of Nathan (1:11-27); and (3) the coronation of Solomon (1:28-53).

I. THE CONSPIRACY OF ADONIJAH 1:1-10

David's final years were full of turmoil and tribulation and even as he lay critically ill and at the point of death he was yet to experience one last heartbreak. His disgruntled eldest son,

¹ Cf. II S 5:3; I K 12:1ff.

Adonijah, tried to take advantage of David's condition and usurp the throne. By the way of background the author first describes (1) the decrepitude of David (vv. 1-4); and then (2) the designs of Adonijah (vv. 5-10).

A. DAVID'S DECREPITUDE 1:1-4

TRANSLATION

(1) Now King David was old, advanced in years; and they covered him with covers, but he could not make himself warm. (2) Therefore his servants said unto him, Let there be sought for my lord the king a maiden who is a virgin and let her stand before the king, and be his intimate companion; and let her lie in your bosom, that my lord the king may be warm. (3) So they sought for a fair maiden in all the borders of Israel, and they found Abishag the Shunammite, and they brought her to the king. (4) The maiden was exceedingly fair, and she became an intimate companion to the king, and she ministered to him; but the king knew her not.

COMMENTS

At the outset two points of a somewhat technical nature need to be made. The chapter is introduced with the word "now" which renders the Hebrew particle *vav*. While this particle usually has a connecting force, it is frequently used at the beginning of a book where there is no connection whatever with any earlier writing (as in Esther, Ezekiel, Jonah, etc.). Therefore, one cannot argue *on the basis of this particle* that the author of Kings considered his work a continuation of preceding history (as Rawlinson argues) or that he has lifted this material from a writing containing the earlier history of David (as Keil argues). The second point concerns the title "king" which is given to David in this chapter. While this title

is used infrequently in Samuel, it is characteristic of the author of Kings.

The Book of Kings opens with a sad scene. David the mighty hero of the books of Samuel has succumbed to the vicissitudes of his life and reign. He is an old man "*stricken in years*" (lit., *entered into days*). Since David began to reign when he was thirty years old, and since he ruled forty years (II S 5:4), he must have been seventy years of age at this time.² The hardships of his youth, the wounds of battle, the sorrows of his later years, and perhaps disease as well have all taken their toll. Even though blankets were piled upon him, the old king was not able to maintain normal body temperature (v. 1).

As a solution to the king's desperate physical condition, the court servants—perhaps the royal physicians³—suggested that a young virgin (lit., *a maiden, a virgin*) be secured "*to stand before the king,*" i.e., to become his servant. She was to be young so that her body might provide warmth to the ailing monarch; a virgin, as befitted a king. She was to become a companion (*sekhenet*) to the king, i.e., one who stands in intimate relationship with another.⁴ Suggested in this Hebrew word is the idea that the maiden would become a concubine to the king (v. 2).⁵

With David's consent, a search was conducted throughout the kingdom for a suitable maiden. Finally in the tribe of Issachar, the town of Shunem,⁶ the royal committee found a girl named Abishag who met all the qualifications (v. 3). She was very fair (lit., *fair to exceeding*), and apparently willing to become the intimate companion to the decrepit king. Abishag

² Of the kings of Judah only David, Solomon and Manasseh exceeded sixty years of age.

³ Josephus (*Ant.* VIII, 19.3) regarded the advice to procure a maiden as a medical prescription.

⁴ Slotki, SBB, p. 1.

⁵ While the evidence falls short of being conclusive, in the light of Solomon's violent response to Adonijah's request to marry Abishag it seems best to regard her as a member of the royal harem. Cf. Gray, QTL, p. 76.

⁶ Shunem is the modern Arab town of Sulem, located about seven miles from Nazareth. Another Shunammite woman appears in II Kings 4:8.

ministered unto the physical needs of David, "*but the king knew her not*" (v.4). This latter remark serves the dual purpose of indicating the wane of David's physical faculties⁷ and the legal grounds upon which Adonijah would dare to request the hand of this maiden after David's death (2:17).

B. ADONIJAH'S DESIGNS 1:5-10

TRANSLATION

(5) Now Adonijah the son of Haggith was exalting himself, saying, Surely I will be king! And he prepared for himself a chariot, horses,⁸ and fifty men who would run before him. (6) Now his father had not afflicted him all his days, saying, Why have you acted this way? And he also was very handsome, and furthermore he had been born after Absalom. (7) And he conferred with Joab the son of Zeruah and with Abiathar the priest; and they followed Adonijah and helped him. (8) But Zadok the priest, and Benaiah the son of Jehoida, and Nathan the prophet, and Shimei, and Rei and David's Gibborim were not with Adonijah. (9) And Adonijah slew sheep, cattle and fatlings at the stone of Zohelath which is by En-rogel; and he summoned all his brothers, sons of the king, and all the men of Judah who were servants of the king. (10) But Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah, and the Gibborim and Solomon his brother he did not summon.

⁷ Snaith (IB, pp. 19-20) feels that the Israelite king, like his Canaanite counterpart, had to prove his sexual potency or lose his right to govern. According to this theory, Abishag was procured in order to excite David sexually. Wilson (WBC p. 241) has followed Snaith in this interpretation for which there is not the slightest warrant in the text. While the phrase "*lie in your bosom*" often refers to sexual intimacy, the meaning is here modified by the primary purpose of the suggested remedy, viz., the supplying of vital body heat by physical contact. See Matheney and Honeycutt, BC, p. 151.

⁸ Heb. *parashim*. Scholars disagree as to whether the term here refers to the horses (Gray) which pulled the chariot, or to a mounted escort which accompanied Adonijah as he rode his chariot (Keil).

COMMENTS

Adonijah, the son of Haggith⁹ was the fourth, and now apparently the eldest surviving son of David (II S 3:4). David's firstborn, Amnon, had been slain in a plot instigated by his younger brother (II S 13:28f.) Absalom, the third son of David, was slain in battle when he led a rebellion against his father (II S 18:15). Of David's second son, Chileab (or Daniel as he is called in I C 3:1), little is known. It is likely that he died very young since nothing is recorded of him. According to the principle of primogeniture (that the oldest son should follow his father as king), Adonijah was now entitled to the throne. But God's ways are not man's ways, and the heavenly King had reserved for Himself the right to choose the earthly king. At his birth, God through His prophet had given a special name to Solomon—Jedidiah which means "*beloved of the LORD.*" David discerned in this that God had chosen Solomon to be his successor, and consequently he gave a solemn oath to Bathsheba that her son would follow him on the throne (cf. vv. 13, 30).

It must have been common knowledge about the palace that David desired Solomon to be his successor (cf. v. 13). His father's preferences notwithstanding, Adonijah was determined to make a bid for the crown. While David's physical condition became progressively worse, Adonijah was exalting himself. He boasted to himself and his confederates that one day he would be king. Confident in his claims to the crown, Adonijah made no effort to conceal his conspiracy. Borrowing a leaf from Absalom's book of subversive tactics (cf. II S 15:1ff.), Adonijah prepared for himself a chariot and horses and fifty men to run before him to herald his coming (v. 5).¹⁰ With this dazzling display of regal pomp, the prince hoped to capture the allegiance

⁹ Haggith means "*dancer*" and perhaps is given "to afford an indication of the weak and trifling character of the prince." Tuck, FTK, p. 72.

¹⁰ Chariots and horses in the days of David were a comparative novelty. When David captured horses, he had all but a few hamstrung (II S 8:4).

of the people, and win the backing of the royal court.

In verse 6 the author attempts to explain the reasons for this reprehensible conduct on the part of Adonijah. In the first place, Adonijah, like Absalom before him, was a spoiled brat. While David was a success in most areas of life, abundant evidence exists that he was a failure as a father. He had never disciplined Adonijah, nor called him to account for his conduct. The young prince began to think of himself as his father's favorite and presumptive heir. Since Adonijah was born when David ruled in Hebron, he must have been between thirty-three and forty years of age at the time of David's grave illness. Still he acts like an arrogant and obnoxious brat. He had so little respect for his father that he would not allow the old man to go down to his grave without this last heartbreak. Bahr observes, "a perverted parent love is self-punishment." If the father does not "trouble" the son, the son will trouble the father.¹¹

Secondly, because of his personal attractiveness Adonijah was bold in his pretensions to the throne. He, like Absalom, was a "goodly man," i.e., a man of handsome physique. Josephus, the Jewish historian, makes mention of his stature. Perhaps Adonijah felt that his physical attributes made him the likely and logical candidate for the crown.

Then too, Adonijah's seniority among the sons of David carried considerable weight in many circles. He was born "after Absalom," and, since the latter was dead, Adonijah was now next in line for the throne. So the argument went. No doubt many people considered it a grave injustice that Adonijah had been slighted and Solomon groomed for kingship. In his mid-thirties at this time, Adonijah must have seemed much more qualified than his younger brother Solomon who was scarcely more than a teenager.

Last but not least, Adonijah was encouraged in his pretensions by powerful and influential national leaders. The prestigious general of David's army, Joab, backed the claims of Adonijah.

¹¹ Bahr, LC, p. 27.

Throughout his career Joab, the son of David's sister Zeruah (I C 2:16), was known for his unwavering fidelity to David. Even ~~when he had disobeyed royal commands,~~ he always had the best interest of his king in mind. Some have conjectured that Joab's support of Adonijah was in his own best interest. According to this theory Joab knew that he was under David's displeasure for his two cold-blooded murders, and for the battlefield execution of Absalom. He feared that Solomon would mete out to him the vengeance which David could not bring himself to execute. So, the theory concludes, by backing Adonijah Joab was acting in his own self-interest. No one, of course, can know for sure what motivated Joab to cast his lot with Adonijah. The present writer feels that acting in his own self-interest would be out of character for Joab. He feared no one, and there does not appear to have been a selfish bone in his body. Whatever other faults Joab may have had, he never tried to use his powerful position for personal advantage. Probably Joab felt that Adonijah was legally the successor of David and logically the man best suited for the job.

No less significant was the support which Adonijah received from Abiathar the priest (v. 7). Abiathar was the sole survivor when Saul massacred the priests at Nob (I S 22:20). He shared the afflictions of David when the latter fled from the insane Saul (I S 22:23) and was rewarded under the reign of David by being named to a position of leadership in the priesthood. Zadok, who shared the priesthood with Abiathar, is usually mentioned first (II S 15:29, 35, 36; 20:25) as though he were the more important and influential. Probably Zadok was the "chief priest"¹² and Abiathar the slightly less prestigious "second priest." To secure the support of this influential religious leader, Adonijah may have promised to restore the high priesthood to the family of Abiathar exclusively. This, of course, is mere speculation. Once again it may have been

¹² Zadok likely became high priest by succeeding Jehoiada who certainly had been high priest in the days of Saul. He and thirty-seven hundred followers joined David at Hebron after the death of Saul. See I Chronicles 12:27; 27:5.

simply that Abiathar felt that Adonijah had a legitimate claim to the throne.

While Adonijah was successful in enlisting the support of Joab and Abiathar, other prominent military and religious leaders remained steadfastly loyal to the express wishes of their dying king. Five are named in verse 8. (1) Zadok, the high priest, during the reign of David remained faithful as did (2) Benaiah, the commander of the royal bodyguard. Benaiah was the son of Jehoiada the high priest (I C 27:5) and consequently a priest in his own right. But because of his military skill (II S-23:20, 21; I C 11:22), he was given command of the bodyguard (II S 8:18; I C 18:17). He probably was a near relative of Zadok. (3) Nathan, the prophetic conscience of David's reign, did not budge in his loyalty to the wishes of the king. Nathan is famous for two prophetic oracles: In the first oracle (II S 7), Nathan promised David that his descendants would rule Israel forever. Jesus Christ, David's greater son, is now ruling over His kingdom in ultimate fulfillment of this promise. Nathan is also famous for his fearless condemnation of David's sin with Bathsheba (II S 12). A Jewish tradition identifies Nathan as the eighth son of Jesse. Various suggestions have been made as to the identity of (4) Shemi. Some think he may have been David's brother Shammah (I S 16:9) or Shimeah as it is spelled in II Samuel 13:3 and 21:21. Others think he is the Shimei, son of Elah, in I Kings 4:18. A third view is that this is the same Shimei who once had cursed David, but who now was "with Solomon" (I K 2:8). (5) Rei is completely unknown except for this passage.

Along with the five individuals named as being loyal to David, the author takes note of the fact that David's mighty men refused to be swayed by the charm and charisma of Adonijah. The *Gibborim* ("mighty men") seems to have been a military order for those who had performed valiant deeds on the field of battle. Thirty men had attained this honor and their names and exploits are recorded in II Samuel 23 and I Chronicles 11.

Undeterred by the lack of support from the key leaders mentioned in verse 8, Adonijah proceeded with plans to seize the throne. A great communal feast was to be the occasion at which

Adonijah would have himself proclaimed king. En-rogel (lit., *spring of treading*)¹³ was chosen as the location for the clandestine coronation. This spring, known today as the well of Job,¹⁴ was located outside Jerusalem's walls at about the point where the Kidron and Hinnom valleys meet southeast of the city. The spot was chosen because (1) it was politically advantageous for Adonijah to conduct his shady business outside Jerusalem which was literally the city of David; (2) the spring furnishes the best water available around Jerusalem; and (3) the spring was located in or very near the shady and cool king's garden or paradise.¹⁵ Even in modern times this area has been described as "the prettiest and most fertile" spot around Jerusalem.¹⁶ The stone of Zohemoth (lit., *stone of the serpent*) mentioned in connection with En-rogel appears to be nothing more than a geographical landmark mentioned by the author to further pinpoint the spot where the feast took place.¹⁷

Animals in abundance were slaughtered¹⁸ in order to provide meat for the numerous guests. All the king's sons (except Solomon) and all the men of the tribe of Judah (Adonijah's tribe) who served in David's court were invited to the festivities (v. 9). Of course those who opposed Adonijah were not invited (v. 10). The fact that Solomon was excluded proves that Adonijah knew him to be David's choice as successor.

¹³ Perhaps En-rogel was a spring where clothes would be washed by treading upon them with the feet. Several other possible explanations of the name are listed in Gray, OTL, pp. 81-82.

¹⁴ The oldest travelers to Palestine identified the well of Job as En-rogel and most modern scholars concur in their judgment.

¹⁵ Josephus (*Ant.* VII, 14.4) states that Adonijah feasted in the king's paradise.

¹⁶ Robinson, BRP, I, 419.

¹⁷ Perhaps the stone was used to allow the blood to drain from the slaughtered animals. Others think it may have been a huge overhanging rock that provided additional shade.

¹⁸ The Hebrew verb *zabach* means primarily "to slaughter" and does not necessarily carry the implication of sacrifice as some commentators wrongly suggest.

THE THRONE OF DAVID CONTESTED	
Supporting Adonijah	Supporting Solomon
Joab (Captain) Abiathar (Priest) of house of Ithamar Sons of the King King's Servants (Men of Judah) Jonathan	Benaiah (Captain) Zadok (Priest) of house of Eleazar Nathan (Prophet) Bathsheba King's Servants Shimei Rei Cherethites and Pelethites
"Behold, a son shall be born to you . . . and his name shall be Solomon . . . and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever." I Chronicles 22:9-10	

II. THE COUNTER-MEASURES OF NATHAN 1:11-27

Adonijah's designs might have succeeded had it not been for the swift action of Nathan and Bathsheba. In narrating how the throne was made secure for Solomon, the author reports (1) Nathan's wise counsel to Bathsheba (vv. 11-14); (2) Bathsheba's impassioned plea to David (vv. 15-21); and (3) Nathan's confirmatory speech before the king (vv. 22-27).

A. NATHAN'S WISE COUNSEL 1:11-14

TRANSLATION

(11) Therefore Nathan said unto Bathsheba the mother of Solomon: Have you not heard that Adonijah the son of Haggith reigns, and David our lord does not know it? (12) Now therefore, come, let me, I pray you, give you counsel, that you may save your life and that of your son Solomon. (13) Go immediately unto King David and say unto him, Did you not, my lord, O king, swear unto your handmaid, saying, Surely Solomon your son shall reign after me, and shall sit upon my throne? Then

why does Adonijah reign? (14) Behold while you are yet speaking there with the king, I also will come after you, and will confirm your words.

COMMENTS

When Nathan heard of Adonijah's coronation festivities, he took prompt and energetic action to thwart the conspiracy. To this prophet of God, Adonijah's actions were an attempt to deliberately set aside the divine will. Very likely it was Nathan who had communicated to David that God had selected Solomon to be his successor, and hence he was properly anxious that the purpose of God should be fulfilled. Immediately he contacted Bathsheba, the mother of Solomon, and informed her of the new developments. Already, it seems, Adonijah had announced his succession, or at least Nathan assumed this to be the case (v. 11). Bathsheba was sought out as being the person, next to Solomon, most directly concerned, and also because she was, it seems, the favorite wife of the king. Nathan stressed the urgency of the situation by suggesting that unless the plot could be successfully countered, the life of both Bathsheba and Solomon would be in jeopardy (v. 12). Nathan was not using scare tactics. Not inviting Solomon to his feast showed Adonijah's feeling toward the latter, and indicated that he wanted no peaceful coexistence with his younger brother. Thus there was ample reason to believe that should the usurpation be a success, the lives of Solomon and all who supported him would be in grave danger. The custom of kings to secure their thrones by a massacre of their rivals is illustrated at least three times in the subsequent history of the kings.¹⁹

Nathan's skillfully arranged plan called for Bathsheba to approach the king first, and, with her womanly appeal, present the danger from the human standpoint. By means of a rhetorical

¹⁹ I Kings 15:29; II Kings 10:7, 14; 11:1.

question she was to remind her husband of a solemn oath which he had made to her, that her son Solomon would succeed him. This oath to Bathsheba is mentioned here for the first time. It is uncertain when David made that oath, but Nathan knew of it, and doubtlessly others at the court knew of it also. When David acknowledged that oath, she was by means of a second rhetorical question to inform him that Adonijah had already commenced his reign (v. 13). Lest David think that Bathsheba had exaggerated the intentions of Adonijah and misrepresented his activities, Nathan would come in on her heels to confirm what she had told the king (v. 14). The use of the expressions "*my lord the king*" (i.e., you) and "*your maidservant*" (i.e., I) are indicative of the usual polite and deferential address used when speaking to an Israelite king.

B. BATHSHEBA'S IMPASSIONED PLEA 1:15-21

TRANSLATION

(15) Then Bathsheba went unto the king to the chamber (now the king was very old and Abishag the Shunammite was ministering unto the king). (16) And Bathsheba bowed, and did homage unto the king. And the king said, What is your concern? (17) And she said to him, O my lord, you surely swore by the LORD your God to your handmaid, surely Solomon your son shall rule after me, and shall sit upon my throne! (18) But now, behold, Adonijah reigns; and now, my lord the king, you do not know it! (19) And he has slain oxen, fatlings and sheep in abundance, and he has summoned all the sons of the king, Abiathar the priest and Joab the captain of the host; but Solomon your servant he has not summoned. (20) And as for you, my lord the king, the eyes of all Israel are upon you that you might declare to them who shall sit upon the throne of my lord the king after him. (21) For it shall come to pass when my lord the king lies down with his fathers, that surely I and my son Solomon will become transgressors.

COMMENTS

Bathsheba was more than willing to cooperate with Nathan. She went immediately to the bedchamber of her husband, the only place where the feeble king could hold audience. There, in the presence of his nurse and constant attendant (v. 15), Bathsheba bowed herself and received David's permission to state her business (v. 16). Abandoning the rhetorical question technique suggested by Nathan, Bathsheba by direct affirmation reminded David of the oath he had given to her that Solomon would succeed him on the throne (v. 17). She then informed him that Adonijah had proclaimed himself King (v. 18). In support of her charge against Adonijah, she described the feast which he had prepared, listed the guests he had invited, (Joab and Abiathar were there) and, most important, the person he had not invited, viz., Solomon (v. 19). That Adonijah would invite all the sons of the king except Solomon clearly showed that his banquet was something more than a fellowship supper!

Bathsheba's appeal reached its climax in the carefully chosen words recorded in verses 20-21. She says in effect, Adonijah has made his move; but it is *you* (the Hebrew emphasizes the pronoun), O king, who must make the decision as to your successor. Bathsheba was not requesting David's abdication, but rather she was suggesting that it was imperative that he appoint a coregent, or at least designate a successor. That "*all Israel*" was looking to the king suggests that the majority of the people had not yet attached themselves to the cause of Adonijah. It would appear from verse 20 that an Israelite king could nominate his successor. Only when the dead king's wishes were unknown could the eldest son claim the right of succession.²⁰ If David took no action, the throne would go to Adonijah by default upon his death.²¹ Then, Bathsheba reminded David,

²⁰ Slotki, SBB, p. 5.

²¹ The phrase "*lie down with his fathers*" in the case of David cannot mean that he was to be buried in his family tomb. These words suggest the belief that one joins his ancestors when he dies. The expression normally points to a peaceful death, being only once used otherwise (I K 22:39f.).

both she and Solomon would be regarded as political offenders, i.e., traitors (v. 21). Bathsheba left to David's imagination what she and her son might expect as *offenders* at the hands of the usurper.

C. NATHAN'S TIMELY CONFIRMATION 1:22-27

TRANSLATION

(22) And behold, while she was yet speaking with the king, Nathan the prophet came. (23) And they told the king, saying, Behold Nathan the prophet. And he came before the king, and bowed to the king upon his face to the ground. (24) And Nathan said, My lord the king, you surely said, Adonijah shall reign after me, and shall sit upon my throne! (25) For today he has gone down, and slain oxen, fatlings, and sheep in abundance, and he has summoned all the sons of the king and the captains of the host, and Abiathar the priest; and behold they are eating and drinking before him, and they have said, Let King Adonijah live! (26) But me, me your servant, Zadok the priest, Benaiah the son of Jehoiada and Solomon your servant he has not summoned. (27) If my lord the king is responsible for this thing, then you have not informed your servants who shall sit upon the throne of my lord the king after him.

COMMENTS

As Bathsheba was finishing her emotional appeal to her husband, Nathan entered the palace complex (v. 22) and was announced to the king. Entering David's bedchamber, Nathan bowed himself until he touched the ground (v. 23). Frequently in the Assyrian monuments men are represented with their faces actually touching the earth before the feet of the king.

Nathan's speech before David was a psychological masterpiece. He began with a strong affirmation (not a question as

in KJV) designed to elicit from David an equally strong disclaimer: "*You must have said, Adonijah shall reign after me and he shall sit upon my throne!*" (v. 24). Nathan innocently assumed that Adonijah could not have done all that he had done without David's knowledge and sanction. Again the details of Adonijah's feast were rehearsed before the king with two details not heretofore mentioned: "*captains of the host,*" i.e., other high ranking military officers besides Joab, were in attendance; and "*they eat and drink before him and say, Let King Adonijah live!*" (v. 25). "Let the king live" was the customary acclamation with which kings were greeted following their anointing or coronation (cf. v. 39; I S 10:24; II S 16:16 etc.).

To further indict Adonijah and make his aims crystal clear, Nathan mentioned those not invited to En-rogel. The names of David's closest and most trusted friends—Nathan, Zadok and Benaiah—as well as that of Solomon had been omitted from the guest list (v. 26). If David was responsible for what was transpiring outside the walls of Jerusalem, the king had changed his plans regarding a successor without consulting with and confiding in Nathan his spiritual counselor (v. 27). By this last statement (or question as rendered in KJV), Nathan was suggesting that the king should officially make his decision and order his successor to be crowned.

III. THE CORONATION OF SOLOMON 1:28-53

The impassioned plea of Bathsheba and the timely confirmation of Nathan served to impress the ailing king with the urgency of royal action in favor of Solomon. David decreed that Solomon should immediately be taken to the spring Gihon and anointed king. By this swift action Adonijah's conspiracy was nipped in the bud. In discussing this crucial coronation the author speaks of (1) the authorization by David (vv. 28-37); (2) the anointing of Solomon (vv. 38-40); and (3) the apprehension which seized Adonijah and his crew when news of the anointing reached them (vv. 41-53).

A. THE AUTHORIZATION BY DAVID 1:28-37

In order for Solomon's coronation to be legal and meaningful, the full backing of David was required. Something dramatic and forceful needed to be done quickly. Stirred to action by the reports of Bathsheba and Nathan, David formulated a brilliant plan for countering the clandestine coronation of Adonijah. But even in this crisis David's personal concern for Bathsheba took precedence over political action with regard to Solomon. Recalling his wife to the bedchamber, David solemnly reaffirmed the oath he had made some years earlier that Solomon would succeed him on the throne. Then in some detail he outlined the procedures to be followed in the coronation of Solomon. Benaiah, unable to restrain himself at this delightful turn of events, burst forth in a prayer for the young man who was about to be anointed. This paragraph lends itself to the following analysis: (1) The promise to Bathsheba (vv. 28-31); (2) the procedure regarding Solomon (vv. 32-35); and (3) the prayer of Benaiah (vv. 36-37).

1. *THE PROMISES TO BATHSHEBA (1:28-31)*

TRANSLATION

(28) And King David answered and said, Summon to me Bathsheba. And she came before the king, and stood before the king. (29) And the king swore and said, As the LORD lives who has redeemed my life from all distress, (30) surely as I swore to you by the LORD God of Israel, saying, Surely Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in place of me; surely thus will I do this day! (31) And Bathsheba bowed with face to the ground, and did homage to the king, and said, May my lord King David live forever!

COMMENTS

David showed no incredulity with regard to the indictment of his eldest son. He seemed to realize that Adonijah is quite capable of entering into just such a conspiracy as had been reported to him. For the moment mustering his physical energies and recapturing that decisiveness which had characterized his reign, David began to act. First, he summoned Bathsheba from a waiting room to which she had retired when Nathan had entered the king's chamber (v. 28). Apparently when the king granted an audience to his wife or one of his counselors, no third party was present unless the king required his assistance.²² In the words of a solemn oath ("*As the LORD lives*") David promised his beloved wife that her son Solomon would succeed him on the throne that very day (vv. 29, 30). In response to this commitment on the part of David, Bathsheba bowed herself to the ground (cf. v. 23) and pronounced a blessing upon a king: "*May my lord King David live forever!*" (v. 31). Such a blessing, never elsewhere used of a Hebrew monarch, was quite common later in the courts of Babylon and Persia (Dan. 2:4; Neh. 2:3, etc.). By these words Bathsheba conveyed to the king the thought that she did not desire his early death, but only the assurance that at the end of his life her son Solomon would follow him on the throne.

2. THE PROCEDURE REGARDING SOLOMON (1:32-35)

TRANSLATION

(32) And king David said, Summon to me Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada. And they came before the king. (33) And the king said to them, Take with you the servants of your lord, and cause Solomon

²² Hammond, PC, p. 7.

my son to ride upon my mule, and take him down to Gihon. (34) And let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him there to be king over Israel. Then you shall blow the trumpet, and say, May King Solomon live! (35) Then go up after him, and he shall come, and sit upon my throne, and he shall reign instead of me; for him I have appointed to be prince over Israel and over Judah.

COMMENTS

True to his word, David took immediate action. Orders were given for Zadok, Nathan and Benaiah to be summoned to the bedside of the king (v. 32). From this it would appear that Nathan had withdrawn from the room at the time Bathsheba made her entrance in verse 28. Several specific instructions were given to the high priest, the prophet and the general: (1) They were to gather the "*servants*" of David, i.e., his personal bodyguard of mercenary troops called Cherethites and Pelethites (cf. v. 38). The presence of these troops would not only serve as a show of formidable force, but also would indicate that the coronation of Solomon had been authorized by the king. (2) Solomon was to ride on David's own mule. God's law stipulated that Israel's king was not to multiply horses to himself (Deut. 17:16), and it is only in the service of David's wayward sons Absalom and Adonijah that horses are mentioned at this time. While commoners rode on asses (cf. 2:40), the mule was reserved to members of the royal family (cf. II S 13:29; 18:9). None but David had ever been seen to ride on this particular mule. The use of this animal would not only be a mark of honor but would serve notice to the populace all along the processional route that David had designated Solomon as his successor.

David ordered (3) that Solomon be taken down to Gihon for the public anointing (v. 33). Some disagreement among scholars exists as to the location of this Gihon, but the best geographers identify it as the Virgin Spring which is in the

Kidron valley, east of the old city of Jerusalem.²³ Because of its intermittent character this spring in ancient times was called Gihon which means “gusher.” During the rainy season this spring gushes forth for forty minutes or so four or five times a day. Because it produces up to 250,000 gallons of water a day, Gihon was vital to the life of Jerusalem from the very earliest times. Today the spring is used as a bathtub by local villagers.

It is not entirely clear why David selected Gihon as the spot for the public anointing of Solomon. In Old Testament times Gihon was on the slope of the City of David somewhat above the bottom of the valley; but in the ensuing years the bottom of the valley has risen practically to the level of the spring. The text certainly does not indicate that the spring had any religious importance.²⁴ Avi-Yonah has suggested that public ceremonies were held at Gihon “because of its life-and-death importance for the capital.”²⁵ This suggestion has some merit particularly in view of the changes in topography which have taken place over the course of the centuries. George Adam Smith captured the feelings of the modern visitor to the spot when he wrote:

Upon the heaped rubbish at the foot of the now naked hill Ophel, and amid the squalid bustle which prevails there today, one forgets that this was the scene of Solomon’s coronation. But in that day the precipitous rock with the fortress above it, the open cave with the mysterious intermittent fountain . . . must have formed a fitting theatre for the first coronation of an Israelite King in Jerusalem.²⁶

Zadok the high priest and Nathan the most famous prophet of the day were instructed (4) to anoint Solomon as king. The king, like the priest, was a sacred personage and consequently

²³ The best discussion is in Smith, JTEH, I, 101-111.

²⁴ J. Simons (JOT, p. 164) contends that the intermittent issue of this spring “may have seemed sufficiently inscrutable to lend Gihon a sacred character.”

²⁵ Avi-Yonah and Kraeling, OLB, p. 128.

²⁶ Smith, JTEH, I, 108.

was set apart for his office by the solemn act of being anointed with oil. Sometimes a king would be anointed on more than one occasion. Saul was probably anointed twice (I S 10:1; 11:15). David was anointed on three occasions (I S 16:13; II S 2:4; 5:3). Solomon himself was anointed twice (cf. I C 29:22).

Following the anointing, David ordered (5) that a ram's horn trumpet be blown and Solomon be acclaimed king by means of the standard coronation greeting "*May King Solomon live!*" (v. 34). The proclamation of a new king seems to have been customarily accompanied by a blast upon trumpets (II S 15:10; II K 9:13; 11:14).

At the conclusion of the formal services at Gihon, (6) Solomon was to be escorted back up the steep hill into the capital where he was to sit on the throne of David. In every possible way David was trying to confirm the selection of Solomon. He virtually abdicates in favor of his son.

David closed his instruction to Zadok, Nathan and Benaiah with a formal and emphatic declaration that he had appointed Solomon prince over the United Kingdom (v. 35). David used the Hebrew term *nagid*, literally, one placed in the forefront; hence, a leader, prince or ruler. Saul had been anointed *nagid* by Samuel (I S 10:1); he was made king by the people (with Samuel officiating) at Gilgal sometime later (I S 11:15). Perhaps David could nominate Solomon as *nagid*, but it was for the people to acclaim him as king. Solomon was to be prince over Israel and Judah. David was keenly aware of the two component parts of this United Kingdom, for he had himself been first king of Judah for over seven years before being recognized by the elders of the other tribes as king of Israel. Furthermore, during his reign he had been forced to suppress an uprising in Judah led by Absalom (II S 15-19), as well as an Israelite uprising led by Sheba (II S 20). It was David's hope that both Israel and Judah would recognize Solomon as king simultaneously.

3. THE PRAYER OF BENAIAH (1:36-37)**TRANSLATION**

(36) And Benaiah son of Jehoiada answered the king, and said, Amen! Thus may the LORD God of my lord the king say! (37) As the LORD was with my lord the king, so may He be with Solomon, and make his throne become greater than the throne of my lord King David.

COMMENTS

Benaiah responded to the king's order with an expression of hearty consent and a prayer for God's approval of what had been ordered. "*Amen*" was a legal term of endorsement (cf. Deut. 27:15ff). The thought in verse 36 is that God always performs His word. If David's word is also God's word, it is sure to be accomplished.

Benaiah's support of Solomon was essential. With most of the military leaders backing Adonijah, it is doubtful that Solomon could have succeeded his father without the strong backing of the palace guard. All present in the royal bedchamber on that fateful day must have been greatly relieved when Benaiah's response to the orders of his commander-in-chief was not merely perfunctory, but rather enthusiastic. This pious soldier realized that God had been with David, and he publicly prayed that God would make the throne of Solomon greater than that of his father (v. 37). History records that God answered that prayer in a most wonderful way.

B. THE ANOINTING OF SOLOMON 1:38-40**TRANSLATION**

(38) So Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah son of

Jehoiada, and the Cherethites, and the Pelethites went down, and they caused Solomon to ride upon the mule of the king, and brought him to Gihon. (39) Now Zadok the priest had taken the horn of the oil from the tent, and he anointed Solomon. And they blew the trumpet, and all the people said, May King Solomon live! (40) And all the people went up after him, and the people were piping with pipes and greatly rejoicing; and the earth rent with their sound.

COMMENTS

In short order Zadok, Nathan²⁷ and Benaiah organized the coronation processional. The Cherethites and Pelethites—the royal palace guard—provided armed escort for the brief march to Gihon (v. 38). These troops were of foreign extraction, probably Philistine. While the function of these soldiers is evident, the precise origin and meaning of the terms Cherethite and Pelethite are subject to dispute.

At Gihon Zadok took a horn of the holy anointing oil which he secured from the tabernacle on Mt. Zion (II S 6:17) and ceremoniously poured it over the head of Solomon. The holy anointing oil had been compounded in the days of Moses of special ingredients (Ex. 30:23-25). It was preserved in the Tabernacle for just such occasions. Jewish tradition says this special oil lasted until the days of the Babylonian captivity. As the oil trickled down the bearded face of Solomon, the coronation trumpet sounded and the great throng which had been attracted by the processional shouted their approval of the transaction: "*May King Solomon live!*" (v. 39). Solomon returned to Mt. Zion and the palace in triumph with hundreds, perhaps thousands, following behind singing and playing their pipes. The ground seemed to rumble as in an earthquake

²⁷ The prophets from Samuel (I S 10:1; 16:13) to Elisha (II K 9:1-6) had a prominent part in designating and rejecting kings. Nathan thus conferred on Solomon the authority of prophetic designation.

because of the noise generated by the jubilant throng (v. 40).

C. THE APPREHENSION OF ADONIJAH 1:41-53

While Jerusalem was jubilant at the coronation of a new king, the assembly at En-rogel was filled with fear and apprehension. The two paragraphs of this section deal with (1) the report of Jonathan to the conspirators (vv. 41-48); and (2) the flight of Adonijah to the altar for safety (vv. 49-53).

1. *THE REPORT OF JONATHAN (1:41-48)*

TRANSLATION

(41) Now Adonijah and all the guests who were with him heard, yet they finished eating. But when Joab heard the sound of the trumpet, then he said, Why is the noise of the city as an uproar? (42) While he was yet speaking, behold Jonathan the son of Abiathar the priest came. And Adonijah said, Come in for you are a man of honor, and you bring good news. (43) But Jonathan answered and said to Adonijah, Not so for our lord King David has made Solomon king. (44) And the king sent Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada and the Cherethites and the Pelethites, and they have caused him to ride on the king's mule. (45) And Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him as king at Gihon. And they have gone up from there rejoicing so that the city is in commotion. That is the sound which you have heard! (46) Moreover Solomon has sat down upon the throne of the kingdom. (47) And also the servants of the king have come to bless our lord King David, saying, May God make the name of Solomon better than your name, and his throne greater than your throne. And the king bowed down upon the bed. (48) And also thus said the king: Blessed is the LORD, the God of Israel who has given one today to sit upon my

throne, and my eyes are seeing it.

COMMENTS

Adonijah and his guests finished eating, even though they heard the clamor at near-by Gihon.²⁸ In hushed anxiety they strained their ears in an effort to make some sense out of the sounds. When Joab heard the sound of the trumpet, he raised the question which was on everyone's mind, but which as yet no one had dared to ask: Why is the city in an uproar? (v. 41).

Adonijah had posted a man in Jerusalem to keep an eye on developments there, and at that very moment that man—Jonathan, son of Abiathar—appeared breathless and exhausted at the entrance of the tent. Trying to maintain a cheery and optimistic attitude, Adonijah invited his messenger into the tent with a cliché which may be paraphrased in English as “a good man like you always brings good tidings!” (v. 42). The word “*verily*” in KJV is unfortunate as the Hebrew word would be better rendered “*on the contrary!*” Jonathan, in effect is saying, “I am sorry to disappoint you, but my news is bad and not good.” Then he blurted out the key fact: “David has made Solomon king!” (v. 43).

In stunned silence the conspirators listened to the details of the counter *coup*. In addition to the facts previously related by the author of Kings (vv. 44-46), Jonathan related how David's servants (probably his chief ministers) had indicated their approval and support of David's action and had, in words similar to those spoken earlier by Benaiah, pronounced their blessing upon the reign of Solomon. In response to their blessing (in reality a prayer) David had bowed himself in worship upon his bed (v. 47) and praised God for having allowed him to see his successor upon the throne (v. 48).

²⁸ En-rogel was seven hundred yards farther south in the Kidron valley. The two spots were out of sight of each other owing to the terrain of the valley, but within ear-shot.

2. *THE FLIGHT OF ADONIJAH (1:49-53)*

TRANSLATION

(49) And all the guests of Adonijah feared, and they arose, and each one went his way. (50) And Adonijah feared because of Solomon, and he arose and went and seized the horns of the altar. (51) And it was told Solomon, saying, Behold, Adonijah fears King Solomon, and behold he has seized the horns of the altar, saying, Let King Solomon swear to me now that he will not kill his servant with the sword. (52) And Solomon said, If he shall become a man of integrity, a hair of him shall not fall to the ground; but if evil be found in him, he shall die. (53) So King Solomon sent, and they brought him down from upon the altar, and he came, and paid homage to King Solomon; and Solomon said to him, Go to your house.

COMMENTS

Upon hearing that Solomon had been enthroned, and that he had wide support from both the general public and the officers of state, the guests of Adonijah departed in fear and trembling (v. 49). They knew the penalty that could well be theirs for sitting at that treasonous table! Adonijah himself was no less afraid, and hastily made his way to an altar where he hoped he would find sanctuary. The "*horns*" of the altar (v. 50) were small protrusions resembling animal horns on the four corners of the altar. It is uncertain to which altar Adonijah fled. At this time there was an altar on Mt. Zion (II S 6:17), one at Gibeon (I K 3:4) and one recently erected by David on the threshing floor of Araunah (II S 24:25). By clinging to the horns of the altar, one was placing himself under the helping grace of God.²⁹ Adonijah's earlier ostentation and boasting

²⁹ Although the right of sanctuary is not expressly mentioned in the law, it is implied by Exodus 21:14 (NBC, p. 303).

ended in cringing.

Word came to Solomon concerning Adonijah's whereabouts. Adonijah refused to leave his place of sanctuary until Solomon swore that he would not execute him. The words of Adonijah in verse 51 are interesting from two respects. First, he addressed Solomon as "*king*" which is in effect a recognition of the new monarch. Second, in demanding an oath that Solomon would not slay him, Adonijah is indirectly confessing that his actions merited the death penalty.

Solomon responded to Adonijah with a simple promise (not an oath). As long as Adonijah proved himself to be a loyal subject (lit., *a son of integrity*), he would have nothing to fear from Solomon; but if he committed any fresh crime he would be executed (v. 52). In view of the fact that Solomon had granted a conditional pardon to him, Adonijah was persuaded to come down from upon the altar to which he was still clinging. The words "*come down from upon*" imply that the altar was elevated. A ramp rather than steps would have led up to it (cf. Ex. 20:26). Adonijah was brought before Solomon, to whom he rendered homage as king. Solomon had little to say to his former rival. He simply instructed him to go to his house (v. 53). While withholding punishment justly deserved, Solomon still felt it was necessary to banish Adonijah from the court to private life.

SPECIAL STUDY

THE CHRONOLOGY OF SOLOMON'S ACCESSION

This study deals with the question much debated among commentators, viz., Had David publicly designated Solomon as his successor prior to the Adonijah revolt? That it was known *privately* that Solomon should succeed his father is obvious from a reading of both Kings and Chronicles. With a great deal of assurance it can be affirmed that *at least* five people knew that David's choice for his successor was Solomon: David himself, Nathan, Bathsheba, Adonijah, and Solomon.

In I Chronicles 22:7-10, David relates to his son, that even before his birth God had designated Solomon to be the builder of the Temple and the ruler of Israel. God had said: "*I will establish the throne of his kingdom over Israel forever*" (v. 10). Scholars generally assume that David had reference to the oracle delivered to him by Nathan the prophet which is recorded in I Chronicles 17 and II Samuel 7. Solomon, however, is not specifically mentioned in either version of the Nathan oracle. Furthermore, some time appears to have elapsed between the proclamation of the Nathan oracle and David's marriage to Bathsheba. For these reasons one must entertain the possibility that David received directly or through Nathan subsequent revelation specifying which of his sons was in view in the original Nathan oracle of I Chronicles 17 and II Samuel 7.

Scripture also states that David had given an oath to Bathsheba that her son Solomon would succeed to the throne (I K 1:13, 17). There is no indication when this oath was taken. That it necessarily would have to follow the marriage to Bathsheba and precede the Adonijah rebellion is obvious. The oath may have been taken even before Solomon was born, in which case Bathsheba would have known for fifteen or more years that her son would be king.

Nathan certainly knew prior to the revolt of Adonijah that Solomon would be king. He had either been present when David gave his oath to Bathsheba, or was told of it by the one or the other (I K 1:13). Even before that, Nathan may have known that Solomon would be king. It is quite reasonable to assume that "*the word of God*" which came to David concerning the future reign of Solomon (I C 22:9, 10) was brought by Nathan.

That Adonijah recognized Solomon as the king's choice is evidenced in the fact that he was the only brother of Adonijah not invited to the En-rogel banquet (I K 1:10). Had David made an announcement to his family and members of the court? Or had Adonijah drawn this conclusion from the favoritism shown to Solomon? There is no way to answer these questions.

But the important question is, Had there been any *public*, formal announcement that Solomon would succeed David prior to Adonijah's revolt? The answer to this question depends on where one places the events of I Chronicles 23-29 in the reign of David. More specifically, the question hinges on the interpretation of I Chronicles 23:1: "*Now when David reached old age, he made his son Solomon king over Israel.*" Immediately following this verse the Chronicler has recorded that David called a great national convention at which he reorganized the religious and civil officers (I C 23-27), "*rose to his feet*" (I C 28:2) and delivered a lengthy and magnificent farewell speech (I C 28:1-29:19). These events are followed by a second anointing of Solomon: "*And they made Solomon son of David king a second time, and they anointed him as ruler for the LORD, and Zadok as priest*" (I C 29:22).

Now how do these chapters in Chronicles fit with relation to the picture of I Kings 1 of a bed-ridden, decrepit David being forced by circumstances to declare himself in favor of Solomon? Should one think of the great national assembly of I Chronicles 23-29 occurring earlier in David's reign when the king was in much better health? Or should these events be placed after the Adonijah rebellion and the anointing at the Gihon? Does I Chronicles 23:1 describe a separate and distinct "declaration" of Solomon apart from his anointing in I Kings 1:39 and his second anointing in I Chronicles 29:22? On these questions commentators have taken four different positions.

1. According to Keil,³⁰ Solomon's accession took place in three stages: He was nominated as king by David sometime prior to the rebellion by Adonijah (I C 23:1). He was anointed king by Nathan and Zadok at the Gihon (I K 1:39). He was subsequently anointed by the national assembly of leaders convoked by David before his death (I C 29:22).

2. Crockett³¹ sees two stages in the accession of Solomon.

³⁰ Keil, BCOTc, pp. 252, 300-301.

³¹ Crockett, HBSKC, pp. 142, 160-161.

In I Chronicles 23:1 Solomon was made king the first time at a national convention called by David *before the revolt of Absalom*. He thinks that I Chronicles 29:22 is parallel to I Kings 1:39 and over this material he places the caption, "Solomon Made King 'the Second Time.' "

3. Ellison³² and others see I Chronicles 23:1 as nothing more than a literary device summarizing what is later treated more fully in I Chronicles 29:22. In this arrangement Solomon ascends the throne in two stages, the first being his emergency anointing at Gihon (I K 1:39), and the second being his anointing at the national convention in I Chronicles 29:22.

4. Rawlinson,³³ Barker,³⁴ Edersheim³⁵ and many others see I Chronicles 23:1 as a summary of and brief allusion to the events of I Kings 1. It grieved the Chronicler too much to record the circumstances under which Solomon was anointed the first time. Concerning the second anointing he goes into quite some detail in I Chronicles 29.

If David had made a formal, official pronouncement in favor of Solomon prior to Adonijah's attempted *coup*, it is difficult to explain why Nathan and Bathsheba were so concerned to secure from him such a pronouncement in I Kings 1. Bathsheba's words in I Kings 1:20 are the death knell to any view making I Chronicles 23:1 refer to an actual anointing of Solomon (Crockett) or for that matter to his formal nomination (Keil): "*And as for you, my lord the king, the eyes of all Israel are upon you that you might declare to them who shall sit upon the throne of my lord the king after him.*" The best view—and the view of the majority of commentators—is that I Chronicles 23:1 is an allusion to the events of I Kings 1. The Chronicler deliberately has chosen to omit the grim details of how David was forced by the actions of his eldest son to elevate Solomon to the throne.

³² Ellison, NBC, pp. 350, 352.

³³ Rawlinson, BCc, p. 252.

³⁴ Barker, PC, p. 374.

³⁵ Edersheim, BH, V, 55.

If, then, Solomon's initial formal nomination and elevation to the throne is recorded in I Kings 1, where do the events recorded in I Chronicles 23-29 fit in? The only conclusion can be that these chapters narrate actions taken by David *subsequent* to the anointing of Solomon recorded in I Kings 1. Thus between chapter one and two of I Kings, David mustered enough physical strength and mental alertness to convoke a national assembly, initiate certain administrative changes, and deliver his final address to the leadership of the tribes. In the colorful language of Kitto:³⁶ "The waning spark of David's life gleamed up once again before it finally expired." It is then recorded that those present in the assembly "*made Solomon the king the second time*" and "*anointed him unto the LORD to be prince*" (I C 29:22). After this it is said: "*Then Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD as king instead of David his father, and prospered; and all Israel obeyed him*" (I C 29:23). The Chronicler emphasizes the universal acceptance of Solomon by adding: "*And all the princes, and the mighty men, and all the sons of King David, submitted themselves unto Solomon the king*" (I C 29:24).

If the preceding reconstruction of events is correct, then Kings records one anointing of Solomon the details of which Chronicles ignores, while Chronicles mentions a second anointing passed over in Kings. Concerning this, Robert Jamieson³⁷ has observed:

This mention of a second anointing, in a historical book which does not record the first, and the description of the first in another historical book which does not contain any allusion to the second, forms an undesigned coincidence which furnishes a strong confirmation of its truth.

³⁶ Kitto, HB, p. 334.

³⁷ Jamieson, JFB, p. 509.

THE TWO CORONATIONS OF SOLOMON	
First Coronation	Second Coronation
I Kings 1:1–2:11 At Gihon Necessitated by Adonijah's actions Made king by David Anointed by Zadok	I Chronicles 28-29 At the Palace Planned by David's authority Made king by the assembly Anointed by the assembly
"Then Solomon sat on the throne of the LORD as king instead of David his father" I Chronicles 29:23	

REVIEW OF CHAPTER TWO

I. FACTS TO MASTER

- A. What role did each of the following play in the anointing of Solomon:
- | | |
|--------------|-------------|
| 1. Abiathar | 6. David |
| 2. Abishag | 7. Joab |
| 3. Adonijah | 8. Jonathan |
| 4. Bathsheba | 9. Nathan |
| 5. Benaiah | 10. Zadok |
- B. Know the significance of the following places mentioned in chapter 1:
1. En-rogel
 2. Gihon
 3. Shunem

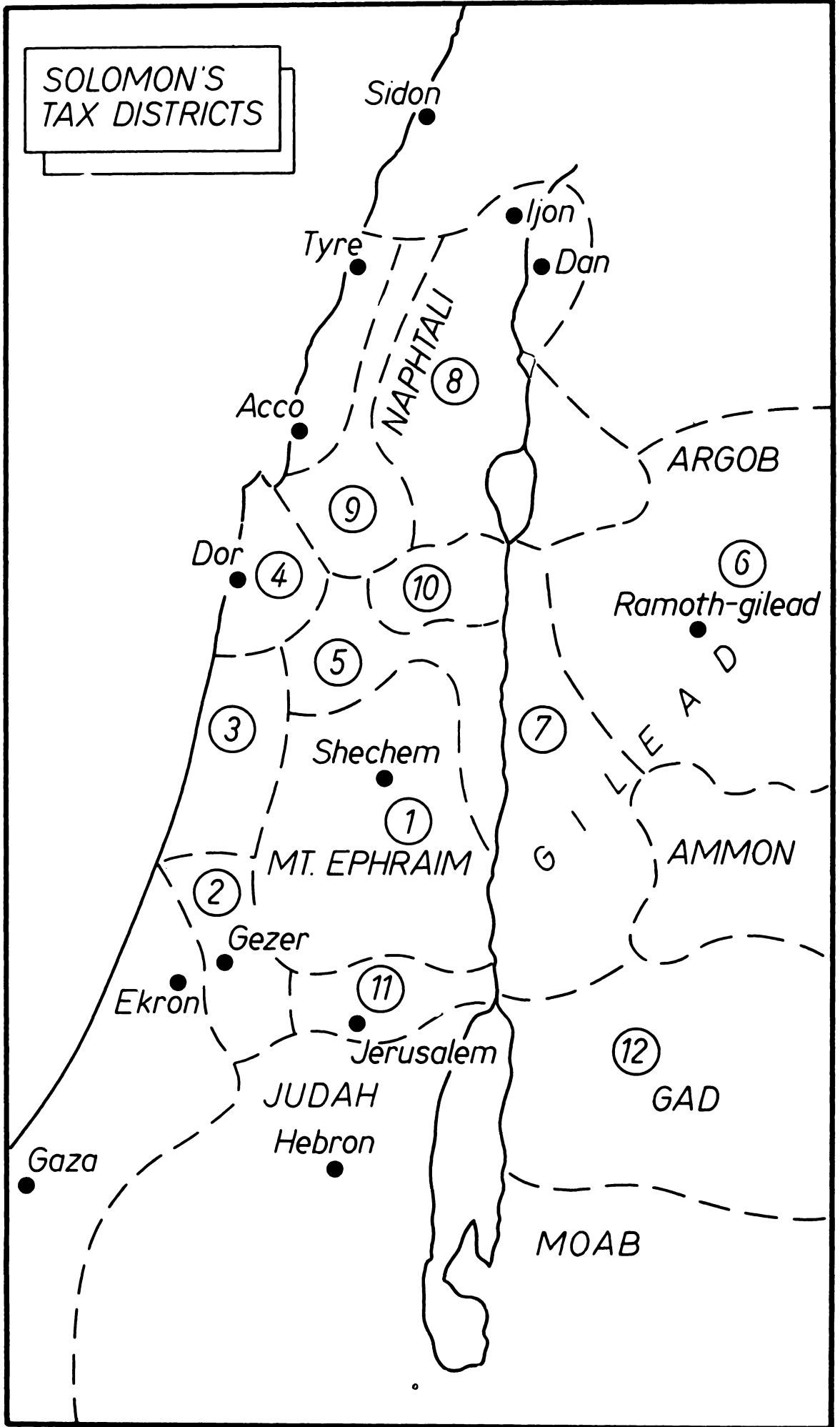
II. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

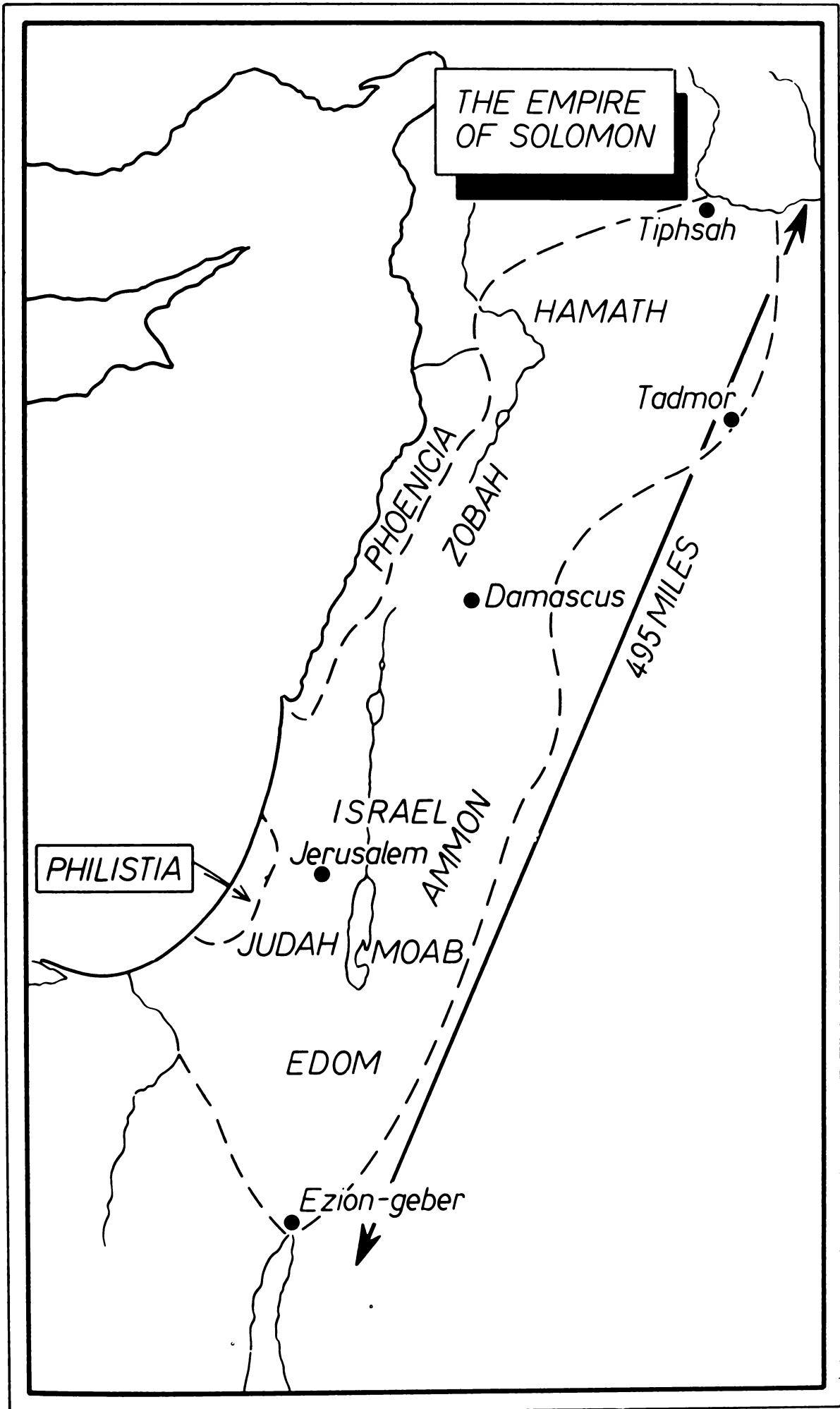
1. What evidence is there in the life of David that he failed as a father?
2. Why did Adonijah's cause gain such solid support even from those noted for their loyalty to David?
3. Why was Nathan so concerned about the activities of Adonijah?

4. What is the psychology behind the plan by which Nathan proposed to stir the aged king to action?
5. When had David given Bathsheba an oath that her son would be king?
6. When and how had God revealed to David that Solomon was the divine choice?
7. Why was the Gihon chosen as the scene of Solomon's anointing?
8. What steps did David take to make sure the people knew he approved of Solomon's anointing?
9. How many times and in what sequence was Solomon "made king" or anointed?
10. What oil was used in Solomon's anointing? Why was *oil* used? Were kings always anointed?
11. Why was Solomon so magnanimous in sparing the life of Adonijah on the day of his anointing?

Lessons in Living THE TWO BROTHERS	
ADONIJAH	SOLOMON
Endued with Beauty Admired of Men Ambitious Sought to Force Events Rebelled against his Father Rejected by God Lost Everything	Endued with Wisdom Loved of God (II S 12:24) Pious (I K 3:3) Waited Patiently for the Lord Reverenced his Mother Chosen by God Gained a Kingdom

SOLOMON'S
TAX DISTRICTS





CHAPTER THREE

SOLOMON'S RULE ESTABLISHED

I Kings 2:1—3:3

Twice in chapter two the sacred historian declares that Solomon was "*established*" on the throne of David (vv. 12, 46). Solomon's rule was made secure because (1) he listened to the death-bed advice of his father (2:1-11); (2) he acted decisively in the face of another conspiracy by his brother (2:12-35); (3) he moved swiftly when his royal authority was taken lightly (2:36-46); (4) he requested and received the hand of Pharaoh's daughter (3:1); and (5) he walked in the path of fidelity to God (3:2-3).

I. DAVID'S LAST COUNSEL TO SOLOMON 2:1-11

It is uncertain how much time elapsed between the events recorded in chapter 1 and the death of David recorded in chapter 2. After the Adonijah incident, and in his fortieth and final year of reign, David convoked a national assembly. Undoubtedly his purpose in so doing was to provide as much as possible for a smooth transition of power to his son. During the course of this assembly of national leaders, David made several important moves. (1) He organized the religious personnel as well as (2) certain civil officers (I C 23-27); (3) he publicly endorsed Solomon before the assembly and asked for their support of the young king (I C 28:1-8); (4) he publicly commissioned Solomon to build the Temple, and handed over to his son the detailed plans for the sanctuary itself and the personnel who would officiate therein (I C 28:9-21); (5) he appealed to the nobles and princes present to contribute liberally to the Temple project (I C 29:1-9); (6) he closed his address to the convention with a wonderful prayer of thanksgiving (I C 29:10-19). The convention reached a climax in a great festive meal at which Solomon was anointed "*a second time*" (I C 29:20-22).

Participation in this great national convention drained the last bit of strength from the old king. Feeling death's grip

tightening upon him, David summoned Solomon to his side to impart to him his final and private instructions. In these last words David tried to impress upon Solomon (1) his general obligation to hear and heed the word of God; and (2) his special obligation to deal with certain individuals who, in some cases, were deserving of punishment, and, in other cases, were worthy of recognition and reward. Thus the outlook of 2:1-4 is devotional; that in 2:5-12 is realistic and practical.

A. GENERAL INSTRUCTIONS 2:1-4

TRANSLATION

(1) When the days of David drew near to die, he commanded Solomon his son, saying, (2) I am going the way of all the earth. Be strong and be a man! (3) Keep the trust of the LORD your God to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments and His testimonies as it is written in the Law of Moses, in order that you prosper in all which you do, and wherever you turn, (4) in order that the LORD may establish His word which He spoke unto me, saying, If your sons will watch their ways to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul (saying), A man shall not be cut off from you from sitting upon the throne of Israel.

COMMENTS

For David death was imminent, and it was time for him to give his final instructions to his son (v. 1). David, the great king and mighty warrior, knew that he was "*walking the way of all the world,*" the path to Sheol, death and what lay beyond. Kings as well as commoners must walk that path! Shortly the full reins of government would be in Solomon's hand alone. The best advice that David could give his son was to "*be strong and be a man*" (v. 2) with respect to observing the law of God (lit.,

keep the keeping of the LORD). In verses 2 and 3 one can hear an echo of Moses' farewell exhortation to Joshua, "*Be strong and of good courage*" (Deut. 31:23) and the divine exhortation to Joshua to the same effect (Josh. 1:6, 9, 18).

It takes genuine courage and real manhood to withstand worldly pressures and faithfully follow the will of God! Using the technique of emphasis by enumeration, David explained what he meant by "*keep the keeping.*" He was referring to God's statutes, commandments, judgments and testimonies. It is impossible to draw fine distinctions between these terms.¹ By piling up these synonyms for God's law, David was making it clear that all God's law must be observed. By walking in the ways of the Lord, Solomon would prosper or succeed. Obedience to the Lord was the condition for experiencing a rich and full life.

Still another blessing would be Solomon's if he followed the ways of the Lord: He would experience the fulfillment of God's promise of everlasting possession of the throne. Through the prophet Nathan, the Lord had spoken glorious promises concerning the dynasty of David many years earlier. The promise as recorded in II Samuel 7 and I Chronicles 17 makes no mention of any conditions which had to be met before the promise became operative; but references to this promise in Psalms 132:12 and I Kings 8:25 make it clear that the promise was conditional. If David's sons were faithful to the Lord, He had promised "*There shall not be cut off to you a man from upon the throne of Israel.*" David would never be wanting a descendant to take the throne. The sovereignty would never be taken from the family of David and given to another. The promise did not mean that no descendant of David would ever be removed from the throne, but that the posterity of David was not to be cut off so as to leave no offspring which could

¹ Gray (OTL, p. 97) proposes that "*statutes*" and "*commandments*" are the direct orders in the form of "you shall" or "you shall not." "*Judgments*" are caustic laws which admit of qualification and refinement ("If a man do thus and so, then"); "*testimonies*" are solemn charges in which God is called to witness.

take possession of the throne. So long as there was a throne, a descendant of the house of David would occupy that throne. Jesus Christ, the greater son of David, sits upon the throne of the Lord today ruling over the Israel of God which is His church. The promise made through Nathan finds ultimate fulfillment in Jesus.

B. SPECIAL INSTRUCTIONS 2:5-11

TRANSLATION

(5) And also as for you, you know that which Joab son of Zeruah did to me, which he did to two captains of the hosts of Israel, to Abner son of Ner and to Amasa the son of Jether both of whom he slew. He shed the blood of war in peace, and thereby put the blood of war on his girdle which is upon his loins, and on his sandals which are upon his feet. (6) Now act in your wisdom, but do not allow his gray head to go down in peace to Sheol. (7) But to the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite show kindness, and let them be among those who eat of your table, for thus they rallied unto me when I fled from before Absalom your brother. (8) And behold Shimei son of Gera, a Benjaminite from Bahurim is with you. Now he cursed me with a vicious curse in the day I went to Mahanaim, but he came down to meet me at the Jordan, and I swore to him by the LORD, saying, I will not slay you with the sword. (9) But now do not consider him to be innocent, for you are a wise man. So take note of that which you shall do to him and bring down his gray hair in blood to Sheol. (10) Then David slept with his fathers and they buried him in the city of David. (11) Now the time that David ruled over Israel was forty years. In Hebron he ruled seven years, and in Jerusalem he ruled thirty-three years. (12) And Solomon sat on the throne of David his father, and his kingdom was firmly established.

COMMENTS

Certain obligations which David had neglected to fulfill, or had promised to fulfill, now devolve upon his son and successor. First, there was Joab who had literally gotten by with murder during the reign of David. Solomon was reminded of the two great crimes which Joab had committed against the crown, viz., the slaying of Abner and Amasa, two generals of the army of Israel. Abner was murdered in the city gate at Hebron (II S 3:22-27) in retaliation for his slaying of Joab's brother Asahel who had been slain in war and in self-defense (II S 2:12-23). It would appear that jealousy was the prime motive in the murder of Amasa some thirty years later (II S 20:4-10). No doubt Joab rationalized his crimes on the basis that Abner and Amasa were threats to David and therefore must be eliminated. While it is true that both generals at one time commanded armies which fought against David, there is no evidence to suggest that either one of them had any hostile intentions toward the king at the time Joab decided to kill them. Joab's ruthlessness is described by David in the words, "*He shed the blood of war in peace,*" i.e., in a time of peace he shed blood that only ought to flow in time of war. The ruthlessness of these crimes is further indicated in the reference to Joab's girdle and sandals being spattered with the blood of war (v. 5). It was while feigning friendship and while moving close so as to plant the kiss of greeting up their cheeks that Joab smote these unsuspecting comrades "*beneath the fifth rib.*"²

David's instruction regarding Joab does not appear to have been motivated by personal revenge. He excluded all mention of personal grievances against his general. He might have mentioned how Joab had disobeyed a direct order of his king and had slain Absalom in battle. He might also have mentioned

² Blood on the girdle and sandals might also have symbolic meaning: the girdle about the loins might suggest that Joab had brought bloodguiltiness upon his progeny; blood on the sandals suggests that the unrequited blood would dog the steps of Joab until it was avenged. Cf. Gray, OTL, p. 98.

the fact that Joab had backed Adonijah's bid for the throne. But these incidents were ignored. It is true that David says in verse 5 "what Joab did *to me*," but that phrase is then immediately explained as referring to the murders of Abner and Amasa. Both of these murders deprived David of able officers and at the same time caused David to be suspected of complicity (II S 3:28, 37). Furthermore, at the time they were slain Amasa was head of David's army and Abner was in negotiation with the king. For this reason David may have felt personally responsible for their deaths.

The heinous deeds of Joab cried out for judicial revenge. As king of the nation David should have ordered Joab executed when he slew Abner thirty-three years previously. But David at that time was weak, not having yet gained the recognition of the Northern tribes. In exasperation, David could only invoke divine retribution upon the head of Joab (II S 3:29). At the time Amasa was slain, David had just come through the rebellions of Absalom and Sheba, and the authority of the crown was at low ebb. Undoubtedly David had intended to punish Joab for his dastardly deeds, but procrastination had robbed him of any further opportunities to deal with his general. It can only be regarded as somewhat cowardly of David to instruct Solomon to do what he had been unwilling to do for thirty-three years! Nevertheless, the instruction is given: "*Let not his gray hairs (indicative of Joab's age) go down to Sheol (abode of the dead) in peace.*" Joab must not be allowed to die a natural death. He must pay for his crimes with his life. Yet, David warned, your wisdom must be your guide (v. 6). The execution of such a powerful man as general Joab could trigger a rebellion in the army which appears to have been quite loyal to its commander. Therefore, Solomon must find a plausible pretext for bringing Joab's just deserts upon him.

The situation is completely different with the sons of Barzillai. Barzillai and his sons³ had befriended David by bringing him

³ That Barzillai's sons assisted him is reasonable in view of the fact he was *eighty years* old at the time.

food and supplies when the king had been forced to flee across the Jordan during the Absalom revolution (II S 17:27ff; 19:32ff). David felt that he owed Barzillai a debt which he could never fully repay. There is no way of knowing how many sons Barzillai had. It is likely, though not certain, that the Chimham of II Samuel 19:37 was his son.⁴ From Ezra 2:61 it would appear that the family of Barzillai was still in existence in the days of the restoration from captivity. David encouraged Solomon to allow Barzillai's family to be included among those who ate at his table (v. 7). Some interpret this phrase literally; others see it as a technical term for receiving an allowance from the king.⁵

While Barzillai and his sons befriended David in his hour of distress, Shimei had taken malicious delight in the king's humiliation and worse, had vehemently cursed him (II S 16:5-8). Shimei, a Benjamite, was of a family of the house of Saul and for this reason he detested David, regarding him as a usurper and illegitimate king. Shimei lived in the village of Bahurim just north of Bethany on the east slope of the Mt. of Olives on the way to Jericho.⁶ The phrase "*you have Shimei with you*" is puzzling and capable of more than one interpretation. David may mean nothing more than that Shimei lives in the vicinity and that Solomon would easily have access to him. On the other hand it is possible to interpret "*with you*" as meaning that Shimei was backing Solomon, supporting his claims to the throne. Reference has already been made to Shimei who supported Solomon during the Adonijah revolt (1:8). Shimei was a leader of considerable influence in the tribe of Benjamin (cf. II S 19:16f.) and it may have been a matter of critical importance which of the two princes he supported. If he did come out in support of Solomon, he undoubtedly would have been given favorable

⁴ Some identify Chimham with Chemoham of Jeremiah 41:17 which speaks of the "habitation of Chemoham" near Bethlehem. From this some have drawn the inference that David or Solomon must have given Chimham land near Bethlehem.

⁵ Completely far-fetched is Gray's suggestion that this entertainment might have been designed to hold these men as hostages for allegiance of Israelites in Transjordan (OTL, p. 99).

⁶ Bahurim was alluded to earlier in the David narratives, II S 3:16; 17:18.

treatment by the young king and would no doubt have ranked among his inner circle of friends.⁷

In spite of the fact that Shimei was a supporter of Solomon, David reminded his son that it was this man who cursed him vehemently in the day he was forced to flee across the Jordan to Mahanaim. One of David's officers would have executed Shimei on the spot, but the king, depressed and confused by recent events, restrained him. When David defeated the insurrection of Absalom, Shimei was one of the first to come down to the Jordan to greet him and beg his forgiveness. Not wishing to mar the joy of his reinstatement by an act of punishment, David took an oath that he would not slay Shimei (v. 8; cf. II S 19:23). But in taking this hasty and inadvised oath, David had pardoned what he had no power to pardon, viz., a sin to which the Law of Moses attached the death penalty (Ex. 22:28). Shimei had yet to suffer the penalty for his crime, and in fact on two occasions he had had his life spared by order of the king, the one who was charged with upholding and enforcing the Law of God. As David lay in his death chamber, the guilt of this negligence weighed heavily upon his mind. David felt that his oath prevented him from taking action against Shimei. But Solomon was under no such obligation. Therefore, David exhorted his son not to hold Shimei guiltless, i.e., not leave him unpunished. Solomon, being a wise man, knew what, according to law, had to be done. As king it would be his responsibility to execute Shimei for his capital crime of blasphemy against the Lord's anointed. Even though Shimei was now an old gray-haired man, the punishment which had so long been delayed must now overtake him (v. 9).

The morality of David's injunction concerning Shimei and Joab has been called into question. No hint of malice or vindictiveness is evident in this passage; he was not bequeathing to Solomon "a dark legacy of hate" as one writer puts it. While unscrupulous men like Joab and Shimei might constitute a threat to the young

⁷ Hammond, PC, p. 27.

king, David's primary concern is not the safety and security of Solomon's kingdom. Verses 2-4 set the tone for these special instructions. What was uppermost in David's mind was strict observance to the Law of God including the stipulated punishments therein. In asking his son to execute the murderer and the blasphemer, David is tacitly admitting to failure on his own part in enforcing that law. He himself was now too old and sickly to execute the sentence against Joab and Shimei. It would give David a great deal of comfort in his final hour to know that his son would perform those unpleasant legal tasks which he had neglected.

Following his instructions to Solomon, David "*slept*" (lit., *lay down*) with his fathers, i.e., he died. Since David was not buried in his family tomb at Bethlehem, the phrase "*with his fathers*" would seem to indicate an awareness of reunion with one's relatives in Sheol, the abode of the dead. The king's body was laid to rest in the city of David—that part of Jerusalem which his personal troops had conquered from the Jebusites. (v. 10). His sepulchre on Mt. Zion still existed in the time of Christ (Acts 2:29). Josephus records two occasions when his tomb was plundered, once by John Hyrcanus and once by Herod the Great.⁸ David's tomb is thought to have been identified through recent excavations.⁹ David had reigned a total of forty years over his people. The figure seven years for David's reign of Judah alone is a round figure. He actually reigned there six months longer than that (cf. II S 5:5).

II. ADONIJAH'S SECOND CONSPIRACY AGAINST SOLOMON 2:13-35

At the collapse of his first conspiracy, Solomon had magnanimously spared the life of Adonijah. The traitor was spared on condition that he "*show himself a worthy man and not get*

⁸ *Ant.* VII, 15.3; XIII, 8.4; XVI, 7.1.

⁹ deVaux, AI, p. 58.

SOLOMON'S RULE ESTABLISHED 2:13-18

involved in any political intrigue again. Adonijah should have learned his lesson. But apparently he never relinquished his claim to the throne, nor overlooked any possibility of undermining his brother. The present paragraph describes (1) the subtle plot devised by Adonijah (vv. 13-18); (2) the innocent petition made on his behalf by Bathsheba (vv. 19-21); and (3) the stern punishment meted out by Solomon (vv. 22-25).

A. THE PLOT DEvised BY ADONIJAH 2:13-18

TRANSLATION

(13) Now Adonijah son of Haggith came unto Bathsheba the mother of Solomon. And she said, In peace do you come? And he said, In peace. (14) Then he said, I have a matter to discuss with you. And she said, Speak it. (15) And he said, You certainly know that the kingdom was mine, and that all Israel set their faces upon me that I should rule; but the kingdom has turned about and has become my brother's, for it was his from the LORD. (16) But now one favor I am about to ask of you; do not deny me. And she said unto him, Speak it. (17) And he said, Speak, I pray you, to Solomon the king (for he will not deny you) that he give to me Abishag the Shunammite for a wife. (18) And Bathsheba said, Fine! I will surely speak on your behalf to the king.

COMMENTS

It is generally agreed among commentators that Adonijah was making a second and more subtle bid for the throne in requesting the hand of Abishag. By means of Abishag the former concubine of the king he hoped to accomplish what his chariots, horsemen and banquets had not accomplished. In order to gain a favorable disposition from the young king, Adonijah spoke to and won the sympathies of the most powerful woman

in the land, Bathsheba the queen mother. She naturally was surprised at a visit from her former antagonist and so she questioned him as to his intentions (v. 13). Adonijah responded that he had come peaceably, and that he simply had a matter he wished to discuss with her (v. 14).

Adonijah prefaced his petition with a statement designed to win the womanly sympathies of Bathsheba. First, he affirmed that the throne of Israel was legally his: "*You* know that *mine* was the kingdom!" The words in italics are emphasized in the Hebrew. Because of his seniority among the sons of David, Adonijah still thought that the throne was rightfully his. To his initial statement Adonijah added "And upon *me* all Israel had set their faces that I should reign." That Adonijah exaggerated his acceptance among the general populace is obvious. If *all* Israel had backed Adonijah, there was no way that Solomon could have gained the crown. But this shrewd prince was not interested in an accurate assessment of his earlier bid for power. This was psychological ply.

Now the implication in what Adonijah had said thus far was that he should have and could have had the throne but for the part taken by Bathsheba in thwarting his efforts. Seeing that he had by these assertions and insinuations aroused the ire of the queen mother, Adonijah hastily added: "But it was God's will that the kingdom be transferred to my brother" (v. 15). By this statement Adonijah led Bathsheba to believe that he had resigned himself to his fate and that he now acquiesced in Solomon's supremacy. But had not Adonijah known of the divine appointment of Solomon long before his attempted usurpation? It is hard to believe otherwise. Bathsheba should have realized that she was being manipulated, and that Adonijah had not relinquished his claim to be rightful king. But Bathsheba listened with a mother's heart instead of with a queen mother's head. Poor Adonijah, she thought. On the verge of stepping through the threshold of greatness to the crown of Israel he had been thwarted by the hand of God!

Having gained the sympathy of Bathsheba, Adonijah was ready to present his petition (v. 16). "I have only one request,"

SOLOMON'S RULE ESTABLISHED 2:19-21

he pleaded, "and I beg you not to deny it to me" (lit., "*turn not away my face,*" i.e., repulse me). He then asked Bathsheba to speak to her son on his behalf that he might be permitted to marry Abishag. He spiced up his request with a bit of flattery when he remarked parenthetically that the king would never deny a request by his mother (v. 17). The argument implied in Adonijah's request is that possession of Abishag was but slight compensation for the loss of the kingdom which was rightfully his.

Apparently Bathsheba did not question Adonijah about his motives for wanting to marry the Shunammite. Her woman's intuition told her that Adonijah had fallen in love with this most beautiful young maiden. That love (or lust) might possibly have motivated Adonijah's request cannot be denied. But higher aspirations were certainly involved as Solomon instantly recognized (cf. v. 22). Taken in by Adonijah's self-pity, his hypocritical piety and his flattery, Bathsheba without hesitation agreed to act as his agent before the king (v. 18).

B. THE PETITION MADE BY BATHSHEBA 2:19-21

TRANSLATION

(19) Then Bathsheba went unto King Solomon to speak to him on behalf of Adonijah. And the king arose to meet her, bowed himself to Her, and sat upon his throne; then he had a throne set for the mother of the king, and she sat on his right hand. (20) And she said, One small favor I am about to ask from you, do not deny me. And the king said to her, Ask, my mother, for I will not deny you. (21) And she said, Let Abishag the Shunammite be given to Adonijah your brother for a wife.

COMMENTS

When Bathsheba entered Solomon's throne room, he rendered unto her the respect due the queen mother, rising to meet her,

bowing to her and placing her throne¹⁰ on the right side of his own (v. 19). Casting herself in the role of Cupid, and with a twinkle in her eye, Bathsheba got right to the point of her visit. She referred to her petition as a small favor, and so it seemed to her. “She thought she held the threads of a love story in her hands and that it would be a small thing for Solomon to make these handsome lovers happy.”¹¹ Solomon expressed willingness to fulfill whatever request his mother might make, never dreaming that she would ask for anything which he could not grant (v. 20). Being thus reassured, Bathsheba stated her request on behalf of Adonijah (v. 21).

C. THE PUNISHMENT ORDERED BY SOLOMON 2:22-25

TRANSLATION

(22) And King Solomon answered and said unto his mother, And why are you asking for Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah? You might as well ask the kingdom for him—because he is my older brother—even for him, for Abiathar the priest, and for Joab the son of Zeruiah. (23) Then King Solomon swore by the LORD, saying, Thus may God do to me and even more if Adonijah has not spoken this thing against his life. (24) And now as the LORD lives who has established me, and caused me to sit upon the throne of my father David, and who has made for me a house as He promised, Today Adonijah shall be put to death. (25) And King Solomon sent by the hand of Benaiah the son of Jehoiada; and he fell upon him and he died.

¹⁰ Most commentators assume that Solomon ordered his servants to so arrange the thrones, but the Hebrew suggests that he did it with his own hand.

¹¹ Hammond, PC, p. 37.

COMMENTS

While Bathsheba may have been gullible concerning Adonijah's request, Solomon was not. He exploded with anger when he heard his mother's request. Rhetorically he asked "Why are *you* asking Abishag the Shunammite for Adonijah?" Commentators through the years have addressed themselves to Solomon's question. Apart from fanciful theories which imagine a heated rivalry between Bathsheba and Abishag—a theory which proposes that Bathsheba would be most anxious to get Abishag out of the palace and out of her son's affections—there are several suggestions as to why Bathsheba allowed herself to be used in this way. First, the smooth talking Adonijah had played on her sympathies and flattered her pride. Then too, being a woman, perhaps she was simply helping along the course of true love. Or perhaps she thought that the granting of such a small favor might help to reconcile the half-brothers. Solomon himself suspected another plot and he was infuriated at the thought that the conspirators had successfully deceived his mother and had made her the unwitting instrument of their evil designs.

Continuing the rebuke of his mother Solomon declared, "*You might as well have asked the kingdom for him also!*" Solomon saw in the request of Adonijah an indirect but dangerous attempt to usurp the throne. Why so? Taking possession of a wife or harem of a deceased king was equivalent to establishment of the claim to the throne. David took possession of the wives of Saul when he succeeded to the throne (II S 12:8). To show contempt for his father and to demonstrate conclusively that he had seized the sovereignty, Absalom made a public display of possessing David's harem (II S 16:22).¹² In public opinion there existed a close connection between the title to the crown and possession of the deceased monarch's wives. To grant this request would be to throw gasoline on the fires of conspiracy

¹² Ishbosheth probably suspected, though without justification, that Abner was making a bid for the crown when he accused him of illicit relations with Rizpah, the concubine of Saul (II S 3:8).

which continually burned within the heart of Adonijah. Furthermore, Solomon declared, "*he is my elder brother,*" and as such, many thought he should be king. The request, if granted, would have given Adonijah a wedge to drive further, and eventually to oust Solomon.

But the question has been raised as to whether Abishag had actually been the wife of David. She is never so called, the sacred historian always referring to her as David's attendant. Some think that had she actually been the wife of the king, Adonijah would here be seeking an incestuous union in the light of Leviticus 18:8 and 20:11. Whatever the precise legal status of Abishag might have been, this much is clear: In the eyes of the people, the beautiful Abishag for all intents and purposes was a wife of David. It may have been on the legal technicality that David had never been able to consummate his marriage to Abishag (assuming he had married her), that Adonijah thought he stood a chance to gain her hand. Solomon was concerned about what this marriage might mean in the eyes of the populace. He was not about to allow Adonijah to use Abishag as a stepping-stone to the throne.

One further indication of the conspiratorial designs of the Abishag request is indicated in the immediate mention of Abiathar and Joab in connection with the request (v. 22). It almost seems that Solomon had received from his intelligence officers some prior information indicating that another plot was brewing. Be that as it may, Solomon views the petition of Adonijah as conclusive proof of another plot.

Having once been lenient with his elder brother, Solomon was in no mood to further ignore the threat that Adonijah posed to his rule. Before his mother and those who might have been present in the room, he took a solemn oath in the name of God that Adonijah would die that very day. Solomon employed the traditional oath formula which literally translated is: "*Thus shall God do unto me and thus shall He add.*" Basically this is a self-imprecation which would fall upon one if he failed to keep his oath. Paraphrased the formula would be: "May God do something terrible to me and even worse than that if I fail

to perform this deed." Solomon believed—and there was good basis for that belief—that his coming to the throne was an act of God. The Lord had established him on the throne of his father, and furthermore, "*had made for him a house*" (v. 24). By the latter expression Solomon may be referring to his son Rheoboam who would have been about a year old at this time.¹³

To Benaiah, captain of the king's bodyguard, Solomon gave the execution order. The order was immediately carried out (v. 25), the first of a bloody trilogy of executions. Those who look on this deed as an example of the ruthless misuse of royal power and as cold blooded murder should ponder anew the following facts: (1) Had Adonijah's first rebellion succeeded, both Solomon and his mother would doubtlessly been killed (I K 1:12); (2) by fleeing to the altar following the collapse of his conspiracy, Adonijah was clearly conscious that he deserved the death of a traitor; (3) Solomon displayed the greatest magnanimity towards Adonijah when, instead of executing him, he placed him on probation; (4) Adonijah had been warned that he must show himself to be a "*worthy man,*" that "*if wickedness*" were found in him, he would be killed (I K 1:52); (5) now so it would appear, Adonijah was seeking anew to wrest the throne from his brother; (6) for Solomon to ignore a second offense might suggest that the king was weak, and such weakness would be an encouragement to sedition throughout the land.

D. THE PLIGHT OF OTHER CONSPIRATORS 2:26-35

It would appear that Abiathar and Joab were again involved in the conspiracy to give the throne to Adonijah. At least this is the interpretation which Solomon put on their conduct. Thus it was in conjunction with the execution of Adonijah that Solomon (1) expelled Abiathar from the priesthood (vv. 26-27); and (2) executed Joab (vv. 28-35).

¹³ Keil, BCOT, p. 33. Cf. 11:42 with 14:21 and II Chronicles 12:13.

1. *THE EXPULSION OF ABIATHAR (2:26-27)*

TRANSLATION

(26) Then to Abiathar the priest the king said, Go to Anathoth to your fields, for you are a man of death; but I will not execute you, because you carried the ark of the Lord GOD before David my father, and because you suffered all those things which my father suffered. (27) So Solomon expelled Abiathar from being a priest of the LORD to fulfill the word of the LORD which He had spoken concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh.

COMMENTS

That the priest Abiathar was again involved in plotting the overthrow of the king is implied in the action taken by Solomon against him. This priest, who on the occasion of the first conspiracy escaped even censure, was summoned to the palace. The king curtly ordered him to retire from the priestly office and to return to his home at Anathoth. The town of Anathoth¹⁴ has been identified with the modern village of Anata, a village just north and east of Jerusalem. As far as Solomon was concerned, Abiathar was worthy of death (lit., *a man of death*) for his past treasonous conduct. But on account of his associations with David, Solomon was inclined to be lenient with the old priest. Abiathar was responsible for carrying the precious ark of the Lord both when that sacred chest was transported to Jerusalem (I C 15:11)—a moment of great joy for David—and later when the ark accompanied David on his flight from Absalom (II S 15:24-29). Abiathar had also endured all the afflictions of David during the period of Saul's persecution as well as the period of Absalom's rebellion. For these reasons Abiathar was sentenced to banishment rather than death. There is an ominous limitation

¹⁴ The later great high priest Hilkiah and Jeremiah the prophet hailed from Anathoth.

placed upon the king's graciousness in the words "*this day.*" Solomon is obviously suggesting that Abiathar would forfeit his life if he engaged in any new crimes (v. 26).

With the deposition of Abiathar, the last descendant of the Ithamar branch of the priestly family, the high priesthood reverted to the descendants of Eleazar who was represented in Solomon's day by Zadok. Solomon's action fulfilled a prophecy made over a century earlier concerning the house of Eli in Shiloh (v. 27). The reference is to I Samuel 2:31-36 where Eli was cursed by an unnamed prophet with cessation of the priesthood from his family. Abiathar was of the fifth generation of Eli's house.

2. *THE EXECUTION OF JOAB (2:28-35)*

TRANSLATION

(28) Now the report came unto Joab, for Joab had turned after Adonijah, although after Absalom he had not turned. And Joab fled unto the tent of the LORD, and seized the horns of the altar. (29) When King Solomon was told that Joab had fled unto the tent of the LORD, and that he was there beside the altar, Solomon sent Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, saying, Go fall on him! (30) And Benaiah went unto the tent of the LORD, and said unto him, Thus the king has said: Come out! And he said, No! But I shall die here. And Benaiah returned the king word, saying, Thus said Joab, and thus he answered me. (31) And the king said to him, Do as he has spoken! Fall on him, and bury him, that the innocent blood which Joab shed may be removed from upon me and from upon the house of my father. (32) And the LORD will return his blood upon his head, because he fell upon two men more righteous and better than he, and slew them with the sword (and my father David did not know): Abner the son of Ner, captain of the host of Israel, and Amasa that son of Jether, captain of the host of Judah. (33) Now their blood shall be returned upon the head of Joab and on the head of

his seed forever; but for David, his seed, his house and his throne, may there be peace forever from the Lord. (34) and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada went up and fell on him, and slew him; and he was buried in his house in the wilderness. (35) And the king appointed Benaiah the son of Jehoiada to his place over the host, and Zadok the priest to take the place of Abiathar.

COMMENTS

When Joab heard of the execution of Adonijah and the deposition of Abiathar, he knew that he would be next on Solomon's extermination list. Though Joab had not supported Absalom in his rebellion against David, he had lent his support, influence and prestige to the ill-fated conspiracy of Adonijah. Realizing that his treason was a capital crime, Joab fled to the tent of the Lord on Mt. Zion and clasped the horns of the altar (v. 28) where he thought he would find sanctuary as Adonijah had found before him (I K 1:50). Since the altar provided no sanctuary to murderers, it cannot be because of his two assassinations that Joab fled there. These crimes had so long remained unpunished that Joab had no doubt pushed them to the back of his mind. It was because of his political intrigue that Joab expected to incur the wrath of the king. But if Joab had rendered loyal, albeit somewhat grudging, support to Solomon since the coronation of the king, why did he now flee? Perhaps his flight was an indication that Joab had been involved in the second conspiracy. It is an ancient belief that Joab suggested to Adonijah the plan of marriage with Abishag.¹⁵

Solomon, regarding Joab's flight to the altar as proof of his continuing treasonous intentions, ordered Benaiah to go and slay the old general (v. 29). Finding Adonijah still clutching the horns of the altar, Benaiah in the name of the king ordered Joab to come away from the altar. Probably Solomon had given

¹⁵ Hammond, PC., p. 41.

orders to Benaiah to avoid if possible profaning that sacred spot with bloodshed. But Joab refused to leave the altar. Did Joab imagine that Solomon would finally relent and that he would escape with his life? Or was he resigned to death and determined because of superstition to die at that spot? Or could his motive have been one of defiance, thinking that if he forced Solomon to profane that holy spot the king would lose popular support? Joab then would accomplish in his death what he had failed to accomplish in his life. While it is impossible to say with certainty, it would seem that Joab was clutching at straws and hoping against hope that his life might be spared. To cling to that altar, he thought, was his only chance. Because of this unexpected development Benaiah sought further instructions from his king (v. 30).

Good reasons existed for denying sanctuary to Joab at the altar, and Solomon spelled out those reasons in verses 31-33.

Since the altar provided no sanctuary for murderers (Ex. 21:14), and since Joab was to be executed as a murderer, Solomon ordered Benaiah to comply with Joab's wishes and slay him at the altar. To attempt to drag Joab away from the altar would have created an ugly stir and might have led to a bloody encounter with some of Joab's numerous friends. After the execution, Benaiah was immediately to bury Joab's corpse thus removing it from the sanctuary it defiled and hiding it away from public view.

Only by the shedding of Joab's guilty blood could the innocent blood of Abner and Amasa be washed away "*from me and from the house of my father*" (v. 31). Solomon must have had in mind such passages as Numbers 35:33¹⁶

So you shall not pollute the land in which you live, for blood defiles the land; and the land cannot be cleansed of the blood that is shed in it except by the blood of him that shed it.

¹⁶ See also Deuteronomy 19:10, 13; 21:9.

As supreme magistrate of the land, Solomon felt an obligation to avenge the death of murder victims. Should the blood of Abner and Amasa go unavenged, Solomon felt that he and his sons might have to answer for it. In so ordering the death of Joab, Solomon considered that he was acting as an agent of God. He was fulfilling a religious duty. The blood that Joab had shed would be "*returned upon his head*," i.e., avenged. As if the execution of Joab needed any further justification, Solomon added that the victims of Joab's sword were better men than their assassin. Though many people, no doubt, suspected David of criminal complicity in these murders, the deeds were actually done without his knowledge, much less his approval (v. 32).

Not only would Joab die for his crime, his descendants would suffer for it as well. David had placed Joab under a curse on the day he slew Abner, and Joab's children were included in that curse (II S 3:29). A man's children often suffer for the sins he commits. If nothing worse befell the children of Joab, they would never be able to forget that their father had died the death of a murderer. But by avenging the death of the innocent, the stain of blood (obligation to punish) would be removed from the house of David. This being the case, the descendants of David would prosper (v. 33). The amazing thing in verses 31-33 is that Solomon never mentions any personal motives for ordering Joab's execution. His motives are so free of malice and revenge that he confidently expects God's blessing upon his decision!

Having received royal authorization to slay Joab in the Tabernacle, Benaiah hastened back up to Gibeon to perform the deed. It is ironical that it was in this very town that Joab had committed the second of his two murders (II S 20:8). "*All those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword*" (Matt. 26:52).

Joab's burial was somewhat unusual in that he was buried in the courtyard of his own house which was located near Bethlehem in the wilderness (open country) of Judah (v. 34). It was considered an honor in ancient Israel to make one's house a mausoleum. This honor, which was accorded to Samuel (I S

25:1), was also accorded to Joab in recognition of his service to his country.

With Joab and Abiathar removed from the scene, Solomon consolidated his power by placing his friends Benaiah and Zadok in the positions of commander of the host and high priest respectively (v. 35). The Zadokites remained in control of the high priesthood until 171 B.C. when Menelaus who was not even a descendant of Aaron bought appointment to the office.¹⁷

III. SHEMEI'S THOUGHTLESS CHALLENGE OF SOLOMON'S AUTHORITY 2:36-46

TRANSLATION

(36) Now the king sent and called for Shimei, and he said to him, Build a house for yourself in Jerusalem, and dwell there; but do not go out from there anywhere. (37) For it shall come to pass in the day you go out, and cross over the brook Kidron, you shall know for certain that you will surely die, and your blood will be upon your own head. (38) And Shimei said to the king, The word is good. As my lord the king has spoken, thus shall your servant do. And Shimei dwelt in Jerusalem many days. (39) But it came to pass at the end of three years, that two servants of Shimei fled unto Achish, son of Maachah, king of Gath. And they told Shimei, saying, Behold your servants are in Gath. (40) And Shimei arose, saddled his ass, and went to Gath unto Achish to seek his servants. Then Shimei went and brought his servants from Gath. (41) Then it was related to Solomon, that Shimei had gone from Jerusalem to Gath, and had returned. (42) And the king sent and called for Shimei, and said unto him, Did I not swear to you by the LORD, and witness against you, saying, In the day that you go out, and travel anywhere you can know for certain that you will surely die? And

¹⁷ II Maccabees 4:24.

you said, Good is the word I have heard. (43) Now why have you not kept the oath of the LORD, and the obligation which I set upon you? (44) And the king said unto Shimei, You know all the evil which your heart admits, which you did to David my father; now the LORD shall return your evil upon your head. (45) But King Solomon is blessed, and the throne of David shall be established before the LORD forever. (46) So the king commanded Benaiah the son of Jehoiada, and he went out, and fell upon him so that he died. And the kingdom was established in the hand of Solomon.

COMMENTS

Even though Shimei had recently been "*with Solomon*" (see comments on 2:8), his earlier bitter outburst against David made Solomon suspicious of him. Shimei was summoned to the palace and ordered to build a new home in Jerusalem and to thereafter remain in the capital (v. 36). Solomon wanted to keep Shimei under surveillance; he also wished to neutralize his considerable influence in his tribe of Benjamin. In the most specific and emphatic terms, Solomon warned Shimei that should he ever leave the city for any reason, he would be executed for his past crime against the crown. Specifically Solomon mentioned crossing the brook Kidron east of Jerusalem, for that would be the direction that Shimei might be expected to go in an effort to return to his home at Bahurim just over the Mt. of Olives. It was Solomon's intention to keep Shimei isolated from his kinsmen of the tribe of Benjamin, who had spearheaded the revolt against David under Sheba (II S 20). Having been clearly warned, Shimei would be responsible for his own death should he venture out of the city (v. 37). Shimei indicated his willingness to comply with the terms of the probation, and so he did for many days (v. 38). The sentence was better than he deserved and probably better than he had expected especially in view of the fact that Solomon was not bound by the oath of his father to refrain from slaying Shimei (II S 19:23).

SOLOMON'S RULE ESTABLISHED 2:36-46

After three years of probation in Jerusalem, an incident occurred which was to cost Shimei his life. Two of Shimei's slaves ran away and took refuge with Achish, king of Gath (v. 39). This is probably the grandson of the Achish with whom David took refuge more than forty years earlier. Learning the whereabouts of his slaves, Shimei immediately set out for Gath to retrieve them (v. 40). The text indicates no secrecy on the part of Shimei either in going from or returning to Jerusalem. Why did he then place his life in jeopardy: Had he forgotten the stern warning which Solomon had given him? Did he think Solomon had forgotten? Did he feel that an exception would be made in view of the rather substantial loss he had incurred in the flight of two slaves? Shimei appears to be a man who acted on impulse. Probably he never gave the terms of his probation a second thought until the day he was summoned to the palace.

It was not long before Shimei's violation was reported to Solomon either by his own secret service agency, or by enemies of Shimei (v. 41). Shimei was summoned to the palace and interrogated by the king. Here it comes out for the first time that Solomon had bound Shimei by an oath to keep the conditions of the probation (v. 42). A three-fold charge was brought against the man: (1) He had profaned the name of God by violating a solemn oath taken in His name (cf. Lev. 19:12); (2) he had violated the terms of his probation, thus disregarding the commands of the king (v. 43); and (3) he had cursed and blasphemed the Lord's anointed, David. For these transgressions Shimei was about to receive divine recompense at the hands of Solomon (v. 44). By executing Shimei, Solomon was acting in the service of God and fully expected that God would be pleased with his action and bless him accordingly (v. 45). Thus with no further hesitation, Solomon ordered Benaiah to execute Shimei. By swiftly eliminating his potential antagonists Adonijah, Abiathar, Joab and Shimei, Solomon firmly established himself as king.

IV. PHARAOH'S UNPRECEDENTED RECOGNITION OF SOLOMON 3:1

TRANSLATION

(1) Then Solomon became allied to Pharaoh king of Egypt by marriage, for he took the daughter of Pharaoh, and brought her unto the city of David, until he had finished building his house, the house of the LORD and the wall of Jerusalem round about.

COMMENTS

The note concerning Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter is inserted at this point in the narrative for two reasons: (1) because it demonstrates how Solomon was able to strengthen his position through this important external alliance; and (2) because chronologically this marriage probably came shortly after the suppression of the internal foes described in the previous chapter.¹⁸ This marriage has not been given the attention it deserves. Yet here is a political occurrence without parallel, not only in Israelite, but also in Egyptian history. No other example has yet been found of a Pharaoh's daughter being given in marriage to a foreign royal house. But never before had a power comparable to the kingdom of David and Solomon arisen on Egypt's frontiers, and this perhaps explains the sudden change in the long-standing Egyptian policy of refusing to give Pharaoh's daughter in marriage to foreign royalty.¹⁹

¹⁸ According to 9:24 the Egyptian princess lived in the city of David unto the completion of Solomon's building projects. These projects were begun in the fourth year of his reign. The last event of chapter two, the death of Shimei, took place in Solomon's third year (2:39).

¹⁹ Abraham Malamat, "The Kingdom of David and Solomon in its Contact with Egypt and Aram Naharaim," *BAR*, II, 91-92. Kadashmanenlil, king of Babylon, asked for the hand of Amenhotep III's daughter and was refused in the following terms: "From of old, a daughter of the king of Egypt has not been given to anyone."

The Pharaoh who gave his daughter to Solomon cannot be positively identified. The kings of the twenty-first dynasty (1085-945 B.C.) were ruling at the time of David and during the first half of Solomon's reign. Under this dynasty Egyptian power declined and the country broke up into two separate units, the Theban theocracy in the South, and the kingdom of Tanis in the North. Certain archaeological evidence discovered in Tanis may furnish a clue as to the identity of Solomon's father-in-law. Here a bas-relief of King Siamon, the predecessor of Psusennes II, the last king of the twenty-first dynasty, was discovered. It depicted the king in the act of slaying an enemy, most likely from among the Sea Peoples. On the basis of this evidence it has been suggested that Siamon made a military expedition against the Philistines in the course of which he conquered the city of Gezer on the frontier between Philistia and Israel, a conquest which the Bible ascribes to Solomon's father-in-law (I K 9:16). Even if this does not constitute incontrovertible proof of the identity of this Pharaoh, chronologically only the last two kings of the twenty-first dynasty fit the identification.²⁰

Solomon's marriage was strictly political, an arrangement between two families in which any courtship was out of the question. Treaties between nations were customarily sealed by intermarriage of the two royal houses. Solomon needed the recognition of the prestigious and once powerful Egypt to help make his claim to the throne secure. Pharaoh needed trade concessions from the king who now controlled the important north-south highways, as well as assurance that his powerful neighbor would not attempt to expand his domain southward. Albeit, this alliance must have been very shocking to the average Israelite since Egypt was the ancestral foe of Israel. Solomon brought his new wife to the city of David and there she lived in the palace formerly occupied by David (II C 8:11) until Solomon was able to complete his building projects

²⁰ Malamat, BAR, II, 93.

on Mt. Moriah—his own house, the Temple and the rest of the wall of the city (v. 1). He began building the Temple in the fourth year of his reign (6:1) and his own house in his eleventh year (7:1).

Marriage with foreign women is not without precedent in Old Testament history. Joseph married an Egyptian woman (Gen. 41:45); Moses married a Midianite woman (Ex. 2:21) and later a Cushite (Num. 12:1), Rahab (Matt. 1:5) and Ruth (Ruth 4:13) both were foreign women who married Israelite men and became part of the genealogy of Christ. Only marriage to Canaanite women is specifically condemned in the Law of Moses (Ex. 34:11-16; Deut. 7:1-5), and even that restriction apparently applied only to *uncovered* Canaanite women. Thus while Solomon was within the *letter* of the law, the *spirit* of the Law of Moses would require that the foreign wife renounce idolatry and pledge allegiance to the Lord. Did Pharaoh's daughter abandon her idols upon becoming the wife of Solomon? Three factors lead one to believe that such was the case: (1) Solomon at this period of his life was an enthusiastic observer of the Law; (2) the king is never condemned for this particular marriage; and (3) no trace of Egyptian idolatry or religious rites can be found in Israel at this time.²¹

V. SOLOMON'S COMMITMENT TO GOD 3:1-2

TRANSLATION

(2) Only the people were sacrificing in the high places because a house for the name of the LORD had not been built until those days. (3) And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of David his father, except in the high places he was sacrificing and offering incense.

²¹ Hammond, PC, p. 50.

COMMENTS

Just as Pharaoh's daughter was compelled to live in the city of David because Solomon's palace was not yet finished, so also the people were forced to continue worshiping God at high places until Solomon's Temple was completed (v. 2). These high places (Heb., *bamoth*) sometimes consisted of an altar alone, but often a shrine was erected near by. The Canaanites were accustomed to worshiping on such high places long before the Israelites entered the land. Sometimes Canaanite high places were taken over by the Israelites, modified and converted to the worship of the Lord. The high place at Gibeon mentioned in verse 4 may have been once used in the worship of the Canaanite pantheon.

At the commencement of his reign, Solomon sincerely attempted to observe "*the statutes of David*," i.e., the laws of God which David had kept (cf. 3:6, 14), and which he had commanded Solomon to keep (2:4). The only blemish on the record of Solomon in those early years was that he worshiped God at the high places (v. 3). The author of Kings does not say that such worship was sinful; he only is suggesting that it was less than ideal. It was an imperfection that God winked at in the period before the Temple was built.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER THREE

I. FACTS TO MASTER

A. Relate how each of the following persons figure in the events of this section:

- | | |
|--------------|-------------|
| 1. Adonijah | 6. Abiathar |
| 2. Bathsheba | 7. Shimei |
| 3. Solomon | 8. Benaiah |
| 4. Abishag | 9. Achish |
| 5. Joab | |

- B. Know why each of the following were alluded to in this section:**
- | | |
|-----------|--------------|
| 1. Abner | 5. Absalom |
| 2. Amasa | 6. Mahanaim |
| 3. Eli | 7. Hebron |
| 4. Shiloh | 8. Jerusalem |
- C. Know how each of the following places figure in the history recorded in this section:**
- | | |
|-------------|-----------|
| 1. Bahurim | 3. Kidron |
| 2. Anathoth | 4. Gath |
- D. List three men executed by Benaiah.**
- E. List three individuals David instructed Solomon to deal with in his final admonition.**

II. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. What motivated David to give Solomon his final admonition regarding Shemei and Joab?
2. Was Adonijah's request for Abishag an innocent romance or a shrewd scheme?
3. Why was Bathsheba so willing to act as intercessor for Adonijah before Solomon?
4. Was Solomon justified in ordering the execution of Adonijah? of Joab?
5. Why was Shimei put on probation in Jerusalem? Why did he violate the terms of his probation?
6. What was the attitude of the author of Kings toward worship in the high places before the erection of the Temple?
7. What mutual advantages would Solomon's treaty with Egypt entail?

CHAPTER FOUR

SOLOMON'S GOVERNMENT

I Kings 3:4—4:34

At the outset of his reign, Solomon received a special endowment from God that enabled him to wisely govern the vast empire which he had inherited from his father. The author of Kings focuses attention on the administrative structure of the empire because that structure was a manifestation and proof of the divine wisdom which God had granted to Solomon. In this section the main points of emphasis are: (1) the endowment of this king (3:4-28); (2) the management of his kingdom (4:1-19); and (3) the wonderment of this reign (4:21-34).

I. THE ENDOWMENT OF THIS KING 3:4-28

Solomon is popularly known as the wisest man who ever lived. This section provides (1) an explanation of Solomon's wisdom (vv. 4-15); and (2) a demonstration of how that wisdom was put into practice (vv. 16-28).

A. THE EXPLANATION OF SOLOMON'S WISDOM 3:4-15

The Bible explains Solomon's famous wisdom as a supernatural endowment of God. It was while the king was engaged in religious activity at Gibeon that God revealed Himself to Solomon in a dream. During the course of that majestic experience (1) Solomon prayed for wisdom to guide and govern his people (vv. 4-9); and (2) received the promise of wisdom and many added blessings (vv. 10-15).

1. THE PRAYER FOR WISDOM (3:4-9)

TRANSLATION

(4) Now the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for it was the great high place. A thousand burnt offerings Solomon did offer upon that altar. (5) In Gibeon the LORD appeared unto Solomon in a dream of the night; and God said, Ask what I shall give you. (6) And Solomon said, You have demonstrated great mercy unto Your servant David my father, as he walked before You in truth, in righteousness and in uprightness of heart with You; and You kept for him this great mercy, that You gave to him a son to sit upon his throne as it is this day. (7) And now, O LORD my God, You have caused your servant to reign instead of David my father, yet I am a small lad: I do not know how to go out or come in. (8) But Your servant is in the midst of Your people which you have chosen, a great people which cannot be counted or numbered because of multitude. (9) Now give Your servant a discerning heart to judge Your people, to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this Your great people?

COMMENTS

Gibeon, about six miles northwest of Jerusalem, was chosen as the spot where the new reign would be inaugurated with a religious service. The leading citizens of the land, including the captains, judges and governors, accompanied the young king to that "*high place.*" Gibeon was chosen as over against the tent of meeting erected by David in Jerusalem because the Tabernacle and huge bronze altar¹ were located there (II C 1:3).²

¹ The bronze altar was 7½ feet square and 4½ feet tall (Ex. 27:1-8). The altar at David's Jerusalem tent was likely much smaller.

² The Tabernacle was last mentioned as being at Nob (I S 21:6). The Scriptures do not relate how and when this sacred tent had been transported to Gibeon.

The site probably is called "*a high place*" because the ark of the covenant, with which the Lord had bound up His presence, was not there.³ Upon the altar in Gibeon a thousand whole burnt offerings were offered by (i.e., provided by) Solomon (v. 4). The purpose of this enormous sacrifice was to implore the divine blessing upon the reign of the new king.

In a dream⁴ one night—perhaps the night following the last day of sacrifices—God appeared to Solomon. Thus the one thing lacking in the place of sacrifice at Gibeon, viz., the ark of the covenant with the presence of the Lord, was supplied by God Himself.⁵ Probably God appeared in the dream as the angel of the Lord in which guise He had on numerous other occasions appeared to Old Testament saints. In response to the numerous sacrificial gifts offered by Solomon to God, the Lord instructed the young king to name whatever it was he might desire that God would give to him in return (v. 5). Such an invitation assumes that the request will be within the will of God. There seems to be a connection between the question which God addressed to Solomon, "*what shall I give you?*" and the object of the sacrifice, viz., to seek the help of God for his reign.

Solomon's reply to the Lord is marked by both perception and piety. He began his prayer by acknowledging the great favor which the Lord had bestowed on David to permit his son to follow him on the throne (v. 6). He then humbly confessed his inability to handle the task that had been thrust upon his shoulders. For one thing, he felt himself to be young and inexperienced, so he referred to himself metaphorically as a "*little child*" or small lad. Solomon must have been only in his teens⁶

³ Keil, BCOT, p. 41. The ark at this time was located at David's Jerusalem tent.

⁴ This is one of the rare occasions in Bible history when God spoke to a man in his dreams. It should be noted, however, that within the context of this dream, Solomon was able to give a rational response to the question posed by God.

⁵ Keil, BCOT, p. 41.

⁶ Rabbinic tradition has Solomon ascending the throne at age twelve, Josephus (*Ant.* VIII, 7.8) says he was fourteen. Modern commentators estimate that he was seventeen or eighteen. However, Solomon already had one child at the time of his accession as is indicated by the fact that he reigned forty years and his son Rehoboam was forty-one at the time of his father's death (I K 14:21). Pharaoh's daughter was not his first wife.

when his father died. He did not know how “*to go out or come in,*” i.e., to conduct himself in the office of king, to manage the affairs of state (v. 7). Furthermore, the nation had become so vast⁷ that the governance of it would be a major challenge even to the most mature and experienced man (v. 8). In view of these circumstances Solomon asked God to give him a discerning heart (lit., *a hearing heart*) that would qualify him to judge (i.e., rule) the people of God, to know the difference between what was true and false. The king in ancient society was the supreme judge as well as the governor of the land. No one would be able to judge so numerous a people unless God gave him a supernatural *endowment* of wisdom to do so (v. 9).

2. THE PROMISE OF WISDOM (3:10-15)

TRANSLATION

(10) And the thing was good in the eyes of the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. (11) And God said unto him, Because you asked this thing, and did not ask for yourself long life, nor did you ask for yourself wealth, nor did you ask for the life of your enemies, but you have asked for yourself understanding to discern judgment, (12) behold I have done according to your word. Behold I have given to you a wise heart and understanding such that there has been none like you before, nor after you shall any arise like you. (13) Also that which you have not asked, I will give to you, both wealth and honor such that there shall not be a man like you among the kingdoms all of your days. (14) And if you walk in My ways to keep My statutes and My commandments as David your father walked, then I will lengthen your days. (15) And Solomon arose, and behold it was a dream, and he went to Jerusalem, and stood before the ark

⁷ In verse 8 Solomon describes the magnitude of the nation in words similar to those used in the divine promise to the patriarchs (Gen. 13:16; 28:14).

of the covenant, and offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings, and made a feast for all of his servants.

COMMENTS

Solomon's response pleased the Lord (v. 10). Even though in a dream, Solomon had expressed to God the true desires of his conscious mind. He might have asked for long life or wealth or victory over his enemies on the field of battle. But since he had asked for a gift that would enable him to better meet the needs of his people (v. 11), God had already granted his petition. Solomon would possess a wisdom such as none before him possessed, nor would any after him be his equal in this respect (v. 12). In addition God gave him what he had not requested, viz., riches and honor (v. 13). The blessing of long life, however, had a condition attached. Only if Solomon continued to walk in the way of the Lord would his days be lengthened (v. 14). In setting forth this condition God confirmed what David earlier had said to Solomon (cf. 2:3, 4). Since Solomon did not meet the condition here set forth, he did not live to an exceptionally old age. He can hardly have been more than sixty (if that much) at the time of his death.

Solomon awoke to discover that he had been dreaming. But this was no ordinary dream; it was a dream in which a divine revelation had been made to him.⁸ Solomon proceeded immediately to the other major sanctuary of that period, the tent which housed the ark of the covenant, and there he offered new sacrifices to the Lord.⁹ In addition to the burnt offerings made at Gibeon, he added peace offerings in gratitude for the endowment he had just received. In the peace offering a token portion of the animal was offered on the altar and the remains were eaten at a sacrificial meal by the worshiper and his guests.

⁸ Similar to the dream granted to Pharaoh (Gen. 41:7) and Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 2, 4).

⁹ The altar in Jerusalem was mentioned in 2:28.

B. THE DEMONSTRATION OF HIS WISDOM 3:16-28

TRANSLATION

(16) Then two women, harlots, came unto the king, and stood before him. (17) And the one woman said, O my lord the king, I and this woman were sleeping in one house; and I brought forth a child with her in the house. (18) And it came to pass on the third day after I brought forth a child, this woman brought forth a child also, and we were together; there was no stranger with us in the house besides the two of us in the house. (19) And the son of this woman died in the night when she laid on top of him. (20) And she arose in the middle of the night, and took my son from beside me while your handmaiden slept, and she laid him in her breast, and her dead son she laid in my breast. (21) When I arose in the morning to nurse my son, behold he was dead. But I considered him closely in the morning, and behold he was not my son to whom I had given birth. (22) And the other woman said, No! But the living one is my son, and your son is the dead one. But the first woman kept saying, No! But your son is the dead one, and my son is the living one. So did they speak before the king. (23) Then the king said, This woman is saying, This is my son that is alive, and your son is the dead one, and this other woman keeps saying, No! But your son is the dead one, and my son the living one. (24) And the king said, Bring me a sword. And they brought the sword before the king. (25) And the king said, Divide the living child into two, and give half to the one woman, and half to the other. (26) Then the mother of the living son said unto the king, since her emotions were stirred because of her son, and she said, O my lord, give to her the living child, for you must not surely slay him. But the other woman kept saying, Let it neither be mine or yours. Divide it! (27) Then the king answered and said, Give the living child to her, and do not slay him. She is his mother. (28) And all Israel heard of the judgment which the king had made, and they feared the king; for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him to give judgment.

COMMENTS

In this section the author has included an actual case from the judicial files of Judah which illustrates how Solomon's wisdom was quickly demonstrated to the nation. The case was a child custody suit involving two women who were harlots (v. 16). These women are not to be thought of as professional prostitutes, but as women who had borne children out of wedlock. Because of their shame they lived together and alone (v. 17). The plaintiff was first allowed to present her side of the story which was as follows: Within three days of one another the two of us were delivered of a child. Emphasis is laid on the fact that no third party was present at the time of the births (v. 18), hence there was no possibility of independent testimony in the dispute. The defendant, while sleeping one night, rolled over on her child and smothered it (v. 19). During the night she discovered that her baby was dead, and so she swapped her lifeless baby for my living baby (v. 20). I awakened early to nurse my infant only to discover the babe at my bosom was dead. In broad daylight, however, I discovered that the dead child was not mine at all (v. 21).

The defendant in this case naturally disputed the contention of the plaintiff, tenaciously maintaining that the living child was really her own. Back and forth the women argued with one another making their claims and counter claims (v. 22). Finally king Solomon was ready to make a decision. First he summarized the problem as it has been presented to him (v. 23). Then he ordered that a sword be brought to him (v. 24) and that the child be divided and half given to each woman (v. 25). The real mother, the plaintiff as it turned out, was emotionally stirred by the decision which in effect would leave her son dead. The Hebrew reads literally, "*her bowels were in a ferment.*" The ancients regarded the lower digestive tract as the center and seat of emotions. In desperation she cried out to the king to spare the child and give it to her rival. She preferred to lose her suit and suffer the agony of handing over the child to her rival rather than allow it to be killed. The defendant, on the

other hand, was perfectly willing to allow the execution of the child to take place. She really had no love for the infant, and her main object all along had been to deprive her companion of the fruit of her womb (v. 26). Jealousy dries up the milk of human kindness! It was now perfectly apparent who was the real mother, and so the king ordered that the plaintiff be given custody of the disputed child (v. 27). The people of Israel were impressed and even awed¹⁰ by this demonstration of the king's sagacity and they rightly concluded that the wisdom of God was in this young king (v. 28).

II. THE MANAGEMENT OF THIS KINGDOM 4:1-20

In this section of Kings in which the author has been discussing the commencement of Solomon's reign, it is natural to find a description of his court and some intimation as to how he organized the government of the realm. The list of officials in verses 1-20 does not, however, necessarily represent the appointments of Solomon's early years. The mention of the king's two married daughters (vv. 11, 15) would seem to necessitate assigning this list to a later date in his reign.¹¹ The list is in two parts containing (1) Solomon's ministers of state (vv. 1-6); and (2) his financial officers (vv. 7-20). These verses serve as an indication of the might and glory of Solomon's reign as well as of his administrative genius.

¹⁰ The Hebrew word signifies both respect and awe as well as fear. Perhaps the people as a whole respected Solomon, while evil-doers feared him because of his wisdom.

¹¹ Keil assigns it to the middle portion of Solomon's reign. It is possible, of course, that these girls may have been given to officers much older than themselves who had long been in office. In this case the officers might well have been appointed in Solomon's early years.

A. THE MINISTERS OF STATE 4:1-6

TRANSLATION

(1) So King Solomon became king over all Israel. (2) Now these were his princes: Azariah the son of Zadok was the priest; (3) Elihoreph and Ahijah, the sons of Shisha, were scribes; Jehoshaphat the son of Ahilud was the recorder; (4) and Benaiah the son of Jehoiada was over the host while Zadok and Abiathar were priests; (5) Azariah the son of Nathan was over the officers; Zabud the son of Nathan was priest, friend of the king; (6) Ahishar was over the house; and Adoniram the son of Abda was over the tribute.

COMMENTS

Through the actions mentioned in I Kings 2, and because of the awe in which the people held him (I K 3:28), Solomon was able to establish himself as king of all Israel (v. 1). All subsequent kings ruled but a part of the land of Israel, as also did David for the first seven years of his reign. Naturally Solomon needed assistance in governing the land, and verses 2-6 list the princes who held the rank of cabinet officers during his reign. To select faithful and efficient servants is one of the most difficult tasks of rulers. The welfare of the whole state depends very largely on the choice. That the list furnishes further evidence of Solomon's wisdom can be seen in the following observations concerning it: (1) Priority in this list is given to officers of peace—scribes are listed before generals. (2) In several positions Solomon retained the faithful and experienced servants of his predecessor. (3) Positions of trust were filled by persons of piety. Many of Solomon's appointees were sons of priests or prophets.

1. The prime minister: Azariah (4:2). Azariah, the first prince to be named, is designated in Hebrew as *ha-kohen*, "the priest" (v. 2). Learned men have discussed at length the precise

meaning of this term as applied to Azariah. Some think that this Azariah was the grandson of Zadok and that he occupied the office of high priest for the greater part of the reign of Solomon.¹² That the term *kohen* has a secular as well as a sacred meaning would seem to be indicated by II Samuel 8:18 where David's sons, unqualified according to the law to occupy the priesthood, are designated as "*priests*." The parallel passage in Chronicles refers simply to David's sons as "*first men*" (I C 18:17). Just as the sacred *kohen* represented the people before God, so the secular *kohen* represented the people before the king and vice versa. Therefore, Azariah should be regarded as the chief administrator or prime minister of the kingdom. He held first place among the confidential counselors of the king. It is impossible to determine whether Zadok his father is the famous high priest or another man of the same name.

2. *The scribes: Elihoreph and Ahijah (4:3)*. Elihoreph and Ahijah were official court scribes. Apparently they had been trained in the scribal duties by their father Shisha who seems to have held the same office during the reign of David.¹³ These scribes were secretaries of state: they wrote letters and proclamations, drew up edicts and apparently had certain fiscal duties (II K 12:10).

3. *The recorder: Jehoshaphat (4:3)*. Jehoshaphat was the recorder or remembrancer whose duty it was to bring to the king's attention matters of importance affecting the state. In Egyptian literature an official bearing a similar title is mentioned. It was his duty to regulate the ceremonies of the palace, introduce people to royal audiences, serve as master of ceremonies on an official tour, report affairs to the king, and explain royal commands to the people.¹⁴ Jehoshaphat also held his office during the reign of David (II S 8:16).

¹² Hammond, PC, pp. 67-68.

¹³ Shisha is probably the same person mentioned in II Samuel 20:25 as *Sheva*; in II Samuel 8:17 as *Seraiah*; and in I Chronicles 18:16 as *Shaysha*.

¹⁴ It would seem that the offices of scribe and chamberlain ("*over the house*") were also modeled after the organization of the Egyptian court. See de Vaux, AI, pp. 129-132.

4. *Over the host: Benaiah (4:4)*. The elevation of Benaiah to the position of commander of the host has already been noted in 2:35.

5. *The priests: Zadok and Abiathar (4:4)*. The mention of Abiathar here after the mention of his deposition in chapter two is somewhat puzzling. It has been suggested that this is a different Abiathar; or that Abiathar was not completely expelled from the priesthood, only demoted to a lower grade; or that Abiathar was subsequently pardoned and restored to office. The simplest explanation is that Abiathar is listed here because he had been high priest under Solomon, albeit only for a brief period.

6. *Over the officers: Azariah (4:5)*. Azariah was over the twelve officers or governors who are enumerated in verses 7-19. His father Nathan is thought by some to be the famous prophet of that name, and by others to be Nathan the son of David (II S 5:14). Which Nathan is meant, if either, cannot be determined.

7. *Friend of the king: Zabud (4:5)*. Another son of Nathan, Zabud, was chief minister and the king's friend (v. 5). Again the problem of interpreting the Hebrew word *kohen* arises. Some think of Zabud as a priest who also occupied the office of king's friend. It is again best to take the word *kohen* in the secular sense of chief minister. See comments on verse 2. The office of king's friend also existed during the days of David (II S 15:37; 16:16). While the exact duties of the king's friend are uncertain, it would appear that he was a confidential adviser to the king who was responsible for carrying out instructions which were to be kept secret.

8. *Over the house: Ahishar (4:6)*. Ahishar was the chamberlain, i.e., he was the steward and manager of the palace. That such an officer was needed indicates the growing size of the court. Ahishar is unique in this list in that his father's name has been omitted. This has been taken to indicate his foreign, or humble origin.

9. *Over the forced labor: Adoniram (4:6)*. Adoniram was over the tribute or levy. The Hebrew word *mas* denotes the

forced labor which citizens were obligated to contribute towards the erection of royal buildings. Adoniram (or Adoram) had also held the office under David (II S 20:24).

SOLOMON'S COURT	
Official	Title
Azariah ben Zadok	Prime Minister
Elihoreph Ahiah	Scribes
Jehoshaphat	Recorder
Benaiah	"Over the Host"
Zadok Abiathar	Priests
Azariah ben Nathan	"Over the Officers"
Zabud Ahishar Adoniram	"Friend of the King" "Over the House" "Over the Forced Labor"

B. THE FINANCIAL OFFICERS 4:7-20

TRANSLATION

(7) And Solomon had twelve officers over all Israel, and they supplied provisions for the king and his household; a month in the year it fell upon one to make provision. (8) And these are their names: The son of Hur in Mt. Ephraim; (9) the son of Dekar, in Makaz, Shaalbin, Beth-shemesh, and Elon-beth-hanan; (10) the son of Hessed, in Aruboth (he had charge of Sochoh and all the land of Hephher); (11) the son of Abinadab, in all the region of Dor (Taphath the daughter of Solomon was his wife); (12) Baana the son of Ahilud—Taanach, Megiddo and all Beth-shean which is by Zartanah beneath Jezreel from Beth-shean to Abel-meholah unto beyond Jokneam; (13) the son of Geber, in Ramoth-gilead who had charge of the towns of Jair, the son of Manasseh which are in Gilead and the region of Argob which is in Bashan—sixty great cities with walls and

bronze bars: (14) Ahinadab the son of Iddo, Mahanaim; (15) Ahimaaz in Naphtali (also he married Basmath the daughter of Solomon); (16) Baanah the son of Hushai, in Asher and in Aloth; (17) Jehoshaphat the son of Paruah, in Issachar; (18) Shimei the son of Elah, in Benjamin; (19) Geber the son of Uri, in the hill country of Gilead, the country of Sihon, king of the Amorites and Og, king of Bashan, and he was the only officer who was in the land. (20) Judah and Israel were many, as the sand which is beside the sea in multitude, eating, drinking and rejoicing.

COMMENTS

Solomon is credited with originating the first scientific system of taxation. He divided his entire realm into twelve tax districts over which he set a governor or superintendent. Each governor was responsible during one month of the year to garner from his district the produce and meat necessary to sustain the king's household during that month (v. 7). Since the office of district governor was quite prestigious, those who were appointed over the several districts are accorded the honor of being listed in the inspired word. Rather than a verse by verse discussion, a few general comments regarding the list as a whole is more in order.

1. The boundaries of Solomon's taxation districts correspond roughly to the old tribal boundaries which were devised in the days of Joshua. Such alterations in these borders as do exist were probably made in order to balance the economic resources of the districts.

2. Rather than being alphabetical or geographical, the list is chronological, i.e., the governors are listed in the order in which they were responsible for the royal provisions during the year.

3. No doubt the districts were mapped out and months assigned according to the capacity of the country to produce the monthly provisions of the king.

4. Of the twelve governors, five are only known by their patronymics (name of their fathers). No satisfactory explanation of this curious circumstance has yet been given.¹⁵

5. Two of the governors are reported to have married daughters of Solomon (vv. 11, 15). While the appointments to these offices may have been made early in the reign of Solomon, the list could not have been compiled sooner than the middle of his reign when his daughters would have been old enough to marry. These men were officers in the districts farthest away from Solomon. This may have been part of Solomon's strategy to assure the loyalty of these officers.

6. Nine of the administrative districts were on the west and three on the east of the Jordan.

7. Judah is omitted from the list of districts. Apparently Judah was exempt from providing supplies for the court and military. This favoritism no doubt engendered jealousy among the tribes.¹⁶

8. The success of these administrative measures is brought out in verse 20. The population of the nation was so numerous that it was easy for the people to pay and for the governors to collect the royal tribute. The expression "*numerous as the sand of the sea*" indicates that the promises made to the patriarchs (Gen. 22:17; 32:12) had been fulfilled. Apparently Solomon's exactions did not deprive the people of necessary food; they had plenty to eat and drink.

III. THE WONDERMENT OF THIS REIGN 4:21-34

With 4:21 (5:1 in the Hebrew) the author takes up the thought introduced in verse 20, viz., that Solomon ruled over a vast and happy people. The disconnected details recorded in this section

¹⁵ Hammond (PC, p. 69) has proposed that part of the document from which the author copied this list had been destroyed.

¹⁶ It could be that Judah had already been organized by David on a separate basis and hence is omitted here from the list. See de Vaux, AI, pp. 133-35.

serve to underscore the fact that the age of Solomon was the golden age of Israel. Here the author discusses (1) the extent and power of Solomon's kingdom (vv. 21-28); and (2) Solomon's profound wisdom and fame (vv. 29-34).

A. THE EXTENT AND POWER OF SOLOMON'S KINGDOM 4:21-28

TRANSLATION

(21) And Solomon became the ruler over all the kingdoms from the river to the land of the Philistines and the border of Egypt. They continued to bring presents and to serve Solomon all the days of his life. (22) Now the provision of Solomon for one day was thirty *kors* of fine flour and sixty *kors* of meal, (23) ten fat cattle, twenty cattle of the field, a hundred sheep besides deer, gazelles, roebucks, and cribbed geese.¹⁷ (24) For he ruled over all the land beyond the river from Tiphseh even to Azzah, over all the kings beyond the river; and he had peace on all sides round about him. (25) And Judah and Israel dwelt securely, each man under his vine and under his fig tree, from Dan to Beersheba, all the days of Solomon. (26) And Solomon had forty thousand stalls of horses for his chariots, and twelve thousand horsemen. (27) And these officers supplied provisions for Solomon and for all who came unto King Solomon's table, each man in his month; they did not lack a thing. (28) Also barley and straw for the horses, and steeds, they brought unto the place where they were, each man according to his assessment.

COMMENTS

Solomon's empire was vast, extending from "*the river,*" i.e.,

¹⁷ The Hebrew word is of uncertain meaning. The translation proposed by Gray has been adapted here.

the Euphrates in the north, to the land of the Philistines, i.e., the Mediterranean shore on the west, to the border of Egypt on the south. The border of Egypt is generally regarded as the *Wadi al-Arish*, or River of Egypt which lies in the desert between Philistia and Egypt. The promise of Genesis 15:18 had now been fulfilled. This verse demonstrates that those millennialists who affirm that the "land promise" of Genesis 15 was never fulfilled are totally wrong. All these lands rendered tribute to Solomon and were under his domain all the days of his life (v. 21).

The daily consumption of the royal household is next related so as to demonstrate the grandeur and luxury of Solomon's court. Each day approximately 340 bushels of fine flour and 155 bushels of meal were consumed (v. 23).¹⁸ Thirty head of beef, a hundred sheep, as well as wild game, were required daily at the royal tables (v. 24). The stall-fed oxen were probably for the palace table, while these from the pasture were for the palace guards and inferior servants. It has been estimated that such a quantity of bread and meat would feed at least fourteen thousand persons and some estimates run as high as thirty-five thousand. Because of what is known of the extravagances in the royal courts of antiquity, even liberal scholars are forced to admit that the figures presented here may be sober history and not wild exaggeration.¹⁹

Solomon's court provisions were commensurate with the size of his kingdom. He had control of the entire region of Beyond-the-River. This is a technical geographical designation for the region west of the Euphrates river. The northern most point in the empire was Tiphseh, a town on the west bank of the middle course of the Euphrates at its most important crossing-place. The southern most point was Azzah, i.e., Gaza, the last

¹⁸ Authorities differ as to how many bushels were in the *kor* measure. Estimates range from a high of eleven bushels to a low of 5.16 bushels. This lower equivalency has been used in the computation here. See Sellers, IDB, R—Z, p. 835. Scott (BAR, III, 345-58) gives the equivalency as 6.25 bushels to a *kor*.

¹⁹ Montgomery cites examples from the Persian and Egyptian court, (ICC, p. 128). According to Gray (OTL, p. 137) these instances "indicate that this is no exaggeration here and may be an excerpt from official records."

town in Palestine on the frontier of Egypt. All the kings in the Beyond-the-River region rendered tribute to Solomon. The author probably has in mind the kings of Syria conquered by David (II S 8:6) and of the Philistines (II S 8:1). But despite the wide extent of his kingdom, there was peace everywhere (v. 24).²⁰ From Dan, at the headwaters of the Jordan, to Beersheba, on the edge of the southern wilderness every man sat "*under his vine and under his fig tree*" (v. 25). This proverbial expression denotes rest and the undisturbed enjoyment of the fruits of the earth.

In the note about Solomon's cavalry and chariotry, the author continues to paint the picture of the pomp and power of Israel's greatest king. At the same time the allusion to this multiplication of horses is an indication that Solomon was beginning to violate the law of God with respect to kings (cf. Deut. 17:16). That the figure forty thousand for the number of stalls is a scribal error is indicated by two considerations: (1) In the parallel passage in II Chronicles 9:25 the figure given is four thousand; and (2) this lower figure is more in line with the number of chariots (fourteen hundred) possessed by Solomon (10:26). It was customary in the Near East to yoke two horses to each chariot. A third horse was usually provided for each chariot in case of an accident. Thus four thousand horses for his chariot force would be more than ample. In addition the king kept twelve hundred cavalry horses. This great number of horses and horsemen threw an extra burden on each of the twelve district governors mentioned in verses 7-19 (v. 27). These officers faithfully brought barley, the food of the horses, and straw to the various depots throughout the land where the animals were kept (v. 28). The "*dromedaries*" of the KJV are really the swift horses used by the king's messengers.

²⁰ Gray (OTL, p. 136) contends that this statement contradicts 11:23 which speaks of the Arameans revolting after the death of David. The present passage, however, is only asserting that the reign of Solomon was predominately peaceful. It may mean no more than that Israel did not itself suffer from the ravages of war.

B. SOLOMON'S PROFOUND WISDOM
AND FAME 4:29-34

TRANSLATION

(29) And God gave wisdom to Solomon and understanding exceedingly much and largeness of heart, even as the sand that is upon the seashore. (30) The wisdom of Solomon was greater than the wisdom of all the sons of the east and greater than the wisdom of Egypt. (31) And he was wiser than all men—than Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman and Calcol, Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the nations round about. (32) And he spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were a thousand and five. (33) And he spoke concerning trees, from the cedar which is in Lebanon to the hyssop which springs out in the wall; and he spoke concerning beasts, birds, creeping things, and fish. (34) And some from all peoples came to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom.

COMMENTS

In fulfillment of the promise made in 3:12, God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding and largeness of heart. These three terms are interesting. Wisdom (Heb., *chokmah*) signifies practical wisdom, the ability to decide what is the best course of action; understanding (Heb., *tebunah*) is the ability to arrive at the solution to difficult problems; and "*largeness of heart*" indicates the power and breadth of the mind, comprehensive knowledge.

In order to impress the reader with the magnitude of Solomon's wisdom, the author makes four comparisons. (1) Solomon's wisdom was "*like the sand by the seashore*" (v. 29), a proverbial expression for an innumerable multitude or great abundance. (2) His wisdom exceeded that of the "*children*

of the east"²¹—the various Arab tribes dwelling east of Canaan including the Edomites who were famous for their wisdom.²² (3) Greater too was his wisdom than that of Egypt (v. 30) which was famous for the knowledge of geometry, arithmetic, astronomy and medicine.²³ (4) Finally, Solomon was wiser than the wisest men of his own nation, Ethan, Heman, Calcol and Darda. These four persons may be the same as the "*sons of Zerah*" mentioned in I Chronicles 2:6. Heman and Ethan apparently were the authors of Psalms 88-89, two of the wisdom or teaching psalms. The term Ezrahite which is applied to Ethan in Kings and to both Ethan and Heman in the psalm titles is probably a variation of the family name of Zerah.²⁴ Solomon's reputation as a polymath spread throughout all the surrounding nations (v. 31).

Only a comparatively small portion of the literary fruits of Solomon's wisdom have been incorporated into the Bible. During his reign he spoke three thousand proverbs of which less than one third are preserved in the Book of Proverbs. The Hebrew word for proverb (*mashal*) denotes "comparison, simile, parable." Of his thousand and five songs (v. 32), only three have survived: the beautiful Song of Songs, and two of the psalms (72 and 127).²⁵ Solomon's wisdom was not limited to

²¹ Gray (OTL p. 140) has pointed out that the Hebrew term translated "east" sometimes denotes ancient time. The thought would then be that Solomon's wisdom exceeded the proverbial wisdom of the ancients.

²² Jeremiah 49:7; Obadiah 8.

²³ Biblical references to the wisdom of Egypt: Isa. 19:11; 31:2; Acts 7:22. Josephus (*Ant.* VIII, 2.5) and the Greek historian Herodotus (II, 160) and Diodorus Siculus (I, 73 and 81) refer to the wisdom of Egypt.

²⁴ I Chronicles 6:33, 44 mentions two Levites, Ethan and Heman, who were singers appointed by David. Are they the same Ethan and Heman mentioned in the present passage? At first appearance the epithet "Ezrahite" (descendant of Zerah of the tribe of Judah) would seem to preclude this identification. Keil, however, thinks that Ethan and Heman were Levites who by virtue of their place of residence were incorporated into the Judahite family of Zerah.

²⁵ Among the Dead Sea Scrolls a document was found containing a similar catalogue of the literary productions of David. He is credited with 3,600 psalms and 450 songs for specific occasions. Sanders, PEQ, pp. 91-93.

the philosophical and poetical, he possessed scientific knowledge as well. He discoursed on trees—from the greatest ones, the cedars of Lebanon, to the smallest, the moss-like hyssop, which might be found growing on a wall.²⁶ Solomon was also knowledgeable concerning the entire animal kingdom—the beasts (larger animals), fowl, creeping things (small animals and reptiles) and fish (v. 33).

Some disagreement exists as to the exact nature of these discourses on the vegetable and animal kingdoms. Some think that the verses refer only to Solomon's ability to draw moral lessons from what he observed in nature, an ability which he certainly demonstrates in some of his proverbs (e.g., 30:25f); others think that the verse refers to parables or animal fables similar to the fable attributed to Jotham in Judges 9; still others have seen a parallel in the classified lists of natural phenomena found in Mesopotamia dating back to the third millennium B.C. It would seem, however, that this verse is affirming that Solomon made observations and research in natural science, or botanical and zoological studies. Hearing of this great wisdom, kings from all over the earth sent ambassadors and messengers to the court of Solomon to hear his learning (v. 34).

REVIEW OF CHAPTER FOUR

I. FACTS TO MASTER

A. Identify each of the following new characters who are introduced in this section:

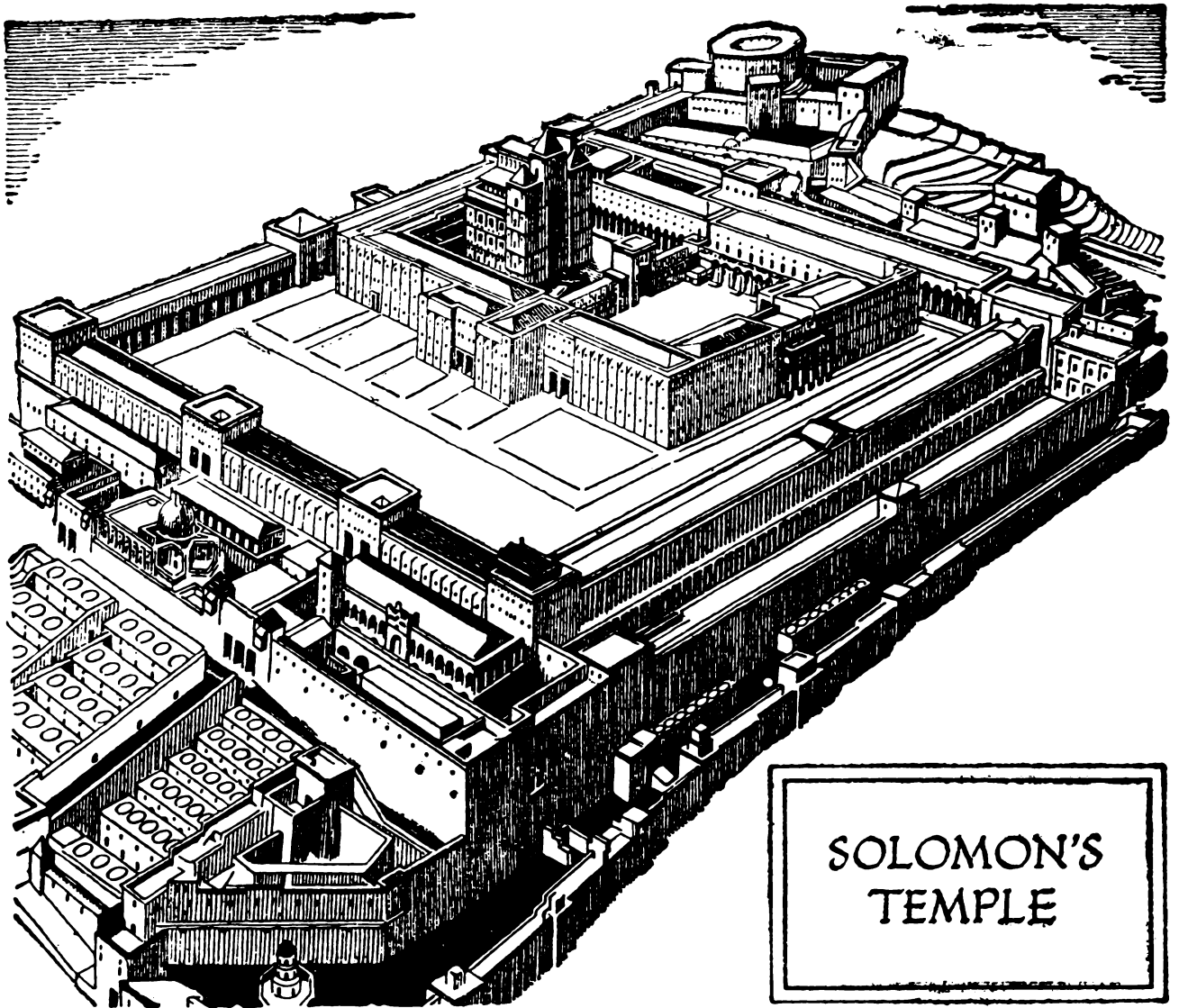
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|-------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Adoniram | 4. Azariah ben Zadok |
| 2. Ahiah | 5. Azariah ben Nathan |
| 3. Ahishar | 6. Basmath |

²⁶ A moss grows in Palestine the leaves of which resemble the hyssop tree. This is probably what the author has in mind rather than the common hyssop which often attains a height of two feet.

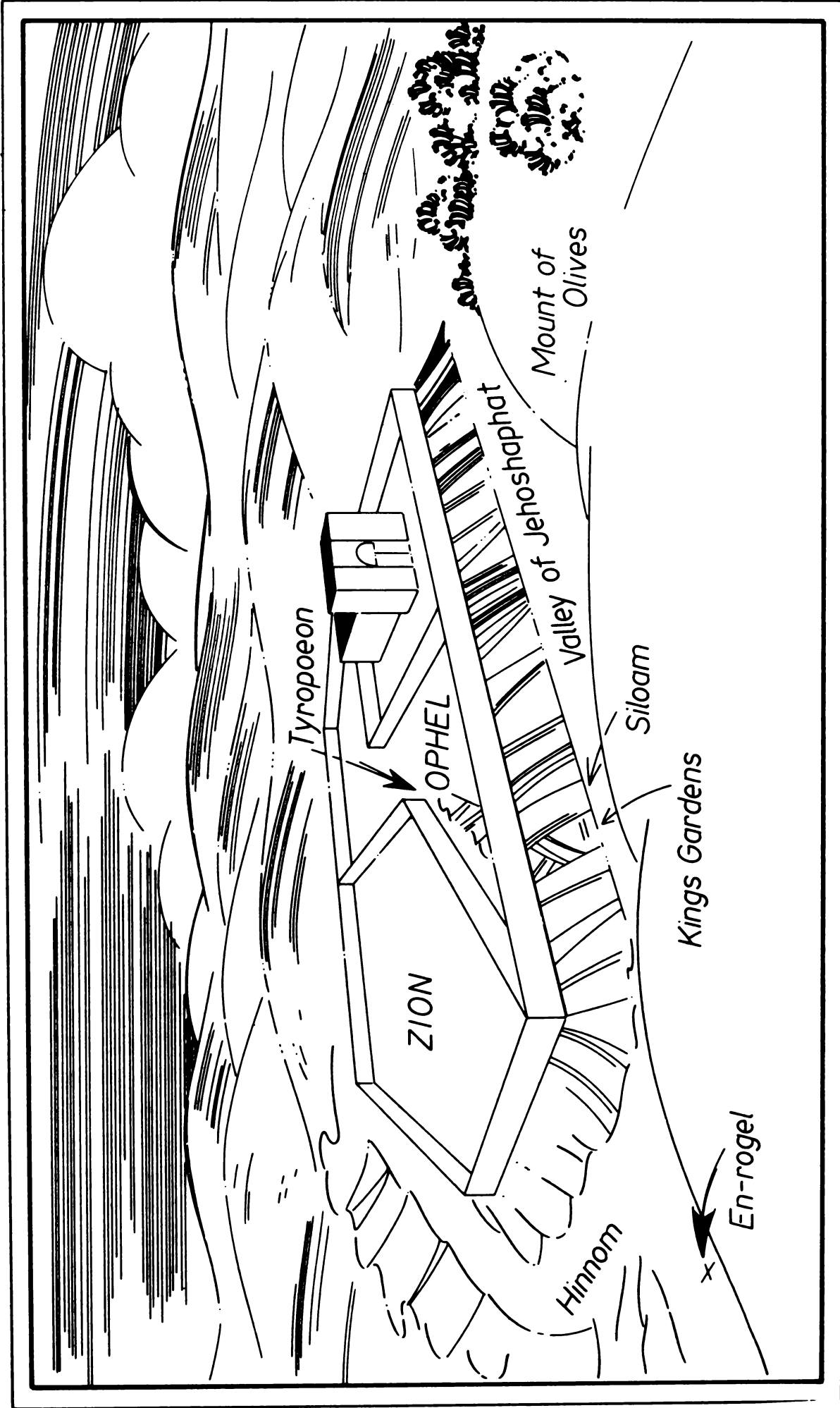
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| 7. Chalcol | 11. Heman |
| 8. Darda | 12. Jehoshaphat |
| 9. Elihoreph | 13. Taphath |
| 10. Ethan | 14. Zabud |
- B. Know how the following places fit into the history recorded in this chapter:**
- | | |
|--------------|--------------|
| 1. Azzah | 5. Jerusalem |
| 2. Beersheba | 6. The River |
| 3. Dan | 7. Tiphseh |
| 4. Gibeon | |
- C. Important Numbers**
1. The number of stalls for Solomon's horses
 2. The number of tax districts in Solomon's kingdom
 3. The number of Solomon's proverbs
 4. The number of Solomon's songs

II. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. How old was Solomon when he became king?
2. Why did Solomon ask the Lord to give him wisdom in his dream experience at Gibeon? Why was the Lord pleased with his request?
3. What proof is offered in these chapters that God actually kept His promise to give Solomon wisdom?
4. How did the court of Solomon differ from that of his father David? What new offices were created under Solomon?
5. What system was used to supply provisions for Solomon's court?
6. What evidence is there that the number of horse stalls in 4:26 should read four thousand instead of forty thousand?
7. Are the Ethan and Heman mentioned as wise men in 4:31 mentioned elsewhere in the Bible?
8. What was the nature of Solomon's wisdom?
9. Why did God direct Solomon to "*Ask what I shall give you*" (I K 3:5)? Would God have asked that question of just anyone?
10. How can a Christian obtain greater wisdom? James 1:5



Drawings by Horace Knowles
from British and Foreign Bible Society



CHAPTER FIVE

THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOLOMON'S TEMPLE

I Kings 5:1—6:38

Without question the greatest achievement of Solomon's glorious reign was the construction of the Jerusalem Temple. Using plans designed by David, and the expertise of Phoenician craftsmen, Solomon brought into being what surely must have been one of the wonders of ancient architecture. In chapter 5 the author relates the preparations which were made for this pious undertaking, and in chapter 6 he describes the Temple as it was completed.

I. PREPARATIONS FOR BUILDING THE TEMPLE 5:1-18

Preparations for Temple construction commenced long before Solomon ascended the throne. The Temple site—Mt. Moriah—had been indicated by God to David in connection with the cessation of the plague against Jerusalem (II S 24: 18-25). But much had to be done in both leveling and raising that ground in order to secure a flat construction area. This work *may* have begun while David was yet king. The Scriptures explicitly state that David energetically engaged in gathering various materials for the Temple—gold, silver, bronze, iron, wood and precious stones (I C 29:2-5). Once Solomon had successfully established himself on the throne of his father, he wholeheartedly devoted himself to those final preparations which were necessary before actual construction could commence. Chapter 5 tells (1) of his negotiations with Hiram of Tyre (vv. 1-12); and (2) of the laboring force which he conscripted to assist in the project (vv. 13-18).

A. NEGOTIATIONS WITH HIRAM 5:1-12

TRANSLATION

(1) Now Hiram, king of Tyre, sent his servants unto Solomon, for he had heard that they had anointed him as king instead of his father, for Hiram had always been friendly to David. (2) And Solomon sent (a message) unto Hiram, saying, (3) You surely know that David my father was not able to build a house to the name of the LORD his God because of the war with which they surrounded him, until the LORD put them under the soles of his feet. (4) But now the LORD my God has given to me rest on every side; there is no adversary, nor evil happenstance. (5) So behold I am proposing to build a house to the name of the LORD my God as the LORD spoke unto David my father, saying, Your son whom I will set upon your throne in place of you, he shall build the house for My name. (6) And now issue a command that they may cut for me cedar trees from Lebanon, and my servants will be with your servants, and the hire of your servants I will give you according to all that you say, for you surely know that there is not among us a man skilled in cutting timber like the Sidonians. (7) And it came to pass when Hiram heard the words of Solomon that he rejoiced exceedingly and said, Blessed be the LORD this day who has given to David a wise son over this great people. (8) And Hiram sent unto Solomon, saying, I have heard (the message) which you sent unto me; I will surely do all your desire in regard to the cedar trees and fir trees. (9) My servants shall bring them down from Lebanon to the sea; and I will surely make them rafts (to go) by sea unto the place which you shall designate unto me; and I will break them up there, and you will take them up; and as for you, do what I desire by giving bread to my house. (10) So Hiram supplied Solomon with cedar trees and fir trees according to his desire. (11) And Solomon gave to Hiram twenty thousand *kors* of wheat as food for his household, and twenty *kors* of pure oil; thus would Solomon give to Hiram year by year. (12) Now the LORD gave wisdom to Solomon just as He had spoken to him;

and there was peace between Solomon and Hiram and they made a covenant between them.

COMMENTS

Before his death King David had gathered considerable materials for the building of the Temple, including the highly valued cedars from Lebanon (I C 22:1-4). This precious timber was coveted by all the kings of antiquity from the Tigris-Euphrates valley to the land of the Pharaohs. The cordial relations which existed between David and Hiram¹ king of Tyre continued under the reign of Solomon. Hiram sent a delegation to Solomon to recognize and congratulate the youthful king, and at the same time to make overtures of friendship. A continuing peaceful relationship with Israel was essential to Hiram in view of the fact that Solomon controlled the vital trade routes which led to Tyre. Furthermore, the Phoenicians in this period seem to have been dependent upon the grains produced in the fertile valleys of Israel. Thus when Hiram heard that Solomon had been anointed king of Israel in place of his father David, he sent his ambassadors to Jerusalem (v. 1).

Solomon responded to the friendly gesture of his neighbor by sending a letter² to Hiram (v. 2). In this communication Solomon made reference to his father's intention to build a house that would be dedicated to the LORD his God. Hiram knew of David's plans, and had already furnished a large number of trees for the project (I C 22:4). But David's dream had not been realized during his lifetime. Because he had been surrounded by adversaries throughout his reign, he had been forced to devote

¹ In verses 10 and 18 the name is spelled Hirom while in Chronicles with one exception (I C 14:1) the name appears as Hiram. According to some authorities, two kings in succession bore the same name, the first being the friend of David and the second of Solomon. According to others *Hiram* was a synonym for "king of Tyre" as *Pharaoh* was for "king of Egypt."

² Josephus (*Ant.*, VIII, 2.8) reports that this letter and Hiram's reply to it (v. 8) were preserved in the public archives of Tyre in the first century A.D.

most of his attention to war and bloodshed (v. 3). Solomon's reign, however, had thus far been peaceful and free from any evil (i.e., unfortunate) occurrence such as rebellion, famine or pestilence (v. 4). Since God had revealed that David's successor would be the Temple builder, and since political circumstances now made that project feasible, Solomon had determined to proceed with it (v. 5).

Solomon made two requests of Hiram. First, he asked that Hiram make available to him the valuable timber from the Lebanon mountains. The inscription of the Sumerian king Gudea (c. 2100 B.C.) and the Report of the Egyptian official Wenamon (c. 1100 B.C.) indicate that Lebanon had supplied timber and stone for the building of temples in very early times and in places far more distant than Jerusalem.³ In addition to the building materials, Solomon also requested that his royal friend send a skilled craftsman to Jerusalem (II C 2:7). In exchange for these provisions Solomon agreed to supply manpower to assist in the logging operation and also to pay the wages of the Tyrian laborers.⁴ In a closing complimentary remark, Solomon alluded to the skill of the Sidonians in woodmanship (v. 6). The subjects of Hiram are called Sidonians because in earlier times Sidon was the most important city of Phoenicia. This usage was also followed by Greek and Latin writers and apparently to some extent by the Phoenicians themselves.⁵

Hiram rejoiced at the prospect of continued friendly relations with Israel and burst forth in praise to God for having given David so wise a son as his successor (v. 7). The wisdom of the young king was evident to Hiram because (1) Solomon had chosen the path of peaceful coexistence; (2) he earnestly desired

³ Barton, AB, pp. 451, 455.

⁴ This latter suggestion is amplified in the account in Chronicles where Solomon is said to have promised to give Hiram's workmen twenty thousand *kors* of wheat, twenty thousand *kors* of barley, twenty thousand *baths* of wine and twenty thousand *baths* of oil (II C 2:10).

⁵ A Phoenician inscription on a bronze bowl refers to a Hiram (probably eighth century B.C.) "king of the Sidonians." See Honor, JCBR, p. 83.

to fulfill his wise father's purposes; and (3) he had made the worship of God the foremost concern of his reign. Hiram's praise for God need not imply that he believed in the exclusive divinity of the God of Israel, but simply that he regarded the Lord as being as real as one of his own deities. Attributing the guidance of Israel's destiny to Israel's Deity conformed completely with the religious notions of Hiram's time.

Without delay Hiram sent his letter of reply to Solomon indicating that he was favorably disposed to providing the cedar and fir trees⁶ which Solomon had requested (v. 8). The plan called for Hiram's servants to bring the logs down the rugged and dangerous mountain road from Lebanon to the sea. At some Phoenician port, possibly Gebal (Byblus), the timber would be lashed into rafts and floated down the Mediterranean seacoast to Joppa (II C 2:16). At that point the lumber would be broken up into separate trees and delivered to Solomon who would be responsible for moving it the forty steep and rugged miles to Jerusalem.

Solomon had to pay for the Phoenician timber by providing grain for the household of Hiram (v. 9). This payment for Hiram's household is in addition to the wages of the laborers which Solomon had volunteered to pay (I K 5:6) and had stipulated (II C 2:10) in his letter to Hiram. It seems as though Hiram set a rather high price on his goods and services, a policy quite different from that which prevailed at the time he gave assistance to David (II S 5:11). That Hiram would designate food as the payment for the timber is quite understandable in view of the geographical situation of Phoenicia. That land occupied a coastal plain which extended for some twenty-eight miles but which averaged only about one mile in breadth. Hence it was essential that Phoenicia import agricultural products from neighboring lands.

Both kings being agreeable to the contractual arrangements,

⁶ The absence of any reference to fir trees in verse 6 is an indication that the report of Solomon's request to Hiram has been condensed.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOLOMON'S TEMPLE 5:13-18

the building material began to move southward to Jerusalem (v. 10). In compensation for this timber Solomon paid Hiram twenty thousand *kors* of wheat (about 103,200 bushels) and twenty (about 1,100 gallons) of pure (Heb., *beaten*) oil, i.e., oil that was obtained by pounding the olives just before they ripened. This kind of oil was whiter in color and gave a clearer light than that furnished by ripe olives. Each year as long as the construction work continued (or possibly longer) Solomon made these payments to the royal court at Tyre. These successful negotiations with Hiram and the mutually advantageous treaty which resulted are regarded by the author of Kings as a further indication of Solomon's wisdom⁷ (v. 12). In accordance with Phoenician policy,⁸ Hiram sealed the renewal by presenting Solomon with his daughter (cf. I K 11:1).

SOLOMON'S ANNUAL PAYMENT TO HIRAM	
For Hiram's Court I Kings 5:11	For Hiram's Workers II Chronicles 2:10
103,200 Bushels of Wheat 1,100 Gallons of Beaten Olive Oil	103,200 Bushels of Wheat 103,200 Bushels of Barley 110,000 Gallons of Wine 110,000 Gallons of Oil

B. THE ORGANIZATION OF LABORERS 5:13-18

TRANSLATION

(13) Then King Solomon raised a levy from all Israel; and the levy was thirty thousand men. (14) And he sent them to Lebanon

⁷ Ellison (NBC, p. 306) and Wilson (WBC, p. 251) feel that this "league" necessarily involved Solomon in a recognition of Hiram's gods. But had such religious compromise been involved, it is hardly likely that the author of Kings would have cited this "league" as an example of Solomon's wisdom.

⁸ Olmstead, HPS, p. 340.

ten thousand a month in shifts; a month they were in Lebanon, two months in their homes. And Adoniram was over the levy. (15) And Solomon had seventy thousand burden bearers, and eighty thousand stonecutters in the mountains, (16) besides Solomon's superintendents who were over the work, thirty-three hundred who supervised the people who labored in the work. (17) And the king commanded and they quarried great stones, precious stones, to lay the foundation of the house, dressed stones. (18) So the builders of Solomon and the builders of Hiram, even the Gegalites, dressed them, and prepared the timber and the stones to build the house.

COMMENTS

Solomon made further preparation for the construction work by drafting out of Israel a labor force numbering some thirty thousand (v. 13). Solomon's Temple was built with forced labor; Moses' Tabernacle was built through freewill offerings and volunteer services. While thirty thousand appears to be rather large, the conscription only affected one in *forty* of the male population.⁹ The thirty thousand were divided into three shifts of ten thousand, and each shift was compelled to labor in Lebanon four months of the year (v. 14). These workmen should be thought of as free Israelites who worked in consort with and under the direction of the servants of Hiram. Whether or not they received remuneration for their labor is uncertain. Certainly the present verse does not contradict 9:22 which asserts that Solomon did not make *bondmen* of the children of Israel as he did of the Canaanites.¹⁰

In addition to the thirty thousand Israelite draftees, Solomon compelled the remnants of the Canaanites to become tribute

⁹ According to the census taken by Joab in the reign of David, Israel numbered eight hundred thousand and Judah five hundred thousand fighting men (II S 24:9).

¹⁰ The Canaanites are called "*tribute-slaves*" (*mas'obed*) while the thirty thousand Israelites are called "*tribute-laborers*" (*mas*).

slaves (9:20, 21). The seventy thousand bearers of burdens and the eighty thousand hewers of stone mentioned in verse 15 were the last of the Canaanites remaining in the land.¹¹ It is a matter of dispute whether or not the phrase "*in the mountain*" refers to the Lebanon mountains or the hill country of Canaan. It is hard to imagine—though it is not impossible—that the massive Temple stones were brought from Lebanon to Jerusalem. Fine quality limestone can be obtained near Jerusalem. This stone is soft when quarried, but gradually hardens under exposure. The term "*hew*" (Heb., *chasab*) denotes the splitting of blocks from the living rock rather than the more skilled operation of dressing the stone (Heb., *pasal*).

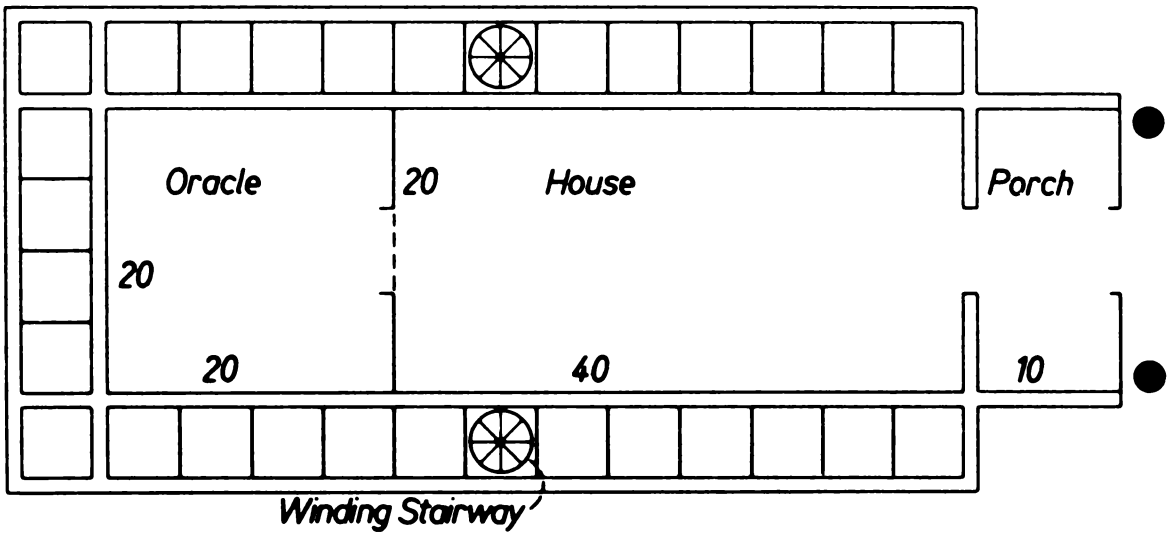
Thirty-three hundred foremen (lit., *the princes of the overseers*) supervised the various work crews (v. 16). At the end of the construction account, mention is made of five hundred fifty additional "*princes of the overseers*" (9:23). This yields a total of 3,850 superintendents which agrees with the total stated in the Book of Chronicles. However, II Chronicles 2:18 refers to a body of thirty-six hundred "*overseers to set the people at work*" while II Chronicles 8:10 speaks of two hundred fifty "*princes of the overseers.*" Thus while the totals are the same in Kings and Chronicles, it is obvious that the two sacred writers have employed different systems of classification and arrangement of these superintendents. The author of Chronicles has made *race* the basis of arrangement. The thirty-six hundred mentioned in II Chronicles 2:18 were Canaanites, while the two hundred fifty mentioned in II Chronicles 8:10 were no doubt Israelites. Kings, on the other hand, has used *rank* as the basis of classification. There were thirty-three hundred subordinate (5:16) and five hundred fifty superior officers (9:23).

¹¹ According to II Chronicles 2:17 David's census had found 153,600 Canaanite men remaining. The burden bearers and stonecutters totaled 150,000 and there were 3,600 Canaanite officers over them (II C 2:18).

SOLOMON'S SUPERINTENDENTS A Harmony of Kings and Chronicles			
CLASSIFICATION BY RACE Chronicles		CLASSIFICATION BY RANK Kings	
II Chronicles 2:18 Canaanite Officers 3,600		I Kings 5:16 Subordinate Officers 3,300	
II Chronicles 8:10 Israelite Officers 250		I Kings 9:23 Superior Officers 550	
Total 3,850		Total 3,850	
CONCLUSIONS			
1. Of the 550 superior officers, 300 were Canaanites.			
2. All of the 3,300 officers in I K 5:16 were Canaanites.			

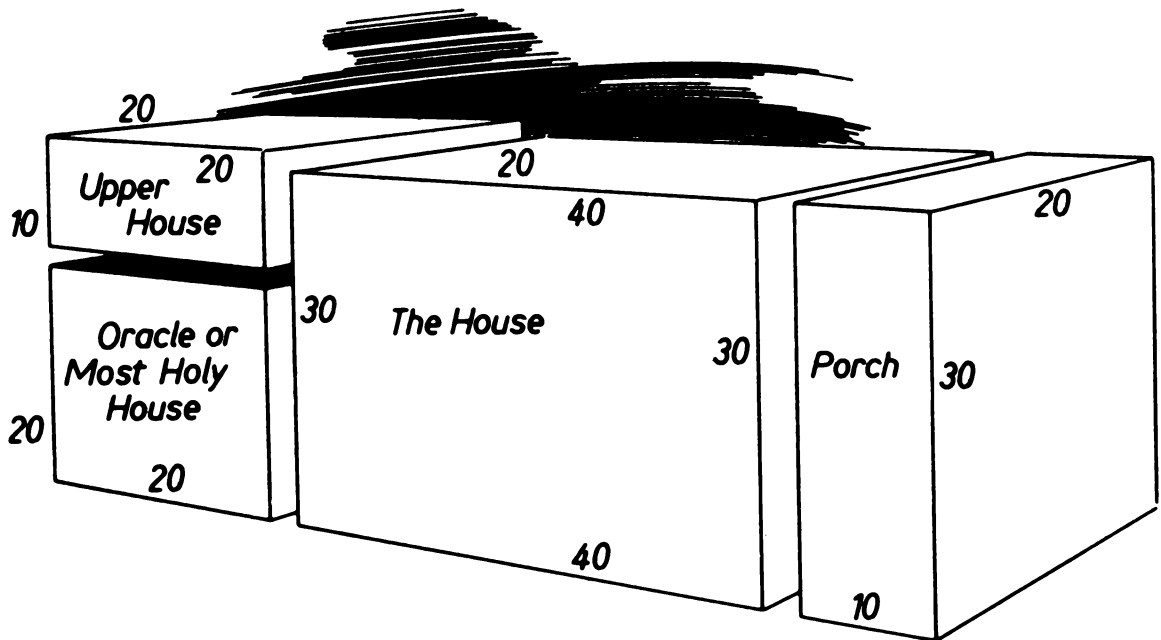
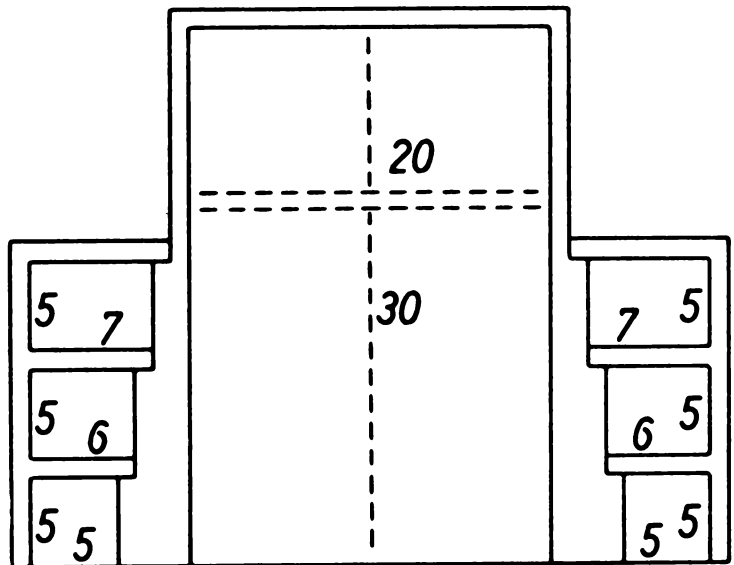
ORGANIZATION OF SOLOMON'S WORK FORCE		
Cabinet Level	ADONIRAM I K 4:6; 5:14	
Superior Officers	250 Israelites II C 8:10	300 Canaanites (Each in Charge of 11 Crews)
Foremen	Probably Hiram's men served as crew Foremen cf. I K 5:6	3,300 Canaanites II C 2:18; I K 5:16 (Each over a Crew of about 45 Men)
Laborers	30,000 Israelites who Cut Timber I K 5:13	70,000 Canaanite Burden Bearers 80,000 Canaanite Stonecutters I K 5:15; II C 2:18
Total	30,250 Israelites	153,600 Canaanites

The workmen having been secured and organized, Solomon issued the order for the foundation stones to be cut out and brought to the Temple site (v. 17). Although the foundation stones would not be seen, equal care was given to their

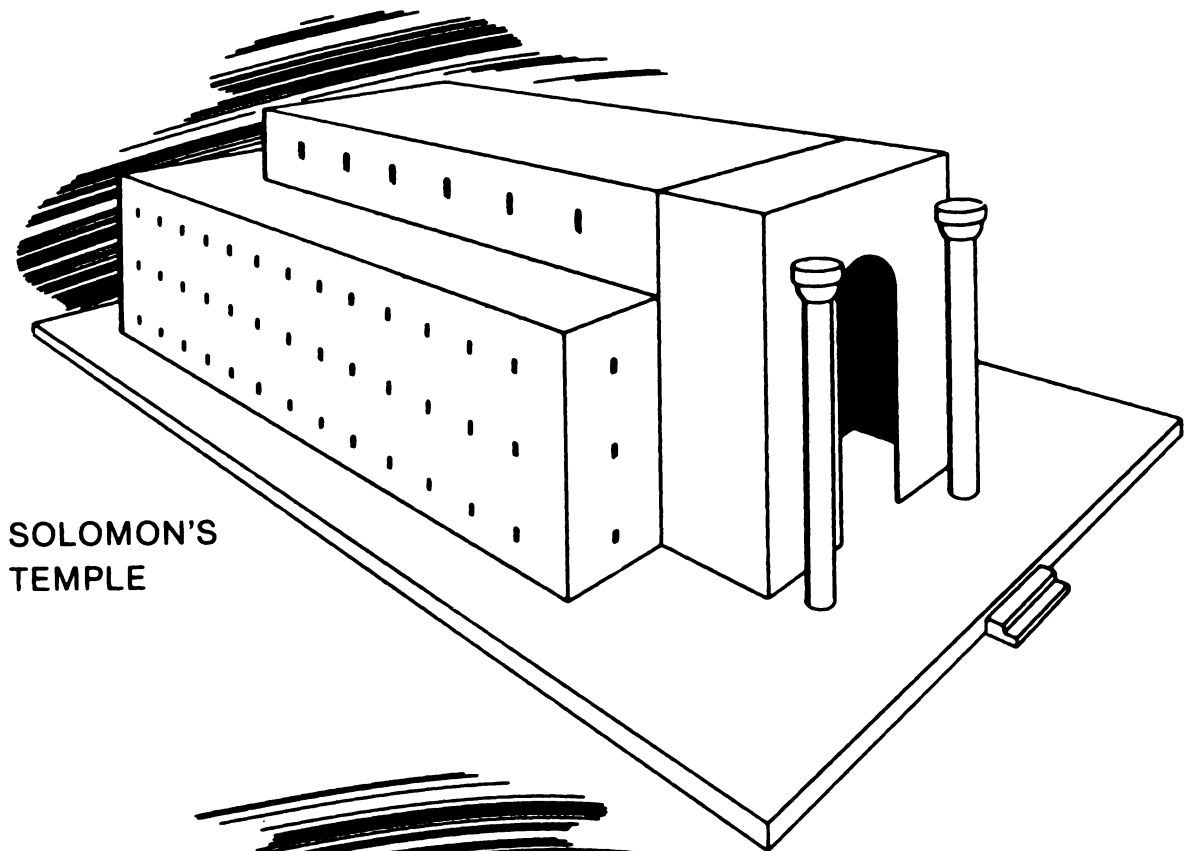


Floor plan of the Temple

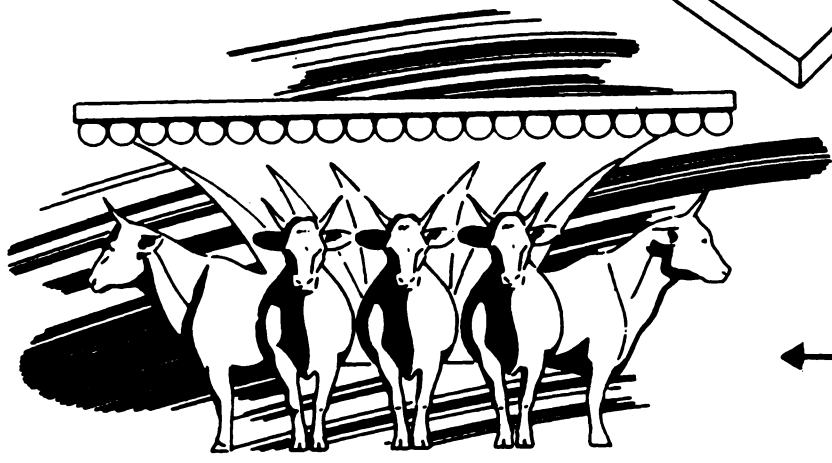
Front perspective of the Temple, showing walls and side chambers in three levels.



Principal compartments of the Temple—side chambers not shown)



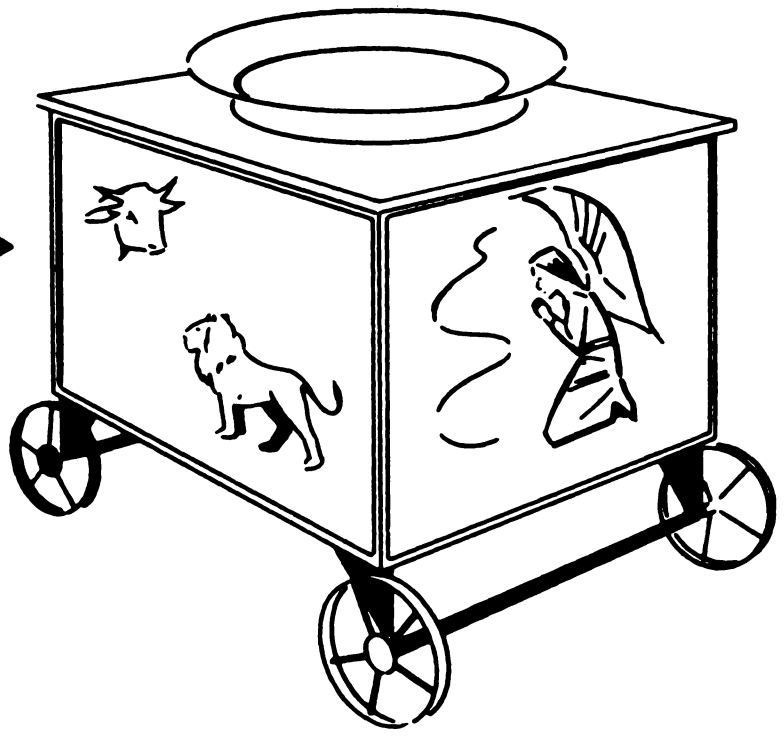
SOLOMON'S TEMPLE



The Molten Sea where the priests washed

A mobile laver

Ten of these were in the court before the Temple.



THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOLOMON'S TEMPLE 5:13-18

preparation. Ordinarily plain stones were used for foundations; but the king commanded that they should prepare great, costly, hewn stones. Some of these very stones can still be viewed at the excavations on Mt. Moriah. There is no contradiction between the reference to hewn stone and the statement in 6:7 that "*neither hammer nor axe nor iron was heard in the house while it was being built*" since the stone was made ready at the quarry.

Hiram's workers assisted in the work of quarrying the great Temple stones as well as in securing the timber (v. 18). The King James rendering "*stonecutters*" in verse 18 is best taken as a proper noun, "*Gebalites*." Gebal (Byblos) was a Phoenician city not far from the coast about twenty miles north of modern Beirut. According to Ezekiel 27:9 the Gebalites were skilled ship builders and therefore, were probably skillful builders generally. They would be the most suitable of Hiram's subjects to superintend the working of the wood and stone for Solomon's building projects.

II. THE DESCRIPTION OF THE TEMPLE 6:1-38

Chapter six is designed to present a word picture of Solomon's Temple. The material presented here is sufficient to allow one to get a general idea of what that magnificent structure must have been like. The omission of crucial architectural details, however, renders impossible absolute certainty about many points. After a brief chronological note (v. 1), the author discusses the exterior (vv. 2-10) and interior (vv. 15-35) of the Temple. Sandwiched between these two blocks of material is a brief passage (vv. 11-14) relating a promise which God gave to Solomon during the course of construction. The chapter concludes with some brief notes concerning other details of the Temple construction (vv. 36-38).

A. AN IMPORTANT CHRONOLOGICAL NOTE 6:1

TRANSLATION

(1) And it came to pass in the four hundred eightieth year after the children of Israel went out from the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Ziv (it is the second month), that he began to build the house of the LORD.

COMMENTS

I Kings 6:1 furnishes the key to Biblical chronology prior to the monarchy period. The ancients were quite time conscious and often would set their dates by referring to a number of years before or after a significant event. It would appear that up until the period of the kings, time was measured in relation to the Exodus from Egypt. The text unequivocally states that four hundred eighty years elapsed between the time the Israelites came out of Egypt and the time when Solomon began building the Temple. Since Solomon began to reign in 971 B.C., his fourth year would be 967 B.C. Figuring back four hundred eighty years from 967 B.C. would yield a date of 1447 B.C. for the Exodus. The Temple work commenced in the month of Ziv,¹² the second month of the Hebrew year, which corresponds roughly to the last part of April and the first part of May on the current calendar.

¹² *Ziv*, the archaic name for the second month, is found only here. Three other survivals of the archaic calendar are found in the Old Testament: *Abib*, the first month; *Ethanim*, the seventh month; and *Bul*, the eighth month. The Jews adopted the Babylonian names of the months during the period of the captivity.

B. THE EXTERIOR OF THE HOUSE 6:2-10

TRANSLATION

(2) As for the house which King Solomon built for the LORD: sixty cubits was its length and twenty cubits its breadth and thirty cubits its height. (3) And the porch in front of the Temple of the house, ten cubits was its breadth before the house. (4) And he made for the house windows of fixed lattices. (5) And he built against the wall of the house, floors round about, against the walls which surrounded the Temple and the Debir; and he made chambers round about. (6) And the lowest chamber was five cubits in width, the middle one was six cubits in width and the third was seven cubits in width, for he made rebatements for the house round about that (there might be) no insertion into the walls of the house. (7) And the house when it was being built was built of perfect stones from the quarry, and neither hammer, ax, nor any tool of iron, was heard in the house while it was being built. (8) The door to the middle chamber was in the right side of the house; and by winding stairs they went up into the middle chamber, and from the middle unto the third. (9) So he built the house, and finished it; and he covered the house with beams and boards of cedar. (10) And then he built chambers against all the house, five cubits high, and it was fastened to the house with cedar beams.

COMMENTS

The erection of Solomon's Temple was no doubt the greatest event heretofore in the history of Jerusalem. This sanctuary made Jerusalem the religious capital of the land, the Holy City. The profound importance of this building in the eyes of the Jews is indicated by the amount of space devoted to it—four chapters, three of which are of considerable length. The careful and detailed dimensions are not only proofs of the tender veneration with which the Jew regarded the Temple; they are also

indications of the belief that this house was for the Lord and not for man. But as exact and detailed as is the description of this edifice, it is only partial, and the account is so obscure as to leave the modern student in considerable doubt as to what Solomon's Temple was really like. Probably more has been written about this building than about any other building in the ancient world. Yet for all that has been said of the Temple, there are few points on which modern scholars are in agreement.

1. The measurements of the main building exclusive of the porch (v. 3) and the side chambers (v. 5) are first given. If the cubit be reckoned as eighteen inches,¹³ this building was ninety feet long, thirty feet wide, and forty-five feet high (v. 2). From these figures it is obvious that the Temple, in comparison with many church buildings, was a very small building. However, the Temple was never meant for the congregation of worshipers, but only for the presence of God and the priests who ministered before that presence. The congregation never met *within* this building; rather they offered their worship *towards* it. Worshipers congregated in the great courtyard which surrounded the Temple.

2. Before the main building was a porch or vestibule which extended across the entire front or east end of the Temple, and which was fifteen feet in depth (v. 3).

3. The windows are next discussed, and there is quite some disagreement as to the precise meaning of the Hebrew words which describe them. Most scholars now are inclined to regard the windows as being made of fixed lattices, i.e., lattices which were not movable as in domestic architecture (cf. II K 1:2; 13:17). As to the number of Temple windows, the text is silent. Keil¹⁴ conjectures that there were no more than six on each side and probably none in the back.

4. Around the outside wall of the entire building (exclusive of the porch or front) Solomon built three stories or floors which were divided by partitions into distinct compartments (v. 5).

¹³ A cubit was the distance from the tip of the elbow to the tip of the middle finger.

¹⁴ Keil, BCOT, p. 74.

The chambers varied in width, those on the first floor being 7½ feet, those on the second 9 feet, and those on the third floor 10½ feet in width. This difference in the width of each tier was due to successive rebatement of the wall from story to story. The outside of the Temple wall took the shape of three (or four) steps, and presented three ledges for the beams which supported the three floors. For some reason the builders did not wish to tie those beams into the wall itself.¹⁵ The fact that a total rebatement of 4½ feet in the wall of the Temple furnishes an indication of the thickness of the wall.¹⁶

The detailed description of rebatements in verse 6 may have been intended to emphasize the fact that no iron tool had to be used to join those chambers to the wall of the Temple proper. Verse seven then amplifies this point by noting the remarkable fact that no iron tool was used on any of the Temple stones.

The stones used in the Temple construction were "*perfect*," i.e., they were so hewn and prepared at the quarry that no sound of any iron tool was heard at the Temple site when the stones were brought together. The King James erroneously renders the Hebrew word *massa* "before it was brought thither." The word simply means "*quarry*." The location of this quarry is uncertain. It may have been that some of the massive foundation stones were brought from the Lebanon mountains along with the wood. But no doubt the bulk of the stone was quarried in Jerusalem itself. Dr. J.T. Barclay, the first missionary to be sent forth by churches of the Restoration movement, discovered just outside the north wall of Jerusalem the entrance to a vast quarry, which stretched back down and under the Temple mount.¹⁷ Immense quantities of stone have been cut from this mammoth cave through the course of Jerusalem's history.

¹⁵ Some think because they wished to preserve the great and costly stones of the Temple intact; others, because it was inappropriate to make these chambers which were not directly connected with worship, part of the sacred edifice.

¹⁶ Keil (BCOT, p. 71) estimates the thickness at the base of the Temple wall to have been about 9 feet, a thickness quite in keeping with the remains of great buildings from antiquity. In Ezekiel's Temple (Ezek. 41:5) the thickness of the walls was 7½ feet.

¹⁷ Barclay, CGK, p. 118.

The ground level chambers no doubt had doors which are passed over by the sacred historian. He does, however, feel compelled to relate how one was able to enter the second and third stories. The door leading to the second story was on the ground floor on the right (i.e., south) side of the building. This door seems to have been in the *external* wall¹⁸ of the side structure, not in the wall of the sanctuary itself. This door led to a winding stairway which, it would appear, was the only means of access to the upper stories (v. 8). It cannot certainly be ascertained whether this entrance to the upper stories was located in the *middle* of the right side or in the front by the side of the porch.

5. The roof of the house was made of beams and boards of cedar wood (v. 9). The roof was most likely flat as was customary in ancient temples and houses.

The height of these side chambers is brought out in verse 10. Each story was 7½ feet high. The three stories would altogether measure 22½ feet. With allowance for the joists and floors, the entire exterior height of the structure would be in the neighborhood of 27-30 feet high. This would leave a clear space of something like 18-21 feet between the side structure and the top of the Temple proper, assuming, of course, that the roof of the side chambers was flat. The side chambers were "*fastened to the house with cedar beams,*" i.e., the joists which supported the different stories rested upon the rebates in the Temple wall.

There is no indication as to how many separate chambers the three tiers about the Temple contained. Keil estimates that there were thirty. Doubtlessly each chamber had a window, but this is not indicated in the text. These chambers served as storage area for Temple treasures and gifts to the Temple which were made in all kinds of produce. Perhaps some of them were occupied by the priests who were on duty in the Temple.¹⁹

¹⁸ Gray (OTL, p. 156), however, thinks this entrance to the side chambers was from within.

¹⁹ Tuck (FTK, p. 101) sees the main purpose of the side chambers as structural. They were intended as buttresses to support the walls of the main building "which were liable to bulge out in consequence of the great weight of the cedar roof."

C. THE PROMISE TO SOLOMON 6:11-14

TRANSLATION

(11) And the word of the LORD came unto Solomon, saying, (12) With regard to this house which you are building, if you continue to walk in My statutes and My judgments you execute, and you keep all My commandments to walk in them, then I will establish My word with you which I spoke unto David your father. (13) And I will dwell in the midst of the children of Israel, and I will not forsake My people Israel. (14) So Solomon built the house and finished it.

COMMENTS

During the course of the building of the Temple the Lord came to Solomon with a gracious promise. While this promise is absent from the Greek or Septuagint version of the Old Testament, there is no substantial reason to question its genuineness. The word of the Lord came to Solomon on this occasion (v. 11) probably through a prophetic intermediary (Nathan?). That God spoke to Solomon directly is ruled out by 9:2 which alludes to the *second* direct revelation to that king. The promise contained in these words is essentially a renewal of that gracious promise made by Nathan to David some years earlier.

In effect the message of the Lord contained an implied commendation of Solomon for having begun such a noble work as the construction of the Temple. If Solomon continued to follow the leading and direction of the Lord, God would establish or confirm the words of promise spoken to David in II Samuel 7:12ff. (v. 12). In addition, a new element was introduced into the promise. God promised that He would dwell in the midst of His people (v. 13). Just as God had pledged that He would occupy the Tabernacle (Exod. 25:8; 29:45), so now He assured Solomon that the house being constructed would be His earthly dwelling place. These verses point to the conditional character

of God's association with the Temple, a point emphasized again and again by the prophets of Israel. It was the prophetic recognition of this conditional aspect of Israel's relation to God which made it possible for the destruction of the Temple to be recognized not as a sign of divine impotence, but rather as a result of unfaithfulness to the covenant. Thus encouraged by the gracious promise of the Lord, Solomon proceeded with the construction of the interior of the Temple (v. 14).

D. THE INTERIOR OF THE HOUSE 6:15-35

Verse 15 resumes the description of the building of the Temple which was interrupted in verses 11-14 by the account of the divine communication which came to Solomon. In this paragraph the author discusses (1) the paneling and partitioning of the house (vv. 15-22); (2) the cherubim of the Debir (vv. 23-28); (3) interior decorations (vv. 29-30); and (4) the Temple doors (vv. 31-35).

1. THE PANELING AND PARTITIONING OF THE HOUSE (6:15-22)

TRANSLATION

(15) And he built the walls of the house within with boards of cedar from the floor of the house unto the walls of the ceiling; he covered the inside with wood, and he covered the floor of the house with planks of fir. (16) And at twenty cubits, from the sides of the house he built planks of cedar from the floor to the walls of the ceiling; he even built them for it within, even for a Debir, the most holy place. (17) Forty cubits was the house, that is the anterior Temple. (18) And the cedar of the house within was engraved work of gourds and flower blossoms; all was cedar, no stone being seen. (19) And the Debir he prepared in the midst of the house within, to set there the ark of the covenant of the LORD. (20) And the interior

of the Debir was twenty cubits in length, twenty cubits in width and twenty cubits in height; and he covered it with pure gold, and he covered the altar with cedar. (21) And Solomon covered the house within with pure gold, and he hung chains of gold before the Debir, and he covered it with gold. (22) And the whole house he covered with gold until he had finished all the house; also the entire altar which was in front of the Debir he covered with gold.

COMMENTS

The interior stone walls of the Temple were lined with wood in order to make it possible to overlay them with gold from the floor to the "*walls of the ceiling*," i.e., the point where the walls meet the ceiling. According to the Chronicler (II C 3:6) the interior walls were also ornamented with precious stones. The wood flooring in the Temple was fir, more technically the Aleppo pine (v. 15). Thirty feet from the west end of the house, Solomon constructed a partition from floor to ceiling which separated the Debir or most holy place from the rest of the house (v. 16). That portion of the structure in front of the Debir was sixty feet long (v. 17). The cedar paneling in the house was covered with engraved work. Authorities are divided as to the nature of this engraved work, some arguing that it was bas-relief, and others, that figures were cut into the wood. The "*gourds*" were oval ornaments (resembling the wild gourd) which ran in rows along the walls (Keil). The "*open flowers*" (lit., *burstings of flowers*) are probably to be understood as flower blossoms. These beautiful walls of wood completely covered the stone walls on the interior of the Temple (v. 18).

At the rear of the Temple structure Solomon constructed the Debir,²⁰ the Holy of Holies, which served the primary purpose

²⁰ The word *Debir* is derived from a Semitic root signifying back or behind, i.e., the hindmost or inner most room. There is no reason to relate this word to *daber*, "*to speak*" and thereby associate the word with an oracle. Honor, JCBR, p. 92.

of housing the ark of the covenant (v. 19). On the inside the Debir was a cube of thirty feet. The Holy of Holies of the Tabernacle was a cube of fifteen feet, and the New Jerusalem was a cube of twelve thousand furlongs. Geometric symbolism is obviously intended in these passages with the cube most likely symbolizing absolute perfection. The Debir was overlaid with pure (lit., *shut up*) gold from which all impurities had been removed. The lavish use of gold in the interior of the Temple must also have had symbolic import as it was never seen except by the priests. Perhaps the gold symbolized light and purity (Job 37:22, 23; Rev. 21:18), and hence was most appropriate for the abode of Him who dwells in light (I Tim. 6:16). The overlaying was not gilding, but little plates of gold were attached to the wood with nails. In front of the Debir was a small stone altar that Solomon covered with cedar (v. 20). Upon the altar incense was offered before the Invisible Presence of God within the Debir.

Since the height of the Debir was thirty feet and the height of the entire Temple structure was forty-five feet, there must have been some space *above* the Debir.²¹ Keil identifies this space as the "*upper chambers*" of II Chronicles 3:9 which were overlaid with gold. But what purpose would such a space serve? Perhaps this chamber was empty and served only to procure the cubical shape of the Debir beneath. It has also been suggested that the relics of the Tabernacle were stored in this upper chamber.

Verse 21 is extremely difficult to translate and interpret, and opinions as to its meaning are quite varied. It would seem that gold chains hung in front of the partition which separated the Debir from the remainder of the building. Whether these chains had some functional purpose²² or were placed there

²¹ This assumes (1) that the Temple had a flat roof, and (2) that the height of the roof was uniform throughout the whole structure. It is *possible that the roof of the Debir section of the building was some fifteen feet lower than that of the house.*

²² Keil (BCOT, p. 78) believes that the door to the Debir was fastened shut with these gold chains until the Day of Atonement.

purely for aesthetic reasons cannot be ascertained. The clause, "and he covered it with gold," probably refers to the cedar partition itself, though this is by no means certain.²³ As a matter of fact the whole house, possibly including the porch (II C 3:4), was covered with gold²⁴ as well as the altar of incense which stood before the Debir (v. 22).

2. THE CHERUBIM IN THE DEBIR (6:23-28)

TRANSLATION

(25) And within the Debir he made two cherubim with olive wood, ten cubits was the height of each one. (24) And five cubits was the wing of one cherub, and five cubits the wing of the other cherub, ten cubits from wing tip to wing tip. (25) And the other cherub was ten cubits; the two cherubim were of one measurement and one shape. (26) The height of the one cherub was ten cubits, and so also was the other cherub. (27) And he put the cherubim within the inner house and they stretched forth the wings of the cherubim so that the wing of one touched a wall, and the wing of the other cherub touched the other wall, and their wings touched one another in the midst of the house. (28) And he covered the cherubim with gold.

COMMENTS

Two giant cherubim made of the precious wood of the wild olive tree dominated the interior of the Debir. Each was fifteen

²³ Keil (BCOT, p. 79) thinks it is the cedar-covered stone altar mentioned in verse 20 which is being alluded to here.

²⁴ Stinespring (IDB, R-Z, 537) suggests that the text refers to *inlay* rather than *overlay*. Pfeiffer (UK, p. 63) concurs in this interpretation.

feet high (v. 23) and had a wingspan of fifteen feet (v. 24). The two figures were exactly the same size and shape (vv. 25, 26). It is useless to conjecture as to the appearance of the cherubim.²⁵ Modern scholars tend to think of them as resembling the Egyptian sphinx—human-headed, winged lions.²⁶ Archaeological discoveries in Palestine have brought to light representations of such creatures which may well be the Biblical cherubim. Keil, on the other hand, thinks of the cherubim as having human form and as standing upright on their feet.²⁷ The Temple cherubim did not face each other as did their Tabernacle counterparts; but faced east toward the Holy Place (II C 3:13).

Each wing of the cherubim was five cubits long. The four wings stretched out across the entire width (20 cubits) of the Debir. The wing tips of the two figures touched in the center of that Holy Place (v. 27).²⁸

Between the bodies of the cherubim there was a clear space of several feet where the ark of the covenant would rest. These cherubim too were overlaid with gold (v. 28). No function is assigned to the cherubim. From other Scripture references, however, it seems that they symbolized God's presence.

3. INTERIOR DECORATIONS (6:29-30)

TRANSLATION

(29) And all the walls of the house round about he carved with reliefs of cherubim, palm trees and open flowers within and

²⁵ Josephus (*Ant.* VIII, 3.3): "Nobody can tell or even conjecture what was the shape of these."

²⁶ See the article "Cherubim" in NBD, pp. 208-209; and the article "Angel" in IDB, A-D, 131.

²⁷ Keil, BCOT, p. 79.

²⁸ The wings were evidently fastened to the back of each cherub and placed so close to one another on the shoulder blades that the small space between their starting points is not taken into consideration in the calculation of their length.

without. (30) And the floor of the house he covered with gold within and without.

COMMENTS

Two further details of the interior decoration are added in verses 29-30. The entire wall of the house, the *Debir*, the main sanctuary and perhaps even the porch, were decorated with reliefs of cherubim, palm trees and open flowers (v. 29). The palm trees *may* represent the tree of life in the Garden of Eden which was to be guarded by cherubim, (Gen. 3:24).²⁹ The flowers may well have been lilies such as decorated the top of the front pillars (7:19). There can be no certainty about the precise form or about the arrangement of these ornamental figures.³⁰ Caution must also be exercised in speculating about the possible symbolic import of these figures. A second detail in these verses is that the floor of the house both in the *Debir* and outside of it was covered with gold (v. 30).

4. THE TEMPLE DOORS (6:31-35)

TRANSLATION

(31) And the entrance of the *Debir* he made doors of olive, and the lintel and the side posts were a fifth part. (32) And two of the doors were of olive wood, and he carved upon them cherubim, palm trees and open flowers, and covered it with gold, and spread the gold over the cherubim and the palm trees. (33) So also for the entrance of the Temple he made posts of olive wood, a fourth part. (34) And the two doors were of fir

²⁹ The motif of cherubim guarding palm trees, probably thought of as a tree of life, is well known in the art of the ancient Near East. See Matheny and Honeycutt, BC, p. 175.

³⁰ Arguing from the analogy of Egyptian temples, Keil contends for two or three rows. In Ezekiel's Temple description, the palm trees alternated with the cherubim, so that there was always one cherub standing between two palm trees (Ezek. 41:18).

wood, the one door being two leaves folding, and the other door two leaves folding. (35) And he carved on them cherubim, palm trees and open flowers, and he spread gold evenly over the engraving.

COMMENTS

The words describing the olive wood doors which led to the Debir are an enigma. Literally the Hebrew reads "*the frame, doorposts, fifth,*" which is obviously capable of various interpretations. Some suggest that the frame of the entrance was pentagonal, having the form of a triangle set on the top of a rectangle.³¹ But pentagonal doorways are without parallel in the architecture of the Near East. Perhaps the simplest explanation is that the entrance to the Debir, inclusive of the side posts which helped to form it, occupied one-fifth of the cedar partition which separated the holy from the most holy place (v. 31). These doors to the Debir had relief carvings upon them similar to those on the walls, and they were overlaid with gold as well. He "*spread the gold upon the cherubim and palms*" so that all the figures—the elevations and depressions of the carved work—were impressed into the gold leaf and were thus plainly seen (v. 32). The author of Kings does not mention the curtain which hung inside the Debir and which prevented any priest from gazing into the Debir when the doors were opened once each year on the day of atonement (II C 3:14).

In a similar manner Solomon made doors for the entire Temple structure. These doors occupied the fourth part of the width of the front wall of the Temple. Since the width of the Temple was thirty feet, the doorway consequently would measure 7½ feet. While the doorposts were of olive wood (v. 33), the doors themselves were of fir. Each door consisted

³¹ Slotki, SBB, p. 45. Honor (JCBR, p. 97) suggests that the doorposts had five sides instead of the usual four. Such a construction might serve to let the doors of the Debir swing wider than would normally be the case with a conventional square doorpost.

THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOLOMON'S TEMPLE 6:36-38

of two leaves or panels which opened on hinges (v. 34). It is impossible to determine whether the doors were divided *lengthwise* into two narrow leaves (Hammond) or *widthwise* about half way up (Keil). These doors, like the inner doors of the Debir, were decorated with figures of cherubim, palm trees and flowers and then were overlaid with gold (v. 35).

E. OTHER DETAILS OF THE TEMPLE CONSTRUCTION 6:36-38

TRANSLATION

(36) And he built the inner court with three rows of hewn stone and a row of cedar beams. (37) In the fourth year the foundation of the house of the LORD was laid in the month of Ziv. (38) And in the eleventh year in the month Bul (which is the eighth month) he finished the house in all of its details and according to all specifications. So he was seven years in building it.

COMMENTS

The description of the building concludes with a brief reference to the construction of the inner court. This court was enclosed by a wall formed by three rows of hewn stones and a row of cedar beams. The cedar beams were used instead of coping stones. It would seem from II Chronicles 7:3 that this wall was low enough to permit men to look over it. Jeremiah (36:10) refers to this court as "*the higher court*" because it occupied a higher level than the "*great court*" mentioned by the Chronicler. Several passages suggest that there may have been chambers in or around this inner court.³² There is no indication, however, that these chambers were built in the

³² II Kings 23:11; Jeremiah 35:2; 36:10.

time of Solomon. The size of this court remains a matter of conjecture. If, as in other matters, the dimensions of the Tabernacle were doubled, this court would measure three hundred feet east to west and a hundred fifty feet north to south.

The account of the Temple construction concludes with a note as to the time involved in the building operation. As already related in 6:1, the foundation of the Temple was laid in the fourth year of Solomon and the second month, the month of Ziv (v. 37). The work was completed in the eleventh year of Solomon, in the eighth month, the month of Bul (October-November). This means the house was 7½ years in the building, and the sacred historian rounds this off to seven years. The construction period was short if one considers the magnitude of the undertaking, but long enough, if one considers the enormous numbers of people engaged in the project.

How the roof of the Temple was supported is not indicated. Some have argued that such a massive roof would have to be supported by pillars—four in the Debir and ten in the holy place.

CAPSULE HISTORY OF SOLOMON'S TEMPLE		
EVENT	REFERENCES	DATE B.C.
Construction of the Temple by Solomon	I K 6-7; II C 3-4	966-960
Dedication of the Temple	I K 8; II C 5-6	960
House filled with the "glory of the Lord"	I K 8:10, 11; II C 5:13-14	960
Temple plundered by Shishak	I K 14:25-28; II C 12:2-9	927
Abomination introduced to Temple worship by Maacah, mother of Abijam	I K 15:2, 12, 13	913-911
Asa cleanses the Temple	I K 15:11-15; II C 15:8-16	911-900
Asa uses Temple treasures to bribe Benhadad	I K 15:18, 19; II C 16:1-2	895

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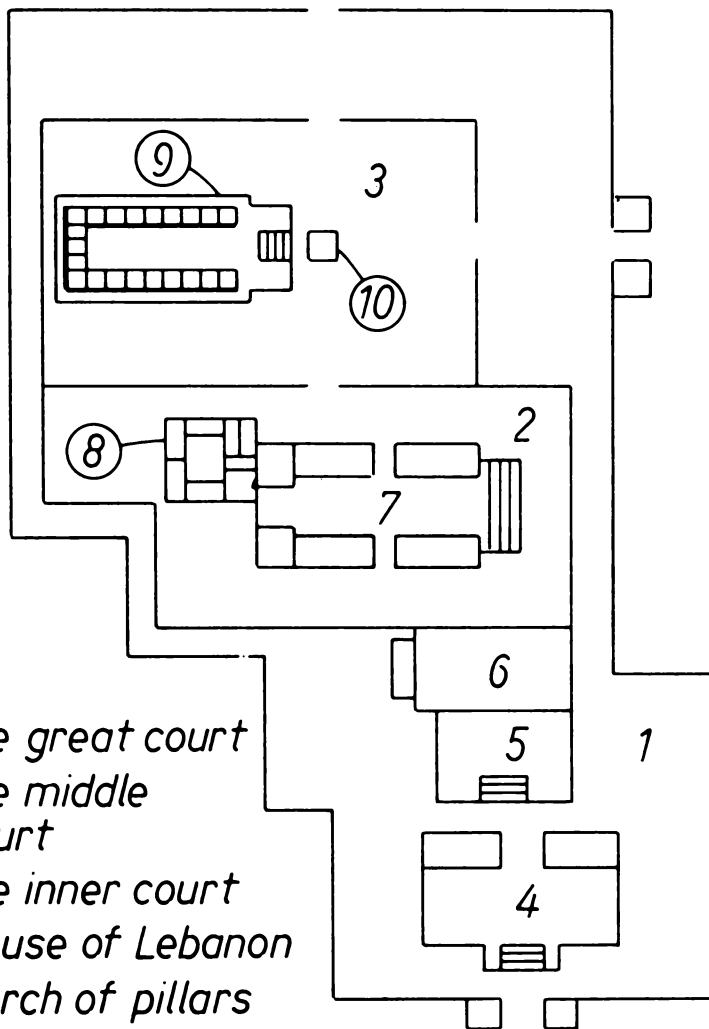
THE CONSTRUCTION OF SOLOMON'S TEMPLE 6:36-38

(Continued from previous page)

CAPSULE HISTORY OF SOLOMON'S TEMPLE		
EVENT	REFERENCES	DATE B.C.
Jehoshaphat enlarged the Temple court	II C 20:5	870-853
Temple repairs made by Joash	II K 12:4-16; II C 24:4-14	835
Uzziah tried to enter Holy Place—smitten with leprosy	II C 26:16	750
Jotham refuses to enter Temple	II C 27:2	750-731
Jotham built a new gate for the Temple	II K 15:35; II C 27:3	739-735
Ahaz bribes Tiglath-pileser with Temple treasure	II K 16:8	733
Ahaz introduces a pagan altar—removes bronze altar, bases and ornaments of lavers and oxen under the Sea	II K 16:10-17	732
Hezekiah cleanses the Temple	II C 29	720-715
Hezekiah removes the gold leaf from the doors of Temple (which he himself had put there) as payment to Sennacherib	II K 18:14-16; II C 32:31	701
Idolatrous altars erected in Temple by Manasseh—an Asherah—worship of host of heaven—horses and chariot dedicated to the sun in Temple court	II K 21:3-7; 23:7, 11	
Josiah cleansed the Temple—law book discovered within	II K 22-23; II C 34-35	632-621
Pagan practices reintroduced under Jehoiakim and Zedekiah	Ezek. 8:7-18	609-587
Nebuchadnezzar carries off some Temple vessels	Dan. 1:1-3	605
Additional Temple vessels carried to Babylon	II K 24:13; II C 36:7	597
Temple destroyed by Babylonians—pillars, Sea broken up, carried off along with lesser vessels.	II K 25:13-16	587



MOBILE LAVER FOR THE TEMPLE



1. The great court
2. The middle court
3. The inner court
4. House of Lebanon
5. Porch of pillars
6. Throne porch
7. Royal palace
8. Harem
9. Temple
10. Altar

SOLOMON'S PALACE
COMPLEX

CHAPTER SIX

OTHER CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS

I Kings 7:1-51

In chapter seven the discussion of Solomon's construction works continues. After describing concisely the royal palace complex built by Solomon (vv. 1-12), the author focuses his attention on the metal works of Hiram the artisan (vv. 13-51).

I. THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE PALACE COMPLEX 7:1-12

TRANSLATION

(1) Now his own house, Solomon was thirteen years in the process of building; and he finished all his house. (2) And he built the house of the forest of Lebanon; a hundred cubits was its length and fifty cubits was its width and thirty cubits was its height, upon four rows of cedar pillars, and cedar beams upon the pillars. (3) And it was covered with cedar above the chambers which were upon the forty-five pillars, fifteen to a row. (4) And there were beam-layers in three rows and outlook¹ was opposite outlook three times. (5) And all the doors and posts² were squared with windows, and light was opposite light in three ranks. (6) And he made a porch of pillars; fifty cubits was its length and thirty cubits was its width, and the porch was before them, and the pillars and the threshold were before them. (7) Then he made a porch for the throne on which he would render judgment, the porch of judgment, and it was covered with cedar from one side of the floor to the others. (8) And

¹ The Hebrew word, which occurs only here, is different from the ordinary word for window, and probably denotes a larger opening.

² Many scholars follow the translation of the Septuagint and render the word "windows" as in the previous verse. However, this translation necessitates an emendation of the Hebrew text.

his house where he would dwell had another court within the porch, of the same construction. And he made a house for the daughter of Pharaoh whom Solomon had married, like unto this porch. (9) All of these were of costly stones, according to the measure of hewn stones sawed with saws, within and without, from foundation to coping, and from the outside unto the great court. (10) And the foundation was of precious stones, great stones, stones of ten cubits and stones of eight cubits. (11) And the superstructure was of precious stones according to the measure of hewn stones, and cedars. (12) And as for the great court, there were round about it three rows of hewn stones, and a row of cedar beams as in the inner court of the house of the LORD, and the porch of the house.

COMMENTS

The first twelve verses of chapter seven constitute a break in the long account of the Temple. Before passing on to the description of the contents of the Temple buildings, the historian pauses to mention other royal buildings erected by Solomon. The translators of the Septuagint version of the Old Testament shifted this section to the end of this chapter. There is, however, logic in the order of the Hebrew Bible. The description of the building of the Temple culminates with the building of the inner court (6:36); after the brief chronological note in 6:37-38 the description proceeds to the outer court (7:9) and the buildings contained therein.

Though Solomon was engaged for 7½ years in the construction of the Temple, it took thirteen years for him to build his house; i.e., the palace complex. This longer period spent on his own house does not argue selfishness or worldiness on the part of Solomon. On the contrary, it speaks well for his piety that he built the Temple first. Three factors account for the longer construction of the king's house. First, much time was saved on the Temple construction due to the fact that David

and Solomon had gathered materials before the actual building operation began. Second, the buildings which made up the palace complex were much larger and thus this undertaking was a more extensive one. Third, a special force of laborers was employed in the erection of the Temple while the number of workers was no doubt greatly diminished in this latter project. The thirteen years date from the completion of the Temple so that in the construction of both the Temple and the palace complex Solomon was engaged for twenty years (9:10). By "*Solomon's house*" is not meant his private residence alone, but a complex of buildings more or less connected, the individual components of which are described in verses 2-12.

1. *The house of the forest of Lebanon* (7:2-5). In describing the outer court, the author begins from the outer entrance and thus deals first with the house of the forest of Lebanon, the building farthest removed from the Temple. This building received its name from the fact that it was built of cedar wood and from the fact that it contained a virtual forest of cedar pillars. Owing to the brevity of the account and the obscurity of the text, attempts to mentally and pictorially reconstruct this building are largely pure conjecture.

With its dimensions of a hundred fifty by seventy-five feet, the house of the forest of Lebanon covered over four times the area of the Temple building. It does not follow that this entire area of 11,250 square feet was all under roof, for it seems that the house was built around an open courtyard. The height of the building was the same as that of the Temple, viz., forty-five feet. The structure was supported by four rows of cedar pillars which probably ran around all four sides, and by great support beams (v. 2) which stretched from these pillars to a stone wall (v. 9). How these pillars were arranged or what the number of pillars might have been remains a matter of conjecture.

It would seem that the house of the forest of Lebanon had three tiers of side chambers modeled after those of the Temple. These side chambers, roofed over with cedar, rested on the pillars mentioned in verse 2. There were forty-five chambers

arranged fifteen in a row on each tier or story³ (v. 3). The rows of side-rooms were built one over the other by means of layers of beams. Things were so arranged that the windows looking out upon the court from one side corresponded exactly to those on the opposite side of the building (v. 4). The doors—both those through which the different rooms were connected with one another and those through which the building and its stories were reached—were square (v. 5). The upper stories were no doubt reached by a winding staircase located on the front side of the building. Keil conjectures that the cedar pillars in the building were twelve feet tall, and the side chambers on top of them thirty-three feet tall. Allowing for the thickness of supporting beams, this would still leave nine feet for the internal height of each story. To judge from I Kings 10:17 and Isaiah 22:8 this building served as a treasury and armory. Possibly it was also the residence of the royal bodyguard.

2. *The porch of pillars (7:6)*. The porch of pillars was no doubt a covered colonnade; i.e., it had a roof but no sides. The pillars were its only walls. From the fact that this porch was seventy-five feet long, the same width as the house of the forest of Lebanon, some commentators have concluded that it served as the entrance to that building. The porch was forty-five feet in width or depth. A small porch of pillars and steps stood in front of the colonnade. The size of this building and the fact that it had itself a porch favor the view that the porch of pillars was an independent structure.⁴ No doubt it stood between the house of the forest of Lebanon and the hall of justice and may have connected the two buildings. What, if any, special function the porch of pillars served is not stated. It may have been that here litigants awaited the call to present their case in the hall of justice.

³ Hammond (PC, p. 125) suggests that the chambers were only built on three sides of the rectangular building and that on each tier they were divided six to each long side and three to the rear.

⁴ As opposed to the view that the porch of pillars was simply the vestibule to the house of the forest of Lebanon or the hall of justice.

3. *The hall of justice (7:7)*. While the function of the third building in the palace complex is explicitly stated, the description is even more vague than in the preceding cases. This building served the dual purpose of an audience room and a court of justice. It was open only in front, and was shut in by solid walls on the other three sides. The interior was covered with cedar "*from one side of the floor to the other*" (lit., *from floor to floor*). Keil thinks that the building was two stories and that the walls from the ground floor to the floor of the second story were covered with cedar. Others think the expression means that the walls and ceiling from one side of the floor to the opposite side were covered with cedar.

4. *The palace (7:8a)*. After the description of the public quarters of the palace, the private residence of the king is mentioned. The author of Kings regarded this phase of Solomon's building activity as comparatively unimportant, and so gives only brief and vague notice to it. Three details only are known of the palace: (1) it was located within a courtyard; (2) this courtyard was within the porch of justice; i.e., the audience room and hall of justice served as the principal entrance into the king's residence; and (3) the royal residence was built on the same order as the porch of justice.

5. *The palace of Pharaoh's daughter (7:8b)*. The house of Pharaoh's daughter was probably distinct from the dwelling-place of the king and located behind the latter. This would seem to have been the private residence of the queen, not the harem where all the wives and concubines were collected.

All of the stones which were used in the construction of the palace complex were of the finest quality, shaped to certain specified dimensions with iron saws. In contrast with the practice of the Phoenician stone-masons who left the outer surface rough, these stones were dressed on all sides. The entire wall was constructed of such stones from the foundation to the coping, the projecting stones on which the beams rested at the top. The pavement of the courtyard in which these buildings were located—the outer court—was of sawed stones (v. 9). The foundation stones were much larger than those reared

upon them, some being twelve feet long and others as much as fifteen feet long (v. 10). The stones of the superstructure were no doubt smaller than those of the foundation, but more carefully smoothed and faced (v. 11).

The palace complex, like the Temple, had two courtyards. The smaller court mentioned in verse 8 seems to have been enclosed among the buildings. The "*great court*" probably surrounded the whole complex. This court was enclosed by a wall consisting of three rows of hewn stones and a coping of cedar (v. 12). It thus resembled the wall of the Temple courtyard (5:36) and also, it would seem, the wall of the court within the porch⁵ (cf. v. 8).

II. THE METALWORK FOR THE TEMPLE 7:13-51

In the remaining verses of chapter 7, the historian focuses his attention for the most part on the bronze metalwork produced by a Phoenician artisan in the Jordan valley. That the various items are described in such detail illustrates the wonderment with which the Hebrews viewed such craftsmanship. The great artisan himself is first introduced (vv. 13-14). Then the historian describes at length the massive bronze pillars which were such a striking feature of the Temple entrance (vv. 15-22). Next the attention shifts to the furnishings of the courtyard and the implements used in connection with them (vv. 23-47). The account of the Temple construction ends with a brief mention of the metallic objects which were used in the inner court (vv. 48-51).

⁵ It is almost impossible to decide whether "porch of the house" refers to the porch of judgment (v. 7) or to the porch of the Temple. Hammond (PC, p. 127) is probably right in taking this to be a reference to the court within the porch mentioned in verse 8.

A. HIRAM THE CRAFTSMAN 7:13-14

TRANSLATION

(13) Now King Solomon had sent and secured Hiram from Tyre. (14) He was a widow's son, from the tribe of Naphtali, and his father was a man of Tyre, a craftsman in bronze; and he was full of wisdom, understanding and knowledge of working all bronze work. And he came to King Solomon and did all of his work.

COMMENTS

To construct the metallic furnishings of the Temple, Hiram the king sent to Solomon, at this request (II C 2:6), a workman who also bore the name Hiram.⁶ He was the son of a widow of the tribe of *Naphtali*, and his father was a Tyrian by birth.

The Chronicler says his mother was "*of the daughters of Dan*" (II C 2:14). The town of Dan was situated in the tribal region of *Naphtali*.⁷ Apparently this Israelite widow had married a man of Tyre, and Hiram was the son of that second mixed marriage.

Hiram, like his father before him, was a skilled worker in bronze, a mixture of copper and tin. Chronicles extends his area of expertise to gold, silver, brass, iron, stone, timber, purple, etc. (II C 2:14). Bronze alone is mentioned here because the following section is limited exclusively to the ornaments

⁶ The name is also spelled *Huram* (II C 2:13; 4:11, 16) and *Hirom* (v. 40). Because of his skills, in Chronicles he receives the title '*abh*' ("*father*") which probably is equivalent to the English word "master." Gray (OTL, p. 171) thinks *Huram-abhi* was the full name of the craftsman, thus regarding '*abhi*' as part of his name, rather than a title.

⁷ Keil (BCOT, p. 96) has a more complicated explanation of this apparent Kings-Chronicles discrepancy: She was a *Danite* by birth, but had married into the tribe of *Naphtali*. Slotki (SBB, p. 49) thinks the phrase "*of the tribe of Naphtali*" describes Hiram because his *father* was of that tribe. His father subsequently became a resident of Tyre.

and furnishings of that metal. Like Bezalel, his counterpart in the days of Moses (Ex. 31:3), Hiram was filled with "*wisdom,⁸ understanding and knowledge*" with regard to metallic works. It is perhaps significant that while Bezalel the Hebrew craftsman is said to be "*filled with the spirit of God,*" no such statement is made of Hiram. Thus Bezalel's skill is regarded as a supernatural gift while Hiram's "*wisdom*" was a natural endowment. Of course Hiram did not personally and singly produce the Temple furnishings, but rather acted as a superintendent of the various crews which worked on this ornamentation. No doubt he brought several assistants with him from Tyre.

B. THE BRONZE PILLARS 7:15-22

TRANSLATION

(15) And he formed the two bronze pillars, eighteen cubits was the height of one pillar and the circumference of the second pillar was twelve cubits. (16) And two capitals he made to put on top of the pillars, cast of bronze, the height of the one capital was five cubits, and five cubits was the height of the other capital. (17) Nets of network and cords, chainwork, were upon the capitals which were on top of the pillars, seven to one capital and seven to the other. (18) And he made the pomegranates, even two rows round about the one network to cover the capitals that were upon the top of the pillars⁹; and so did he for the other capital. (19) And the capitals which were upon the top of the pillars were of lily-work in the manner of the porch, four cubits. (20) And the capitals upon the two pillars (he made) also above the belly which was on the other side

⁸ "Wisdom" (Heb., *chokmah*) is empirical wisdom, practical insight and sagacity and is used of the skill of the seaman (Ps. 107:27), the general (I S 10:13) and the artisan (Ex. 28:3).

⁹ In this verse it appears that the Hebrew word for "pomegranates" and "pillars" have been transposed. Most commentaries follow the order as given in the Septuagint which is also supported by two Hebrew manuscripts.

of the network, and the pomegranates were two hundred in rows round about upon the other capital. (21) And he set up the pillars at the porch of the Temple, and set up the right pillar, and called its name Jachin, and he set up the left pillar and called its name Boaz. (22) And upon the top of the pillars he made lily-work; and the work of the pillars was finished.

COMMENTS

Two enormous pillars of bronze are first mentioned as being, no doubt, the most prominent work of Hiram. Each of these two pillars was twenty-seven feet tall not counting the 7½ feet of the capital, but probably including the height of the pedestals. The height of these pillars would thus approximate that of a modern three story building. The pillars were hollow, the metal being four finger breadths thick (Jer. 52:21). The circumference (lit., *a line went around*) was eighteen feet (v. 5). The statement of the height of one pillar and the circumference of the other is to be understood as an abbreviated expression signifying that the two pillars were identical in size.

A problem arises concerning the height of these pillars when one studies the parallel passage in II Chronicles 3:15. The Chronicler gives a figure for the height (?) of the pillars equivalent to 52½ feet. It is interesting, however, that Chronicles does not use the Hebrew word for height which is used in Kings (*qomah*), but the Hebrew word usually translated length (*'orech*). Chronicles *may* be giving the *total* length of both pillars minus the pedestals to which they were anchored; Kings may be giving the height of each pillar individually, including the height of the pedestal.¹⁰

A bronze capital or crown adorned the top of each pillar,

¹⁰ Another possibility is that the actual height of each pillar of 17½ cubits and that Kings has rounded off the figure to eighteen cubits. The 17½ cubits of each pillar combined would yield the thirty-five cubits of II C 3:15. Most conservative scholars, however, concede that the figure in Chronicles has been corrupted in the course of transmission of the text and should read eighteen cubits as in Kings.

These capitals were five cubits high¹¹ (v. 16). The capitals were each elaborately decorated, but it is almost impossible to speculate on what the exact form of these decorations might have been.

A row of one hundred (v. 20) pomegranates ran around the pillars below the network (chainwork) with a second row of one hundred above. The pomegranates would thus form a double border to the chainwork (v. 18). Probably the pomegranate was selected for its beautiful form rather than because of any symbolic import.¹² This fruit was also portrayed in various colors on the hem of the robe of the high priestly ephod (Ex. 28:33, 34; 39:24).

Verse 19 has been taken by some to refer to a second capital which was superimposed on the one which was just described. It is better, however, to regard this verse as further describing the single capital which crowned each pillar. It would seem that the lower part of the capital to which the braided work (*“network”*) was fastened, was rounded in the form of a pitcher or caldron.¹³ The decoration of the upper part of the capitals consisted of sculpture in the form of flowering lilies. The lily-work covered six feet of the total 7½ feet occupied by the capitals. The phrase *“in the manner of the porch”* (lit., *in the porch*) is difficult. Keil’s interpretation, though not without its difficulties, is perhaps the best, viz., that the lily-work on the capitals resembled some lily-work which, it would appear, was in or on the porch of the Temple.¹⁴

Verse 20 should be regarded as a further amplification of verse 19 indicating exactly where the crowns of lily-work were placed on the capitals. The *“belly”* (*“bowl”* in v. 41) was the rounding of the lower portion of the capitals which was behind

¹¹ II K 25:7 gives the height as three cubits. This figure is usually regarded as a scribal miscopying.

¹² Some have suggested that the pomegranates signified fruitfulness in good works; others, that the fruit was an image of the law or covenant of the Lord, and the seeds symbolic of the separate commands of the law.

¹³ See verses 41-42; II C 3:16; 4:12, 13; Jer. 52:23.

¹⁴ The construction of this porch is not minutely described, hence there is no other reference to this decorative lily-work.

or under the plait or network. Two hundred pomegranates were on each capital, one hundred to a row; according to Jeremiah 52:23 ninety-six of the hundred faced the four quarters, the remaining four occupied the four corners. Thus it would appear that this part of the capital was four-square.

Verse 21 raises questions about the precise location and function of the two massive bronze pillars. It would *appear* that they stood *within* the porch, not in front of it as some have suggested. Whether the pillars were functional or whether they were ornamental is a much discussed question. The following lines of thought suggest that these pillars were ornamental rather than functional.

1. The size of these pillars—over thirty-four feet—seems to preclude their being used as supports for the roof.

2. If the pillars had been a functional part of the building, they would almost certainly have been of the same material, i.e., wood or stone. Their metallic composition is certainly an argument for their monumental character.

3. While these columns received special names, no architectural portion of the building was so designated.

4. These two pillars were not mentioned in connection with the building of the Temple and the porch, but are referred to here for the first time in the enumeration of the sacred vessels of the court that were made of bronze.

But if these renowned pillars were ornamental and symbolic—and most modern scholars concede that they were—what religious function did they serve? Some have tried to associate them with the forbidden Canaanite *masseboth*, the memorial monoliths which were a regular feature of Canaanite sanctuaries. Others see a connection with the Egyptian solar cult. Still others regard them as fire-altars or incense burners which may have symbolized the wilderness pillar of fire and pillar of cloud, i.e., God's leadership during the period of the wandering.¹⁵ The first two suggestions can be immediately dismissed as

¹⁵ A theory originally proposed by Robertson-Smith and recently more or less supported by Albright, ARI, pp. 144-48.

unworthy of the Temple of God. The third suggestion, while not impossible, is improbable in as much as the text gives not the slightest hint that these pillars had any more than a symbolic significance.

The two pillars in the porch before the sanctuary symbolized the power and eternity of the God to whom this sacred building was dedicated. The pillar on the right (south) was called "*Jachin*," i.e., "*He shall establish*," and the pillar on the left, "*Boaz*," i.e., "*in Him is strength*." These pillars thus pointed to God as the true support of His sanctuary, and emphasized as well the stability and strength of the kingdom of God of which the Temple was an outward symbol.

Verse 22 repeats verse 19 and serves to underscore the significance of the lily-work atop the two pillars. The capitals themselves roughly resembled a full blown lily-cup, and furthermore had representations of the leaf of the lily superimposed upon it. "The two pillars would thus resemble two giant plants, the column answering to the stalk, the capital to the flower."¹⁶ The implication of verse 22 is that the columns, capitals and decorations were cast separately, and that when the columns were set up, the work was not finished until the decorations had been affixed.

C. THE METALLIC OBJECTS ASSOCIATED WITH THE COURTYARD 7:23-47

Associated with the courtyard of the Temple were the following items: (1) the bronze sea (vv. 23-26); (2) the bronze stands and basins (vv. 27-39); and (3) various small implements (v. 40). For some reason the historian has omitted any reference to the huge bronze altar which was, perhaps, the dominant feature of the court.

¹⁶ Hammond, PC, p. 131.

1. THE BRONZE SEA (7:23-26)

TRANSLATION

(23) And he made the molten sea, ten cubits from one brim to the other; it was circular, and five cubits high with a circumference of thirty cubits. (24) And gourds ran round it under its brim, ten to a cubit, compassing the sea round about. The gourds were cast in two rows when it was cast. (25) It stood upon twelve oxen, three facing north, three facing east; and the sea was set above them and all their hinder parts were inward. (26) And its breadth was the thickness of a hand and its brim was like the brim of a cup, as the blossom of a lily; it contained two thousand baths.

COMMENTS

In addition to the massive front pillars, Hiram made a great bronze water-basin which was called "*the sea*" on account of its unprecedented size and capacity. Like the laver of the Tabernacle (Ex. 30:18-20), this vessel was designed to contain the water necessary for the ablutions of the priests. The sea was circular and measured fifteen feet in diameter, forty-five feet in circumference¹⁷ and 7½ feet in depth (v. 23). The sea was decorated with two rows of gourds numbering ten to a cubit. In contrast to the ornamentation of the capitals of the columns, these ornaments were "*cast when it was cast,*" i.e., they were not attached to the sea after it was made, but were cast in the same mold with the sea. The bronze of which this giant laver was composed had been taken by David from the cities of Hadadezer (I C 18:8; I Sam. 8:8 LXX). The sea rested on twelve oxen, three of which faced each of the four directions of the compass. The oxen faced outward (v. 25). All conjectures as

¹⁷ The sacred historian here uses round figures rather than precise measures, hence the small mathematical discrepancy in the ratio of the diameter to the circumference.

to the height and size of the oxen are of little value. The number twelve pointed to the twelve tribes of Israel as a priestly nation “which cleansed itself here in the persons of its priests, to appear clean and holy before the Lord.”¹⁸

The sea was a handbreadth thick (three inches). The brim of the sea was like that of a cup; i.e., it curved outwards like a lily. The precise shape of the sea is unknown. Some think it was hemispherical, others cylindrical. The prevailing opinion, however, appears to be that it was thirty cubits in circumference only at the brim and that it bellied out considerably below. The capacity according to Kings was two thousand *baths*¹⁹ (v. 26), according to Chronicles three thousand *baths* (II C 4:5). Probably Kings gives the capacity when filled to ordinary height, and Chronicles gives the capacity when filled to the brim. The sea provided water with which the priests could wash (II C 4:6) their hands and feet (Ex. 30:19, 21). Rabbinic tradition indicates that the sea was provided with taps or faucets. It is probable that a basin of some sort was attached to it. Whether the sea was filled by hand or by some special contrivance is impossible to say. It has been computed that such a laver would weigh twenty-five to thirty tons. It was truly a “triumph of bronze working.”²⁰

2. THE BRONZE STANDS AND BASINS (7:27-39)

TRANSLATION

(27) And he made ten stands of bronze; the length of each stand was four cubits, its width four cubits, and its height three cubits. (28) Their construction was the following: they had panels which were set between frames, (29) and on these particular panels were lions, oxen and cherubim; and upon the frames

¹⁸ Keil, BCOT, pp. 104-105.

¹⁹ It was formerly thought that a *bath* was equal to about eight gallons (Slotki). On the basis of stamped jars which have been excavated, a *bath* is now computed to have been about 5½ gallons. See IDB, R-Z, 835.

²⁰ Honor, JCBR, p. 104.

was a pedestal above, and beneath the lions and oxen, there were wreaths, pendant work. (30) And each stand had four bronze wheels with bronze axels and its four feet had supports; beneath the basin were cast the supports with wreaths at each side. (31) And its [the basin] opening was within the crown at the top which projected upward one cubit; and its [the crown] opening was round, as a pedestal was made, a cubit and a half deep. At its opening was engraved work; and its panels were square and not round. (32) And the four wheels were under the panels; the axels of the wheels were connected to the stand. And the height of one wheel was a cubit and a half. (33) And the wheels were like the wheels of a chariot. Their axels, rims, spokes and hubs were all molten. (34) And there were four supports at the four corners of each stand; the supports were of one piece with the stands. (35) And on the top of the stand there was a round band half a cubit high; and on the top, the stays and panels were of one piece with the stand itself. (36) And on the surfaces of its stays and on its panels were engraved cherubim, lions, and palms according to the empty space of each, with wreaths round about. (37) On this manner he made the ten stands of one kind of casting, measure, and form. (38) And he made ten bronze basins, each holding forty *baths*, and each basin four cubits, one basin upon each of the ten stands. (39) And he put five stands upon the right side of the house and five upon the left side of the house; and the sea he put on the right side of the house eastward over against the south.

COMMENTS

In order to clarify this somewhat obscure text it is best to break the passage down topically. After a general description of these stands (vv. 27-29, 37) the historian describes the wheels of the stand (vv. 30, 32-33); the top of the stand (vv. 31, 34-36); the basins or lavers which were supported by the stands (v. 38); and the disposition of the stands (v. 39).

a) *General description of the stands* (vv. 27-28, 37). Hiram

constructed ten identical bronze stands to be placed in the courtyard of the Temple (v. 37). The stands were box-shaped, 6 feet square and 4½ feet high (v. 27). Each stand was constructed of four panels or flat sides²¹ held together by a frame (v. 28). Each panel was decorated with figures or bas-reliefs of lions, oxen and cherubim. Beneath these figures were sculptured festoons of flowers. Upon the square chest was a stand or pedestal for the basin or laver (v. 29).

b) The wheels of the stands (vv. 30, 32-33). The square chests had axles with wheels of bronze so that they could be moved from one spot to another. The chest itself, however, did not rest directly upon the axles, but stood upon four “feet,” which were fastened upon the axles. These “feet” raised the chest above the rim of the wheel so that the sides of the chest, which were ornamented with figures, were left uncovered. The wheels, then, stood *below* the panels of the chest and *not* at the sides of the chest. The wheels were twenty-seven inches in diameter (v. 32) and resembled chariot wheels. The entire wheel work—axles, rim, spokes, and hubs—was cast in bronze (v. 33).

c) The crown (vv. 31, 34-36). Above the “frames” a “pedestal” for the laver itself was mounted (v. 29). Since the “pedestal” was circular and surmounted the rectangular base, it was called a “crown” (v. 31). The “crown” was divided into “panels” which were reinforced at appropriate intervals by “stays,” i.e., extra strong, broad borders (v. 35). The “panels” of the “crown” were decorated with cherubim, lions, palms and wreaths (v. 36). Four angular supports arose from the top four corners of the “frame” to support the elevated “crown” (v. 34). These supports were apparently decorated with wreaths (v. 30). The distance from the top of the “frame” to the top of the “crown” itself was eighteen inches (v. 31).

d) The lavers (v. 38). The lavers which rested upon the portable stands were also cast of bronze. Each laver contained forty *baths*, about two hundred twenty gallons. It is uncertain whether

²¹ Ahaz is said to have removed these panels and thus they could not have been structurally important (II K 16:17).

the "four cubits" of verse 38 refers to the height or to the diameter of the laver (Keil).²²

e) *The disposition of the lavers* (v. 39). The lavers were arranged five on the south and five on the north side of the house. The sea, the massive laver, stood farther forward between the Temple and the altar, only more toward the south, i.e., to the southeast of the Temple. These lavers were used to wash the flesh and fat which were to be consumed upon the altar of burnt-offering. The wheeled stands made it possible to bring water near to the priests who were engaged in preparing the sacrifices. No doubt the lavers were equipped with some faucet by which the water could more easily be utilized by the priests. The number and size of the basins were necessitated by the circumstances that a considerable number of sacrifices had to be made ready for the altar at the same time. The lavers also were used for the purification of worshipers (II C 4:6), and for the cleansing of the altar and court after bloody sacrifices.

The artistic work of these stands was to some extent the same as that of the Temple walls, the only difference being that the Temple decorations were wrought in gold, whereas the ornamentations of these stands were in bronze. Lions and oxen may symbolize the royal and priestly characteristics which, according to Exodus 19:6 combined in the nation worshipping God in this place. It has been estimated that these lavers with their own weight of bronze plus the weight of the water contained in the basin would by conservative estimate have weighed well over a ton.²³

²² The height of all other parts of the stand has been mentioned. If the four cubits refers to the height, then the entire height of the stand and laver together would be about thirteen feet. Hammond (PC, p. 134): "This surprising size is accounted for by remembering the height of the altar, to which the fat and other sacrificial portions had to be transferred from the laver."

²³ Gray, OTL, p. 180.

TABERNACLE - TEMPLE COMPARISONS		
Item	Tabernacle	Temple
Holy Place	20 x 20 Cubits	40 x 20 Cubits
Holy of Holies	10 x 10 x 10	20 x 20 x 20
Whole Structure	40 x 20 Cubits	80 x 40 Cubits
Height	15 Cubits	30 Cubits
Laver	Only One	10 Mobile Lavers and the Molten Sea
Lampstand	Only One	10 Lampstands
Table of Showbread	Only One	10 Tables

D. SUMMARY OF HIRAM'S WORKS 7:40-47

TRANSLATION

(40) And Hiram made the pots,²⁴ the shovels, and the bowls. So Hiram finished making all the work that he made for King Solomon for the house of the LORD. (41) The two pillars and the bowls of the capitals which were atop the two pillars, and the two networks to cover the two bowls of the capitals which were atop the pillars; (42) And the four hundred pomegranates for the two networks, two rows of pomegranates for one network to cover the two bowls of the capitals which were on the surface of the pillars; (43) and the ten bases, and ten lavers on the bases; (44) and one sea, and twelve oxen under the sea; (45) and

²⁴ The standard Hebrew text has *hakkioroth* "lavers." However, the Septuagint and some Hebrew manuscripts suggest the more ancient reading may have been *hassiroth* "pots." Verse 45 and II Chronicles 4:11 also suggest that the reading should be "pots." In the unvocalized Hebrew text there is only one letter difference between the two words.

the pots and the shovels and the bowls; even all these vessels which Hiram made for King Solomon for the house of the LORD, were of bright bronze. (46) In the plain of the Jordan the king cast them in the clay ground between Succoth and Zarethan. (47) And Solomon left all the vessels unweighed because they were exceeding many, neither was the weight of the bronze discovered.

COMMENTS

Verses 40-45 contain a summary of the objects for which Hiram was responsible in Solomon's Temple. His work was as follows:

1. Some of the smaller implements used in the Temple service. He made the pots used for boiling the flesh of the peace offering (cf. I S 2:13, 14); the shovels used for taking away the ashes from the altar (cf. Ex. 27:3; Num. 4:14); and the bowls used for receiving the blood of the sacrificial animals (cf. Ex. 38:3; Num. 4:14).

2. The two massive pillars called Jachin and Boaz.

3. The bowls of the capitals which were atop the bronze pillars.

4. The two networks which covered the bowls of the capitals (v. 41).

5. The four hundred pomegranates which were attached to the networks, two rows of one hundred each on each network (v. 42).

6. The ten portable stands and ten lavers which they supported (v. 43).

7. The great sea which rested on the twelve oxen (v. 44).

8. The smaller implements—the pots, shovels and bowls or basins (v. 45).

In this summary there is no mention of the bronze altar as in II Chronicles 4:1, possibly because it was not made by Hiram. All the objects in this list were made of bright bronze, i.e., bronze polished after casting (v. 45). The casting was done

in Gilead between Succoth and Zarethan. Hiram chose this site because it had an adequate supply of water and good clay readily available and was a convenient place from which to transport the finished product to Jerusalem.²⁵ Apparently earthen boundaries or clay molds were used to form these objects. The casting was done by Hiram, but since Hiram worked for the king, the king is credited with the achievement. Despite the large number of vessels, the quantity of bronze used for making them was insignificant in comparison with the enormous quantity required in making the sea, the bases, the lavers, and the two pillars (v. 47).²⁶

E. THE INTERIOR TEMPLE VESSELS 7:48-51

TRANSLATION

(48) And Solomon made all the vessels which belonged to the house of the LORD: the altar of gold, and the table on which was the bread of the presence was gold; (49) and the five lamp-stands, five on the right and five on the left before the Debir, were of pure gold, and the flowers, the lamps and the tongs were of gold; (50) and the basins, the snuffers, the bowls, the spoons and censers were of pure gold; and the hinges of the doors of the inner house, the Holy of Holies, (and) for the doors of the house, the Temple, were of gold. (51) So all the work was finished which King Solomon made for the house of the LORD. And Solomon brought the holy things of David his father; the silver, the gold and the vessels he put among the treasures of the house of the LORD.

²⁵ Honor, JCBR, p. 108.

²⁶ Another interpretation is that no attempt was made to discover the exact weight of the metal on account of the vast quantities of bronze employed.

COMMENTS

In the final section of chapter 7 the sacred historian enumerates the vessels used inside the Temple. These vessels were all of gold while the vessels used outside the Temple were of bronze. From the fact that Hiram's name is not mentioned here, it would appear that he had nothing to do with the manufacture of these vessels. The following are the objects of gold within the house:

1. The altar of incense.

2. The table of gold upon which the showbread was weekly displayed. The Chronicler mentions that there were ten tables within the Temple (I C 28:16; II C 4:8).

3. The ten lampstands which were arranged five on each side of the Debir.²⁷ Some hold that these lampstands were arranged in a single row, in front of and parallel to the Debir. Others feel the lampstands were arranged in two rows perpendicular to the partition of the Debir. In the latter arrangement these lamps would furnish the light throughout the Holy Place. In the former arrangement the lamps would serve as a barrier before the Debir. The lampstands were decorated with flowers and had seven "*lamps*," extremities which held the oil and wicks. These lampstands were probably fashioned after that of the Tabernacle.

4. The tongs probably were used in connection with the altar of incense (v. 49).

5. The bowls, which were probably used for incense.

6. The snuffers (lit., *knives*) were used for trimming the wick and extinguishing the lamps.

7. The basins of gold, which, according to Chronicles, were a hundred in number (II C 4:8). They were probably used for the water or blood of sprinklings, though it is possible they were used for the libations of wine.

8. The spoons (lit., *palms*) which were really shallow vessels

²⁷ The idea that the ten lampstands rested on the ten tables mentioned in Chronicles is entirely groundless.

used for incense (cf. Lev. 24:7).

9. The censers. In Exodus 25:38 the Hebrew word is translated “*snuff-dishes*.” In Numbers 4:14; 16:6 it signifies censers which appears to be its meaning here.

10. The hinges or sockets of the hinges (Keil) of the doors of the Holy of Holies and for the Temple itself (v. 50).

Even after the construction of all the Temple vessels and furniture there was still a surplus of the precious metal and bronze gathered by David.²⁸ This surplus was stored in the Temple treasury (v. 51).²⁹ The “*vessels*” alluded to may have been spoils of war such as the shields of gold captured by David from Hadadezer (II S 8:7).

REVIEW OF CHAPTERS FIVE AND SIX

I. FACTS TO MASTER

A. Names: Be able to identify each of the following and relate their significance to the construction of the Temple.

- | | |
|---------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. King Hiram | 5. Ziv and Bul |
| 2. Hiram, the widow's son | 6. Jachin and Boaz |
| 3. Lebanon | 7. Succoth and Zarethan |
| 4. Tyre | |

B. Numbers

1. The total number of people employed in the Temple project.
2. The number of years which elapsed between the Exodus and the commencement of the Temple work.
3. The dimensions of the Temple.
4. The length of time consumed in building the Temple.
5. The length of time involved in construction of the palace complex.

²⁸ II S 8:8-11; I C 22:3, 14, 16; 28:14-18.

²⁹ Some suggest that Solomon made no use of the gold, silver and trophies of victory which David had prepared because they were spoils of war, and he did not wish to have it said that the Temple was built with gains won by violence.

C. Other Facts

1. Name the various divisions or areas of Solomon's Temple.
2. Name the various furnishings of each division or area of the Temple proper and the court.
3. Name the major items of the Temple constructed under the direction of Hiram.

II. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. Why was David refused permission to build God a Temple?
2. Why was Hiram so happy to hear of Solomon's intentions to build a Temple? 5:7
3. Ancient covenants usually involved mutual recognition of deities. Do you think that was the case in the covenant between Solomon and Hiram?
4. How does the organization of workers for the Temple project reveal the wisdom of Solomon?
5. What possible symbolism is there in the Holy of Holies being a cube?
6. For what purpose were side chambers built about the Temple on three sides?
7. Ancient temples were not so much places for the worshipers to enter (they were too small for this purpose) as dwelling places for deities. On what did the presence of God in Solomon's Temple depend? 6:11-13
8. What were cherubim? How were they represented in Israelite art?
9. What purpose might the house of the forest of Lebanon have served? How did it get its name?
10. What is so significant about Solomon's marriage to Pharaoh's daughter?
11. What purpose did the two massive pillars before Solomon's Temple serve?
12. What purpose did the molten sea serve? The mobile lavers?

CHAPTER SEVEN

COMMUNICATION WITH GOD

I Kings 8:1—9:9

Of the seventy-five verses discussed in this section, forty-three are concerned with direct communication between Solomon and his God. In thirty-one of these verses, Solomon addressed God directly in prayer; the other nine verses constitute the divine answer to that prayer. Another thirteen verses couched in the third person are devoted to “blessings” of the Lord. Such “blessings” are very closely related to prayer, if indeed they are not such. Thus the dominant theme of 8:1—9:9 is communication with God.

This section divides itself naturally into two unequal subdivisions: (1) the dedication of the Temple (8:1-66); and (2) The revelation to Solomon (9:1-9).

I. THE DEDICATION OF THE TEMPLE 8:1-66

Because of its importance in the history of redemption, the sacred historian devotes considerable space to the dedication of Solomon’s Temple. For centuries God had been worshiped at a portable shrine, a tent which, with the passage of time, had become tattered and torn. Now the great day predicted by Moses and anticipated by David had finally come. Thousands of people flocked to Jerusalem to share in the paramount event. No doubt there was an air of expectancy throughout Jerusalem as people contemplated the possibility of a supernatural manifestation of God’s approval of the new edifice. Without question the dedication of Solomon’s Temple was the grandest ceremony ever performed under the Mosaic dispensation.¹ The solemn dedicatory transaction consisted of five acts: (1) a processional

¹ Smith, OTH, p. 521.

(vv. 1-14); (2) a speech (vv. 12-21); (3) a lengthy prayer (vv. 22-53); (4) a benediction (vv. 54-61); and (5) a celebration (vv. 62-66).

A. THE DEDICATORY PROCESSIONAL 8:1-13

This unit again breaks down into two unequal divisions; (1) the installation of the ark (vv. 1-4); and (2) the declaration of Solomon (vv. 12-13).

1. *THE INSTALLATION OF THE ARK (8:1-11)*

TRANSLATION

(1) Then Solomon assembled the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the princes of the fathers of the children of Israel, unto King Solomon in Jerusalem for the purpose of bringing up the ark of the covenant of the LORD from the city of David which is Zion. (2) And all the men of Israel assembled themselves unto King Solomon at the feast, in the month Ethanim, which is the seventh month. (3) And all the elders of Israel came, and the priests carried the ark. (4) And they brought up the ark of the LORD and the tabernacle of meeting and all the holy vessels which were in the tent, even them did the priests and Levites bring up. (5) And King Solomon and all the congregation of Israel which were assembled unto him before the ark, were sacrificing sheep and oxen which could not be counted or numbered for multitude. (6) And the priests brought the ark of the covenant of the LORD unto its place, unto the Debir of the house, the most holy place, beneath the wings of the cherubim. (7) For the cherubim spread forth their wings unto the place of the ark, and the cherubim covered the ark and its staves from above. (8) And they drew out the staves, and the tips of the staves were seen from the holy place before the Debir, but they were not seen without; and they are there unto this day. (9) There was nothing in the ark except the two tables of stone which Moses placed there

at Horeb where the LORD made a covenant with the children of Israel when they came out of the land of Egypt. (10) And it came to pass when the priests went out from the Holy Place, that the cloud filled the house of the LORD, (11) so that the priests were not able to stand and minister because of the cloud, because the glory of the LORD filled the house of the LORD.

COMMENTS

When the work on the Temple for all practical purposes was completed, Solomon summoned all the leaders of the nation to Jerusalem to share in the dedication ceremonies. It is only natural that Solomon would want the representatives of the people present to witness this historic and momentous event. After years of waiting, a national sanctuary was to be dedicated which would supersede the Tabernacle of Moses at which their forefathers had worshiped for five centuries. The first order of business was the transfer of the ark of the covenant from Zion, the city of David,² to its permanent resting place in the Debir of the Temple on Mt. Moriah. As the repository of the tables of law, the ark became a symbol of the covenant between God and Israel, and for this reason is here called "*the ark of the covenant*" (v. 1). Because it housed the sacred ark, the newly-built Temple enjoyed the sanctity and national prestige of the sanctuary in Shiloh which had been destroyed by the Philistines about a hundred years earlier.

In addition to the princes summoned by Solomon "*all the men of Israel*" also came to Jerusalem to participate in *the feast*. Under the Law of Moses every adult male was obligated to attend the three major annual feasts—Passover, Pentecost

² Originally *Zion* was restricted to the Jebusite fortress (city of David) on the southern and lower part of the hill on which the Temple had been built. In later times the name *Zion* denoted the Temple hill (Amos 1:2; Isa. 8:18 etc.) and the entire city of Jerusalem (Amos 6:1; Isa. 10:24 etc.).

and Tabernacles. Since this gathering took place in the month of Ethanim,³ the seventh month (v. 2), the particular feast must have been the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast was "*the feast of ingathering*" (Ex. 23:16), and commemorated as well the deliverance from Egypt (Lev. 23:43). As a social festival (Lev. 23:40-42), Tabernacles was the greatest and most joyous gathering of the year. It was doubtless for this reason that Tabernacles was chosen as the time for the dedication.

While the month of the Temple dedication is certain, the precise year is in dispute. The author has already indicated that the Temple was finished in the eighth month of the eleventh year of Solomon's reign (6:38). Some have argued that the dedication was in the seventh month of that same year (Hammond). Others hold that Solomon waited until the seventh month of the year following (Gray). In the former case the dedication took place one month prior to the completion of the construction;⁴ in the latter case, eleven months after completion. Keil regards 9:1-10 as a clue to dating the dedication. These verses relate that the answer to Solomon's dedicatory prayer came after he had finished his building projects, thirteen years after he had finished the Temple. If God's answer came shortly after the petition was made, then one is forced to conclude that the dedication did not take place until twenty years after the building was begun, or thirteen years after it was finished.

While either the immediate dedication view or the delayed dedication view can be harmonized with the Biblical data, the former explanation seems preferable. Preparations for building extended back into the preceding reign (I C 28-29) and consequently the dedication had long been eagerly anticipated.

³ Ethanim means "running water." The early rains which began to fall during the month caused the dry brooks to flow constantly. In later times this month was called Tishri. It corresponds to October-November on the present calendar.

⁴ The completion of the Temple in 6:38 may have been reckoned from the completion of the dedication which lasted for fourteen days and therefore, continued into the eighth month. This suggestion by Honor (JCBR, p. 113), would eliminate the difficulty of having the Temple dedicated one month before it was completed.

Furthermore, the prodigious number of laborers employed on the project is evidence that the work had been carried forward as rapidly as possible. It would be almost inconceivable that after these energetic measures had been taken, the king or his subjects would have been content to allow this grand facility to go unused for thirteen years, while the royal palace complex was completed. It is more likely that Solomon, wishing to connect the dedication with the Feast of Tabernacles, ordered the services to be conducted in the seventh month of his eleventh year, one month before the completion of the final details of the building. It would not be inconsistent with the usual procedure of sacred writers to describe the Temple as finished when in reality it was incomplete in a few minor particulars.

As on former occasions of extraordinary solemnity, the priests rather than the Levites (cf. Number 4:15; 7:9) carried the ark of the covenant (v. 3).⁵ The parallel verse in Chronicles states that the *Levites* took up the ark (II C 5:4). All priests were of the tribe of Levi and might properly be designated as Levites. But the Chronicler removes any possibility of contradiction with Kings by going on to state that it was "*the priests*" (v. 7) and the "*Levitical priests*" (v. 5) who brought in the ark.

For nearly forty years the ark had been kept in a special tent erected for it on Mt. Zion by David (II S 6:17). The Tabernacle erected by Moses (Ex. 33:7-10) had for many years been located at Gibeon (3:4; II C 1:3). The ark and the Tabernacle were now reunited in the Temple of Solomon. The holy vessels of the Tabernacle—the bronze altar, the altar of incense, the table of showbread, the lampstand—were preserved in the storage areas of the Temple as relics of the past. While the priests carried the ark, apparently the Levites transported the Tabernacle and the holy vessels (v. 4).⁶

The priestly processional occasionally halted *en route* to the Temple so that Solomon and the congregation, following

⁵ The priests carried the ark at the crossing of the Jordan (Josh. 3:6ff.) and at the siege of Jericho (Josh. 6:6).

⁶ In contrast to the frequent allusion to Levites in Chronicles, this is the only reference to them in Kings.

the precedent of David (II S 6:13), could offer sacrifices⁷ (v. 5). These innumerable sacrifices were intended to express the grateful joy of the populace that a “*house of cedars*” (II S 7:7) had now been provided for the ark which had “*dwelt in curtains*” for five hundred years. The sacrifices may also have been intended to avert the divine wrath against any possible errors and imperfections in the transportation operation. Those who planned this phase of the dedicatory service would be keenly aware of the past tragedies connected with the removal of the ark.⁸ Josephus adds that a vast quantity of incense was burnt and men preceded the ark, singing and dancing until it reached its destination.⁹

The priests deposited the ark in its assigned place in the Debir—the Holy of Holies—under the wings of the two giant cherubim which dominated that place in the Temple (v. 6). The wings of the cherubim completely covered the ark so that it was enveloped in darkness¹⁰ (v. 7). As it was forbidden to remove the staves from the rings at the corners of the ark (Ex. 25:12-15), they drew the staves forward toward the front end of the ark. These staves could be seen by one who might be standing in the Holy Place or area of the Temple immediately in front of the Debir, but outside the Holy Place—in the porch or courtyard—the staves could not be seen. It is impossible to determine whether the author means that the staves could constantly be seen by those priests ministering in the Holy Place, or that they occasionally could be seen as when the curtain was pulled aside to allow the high priest to enter the Debir on the Day of Atonement.¹¹

⁷ Keil (BCOT, p. 120) thinks the sacrifices were made in the Temple courtyard when the ark was set down there either in front of or within the sanctuary.

⁸ Cf. I S 4:17; 6:19; II S 6:7.

⁹ *Antiquities* VIII, 4.1.

¹⁰ If the outspread wings of the cherubim threw a shade not only over the ark, but over its poles, the ark was probably so placed that the poles ran from north to south (Keil, BCOT, p. 121).

¹¹ Hammond (PC, p. 148) argues persuasively for the latter view. The traditional Jewish view is that the staves pressed against the veil which hung before the Debir.

The expression "*unto this day*" (v. 8) occurs several times in Kings (9:21; 12:19; II K 8:22). This expression refers not to the date of the publication of the Book of Kings at which time the Temple had already been destroyed, but to the date of the *source* which the author of Kings used for the history of Solomon.

At the time the ark was placed in the Temple it contained only the two tables of stone which had been put there by Moses at Horeb (v. 9). Horeb refers to the mountain range, Sinai to the particular peak where the law was given. The golden pot of manna and Aaron's rod that budded which had formerly been in the ark (Hebrews 9:4; Ex. 16:34; Num. 17:10) were probably removed by the Philistines when they had temporary possession of the ark (I S 5-6). The sacrilege of the Philistines was probably discovered by the men of Beth-shemesh when they peered into the ark (I S 6:19).

As the priests withdrew from the Debir, here designated as the Holy Place (cf. Ezek. 41:23), and were preparing to minister¹² in the sanctuary the cloud which was indicative of the divine presence filled the house of the Lord¹³ (v. 10). This is the same cloud which rested on the Tabernacle when it was dedicated (Ex. 40:34) and which accompanied that sacred tent in its journeys (Ex. 40:38). At certain critical points in the history of Israel that cloud had made itself manifest (Num. 12:5, 10; 16:42; Deut. 31:15). The cloud was the acknowledged symbol of God's presence, and its appearance at the Temple dedication served to indicate that God now accepted the Temple as His shrine and dwelling place. The appearance of this cloud in the house was so awe-inspiring that the priests could not stand

¹² Chronicles is even more precise in identifying the moment the cloud appeared: It was when the singers and trumpeters, standing at the east end of the altar, began their service of praise. The reappearance of the priest may well have been the signal for them to begin (II C 5:13).

¹³ At the dedication of the Tabernacle, the cloud of divine glory filled the sanctuary so that Moses could not enter (Ex. 40:34-35).

in its presence to conduct their ministrations¹⁴ (v. 11). This marvelous manifestation took place only at the dedication; after that, the cloud of divine glory was visible only in the Debir on the great Day of Atonement when the high priest entered.

2. THE DECLARATION OF SOLOMON (8:12-13)

TRANSLATION

(12) Then Solomon said, the LORD has intended to dwell in thick darkness. (13) I have surely built a house for You, a settled place for You to dwell in forever.

COMMENTS

As Solomon witnessed this divine manifestation, he was stirred to the depths of his being. That glorious cloud proved that his work of piety had been accepted. The almighty God, creator of heaven and earth, would enter the earthly shrine he had prepared and would continue to abide there! He recalled to mind the divine utterance of Leviticus 16:2, "*I will appear in the cloud upon the mercy seat,*" and he knew that he was witnessing a theophany (v. 12).¹⁵ He could only turn his eyes heavenward and utter a prayer of declaration in which he affirmed anew his purpose in building the Temple. It was intended to be "*a house*" in which God might dwell among His people; "*a settled place*" in contrast to the portable shrine of the

¹⁴ Exodus 40:34 seems to distinguish between the cloud which abode upon the tent of meeting and the "*glory of the Lord*" which filled the interior of the tent. Hammond (PC, p. 150) thinks the "*glory of the Lord*" in verse 11 was a brilliant light that was "resident in the cloud" but not always luminous.

¹⁵ Other passages which speak of God appearing in thick darkness or in a cloud: Ex. 19:9; 20:21; Deut. 4:11; 5:22. Some think that the thick darkness here is an allusion to the fact that the Debir was windowless.

Tabernacle (v. 13). The Temple was a shrine for the ark, and God dwelt between the cherubim of the mercy seat of that ark.

B. THE DEDICATORY SPEECH 8:14-21

TRANSLATION

(14) And the king turned his face, and blessed the whole congregation of Israel, while all the congregation of Israel stood. (15) And he said, Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, who spake with his mouth unto David my father and with His hand has fulfilled it, saying, (16) Since the day when I brought My people Israel out of Egypt I did not choose a city from all the tribes of Israel to build a house that My name might be there; but I chose David to be over My people Israel. (17) And it was in the heart of David my father to build a house for the name of the LORD God of Israel. (18) And the LORD said unto David my father, Whereas it was in your heart to build a house for My name, you did well that it was in your heart. (19) Nevertheless, you shall not build the house for My name; but your son who comes out of your loins, he shall build the house for My name. (20) And the LORD has established the word which he has spoken; for I have arisen in my father David's stead, and sit upon the throne of Israel, as the LORD spoke, and have built the house for the name of the LORD, God of Israel. (21) And I have set there a place for the ark, in which is the covenant of the LORD, which he made with our fathers when He brought them out from the land of Egypt.

COMMENTS

Turning his gaze from the house where the cloud appeared, Solomon faced the congregation assembled there and perhaps gestured to them that they might stand up. The king then "*blessed*," i.e., greeted the people (v. 14), and addressed them.

His speech is primarily a summary recapitulation of Nathan's oracle to David in II Samuel 7:12-16. He first burst forth into praise for God because that which He had spoken "*with his mouth*" unto David He had brought to pass by His hand or power (v. 15). The word "*blessed*" when spoken of God indicates joyous thanksgiving to the Giver of every blessing. That which was spoken through a prophet is here viewed as being spoken directly by the mouth of God.

In verses 16-21 Solomon rapidly reviews the circumstances leading up to the building of the Temple. He took note of the fact that the selection of David to rule over Israel took precedence over the selection of a site for the national shrine, the implication being that God was looking for the right man to build the Temple (v. 16). David desired to build a house for the name of the Lord (v. 17), and God approved of that desire (v. 18). Nevertheless, God decreed that David's son would have the honor of being the Temple builder (v. 19). To God belongs the credit for raising up Solomon to succeed his father and for aiding the young king to bring the Temple project to completion (v. 20). Thus it was that Solomon was able to construct this beautiful house for the ark which contained the written covenant that God had made with the forefathers almost *five centuries* earlier (v. 21).

C. THE DEDICATORY PRAYER 8:22-53

The dedicatory prayer of Solomon is one of the most beautiful passages in the Bible. No doubt the author of Kings copied this composition from the "*book of the acts of Solomon*" (I K 11:41), or possibly from the "*book of Nathan*" (II C 9:29). Modern critics have attacked the authenticity of the prayer on the dubious grounds that it contains too many references to the Pentateuch! Of course if the Pentateuch in its entirety be regarded as Mosaic in origin, there is no reason in the world why Solomon could not or would not have alluded to it frequently.

It is interesting to note that in the entire prayer there is not one reference to offering sacrifice in the Temple. The concept of the Temple as a house of prayer was not, then, a postexilic evolutionary development as critics are wont to maintain. The prayer consists of three parts: (1) adoration of God (vv. 22-30); (2) special petitions (vv. 31-50); and (3) a general conclusion and final appeal (vv. 51-53).

1. ADORATION OF GOD (8:22-30)

TRANSLATION

(22) And Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and he spread out his hands to heaven. (23) And he said, O LORD, God of Israel, there is no God like you in heaven above or on the earth beneath, who keeps covenant and mercy with Your servants who walk before You with all their heart, (24) Who has kept with your servant David that which You spoke to him; and You have spoken with Your mouth, and with Your hand You have fulfilled it as it is this day. (25) And now O LORD, God of Israel, keep with Your servant David my father that which You spoke unto him, saying, A man shall not be cut off to you from before Me sitting upon the throne of Israel if only your sons keep their way to walk before Me as you walked before Me. (26) And now, O God of Israel, let Your word, I pray you, be faithful, which You spoke to Your servant David my father. (27) Should God really dwell upon the earth? Behold, the heaven and the heaven of heavens cannot contain You, much less this house which I have built. (28) Yet have respect unto the prayer of Your servant and unto his supplication, O LORD my God, to hearken unto the cry and unto the prayer which Your servant prays before You today, (29) that Your eyes may be open unto this house night and day, unto the place of which You said, My name shall be there, to hearken unto the prayer which Your servant prays unto this place. (30) And

hearken unto the prayer of Your servant and Your people Israel which they shall pray toward this place, may You hear in Your dwelling place in heaven, and when You hear, forgive.

COMMENTS

An appropriate caption for verses 22-30 might well be, "How Great Thou Art!" Solomon makes the point that God is greater than any other god—greater than the universe—great in mercy—great in faithfulness—great in condescension—great in forgiveness. Solomon began his prayer in a standing position with his hands spread forth toward heaven (v. 22). This posture was so often employed for prayer by the ancients that the phrase "*lift up the hands*" came to be a synonym for supplication.¹⁶ Chronicles adds that he stood upon a bronze platform 4½ feet high which was set in the midst of the Temple courtyard before the altar of the Lord (II C 6:13). Using language which had been previously employed by Moses (Ex. 15:11) and David (Ps. 86:8), Solomon declared that no other god in heaven or earth compared to the Lord God of Israel. This expression does not imply that other gods really exist, but in effect means that the Lord is the only God (cf. v. 60). The thing that distinguished God from the non-entities worshiped by other peoples is that the Lord kept His covenantal word and extended mercy to those who sincerely tried to live by the terms of that covenant (v. 23).

As a particular example of God's faithfulness, Solomon mentioned the promises made to David, which, in view of his own succession and the completion of the Temple, he regarded as fulfilled (v. 24; cf. v. 15). But God had also promised that the succession would continue in the line of David so long as David's descendants continued to keep His commandments (cf. 2:4). Solomon's first petition was that God would keep

¹⁶ Ex. 9:29, 33; Ps. 44:20; 143:6; Isa. 1:15; 65:2.

this promise just as He had kept the other promises made to David in II Samuel 7 (v. 25).

Again in verse 26 Solomon called upon God to keep the words which He had spoken to David. The king knew that God is infinite—that He cannot be contained, i.e., shut up, within a man-made building. Even “*the heaven of heavens,*” i.e., the highest heavens, cannot contain Him! (v. 27). Yet he prayed that his God would pay attention to the prayer, supplication and cry being addressed to Him by His servant¹⁷ (v. 28). He prayed that this great God would condescend to take notice of the earnest worship and prayer offered to Him at the Temple. That this petition is not presumptuous is indicated by the fact that God had designated the Temple as the place where His name would dwell,¹⁸ and had indicated His acceptance of the house by the cloud theophany. Now that God had revealed His presence in the Temple, an Israelite, wherever he might be, would pray toward that sacred spot (v. 29).

The general petition concluded with an appeal that God in heaven would hear those prayers which the king and people henceforth would bring before Him in the Temple, and that He would respond to those prayers of penitence by forgiving whatever trespass had been committed (v. 30). The Temple was the divinely appointed bridge for the gap between the distant heavenly God and His people’s desire for knowledge of His nearness.¹⁹

¹⁷ “*Your servant*” in verse 28 is probably more than the customary form of deferential address. Here as elsewhere in the Old Testament the term denotes one who represents the religious community before God (Gray, OTL, p. 205).

¹⁸ The reference may be to II Samuel 7:13 (“*He shall build a house for My name*”) or to some other revelation made to David concerning the sanctuary which has not been preserved. Rawlinson thinks the reference is to the many passages in Deuteronomy where God speaks of a place which he shall choose to “*set His name*” (e.g., Deut. 12:5, 11, 18 etc.).

¹⁹ Wright, BAR, I, 180-81.

2. *SPECIAL PETITIONS (8:31-53)*

TRANSLATION

(31) If a man shall sin against his neighbor, and an oath is laid upon him to cause him to swear, and he come, and swear before the altar in this house, (32) then hear in heaven, and act, and judge Your servants, punishing the wicked by bringing his way on his head, and vindicating the innocent by giving to him according to his righteousness. (33) When Your people Israel are smitten before an enemy because they have sinned against You, and they turn unto You, and praise Your name, and they pray, and make supplication in this house, (34) then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your people Israel, and cause them to return unto the land which You gave to their fathers. (35) When the heavens are shut up, and there is no rain because they have sinned against You, and they pray toward this place, and praise Your name, and they turn from their sin because You have afflicted them, (36) then hear in heaven, and forgive the sin of Your servants and Your people Israel, because You teach them the good way in which they should walk. And give rain upon Your land which You have given to Your people for an inheritance. (37) If there be famine in the land, if there be pestilence, blasting, mildew, if there be a devouring locust; if his enemy besiege him in the land of his gates, whatever plague, whatever sickness, (38) whatever the prayer, whatever the supplication which any individual or all Your people Israel have, when every man shall know the plague of his heart and shall spread forth his hands toward this house, (39) then hear in heaven, Your dwelling place, and forgive, and act, and give to each man according to all his ways because You know his heart, for You alone know the heart of all the children of men. (40) In order that they may fear You all the days that they live in the land which You gave to our fathers. (41) And also unto a stranger who is not of Your people Israel, but comes from a distant land for the sake of Your name, (42) for they shall hear of Your great name and of Your strong

hand and of Your outstretched arm, when he comes and prays toward this house, (43) hear in heaven, Your dwelling place, and act according to all which the stranger shall call unto You, in order that all the peoples of the earth might know Your name, to fear You as Your people Israel, and that they might know that Your name is called over this house which I have built. (44) If Your people go out to war against their enemy in the way in which You send them, and they pray unto the LORD toward the city which You have chosen and the house which I have built for Your name, (45) then hear in heaven their prayer and supplication, and execute justice on their behalf. (46) If they sin against You (for there is no man who does not sin), and You become angry with them, and give them to the enemy, so that they take them captive unto the land of the enemy far or near, (47) and they come to their senses in the land to which they were carried captive, and repent, and pray unto You in the land of their captivity, saying, We have sinned, we have committed iniquity, we have done wickedness, (48) and they turn unto You with all their heart and with all their soul in the land of their enemies which took them captive, and pray unto You toward their land which You gave to their fathers, the city which You have chosen and the house which I have built for Your name, (49) hear in heaven, Your dwelling place, their prayer and their supplication, and execute justice on their behalf, (50) and forgive Your people who have sinned against You, and all their rebellions which they have committed against You, and give them compassion before those who took them captive that they may have compassion upon them.

COMMENTS

From the general, Solomon moved to the particular in verses 31-53 by introducing seven special petitions concerning specific conditions that could be expected to arise in the future. Each situation is cast in the “if . . . then” framework. Frequently Solomon alludes to “God in heaven”; four times praying toward

the Temple is mentioned.

1. The first petition (vv. 31-32) has reference to oaths. Under certain circumstances disputes between two persons were settled with finality before the altar, the accused party being required to take a solemn oath that he was innocent (v. 31). Solomon prayed that God would hear every such oath taken before His altar and actively intervene to punish the guilty and justify the innocent (v. 32). The phrase "*bring his way on his head*" means to cause the merited punishment to fall upon him. A false oath taken in God's name dishonored that name and polluted the sanctuary dedicated to that name. Consequently the false swearer had to be punished.

2. The second petition concerned military defeat and exile (vv. 33-34). Such calamities were recognized as judgment which came as the result of national sin. When the chastened nation repented, confessed transgression and came into the Temple with prayers of supplication offered by priestly intercessors, Solomon petitioned God to hearken, to forgive and to restore to the homeland those individuals who had been taken into exile.

3. The third petition concerns the plague of drought (vv. 35-36). More than once God had threatened to shut up the heavens if His people were unfaithful to Him (Lev. 26:19; Deut. 11:17 etc.). Under such circumstances contrite people all over the land would direct their prayers toward the Temple in Jerusalem. Because of the disciplinary nature of such natural disasters, God must forgive His people when they recognize the punishment as a divine chastisement and come to Him with penitential prayer.

4. The fourth petition (vv. 37-40) refers to other plagues which might fall upon the land because of rebellion. "*Pestilence*" is the plague of man and beast which might be a consequence of shortage and pollution of water, or might be an infection brought in from neighboring lands. "*Mildew*" (lit., *greenness, paleness*) is caused by excessive dew of spring and summer in consequence of the heavy condensation on the high mountains of the interior, the paleness being caused by a parasite fungus

which exhausts the nutritive substances on which the plant depends. "*Blasting*" is the premature desiccation of the plant in consequence of the desert winds which sweep across Palestine usually in May and October. Usually these winds, called the sirocco, come during or after the harvest, but if they come earlier than usual, growth is immediately arrested. "*Locusts*" were a pest to which Palestine is particularly susceptible owing to its proximity to the desert where the locusts breed. During such times of national trial, each man would experience the "*plague of his own heart*"—the painful agony of stricken conscience—and would "*spread forth his hands*" in desperate prayer toward the Temple (v. 38). Solomon prayed that God would hear these prayers and give to every man according to his way. God alone can fairly deal with each person, for He alone knows what is hidden in the heart (v. 39). The forgiveness and goodness of God would (or at least should) result in godly fear on the part of His people (v. 40).

5. Having first prayed to God on behalf of his fellow countrymen, Solomon made intercession for foreigners in his fifth petition (vv. 41-43). The king assumed that strangers would come and worship before the Lord in His Temple (v. 41) once they had heard of His fame, His "*strong and outstretched arm,*" i.e., the wondrous manifestations of divine power on behalf of Israel. Solomon pleaded that God would answer such prayers so that all people of the earth might come to fear (i.e., worship and serve) the Lord and realize that the Temple was His special habitation (v. 43). Representatives of foreign governments and neighboring aliens whose business led them to Palestine may have been attracted to the higher worship of the God of Israel.

6. The last two petitions concern prayers directed towards the Temple by those far distant from Jerusalem. The sixth petition refers to those who might be called upon to go into war at the appointment of God (vv. 44-45). Wherever they might be, if they prayed toward Jerusalem and the Temple, Solomon called upon God to hear their supplication in heaven and intervene on their behalf to defend their cause.

7. In the last petition, Solomon contemplated the captivity of the Hebrew nation (vv. 46-50). Long before, Moses had warned of the possibility of Israel going into captivity if the nation persisted in disobedience (Lev. 26:33, 44; Deut. 28:25; 36, 64). Solomon's plea is that God might show mercy to those captives when they (1) came to their senses, (2) made supplication unto the Lord, confessing their iniquity, (v. 47) and (3) returned unto their God with all their heart and soul (v. 48). Divine mercy in this case would take the form of intervening on their behalf (v. 49), and causing their captors to have compassion upon them. God would thereby demonstrate that He had forgiven their sins and their rebellions (v. 50).²⁰

3. GENERAL CONCLUSION AND FINAL APPEAL (8:51-53).

TRANSLATION

(51) (For they are Your people, and Your inheritance whom You brought out from Egypt, from the midst of the furnace of iron), (52) that Your eyes may be opened unto the supplication of Your servant, and unto the supplication of Your people Israel, to hearken unto them in all that they cry unto You. (53) For You separated them to Yourself for an inheritance from all the peoples of the earth, as You spoke by the hand of Moses Your servant, when You brought our fathers out from Egypt, O Lord GOD.

²⁰ In verse 50 Solomon uses two terms to describe the reason for the captivity: (1) Their "sins" (Heb. *chata*)—which may denote an unwitting or unwilling delinquency; and (2) their "rebellions" (Heb. *pesha*)—a stronger word indicating rebellion against the known will of God. Note also in verse 47 "to do iniquity" (lit., twist, distort) and "to do wickedness" (lit., be loose, disjointed, abnormal).

COMMENTS

Verses 51-53 are a fitting conclusion to this magnificent prayer. Here Solomon recited several reasons why God should hearken to the present prayer and all future prayers which God's servant (i.e., a special intercessor) or the people of Israel should offer before Him (v. 52). Israel is God's people (Deut. 4:10), His inheritance among the nations of the earth (cf. Deut. 32:8f). God had rescued them from the furnace of Egyptian bondage and He could not well forsake them now (v. 51). The Lord had set them apart from all other peoples (Lev. 20:24, 26) and had declared, by His servant Moses, that they were His special possession (v. 53). In Chronicles this prayer closes with an appeal to the Lord to cause salvation and grace to go forth from the Temple over His people (II C 6:40-42).

D. THE DEDICATORY BENEDICTION 8:54-61

TRANSLATION

(54) And it came to pass when Solomon had finished praying unto the LORD all of this prayer and supplication, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, from kneeling upon his knees with his hands spread toward heaven. (55) And he stood, and blessed all the congregation of Israel with a loud voice, saying, (56) Blessed be the LORD, who has given rest to His people Israel according to all which He has spoken. There has not failed one word from all His good word which He spoke by the hand of Moses His servant. (57) May the LORD our God be with us as He was with our fathers; may He not leave or forsake us, (58) that He may cause our hearts to incline unto Himself, to walk in all His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes and His judgments which He commanded our fathers. (59) And may these my words, with which I have made supplication before the LORD, come near unto the LORD our God day and night, that He may execute justice for

His servant, and justice for His people Israel in every situation, (60) so that all peoples of the land may know that the LORD is God; there is no other. (61) Therefore, let your heart be perfect with the LORD our God to walk in His statutes, and to keep His commandments as at this day.

COMMENTS

The service of dedication concluded as it commenced with a benediction²¹ (cf. v. 14). At the conclusion of his prayer, Solomon rose up from his knees and, with hands spread toward heaven (v. 54) blessed the congregation (v. 55). According to verse 22, Solomon *stood* before the altar when he began his prayer. It must be assumed from this verse that at some point during the course of the prayer, he changed his posture from standing to kneeling.

The blessing began with praise to the Lord for the fulfillment of His promises. God had promised His people rest, and then the appointment of a place of sacrifice (Deut. 12:9-11). God had already given Israel a measure of rest when the land of Canaan was conquered by Joshua (Josh. 21:44); but it was only after the victories of David that rest was fully secured. Solomon apparently regarded the dedication of the Temple as proof that the promised rest was at last fully attained. No other promise of God made through Moses had failed to be fulfilled either (v. 56).

Solomon summed up all his wishes for the good of his kingdom in verses 57-61. Verse 57 indicates two ways in which God might bring Israel to His commandments: (1) by positive guidance such as He had given to the fathers at Sinai; (2) by way of punishment—leaving or forsaking Israel. Solomon accordingly prayed that God would choose the former method. He prays that God might incline their hearts toward Him so

²¹ The benediction is absent from the account in II Chronicles 6.

that they might obey His commandments and thus meet the prerequisite for further divine blessing (v. 58). He prayed that the words of his dedicatory prayer might ever be before the Lord that He might execute justice (i.e., secure the right) of both the king and the people of Israel (v. 59). He prayed that Israel would be so blessed of God that all people of the earth would recognize that He alone was God (v. 60).

Solomon's concluding remarks ended with a brief exhortation that the people continue to demonstrate the piety and loyalty to the Lord which they demonstrated in dedicating the Temple. Solomon exhorted, *"Let your heart be perfect with the Lord"*; of this king a few years later it would be said *"his heart was not perfect with the Lord"* (I K 11:4). Having preached to others he himself became a castaway! According to Chronicles, it was at this moment that *"fire came down from heaven and consumed the burnt offering and the sacrifices, and the glory of the Lord filled the house"* (II C 7:1).

E. THE DEDICATORY CELEBRATION 8:62-66

TRANSLATION

(62) And the king and all Israel with him offered sacrifice before the LORD. (63) And Solomon offered for a sacrifice of peace offerings, which he offered unto the LORD, twenty-two thousand oxen and a hundred twenty thousand sheep. So did the king and all the children of Israel dedicate the house of the LORD. (64) In that day the king sanctified the middle court which was before the house of the LORD, for there he made burnt offerings and meal offerings and the fat of peace offerings, because the bronze altar which was before the LORD was too small to contain the burnt offerings and the meal offerings and the fat of peace offerings. (65) And at that time Solomon made a great feast, and all Israel with him, a great congregation from the entrance of Hamath to the brook of Egypt, before the LORD our God, for seven days and seven days, fourteen

days. (66) On the eighth day he sent the people away and they blessed the king. Then they went to their tents rejoicing and glad of heart because of all the goodness which the LORD had done for David His servant and for Israel His people.

COMMENTS

The dedication ceremonies were followed by a magnificent sacrifice offered by the king and people alike (v. 62). Apart from their religious use and significance, these sacrifices testified to the religious devotion of the worshiper. The sacrifices also provided meat for the prolonged feast by which this glorious day was celebrated. The peace offering alone consisted of twenty-two thousand oxen and a hundred thousand sheep.²² Critics have attacked these figures as being an exaggeration, but the following considerations argue in favor of their credibility:

1. Josephus relates that on one occasion during the reign of Nero the priests slaughtered two hundred fifty thousand paschal lambs between the ninth and eleventh hours.²³ If that many lambs could be slaughtered in three hours of the afternoon, there can be no difficulty in accepting the figures here.

2. The sacrifices were made over the course of at least seven days and more likely fourteen days. This would mean that only 1,565 oxen and 8,572 sheep would have been offered each day.

The number of Levites qualified for service in the days of David was thirty-eight thousand. A reasonable assumption is that there were at least two or three thousand priests. But if only five hundred priests officiated during the dedicatory services, each would only have had to attend to sacrifice of three oxen and eighteen sheep each of the fourteen days of celebration.

²² Even Gray (OTL, p. 216) concedes that "the numbers may be near the truth, though of course round numbers."

²³ *Wars* VI, 9.3.

4. According to the law in Leviticus 1 and 3, the slaughtering, flaying and preparation of the sacrificial animal could be performed by any Israelite. Only the sprinkling of the blood upon the altar and the burning of the sacrificial pieces—the fat pieces—on the altar were the exclusive prerogative of the priests.

5. By the very lowest computations there could hardly be less than a hundred thousand heads of houses present at the feast, and the figures given in David's census suggest that there may have been four or five times that number (II S 24:9). Every Israelite would doubtless offer his sacrifice of thanksgiving on such an occasion as this.

6. In the peace offering only the fat was burned on the altar and the rest of the sacrificial animal was eaten. Thus enormous numbers of animals would have been required to feed the vast multitudes which gathered for the dedication.

Even though the bronze altar in the Temple courtyard had a top surface of one hundred square yards, it was not large enough to accommodate the offering at the Temple dedication. In addition to the enormous number of peace offerings just mentioned, burnt offerings and meal offerings appropriate to such an occasion were being made. The "*burnt offering*" was entirely consumed in the altar fire. The meal offering contained incense and oil in addition to meal. Because of all these sacrifices, Solomon "*sanctified the middle court,*" i.e., the entire area of the court of priests, which was before the house (v. 64). Probably the court and its objects were sprinkled with the holy anointing oil as Moses had done to the Tabernacle and the furnishings (Ex. 40:1-15). The whole space may have been regarded as one huge altar (Rawlinson), or temporary altars may have been erected all over the courtyard (Keil).

A great congregation had assembled from as far as the entrance (or district) of Hamath in the north on the Orontes river to the Wadi of Egypt (*Wadi el-Arish*) in the south, i.e., from one end of the land to the other. These worshipers joined Solomon in a seven day feast of dedication which was in turn followed by the seven day Feast of Tabernacles (v. 65; cf.

II C 7:9, 10). On the eighth day of the *second* feast, the twenty-second day of the seventh month,²⁴ Solomon dismissed the multitude. The crowd reciprocated by blessing (i.e., saluting) their king, and on the morrow, departed for their tents (i.e., dwellings) full of joy and gladness because of what the Lord had done for His servant David and His people Israel (v. 66). David is mentioned in verse 66 because the Temple was part of the fulfillment of the divine promise given to him.

II. THE REVELATION TO SOLOMON 9:1-9

TRANSLATION

(1) And it came to pass when Solomon had finished building the house of the LORD, and the house of the king, and all Solomon's desire which he had desired to do, (2) that the LORD appeared unto Solomon a second time as He appeared unto him in Gibeon. (3) And the LORD said unto him, I have heard your prayer and your supplication which you have made before Me. I have sanctified this house which you have built, to put My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart shall always be there. (4) But as for you, if you continue to walk before Me as David your father walked with integrity of heart and uprightness, doing according to all which I have commanded you, and My statutes and My judgments you continue to keep, (5) then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever as I spoke unto David your father, saying, A man shall not be cut off to you from upon the throne of Israel. (6) If you surely turn, you and your sons, from after Me and do not keep My commandments, My statutes which I have set before you, and you go and serve other gods, and worship them, (7) then

²⁴ The Feast of Tabernacles lasted from the fifteenth to the twenty-first of the seventh month. On the eighth day, that is the twenty-second of the month, Solomon dismissed the people, and on the next morning, the twenty-third of the month the people took their journey home (II C 7:10).

I will cut off Israel from upon the face of the land which I gave to them, and the house which I have sanctified for My name I will cast away from before Me, and Israel shall become a byword and a taunt among all peoples. (8) And this house shall be high, all passing by it shall be astonished and hiss and say, Why has the LORD done thus to this land and to this house? (9) And they shall answer, Because they forsook the LORD their God who brought their fathers from the land of Egypt, and they seized other gods, and bowed down to them, and served them; therefore, the LORD brought upon them all this calamity.

COMMENTS

After Solomon had completed his building projects (v. 1) the Lord appeared to him a second time as He had appeared unto him in the dream at Gibeon (v. 2). Solomon had received a message from the Lord during the course of the Temple building, but that message had probably come through the lips of a prophet (cf. 6:11). In this divine communication there is constant and unmistakable reference to the dedicatory prayer of Solomon which was recorded in the previous chapter. In fact, this second dream appearance of the Lord must be regarded as God's answer to that earlier prayer. Now if the dedication of the Temple took place immediately following the completion of that structure, and the second dream appearance followed the completion of the palace complex, then it would appear that at least thirteen years elapsed between Solomon's dedicatory prayer and the answer to it (cf. 9:10).²⁵ Solomon was now at the height of his prosperity. With his building projects completed his heart was puffed up with pride. His love for the Lord was waning and he had already begun

²⁵ Slotki (SBB, p. 70) suggests that the "*prayer and supplication*" to which God alludes in verse 3 is *not* the dedicatory prayer, but some similar and unrecorded prayer offered by Solomon several years later.

that spiritual decline which eventually led to idolatry. The divine warning served to remind him of that wonderful prayer and youthful devotion which he was in danger of forgetting.

The divine message to Solomon is given in greater detail in Chronicles (II C 7:12-22). As far as the present account is concerned, God assured Solomon that he had heard his dedicatory prayer which had been made several years before and, as a consequence of that prayer, had sanctified the Temple. Probably the Lord is alluding to that manifestation described in 8:11 where the cloud of divine glory settled upon the house. Solomon had offered the house to God and God had "*put His name there,*" i.e., he accepted it as His own special dwelling forever. Solomon had asked that God's eye might be upon the house; God now assured him that His heart would be there as well as His eyes (v. 3). But if Solomon was to continue to enjoy divine favor he must continue to walk in the ways of his father David. The "*integrity*" of David consisted of his steadfast loyalty to the true God, his allegiance to the truth. Solomon prayed that David's dynasty might be established over Israel forever just as God had promised his father (8:26); God reminded Solomon that the promise to David was conditional. Only if Solomon kept all the commandments of the Lord (v. 4) would David's dynasty be established (v. 5).

The warnings against unfaithfulness in verses 6-9 are stern and uncompromising. If Solomon or any of his children turned from following the Lord and failed to keep His commandments (v. 6), then God would deprive the nation of the land He had given it, and He would utterly reject the Temple He had so recently acknowledged. The condition of Israel would become so deplorable that people would allude to Israel when they wished to use an apt illustration of folly and unfaithfulness (v. 7). "*A byword and a taunt*" is an expression found in Deuteronomy 28:37 expressive of extraordinary calamity. The fate of Israel would be an example and admonition to others, a figure for disaster. The house of God would be "*high*"²⁶ in that day, i.e., it would be a conspicuous

²⁶ Another possible rendering "though it be high, everyone passing by shall be astonished. . . ."

example of the fate which befalls an unfaithful people. The Temple stood upon a high mountain so that its ruins could not fail to attract the attention of all who went past. Those who observed the ruins of that once sacred spot would hiss or whistle in derision and perhaps astonishment, and ask one another why the Lord would have treated the land of the Temple in this manner (v. 8). The answer would come back from those close to the scene that Israel had forsaken the God that had formed their nation and had brought them out of Egypt (v. 9).

REVIEW OF CHAPTER SEVEN

I. FACTS TO MASTER

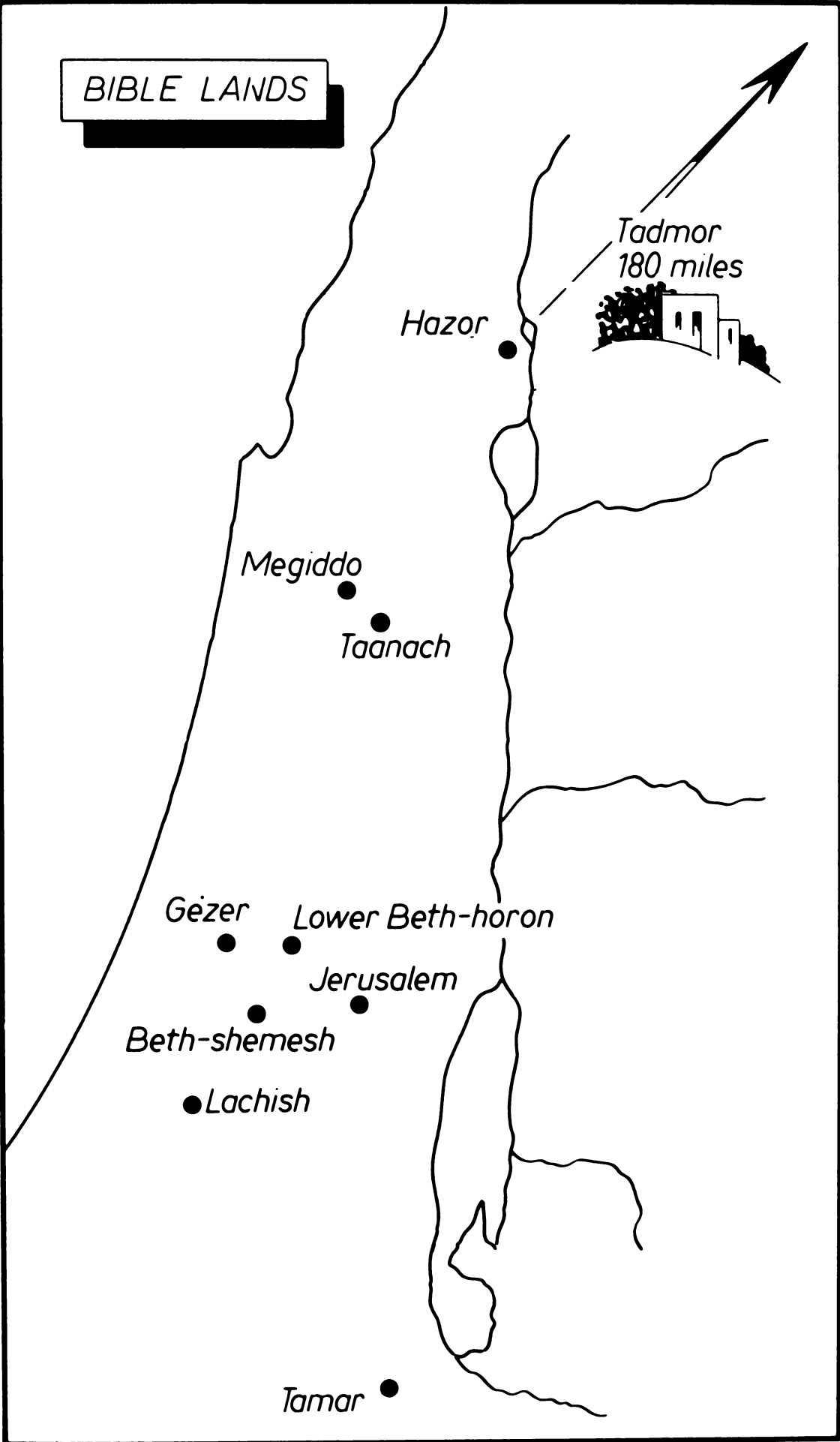
1. Five calamities which might befall Israel if unfaithful.
2. Duration of the dedication activities (8:65).
3. The identity of the feast which followed the dedication ceremonies (8:65).
4. Number of sacrifices offered during the dedication (8:63).
5. Boundaries of the land of Israel on the north and south (8:65).
6. Time of the second dream appearance to Solomon (9:1).
7. Those sacred objects deposited by priests and Levites in the new Temple.
8. That which remained in the ark at this time.
9. The meaning of "*Ethanim*."
10. The spot where God originally made a covenant with Israel.

II. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. How many prayer postures are alluded to in this section? What has posture to do with effective prayer?
2. In Solomon's dedicatory prayer, what receives the most emphasis: praise, petition or thanksgiving?

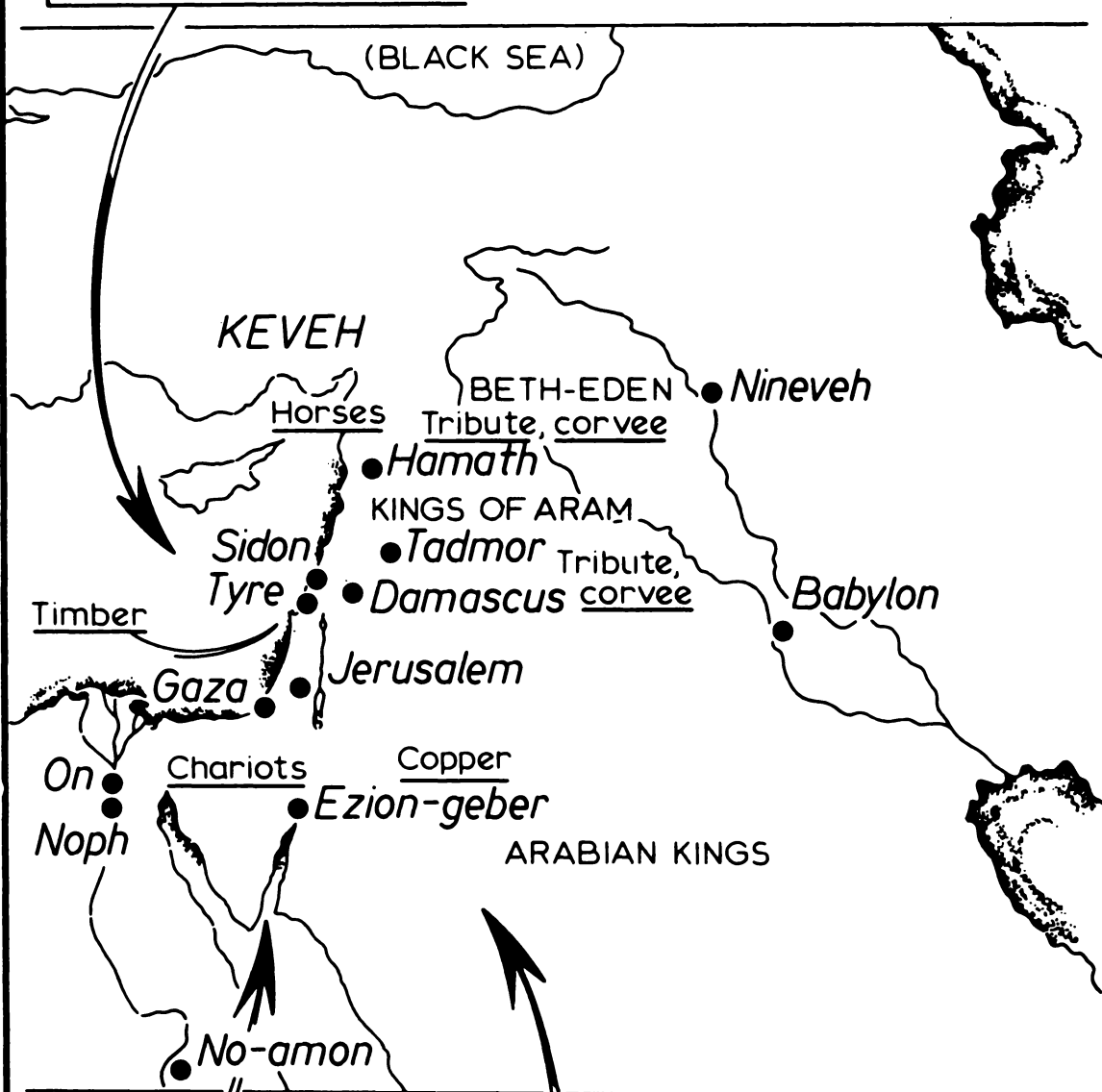
3. Is there anything in this section to suggest that Solomon was a prophet like his father David?
4. What promise made to David had already been fulfilled at the time of the Temple dedication?
5. What is the special significance of the term "*your servant*" used several times in this section?
6. Many writers speak of the "universalism" in Solomon's prayer. What is the element of universalism?
7. What is the significance of the three words for prayer used in 8:28?
8. What is the "*plague of his own heart*" in 8:38?
9. Can you think of examples in Old Testament history of foreigners who embraced the worship of the true God?
10. What is meant by "*fear God*"?
11. What evidence is there that Solomon did not think of God as confined to the Temple or to Jerusalem?
12. What is the significance of the use of the two words for sin in 8:50?
13. What are some reasons Solomon suggested as to why God should answer his prayer for Israel? 8:51-53
14. What are the promises made by Moses that Solomon regarded as already fulfilled? 8:56
15. What condition is attached to the continued divine support for the Davidic dynasty?
16. In 8:27 Solomon the Temple builder raised a basic question about the construction of temples which was later echoed by Stephen (Acts 7:47ff.). What should be the Christian attitude regarding the spending of large sums of money to construct lavish places of worship?

BIBLE LANDS



SOURCES OF SOLOMON'S WEALTH

*Tarshish fleet brings
gold, silver, apes,
baboons, ivory*



*From Ophir
gold
Almug wood
precious stones*

*From Sheba
perfumes
gold
precious stones
spices*

CHAPTER EIGHT

SOLOMON IN ALL OF HIS GLORY

I Kings 9:10—10:29

Jesus once referred to “Solomon in all of his glory,” and no section of Kings illustrates better than 9:10—10:29 the grandeur of his reign. Some of the matters related here have been previously mentioned, and others are introduced here for the first time. In general these details underscore the wisdom of Solomon’s rule and the subsequent material blessing poured out upon the kingdom from the Lord. Solomon’s was surely the most glorious kingdom the world had yet seen, not because it was the largest or even the most prosperous, but because of the wisdom of its king and the perfection of its government.¹

I. THE BASIS OF SOLOMON’S GLORY 9:10-28

Whereas it was David who established the kingdom in its extent and power, it was Solomon who added the glamour. In 9:10-28 all that remains to be said about Solomon’s building projects is collected. The heterogeneous materials are so arranged as to indicate the resources which enabled Solomon to erect so many and such magnificent buildings. These resources were threefold: (1) his connection with Hiram who supplied the building materials (vv. 10-14); (2) the tributary labor which he raised within his kingdom (vv. 15-25); and (3) the maritime expedition to Ophir which brought him great wealth and at the same time spread his fame (vv. 26-28). These notices are very condensed as a comparison with the parallel account in II Chronicles 8 indicates.

¹ Whitcomb, STE, p. 15.

A. SOLOMON AND HIRAM 9:10-14

TRANSLATION

(10) And it came to pass at the end of twenty years, when Solomon had built the two houses, the house of the LORD and the house of the king, (11) (Hiram, king of Tyre, supplied Solomon with cedar trees and fir trees and with gold according to all his desire), that then King Solomon gave to Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee. (12) And Hiram went out from Tyre to see the cities which Solomon had given to him, and they did not please him. (13) And he said, What cities are these which you have given to me, my brother? And he called them, The Land of Cabul unto this day. (14) Now Hiram had sent² the king a hundred twenty talents of gold.

COMMENTS

Solomon spent twenty years on his major building projects—seven years on the Temple and thirteen years on the palace complex (v. 10). That Solomon was able to build such magnificent buildings was due largely to his alliance with Hiram king of Tyre, from whom, as has already been noted, he had received enormous amounts of timber. At some point during that twenty years, Solomon ran short of gold and again turned to Hiram to supply his need. Probably the hundred twenty talents of gold alluded to in verse 14 was a loan rather than a gift. The talent (lit., *round thing*) was the highest unit of weight in the Near East. The talent varied in weight from a hundred thirty pounds in the old Babylonian system to as little as forty-five pounds in the late Jewish system. The Berkley Version computes the value of this gold loan to have been about \$3,500,000. David had collected vast amounts of precious

² The pluperfect rendering of the RSV is much to be preferred to the simple past of the KJV and NASB.

metal for the Temple, and Solomon had in addition considerable yearly revenues derived from tribute and trade. Nevertheless, Solomon's buildings were so extensive that his revenues were not sufficient for the completion of these costly works. He was, therefore, compelled to procure a loan from the wealthy King Hiram. Some scholars believe that this money was advanced by Hiram on the strength of anticipated profits from his share in the joint naval expedition to Ophir described in verses 26-28.

Exactly why Solomon gave to Hiram twenty cities in the land of Galilee (v. 11) is unclear. Three views have been advocated in the commentaries: (1) the cities were a gift in appreciation for the help Hiram had rendered throughout the twenty years of building;³ (2) Solomon could not keep up his yearly payments for Tyrian goods and services and was forced to cede these towns to Hiram;⁴ (3) the towns were put up as security for the loan of the hundred twenty talents of gold. The last view is probably the correct one.

Old Testament Galilee was the northern part of the tribal territory of Naphtali.⁵ This region is known elsewhere as "Galilee of the Gentiles" because of the large number of Phoenicians who inhabited it.⁶ The villages given to Hiram were doubtlessly Canaanite communities which had not been taken over and developed into Israelite cities. No doubt Solomon selected this territory to serve as security for the loan because of its geographical proximity to Phoenicia, its heavy foreign population and, apparently, its unproductiveness and general unattractiveness.

When Hiram went out to inspect his newly acquired territory, he was greatly disappointed (v. 12). He had hoped to be awarded a rich grain-producing area, but had received instead a mountainous, bleak and barren tract. Immediately he fired off a

³ Slotki, SBB, p. 72.

⁴ Olmstead, HPS, p. 346.

⁵ Old Testament Galilee was not nearly so extensive as the territory called by that name in the New Testament. See Joshua 20:7; II Kings 15:29; Isaiah 9:1.

⁶ Isaiah 9:1; Matthew 4:15.

letter to Jerusalem to express his disappointment to Solomon. The terminology "*my brother*" was the standard form of address between kings who had formal treaties of friendship with one another. The king designated the land he had received as "*Cabul*" and the name stuck. Cabul is of uncertain derivation and scholars have expressed widely different views as to its meaning. Perhaps the best suggestion is that of Keil, supported recently by Gray, that Cabul means "*mortgaged*." Others claim the name means "*nothing*" or "*worthless*." Whatever be the precise meaning of the word, it is almost certainly an expression of disparagement intended to mark Solomon's stinginess. The Chronicler intimates that Solomon regained possession of the "mortgaged" cities (II C 8:1-2). Perhaps Hiram simply refused to take jurisdiction of the area and gave the cities back to Solomon.

B. SOLOMON AND THE *CORVÉE* 9:15-25

The second means by which Solomon was able to construct so many buildings was the compulsory labor force. The use of forced labor (Heb. *hammas*) was mentioned in connection with the building of the Temple (5:13-18). Here it is mentioned again in connection with Solomon's other building projects. The object of the forced labor was the building of public works, the Temple, palace, fortifications and strategic points in the provinces. This section lists the various construction projects of the *corvée* (vv. 15-19), discusses the composition of the *corvée* (vv. 20-23), and concludes with two brief notes pointing to the completion of Solomon's Jerusalem projects (vv. 24-25).

1. *THE PROJECTS OF THE CORVEE* (9:15-19)

TRANSLATION

(15) And this is the case with regard to the levy which King Solomon raised to build the house of the LORD, and his house,

and the Millo, and the wall of Jerusalem, and Hazor, and Megiddo, and Gezer. (16) Pharaoh, king of Egypt, had come up and captured Gezer and burned it with fire, and the Canaanites who lived in the city he had slain; and he had given it as a dowry to his daughter, the wife of Solomon. (17) And Solomon built Gezer, Beth-horon the Lower, (18) Baalath, Tamar in the wilderness of the land, (19) all the store cities which Solomon had, cities for his chariots, cities for his horses, and what Solomon was pleased to build in Jerusalem and in Lebanon and in all the land of the dominion.

COMMENTS

The building projects of the corvee fall into five categories: (1) the Jerusalem projects (v. 15a); (2) the fortress cities (vv. 15b-18); (3) the storage cities (v. 19a); (4) the chariot cities (v. 19b); and (5) the pleasure houses (v. 19c).

a) *The Jerusalem projects.* The first and foremost of the works of the manpower levy were the house of the Lord and the palace complex about which so much has already been narrated. In addition, two projects connected with Jerusalem are mentioned, the Millo and the wall of Jerusalem.

(1) *The Millo* is mentioned six times in Scripture, each time with the definite article. The term literally means "*the filling in.*" The fact that Millo is mentioned in connection with the wall of Jerusalem would seem to indicate that it was part of the defense works of the city. In 11:27 Millo is mentioned in connection with the closing of a breach in the city of David.⁷ Thus the Millo may have been a bastion which filled some weak point in the walls.⁸ The evidence seems to suggest that Millo stood in David's time and even in Jebusite days (II S 5:9). If this be the case, then Solomon's efforts must be viewed as

⁷ Others, however, feel that the closing of the breach and construction of the Millo in 11:27 are two altogether different projects.

⁸ Others think of the Millo as a rampart of filled-in earth or a land-fill in the ravine which separated the city of David from the Temple mount.

either strengthening, extending or perhaps rebuilding this feature of the city's fortifications. Many theories have been put forward as to what part of the city of David was strengthened by the Millo, but in the absence of concrete archaeological evidence these theories must be regarded as pure speculation.

(2) *The wall of Jerusalem.* The precise extent and location of the wall of Jerusalem built by Solomon is uncertain.⁹ With the expansion of the city to include the Temple and palace area, new fortifications were necessary. Solomon closed the breach of the city of David (11:27) and probably extended the city wall so as to enclose the Temple mount. He may also have surrounded the lower city with a wall since David had only built a fortification round about the upper city upon Zion (cf. II S 5:9).

b) *The fortress cities.* Outside Jerusalem Solomon constructed six fortresses located at points strategic for controlling all approaches to the plateau of Judah and (what was even more important) for controlling the movement of caravans of commerce. These fortresses were Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer, Lower Beth-horon, Baalath, and Tamar.

(1) *The fortress of Hazor* situated in northern Galilee occupied a position of military importance from the time of Joshua (cf. Josh. 11:10). Located on an elevation overlooking the waters of Merom, Hazor commanded the routes from the north. Archaeological excavation on the site has unearthed a double-chambered gateway and casemate walls dating to the time of Solomon. Hazor was a rather large city, and the modern remains are strewn over twenty-two acres.

(2) *Megiddo* was the great fortress which commanded one of the major passes through the mountain range which separated the coastal Plain of Sharon from the Plain of Esdraelon, the great battlefield of Palestine. The main highway from Egypt to Damascus passed through Megiddo. Throughout the period of the monarchy, the city was heavily fortified until

⁹ Gray, OTL, p. 227.

it was finally captured by the Assyrians in 734 B.C. The remains of a complex gateway and casemate walls dating to the time of Solomon have been excavated at Megiddo.¹⁰

(3) *Gezer* (v. 15) was Solomon's fortress guarding the southern frontier of Israel. The city stands on a spur of the Judaeen foothills overlooking the major north-south highway through the coastal plains.

The mention of Gezer among the cities built and fortified by Solomon causes the author to digress that he might relate how this city came into the possession of Israel. Though Gezer was allotted to the tribe of Ephraim (Josh. 16:3) and designated as a Levitical city (Josh. 21:21), the Canaanite inhabitants had never been displaced either by the Philistines or by the military efforts of David. Gezer seems to have enjoyed an independent status. Pharaoh attacked and destroyed the city and put the Canaanite inhabitants to the sword. The precise date of this conquest is uncertain, but it must certainly have been several years prior to the marriage between Solomon and this Pharaoh's daughter. Pharaoh gave Gezer to his daughter as a wedding present (v. 16). The city was then rebuilt and fortified by Solomon. The incorporation of this hostile fortress into Solomon's kingdom made possible the significant trade relations between Israel and Egypt which characterized Solomon's reign (cf. 10:26-29). That this trade was important to Egypt as well as Israel may be inferred from the trouble Pharaoh went to in order to bring Gezer under Solomon's control. For a suggestion as to the identity of the Pharaoh who conquered Gezer see comments on 3:1.

(4) *Lower Beth-horon* (v. 17) was situated at the foot of a ravine on a prominent hill guarding one of the main roads between Jerusalem and the seacoast. The object of the king in fortifying this spot was to protect the Judaeen highlands against invasion from the Philistine plain. According to II Chronicles 8:5 Upper Beth-horon, situated at the summit of

¹⁰ BAR, II, 240-247.

the same pass, was also fortified by Solomon.

(5) *Baalath*, probably the place mentioned in Joshua 19:44, was located in the tribal territory of Dan southwest of Beth-horon.¹¹

(6) *Tamar* (not Tadmor as in KJV) is mentioned in Ezekiel 47:19 and 48:28 as the southeastern limit of the holy land. The name Tamar means "*Palms*," and the spot may be the same as the "*city of Palms*" mentioned in Judges 1:16. No doubt this fortress protected the route to Ezion-geber, a city which was vital to Solomon's economic program as verses 26-28 indicate.

To this list of outlying fortresses the Chronicler adds Tadmor, an earlier name for Palmyra, the oasis in the Syrian desert a hundred fifty miles northwest of Damascus (II C 8:4). The major trade routes to Mesopotamia met at this important oasis which was located about midway between Damascus and the Euphrates. Palmyra continued as an important trade center until the early centuries of the Christian age.

c) *The store cities*. Other cities were set aside for storage of produce. Such provisions were used for the troops and the royal household, and possibly as insurance against seasons of scarcity. These may have been the cities where Solomon's twelve administrative officers lived (4:7) who were responsible for supplying a month's provisions to the court each year. Each would have needed large storage facilities. Archaeologists have found buildings in several cities—Beth-shemesh, Lachish, Hazor—which seem to have served the purpose of public storage bins.¹²

d) *Chariot cities*. Other cities served as bases for Solomon's chariot forces and cavalry units.¹³ The remains of stables dating to the time of Solomon have been found at Hazor and at Taanach

¹¹ The other possibility is that Baalath is to be taken with Tamar, in which case it would be the Baalath of Joshua 15:24 or the Baalah of Joshua 15:29 which are ascribed to Simeon (Joshua 19:3).

¹² Wright, BA, p. 130.

¹³ "Horses" is a technical expression for horses used in military operations whether for cavalry or chariots. Mould, EBH, p. 197, n. 65.

four miles south of Megiddo.¹⁴ The great plain at Megiddo was an ideal location for training in chariot tactics. The chariot cities were probably in part identical with the store cities.

e) *Pleasure houses.* In addition to the projects already named, Solomon constructed for himself pleasure buildings where he could relax and refresh himself. This seems to be the meaning of the phrase "*that which Solomon desired to build,*" which literally in the Hebrew reads, "*the desire of Solomon which he desired.*" Leisure houses were built in Lebanon and leisure gardens in and around Jerusalem and elsewhere in his domain (v. 19).

2. THE COMPOSITION OF THE CORVÉE (9:20-23)

TRANSLATION

(20) And all the people remaining from the Amorites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Hivites and Jebusites which were not from the children of Israel, (21) their children which were left after them in the land which the children of Israel had not been able to destroy, them did Solomon bring up to the levy of servitude unto this day. (22) But of the children of Israel Solomon made no bondsmen; but they were men of war, his servants and his officers and his captains, his chariot commanders and his horsemen. (23) These are the chief of the officers who were over the work of Solomon, five hundred fifty who ruled over the people who did the work.

COMMENTS

Solomon's levy of bondslaves was taken from among the foreign people—Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites and

¹⁴ The stable complex found at Megiddo for many years was thought to be Solomonic. But Yadin has now pronounced them to be from the time of Ahab. BAR, II, 247.

Jebusites (v. 20)—whom the Israelites had not completely destroyed¹⁵ when they entered Canaan (v. 21). The various peoples named in verse 21 reflect the diversity of races which were to be found in Palestine prior to the Israelite invasion. Those racially closest to the Israelites would be the Amorites. The Hittites of antiquity were mainly located in Anatolia (Asia Minor), though some Hittite trading colonies seem to have been located in Palestine. The Perizzites, Gergashites and possibly the Jebusites may have been descendants of mercenaries from the northeast who had garrisoned in Palestine during the period of Egyptian domination from the fifteenth to the thirteenth century B.C.¹⁶ The practice of subjecting these conquered peoples to servile labor originated with Joshua (Josh. 9:22-27). Nelson Glueck, in his explorations east of the Jordan, discovered what he believed were prison camps in the vicinity of copper mines. This would seem to indicate that the copper mines were worked by forced labor.¹⁷ The levy of servitude was also a feature of Canaanite life as the Ras Shamra texts show.¹⁸

Since the Law of Moses forbade enslavement of Hebrews (Lev. 25:39), no Israelites were forced to become bondslaves. The statement in 5:13 that "*Solomon raised a levy out of all Israel*" must be interpreted in the light of the present passage. Probably there were two levies—one of Canaanite bondmen or slaves, and the other of Israelites who, though compelled to serve, were treated as hired servants.¹⁹ Furthermore, the Canaanite bondservants were compelled to serve for a life-time whereas the Israelite levy served one month in three until the building projects were completed. By and large Solomon used

¹⁵ The term "*destroyed*" (Heb. *cherem*) is a technical term from the vocabulary of the holy war. The entire Canaanite population was put under the curse or ban and was to be exterminated. In the holy war the Israelites were acting as the agents of God's judgment.

¹⁶ Gray, OTL, p. 233.

¹⁷ Glueck, OSJ, chap. 3.

¹⁸ Gray, OTL, p. 233.

¹⁹ See further the comments on 5:13. Finley (BBC, p. 384) feels that even in 5:13 an all Canaanite levy is intended. He interprets the term "*all Israel*" to be geographical. The levy was raised from all the tribal territories of Israel; but only the Canaanites living in those regions were pressed into service.

Israelites for the more exalted service in the army or in the royal court as princes and officers. The word translated “*captains*” in verse 22 means literally “*third men*” and refers to a noble rank of soldiers who fought from chariots. Solomon’s chariots carried three men, and the third man, besides the driver and the warrior, was the armor-bearer.²⁰

At the top administrative level over Solomon’s levy of bondmen were five hundred fifty officers (v. 23). As has been previously pointed out in the comments on 5:16, three hundred of these superior officers were Canaanites.

3. FINAL CONSTRUCTION NOTICES (9:24-25)

TRANSLATION

(24) And the daughter of Pharaoh went up from the city of David unto her house which he had built for her; then he built Millo. (25) And Solomon offered up burnt offerings and peace offerings three times in the year upon the altar which he had built for the LORD, and he burned incense upon the altar which was before the LORD. So he finished the house.

COMMENTS

The account of Solomon’s building operations is brought to a close with two notices in verses 24 and 25. When Solomon married Pharaoh’s daughter, he brought her into the city of David (3:1) until he had finished his own palace and had built for her a house of her own. After this building was built, he had her brought up from the city of David to the loftier summit where her palace was situated. Just as soon as this project was

²⁰ The term “*third man*” (Heb., *shalish*) came to signify a royal aide-de-camp, “*he on whose arm the king stayed himself*” (II K 7:2, 17, 19). The position was of such importance that it could be used as a springboard to the crown (II K 15:25).

completed, Solomon built Millo (see on v. 15). The corresponding verse in Chronicles (II C 8:11) indicates Solomon's motives in moving his Egyptian wife out of the city of David. According to the Chronicler, Solomon felt that the presence of this foreign princess in the holy city would be sacrilegious.

After the building of the Temple, the practice of sacrificing upon the altars of the high places could be brought to an end (cf. 3:2). The king was now able to offer burnt offerings and thank offerings upon the altar which he had built to the Lord in the courtyard of the Temple. This Solomon did three times a year at the three great yearly feasts—Passover, Weeks and Tabernacles (II C 8:13). These words are not to be interpreted to mean that Solomon himself officiated at the sacrifice, for this was the prerogative of the Aaronic priesthood alone. Still less is it to be inferred that Solomon entered the Holy Place and offered incense upon the altar. Only priests could enter there. Rather the meaning is that Solomon as builder of the Temple provided these special offerings which were offered by the ministering priests in the name of the king (cf. II C 8:14). The words "*so he finished the house*" are repeated from 6:22 except that here the inspired author uses a form of the verb which may carry the idea, "*he perfected the house,*" i.e., by devoting it to its proper use. It was, after all, to be a house of sacrifice.²¹

C. SOLOMON'S NAVY 9:26-28

TRANSLATION

(26) And King Solomon made a fleet of Ezion-geber which is beside Eloth upon the shore of the Red Sea, in the land of Edom. (27) And Hiram sent his servants with the fleet, skilled sailors, along with the servants of Solomon. (28) And they

²¹ Hammond, PC, pp. 194-95. Another view is that the phrase means that Solomon kept the Temple in repair.

went to Ophir, and brought from there four hundred twenty talents of gold, and brought unto King Solomon.

COMMENTS

The allusion to Solomon's navy is probably inserted at this point because it was to the voyage of this fleet that the king was indebted for the gold with which he financed his various building projects. Next to the Temple, the construction of this fleet was probably the greatest accomplishment of Solomon's reign.²² The king built his ships at Ezion-geber located on the northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba (v. 26). The earlier subjugation of Edom in the reign of David (II S 8:14) made this valuable port available to the Israelites. The Chronicler adds a detail to what is recorded in verse 26 when he relates that Solomon himself made a journey or possibly undertook a campaign to Ezion-geber (II C 8:17). The *Eloth* mentioned in verse 26 is probably the new settlement which sprang up in the days of Solomon around the ancient settlement of Ezion-geber.

The importance of the outlet at Ezion-geber to the Israelites can hardly be overestimated. From the time of David unto the reign of Ahaz (735-715 B.C.), the kings of Jerusalem sought to maintain control over this spot and the near-by trade routes.²³

In this maritime venture, Solomon and Hiram of Tyre were partners. Phoenician sailors, known throughout ancient times for their expertise in seamanship, joined the inexperienced men of Solomon on their voyages (v. 27). The Chronicler adds that Hiram also provided the ships (II C 8:18). This probably means that the ships were transported overland, in sections,

²² That Israelite naval enterprises actually began under David is hinted at in the fact that David collected for the Temple three hundred talents of "gold of Ophir" (I C 29:4). Traditions concerning David's maritime activities have survived in the Jewish communities of the Mediterranean. See Stieglitz, MAAI, p. 148.

²³ Stieglitz, MAAI, p. 73.

to the port at Ezion-geber and were there reassembled. Hiram would not have encouraged Solomon in a maritime enterprise which would have involved competition with his own interests. He was, however, anxious to open up the Red Sea trade routes to which he otherwise had no access.

The location of Ophir is uncertain. Modern scholarship has attempted to narrow the location to either India or East Africa. A couple of clues bearing on this problem are given in the text. For one thing it would appear that Ophir was accessible *only* from the Red Sea and therefore, must be located somewhere along the coasts of that body of water which today is called the Indian Ocean. The best clue, however, is the list of products obtained from Ophir: gold, almug trees and precious stones (I K 10:11).²⁴ These products suggest that Ophir was located along the coasts of Africa, possibly even the Atlantic coasts of Africa.²⁵ Without further evidence,²⁶ however, it is difficult to be more precise as to the whereabouts of Ophir.

Wherever its location, Ophir supplied Solomon with enormous quantities of gold—four hundred twenty talents (about \$10,000,000) according to Kings (v. 28), four hundred fifty talents according to Chronicles. It is possible that Kings gives the amount of gold that actually entered the coffers of Solomon, while Chronicles includes thirty additional talents which went to Hiram for his services. Whether all this gold, amounting to some thirty tons, was brought back on one voyage, or whether this figure represents the profits from several voyages to Ophir cannot be determined.

²⁴ Other products, usually assumed by scholars to originate in Ophir (although this is not stated in the Bible), are those which were brought back by Solomon's Tarshish fleet: gold, silver, ivory, apes and baboons. For discussion of Solomon's Tarshish fleet see comments on 10:22.

²⁵ Stieglitz, MAAI, pp. 60-61.

²⁶ Attempts have been made to identify Ophir by linguistic analysis of the Biblical product names. The results are inconclusive, some scholars vigorously asserting the Indian and some the Egyptian origin of these names.

II. THE RECOGNITION OF SOLOMON'S GLORY
(10:1-13)

TRANSLATION

(1) When the queen of Sheba continued to hear the report of Solomon in relation to the name of the LORD, she came to test him with riddles. (2) And she came to Jerusalem with a very heavy host, with camels bearing spices and very much gold and precious stones. When she came unto Solomon, she spoke unto him all which was within her heart. (3) And Solomon related to her all of her matters. Nothing was hidden from the king which he did not relate to her. (4) When the queen of Sheba saw all the wisdom of Solomon, the house which he had built, (5) the food of his table, the sitting of his servants, the attendance of his ministers and their apparel, his cupbearers, and his ascent²⁷ by which he went up to the house of the LORD, there was no more spirit within her. (6) And she said unto the king, True was the word which I heard in my land concerning your words and your wisdom. (7) But I did not believe the words until I came and my eyes saw, and behold the half was not told me; with respect to wisdom and prosperity you have exceeded the report which I heard. (8) Happy are your men, happy are these your servants who stand before you continually, hearing your wisdom. (9) May the LORD your God be blessed who delighted in you to set you upon the throne of Israel; because the LORD loved Israel forever and made you king to execute justice and righteousness. (10) And she gave the king a hundred twenty talents of gold and exceeding much spices and precious stones. There never came again an abundance of spices like those which the queen of Sheba gave to Solomon. (11) And also the fleet of Hiram which carried gold from Ophir brought in from Ophir very great quantities

²⁷ The text here literally reads "*his burnt offering*" (Heb. 'olatho), but Chronicles has "*his ascent*" (Heb. 'aliyatho).

of almug trees and precious stones. (12) And the king made the almug trees into pillars for the house of the LORD and the king's house, and harps and psaltries for singers. Such almug trees have not come in again, nor have they been seen to this day. (13) And King Solomon gave the queen of Sheba all her desire which she asked, besides that which he gave her as the hand of King Solomon. And she turned and went to her land, she and her servants.

COMMENTS

In 10:1-13 the author narrates one of the results produced by the wide-ranging voyages of Solomon's fleet. The fame of this king and news of his great undertakings were widely diffused and stirred great wonder throughout the ancient world. Among others, an incredulous queen of Arabia came to inspect first hand the marvels of Solomon's city and court. The prediction made in Solomon's dedicatory prayer (8:42) was thereby fulfilled.

Sheba, located in southern Arabia, was one of a number of advanced states in that region contemporary with the Hebrew monarchy. These kingdoms were essentially trading empires. Costly luxury commodities from India and East Africa along with incense produced locally would move through Sheba northward via the Arabian oases of Mecca, Medina and Teima to such distribution points as Damascus in the north and Gaza in the west. More than mere curiosity moved this queen to head for Jerusalem. The visit of the queen of Sheba was probably a trade mission rendered necessary by the Hebrew control of the major land routes to the north and by the economic threat to south Arabian trade with India and East Africa posed by Solomon's naval enterprise. The precise identity of the queen of Sheba has not yet been ascertained. It is known, however, that queens were quite prominent in the northern part of the Arabian peninsula, and there is absolutely no basis for thinking of the queen of Sheba as a fictional character invented by the

author of Kings.²⁸

The queen of Sheba heard of Solomon's fame through traders—perhaps Solomon's own sailors—who had been to Jerusalem and seen the magnificence of the city. She was informed that Solomon's greatness was due to his relationship with the God of Israel and part of her reason for going to Jerusalem was to test the king by means of enigmatic riddles in order to see for herself if he had supernatural wisdom (v. 1). Such tests of practical sagacity were part of the diplomatic encounters of that time. A king's wit and poetic skill were evidence of the extent to which he was conversant with affairs and culture in the world of his day.²⁹ Josephus records a similar battle of wits between Solomon and Hiram.³⁰

The journey to Jerusalem from Sheba—a trip of some fifteen hundred miles—was no small undertaking in that day. The queen brought with her a very heavy force or host which included no doubt an armed escort and court attendants, as well as camels bearing spices, gold and precious stones to be bestowed upon her host. When she reached Jerusalem, the queen spoke to Solomon "*all that was in her heart*" (v. 2), and the king was able to answer appropriately all the questions which were put to him (v. 3). The queen was quite impressed with the wisdom of Solomon and the palace he had built for himself (v. 4). She was amazed as she watched Solomon's hundreds of servants gathered about the bountiful tables which the king spread for them. The rich and costly apparel of Solomon's personal attendants and his cupbearers (cf. II C 9:4) particularly caught her eye. The queen also took note of the ascent or private entrance by which the king entered the Temple (cf. II K 16:18) which must have been a work of architectural

²⁸ See Abbot, *AJSL*, LVIII^f (1946), 1ff. A South Arabian clay stamp used to seal cargo boxes has also been discovered in Palestine. This discovery would be a witness to the trade agreement between Israel and South Arabia in the days of Solomon. See Free, *ABH*, p. 174.

²⁹ Gray, *OTL*, p. 241.

³⁰ *Ant.*, VIII, 5.3.

magnificence.³¹ The reaction of the queen to all the grandeur of Solomon's court is expressed in the words "*and there was no more spirit in her,*" i.e., she was beside herself with amazement.

The queen was not reluctant to express her feelings and reactions to Solomon. All that she had heard concerning his words and wisdom had proved to be true (v. 6). While she had been incredulous prior to making her journey to Jerusalem, she now was of the opinion that the wisdom and prosperity of Solomon far exceeded any report which had come to her ears (v. 7). How happy must be those servants who were part of this glorious court! (v. 8).

The queen rightly discerned that Solomon's prosperity and sagacity came from the Lord, the God of Israel, and thus in verse 9 she directed her praise heavenward. The Lord delighted in Solomon and set him upon the throne of Israel because He loved Israel and wished a king to rule over His people who would execute justice and righteousness. Thus an interesting thought is attributed to the queen: the choice of Solomon was an indication of the extent of God's love for Israel. On the basis of verse 9 and the allusion to the queen of Sheba in Matthew 12:42, it has been concluded that the queen became a convert to the religion of Israel. However, it should be noted that she speaks here of "the Lord *your* God." Also it is noteworthy that no record is made that she gave any of her gifts to the Temple; they all were given to King Solomon. One who is polytheist may recognize the absolute authority of a god of another people in another place.

The state visit was concluded with an exchange of gifts. For her part, the queen gave Solomon a hundred twenty talents

³¹ The phrase "*his ascent*" has caused considerable speculation. Some think it may have been an arched bridge or viaduct over the Tyropoeon Valley between Mt. Zion and the western wall of the Temple area. It has been estimated that such a bridge would have been at least three hundred fifty feet long and a hundred thirty feet in altitude. Others, however, think the reference is not to some architectural achievement, but rather to the splendid retinue which accompanied Solomon on his visits to the Temple.

SOLOMON IN ALL OF HIS GLORY 10:1-13

of gold,³² a vast amount of spices, and precious stones (v. 10). Solomon made appropriate gifts to the queen in return for her generosity and in addition gave her whatever she asked (v. 13). This might well include a satisfactory trade agreement. Ethiopian Christians take these words as a basis for their belief that the queen bore a son by Solomon—Melimelek by name—from whom the recent monarchs of Ethiopia claimed to derive their descent.

The account of the gifts given to Solomon by the queen of Sheba causes the author to digress in verses 11 and 12 to relate other importations during this reign. From the fleet of Hiram,³³ Solomon received a great quantity of gold from Ophir as well as precious stones and almug trees (v. 11). On the location of Ophir, see comments on 9:28. The precise identification of the almug tree depends on the view one has of the location of Ophir. From this precious wood Solomon constructed “pillars” (lit., *props, supports*) and stairs (II C 9:11). Taking both the Chronicles and Kings passages into account, Keil suggests that it was a flight of steps or staircase with banisters which was constructed. Also from this precious almug wood various types of stringed musical instruments were constructed for use by the Temple singers. The Chronicler implies that these musical instruments marked an innovation. Apparently it was only during the reign of Solomon that almug wood was imported to Israel (v. 12).

III. INDICATIONS OF SOLOMON'S GLORY 10:14-29

The account of the visit of the queen of Sheba is followed by a description of Solomon's revenues, his throne, and various other particulars of his wealth and magnificence. These notices

³² According to the Berkeley Version the value of this gold would be about \$3,500,000.

³³ It is difficult to determine whether this fleet is the same as that mentioned in 9:26-28. Stieglitz (MAAI, p. 151) feels they are separate fleets, although he suggests the two fleets may have sailed together on occasion (p. 154).

are a continuation of 9:23-28 from which they have been separated by the queen of Sheba narrative. There is no inkling of criticism in these notices. On the contrary, it was probably the intent of the author to emphasize the fulfillment of the promise to Solomon (3:13) that he would be given riches and honor in addition to wisdom.

In this section the author discusses (1) Solomon's enormous gold revenues (vv. 14-21); and (2) his wealth in substance other than gold, particularly in silver (vv. 22-29).

A. SOLOMON'S WEALTH IN GOLD 10:14-21

TRANSLATION

(14) Now the weight of the gold which was brought to Solomon in one year was 666 talents of gold, (15) besides that which came from the merchants and the commerce of the caravaneers and of all the kings of Arabia and the governors of the land. (16) And King Solomon made two hundred shields of beaten gold, six hundred shekels of gold went into one shield. (17) And three hundred shields of beaten gold with three minas of gold going into each shield. And the king put them in the house of the forest of Lebanon. (18) And the king made a great throne of ivory and overlaid it with fine gold. (19) The throne had six steps, and a rounded head on its hinder part, and arms on both sides of the seat with two lions standing beside the arms. (20) And twelve lions stood there upon the six steps on either side. There was not the like made in any kingdom. (21) And the drinking vessels of King Solomon were of gold and all the vessels of the house of the forest of Lebanon were of pure gold; none were of silver, it was of no account in the days of Solomon.

COMMENTS

In one year³⁴—probably the year of the queen's visit—the gold revenues of Solomon weighed 666 talents (\$20,000,000 BV). The correspondence with the number of the beast in Revelation 13:18 is probably not accidental. This enormous income is indicative of Solomon's worldliness and was no doubt the turning point in his estrangement from God. From this point on the story of Solomon is one of steady declension. The 666 talents include the receipts from all sources—taxes, tribute, and voyages—with the exception noted in verse 15.

Solomon also received vast annual revenues from caravaners who passed through his territory, the Arabian kings³⁵ who were subject to him. The "*governors of the land*" may refer to the twelve officers mentioned in chapter 4 who administered the kingdom. On the other hand, these governors may have been vassal princes conquered by David. The contributions mentioned in verse 15 may have been in kind, i.e., produce or animals or goods, and this would explain why they are distinguished from the gold revenues mentioned in verse 14.

From his enormous gold treasures Solomon made two hundred bucklers (Heb. *tsinnah*—a large oblong shield which covered the entire person) of beaten gold. It cannot be determined whether these bucklers were of solid gold, or simply were plated with gold.³⁶ The gold used in this project amounted to six hundred shekels (v. 16) in which case the weight would be about nine pounds per buckler.³⁷ In addition, Solomon made

³⁴ The text does not necessarily imply that this income was annual. It may be interpreted as referring to the total income in Solomon's most prosperous year.

³⁵ The text of Kings literally says "*kings of the mingled peoples*" (Heb. *ha'erebh*); Chronicles reads "*kings of Arabia*" (Heb. *'arabh*). On either reading, the sheiks of the nomad tribes in parts of Arabia are meant.

³⁶ Shields of gold are mentioned in II Samuel 8:7.

³⁷ This assumes that the *royal shekel* is meant and not the *Mosaic shekel* which weighed almost twice as much. According to the Berkeley Version, six hundred *shekels* is equivalent to about \$6,000.

three hundred of the smaller shields (Heb. *magen*) such as soldiers used in hand-to-hand combat. These golden shields were carried by the royal bodyguard on special occasions (cf. 14:27). Each of these shields contained three *minas* (three hundred shekels according to II C 9:16) of gold, half of the amount contained in the larger bucklers. When not in use during royal ceremonies these shields were suspended from the walls of the house of the forest of Lebanon (cf. 7:2), but whether on the inside or outside cannot be ascertained (v. 17). All of these golden shields were carried off by Pharaoh Shishak when he invaded the land during the reign of Solomon's son Rehoboam.

As the house of the forest of Lebanon was distinguished by the golden shields which emblazoned its walls, so the "*porch of judgment*" was distinguished by Solomon's glorious throne. The throne was made of solid ivory³⁸ overlaid with pure gold (v. 18). It is very unlikely, however, that the gold entirely covered and concealed the beautiful ivory. The throne was elevated and was ascended by means of six steps. Perhaps the seven levels symbolized the perfection, and overlordship exercised by the king sitting in judgment.³⁹

The top or head of the throne was rounded or arched in form. There were arm rests on either side of the seat and two great lions on either side of those arm rests (v. 19). The lions were probably made of wood overlaid with gold. In addition to the two lions mentioned in verse 19, there were ten other lions, two on either side of the steps leading to the throne. The lion was a familiar emblem of royalty among the nations and had a special significance in this case, being the symbol of the tribe of Judah (Gen. 49:9; Num. 23:24). Perhaps the twelve lions represented the twelve tribes as the guardians of the throne of Israel. Thrones somewhat similar to this one, but much less magnificent, are depicted on the monuments of the ancient

³⁸ Others think the throne was of wood inlaid with ivory. Cf. Honor, JCBR, p. 147.

³⁹ Finley, BBC, p. 188.

SOLOMON IN ALL OF HIS GLORY 10:22-29

Near East; but never had any kingdom constructed a throne like that of Solomon (v. 20).

All of Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, as were also the vessels used in the house of the forest of Lebanon. None were of silver, since silver had become so plentiful that it had lost all value (v. 21). Such extravagance was possible in Solomonic Jerusalem because of the prodigious quantity of gold and silver brought in by the fleet.

B. SOLOMON'S OTHER WEALTH 10:22-29

TRANSLATION

(22) For the king had a Tarshish fleet in the sea with the fleet of Hiram; once in three years the Tarshish fleet came, bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes and baboons. (23) So King Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for wealth and wisdom. (24) And all the earth sought the face of Solomon to hear his wisdom which God had put in his heart. (25) And each one brought his present—vessels of silver and vessels of gold, garments, and myrrh and spices, horses and mules at an annual rate. (26) And Solomon gathered chariots and horsemen, and he had fourteen hundred chariots and twelve thousand horsemen; and he stationed⁴⁰ them in the chariot cities and with the king in Jerusalem. (27) And the king made silver in Jerusalem like stones, and cedar trees he made abundant to be like sycamore trees which are in the lowland. (28) And the horses which Solomon had were exported from Egypt and from Keveh; the king's traders got them from Kevah at a certain price. (29) And a chariot came up and went out from Egypt for six hundred shekels of silver and a horse for a hundred fifty shekels; and thus for all the kings of the Hittites, and for the kings of Aram by their hand they were brought out.

⁴⁰ The Hebrew text reads literally, "*and he led them.*" The reading "*and he stationed them*" is supported by Chronicles and by the ancient versions.

COMMENTS

The term "*Tarshish fleet*" used by the author of Kings is explained by the Chronicler as meaning "*ships going to Tarshish*" (II C 9:21). Tarshish in several Old Testament texts is a place far from Palestine, probably on the Atlantic coast of Spain.⁴¹ It was to Tarshish that Jonah was attempting to flee when he first rejected the divine commission to preach in Nineveh (Jonah 1:3; 4:2). Just as Ophir was the gold-land of the Bible, the land of Tarshish was noted for its silver. According to Ezekiel the Phoenicians traded with Tarshish and secured from thence "*silver, iron, tin and lead*" (Ezek. 27:12). Jeremiah also alludes to silver from Tarshish (Jer. 10:9). The Tarshish fleet operated on a lengthy schedule away from its home port. On its three-year trips to distant lands, this fleet, like the Ophir fleet, brought back various exotic products. The gold and silver were secured in Tarshish; the apes, baboons⁴² and ivory were available through the trading colonies along the coast of Africa.

This Tarshish fleet is probably to be distinguished from the Ophir fleet of 9:26-28 and 10:11. The cargo and schedule of the two fleets are different.⁴³ It is not clear which port this Tarshish fleet used as home base. If this fleet was based at Ezion-geber, then it could have sailed to Tarshish by circumnavigating Africa.⁴⁴ It seems best, however, to think of the

⁴¹ Stieglitz, MAAI, p. 75.

⁴² Commentaries frequently assert that the words translated "*apes and baboons*" are of Indian origin. W. E. Clarke, an acknowledged expert in Sanskrit, has serious reservations about this assertion. See AJSL, XXXVI (1920), pp. 103ff. W. F. Albright argues for the Egyptian origin of these words. See ARI, p. 212.

⁴³ Keil and most commentators insist that the fleet mentioned in 10:22 is the same as the fleet mentioned in 9:26-28. The term "*Tarshish fleet*" is then taken to be a general name for all "large, ocean-going ships" or "merchant vessels." That the term *can* have this meaning is clear from I Kings 22:48, "*Jehoshaphat made ships of Tarshish to go to Ophir.*" However, II Chronicles 9:21 *proves* that Tarshish in reference to Solomon's fleet is a geographical designation. Tuck (FTK, p. 146) and William Smith (OTH, p. 525) support the view that Solomon had two fleets.

⁴⁴ Circumnavigation of Africa, while not demonstrable for the tenth century, was certainly not technically impossible at that time. Cf. Stieglitz, MAAI, p. 156.

Tarshish fleet as being based at some Mediterranean port.

Solomon's Tarshish fleet is said to have been "*with the fleet of Hiram*" (v. 22). This expression might be taken to mean that both Solomon and Hiram had navies sailing the Mediterranean Sea. On the other hand, the "*fleet of Hiram*" may refer to those ships which sailed out of the port of Ezion-geber bound for Ophir. The Red Sea fleet was Hiram's in the sense that he had supplied the ships to Solomon as well as the crews to man them (II C 8:18). Interpreted in this way, the phrase "*with the fleet of Hiram*" confirms the opinion already advanced that Solomon had two naval operations—one on the Red Sea and one on the Mediterranean Sea. Primarily because of this extensive maritime activity Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth in wealth as well as wisdom (v. 23).

The fame of Solomon spread throughout the ancient Near East. Dignitaries from all over the civilized world came to Jerusalem to hear the wisdom of the man so richly endowed of God (v. 24). These visitors bestowed upon Solomon luxurious presents including gold and silver vessels, garments, arms, spices and riding animals. The concluding phrase of verse 25 is difficult. The "*annual rate*" (lit., *the matter of a year in his year*) suggests that at least some of those who visited Solomon were tributaries who brought with them their annual assessment.

The closing verses of chapter 10 continue to offer convincing evidence of Solomon's glory. In contravention of Deuteronomy 17:16 Solomon multiplied to himself horses. His force of fourteen hundred chariots would appear to have been maintained largely for the sake of pomp and display. The chariot is of little tactical value in the hilly terrain of Palestine and, furthermore, Solomon's reign was peaceful and hence did not necessitate such a large force. Even in time of war, David only retained for himself a tenth of the thousand chariots he captured from a Syrian king (I C 18:4). Solomon was determined in every way and at any cost to rival and surpass all contemporary kings. The maintenance of twelve thousand cavalry troops is further indication of Solomon's materialistic disposition. The various chariot and cavalry units were stationed throughout

the land (cf. 9:19) as well as in Jerusalem, the royal residence (v. 26).

In an obvious hyperbole the author declares that during the reign of Solomon, silver became as common as ordinary stones which cover the environs of Jerusalem. The highly valued cedar wood, imported from Phoenicia, became as common as the much less prestigious sycamore wood which heretofore, it would appear, had been used for building purposes. These trees grew profusely in the Shephelah, that region of rolling hills which separates the mountains of Judah from the coastal plains (v. 27). The sycamore is a large, well-rooted spreading tree which bears an inferior kind of fig. The sycamore tree was considered so important under the reign of David that a royal supervisor was appointed over the "*olive trees and the sycamore trees in the Shephelah*" (I C 27:28). The prophet Amos was engaged in cultivating these trees for their fruit at the time God called him to the prophetic office (Amos 7:14).

The last two verses of chapter 10 describe still another source of revenue for Solomon's coffers—his monopolistic control of chariot and horse trading. Solomon secured horses from Egypt⁴⁵ and from Keveh⁴⁶ (Kue, NASB), the Hebrew name for Cilicia in Asia Minor. Cilicia in ancient times was the source of good horses for foreign countries. It is also known that the Egyptians, during this period, imported wood from Syria in order to manufacture chariots.⁴⁷ Since Solomon controlled all the important trade routes from Cilicia and Egypt to Syria, he seems to have held a virtual monopoly on the horse and chariot trade in this region of the world. Thus, the Neo-Hittite⁴⁸ and Aramean kings

⁴⁵ Many modern scholars think that a *northern* Egypt in Anatolia is intended. This theory, however, has been convincingly refuted by H. Tadmor, IEJ, II (1961), 143ff.

⁴⁶ Not "*linen yarn*" as in KJV. A few older commentators and all modern ones recognize the Hebrew word as a proper noun. Both the Septuagint and the Vulgate versions rendered it as a proper noun.

⁴⁷ Finley, BBC, p. 389.

⁴⁸ The term "*Hittite*" probably denotes the descendants of the great feudal lords who ruled districts there during the Hittite ascendancy and who had asserted their independence on the collapse of the Hittite empire about 1200 B.C. Gray, OTL, p. 250.

to the north depended upon Solomon for Egyptian chariots, while the Egyptians and others depended on him for Cilician horses. Solomon, as the middleman in this lucrative trade, no doubt made a handsome profit for himself. It is not known what the original prices were, but the established rate of exchange was a hundred fifty shekels (\$100 BV) for one Cilician horse, and for one Egyptian chariot six hundred shekels (\$400 BV).

REVIEW OF CHAPTER EIGHT

I. FACTS TO MASTER

- A. The time it took Solomon to build the Temple and his palace (9:10).
- B. The location of the following fortress cities:
 - 1. Hazor
 - 2. Megiddo
 - 3. Gezer
 - 4. Beth-horon
 - 5. Baalath
 - 6. Tamar
- C. How Solomon acquired the city of Gezer (9:16).
- D. The names of the native people pressed into slave labor (9:20).
- E. The southern port used by Solomon's navy (9:26).
- F. Distant ports from which exotic goods were secured (9:28; 10:22).
- G. The spot from which a curious queen came to interrogate Solomon (10:1).
- H. The objects made by Solomon and placed in the house of the forest of Lebanon (10:17).
- I. The number of Solomon's chariots and horses (10:26).

II. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

- 1. Why did Solomon give Hiram twenty cities? 9:11
- 2. Did Solomon force Israelites into slave work? See 9:22; 5:13.

3. Why did Solomon build a special house for Pharaoh's daughter? 9:24
4. Did Solomon have a navy on the Mediterranean as well as the Red Sea?
5. Where was Ophir?
6. In what way did Hiram help Solomon in his naval enterprise? Why?
7. What is behind the visit of the queen of Sheba? What is the point in Jesus' reference to this queen? Matt. 12:42
8. What was there about Solomon's court and land that particularly impressed the queen of Sheba?
9. What are the possible symbolic significances of the various features of Solomon's throne? 10:18-20
10. Describe Solomon's commercial dealing in horses and chariots. 10:28-29

THE ROYAL DEPARTURE FROM THE DIVINE STANDARD	
The Divine Standard	The Reign of Solomon
<p><i>"He shall not multiply horses to himself."</i> Deut. 17:16</p> <p><i>"He shall not multiply wives to himself."</i> Deut. 17:17</p> <p><i>"He shall not multiply to himself silver and gold."</i> Deut. 17:17</p>	<p><i>"And Solomon had four thousand stalls for horses and chariots and twelve thousand horsemen."</i> I K 5:26; II C 9:25</p> <p><i>"And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned his heart."</i> I K 11:3</p> <p><i>"And the king made silver and gold to be in Jerusalem as stones."</i> II C 1:15</p>



ASHTARETH

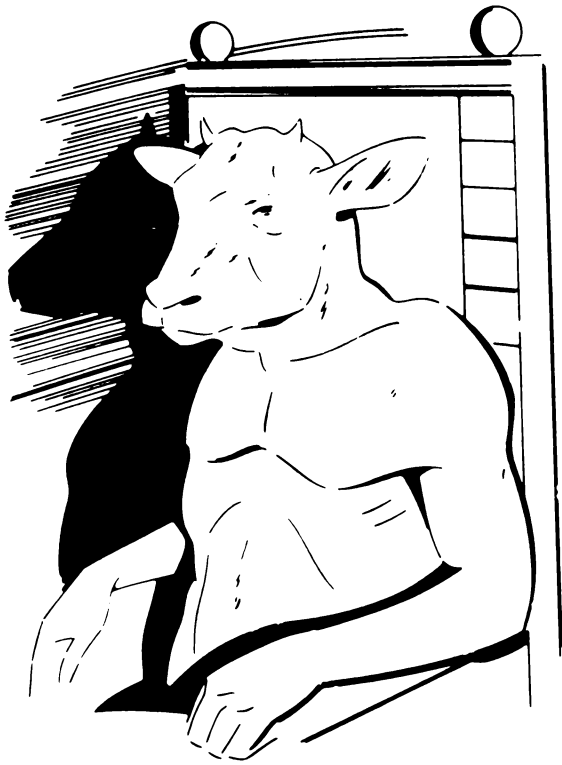
The Ashtareth was the **Principal Semitic goddess**. She was most prevalent among the Sidonians, although she was also prominent among the Phoenicians. She was mainly a fertility goddess; however, she also represented war and love.



HADAD

This was the name of a Syrian deity meaning 'the Thunderer' who was the Amorite equivalent of the god of the storms Baal (So Ras Shamra texts). It is also written Adad, Adda, and Addu. A Hadad temple at Aleppo is known. Because of his title of a storm-god, he is usually pictured on the back of a bull with forked-lightning in his hands.

References: Zechariah 12:11



MOLECH or MOLOCH

The chief god of the Ammonites. It was constructed of brass, with a calf's head. They honored it by the sacrifice of children, in which they were caused to pass through or/ into the fire. Palestinian excavations have uncovered evidences of infant skeletons in burial places around heathen shrines. Ammonites revered Molech as a protecting father.



BAAL-BERITH

He was also called El-Berith. It literally means "god of the covenant." Baal worship was so prominent that most settlements had their local Baal.

CHAPTER NINE

SOLOMON'S TRANSGRESSIONS AND TROUBLES

I Kings 11:1-43

A long period of peace always proves a serious time of testing for a nation. Because of polygamy, idolatry, excessive taxation and neglect of the prophetic order, the kingdom of Solomon gradually deteriorated. Chapter 11 focuses on the royal transgressions and subsequent troubles which befell the nation. The chapter falls into three main divisions. First, the author describes the apostasy of King Solomon in the later years of his reign (vv. 1-13). Then he deals with the troubles which came upon Solomon as a consequence of his apostasy (vv. 14-40). The chapter concludes with a summary statement concerning the reign of Solomon (vv. 41-43).

I. SOLOMON'S TRANSGRESSIONS 11:1-13

TRANSLATION

(1) And King Solomon loved many strange women, even Pharaoh's daughter, Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian and Hittite women (2) from the nations of which the LORD had said unto the children of Israel, Do not go among them, and they shall not come among you; surely they will turn away your heart after their gods. Even these Solomon clung to in love. (3) And he had seven hundred wives who were princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. (4) And it came to pass in Solomon's old age that his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not with the LORD his God as was the heart of David his father. (5) And Solomon went after Ashtoreth goddess¹ of the Sidonians,

¹ The masculine form of the word is actually used in the Hebrew because the language has no word for "goddess."

and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. (6) And Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD and did not go fully after the LORD as had David his father. (7) Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is before Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the children of Ammon. (8) And thus he did for all his foreign wives who burnt incense and offered sacrifices to their gods. (9) And the LORD became angry with Solomon because he turned his heart from with the LORD God of Israel who had appeared unto him twice. (10) And He had commanded him concerning this thing not to go after other gods; but he did not keep that which the LORD commanded him. (11) And the LORD said to Solomon, Because you have done this and have not kept My covenant and My statutes which I commanded you, I will surely rend the kingdom from you and I will give it to your servant. (12) But in your days I will not do it because of David your father; from the hand of your son I will rend it. (13) Only all of the kingdom I will not rend; one tribe I will give to your son because of David My servant and because of Jerusalem which I have chosen.

COMMENTS

In 11:1-13 the author relates the sad story of how Solomon violated the third of the three prohibitions placed upon Israelite kings by almighty God in Deuteronomy 17. Previously Solomon's multiplication of wealth (10:14-25) and of horses (10:27-29) has been narrated. In the present section the ruin of this great prince becomes inevitable as he multiplies wives unto himself. The account in Chronicles is altogether silent with regard to Solomon's fall, as it is also with regard to David's sin. The conjunction with which chapter 11 begins suggests that the account is a direct continuation of the preceding chapter. The polygamy was but a part of the worldliness of this king like the chariots and gold already mentioned.

Besides his marriage to Pharaoh's daughter, the uniqueness

SOLOMON'S TRANSGRESSIONS AND TROUBLES 11:1-13

of which has already been indicated, Solomon married many other "*strange*" or foreign women. As a matter of fact, Solomon must have married Naamah the Ammonitess a couple of years *before* he became king, and thus before he married the Egyptian princess.² Pharaoh's daughter is set apart from the other foreign wives in 11:1 not because she was his first wife or even his favorite wife, but because of the uniqueness of that marriage (cf. 3:1).

Among Solomon's foreign wives were women of Moab and Ammon. Ammonites and Moabites were not to be received into the congregation of the Lord until the tenth generation (Deut. 23:3). While marriage to a woman of these nations was not, strictly speaking, forbidden, such marriages must have been repugnant. The Edomites were viewed with more favor, being allowed to enter the congregation of the Lord in the third generation (Deut. 23:7). The mention of Sidonians among the wives of Solomon has given rise to the tradition that Solomon married a daughter of Hiram.³ One would not expect, however, a marriage to Hiram's daughter to be passed over without special mention. The "*Hittite*" women were from those kingdoms which had once been subject to the Hittite empire prior to the collapse of that empire about 1200 B.C. (v. 1). With the exception of Jehoram who married Athaliah, the semi-Phoenician daughter of Ahab, none of Solomon's successors on the throne of Judah married foreign princesses so far as the record goes.⁴

God desired His people to be separated from the pagan nations round about. The prohibition against association with idolaters served as a safeguard against intermarriage with them. On numerous occasions God had warned His people about intermarriage with foreign peoples. Of the nations enumerated

² Rehoboam the son of Naamah was forty-one when Solomon died at the end of a forty year reign (I K 14:21; II C 12:13). Thus the import of 11:1 cannot be that Pharaoh's daughter was Solomon's first and therefore legitimate wife and that all subsequent wives were "*strange*" in the sense of being illegitimate.

³ Meander of Tyre states that Solomon married the daughter of Hiram. Quoted by Clement of Alexandria, *Strom.* I, 114.2.

⁴ Honor, JCBR, p. 151.

in verse 1, the law expressly forbade marriage with the Hittites alone (Ex. 34:11-16; Deut. 7:1-4), although the Sidonians are probably to be included in the prohibition as being Canaanites (cf. Gen. 10:15). But the principle which applied to marriage with the seven nations of Canaan applied equally to all other idolaters, viz., "*they will turn away your sons from following after me*" (Deut. 7:4). Thus by marrying any of these foreign women Solomon was certainly violating the spirit of the law. Despite the prohibitions of the law and the warnings regarding such marriages, Solomon clung unto these women in love (v. 2). By placing the object of the preposition before the verb, the Hebrew suggests an emphasis which may be missed in the English: "*even them Solomon clung to.*" Instead of clinging to God as commanded in the Law (Deut. 4:4; 10:20; 30:20), Solomon chose to cling to his women!

Seven hundred of Solomon's wives were princesses, i.e., members of the royal houses of neighboring nations. His concubines—wives of secondary rank—numbered three hundred. Keil suggests that these figures represent the total number in the harem at different periods of Solomon's reign rather than the number present at any one time. In all due respect to the interpretive genius of Keil, this does not appear to be the natural interpretation of the words. These numbers, when compared with the practice of other monarchs of the Near East, are not found at all to be incredible.⁵

The vast number of the harem suggests that Solomon was not motivated by sensuality in gathering these women. It is difficult to believe that a thousand women were kept for mere purposes of passion! The mention that seven hundred of these women were *princesses* suggests that the object of this array of mistresses was to enhance Solomon's state and renown. As he exceeded other kings in glory, wisdom, and power, so must he excell them, not only in armies, chariots, and horses, but also in the number of his wives. It was *pride* rather than

⁵ Hammond, PC, p. 221. Darius Codomannus took with him on his expedition against Alexander three hundred sixty female attendants.

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passion that drove Solomon to violate God's command against the multiplication of wives. Solomon paid the price for his pride, for these women turned his heart away from God (v. 3). "Like Samson he became too weak to withstand the constant pressure of female importunity."⁶

The time, manner, and extent of Solomon's defection are spelled out in verse 4. Solomon's wives got to him when he was old. As he was but sixty at the time of his death, "old" is here used in a relative sense and must mean "toward the close of his life." The king's wives were successful in turning Solomon's heart away from his God and toward pagan deities. This need not be taken to mean that Solomon himself took part in idolatrous practices, but only that he sanctioned such practices in the vicinity of Jerusalem.⁷ In his early reign he had been uneasy at the mere presence of Pharaoh's daughter in the city of David; but now he crowned the hills overlooking the Temple precincts with monuments to idolatry.

Two of the deities to whom Solomon showed favor are named in verse 5. The first is Ashtoreth⁸ who should not be confused with Asherah, the consort of Baal. Ashtoreth is the Hebrew name of Astarte, one of the principal Phoenician goddesses. She had many functions; in the main however she was goddess of fertility. As such she was worshiped by means of sexual intercourse in her temples. In Canaan she is first encountered among the offering lists and myths of the Ugaritic texts which date to about 1400 B.C. Her precise role in the Canaanite mythology is uncertain. Small clay figurines of her with her breasts and pudenda accentuated have been found in Palestinian excavations in great abundance.⁹

⁶ Farrar, SHLT, p. 143.

⁷ A king who actually engaged in idolatry is said to have "served" other gods (cf. I K 16:31; 22:53; II K 16:3 etc.). The phrase "went after other gods" (v. 5) is sometimes used of actual idolatry (Deut. 11:28; 13:2; 28:14); but in the majority of passages, even this phrase is joined to some more precise phrase (e.g., "and served them" or "and worshiped them") when participatory idolatry is intended.

⁸ The singular form of the name is found only here and in II Kings 23:13. More commonly the plural Ashtaroth is used in general statements about Canaanite paganism.

⁹ Burrows, WMTS, p. 230f.

Milcom, the second deity mentioned in verse 5, was the god of the Ammonites. He is called an "*abomination*" because of the worship offered to him which included the sacrifice of little children. The children were not merely passed through the fire in some dedicatory rite, but were actually offered as whole burnt offerings to this deity. This is the first direct historical allusion to the worship of Milcom in the Old Testament, although a warning against this type of worship is found in Leviticus 20:2-5. The name is spelled *Milcam* in Jeremiah 49:13 and Amos 1:15, and *Molech* in verse 9 of the present chapter. It also would appear that the Ammonite god Milcom is the same deity called by the Moabites Chemosh¹⁰ (v. 7). Whether or not Solomon permitted the child sacrifice rituals to be performed in Jerusalem cannot be determined. Human sacrifice in Israel is first explicitly attested under Ahaz in Judah (II K 16:3), and in Israel under Hoshea (II K 17:17). No doubt the sacred historian would have voiced loud protest had Solomon permitted the sacrifice of innocent children in Jerusalem. Nonetheless, because of his inclination to permit idolatry within the environs of Jerusalem, Solomon did evil in the eyes of the Lord and was only half-hearted in his devotion to Him (v. 6).

The extent to which Solomon "*went after*" pagan gods is spelled out in verses 7-8. He is said to have built a high place—a shrine—for Chemosh the god of Moab on a hill beside Jerusalem. The hill upon which this shrine was erected was the Mt. of Olives on the east side of Jerusalem, which is called in II Kings 23:13 "*the mount of corruption.*" In the same vicinity Solomon erected a shrine for Molech the national god of Ammon (v. 7). The king also built places of worship for all the other gods worshiped by his foreign wives. The women made use of these sanctuaries by offering incense and animal sacrifices to their respective deities (v. 8).

With regard to the question of Solomon's apostasy, verse 8

¹⁰ Gray, OTL, pp. 258-59. Jephthah's reply to the Ammonites (Jud. 11:24) seems to support this conclusion.

is again suggestive. While Solomon *built* the altars, his wives *sacrificed* and worshiped at them. These shrines erected by Solomon remained for three hundred years inviolable and untouched even during the reigns of such reformers as Asa, Jehoshaphat, and Hezekiah. At last they were removed during Josiah's thorough reform movement in the seventh century before Christ (II K 23:13). The divine appraisal of Solomon's folly is nowhere more aptly stated than in the words of Nehemiah:

Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations was there no king like him, who was beloved of his God, and God made him king over all Israel; nevertheless even him did outlandish women cause to sin (Neh. 13:26).

The Lord was extremely angry with Solomon because his allegiance to Him had grown cold. Exceptional favors had been granted to this man. Twice he had been permitted to receive direct revelations from God (v. 9)—once at Gibeon (3:5) and a second time in Jerusalem (9:2). He had been solemnly warned about pursuing other gods; but he had paid no heed to what the Lord had commanded (v. 10). Therefore, the Lord in His anger pronounced a solemn judgment upon Solomon. No doubt the pronouncement came through the mouth of one of God's prophets—perhaps Ahijah or Iddo—for it is hardly likely that God would condescend to grant this apostate prince yet another direct revelation. The message is dreadful. Because Solomon had failed to live up to his obligations before God, the Lord would rend the kingdom from him and give it to one of his servants (v. 11).

How bitter is this decree! A mere servant would be heir to all of Solomon's glory and treasure. Yet God tempered the threat with two gracious and merciful limitations: (1) the blow would not fall until after the death of Solomon (v. 12); and (2) the disruption would only be partial. One tribe, Judah,¹¹

¹¹ The tribes of Benjamin and Simeon were also a part of the kingdom left to the descendants of Solomon, but they were too small in number and significance to be specified at this point.

would remain under the control of the Davidic dynasty. Two reasons are given for these merciful limitations: (1) *“for David my servant’s sake,”* i.e., because of David’s piety and because of the promises made to David (cf. II S 7:13); and (2) *“for Jerusalem’s sake which I have chosen”* (v. 13). God had chosen Jerusalem as the site of His Temple and as the appropriate capital of His earthly kingdom.

DIVINE COMMUNICATION TO SOLOMON			
TIME	REFERENCE	MEANS	SUMMARY
At the Beginning of his Reign	I K 3:5-14	In a Dream	Solomon promised riches and honor as well as wisdom
During the Temple Construction	I K 6:11-13	By a Prophet	If he is faithful, God will dwell in the Temple
At the Height of his Prosperity	I K 9:1-9	In a Dream	Warning that apostasy would lead to national destruction
At the Time of his Apostasy	I K 11:11-13	By a Prophet	Announcement that the kingdom would be taken from Solomon’s son

II. SOLOMON’S TROUBLES 11:14-40

While reading the preceding chapters, one has the impression that Solomon enjoyed a reign of uninterrupted peace and splendor. But here at the close of the account of this king the author has gathered all the significant information concerning Solomon’s adversaries. Owing to the fact that these accounts stand at the end of his history, many students have jumped to the conclusion that all Solomon’s troubles arose at the end of his reign. This conclusion is, however, not justified. The hated opposition of Hadad began at an early period of

SOLOMON'S TRANSGRESSIONS AND TROUBLES 11:14-22

Solomon's reign. So also, it would seem did the opposition of Rezon. These accounts are placed here because (1) it is the habit of the author to collect into one passage material related to a particular facet of Solomon's reign;¹² (2) it was only in his later life that these adversaries materially affected Solomon's position and rule; and (3) because these troubles are regarded as a chastisement for Solomon's sin which has just been described.

The accounts of Solomon's adversaries recall to mind the words of Nathan to David: ". . . if he commit iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men" (II S 7:14). Solomon's ultimate punishment for his sins was the rending of the kingdom from his descendants. However before that, God sent adversaries against him to chasten him and stir him to repentance. In this section the author discusses the rebellions led by (1) Hadad the Edomite (vv. 14-22); (2) Rezon and Damascus (vv. 23-25); and (3) Jeroboam of Ephraim (vv. 26-40).

A. THE REBELLION OF HADAD 11:14-22

(14) And the LORD raised up an adversary to Solomon, Hadad the Edomite; he was of the royal seed in Edom. (15) For it had happened when David was in Edom,¹³ and Joab the captain of the host had gone up to bury the slain, and he had smitten every male in Edom. (16) (For six months Joab remained there along with all Israel until he had cut off every male in Edom.), (17) that Hadad fled, he and certain men, Edomites from the servants of his father with him, to go to Egypt while Hadad was yet a young lad. (18) And they arose out of Midian and came to Paran; and they took men with them from Paran and came to Egypt, unto Pharaoh king of Egypt; and he gave to him a house, and ordered food for him and gave land to him. (19) And

¹² Information respecting the Temple is gathered in chapters 6-8 and scattered notices respecting Solomon's power and greatness are grouped in chapters 9-10.

¹³ Literally, "*with Edom.*" Keil interprets: "When David had to do with Edom." The Septuagint and Syriac read, "when David *smote* Edom."

Hadad found great favor in the eyes of Pharaoh, so that he gave to him as a wife the sister of his wife, the sister of Tahpenes the queen. (20) And the sister of Tahpenes bare for him Genubath his son, whom Tahpenes weaned in the midst of the house of Pharaoh; and Genubath was in the house of Pharaoh among the sons of Pharaoh. (21) When Hadad heard in Egypt that David slept with his fathers, and that Joab the captain of the host was dead, then Hadad said unto Pharaoh, Dismiss me that I may go unto my land. (22) And Pharaoh said to him, But what have you been lacking with me that behold you are seeking to go unto your land? And he said, Nothing, but you must surely dismiss me!

COMMENTS

The first adversary¹⁴ raised up by God was Hadad (also spelled Adad) the Edomite. Edom, to the south of Israel, had been a vassal state from the time it had been subdued by Joab under David (II S 8:13-14). Apparently "*Hadad*" was the title by which the kings of Edom were designated rather than the personal name of this particular king¹⁵ (v. 14). This Hadad had become the implacable foe of Israel from the time when the armies of David had entered Edom and had slain a goodly portion of the male population. According to Chronicles, Abishai slew eighteen thousand (I C 18:12), while the title of Psalms 60 represents Joab as having slain twelve thousand at the same time and place. Both of these brothers were commanders in the army of David, and it is uncertain whether the two figures should be combined or whether the smaller figure is included within the

¹⁴ "*Adversary*" is the English translation of the Hebrew word *satan*. In early Biblical literature *satan* is frequently used of human adversaries; in later Old Testament books it is a proper name of a superhuman adversary.

¹⁵ Two kings of Edom before the time of the Hebrew monarchy bear this name (Gen. 36:31-39). "*Hadad*" was the proper name of the Canaanite god of thunder and rain who more frequently was simply called Baal, "*lord*." The name Hadad was also a favorite among the kings of Aram as can be seen in the names *Benhadad* and *Hadadezer*.

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larger. In any case, this fierce Israelite attack against Edom apparently was brought on by a merciless Edomite invasion of Israel in which many Israelites were slain. It was after Joab had buried these dead Israelites that he led the armies of David into Edom in retaliation (v. 15). It had taken Joab six months to complete this ruthless campaign even though he had at his disposal "*all Israel*," i.e., the entire army of Israel. "*Every male*" (v. 16) refers to men capable of bearing arms, who fell into the hands of the Israelites.

Because of this Israelite invasion, the young crown prince and some of the royal servants fled toward Egypt (v. 17). The party followed a somewhat unnatural route so as to escape the vigilant eyes of Joab's men. For a while they seem to have taken refuge in the trackless waste of Midian south of Edom. They may have spent several years there before passing on to Egypt. Eventually Hadad and his company pressed on toward Egypt stopping in Paran to secure guides who would lead them across the Sinaitic peninsula to the kingdom of the Pharaohs.

In Egypt Hadad and his party were graciously received, the Pharaoh giving to the young prince a house and land and provision for his table (v. 18). In due time Pharaoh gave Hadad the hand of his sister-in-law, the sister of Tahpenes the queen consort (v. 19). This action reflects the political hopes which the Egyptians pinned on the Edomite heir. The fact that the Biblical historiographer was familiar with the name (or title) of the queen of Egypt accords with the high position and political influence wielded by the wives of the Pharaohs of the twenty-first dynasty. The name Tahpenes has not been identified in the few existing contemporary Egyptian sources. However, some Egyptologists are inclined to relate it to a name of a princess appearing on a statue attributed to the twenty-first dynasty.¹⁶

¹⁶ Malamat, BAR, II, 90-91. It has also been asserted that Tahpenes is not a proper name at all, but an Egyptian title for "king's wife."

Hadad's Egyptian wife gave birth to a son who was named Genubath. The queen herself took charge of the great festivities which accompanied the weaning of this child (cf. Gen. 21:8). Furthermore, Genubath was reared in Pharaoh's palace and had all the privileges of the sons of Pharaoh (v. 20).

When Hadad heard of the deaths of David and Joab, he requested that his Egyptian benefactor dismiss him in order that he might return to his own land (v. 21). Pharaoh was reluctant to see Hadad, who had now been in Egypt for at least twenty-five years, leave his court. Nonetheless, Hadad insisted that he be allowed to return to Edom (v. 22). Here the story abruptly ends; but verse 25 makes it clear that Hadad did return to his native land. At some point subsequent to his return Hadad led a rebellion against Solomon. Whether he succeeded in wresting any territory from Solomon's control or merely acted as a constant menace to the Israelite merchant caravans is unclear.

B. THE REBELLION OF REZON 11:23-25

TRANSLATION

(23) And God raised up to him an adversary, Rezon the son of Eliadah, who had fled from Hadadezer king of Zobah, his lord. (24) And he gathered around him men and became captain of a band, after David slew them (of Zobah); and they fled to Damascus, and dwelled therein, and they ruled over Damascus. (25) And he became an adversary to Israel all the days of Solomon, besides the evil which Hadad did; and he loathed Israel and ruled over Aram.

COMMENTS

The second adversary raised up by God against Solomon was Rezon,¹⁷ an Aramean who established himself in Damascus.

¹⁷ Some scholars feel that Rezon is a variant of Hezion who appears to be the founder of the Damascus dynasty in 15:18. Others think Hezion was the proper name of this king and Rezon was his title. Still others assume that after Rezon, Hezion founded a new dynasty in Damascus. See Unger, IA, p. 57; and Mazar, BAR, II, 133-34.

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It would appear that during the reign of David, Damascus was part of the Aramean kingdom of Zobah. The city fell under Israelite control when David inflicted a crushing defeat on Hadadezer of Zobah (II S 8:3-12; 10:6-19). Either just before or just after this battle with David, Rezon deserted his master Hadadezer (v. 23). The stages of Rezon's rise to power are indicated in verse 24. From being the adventurous chief of a roving gang, he rose to the position of leader of a group of warriors who advanced on Damascus, captured and settled in that city, and finally established themselves as the ruling power. According to verse 25, the entire country of Aram eventually recognized Rezon as their king.

It is not certain at what point in the reign of Solomon Rezon took control of Damascus. On the whole it seems best to assign this event to the late period of Solomon's reign when his rule weakened and the state was disintegrating internally and externally.¹⁸ In any case, the text gives no indication that the pacific Solomon made any attempt to thwart Rezon. Thus Solomon was faced with opposition simultaneously on the northern and southern frontiers of his empire (v. 25). The phrase "*all the days of Solomon*" may refer to the time after the king had sinned and set up gods for his foreign wives. On the other hand, the author may mean that even before Rezon became king of Damascus he was a dangerous adversary as a roving bandit on the borders of Israel.

What is recorded here appears to be nothing less than the founding of the powerful Aramean kingdom of Damascus, which was destined to be the most formidable rival and enemy of Israel during the next two centuries. Rezon's continued harassments and his increasing power toward the later years of Solomon's reign threatened to disrupt Israelite control of the Aramean states. Shortly after the close of Solomon's reign, probably in conjunction with Jeroboam's revolt and the invasion

¹⁸ Mazar, BAR, II, 133.

of Pharaoh Shishak, Israel lost all control of these northern territories.¹⁹

C. THE REBELLION OF JEROBOAM 11:26-40

TRANSLATION

(26) And Jeroboam the son of Nebat, an Ephrathite of Zereda, Solomon's servant, whose mother's name was Zeruah, a widow, even he raised up a hand against the king. (27) And this is the circumstance which caused him to raise up a hand against the king: Solomon built Millo, and closed the breach of the city of David his father. (28) And the man Jeroboam was a mighty man of valor. And Solomon saw the young man that he was industrious, and he appointed him over all the charge of the house of Joseph. (29) And it came to pass at that time when Jeroboam went out from Jerusalem, that Ahijah the Shilonite, the prophet, who had clothed himself with a new garment, found him in the way; and the two of them were alone in the field. (30) And Ahijah took hold of the new garment which was upon him, and tore it into twelve pieces. (31) And he said to Jeroboam, Take for yourself ten pieces, for thus says the LORD God of Israel, Behold I am about to tear the kingdom from the hand of Solomon, and I shall give to you ten tribes; (32) (But one tribe shall belong to him for the sake of My servant David, and for the sake of Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel.) (33) because they have forsaken Me, and bowed down to Ashtoreth goddess of the Sidonians, and to Chemosh the god of Moab, and to Milcom the god of the children of Ammon, and have not walked in My ways, to do what is right in My eyes even with regard to My statutes and My judgments, like David his father. (34) Nevertheless, I will not take all of the kingdom from his hand,

¹⁹ Bright, HI, p. 211.

but I will make him a prince all the days of his life, for the sake of David My servant whom I chose, who kept My commandments and My statutes; (35) but I will take the kingdom out of the hand of his son and I will give it to you, ten tribes. (36) But to his son I will give one tribe, in order that there may be a lamp to David My servant continually before Me in Jerusalem, the city which I have chosen for Myself to put My name there. (37) And you I will take, and you shall reign over all which your soul desires, and you shall be king over Israel. (38) And it shall come to pass, if you hearken to all which I command you and you walk in My ways, and do what is right in My eyes to keep My statutes and My commandments, as David My servant did, then I will be with you, and I will build for you a sure house as I built for David, and I will give to you Israel. (39) And I will afflict the seed of David because of this, but not continually. (40) And Solomon sought to kill Jeroboam; but Jeroboam arose and fled to Egypt unto Shishak king of Egypt, and was in Egypt unto the death of Solomon.

COMMENTS

The third adversary of Solomon was an internal one, Jeroboam the son of Nebat. The author devotes considerably more space to this rebellion because of the bearing which it had on the subsequent history of Israel. This rebellion led to the disruption of the kingdom. Numerous indications of Solomon's decline in piety have already been noted; the present passage points to the decadence of Solomon's power. Solomon's kingdom had passed its zenith. The assumption that it was Ahijah who delivered the divine message to Solomon in 11:9-13 gains support from the present passage, for Ahijah makes the same points in his words to Jeroboam.

Jeroboam is called an *Ephrathite*, i.e., an Ephraimite (cf. Jud. 12:5; I S 1:1). Ephraim was the most powerful of the Northern tribes, the constant rival of Judah throughout the history of the descendants of Jacob. Jeroboam's hometown, Zereda, is

mentioned only here and the location is uncertain. His mother's name, Zeruah, means "*leper*," and she is said to be a widow.²⁰ Perhaps these facts are recorded to emphasize Jeroboam's humble origin.

This servant or officer of Solomon "*lifted up his hand*," i.e., rebelled, against his king (v. 26). No account of this rebellion has survived. It apparently took place at the time Solomon was building Millo (v. 27), about the twenty-fifth year of his reign (cf. 9:15). Because of his industry Jeroboam had been appointed superintendent over the workers of the house of Joseph (Ephraimites) who were compelled to labor on this project. The phrase "*mighty man of valor*" does not necessarily imply military expertise; in verse 28 it may be intended to connote industry and efficiency.²¹ It must have been very distasteful for these proud Ephraimites to find themselves employed on the fortifications of Jerusalem. Their murmurings revealed to Jeroboam the unpopularity of Solomon and perhaps suggested thoughts of overt rebellion.

It is not certain just how much the opening words of verse 29 should be stressed: "*at that time*" Jeroboam went out from Jerusalem. Was this a casual trip outside the capital? Or is Whitcomb right when he conjectures that Jeroboam was on his way back to Ephraim to rally support for an attempted *coup*?²² According to this intriguing theory, it was the prophet Ahijah's aim to thwart this murderous plot. If Jeroboam would honor the Davidic kings and Zadokite priests in Jerusalem, God would give him a perpetual dynasty in the North.

At the time Jeroboam became Solomon's overseer, Ahijah the Shilonite (i.e., one from the town of Shiloh²³) sought out

²⁰ The Greek version says she was a *harlot*. This would appear to be a deliberate effort to discredit Jeroboam.

²¹ Honor, JCBR, p. 160; Gray (OTL, p. 273) thinks the phrase refers to a man of property who had obligations in war.

²² Whitcomb, STE, pp. 20-21.

²³ The sanctuary at Shiloh and the entire city had been destroyed by the Philistines in the days of Samuel (I S 4:11; cf. Jer. 7:12). There may have been a limited settlement, however, on or near the site of the former city.

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Jeroboam and privately conferred with him in a field near Jerusalem. The prophet²⁴ was clad in a new outer garment (v. 29) which he took in his hands and tore into twelve pieces (v. 30). This is the first instance in the Scriptures of an action parable performed by a prophet.²⁵ Israel is always reckoned as made up of twelve tribes. Since the tribe of Joseph had been divided into two, Ephraim and Manasseh, the total should have risen to thirteen. But since the number was left at twelve, it must be assumed that Levi was not included in the computation owing, no doubt, to the fact that the Levites were dispersed among all the tribes. The young Ephraimite was instructed to take ten of the pieces of cloth, symbolizing the ten tribes which God would rend from the hand of Solomon and give them to Jeroboam (v. 31). There was something significant in the fact that Ahijah's garment was *new*, for this is twice mentioned. No doubt this symbolizes the newness of the kingdom which was still young and vigorous.

One tribe, Judah, would be left to the house of David. In 12:21 and II Chronicles 11:3, 23 Benjamin is also reckoned to Rehoboam the son of Solomon. In the present passage little Benjamin is simply not deserving of separate mention inasmuch as both Judah and Benjamin shared the holy city of Jerusalem. Some commentators take the present passage to mean that God would grant to the house of David one tribe besides Judah. It is obvious, however, that since the garment was torn into *twelve* pieces, and since Jeroboam had been given *ten* pieces that *two* tribes were left to the house of David. God's graciousness to the house of David is based on two principles: (1) God's love for and promises to David himself; and (2) God's love for and choice of Jerusalem as His holy dwelling place (v. 32).

The division and disruption in Solomon's kingdom came

²⁴ It is not without significance that nowhere in Kings is it said that Solomon consulted the will of God either through priest or prophet.

²⁵ Cf. I Samuel 15:27ff. where Saul accidentally tore Samuel's robe and the prophet seized the opportunity to emphasize the prediction that God would rend the kingdom from the house of Saul.

about because of the idolatrous leanings of Solomon and the overt worship of pagan deities by his wives. The king tolerated and perhaps participated in the worship of Ashtoreth, Chemosh, Milcom (cf. vv. 5, 7) and other deities. He had rejected the Davidic path of absolute commitment to God (v. 33). But the divine judgment against the house of David is tempered in two ways: (1) The entire kingdom would not be taken from Solomon; and (2) as long as Solomon lived he would retain the crown. God's graciousness to Solomon is based on His faithfulness to David (v. 34). Solomon may have broken his covenant with God, but God would not break His covenant with David. Therefore, the dispersion of the kingdom would be deferred until the reign of Rehoboam, son of Solomon.

As if to underscore what He already had declared, the Lord reiterated the threat: From Rehoboam He would take ten tribes and give them into the hand of Jeroboam (v. 35). But Rehoboam would retain sovereignty over one tribe so that David would always "*have a lamp*" before God (v. 36). The lighted lamp is frequently used in the Old Testament as a symbol of life, happiness, and prosperity. The figure may have been derived from the custom of keeping a lamp burning in the tent or home. The extinction of the lamp symbolized the breaking up of the home.²⁶ The reference to David having a lamp in Jerusalem is repeated in 15:4, II Kings 8:19 and II Chronicles 21:7.

The concluding words of Ahijah point to the privileges and the promise that pertained to Jeroboam, and to a prediction concerning the house of David. Jeroboam was assured that he would reign and enjoy all the privileges of kingship. As king, his every desire would be gratified (v. 37).²⁷ Furthermore, he was given the divine promise that if he faithfully followed the Davidic path of steadfast obedience to God, the Lord would (1) be with him, and (2) give him a sure house, i.e., family or dynasty (v. 38).

²⁶ Honor, JCBR, p. 163.

²⁷ The term "*Israel*" in verse 37 refers to the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom as contrasted with Judah, the Southern Kingdom.

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It should be noted that God did not promise Jeroboam an enduring *kingdom* as He had promised David. It was not God's design to take away the kingdom from the house of David forever, and this is the thrust of the prediction in verse 39. God would afflict the house of David by means of the political schism, but "*not forever*" (lit., *all the days*). Thus Ahijah intimates what later prophets specifically would predict, viz., that in the future, the kingdom would be restored to the house of David. Jesus Christ, David's greatest son, now rules over the kingdom of Israel—the spiritual Israel which includes all men who through faith have obeyed the Gospel.

III. CONCLUSION OF THE HISTORY OF SOLOMON 11:41-43

TRANSLATION

(41) And the rest of the acts of Solomon and all which he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in the book of the acts of Solomon? (42) And the time that Solomon ruled in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years. (43) And Solomon slept with his fathers in the city of David his father, and Rehoboam his son ruled in his stead.

COMMENTS

As a consequence of Jeroboam's rebellion, Solomon sought to slay his young Ephraimite overseer. Probably the rebellion specifically mentioned in verse 26 was the result of Ahijah's private prophecy. But this in no way justified any treasonous act on the part of Jeroboam. The fact that God had revealed His purposes to the young man was no reason for Jeroboam to attempt to bring these things to pass. David had known that he was destined to be king, but in faith he patiently waited for God to place him on the throne. Jeroboam should have

imitated that example. Furthermore, the rebellion of Jeroboam was all the more inexcusable in view of the fact that Ahijah specifically had declared that Solomon was to retain the kingdom during his lifetime. Nevertheless, Jeroboam "*lifted up his hand*" against his king, and it was because of this overt act of rebellion that Solomon sought to slay him. Consequently, Jeroboam fled for his life to Pharaoh Shishak in Egypt. Shishak is the first Pharaoh in the Bible who can be identified with certainty. He is known in Egyptian history as Sheshonk I who began to reign between 988 and 980 B.C. The fact that he granted asylum to Jeroboam proves that he was no friend of Solomon. Hence the official attitude of Egypt towards Israel had drastically changed since the days when one of Shishak's predecessors had given Solomon the hand of his daughter in marriage.

In concluding his account of the reign of Solomon, the author indicates one of the sources which the Holy Spirit directed him to use: the book of the acts of Solomon²⁸ (v. 41). The sources of this history are mentioned more specifically in II Chronicles 9:29. Like the reign of David, Solomon's reign lasted forty years (v. 42). It has been computed that he could not have been more than sixty at the time of his death.²⁹ The great king was buried in the city of David—that portion of Jerusalem which David had conquered from the Jebusites. Rehoboam, Solomon's son, succeeded to the throne. As far as can be determined from Scripture, Rehoboam was Solomon's only son.

It is appropriate at this juncture to make some evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses, the successes and failures of this complex character Solomon. The son of David made Jerusalem a splendid city—the center of attraction to the world of his day. His foremost achievement was the construction of the Temple whose architectural magnificence was only exceeded

²⁸ On the nature and content of this document, see section III of the introductory chapter.

²⁹ Slotki, SBB, p. 90.

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by its spiritual significance. In addition to the Temple, a splendid group of governmental buildings, a magnificent city wall, six fortresses at strategic locations, two fleets of commercial vessels, industrial development, and the first scientifically planned tax system stand as the constructive accomplishments of his reign. He was a merchant prince and an industrial magnate. Because peace prevailed throughout his reign he was able to develop both commerce and culture. His reputation for wisdom spread throughout his world. He was led of the Holy Spirit to produce three major literary works—Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Canticles (Song of Solomon).

On the other hand, Solomon's weaknesses were neither few nor trival. He was selfish, overambitious, and out of sympathy with his people. He was a polygamist of the worst sort, and his harem proved his undoing. To accommodate the religious tastes of his many wives, Solomon filled Jerusalem with shrines to various deities. His early zeal for the Lord waned during the middle years of his life. The Book of Ecclesiastes may well have been his public confession of a misspent life. Through bitter experience he came to realize that the duty of man was to fear God and keep His commandments (Ecc. 12:13).

REVIEW OF CHAPTER NINE

I. FACTS TO MASTER

A. Identify the following:

- | | | |
|--------------|-------------|-------------|
| 1. Ahijah | 5. Shishak | 9. Rezon |
| 2. Tahpenes | 6. Rehoboam | 10. Chemosh |
| 3. Genubath | 7. Jeroboam | 11. Milcom |
| 4. Ashtoreth | 8. Hadad | |

B. Relate the importance of the following places in chapter 11:

- | | | |
|-------------|------------|---------|
| 1. Millo | 4. Midian | 7. Edom |
| 2. Damascus | 5. Zeredah | |
| 3. Paran | 6. Shiloh | |

C. Other facts to know:

1. The number of Solomon's wives and concubines
2. The names of the pagan gods to whom Solomon was inclined
3. The names and locations of Solomon's adversaries
4. The length of Solomon's reign

II. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. Is it right for us, in the absence of prophecy, to interpret national disasters as being due to specific acts of national apostasy?
2. Why did God permit Solomon, and David for that matter, to multiply wives? cf. II S 12:8; Matt. 19:8; Deut. 17:17. Did Solomon have before him any tragic examples of the negative effects of polygamy? See Gen. 16:1-6; 30:16; 34:30; 35:21.
3. How did the Lord speak to Solomon in 11:11-13?
4. What element of divine grace is found in the threats made to Solomon? 11:11-13, 34-36.
5. When did Hadad and Rezon become Solomon's adversaries? Why are these accounts placed at the conclusion of the history of Solomon?
6. What are the indications that Hadad was graciously received in Egypt? Why this treatment from Pharaoh?
7. Did Ahijah's message to Jeroboam precipitate the abortive rebellion against Solomon?
8. What can one deduce from this chapter about the leadership potential of Jeroboam?
9. What is the one tribe that Ahijah declared would remain with the house of David?
10. What is the problem as regards the tribe of Simeon in the tribal divisions mentioned by Ahijah?
11. What were the conditions in the divine promise made to Jeroboam?
12. Compare and contrast the lives of David and his son Solomon.

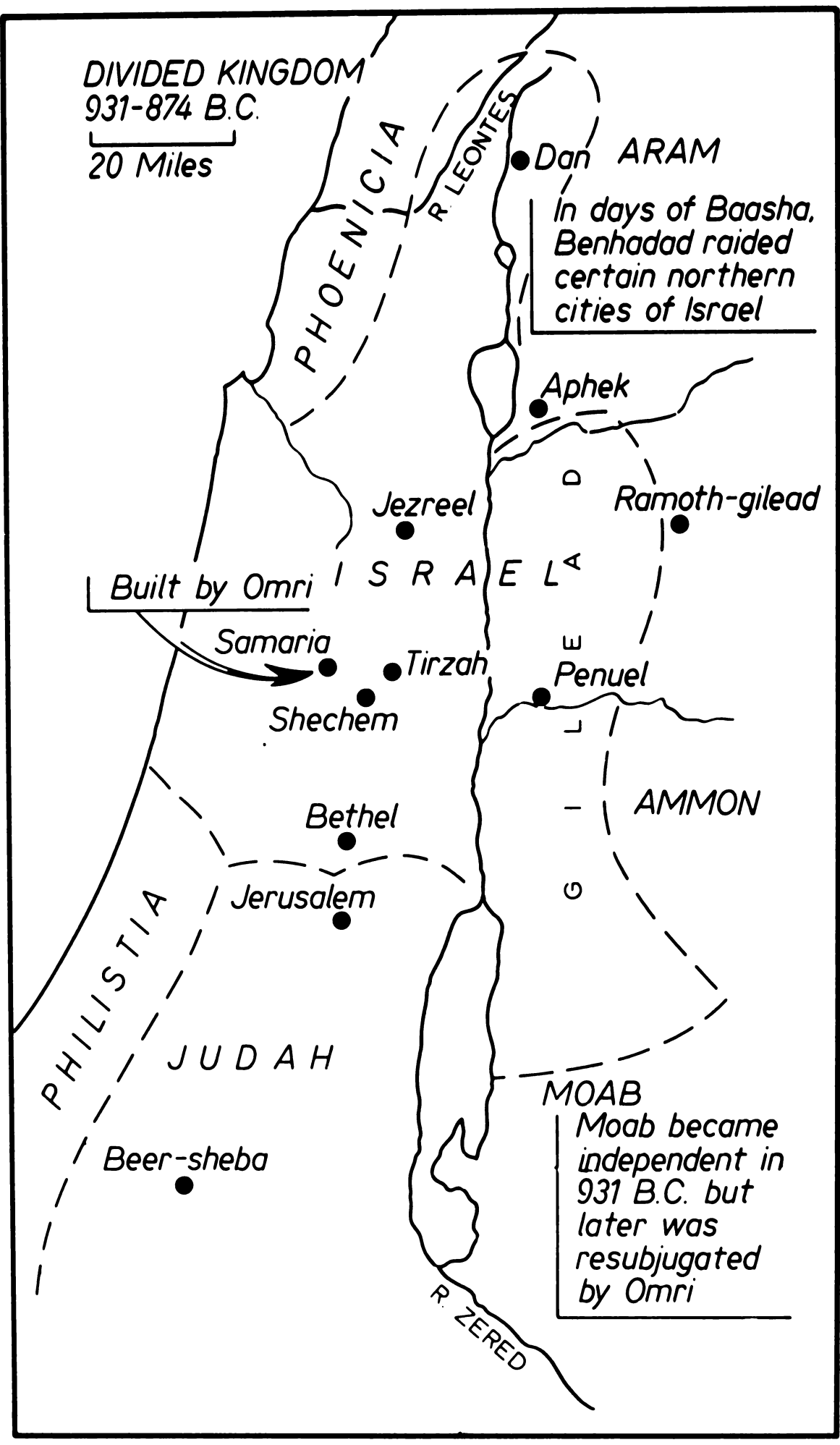
SOLOMON'S TRANSGRESSIONS AND TROUBLES 11:41-43

13. At what times during his reign did Solomon receive divine communication?
14. On what other occasions in the history of Israel did the tribe of Ephraim create dissension among the tribes of Israel? See Joshua 17:14; Jud. 8:1; 12:1.

SYNOPSIS OF PART TWO - THE SISTER KINGDOMS				
I KINGS 12 - II KINGS 17				
NINETEEN KINGS OF ISRAEL		TWELVE KINGS OF JUDAH		
931-722 B.C.		210 YEARS		
Hostility	Harmony	Humiliation	Heyday	Homage
931-885 B.C.	885-841 B.C.	841-790 B.C.	790-750 B.C.	750-722 B.C.
Conflicts between the two kingdoms	Cooperation between the two kingdoms	Political low ebb	Political high tide	Decline and subjugation
Kings I Jeroboam Nadab Baasha Elah Zimri J Rehoboam Abijam Asa	Kings I Omri Ahab Ahaziah Jehoram J Jehoshaphat Jehoram Ahaziah	Kings I Jehu Jehoahaz Jehoash J (Athaliah) Joash Amaziah	Kings I Jeroboam Zechariah Shallum J Uzziah	Kings I Menahem Pekahiah Pekah Hoshea J Jotham Ahaz Hezekiah
I K 12:1-16:20	I K 16:21 - II K 9:37	II K 10:1-14:20	II K 14:21-15:15	II K 15:16-17:41
Chapters Ten-Twelve	Chapters Twelve-Eighteen	Chapters Nineteen-Twenty	Chapter Twenty-one	Chapter Twenty-two

DIVIDED KINGDOM
931-874 B.C.

20 Miles



In days of Baasha,
Benhadad raided
certain northern
cities of Israel

Built by Omri

Moab became
independent in
931 B.C. but
later was
resubjugated
by Omri



Entrance to a Vineyard

Drawings by Horace Knowles
from the British and Foreign Bible Society

CHAPTER TEN

THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM

I Kings 12:1-33

The signs of disintegration in the empire during Solomon's last days have been noted by the historian. Still the events recorded in chapters 12 and 13 are somewhat shocking and certainly sad. In these chapters the historian speaks of (1) the great schism (12:1-24); and (2) the great apostasy (12:25-33).

I. THE GREAT SCHISM 12:1-24

The gripping narrative of Rehoboam's folly unfolds in the first twenty-four verses of chapter 12. For study purposes this narrative may be divided into five units: (1) the request of Israel (vv. 1-5); (2) the recommendation of the counselors (vv. 6-11); (3) the reply of Rehoboam (vv. 12-15); (4) the rebellion of Israel (vv. 16-20); and (5) the response of Rehoboam (vv. 21-24).

A. THE REQUEST OF ISRAEL 12:1-5

TRANSLATION

(1) Then Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel came to Shechem to make him king. (2) And it came to pass when Jeroboam the son of Nebat heard (now he was yet in Egypt, where he had fled from before King Solomon; while Jeroboam dwelt in Egypt, (3) they sent and called him), that Jeroboam and all the congregation of Israel came and spoke unto Rehoboam, saying, (4) Your father made our yoke hard; you therefore lighten the hard service of your father and the heavy yoke which he put on us, and we will serve you. (5) And he said unto them, Go yet for three days, then return unto me. So the people departed.

COMMENTS

Rehoboam was no child when he ascended the throne. It would appear from 14:21 and II Chronicles 12:13 that he was forty-one at the time of his accession. Soon after his Jerusalem coronation Rehoboam was invited to Shechem, the ancient gathering place of the Northern tribes (Josh. 24) and most important city in Ephraim, to receive the acclaim of "*all Israel*," i.e., the Northern tribes.¹ It would not appear that the Northern tribes had any concrete plans to revolt at this time, for verse one plainly states that they gathered in Shechem to "*make him king*." Nonetheless, these tribes were disgruntled because of Solomon's high-handed tactics and rigorous taxation policies, and their insistence that Rehoboam meet with them on their own ground should have been a significant hint that they would brook no negative response to their demands.

Jeroboam son of Nebat served as the spokesman for the dissident tribes at Shechem. Since the time of his abortive rebellion against Solomon, Jeroboam had resided in Egypt. When Solomon died the elders of Israel immediately sent to Egypt to inform Jeroboam of these developments and to invite him to return and speak on their behalf to Solomon's would-be successor (v. 2). Putting forth Jeroboam as their spokesman was a plain indication that the elders did not mean to be ignored (v. 3).

The dissidents complained that Solomon had placed a heavy yoke upon them, and they requested that Rehoboam grant them a measure of relief. If this relief was forthcoming, the elders promised to serve Rehoboam. There is, of course, an implied threat in this conditional allegiance (v. 4). There is no reason to think that the grievance of the Northern tribes was fictitious. While it is true that the reign of Solomon had brought plenty and prosperity to Israel (4:20, 25), that national glory

¹ Slotki (SBB, p. 92) thinks the tribes of the South as well as those from the North assembled at Shechem.

had only been achieved by means of a galling conscription and perhaps heavy taxation as well. In view of the magnitude of Solomon's undertakings, and the number of men necessarily employed in executing them, the forced labor must have involved no little hardship and dissatisfaction. That the petitioners are not exaggerating is indicated by the fact that both the aged counselors (v. 7) and the writer of the book (vv. 13-15) manifest some degree of sympathy with their request.

Rehoboam wisely postponed his decision regarding the Northern ultimatum for three days. The new king did not suffer from impetuosity. He evidently sensed how much depended upon his reply. If he complied with the request, he was accepting the crown conditionally, and there was danger he would not have the power to rule. On the other hand, if he denied their request, there was danger of revolt. He therefore asked for three days in which to deliberate. The new king wished to use that time to consult with his advisers, some of whom had accompanied him to Shechem, and others of whom were hastily summoned from Jerusalem. Viewing Rehoboam's proposed three day delay as a reasonable interval, the dissidents peacefully departed (v. 5). There is no hint as yet that the Northern tribes had already determined to revolt.

B. THE RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE COUNSELORS 12:6-11

TRANSLATION

(6) And King Rehoboam consulted the elders who had stood before Solomon his father when he was alive, saying, How do you counsel me to respond to this people? (7) And they spoke unto him, saying, If you will be a servant to this people today, serve them, respond to them, and speak unto them good words; then they will be your servants forever. (8) But he rejected the counsel of the elders who had advised him, and consulted with the young men with whom he had grown up, who stood before

him. (9) And he said unto them, What do you counsel, that we may respond to this people who have said unto me, Lighten the yoke which your father placed upon us. (10) And the young men who grew up with him said unto him, Thus you shall say to this people who have spoken unto you, saying, Your father made our yoke heavy, but as for you, lighten our yoke! Thus you shall speak unto them: My little finger is thicker than the loins of my father! (11) And therefore though my father burdened you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke; my father disciplined you with whips, but I will discipline you with scorpions.

COMMENTS

Rehoboam turned first to the older men who were experienced in statecraft from their service in the court of Solomon and asked them for their advice about handling the dissidents (v. 6). They advised Rehoboam to "*be a servant*" unto the people for this day—to accede to their demands and make reasonable concessions to them. If the new king would so humble himself this once and momentarily refrain from exercising autocratic kingly power, he would gain the allegiance of the Northern tribes forever (v. 7). Playing the role of a servant for the one day would gain for the new king many servants forever!

Rehoboam had other ideas. Having so recently tasted the sweets of royalty, the rash and imperious young king was not in a compromising mood. Spurning the advice of his father's counselors, Rehoboam turned to young men who served as his personal courtiers and counselors. These were men who had grown up with Rehoboam in Solomon's harem (v. 8). Of these friends and advisers Rehoboam asked the same question which he had asked of the elders with three slight changes. (1) He emphasized the pronoun "*you*" in the Hebrew as though he anticipated a very different answer from that which he had heard from the elders. (2) In the words "*that we may respond*" he identified these young men with himself. (3) He repeated the request of the dissidents, no doubt expressing his contempt

for their audacity by the tone of his voice (v. 9).

The young men sensed already what their friend and king wanted to hear. The author of Kings seems to express contempt for these young men by again mentioning that they were the ones who had grown up with Rehoboam. They were accustomed to autocratic rule and warned the king against accepting the crown conditionally. These young men viewed the request of the dissidents as presumptuous and they urged the king to follow a "get tough" policy with them. They suggested that he use what must have been a proverbial expression, "*My little finger is thicker than the loins of my father.*" The meaning of this expression is quite clear: Rehoboam's weakness will be stronger than his father's strength (v. 10). They urged Rehoboam to threaten to place additional burdens upon the people. Solomon had chastised them with whips; but the chastisement under Rehoboam would be with scorpions (v. 11). Some doubt exists as to whether "*scorpions*" is purely a figure of speech reflecting an even greater pain to be administered under Rehoboam (Hammond), or whether it refers to a particular kind of whip, perhaps one with barbed points like the point of a scorpion's sting (Keil). In either case "*scorpions*" would constitute an ominous threat. The advice of the young counselors was based on the idea that appeasement would not work. Any attempt to placate the people by kindly words, they feared, would be interpreted as weakness. They advised him to assert his authority unmistakably.

C. THE REPLY OF REHOBOAM 12:12-13

TRANSLATION

(12) Then Jeroboam and all the people came unto Rehoboam on the third day as the king had spoken, saying, Return unto me on the third day. (13) And the king answered the people harshly, for he had abandoned the counsel which had been proposed by the elders. (14) And he spoke unto them according

THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM 12:16-20

to the counsel of the young men, saying, My father made your yoke heavy, but I will discipline you with scorpions. (15) So the king did not hearken unto the people; for it was a turn of events brought about by the LORD, in order to establish His word, which the LORD had spoken by the hand of Ahijah the Shilonite unto Jeroboam son of Nebat.

COMMENTS

On the third day Jeroboam and the representatives of the Northern tribes appeared again before Rehoboam as the king had instructed (v. 12). Abandoning the course proposed by the elder statesmen, Rehoboam spoke harshly to the petitioners (v. 13), repeating verbatim the declaration of his young advisers (v. 14). Rehoboam's pride is inexcusable and reprehensible. Nevertheless, the Lord used this incident to accomplish His purpose of bringing about a division within the kingdom. God may even use the sinful acts of men to accomplish His will. What happened at Shechem led to the fulfillment of the predictions made by the prophet Ahijah to Jeroboam some two decades earlier (v. 15).

D. THE REBELLION OF ISRAEL 12:16-20

TRANSLATION

(16) When all of Israel saw that the king did not hearken unto them, the people responded to the king, saying, What portion do we have in David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse! To your tents, O Israel! Now look after your own house, David! So Israel went to their tents. (17) But as for the children of Israel who lived in the cities of Judah, Rehoboam reigned over them. (18) And King Rehoboam sent Adoram who was over the forced labor, but all Israel pelted him with stones, and he died. Then King Rehoboam hastened to mount his chariot

to flee to Jerusalem. (19) So Israel rebelled against the house of David unto this day. (20) And when all of Israel heard that Jeroboam had returned, they sent and called him unto the assembly, and they made him king over all Israel. None followed after the house of David except the tribe of Judah alone.

COMMENTS

After briefly consulting among themselves, the representatives of the Northern tribes defiantly replied to the king: "*What portion have we in David?*" This is the same expression used in II Samuel 20:1 and seems to mean, We are receiving no consideration from David's seed, so why yield homage to him? (cf. II S 19:43). The dissidents further declared, "*Neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse,*" i.e., his tribe is not ours; his interests are not ours. "*To your tents, O Israel,*" they shouted. This was a battle cry that had its origins in the period of the desert wanderings. As they angrily stomped out of the audience chamber they shouted one last warning, "*Now see to your own house, David,*" i.e., Let the seed of David henceforth reign over the tribe of Judah if it can; but let him not interfere in the affairs of the other tribes. With these onimous words, the representatives of Israel departed for their tents, i.e., their dwellings (v. 16).

The battle-cry here is similar to the one used by Sheba (II S 20:1) when he rebelled against David, and yet the circumstances are very different. Sheba cried, "*We have no portion in David*" because he believed in the dynastic principle, and believed that the scepter should remain in the house of Saul. In this case, the people used the battle-cry to indicate that they were *not* committed to the dynastic principle. They felt no compulsion to accept Solomon's heir as their king. The right to bestow sovereignty rested with the people.²

² Honor, JCBR, p. 176.

THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM 12:16-20

Only those members of the ten tribes who happened to be settled within the territory of Judah rendered homage to Rehoboam (v. 17). A number of Simeonites were certainly among them (cf. Josh. 19:1-9). From this point on, the term children of Israel will be used by the author of Kings in its restricted sense as referring to the inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom, the kingdom of Jeroboam.

Rehoboam was determined to demonstrate to the rebels that he would not be intimidated. He therefore sought immediately to force the Northern tribes to pay tribute and thereby to recognize his sovereignty. The king assigned this task to Adoram,³ the superintendent of forced labor, a man who would naturally be obnoxious to the people of the North. But the Northern tribes would no longer allow themselves to be coerced into serving the Davidic dynasty. With vicious determination they picked up stones and pelted Adoram until he died. The death of Adoram showed Rehoboam that the revolt was for real and that his own life was in danger in Shechem. He therefore lost no time in hastening south to the safety of Jerusalem (v. 18).

With the single exception of the death of Adoram, the revolution of 931 B.C. was a bloodless one. The author of Kings seems to regard that death as marking the formal beginning of the rebellion which was to continue until those Northern tribes were carried away captive in 722 B.C. The phrase "*unto this day*" (v. 19) indicates that the source for this history utilized by the author of Kings was written *before* the destruction of the Northern Kingdom. The phrase reveals a hope that the two sister kingdoms would ultimately be reunited.

The representatives of the Northern tribes returned to their respective communities and reported what had transpired at Shechem. When the people heard that Jeroboam had returned from Egypt, they were anxious to assemble and crown him. The sacred historian does not reveal where the coronation

³ Adoram is usually identified with Adoniram who served as superintendent of forced labor under Solomon (4:6).

ceremony was held, but it was likely at Shechem soon after the flight of Rehoboam. This public and formal consecration of Jeroboam completed the secession of the Northern tribes. Only the tribe of Judah (v. 20) and the tiny tribe of Benjamin rendered allegiance to Rehoboam (v. 21).

It is somewhat surprising to find that Benjamin cast its lot with Judah. The hereditary ties of Benjamin were with the Northern tribes. Furthermore, when the scepter was transferred from the house of the Benjaminite Saul to the house of David, deep and bitter jealousy between the two tribes developed. Apart from David's struggles with Abner and Ishbosheth, Saul's son, David had to deal with rebellions led by Sheba (II S 20:1) and Shimei (II S 16:5ff), both Benjaminites. Nevertheless, when the Northern tribes fell away, Benjamin never seems to have wavered in its allegiance to the house of David. It was probably their interest in Jerusalem which drew Benjamin close to Judah. This magnificent city, the civil and religious capital of the empire, was on the border between Benjamin and Judah. Separation from Judah would mean the loss of Jerusalem to Judah. But while the tribe as a whole elected to adhere to the house of David, some portions of Benjamin—Bethel, Gilgal, and Jericho, for example—were controlled by the Northern Kingdom.

E. THE RESPONSE OF REHOBOAM 12:21-24

TRANSLATION

(21) Now Rehoboam came to Jerusalem and assembled the house of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin, a hundred eighty thousand chosen men who were warriors, to fight with the house of Israel, to cause the kingdom to return to Rehoboam the son of Solomon. (22) But the word of God came unto Shemaiah the man of God, saying, (23) Say unto Rehoboam the son of Solomon, king of Judah, and unto all the house of Judah and

Benjamin, and the rest of the people, saying, (24) Thus says the LORD: Do not go up and fight with your brethren the house of Israel. Return each one to his house, for this thing has come from Me. And they hearkened to the word of the LORD, and turned, and departed according to the word of the LORD.

COMMENTS

Rehoboam was determined to crush the Northern uprising with military force. To this end he gathered his forces from Judah and Benjamin. The figure of a hundred eighty thousand men (v. 21) is not an overstatement in view of the fact that David's census found some five hundred thousand men in Judah (II S 24:9).⁴

Whereas Rehoboam wanted to fight for the unity of his kingdom, God had other plans. Shemaiah the man of God (v. 22) was sent to the king and the loyalists with a divine prohibition (v. 23). The term "*man of God*" is a favorite expression of the author of Kings to designate servants of the Lord, particularly prophets. The "*remnant of the people*" of verse 23 are the children of Israel who lived in Judah and remained loyal to the crown. Shemaiah,⁵ in the name of the Lord, ordered a halt to the planned invasion of the North, and ordered every soldier to return to his house. Two reasons were cited for this order. The Northern tribes were still the "*brethren*" of those who lived in the South. Furthermore, this national disruption was God-ordained. Thus a prophet

⁴ Some commentators have tried to reduce the size of this army by suggesting that the Hebrew word '*eleph*' may mean *tribal division* as well as *thousand*. Thus Rehoboam mustered a hundred eighty tribal divisions. Calculating two hundred men to a division, he would have had about thirty-six thousand men in his army. See Honor, JCBR, p. 184. This theory regarding the meaning of '*eleph*' will not bear the test of careful investigation throughout the Old Testament.

⁵ Shemaiah was the historian of Rehoboam's reign (II C 12:15).

of Judah (Shemaiah) confirmed what a prophet of Israel (Ahijah) had announced. Because of this prophetic prohibition, the men of Judah called off the planned attack on the North and returned to their homes (v. 24).⁶

II. THE GREAT APOSTASY 12:25-33

TRANSLATION

(25) And Jeroboam built Shechem in Mt. Ephraim, and dwelt in it. And he went out from there and built Penuel. (26) And Jeroboam said in his heart, Now the kingdom will return to the house of David. (27) If this people go up to make sacrifices in the house of the LORD in Jerusalem, then the heart of this people shall turn unto their lord, unto Rehoboam the king of Judah. (28) So the king took counsel, and made two golden calves, and he said unto them, It is too much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Behold your gods, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt. (29) And he placed one in Bethel and the other he put in Dan. (30) And this thing became a sin, for the people went before the one as far as Dan. (31) And he made houses on high places, and made priests from all classes of the people who were not from the house of Levi. (32) And Jeroboam made a feast in the eighth month, the fifteenth day of the month, like the feast which was in Judah, and he went up to the altar! Thus he did in Bethel, offering sacrifices to the calves which he had made. And he stationed in Bethel the priests of the high places which he had made. (33) And they went up to the altar which he had made in Bethel on the fifteenth day of the eighth month which he had devised from his own heart; and he made a feast for the children of Israel, and went up to the altar to offer incense.

⁶ At this point the Septuagint (Greek version) inserts a long addition which differs from and contradicts the Hebrew account in several particulars. Rawlinson (BC, II, 56ff.) has demonstrated conclusively that this Greek addition is a compilation of a later date, is untrustworthy, and certainly has no right to a place in the canonical Scriptures.

COMMENTS

Jeroboam's first concern as king of Israel was to strengthen his position by fortifying his capital at Shechem. Shechem was the most prominent city in the North, and was ideally located in Mt. Ephraim, i.e., the mountain district of the tribe of Ephraim. Not long after he had completed the rebuilding or fortifying of Shechem, Jeroboam was forced to temporarily move the seat of government across the Jordan river to Penuel in the area of Gilead (v. 25). This sudden shift was made necessary by the invasion of Pharaoh Shishak concerning which the sacred historian will have more to say in chapter 14.

Another urgent concern of Jeroboam was the creation of a cult in the North which would rival the divinely revealed religion practiced in the South. That Jeroboam was uneasy and insecure in his new role as king is the clear implication of verse 26. He realized that if his people continued to travel to Jerusalem three times each year to keep the prescribed feasts, the religious sentiment would soon reassert itself and sweep him and his new dynasty away (v. 27). With one religion, one sanctuary, one priesthood, there could not long endure two kingdoms. Furthermore, many of the psalms sung in the Jerusalem Temple worship centered on the divine promises made to the house of David. Jeroboam simply could not afford to have his people thus indoctrinated. When Jeroboam saw that the priests and Levites who were in the North were emigrating to Judah (II C 11:13, 16), he knew he could wait no longer, and he began to implement the plan upon which he had been meditating for some time.

After taking counsel of his closest advisers, Jeroboam determined that the new religion should center about the images of two golden calves which he erected in the shrines at Dan and Bethel (v. 29). Propaganda poured forth from the palace in an attempt to persuade the people to change their religious affiliation. Jeroboam argued that it was inconvenient for the people to have to make the long walk to Jerusalem for worship. Besides, the golden calves which he had erected represented the divine personages who had led the nation out of Egypt (v. 28).

To further encourage the people to accept his counterfeit religion, Jeroboam placed his calves conveniently in Bethel in the southern part of his kingdom and at Dan in the north (v. 29). Both of these cities were in some sense sanctuaries already. Bethel had been a holy place since the days when Jacob received his heavenly vision there (Gen. 28:11-19). A shrine had been set up at Dan during the days of the Judges by a grandson of Moses (Jud. 18:31).

The establishment of the calf religion in the North was a sin, for it both set at nought the express prohibition of the decalogue (Ex. 20:4), and also disregarded the one sanctuary of God's choice (Deut. 12:5). By thus establishing these calf centers, Jeroboam not only committed gross sin himself, but he provided an occasion for the people to sin (cf. 14:16; 15:26). The last clause of verse 30 is difficult, and there is no agreement among commentators as to its meaning. "*The people went to worship before the one even unto Dan*" is probably intended to convey the zeal with which the people pursued their new religion. If this interpretation is correct, the irony here becomes manifest. Ostensibly, Jerusalem had been rejected as a place of worship because of its distance; but the people became so addicted to the calf symbol that they willingly journeyed to distant Dan to engage in this worthless worship.

Further details of Jeroboam's counterfeit religion are presented in verses 31-33.

1. He built a house of high places. Some take this to mean that he built such a house at both Bethel and Dan, i.e., he built two temples for his calves (Keil; Rawlinson). Others think that a shrine already existed at Dan, and that verse 31 alludes to the construction of a similar shrine at Bethel (Hammond).

2. Jeroboam made priests of "*all classes of the people*" (lit., *from the ends of the people*). He thus violated the divine scheme of things which restricted the priestly rights to the tribe of Levi (v. 31). No doubt Jeroboam would have gladly retained the Levitical priests in that capacity had they been willing to serve. But they had refused to serve and had gone over to Rehoboam as a body (II C 11:13, 14).

3. Jeroboam ordered that a great religious festival be held on the fifteenth day of the eighth month. This was a deliberate imitation of the God-ordained Feast of Tabernacles held in Judah on the fifteenth day of the *seventh* month. The switch from the seventh to the eighth month would make this feast more convenient for the farmers in the North where the harvest or vintage was a month later than in Judah.⁷ The fifteenth day was retained because in lunar months, the fifteenth was the day of the full moon.

4. Jeroboam himself seems to have officiated in the sacrificial service at Bethel. It would seem that the harvest feast just mentioned was conducted only at Bethel.

5. Jeroboam stationed his newly ordained priests in Bethel. They are contemptuously referred to as "*priests of the high places*" (v. 32). The omission of reference to the sanctuary at Dan is somewhat surprising. Probably the two shrines did not have equal status. While the sanctuary at Dan was established for the convenience of those living in the far north, Bethel was regarded as the royal sanctuary (cf. Amos 7:13).

The audacity of Jeroboam's ministering at the altar in person is underscored by repetition in verse 33. The king was probably motivated by the desire to invest the newly ordained feast with regal splendor and also by the idea of encouraging his new priests to enter on their unauthorized functions without fear. Previous history supplied concrete illustration of the dangers which attended the presumptuous assumption of priestly prerogatives (Lev. 10; Num. 16:40). The threats of the Law with respect to unlawful usurpation of priestly rights may have made Jeroboam's priests hesitant. To allay their fears, the king undertook to offer the first sacrifices on the Bethel altar.

Every phase of the religion of the North was devised in Jeroboam's own heart. Thus Jeroboam schemed to promote his own cause rather than the cause of God. In his religious

⁷ It is unlikely that Jeroboam altered the month of the harvest festival merely for the sake of creating a distinction between his religion and that of the South as maintained by Keil.

innovations he went beyond God's design for him as an instrument of divine judgment upon David's house. Had Jeroboam trusted God and not tried to establish his own religion, God would have kept the promise made to him through Ahijah to give him an enduring dynasty.

The precise significance of the golden calves has been debated for years. At Mt. Sinai Aaron led the restless people in constructing a golden calf (Deut. 32:4-8). Just why the calf figure was chosen is uncertain; but the bull appears in the art and religious texts throughout the ancient Near East. Some authorities believe that the calf symbol was borrowed from Egyptian religion. Several calf cults are attested in Egypt.⁸ The calf or bull was the symbol of fertility in nature, and of physical strength. Other authorities link the Sinai calf with the cult of the moon god Sin whose worship was widespread in the ancient Near East. The shape of the animal's horns apparently symbolized the crescent of the moon.⁹ In near-by Canaan, the calf was the animal of Baal or Hadad, god of storm, fertility, and vegetation. The gods of Syria are frequently represented standing upon a bull or calf.

It is obvious that Jeroboam intended to link his calves to that Sinai calf. The expression, "*These are your gods, O Israel, which brought you out of the land of Egypt*" is common to both the present narrative and the Sinai account. But just what was the purpose, function, or theological explanation of these images?

Jeroboam's effort could hardly have succeeded if the calves erected at Bethel and Dan had been understood to be *images* of Yahweh;¹⁰ the effort would have been absurd if Jeroboam had introduced the worship of Hadad-Rimmon, the Syrian deity, in the form of a bull. Possibly the calves represented pedestals or thrones upon which the invisible Yahweh was

⁸ Kitchen, NBD, p. 180.

⁹ Key, JBL, LXXIV (1965), pp. 20-26.

¹⁰ The Semites never represented their gods zoomorphically.

understood to be enthroned.¹¹ In such a case, the calves had virtually the same theological significance as the ark and Cherubim in the Jerusalem Temple.¹²

Two negative results of the calf worship are attested in the history of Israel. First, the calf or bull was entirely too apt a symbol of fertility long to remain unrelated to the Canaanite fertility cult. The bulls at Bethel and Dan eventually led to syncretism—the adoption of pagan practices. Furthermore, the bulls could not long remain as a representation merely of Yahweh's pedestal or throne; they eventually became identified with Yahweh Himself in popular religious understanding. For this reason Hosea regarded the calves as idols (Hosea 13:2).

SPECIAL NOTE

THE SCHISM OF 931 B.C.

It is not the place of a commentator to indulge in lengthy historical analysis. Nonetheless, the schism of 931 B.C. is so important in the history of God's people that a brief note of this nature is in order. Three points regarding the revolt of the ten tribes need further treatment: (1) the causes of the secession; (2) the consequences of the secession; and (3) the conditions after the secession.

I. THE CAUSES OF THE SCHISM

A superficial reading of Kings might lead to the altogether unwarranted conclusion that it was Rehoboam's foolish decision

¹¹ W. F. Albright, *FSAC*, pp. 299-300. If Albright is correct in assuming that the Biblical Cherubim were winged bulls, then the correspondence with the bulls (calves) of Bethel and Dan would be even more striking. For a discussion of the appearance of the Cherubim, see comments on I Kings 6:23.

¹² According to II Kings 19:15, God dwelled between the Cherubim, the ark with its golden mercy seat apparently thought of as God's earthly throne. See also Ps. 80:1; 99:1; Ezek. 10:1.

at Shechem that led to the rebellion of the ten tribes. However, a careful scrutiny of the Biblical materials reveals that there were multiple causes for the division. These may be grouped under the following seven headings:

A. THEOLOGICAL FACTORS

The Scripture makes it clear that the schism of 931 B.C. did not catch God by surprise. The sacred historian declares that the rebellion was "*a turn of events from the Lord*" (12:15). Through the mouth of the prophet Shemaiah the Lord declared: "*This thing has come from Me.*" Thus it was the will of God that there be a division at this time among the tribes of His people. As part of His grand plan of redemption, God saw fit to keep Judah, the tribe of destiny, isolated as much as possible from the degrading influences of the Northern tribes. Furthermore, the division of 931 B.C. was an act of divine judgment upon the house of David for the idolatry and excesses of Solomon's reign (11:11-13, 33).

B. HISTORICAL FACTORS

As one reads the early chapters of the history of Israel, he can see the roots of the 931 B.C. schism. From the time of the Conquest, Ephraim constantly complained and created turmoil among the tribal confederacy. The Ephraimites complained to Joshua about their tribal allotment (Josh. 17:14), and to Gideon about not being included in the initial attack against Midian (Jud. 8:1). Ephraim was involved in a civil war with the men of Gilead in the days of Jephthah (Jud. 12:4). Ephraim gave allegiance to ill-fated bid of Ishbosheth to succeed his father Saul on the throne (II S 2:10). Further, the Northern tribes revealed their jealousy of and hostility toward Judah following David's victory over Absalom (II S 19:41-43). Many men of the Northern tribes joined in Sheba's rebellion against

THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM 12:25-33

David (II S 20:2). From all of this it would appear there had always been an intense rivalry between Judah and the Northern tribes, particularly Ephraim.

C. GEOGRAPHICAL FACTORS

C. F. Kent indicates the great importance of geographical factors in the schism of 931 B.C. when he writes: "Thus that great schism between north and south . . . found its primal cause in the physical characteristics that distinguish the land of Judah from that of Samaria."¹³ Kent refers to the geographical isolation of Judah and the mountainous character of the land which made effective communication between Jerusalem and the Northern cities very difficult. Judah was in effect a mountain fortress with natural barriers on all sides. Ephraim, on the other hand, stood exposed to every invader. The barrenness of Judah made that land unattractive to foreign invaders; the fertile hills of Ephraim beckoned the adventuresome plunderer. The commercial highways which skirted Judah ran through the heart of Ephraim. Kent feels these very different geographical environments produced two very different types of people. The inhabitants of Judah were for the most part sturdy, brave, intensely loyal and durable. The inhabitants of Ephraim, on the other hand, were luxury-loving, carefree, tolerant, eager for foreign ideas, cults and customs. Thus geography played a role in producing the schism of 931 B.C.

D. POLITICAL FACTORS

It would be to the distinct advantage of Egypt to bring about the division of Solomon's empire. Solomon's enemies Hadad and Jeroboam both took refuge in Egypt (11:17, 40). The fact

¹³ Kent, BGH, p. 44.

that Pharaoh Shishak invaded Palestine shortly after the division of the kingdom (14:25) suggests that he had been working toward this goal behind the scenes.

E. RELIGIOUS FACTORS

The religious bond that held the various tribes together was weakened by the introduction of pagan forms of worship under Solomon. Furthermore, the role of the prophets in the schism must not be overlooked. The prophets, who played such a key role in the reigns of Saul and David, disappeared during the reign of Solomon. No doubt the prophets resented the introduction of paganism into Israel by Solomon as well as the encroachments on tribal prerogatives and individual liberties which characterized that reign. In Ahijah of Shiloh and Shemaiah of Jerusalem the prophets reappeared, but only as antagonists of the crown pronouncing prophetic judgment upon the house of David.

F. ECONOMIC FACTORS

The extravagance of Solomon and his ambitious building program, particularly in Jerusalem, resulted in heavy taxation and forced labor. The Northern tribes had no particular interest in the further beautification and enlargement of Jerusalem. It was from this burdensome tax load that the Northern tribes demanded relief from Rehoboam (12:4).

G. PETTY FACTORS

Finally, one cannot overlook the shrewd and ambitious leadership of Jeroboam, nor Rehoboam's foolish handling of the confrontation at Shechem as factors contributing to the schism.

II. CONSEQUENCES OF THE SCHISM

The schism of 931 B.C. had ramifications in three different areas: political, economic, and religious.

A. POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES

The first and most obvious consequence of the 931 B.C. schism was the break-up of the Solomonic empire. Signs of decay were present even during the closing years of Solomon's reign. Damascus seems to have been the first vassal state to throw off the yoke of Jerusalem. As a result of the 931 schism, Ammon and Moab in Transjordan broke away from Israel. In the southeast, Edom gained independence. In the southwest, the Philistines for the most part seem to have regained their freedom. The once mighty empire was so weakened that Pharaoh Shishak met little resistance when he invaded the land in 926 B.C.

B. ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES

Solomon's wealth was derived mainly from his wide-ranging naval operations and from revenues derived from merchant caravans which traversed his land. With the schism of 931 B.C. the seaport at Ezion-geber was lost, and neither of the two miniature kingdoms was strong enough to control the major trade routes along the coast and in Transjordan. This lost revenue, plus the burden of now having to pay political bribes to foreign powers (14:26; 15:18), put a severe strain upon the economy of the two kingdoms. What little economic strength that was internally generated was dissipated in the forty or so years of intermittent warfare between Israel and Judah.

C. RELIGIOUS CONSEQUENCES

Growing directly out of the schism of 931 B.C. was the emergence of a counterfeit brand of Yahwism with shrines located in the North at Bethel and Dan. This watered-down version of revealed religion was not able to resist the energetic invasion of the worship of the Baal of Tyre in the days of Ahab. Furthermore, the state of hostilities between the two rival nations prevented thousands of people in the Northern Kingdom from attending the sacred festivals in Jerusalem. Many of the faithful in the North did emigrate to Judah. This population drain at one point became so severe that king Baasha attempted to blockade the main road to Jerusalem (15:17).

III. THE CONDITIONS AFTER THE SCHISM

Each new state had certain advantages and disadvantages after the disruption of 931 B.C.

A. THE ADVANTAGES OF ISRAEL OVER JUDAH

The Northern Kingdom had five times the territory and twice the population of Judah. Three popular and ancient sanctuaries (Bethel, Dan, and Gilgal) helped compensate for being cut off from the magnificent Temple in Jerusalem. Furthermore, Israel was a far more fertile and wealthy land than Judah. Throughout the parallel histories of the two kingdoms Israel was of much more political and military consequence than Judah could ever hope to be.¹⁴

¹⁴ North, OTIH, p. 10.

B. THE ADVANTAGES OF JUDAH OVER ISRAEL

The advantages of Judah are five in number. First, Judah had a stable monarchy. Judah held unflinchingly to the succession of the house of David. Throughout the history of the Southern Kingdom, the throne passed on, for the most part without difficulty, to the king's eldest son. In the Northern Kingdom there was no orderly arrangement for the succession of kings. A future king would be proclaimed by a prophet, and then he would await his opportunity to seize the throne.

A second advantage lies in the fact that Judah had a royal city. Jerusalem remained the place of royal residence for kings of Judah until the end of that kingdom. Israel had no such city and the Northern capital moved from Shechem to Penuel to Tirzah and finally to Samaria. Even after Omri built Samaria, other cities (e.g., Jezreel) seem to have served as secondary capitals.

Thirdly, Judah had a genuine religious center and a magnificent Temple which contained the ancient sacred ark. That this was no small advantage is proved by Jeroboam's determined effort to keep his subjects from making the trip southward to worship.

From one point of view Judah's geographical isolation may be counted as an advantage. Since none of the major highways passed through her, and since she was no great military prize, Judah was able to pursue her modest way of life for the most part without outside interference.¹⁵

Finally, although Judah's population was smaller than that of Israel, it was more homogenous. Many Canaanite enclaves existed in the North; but those living in Judah were for the most part of pure Israelite stock.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

THE KINGDOMS CONTRASTED	
ISRAEL	JUDAH
<p>Northern Kingdom Ten Tribes First King: Jeroboam Capitals: Shechem, Samaria Worship: at Dan, Bethel, Samaria Nine dynasties Nineteen kings All bad kings Shorter reigns Lasted about 210 years Kingdom fell in 722 B.C. Taken into Assyria by Shalmaneser-Sargon Longest Reign: Jeroboam II—41 years Shortest Reign: Zimri—7 days Last King: Hoshea</p>	<p>Southern Kingdom Two Tribes First King: Rehoboam Capital: Jerusalem Worship: Jerusalem One dynasty Nineteen kings and one queen Good and bad kings Longer reigns Lasted about 344 years Kingdom fell in 587 B.C. Taken into Babylon by Nebuchadnezzar Longest Reign: Manasseh—55 years Shortest Reign: Jehoahaz—3 months Last King: Zedekiah</p>

REVIEW OF CHAPTER TEN

I. FACTS TO MASTER

A. What is the significance of each of the following places in chapter 12:

- | | | |
|--------------|------------|-----------|
| 1. Shechem | 4. Israel | 7. Penuel |
| 2. Egypt | 5. Judah | 8. Bethel |
| 3. Jerusalem | 6. Ephraim | 9. Dan |

B. What role did each of the following people play in chapter 12:

- | | | |
|-------------|-------------|-----------|
| 1. Rehoboam | 3. Ahijah | 5. Adoram |
| 2. Jeroboam | 4. Shemaiah | |

C. Numbers worth remembering:

THE DIVISION OF THE KINGDOM 12:25-33

1. 931 B.C.
 2. Three days
 3. Eighth month
 4. 180,000
- D. The following words should recall to mind significant facts related in chapter 12:
1. yoke
 2. whips
 3. scorpions
 4. tents
 5. stones
 6. chariot
 7. calves
 8. priests
 9. feast
 10. incense

II. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. Why did Rehoboam respond to the summons to meet with the Northern leaders at Shechem?
2. Did the Northern tribes make unreasonable demands of Rehoboam at Shechem? Why did the king follow the advice of his junior counselors?
3. What really caused the schism of 931 B.C.?
4. What is meant by the expression, "*My little finger is thicker than my father's loins*"?
5. What advantages did Israel have after the schism? What of Judah?
6. What problems of adjustment did Jeroboam face following the schism of 931 B.C.?
7. Why did Jeroboam fear for his people to go to Jerusalem to worship? Why did Jeroboam use the calf symbol in his worship?
8. In what ways did the religion of Jeroboam differ from that practiced in Jerusalem?
9. What was the theological significance of the calves?

CHAPTER ELEVEN

JEROBOAM AND THE PROPHETS

I Kings 13:1—14:20

Because of his religious deviations, Jeroboam lost the support of the influential and conservative prophetic order. This section consists in the main of two narratives. The first relates how Jeroboam was publicly denounced by an unnamed prophet from Judah on the very day he dedicated his new temple at Bethel (13:1-34). The second narrative tells of an oracle of doom which Ahijah delivered against the house of Jeroboam (14:1-18). To this material the author adds a brief concluding note regarding the reign of Jeroboam (14:19-20).

First King of Israel

JEROBOAM BEN NEBAT
931-910 B.C.

("whose people is many")

I K 11:26-40; 12:1-14:20; II C 10; 13:1-20

Synchronism

Jeroboam 1 = Rehoboam 1

Contemporary Prophets

Ahijah

Man of God from Judah; Old prophet of Bethel

*"The memory of the just is blessed;
but the name of the wicked shall rot."* Proverbs 10:7

I. DENUNCIATION OF JEROBOAM 13:1-32

Chapter 13 narrates a thought-provoking episode from the early history of the Northern Kingdom. The historical message of the chapter is clear. Because Jeroboam had initiated his apostate religion in Israel, he lost the support of the prophetic community. But while this basic thrust of the chapter is simple, the ethical and doctrinal implications are profound.

The historian first describes the mission of an unnamed

man of God who publicly and fearlessly denounced Jeroboam for his religious innovations (vv. 1-10). He then relates how this devout man of God was deceived and consequently violated the specific commandment of God (vv. 11-19). Then the account moves on to relate how the man of God received divine condemnation and judgment for his disobedience (vv. 20-26). Finally, the section closes with the sad burial of this man of God and attendant lamentation for him (vv. 27-32).

A. THE MISSION OF THE MAN OF GOD 13:1-10

TRANSLATION

(1) And behold a man of God came from Judah by the word of the LORD unto Bethel, while Jeroboam was standing upon the altar to make sacrifice. (2) And he cried against the altar in the word of the LORD, and said, O altar, altar, Thus says the LORD: Behold a son shall be born to the house of David, Josiah will be his name; and he shall sacrifice upon you the priests of the high places who make sacrifice upon you; and the bones of men shall be burned upon you. (3) Then he gave a sign in that day, saying, This is the sign that the LORD has spoken: Behold the altar shall be rent and the ashes which are upon it shall be poured out. (4) And it came to pass when the king heard the word of the man of God which he cried against the altar in Bethel, that Jeroboam put forth his hand from upon the altar, saying, Seize him! And his hand which he put forth upon him withered, so that he was not able to pull it back to himself. (5) And as for the altar, it was rent and the ashes spilled from upon the altar according to the sign which the man of God had given in the word of the LORD. (6) And the king answered and said unto the man of God, Entreat the face of the LORD your God, and pray on my behalf, that my hand may be restored unto me. So the man of God entreated the face of the LORD, and the hand of the king was restored unto him, and became as it was before.

(7) And the king said unto the man of God. Come with me to the house and refresh yourself, and I will give you a gift. (8) And the man of God said unto the king, If you were to give me half of your house I would not go with you, nor would I eat bread or drink water in this place. (9) For thus it was commanded me in the word of the LORD, saying, Do not eat bread, nor drink water, nor return by the way you went. (10) So he went another way, and did not return by the way which he had come unto Bethel.

COMMENTS

The God of Israel did not permit the inauguration of Jeroboam's first great feast at Bethel to proceed without prophetic protest. An unidentified man of God¹ or prophet from Judah received divine revelation to go to Bethel to deliver the word of the Lord. Bethel, modern *Beitin*, was located about twelve miles north of Jerusalem, in Benjaminite territory just a short distance beyond the border between Judah and Benjamin.² When the youthful man of God entered the illegitimate Bethel temple, Jeroboam was standing on the ramp or steps that led to the altar and was preparing to make sacrifices there (v. 1). Pushing his way through the throngs, the man of God stood beside the abominable altar and delivered a dramatic oracle against that symbol of apostate worship. The man of God predicted that a future scion of David's house would utterly desecrate that altar at Bethel by burning the bones of apostate priests upon it. With precision rare but not unique³ in Bible prophecy, the very name of the son of David who would

¹ Josephus (*Ant.* VIII, 9.1) gives the name of this prophet as Yodon. The Iddo of II Chronicles 13:22 has also been nominated.

² In 931 B.C. the northern part of Benjamin had seceded with the other tribes; the southern part nearer Jerusalem remained with Judah.

³ In Isaiah 44:28 and 45:1 Cyrus, the Persian king who would deliver the Jews from Babylonian exile, is named about a hundred fifty years before his birth.

accomplish this desecration is given. Josiah,⁴ who would not be born for some three hundred years, is named as the instrument who would bring the wrath of God upon Bethel and its altar. The fulfillment of this prediction is recorded in II Kings 23:20.

Because his prophecy pertained to the distant future, the prophet felt compelled to offer to King Jeroboam and the astonished audience a miraculous sign to attest the divine origin of his oracle. The long-range prediction was to be validated by a short-range prediction that the altar would be rent and the ashes (lit., *fatness*, i.e., the fat of the sacrificial victim mixed with the ashes that consumed it) poured out (v. 3). This residue of fat was that part of the sacrifice reserved for the Lord, and so had to be very carefully disposed of in a "clean" place (Lev. 1:16; 4:12; 6:10ff.). The unceremonious scattering of the fat signified that the fat was "common" and the sacrifice invalid.⁵ This partial destruction and scattering of the sacrifice was admirably suitable to presage the ultimate and ignominious overthrow of that altar.

Overcoming his momentary shock, Jeroboam in violent anger whirled about to seize the prophet, at the same time shouting orders that the intruder be arrested. In his unbelief it never occurred to him to wait to see if the promised sign was given. He was determined to punish this brash young man who had dared interrupt the solemnity of the royal sanctuary and denounce the state religion. But that powerful arm reaching out to punish the prophet of God was itself punished. His hand dried up, i.e., it was stricken with a paralysis so that he could no longer control it (v. 4). God protected His messenger from the wrath of the king and at the same time taught the king

⁴ No valid reason can be advanced for eliminating the name "*Josiah*" from this text (as proposed by Hammond), or for regarding "*Josiah*" as merely an appellation ("*he whom Yahweh sustains*") rather than a proper name (as Keil proposes).

⁵ Gray, OTL, p. 326.

that he must never lay a hand upon the spokesmen of God.⁶ At that same instant the altar was smitten by God and the sign which had been offered by the man of God was fulfilled before the entire congregation (v. 5).

In the face of such dramatic manifestations of divine power, the king's countenance changed. He was humbled and alarmed by the judgment which he had experienced in his own person. In desperation he begged the prophet to entreat (lit., *smooth or stroke the face of*) God on his behalf that the use of his hand might be restored. The phrase "the Lord *your* God" perhaps suggests the spiritual estrangment which Jeroboam felt in this awesome moment.⁷ The sight of the pompous and presumptuous Jeroboam humbly beseeching this outspoken opponent of calf worship must surely have made a lasting impression on the minds of those who had assembled for worship on that auspicious occasion. The prophet of God, sensing that he was no longer in danger, complied with the request of the king. He entreated the Lord and the king's hand was made whole once again (v. 6).⁸

In grateful appreciation for the prophet's intercessory prayer, Jeroboam invited the young man to the palace for refreshment and reward. Whether or not Jeroboam had any ulterior motives in this invitation is uncertain. Was he trying to win this man of God to his side by friendliness? Did he hope by this means to somehow neutralize the threat which the prophet had made against his religion? Possibly. But oriental courtesy alone would require him to offer hospitality to his benefactor. In the mention of the reward nothing sinister or seductive is necessarily intended. Petitioners frequently gave presents to

⁶ Liberal scholars are prone to explain away the miracle of the withered hand. Gray (OTL, p. 322) thinks the "factual basis" of this account is the stretching forth the hand to command arrest having no effect owing to the popular dread of the word of God in the mouth of the prophet.

⁷ The expression "*the Lord your God*" may have been customary usage when a man of God was being addressed. See I Kings 17:12; 18:10.

⁸ The intercessory role of the prophet is documented throughout the Old Testament, e.g., I Sam. 7:8; Amos 7:1-6.

seers or prophets either before or after personal services were rendered.⁹

The man of God was firm in his refusal to accept the hospitality of the apostate king. Even if the king were to promise him half of the wealth of his house, the young man could not accept the hospitality of Bethel (v. 8). To share a meal in the ancient East was a token of close communion, and God had forbidden him to have such fellowship with the apostates. The refusal of the prophet was a forcible disclaimer of all fellowship with, and a public repudiation of, the Northern calf-worshippers.¹⁰ God had even commanded His messenger that he should not return to Judah by the way which he had gone to Bethel (v. 9). The precise reason for this last command is not clear. Possibly the object of it was to avoid as far as possible his being traced and followed.¹¹ In any case, the man of God faithfully carried out these instructions (v. 10).

B. THE DECEPTION OF THE MAN OF GOD 13:11-19

TRANSLATION

(11) Now a certain old prophet lived in Bethel; and his son¹² came and related to him all which the man of God had done that day in Bethel; the words which he had spoken unto the king, they told to their father. (12) And their father spoke unto them, What way did he go? For his sons had seen the way which the man of God who had come from Judah had gone. (13) And

⁹ I Kings 14:3; I Samuel 9:7,8; II Kings 5:5,15; 8:8,9.

¹⁰ The traditional Jewish explanation of the refusal to eat in Bethel: To eat there involved the danger of eating meat of the sacrificial animals which would be tantamount to participation in the rites he was denouncing. Honor, JCBR, p. 191.

¹¹ Other explanations of this prohibition offered by commentators: (1) to test the obedience of the man of God (Hammond; Rawlinson); (2) to prevent delay (Keil); (3) to prevent his being waylaid and molested (Gray; Slotki).

¹² The Hebrew is singular here, but plural in the last clause of the verse. Apparently one of the sons acted as spokesman for the rest.

he said unto his sons, Saddle the donkey! And they saddled for him the donkey and he rode after him. (14) And he went after the man of God and found him sitting under an oak; and he said unto him, Are you the man of God who came from Judah? And he said, I am. (15) And he said unto him, Come with me to my house and eat bread. (16) And he said, I cannot return with you, nor go with you, nor will I eat bread or drink water with you in this place. (17) For it was said unto me in the word of the LORD, Do not eat bread nor drink water there; do not return by going the way in which you went. (18) And he said to him, I also am a prophet like you, and an angel spoke unto me in the word of the LORD, saying, Bring him back with you unto your house, that he may eat bread and drink water. But he lied to him. (19) So he returned with him, and ate bread in his house and drank water.

COMMENTS

It is somewhat surprising to find a prophet of God residing in Bethel, the very stronghold of the Northern apostasy, Faithful priests and Levites had emigrated to Judah (II C 11:13-16), and probably most all other devout worshipers of the Lord had followed their lead. It was not a sense of duty which kept the old prophet in Bethel. The fact that he remained silent while the schism was being born, and that he permitted his sons to attend Jeroboam's sacrificial feast is perhaps an index to the character of this prophet. His allegiance to his tribe superseded his allegiance to truth. Despite his better judgment, he had gone along with the majority of the nation. Now he found it difficult to withdraw from that position even though he personally could not participate in the apostate worship.¹³

Upon returning from the Bethel temple, the sons of the old

¹³ Others see the old prophet as one who had condoned Jeroboam's apostasy and who attempted to use the weapon of lying to thwart the mission of the man of God. He would, then, be one of the first of the false prophets.

prophet reported to their father what they had seen and heard¹⁴ (v. 11). The account of the fearless appearance of the man of God before Jeroboam stirred the old prophet to assert himself. The old prophet, wishing to converse with the man of God inquired as to what way the man of God had gone. The motives of the old prophet are not entirely clear. Did he merely wish to fellowship with the dynamic and daring young prophet? Or was it his intention to persuade that man of God to reverse or change the curse he had pronounced against the Bethel altar? The sons, having noted the route the young prophet had selected,¹⁵ related this information to their father (v. 12). The old man promptly ordered his donkey to be saddled and he then rode off in pursuit of the man of God (v. 13).

The old prophet caught up with the man of God sitting under an oak¹⁶ along the road to Judah. Some have seen in this brief rest the beginning of the sin of the young prophet, and certainly it would seem against the *spirit* of his instructions to tarry so near a place from which he was to speedily disappear. In any case the action betrays his fatigue and exhaustion. Suspecting that this might be the man of God, the old prophet inquired and learned that he was indeed the man for whom he had been searching (v. 14). He invited the man of God to his home to eat with him (v. 15), but was rebuffed with the same words used in response to Jeroboam's invitation (vv. 16-17). Determined to succeed in his mission, the old prophet fabricated a story about an angelic visitation in which he was instructed to bring the man of God back to Bethel (v. 18). Probably the angel was mentioned partly for the purpose of making his story sound authentic, and partly to convey the idea of his having a

¹⁴ Verse 11 begins by quoting one son and ends by quoting several of them. Very likely one son started talking and the others joined in the account of what happened. Something of the excitement of the occasion is thus skillfully conveyed to the reader (Honor, JCBR, p. 193).

¹⁵ Targum, Septuagint and Vulgate read "*his sons showed him the way the man of God went.*" This implies a change only of one vowel in the Hebrew text.

¹⁶ The Hebrew reads *the oak* suggesting that some particular, well-known landmark is meant.

superior authority for his message. A communication through a celestial messenger would seem to have been regarded as a higher form of revelation than a subjective communication to the mind of the prophet.¹⁷

The motives of the old prophet are not entirely clear. Putting his action in the best possible light, his lie may have been born out of an ardent desire for fellowship with the man of God. At least two more sinister interpretations for his actions have been suggested:

1. When the man of God rejected the hospitality of Jeroboam, he had put the city of Bethel and the calf cult under a ban—a prophetic anathema. Though the old prophet had not personally participated in the temple activities, he felt himself condemned by the actions of the man of God. If the man of God returned to Bethel and broke bread there, it would be a public repudiation of his earlier stern stand against any fellowship with the apostates.

2. Still another view—that of Gray (OTL, p. 322)—is that the old prophet was testing the authority of his colleague, attempting to determine whether the prophet spoke with the authority of God or was merely an agent for the political enemies of the Northern Kingdom. He concentrated on the alleged divine command not to eat and drink. If the man of God could evade this word of God with impunity, his threats regarding the future of the Bethel altar might be viewed as idle.

Thus it *may* be that the old prophet was acting in the interest of his king. By bringing back the man of God the old prophet would make the whole city, and especially the sovereign, his debtor. By accomplishing what the *king* had failed to effect, he would secure for himself a position of no little influence in the new kingdom.

¹⁷ Hammond, PC, p. 296. cf. Acts 7:53; Heb. 2:2; Luke 1:13,29, etc. Slotki (SBB, p. 101), on the other hand, regards a communication through an angel as being inferior to the direct communication from God which the man of God had received. Gray (OTL, p. 330) thinks the angel was mentioned in order to avoid telling a deliberate lie in the name of God, which might have called down immediate wrath.

C. THE CONDEMNATION OF THE MAN OF GOD
13:20-26

TRANSLATION

(20) And it came to pass as they were sitting at the table, that the word of the LORD came unto the prophet who brought him back; (21) and he cried unto the man of God which came from Judah, saying, Thus says the LORD, Because you rebelled against the word of the LORD, and did not keep the commandment which the LORD your God commanded you, (22) but have returned and eaten bread and drunk water in the place of which He spoke unto you, Do not eat bread and do not drink water, your corpse shall not come unto the grave of your fathers. (23) And it came to pass after he had eaten bread and after he had drunk, that he saddled for him a donkey, for the prophet which he had brought back. (24) And when he had gone, a lion found him in the way and slew him, and his corpse was cast in the way, with the donkey standing beside it; also the lion was standing beside the corpse. (25) And behold men were passing by, and they saw the corpse cast in the way, and the lion standing beside the corpse, and they came and told it in the city where the old prophet lived. (26) When the prophet who had brought him back from the way heard, he said, He is the man of God, who rebelled against the word of the LORD; therefore the LORD has given him to the lion, which has torn him and slain him, according to the word of the LORD which he spoke to him.

COMMENTS

The man of God fell for the lie and returned to Bethel to share the hospitality of the old prophet (v. 19). How quickly obedience can turn to disobedience when one's guard is down! During the meal the old prophet received a genuine revelation from God (v. 20). The Holy Spirit took control of the old prophet and

compelled him to cry out against the man of God. He who denounced the sin of Jeroboam is now himself denounced (v. 21). Part of the punishment of the old prophet was this revelation, for it forced him to admit to his guest that he had told an untruth. Furthermore, he was forced to pronounce the sentence of doom on the life of a godly man.

The punishment of disobedience is severe. The man of God would experience an ignominious death (indicated by the word *carcass*) and the disgrace of burial among strangers. Only burial in the family sepulcher was regarded as dignified.¹⁸ The supreme warning in these verses is plain: Disobedience brings punishment irrespective of past faithfulness and service.

The gloomy meal at an end, the Bethel prophet saddled his donkey for the man of God who seems to have been traveling on foot (v. 23). The donkey may have been lent or given to the man of God by the false prophet to salve his conscience or as an act of courtesy. The donkey is mentioned specifically at this point because of the role this animal was to play at the end of the story.

As he was making his way south toward Judah, a lion¹⁹ pounced upon the man of God and slew him. That this death was no accident is indicated by the peculiar behavior of the donkey and the lion, both of which simply stood near the corpse of the fallen prophet (v. 24). The lion standing guard at the spot is a marvelous picture of perfect obedience to God in contrast to the fallen prophet who has paid the price of disobedience.

Those who had traveled that highway reported in Bethel what they had seen—the corpse of a man in the way with a lion standing nearby (v. 25). Hearing this report, the old prophet knew instantly the identity of that corpse and the reason for this tragedy (v. 26).

¹⁸ Slotki, SBB, p. 101.

¹⁹ Lions of a small breed were known in Palestine and the Near East in Old Testament times (I S 17:34; Amos 3:12, etc.), and are known to have become extinct only in the twelfth century A.D.

D. THE LAMENTATION FOR THE MAN OF GOD 13:27-32

TRANSLATION

(27) Then he spoke unto his sons, saying, saddle for me the donkey, and they saddled it. (28) And he went and found his carcass cast in the way with the donkey and the lion standing beside the carcass; the lion had not eaten the carcass nor torn the donkey. (29) And the prophet lifted up the carcass of the man of God and laid it on the donkey, and brought it back and came unto the city of the old prophet to mourn and to bury it. (30) And he laid the carcass in his own grave, and he lamented over him, Alas my brother! (31) And it came to pass after he buried him, that he said unto his sons, saying, When I die bury me in the grave where the man of God is buried; cause my bones to rest beside his bones. (32) For the word which he cried in the word of the LORD against the altar which was in Bethel, and against all the houses of the high places which are in the cities of Samaria, shall surely come to pass.

COMMENTS

Immediately the old prophet ordered his sons to saddle his donkey (v. 27), and he went to the spot where the man of God had fallen. A strange sight that was! His mouth having been sealed by the hand of God, the lion simply was standing by the body of the man of God. Contrary to his carnivorous instincts, the lion had not mangled the body of the man of God, nor had it attacked the donkey (v. 28).

The prophet had no trouble shooing the docile lion from the scene. He then tenderly took up the body of the man of God and draped it over the donkey that was idly standing by. With great sorrow the old prophet brought the corpse back to Bethel (v. 29). There he bestowed profound respect upon that corpse by burying it in his own grave. Seeing that the old prophet was responsible for his death, he could hardly have done less! Outside the sepulcher the man of God was mourned with a

customary lamentation formula: "*Alas, my brother!*" (v. 30). Thus the old prophet felt keenly the loss of the man of God and mourned his death as a relative or dear friend (cf. Jer. 22:18). The sudden death of the man of God authenticated the oracle spoken in the temple. The tomb where he was buried was still known in the time of Josiah (II K 23:17).

Following the funeral, the Bethel prophet instructed his sons to bury him upon his death alongside of the man of God (v. 31). The old prophet was now convinced that the predictions of the man of God regarding the Bethel altar and "*houses of the high places*" would certainly come to pass. "*All the houses of the high places*" suggests that other sanctuaries besides those at Dan and Bethel were springing up. On the other hand, it is possible that the old prophet *foresaw* that such sanctuaries would be multiplied in the North and knew that all such sanctuaries would meet the fate pronounced against the Bethel altar. The phrase "*cities of Samaria*" (v. 32) is proleptical, for the city of Samaria owes its existence and name to King Omri (I K 16:24).

E. THE DEPRECATION OF JEROBOAM 13:33-34

TRANSLATION

(33) After this thing, Jeroboam did not turn from his evil way, but again made priests of the high places from all classes of the people. Anyone who desired, he ordained to be priests of the high places. (34) And this thing became a sin of the house of Jeroboam, even to cut off and destroy it from off the face of the earth.

COMMENTS

The dramatic demonstration at the Bethel temple and the subsequent death of the man of God for disobeying the word of God failed to make any lasting impression on the apostate Jeroboam. Shortly after these events the king returned to his policy of appointing priests from the population in general

rather than restricting that high privilege, as the Law required, to the sons of Aaron (v. 33). Because of his contemptuous defiance of the Law of God, Jeroboam forfeited his claims to all promises made to him by Ahijah the prophet. From the moment he introduced the religious schism into Israel, his dynasty was doomed to destruction (v. 34).

II. THE DECREE AGAINST JEROBOAM 14:1-20

The commencement of the divine retribution against the house of Jeroboam is related in this unit. The same prophet who foretold Jeroboam's reign over Israel now issued a decree of doom against his dynasty. Here is narrated (1) the mission of the king's wife (vv. 1-5); (2) the message of the prophet (vv. 6-16); (3) and the mourning over the king's son (vv. 17-18). To this is appended (4) a concluding note on the reign of Jeroboam (vv. 19-20).

A. THE MISSION OF THE KING'S WIFE 14:1-5

TRANSLATION

(1) At that time Abijah the son of Jeroboam became sick. (2) And Jeroboam said to his wife, Arise, I pray you, disguise yourself, that it might not be known that you are the wife of Jeroboam, and go to Shiloh. Behold Ahijah the prophet is there. He is the one who spoke concerning me that I would be king over this people. (3) And take in your hand ten loaves of bread, and cakes and a jar of honey, and go unto him. He shall tell you what shall become of the lad. (4) And the wife of Jeroboam did so, and arose and went to Shiloh, and came to the house of Ahijah. Now Ahijah was not able to see, for his eyes were set because of his age. (5) And the LORD had said unto Ahijah, Behold the wife of Jeroboam is about to come to inquire of you concerning her son, for he is sick. Thus and thus shall you speak unto her. And it shall come to pass when she comes that she will pretend to be another woman.

COMMENTS

Some time seems to have elapsed since the events of the last chapter, and the reign of Jeroboam is coming to a close. The capital has been transferred from Shechem (12:25) to Tirzah, probably because the latter town was easier to defend. During those days, the crown prince Abijah²⁰ (“*Yahweh is my father*”) fell desperately sick (v. 1). The fact that Jeroboam gave his son a name ending in *yah* (short for Yahweh) has been adduced as proof that he did not regard himself as disloyal to the national Deity, although he had repudiated the national sanctuary in Jerusalem. Apart from the fact that the child may have been born prior to the establishment of the calf religion, it remains a precarious procedure to draw inferences about a man’s theology from the names that he gave his children.

Suspecting that the illness of his son was punitive, Jeroboam determined to secure from the prophet of God some word as to the prognosis for the lad. The king’s decision to seek help from Ahijah was based on the prophet’s support of him in the past. But realizing that his own religious activities would bring only censure and rebuke and perhaps an unfavorable prediction, Jeroboam determined to send his wife to seek the oracle. Even she must disguise (lit., *change*) herself so that neither the prophet nor the populace²¹ would recognize her as the queen (v. 2).

The commission was too delicate to be entrusted to a servant or stranger. The inconsistency of the king is seen in that while he anticipated receiving from the prophet reliable insight into the future, he expected the old man to be deceived by his wife’s disguise. At any rate, the wife was instructed to take with her certain gifts—ten loaves, some cakes, a leather bottle of honey—as presents for the prophet. The present was purposely a poor

²⁰ It is most interesting to note that both Jeroboam and Rehoboam gave their sons and intended successors the name Abijah. cf. II Chronicles 12:16.

²¹ According to Slotki (SBB, p. 104) the disguise was intended to be a protection against the king’s personal enemies and was not intended to conceal her identity from the prophet.

one for the sake of maintaining the deception. The reason for this elaborate preparation is so that the king might learn what the fate of his young son would be (v. 3). Probably Jeroboam hoped for more than just information; he may have hoped to trick the old prophet into a declaration that the son would recover. In godless superstition he apparently believed that whatever the prophet said would come to pass even if he were tricked into saying it.

The queen was just as anxious as her husband to secure the pronouncement of the prophet and so, as soon as she had made the necessary preparations, she hastened to Shiloh. Shiloh would be about thirty miles distant from Tirzah—more than a day's journey for the queen, as the road involves some toilsome climbing. Ahijah lived in his own house in Shiloh and spent his days there in darkness because his eyes "*had set,*" i.e., his pupils would not adjust to the light (v. 4). Why Ahijah had remained in the North when other godly Israelites were migrating to the South is not stated. Some suggest it was because of his old age and others that he felt a duty to remain and be as best he could a witness for truth.

The attempted deception was frustrated by a direct revelation from the Lord. Ahijah was told who was coming to his house and for what purpose she was coming (v. 5).

B. THE MESSAGE OF GOD'S PROPHET 14:6-16

TRANSLATION

(6) And it came to pass when Ahijah heard the sound of her feet coming at the door, that he said, Enter, wife of Jeroboam! Why are you pretending to be someone else? For I have been sent unto you with a heavy word. (7) Go say to Jeroboam, Thus says the LORD the God of Israel: Because I raised you up from the midst of the people and made you a prince over My people Israel, (8) and rent the kingdom from the house of David, and gave it to you, and you have not become like My servant David who kept My commandments and who walked after Me with

all his heart to do only that which was upright in My eyes, (9) and you have done evil more than all who were before you, and have made for yourself other gods and molten images to provoke Me to anger; and Me you have pushed behind your back: (10) Therefore, behold I am about to bring a calamity upon the house of Jeroboam; and I will cut off from Jeroboam male offspring, both the fettered and the free in Israel, and I will exterminate the rest of the house of Jeroboam, as one takes away dung until it be gone. (11) The one of Jeroboam who dies in the city the dogs shall eat, and the one who dies in the field shall the birds of the heaven eat; for the LORD has spoken. (12) But as for you, Arise, Go to your house. When your feet enter the city the lad will die. (13) And all of Israel shall lament for him and bury him, for he alone of Jeroboam shall come to the grave, because in him there was found a good thing toward the LORD God of Israel in the house of Jeroboam. (14) And the LORD shall raise up for Himself a king over Israel who will cut off the house of Jeroboam this day. And what? Now! (15) For the LORD shall smite Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water; and He shall pluck up Israel from upon this good land which He gave to their fathers, and He shall scatter them beyond the River, because they have made their Asherim, provoking the LORD. (16) And He shall give Israel up on account of the sins of Jeroboam, who sinned and who caused Israel to sin.

COMMENTS

When the queen stood at the door, the prophet ripped away the deception by identifying her and asking why she had attempted to perpetrate this masquerade. No favorable oracle would fall from the lips of the prophet, for he had been instructed by his God to bring to her heavy or rough tidings (v. 6). Some writers detect in the phrase "*heavy tidings*" a certain sympathy for Jeroboam and his wife. If this be the case, Ahijah did not permit his sympathy to compromise the message he was to deliver from the Lord.

The message which Ahijah gave the queen to take back to Jeroboam was indeed ominous. Before pronouncing sentence, the prophet briefly stated the divine case against Jeroboam. It was God who had raised the lowly Jeroboam to the throne of Israel and, whether he realized it or not, the king was merely God's vice-regent ruling over God's people (v. 7). In spite of the fact that God had torn such a large part of the kingdom from the house of David and had given it to Jeroboam, the king of Israel had not walked the paths of spiritual fidelity which David had trod (v. 8). As a matter of fact Jeroboam had committed a more grievous sin than any of his predecessors whether kings (Saul and Solomon in particular) or judges. In defiance of the decalogue, (Ex. 20:4) Jeroboam had made "*other gods*" which were merely "*molten images*," two names for the same things, viz., the calves at Bethel and Dan. Doubtlessly Jeroboam had not intended his calves to be considered idols, but only symbols like the Cherubim in the Jerusalem Temple. But God did not recognize whatever theological distinctions the king had worked out. In His view those calves were "*other gods*," and the introduction of this element into the religion of Israel had provoked God to anger. Jeroboam had put God behind his back, i.e., had contemptuously disregarded God's revealed will (v. 9). For these reasons the king and his dynasty had to be punished.

The judgment which Ahijah pronounced against the house of Jeroboam would be swift²² and thorough. Every male of his house would be cut off.²³ The proverbial expression "*him that is shut up and left in Israel*" (KJV) probably refers to those both bond and free or, in other words, men of all kinds and classes.²⁴ The translation, proposed by Honor, "*the fettered and free*," preserves the alliteration of the original Hebrew.

²² The Hebrew *hinne* ("behold") and the participle after *lakhen* ("therefore") introduces a prophetic threat in the immediate future.

²³ The Hebrew literally reads, "*he who urinates against the wall*." Hammond (PC, p. 315) restricts the phrase to boys (as opposed to men).

²⁴ The expression also occurs in Deuteronomy 32:36; I Kings 21:21; II Kings 9:8. It has been taken to mean: (1) married and single; (2) precious and vile; (3) minors and those of age.

God would continue to exterminate the members of the royal household until they had all been removed. The expression "*as one takes away dung*" indicates the loathing and contempt with which the members of the royal house would be treated in that day of judgment (v. 10). The corpses of those pathetic princes would be left unburied. Those who fell in the city would be eaten by the roving packs of savage dogs; those who fall in the open field, by vultures and other birds of prey. To the eastern mind, the thought of being left unburied was the ultimate in disgrace and dishonor. Yet this is exactly what would take place with respect to the offspring of Jeroboam because "*the Lord has spoken it*" (v. 11).

As a sign that the long-range prediction concerning the dynasty of Jeroboam would come to pass, Ahijah gave a prediction which could be verified within a matter of hours. At the precise moment that the queen arrived back at the palace, her son would die (v. 12). The entire nation would mourn for the crown prince and they would bury him. He would be the one exception to the gruesome picture of verse 11 of the sons of Jeroboam being left unburied. Of all the members of the royal household, this young prince alone had demonstrated the kind of disposition and piety which deserved recognition by the Lord (v. 13). The words almost suggest that Abijah dissented from his father's ecclesiastical policy. To accomplish His divine purposes against the house of Jeroboam the Lord would raise up a king which later history reveals to be Baasha (15:29). The day of judgment for the house of Jeroboam was to begin on that very day that Ahijah delivered his oracle of doom. The last three words of verse 14 are difficult to interpret. Probably they mean something like, "*and what do I say? Even now!*" They are intended to underscore the immediacy of the prediction.²⁵

The people as well as the king of Israel would share in the judgment of God. They had acquiesced in the wicked innovations

²⁵ Slotki, SBB, p. 106.

JEROBOAM AND THE PROPHETS 14:17-18

of Jeroboam and had joined in the worship of the calves. God would smite Israel and sweep it away as easily and swiftly as a reed might be swept down a turbulent stream. Israel shall be removed from the land God had promised to the godly patriarchs and carried into captivity beyond the Euphrates river. The captivity foreshadowed by Moses (Deut. 28) and by Solomon (I K 8:46-50) is here prophesied for the first time. This terrible fate would befall the nation because they had provoked the Lord by making their Asherim (v. 15). Asherah (not "grove" as in KJV) was a goddess represented by a wooden pole or a tree stripped of its branches, set up by the side of an altar to Baal.²⁶ It is clear from this passage that the old Canaanite abominations had survived in Israel and that during the reign of Jeroboam these pagan practices flourished alongside of the recently established calf cult. So because of all the sins inaugurated and tolerated during the reign of the first king of the Northern Kingdom, God was forced to simply give up Israel to her enemies for punishment and judgment (v. 16).

C. THE MOURNING OVER JEROBOAM'S SON 14:17-18

TRANSLATION

(17) And the wife of Jeroboam arose, and departed, and came to Tirzah, and when she was about to enter the threshold of the door, the lad died. (18) And all Israel buried him, and lamented for him according to the word of the LORD which He spoke by the hand of His servant Ahijah the prophet.

²⁶ Because it was made of wood, there is no possibility of discovering one through archaeological excavation, except perhaps in a carbonized form. Moreover, thus far there has not been found in Palestine any depiction on stone engraving which could be definitely identified as an Asherah. Honor, JCBR, p. 202.

COMMENTS

With sad heart the queen arose to make the long twenty-five mile trek back to the capital at Tirzah.²⁷ When the distraught lady entered the threshold of the palace, her son died (v. 17). At first sight this statement seems to be at variance with the prediction of verse 12, that the child would die when the queen entered the *city*. But the palace may have been on the edge of the city, or the city may have been little more than the palace itself. The prince was buried and mourned just as Ahijah had prophesied (v. 18).

D. CONCLUDING NOTE
ON THE REIGN OF JEROBOAM 14:19-20

TRANSLATION

(19) And the rest of the acts of Jeroboam how he fought and how he reigned, behold they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. (20) And the length of Jeroboam's reign was twenty-two years, and he slept with his fathers, and his son Nadab ruled in his stead.

COMMENTS

In closing the account of Jeroboam, the historian mentions sources to which the reader of his book might turn for further information about this reign. Not much is said about the exploits of Jeroboam as the attention has been focused almost entirely on the sin which he committed. The full account of

²⁷ Some scholars assume that Jeroboam did not make Tirzah his capital, but only used it as his summer residence. The site of Tirzah long has been disputed, but now general agreement exists that it was at *Tell al-Far'a*, a well-watered and strategically significant site six miles northeast of Shechem commanding access to the Jordan valley.

JEROBOAM AND THE ,PROPHETS 14:19-20

Jeroboam's reign was recorded in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel, which seems to have been a record of daily occurrences during this reign (v. 19). Jeroboam died after a reign of twenty-two years. Elsewhere it is recorded that the Lord smote him, and this certainly suggests that he died as a result of some kind of divine visitation. Be that as it may, he was succeeded on the throne by his son Nadab (v. 20).

REVIEW OF CHAPTER ELEVEN

I. FACTS TO MASTER

A. Identify how each of the following fit into the events in this section:

- | | |
|------------|-----------|
| 1. Bethel | 5. Josiah |
| 2. Samaria | 6. Abijah |
| 3. Shiloh | 7. Ahijah |
| 4. Tirzah | |

B. Each of the following should bring to mind significant information contained in this section:

- | | | |
|-----------|--------------|---------------------|
| 1. sign | 5. oak | 9. ten loaves |
| 2. altar | 6. angel | 10. blind eyes |
| 3. hand | 7. lion | 11. sick child |
| 4. donkey | 8. sepulcher | 12. disguised woman |

C. Summarize each of the following:

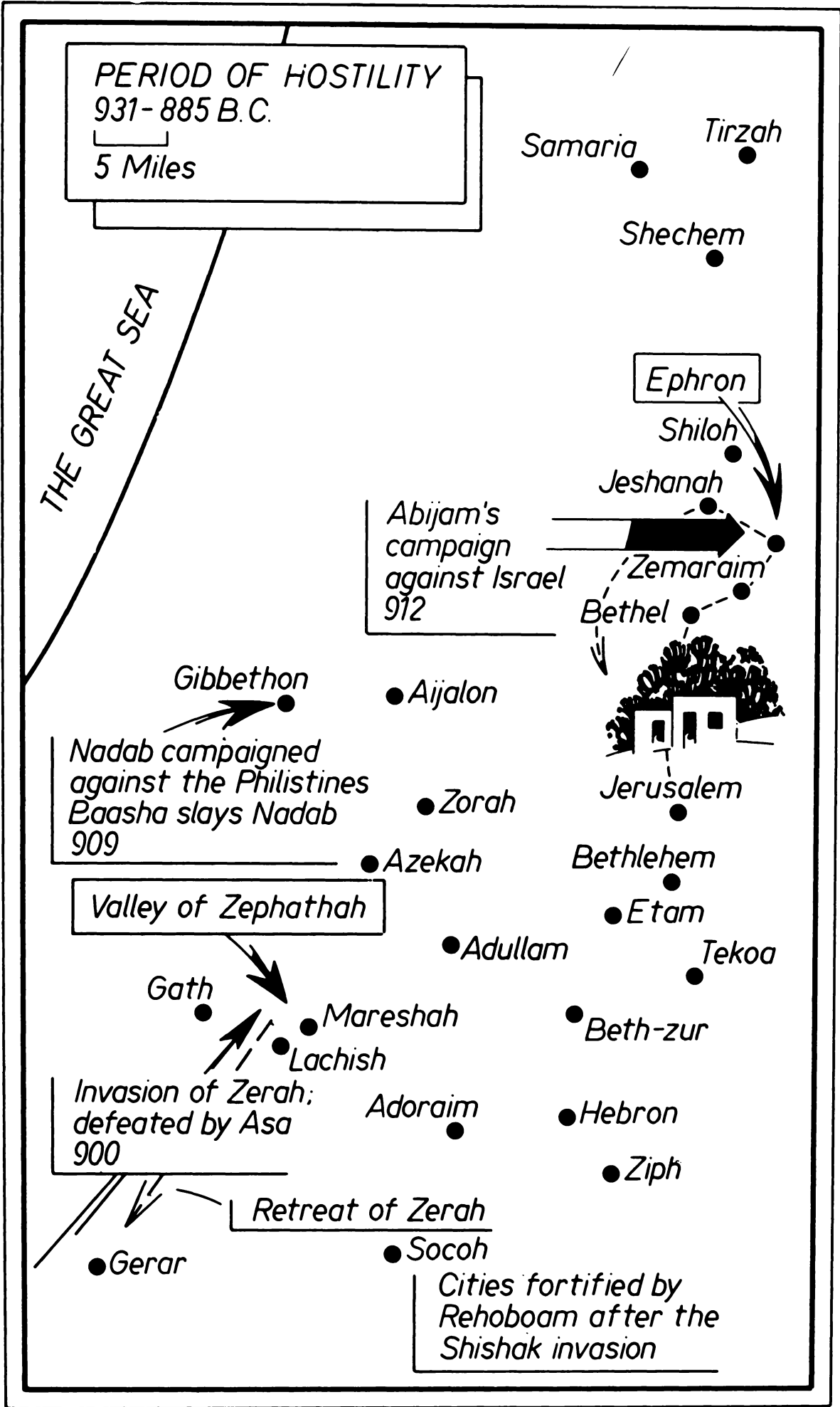
1. The prophecy against the Bethel altar
2. The prophecy regarding the son of Jeroboam and his dynasty

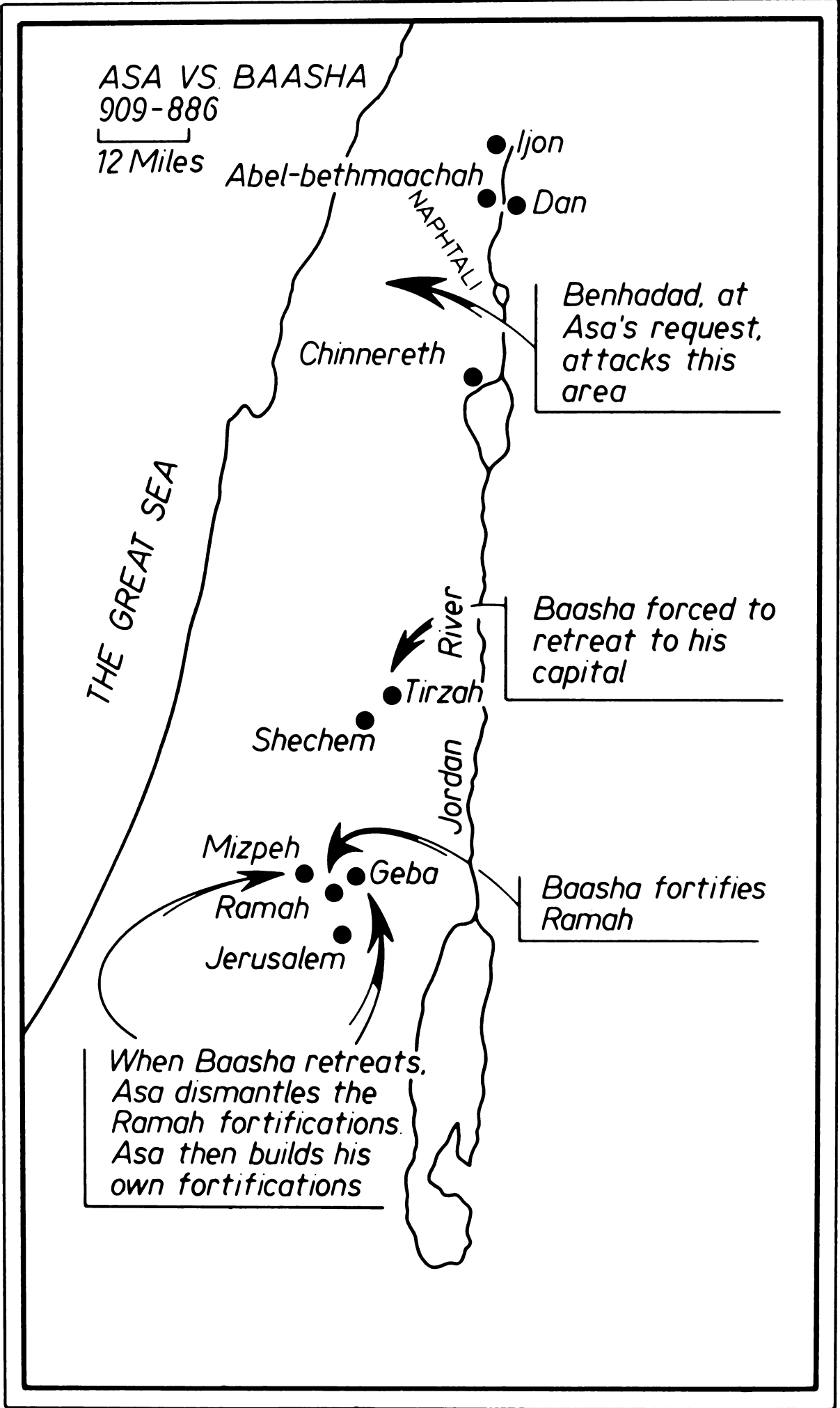
II. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. What admirable qualities can one see in the life of the unnamed man of God from Judah?
2. What lesson was God teaching Jeroboam when He caused

his arm to wither?

3. Why did the king invite the man of God to go home with him?
4. Why do you think the old Bethel prophet wanted to meet the man of God? Why the lie?
5. Why was the man of God slain while the old prophet escaped punishment? *Did* the old prophet really escape punishment?
6. What purpose did the death of the man of God serve?
7. Is it possible to believe a lie today and eternally be punished? See II Thessalonians 2:11.
8. What basic lessons of eternal value can be gleaned from I Kings 13?
9. Why did Jeroboam have his wife disguise herself before going to consult with Ahijah?
10. Why did God take the life of Jeroboam's son? See especially 14:13.
11. Jeroboam's religion was part truth and part error. Since it was man-made and man-centered, it was in essence idolatry. In what way was Jeroboam's brand of idolatry worse than that practiced by pagans?





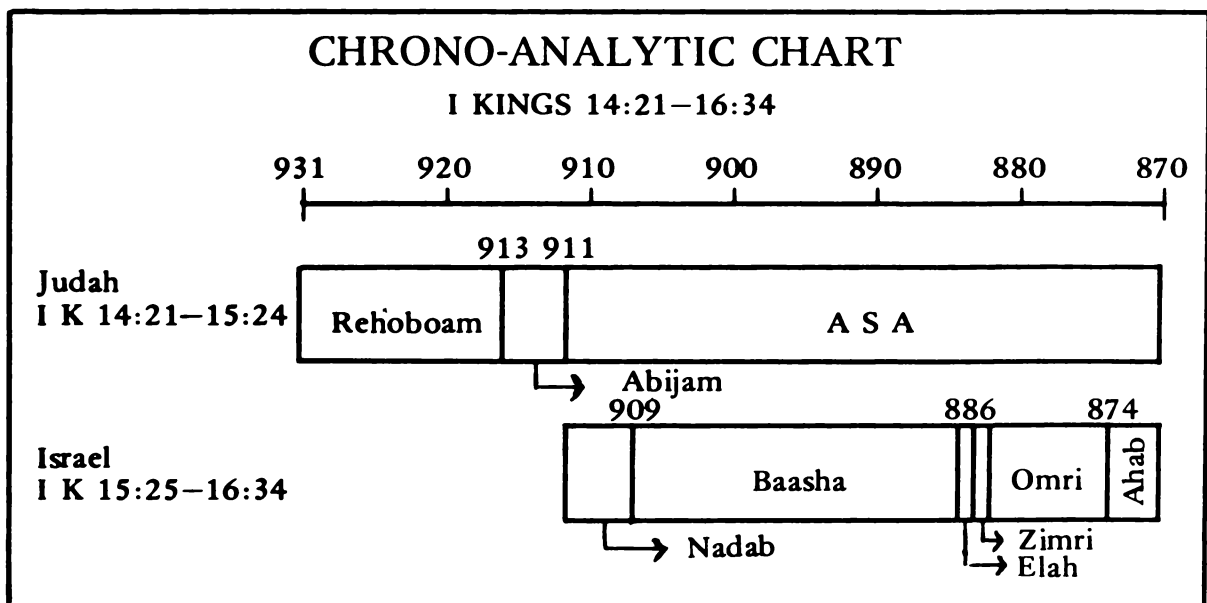
CHAPTER TWELVE

THE KINGDOMS IN CONFRONTATION AND COOPERATION

I Kings 14:21—16:34

The material found in 14:21—16:34 is perhaps the least interesting in the books of Kings. This is the case because more than half of the seventy-nine verses of this section contain editorial introductions, epilogues, and comments on the reigns of the various kings.

These verses cover the first six decades of the Divided Monarchy, from 931-870 B.C. The contents of this section can be diagrammed as follows:



From the time of the schism in 931 B.C. the two kingdoms—Israel and Judah—had hostile relations one with the other. The state of belligerency lasted until the great diplomat Omri ascended the throne of Israel in 885 B.C. At that point Israel and Judah became closely allied through marriage. During the course of the Omri dynasty, Northern and Southern kings joined together in both commercial and military ventures. In this unit of the text, the sacred historian treats the kings of Judah

whose reigns cover the years 931 to 870 B.C. He also treats five complete reigns of the Northern kings covering the years 910-874 B.C. At the conclusion of chapter 16 he introduces the reign of Ahab about whom he will have much more to say in subsequent chapters.

I. THE FIRST THREE KINGS OF JUDAH 14:21—15:24

(931-870 B.C.)

The first three kings of Judah ruled for sixty-one years. In this section the author speaks of (1) the apostasy of Rehoboam (14:21-31); (2) the hypocrisy of Abijam (15:1-8); and (3) the reformation of Asa (15:9-24)

A. THE APOSTASY OF REHOBOAM 14:21-31

In dealing with the unfaithfulness of Judah under Rehoboam, the historian first describes (1) the extent of the apostasy (vv. 21-24), and then (2) the punishment of the apostasy. The chapter closes with (3) a brief summary note about Rehoboam (vv. 29-31).

<p>First King of Judah REHOBOAM BEN SOLOMON 931-913 B.C. ("liberator or enlarger of the people") I K 12:1-24; 14:21-31; II C 10-12 Synchronism Rehoboam 1 = Jeroboam 1 Contemporary Prophet Shemaiah</p>	
<p>Mother: Naamah</p>	<p>Appraisal: Bad</p>
<p><i>"In the multitude of people is the king's honor; but in the want of people is the destruction of the prince."</i> Proverbs 14:28</p>	

1. THE EXTENT OF THE APOSTASY (14:21-24)

TRANSLATION

(21) Now Rehoboam the son of Solomon ruled in Judah. Rehoboam was forty-one years old when he began to reign, and he ruled seventeen years in Jerusalem, the city which the LORD chose from all the tribes of Israel, to put His name there. And the name of his mother was Naamah the Ammonitess. (22) And Judah did that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD, and they made Him jealous more than all which their fathers had done in their sins which they committed. (23) And they also built for themselves high places and pillars and Asherim upon every high hill and under every green tree. (24) And also male temple prostitutes came to be in the land; they did according to all the abominations of the nations which the LORD had driven out from before the children of Israel.

COMMENTS

Having brought to a close his treatment of the first king in the North, the historian now turns his attention to the reign of Rehoboam who ruled simultaneously in the South. Rehoboam was no child when he foolishly responded to the elders of the Northern tribes and thereby lost their allegiance. He was forty-one when he became king. He ruled for seventeen years in Jerusalem, the capital of God's own choosing. It was a great advantage to Rehoboam to have as the seat of his government the city which God had chosen for His Temple and thus this point is emphasized by the historian in verse 21. The name of Rehoboam's mother is given—she was Naamah ("peasant") the Ammonitess (v. 21). The name of the mother is given with every king in Judah, probably because of the position of influence which the queen mother occupied in the kingdom.

It is somewhat shocking that there was extensive religious deterioration and apostasy in Judah during the reign of

Rehoboam. From the account in Chronicles it would appear that the tiny nation remained faithful to the Lord for the first three or four years of this reign. But when Rehoboam began to feel secure, the defection commenced (II C 12:1). It is perhaps noteworthy that the historian says Judah, not Rehoboam, did evil. Perhaps the king himself remained faithful and was unable to suppress the idolatrous tendencies which had crept in under his father Solomon. Be that as it may, the evil in Judah provoked the Lord to jealousy. Israel was the bride of the Lord and whenever the nation got carried away with the worship of other gods, the Scriptures speak anthropomorphically of God's jealousy.

The apostasy was quite serious, for the people exceeded their fathers in sin (v. 22). Just as in the Northern Kingdom, the people built high places where they might worship the astral deities. They erected the pillars which symbolized Baal and the poles which were symbols of Asherah.¹ These abominations were found throughout the land "*on every high hill and under every green tree*" (v. 23). Shady spots were necessary for the immoral rites associated with Baal worship. Most shocking of all, male cult prostitutes² sprang up around the land. Whether these were homosexual³ or heterosexual prostitutes is uncertain. For these abominations the Lord cast out the Canaanites (v. 24), and now His own people had adopted these practices!

2. THE PUNISHMENT OF THE APOSTASY (14:25-28)

TRANSLATION

(25) And it came to pass in the fifth year of King Rehoboam that

¹ The Ras Shamra texts revealed that *Asherah* was the mother-goddess of the fertility cult.

² According to Deuteronomy 23:18 cult prostitutes were of both sexes. The masculine here may embrace both male and female prostitutes.

³ That castrated Sodomites were known in ancient Israel is indicated by Deuteronomy 23:2.

Shishak, king of Egypt, went up against Jerusalem. (26) And he took away the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the house of the king, and everything he took away, even taking the shields of gold which Solomon had made. (27) And King Rehoboam made in their place shields of bronze, and committed them into the hand of the commanders of the guard who kept the door of the king's house. (28) And it came to pass when the king went up to the house of the LORD, the guard carried them; and then they returned them to the chamber of the guard.

COMMENTS

The apostasy in Judah was punished rather swiftly by the Lord. In the fifth year of Rehoboam (926 B.C.) the great Pharaoh Shishak invaded the land (v. 25). Egypt was overjoyed at the turn of events in Canaan. The mighty empire of Solomon had been divided. No doubt this is the very thing which Shishak had hoped for when he granted assylum to Jeroboam several years earlier. At last Egypt could reassert her claims to dominion over Palestine. A record of this invasion is inscribed on one of the pylons of the great Amon temple at Karnak (Thebes) in lower Egypt. This inscription contains the names of between fifty and sixty localities in Israel and about a hundred in Judah which were captured on this expedition.⁴ Scripture makes no direct mention of the fact that the kingdom of Jeroboam suffered along with Judah, but there is a hint to this effect in the notice that Jeroboam moved his capital temporarily into the region of Transjordan (12:25).

The Chronicler relates that at the approach of Shishak, Rehoboam and the nation repented of their transgressions and begged God for mercy. God heard that prayer and spared Jerusalem

⁴ Shishak left at Megiddo a stele of which fragments have been found. The best discussion of this campaign is B. Mazar, "The Campaign of Pharaoh Shishak to Palestine," SVT, IV (1957), 57-66.

from destruction at the hands of Shishak (II C 12:5-8). Nevertheless, to teach His people the bitter results of sin, God permitted them to be brought under tributary obligation to Shishak. The Egyptian invader took away all the treasures of the house of the Lord as well as those of the king's palace, including the beautiful shields of gold which Solomon had hung in the house of the forest of Lebanon (v. 26). Rehoboam could do no better than to replace these golden shields with shields of bronze or copper (v. 27) which were carried by the royal bodyguards (lit., "*runners*") whenever the king made an official visit to the Temple. After the parade these shields were immediately returned to guard chambers so as to conceal from the people the humiliating fact that bronze had been substituted for gold (v. 28). What a contrast! Solomon's golden shields were put on public display in the house of the forest of Lebanon; but the shields of bronze were of so little value that they were stored in a guard chamber. The shields of bronze are a striking evidence of the decadence of Rehoboam's kingdom. Try as he may to maintain the grandeur of Solomon's court, Rehoboam was but a pale imitation of his father.

**3. A CONCLUDING NOTE
ON THE REIGN OF REHOBOAM (14:29-31)**

TRANSLATION

(29) And the rest of the acts of Rehoboam and all which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? (30) And war occurred between Rehoboam and Jeroboam constantly. (31) And Rehoboam slept with his fathers, and he was buried with his fathers in the city of David. And the name of his mother was Naamah the Ammonitess; and Abijam his son reigned in his stead.

COMMENTS

In this formal conclusion to the account of Rehoboam the historian alludes to his source of information—the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah (v. 29). He adds the information that a state of war or perhaps an armed truce existed between Rehoboam and his counterpart in the North, Jeroboam, throughout the seventeen years in which they simultaneously reigned (v. 30). Shemaiah the prophet had prohibited a full-scale invasion of the North by Rehoboam, and thus it is unlikely that verse 30 is referring to organized campaigns. Rather the reference here is probably to incessant border skirmishes and raids.

The account concludes with a note that Rehoboam died peacefully (*“he slept with his fathers”*) and was buried in the family tomb in the city of David, i.e., the southeastern hill of Jerusalem.⁵ The name of Rehoboam’s Ammonitess mother is repeated from verse 21, perhaps suggesting that she was the one who had unduly influenced Rehoboam to walk the paths of apostasy. Finally, the name of Rehoboam’s son and successor, Abijam (or Abijah⁶ as it appears in Chronicles) is given (v. 31).

B. HYPOCRISY UNDER ABIJAM 15:1-8

• TRANSLATION

(1) Now in the eighteenth year of King Jeroboam son of Nebat, Abijam reigned over Judah. (2) Three years he reigned in Jerusalem; and the name of his mother was Maachah the daughter of Abishalom. (3) And he walked in all the sins of his father

⁵ The phrase *“slept with his fathers”* may reflect the mortuary custom of laying corpses on benches in the burial cave as though on a couch. Honor, JCBR, p. 208.

⁶ It may be that the author of Kings has deliberately corrupted the name Abijah (*“my father is Yahweh”*) to make it Abijam (*“my father is Yam”*). *Yam* was the Canaanite sea god. Some Hebrew manuscripts, however, read here *Abijah*.

which he had done before him; and his heart was not perfect with the LORD his God like the heart of David his father. (4) But for the sake of David, the LORD his God gave to him a lamp in Jerusalem, to raise up his son after him and to cause Jerusalem to stand; (5) because David had done that which was upright in the eyes of the LORD, and did not turn aside from all which He commanded him all the days of his life, except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite. (6) And there was war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam all the days of his life. (7) And the rest of the deeds of Abijam and all which he did, are they not written in the book of chronicles of the kings of Judah? And there was war between Abijam and Jeroboam. (8) And Abijam slept with his fathers, and they buried him in the city of David; and Asa his son ruled in his stead.

Second King of Judah

ABIJAH (ABIJAM) BEN REHOBOAM

913-911 B.C.

(*"Yahweh is my Father"*)

I K 15:1-8; II C 13

Synchronism

Abijah 1 = Jeroboam 18

Contemporary Prophet

Iddo

Mother: Maachah

Appraisal: Bad

"Great deliverance gives He to His king; and shows mercy to His anointed, to David, and to his seed forevermore." Psalms 18:50

COMMENTS

Abijam does not appear to have been the eldest of Rehoboam's twenty-eight sons (cf. II C 11:20-22), but he was nevertheless selected to succeed his father because he was the eldest son of Rehoboam's favorite wife. Abijam must have been of considerable age when he ascended the throne, because at his death three years later he left behind him thirty-eight children (II C 13:21).

The three years which Abijam reigned are not to be interpreted strictly. As he ascended the throne in the eighteenth year of Jeroboam and died in the twentieth year of that monarch, his reign was really two plus years. The Hebrews often rounded off numbers counting part of a year as a whole year.

Rehoboam's mother's name is given here as Maachah and in Chronicles as Michaiah (II C 13:2). This suggests that her name was changed somewhere along the line. Which of the above names was her given name is impossible to ascertain. Maachah was a descendant of Abishalom (v. 2), another spelling of Absalom, the son of David (cf. II C 11:21).⁷

Abijam himself seems to have been a worshiper of the Lord, but because he tolerated idolatry in the realm he receives the reproof of the author. It is said of him what was said of Solomon, "*his heart was not perfect with the Lord his God*" (v. 3). Nevertheless, God gave him a lamp, i.e., *progeny*, and a successor on the throne of Judah for the sake of David. But for David's piety, Abijam's family would have been dethroned if not destroyed as was that of Jeroboam, his contemporary in the Northern Kingdom. Abijam was the third prince of the line of David to permit idolatrous worship in Jerusalem, so the dynasty deserved divine judgment. Yet for four hundred years the descendants of David continued to sit on the throne of Judah, while in the Northern Kingdom there were nine changes of dynasty in just over two hundred years. Thus did God demonstrate His faithfulness to David, the man after God's own heart, who had so faithfully observed the commandments of God except in the matter of Uriah the Hittite⁸ (v. 5).

The writer has previously indicated that a state of hostilities existed between Rehoboam and Jeroboam throughout their

⁷ In II Chronicles 13:2 Abijah's mother is said to have been the daughter of Uriel. Uriel must have married Absalom's daughter Tamar (II S 14:27), and Maachah was the fruit of that marriage. Thus Maachah was the granddaughter of Absalom on her mother's side. Such was the proposal made by Josephus *Ant.* VIII, 9.1.

⁸ Because this qualification is missing in the Septuagint, many critics *assume* that it is a gloss added by a later reader. Verse 6, the second reference to the war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, is also absent in the Septuagint.

reigns (cf. 14:30). Rehoboam in verse 6 stands for the *house* of Rehoboam represented by Abijam, and the purpose of the author here is to indicate that the state of hostilities erupted into open warfare during the reign of Abijam (v. 7). The Chronicler gives the details of Abijam's invasion of the Northern Kingdom with four hundred thousand men. In spite of being outnumbered two to one, the troops of Abijam won a decisive battle at mount Zemaraim. Several Northern cities were annexed by Judah,⁹ and Jeroboam was not able to recover his strength¹⁰ all the days of Abijam (II C 13:3-20). This military victory is the only distinctive accomplishment of Abijam's reign. The only other information known about this lackluster monarch is that he married fourteen wives and begat thirty-four sons and daughters (II C 13:21). Abijam was succeeded on the throne by his son Asa (v. 8).

C. THE REFORMATION UNDER ASA 15:9-24

At the outset of his reign, Asa launched a national movement to bring his people back to the old paths of fidelity to God. But as time went on, Asa's religious fervor cooled. The text here briefly alludes to these two aspects of his reign: (1) Asa's exercise of faith (vv. 9-15); and (2) Asa's failure of faith (vv. 16-22). To these two major themes the historian adds (3) his customary concluding statement regarding this king (vv. 23-24).

1. ASA'S EXERCISE OF FAITH (15:9-15)

TRANSLATION

(9) And in the twentieth year of Jeroboam, king of Israel, Asa

⁹ Among the cities captured was Bethel. Scripture relates neither the time nor the circumstances when Bethel was restored to the Northern Kingdom.

¹⁰ Abijam's decisive victory over Jeroboam may have been the reason for the dissatisfaction with the house of Jeroboam which led to the revolt of Baasha.

reigned over Judah. (10) And forty-one years he reigned in Jerusalem; and the name of his grandmother¹¹ was Maachah the descendant of Abishalom. (11) And Asa did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, like David his father. (12) And he removed the male temple prostitutes from the land, and took away all the idols which his fathers had made. (13) And also Maachah his grandmother he removed from the position of principal lady because she had made an idol for Asherah; and Asa cut down her idol and burned it at the brook Kidron. (14) But the high places he did not remove; nevertheless, the heart of Asa was perfect with the LORD all his days. (15) And he brought the holy things of his father and his own holy things into the house of the LORD: silver, and gold, and vessels.

Third King of Judah		
ASA BEN ABIJAM		
911-870 B.C.		
(<i>"Healing, or Cure"</i>)		
I K 15:9-24; II C 14-16		
Synchronism		
Asa 1 = Jeroboam 20 ¹²		
Contemporary Prophets		
Azariah, Hanani, Jehoram		
Mother (?): Maachah		Appraisal: Good
<i>"Better is a poor and wise child, than an old and foolish king, who will no more be admonished."</i> Ecclesiastes 4:13		

COMMENTS

It appears that Maachah the granddaughter of Absalom (cf. v. 2) retained her position of power in the court of Judah into the reign of Asa. It is not certain why the grandmother rather than the mother of Asa is named in verse 10. Perhaps

¹¹ The Hebrew word *'em* usually translated "*mother*," can refer to any ancestress.

¹² According to the Septuagint, Asa began to reign during the twenty-fourth year of Jeroboam.

Asa's mother died while he was quite young and he was reared by his grandmother Maachah.

In spite of the fact that he grew up in a palace dominated by an idolatrous grandmother and a hypocritical father, Asa did that which was right in the eyes of the Lord (v. 11). He removed the cult prostitutes from the land (cf. 14:25) and took away the wooden idols¹³ (lit., *logs*) which his predecessors Abijam and Rehoboam had made (v. 12). He removed his grandmother from her powerful position as principal lady because she had made an idol (lit., *horrible thing*) to Asherah the Canaanite mother-goddess. This horrible thing,¹⁴ Asa cut down, carried to the brook Kidron on the east side of Jerusalem, and burned (v. 13).

Unfortunately Asa did not go far enough in his reforms, for he did not remove the high places, the unauthorized Yahweh shrines scattered throughout the land (v. 14). A problem arises here in that the Chronicler asserts that Asa "*took away the high places*" (II C 14:3). Yet the Chronicler adds that "*the high places were not taken away out of Israel*" (II C 15:17). How are these statements to be reconciled? Several suggestions have been made: (1) Perhaps he *ordered* the high places removed, but was not able to completely rid the countryside of them. (2) Or perhaps he did remove them, but they were gradually reintroduced. (3) But the most likely suggestion is that two different kinds of high places are in view. Asa removed the *pagan* high places, but did not remove the high places dedicated to Yahweh. In spite of this defect in the devotion of Asa, the author still can describe the heart of this king as being "*perfect*" with the Lord (v. 14). All of the valuables captured in the wars fought by his father and by himself, Asa dedicated to the Lord and placed in the house of God (v. 15).

¹³ The Hebrew word is not the usual one for *idols*. It is etymologically related to the word meaning *to roll*. It may, therefore, refer to idols without specific form, something which may be *rolled*.

¹⁴ The Hebrew word literally means *something that causes shuttering*. Some scholars believe that the writer was referring to its repulsive appearance, others to its degrading significance.

2. ASA'S FAILURE OF FAITH (15:16-22)

TRANSLATION

(16) Now there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days. (17) And Baasha, king of Israel, went up against Judah and built Ramah in order not to permit anyone to go out or come in to Asa king of Judah. (18) And Asa took all the silver and the gold which was left in the treasuries of the house of the LORD and the treasuries of the house of the king, and gave them to his servants. And King Asa sent unto Benhadad, the son of Tabrimon, the son of Hezion, king of Aram, who resided in Damascus, saying, (19) A covenant between me and you, between my father and your father. Behold I have sent to you a present of silver and gold. Come break your covenant with Baasha king of Israel, that he may depart from me. (20) And Benhadad hearkened unto King Asa, and sent the captains of his armies against the cities of Israel. And they smote Ijon and Dan and Abel-beth-maachah, and all Chinneroth with all the land of Naphtali. (21) And it came to pass when Baasha heard, that he ceased building Ramah and stayed in Tirzah. (22) Then King Asa made a proclamation throughout all the land, none was exempted; and they took up the stones of Ramah and its wood which Baasha had built. And King Asa built with them Geba of Benjamin and Mizpah.

COMMENTS

The state of hostilities between Israel and Judah which had begun in the reign of Rehoboam continued throughout the reign of Asa (v. 16).¹⁵ In the fifteenth year of

¹⁵ That there was no actual armed confrontation between the two kingdoms for at least the first ten years of Asa's reign is proved by II Chronicles 14:1. Thus "war" in verse 16 must be interpreted in the broad sense of hostility.

Asa,¹⁶ Baasha king of Israel attacked Judah in an effort to reconquer the territories lost to Abijam following the battle of Zemaraim (cf. II C 13:19). Apparently Baasha was able to regain some of this territory. In addition he began to build a fortress at Ramah only five miles distant from Jerusalem on the frontier of the two kingdoms. As well as controlling traffic on the main north-south road, Ramah also controlled the head of the Descent of Beth-horon to the foothills of Ephraim and the coastal plains. From this fortress, Baasha could prevent any of his subjects from defecting to Judah or even from going to the Temple to worship. It seems that Baasha was concerned about the large numbers of his subjects who were migrating to Judah because they saw that the Lord was with Asa (II C 15:9). He hoped that by "*building*," i.e., fortifying, Ramah he would virtually seal off the northern approaches of Judah (v. 17).

Naturally Asa was quite concerned about Baasha's fortification of Ramah. Why Asa himself did not undertake an attack against Baasha is not clear. The record states that he elected to rid himself of the danger at Ramah by political strategy and foreign alliance. The treasures which had accumulated in the Temple and palace since the Shishak invasion were gathered and sent by servants to Benhadad¹⁷ the king of Aram (KJV Syria) who lived in Damascus (v. 18). Aram was the first of the possessions of Solomon to regain its independence (11:24). Both Israel and Judah,¹⁸ it would seem, had alliances with

¹⁶ II Chronicles 16:1 dates this invasion to the thirty-sixth year of Asa. But Baasha died in the twenty-seventh year of Asa (I K 15:33). Therefore, Baasha must have undertaken the fortification of Ramah in the thirty-sixth year of the *kingdom* of Asa (i.e., the kingdom of Judah) which would be the fifteenth or sixteenth *year* of Asa's reign.

¹⁷ In the genealogy of Benhadad in verse 18 there is no mention of Rezon, the founder of the state of Damascus. It is possible, as Kraeling suggests (AAI, p. 48, n. 2), that the Rezon of 11:23 is the same as the Hezion of 14:18. In this case "Rezon" would be the royal *title*. The name Benhadad ("*son of Hadad*") points to the supreme deity of the Arameans, Hadad, who was known to the Canaanites as Baal.

¹⁸ It may have been Abijam's treaty with Benhadad which allowed him to take the initiative against Jeroboam of Israel and soundly defeat him. Jeroboam's successor seems to have followed the policy of the kings of Judah by entering into a treaty with Benhadad.

this increasingly powerful state. By sending this enormous gift to Benhadad, Asa hoped to bribe the Aramean king to break his non-aggression pact with Israel and attack Israel from the north (v. 19). With Asa's overtures to Benhadad, the author introduces the powerful Aramean kingdom of Damascus which was to play such a decisive role in the subsequent history of Israel. Asa's short-sighted policy was interpreted as a lack of faith and was severely condemned (II C 16:7-10).

Benhadad gleefully complied with Asa's request. Damascus was most anxious to obtain Israelite territory along the important trade route to Acco on the coast. The Aramean therefore sent his forces against the northern cities of Israel—Ijon, Dan,¹⁹ and Abel-beth-maachah²⁰—as well as the district of Chinneroth on the western edge of the Sea of Galilee and the tribal region of Napthali (v. 20). This invasion was the beginning of internecine warfare between Israel and Damascus which lasted over a century.

The Aramean invasion in the north forced Baasha to abandon his plans to fortify Ramah and to withdraw to the safety of his capital at Tirzah (v. 21).²¹ Swiftly Asa mustered his workmen, advanced on Ramah, and dismantled the fortifications which Baasha had started. The confiscated materials were used to build two prominent Judaeen fortresses, one at Geba²² and one at Mizpah²³ (v. 22). The former fortress became the

¹⁹ Formally Laish, this town was captured by the tribe of Dan during the Conquest period.

²⁰ Or Abel-maim (II C 16:4). Rebels led by Sheba took their last stand against David here (II S 20:15).

²¹ Whether or not Baasha attempted to regain the territory lost to Benhadad is uncertain.

²² Geba, about five miles east of Gibeon, was strategically important to Asa because it guarded a valley which led down to the Israelite stronghold of Jericho. Geba served as a base for Saul and Jonathan in their campaign against the Philistines (I S 14) and as a staging area for Assyrian troops in their advance against Jerusalem (Isa. 10:29).

²³ Mizpah is probably to be identified with *Tell an-Nasbeh* four miles north of Ramah. It would appear that Asa took advantage of the distraction in the North to extend his Northern frontier. There is, however, widespread disagreement as to the interpretation of this passage owing to the lack of general agreement concerning the location of Ramah, Geba of Benjamin and Mizpah. See Honor, JCBR, p. 217 for alternative views.

northern limit of the kingdom of Judah (II K 23:8).

3. CONCLUDING STATEMENT REGARDING ASA (15:23-24)

TRANSLATION

(23) And the rest of the acts of Asa, all his might, all which he did, and the cities which he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? Nevertheless, at the time of his old age he was diseased in his feet. (24) And Asa slept with his fathers, and he was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father, and Jehoshaphat his son ruled in his stead.

COMMENTS

In the concluding words relating to the reign of Asa the historian alludes to the *might* of this king. The Chronicler indicates that Asa had an army consisting of three hundred thousand men of Judah and two hundred eighty thousand men of Benjamin (II C 14:8). With this army Asa won a smashing victory over the mammoth forces of Zerah the Ethiopian (II C 14:9-15). The historian also alludes to the *cities constructed by Asa* in the early part of his reign when the land was at peace (cf. II C 14:6-7).

In Kings only one exception to the otherwise happy and prosperous reign of Asa is noted. In the closing years of his reign, the king was diseased in his feet (v. 23), "*yet he sought not to the Lord but to the physicians*" (II C 16:12). At his death the people made a great burning for Asa, i.e., they burned incense for him (II C 16:14). The king was buried in a sepulcher which he himself had prepared in the city of David, i.e., the old part of the city of Jerusalem (v. 24; cf. II C 16:14).

THE ARAMEAN KINGS OF DAMASCUS			
Kings	Approximate Date	References	Notes
Hezion	940-913	I K 11:23 I K 14:18	Founded the Aramean kingdom of Damascus c. 940, during the reign of Solomon
Tabrimmon	913-890	I K 14:18	Apparently had an alliance with Abijam of Judah (cf. I K 14:19)
Benhadad I	890-841	I K 14:18ff I K 20	(1) Asa of Judah sent gifts to bribe him. As a result he attacked Israel and captured certain cities. (2) Ahab twice defeated him; entered into an alliance with him. (3) His assassination fulfilled a prediction made by Elisha.
Hazael	841-801	I K 19:15-17 II K 8:7-15 II K 8:28, 29 II K 9:14, 15 II K 10:32, 33 II K 13:3, 22ff. II K 12:17, 18	(1) Elijah was commissioned to anoint him. (2) Elisha prophesied his oppression of Israel. (3) Murdered Benhadad. (4) Fought against Jehoram at Ramoth-gilead. (5) Reduced Jehu to a position of vassal. (6) Continued attacks in reign of Jehoahaz. (7) One incursion brought him to the gates of Jerusalem where he received tribute from king Joash.
Benhadad II	801-780	II K 13:22 II K 6:24-7:20 II K 13:14-19, 25	(1) Continued to oppress Israel; besieged Samaria. (2) Israel began to recover lost territory.
Rezin	750-735	Isaiah 7 II K 15:37 II C 28:5	Joined forces with Pekah of Israel to attack Judah in 735.

II. THE KINGS OF ISRAEL 15:25—16:34

(910-870 B.C.)

Chronologically 15:25—16:34 is parallel to 15:9-24. To state the matter differently, the reigns of Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri and the early years of Ahab were synchronological with the lengthy reign of Asa of Judah. The reigns of the first five successors of Jeroboam are related only briefly inasmuch as these reigns had little bearing on *religious* history of Israel. From I Kings 15:25 through II Kings 10 the historian has focused almost entirely upon the Northern Kingdom, except for the brief notices in I Kings 22:46-49 and II Kings 8:16-24. This preoccupation with Northern affairs is partly to be explained by the limited significance of Judah during this period, and partly by the heightened prophetic activity in the North.

The last event to be related regarding the Northern Kingdom was the death of Jeroboam recorded in 14:20. Now the account of that kingdom is taken up anew. The author discusses (1) the fall of Jeroboam's dynasty (15:25-31); (2) the Baasha dynasty (15:32—16:14); (3) the seven day reign of Zimri (16:15-20); and (4) the Omri dynasty (16:21-34).

A. THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF JEROBOAM 15:25-31

TRANSLATION

(25) And Nadab the son of Jeroboam reigned over Israel in the second year of Asa king of Judah, and he reigned two years. (26) And he did that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD, and he walked in the way of his father and in his sin with which he had made Israel to sin. (27) And Baasha, the son of Ahijah of the house of Issachar, conspired against him; and Baasha smote him at Gibbethon which belongs to the Philistines while Nadab and all Israel were besieging Gibbethon. (28) And Baasha slew him in the third year of Asa king of Judah,

and reigned in his stead. (29) And it came to pass when he reigned, he smote all the house of Jeroboam. He left not any that breathed to Jeroboam until he had destroyed him according to the word of the LORD which He spoke by the hand of his servant Ahijah the Shilonite; (30) because of the sins of Jeroboam which he had committed and with which he had caused Israel to sin, by his vexing by which he vexed the LORD God of Israel. (31) Now the rest of the acts of Nadab and all which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

Second King of Israel
 NADAB BEN JEROBOAM
 910-909 B.C.
 ("Willing")
 I K 15:25-31

Synchronism
 Nadab 1 = Asa 2

"The house of the wicked shall be overthrown; but the tabernacle of the upright shall flourish." Proverbs 14:11

COMMENTS

Nadab,²⁴ the son of Jeroboam, was only able to hold the throne of Israel for two years (v. 25). He continued the schismatic religious policies of his father (v. 26). Against this weak king, Baasha, from the tribe of Issachar, conspired. While Nadab was leading a campaign to recover Gibbethon²⁵ from Philistine control, the plot was executed and the king was

²⁴ The name seems to be a shortened form of Nadabiah which means "Yahweh has freely given" or "Yahweh incites to noble deeds." See Gray, OTL, p. 341.

²⁵ A Levitical city on the frontiers of Dan (Josh. 19:44; 21:23) which had fallen into the hands of the Philistines, or perhaps had always remained under their control. Gibbethon is possibly to be identified with *Tell Mal'at*, three miles west of Gezer and five miles north of Ekron.

slain (v. 27). The assassination is said to have taken place in the third year of Asa of Judah (v. 28). Here is a very clear instance of the Hebrew habit of counting parts of years as entire years for it is obvious that if Nadab succeeded to the throne in the *second* (v. 25) and died in the *third* year of Asa, he cannot have reigned two full years (v. 25). Since the assassination of Nadab took place during a military campaign, it is probable that Baasha was one of the military officers.

Upon assuming the throne, Baasha launched a bloody purge that utterly wiped out the house of Jeroboam, thus eliminating all potential rivals. By so doing, Baasha was unconsciously fulfilling the prophecies of Ahijah the Shilonite concerning the posterity of Jeroboam (14:10). The massacre of the descendants is regarded by the author of Kings as being divine retribution for the sins which Jeroboam had committed (v. 30). Whatever other accomplishments Nadab made during his brief reign were to be found in the prophetic annals of the Northern Kingdom (v. 31).

B. THE BAASHA DYNASTY 15:32—16:14

The Baasha dynasty receives the most cursory treatment from the author of Kings. Political accomplishments of Baasha are almost totally ignored, as the author has elected to focus on the prophetic curse which ultimately brought destruction to this dynasty. The material may be conveniently discussed under the headings (1) the reign of Baasha and the prophecy of Jehu (15:32—16:7); and (2) the reign of Elah and his assassination by Zimri (16:8-14).

1. *THE REIGN OF BAASHA AND THE PROPHECY OF JEHU (15:32—16:7)*

TRANSLATION

(32) And there was war between Asa and Baasha king of Israel all their days. (33) In the third year of Asa king of Judah,

CONFRONTATION AND COOPERATION 15:32—16:7

Baasha the son of Ahijah reigned over all Israel in Tizrah, twenty-four years. (34) And he did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and went in the way of Jeroboam, and in his sin with which he had made Israel to sin. (1) And the word of the LORD came unto Jehu, the son of Hanani, against Baasha, saying, (2) Because I raised you up from the dust, and made you a prince over My people Israel, but you have walked in the way of Jeroboam, and you have caused My people Israel to sin to provoke Me with their sin, (3) I will burn after Baasha and after his house, and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam, son of Nebat. (4) The one of Baasha who dies in the city, the dogs shall eat, and the ones of him who die in the field the birds of the heavens shall eat. (5) And the rest of the acts of Baasha, that which he did, and his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? (6) So Baasha slept with his fathers, and he was buried in Tirzah; and his son Elah, reigned in his place. (7) And also by the hand of Jehu the son of Hanani, the prophet, the word of the LORD came against Baasha and against his house, even for all the evil which he had done in the eyes of the LORD to provoke Him with the deeds of his hands, to be like the house of Jeroboam; and because he smote him.

Third King of Israel
BAASHA BEN AHIJAH
909-886 B.C.

("He who seeks, or lays waste")

I K 15:27—16:7; II C 16:1-6

Synchronism
Baasha 1 = Asa 3

Contemporary Prophet
Jehu son of Hanani

"The Lord has made all things for Himself; yea, even the wicked for the day of evil." Proverbs 16:4

COMMENTS

The author has already made mention of the hostilities between Asa and Baasha (cf. v. 16). Why does he again mention this perpetual conflict? Some have argued that the verse is out of place here in the concluding formula of Nadab's reign, and, therefore, should be omitted.²⁶ However, the repetition may well be deliberate. Inasmuch as Baasha had exterminated the house of Jeroboam (Nadab and his immediate relatives) with whom Asa had been at war, one might think that Asa's attitude toward the royal house of the North might have changed. This, however, was not the case and thus the author underscores what he previously has said.

No events of Baasha's reign are recorded at this point in Kings. On the basis of information given earlier in Kings (15:16-22, 27ff.) and in Chronicles (II C 13-15; 16:1-6) it is possible to draw up a picture of his reign. When he came to the throne, his nation was in bad shape. Israel had been severely defeated by Judah; the Philistines were threatening from the southwest; the Aramean kingdom of Damascus had entered a friendly alliance with Judah and was threatening from the northeast. Baasha was able to persuade the Arameans to shift their alliance to Israel.

Now the invasion of Judah by Zerah, the Ethiopian, forced Asa to devote his attention to fortification of his southern frontier. Baasha seized upon this opportunity by recapturing Bethel and the greater part of Benjamin and extending his boundary as far as Ramah. The fortification of Ramah was a real threat to Judah. Asa sent gifts to Benhadad and persuaded him to break his alliance with Baasha and apply some military pressure on the northern boundary of Israel. Benhadad entered the alliance with Asa, invaded Israel, and captured several towns. Baasha abandoned his efforts to fortify Ramah and retreated to the safety of his capital.

²⁶ The verse is omitted in the Septuagint version.

CONFRONTATION AND COOPERATION 15:32—16:7

It is reasonable to assume that Baasha had been encouraged by the prophets to take the initiative against the house of Jeroboam. When it became apparent, however, that he intended to follow in the same pitiful path as his two Northern predecessors, Baasha lost prophetic support. The Lord immediately dispatched a prophet from Judah,²⁷ Jehu, the son of the prophet Hanani,²⁸ to publicly proclaim in the North the doom of Baasha (v. 1).

Though Baasha had been used as a tool of divine judgment against the Jeroboam dynasty, and though he had consequently been elevated from lowly ranks to the highest position in the realm, yet Baasha had not proved to be faithful to the Lord (v. 2). In words almost identical to those used by Ahijah against Jeroboam, Jehu pronounced the doom of Baasha's dynasty (v. 3). The relatives of Baasha would fall in the city and in the field, and their corpses would be left unburied (v. 4).

One example of Baasha's might (v. 5) has already been recorded in chapter 15. The fortification of Ramah, not five miles from the city limits of Jerusalem, is convincing proof that Baasha was a strong king. Furthermore, the reluctance of Asa of Judah to challenge his building operations at Ramah is further evidence that Baasha must have had a formidable force.

Baasha died a natural death and was buried in Tirzah. His son Elah tried to succeed his father on the throne (v. 6). But the hand of divine destruction fell swiftly on the family of Baasha, both because of the participation in calf worship, and because Baasha had murdered his predecessor (v. 7). Had

²⁷ About fifty years later, Jehu was still active. He rebuked king Jehoshaphat of Judah, for giving aid to wicked Ahab (II C 19:2). This prophet also wrote the history of the reign of Jehoshaphat, which was incorporated into "*the book of the kings of Israel*" (II C 20:34). This suggests that Jehu was a prophet of Judah (like Amos) who came north for the express purpose of delivering this blast against Baasha and then returned to his native land. Others have suggested that Jehu was a Northern prophet who took refuge in Judah during the Jezebel persecution.

²⁸ Hanani is mentioned in II Chronicles 16:7 as having admonished Asa of Judah and as having been thrown into prison for doing so.

Baasha been a righteous man, his destruction of the house of Jeroboam would have been regarded as a divine mission; but since he was just as evil as the man he had killed, his act was only motivated by personal ambition and was judged as such.²⁹

**2. THE REIGN OF ELAH AND HIS ASSASSINATION
BY ZIMRI (16:8-14)**

TRANSLATION

(8) In the twenty-sixth year of Asa king of Judah, Elah son of Baasha, reigned over Israel in Tirzah, two years. (9) And his servant, Zimri, the captain of half of his chariots, conspired against him while he was in Tirzah drinking himself drunk in the house of Arza, who was over the house in Tirzah. (10) And Zimri came and smote him, and slew him in the twenty-seventh year of Asa king of Judah; and he ruled in his place. (11) And it came to pass when he reigned, as soon as he was sitting upon the throne, he smote all the house of Baasha. There did not remain to him a male descendant, either of his kinfolks or his friends. (12) And Zimri destroyed all the house of Baasha according to the word of the LORD which He spake against Baasha by the hand of Jehu the prophet, (13) for all the sin of Baasha and the sin of Elah his son, which they had committed, and because they had caused Israel to sin by provoking the LORD of Israel with their vanities. (14) Now the rest of the deeds of Elah, and all which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

²⁹ Slotki, SBB, p. 117.

Fourth King of Israel

ELAH BEN BAASHA

826 B.C.

("An Oak")

I K 16:8-14

Synchronism

Elah 1 = Asa 26

"Behold, the righteous shall be recompensed in the earth; much more the wicked and the sinner." Proverbs 11:31

COMMENTS

Having affirmed in verse 7 that the prophecy against the house of Baasha was fulfilled, the historian now describes the fulfillment. When Elah had reigned two years (v. 8), one of his military officers, Zimri, the commander of half of the Israelite chariotry force, conspired against him. Elah seems to have been a dissolute and drunken incompetent. As king, he should have been with the army, which was engaged in a campaign at Gibbethon (cf. v. 15). But instead, he was in the house of one of his attendants participating in a drunken orgy (v. 9). Perhaps Elah remained in Tirzah because he remembered the fate of Nadab, who had been assassinated at Gibbethon (15:27), and perhaps superstitiously avoided this spot. It was a serious breach of monarchical etiquette for the king to ever accept the hospitality of one of his subjects.³⁰ Arza, the steward or attendant, may have been in on the conspiracy, in which case Elah is made to look all the more naive. At any rate, it was during this drinking party that Zimri assassinated his king³¹ (v. 10).

³⁰ Rawlinson, BC, II, 550.

³¹ Special odium seems to be attached to action of Zimri (cf. II K 9:31). Probably this was the case because the deed was not committed in open revolt but stealthily after his victim had been reduced to a drunken stupor. In Jewish and even English literature the name of Zimri became a term of opprobrium (Honor, JCBR, p. 228).

Following the example of Baasha who destroyed the Jeroboam dynasty, Zimri no sooner had sat on the throne when he ordered the execution of all the male relatives of Baasha. Not only would this eliminate all potential rivals for the throne, it would also remove all those who might feel obligated to avenge the blood of their relative (cf. Num. 35:19). Zimri went a step beyond what Baasha had done when he also executed the friends of the royal house, any who might sympathize with Elah (v. 11). The bloodshed fulfilled the prediction made against the Baasha dynasty by the prophet Jehu (v. 12). This dynasty had incurred the wrath of God because of its commitment to “*vanities*,” i.e., the golden calves (v. 13). It is hard to imagine what acts of Elah would have been worth recording in the prophetic chronicles, but nonetheless, the author refers his readers to those records for further information about Elah (v. 14).

C. THE SEVEN-DAY REIGN OF ZIMRI 16:15-20

TRANSLATION

(15) In the twenty-seventh year of Asa king of Judah, Zimri reigned seven days in Tirzah. Now the people were on an expedition against Gibbethon which belonged to the Philistines. (16) And the people who were on the expedition heard, saying, Zimri has conspired, and also he has smitten the king, And all Israel proclaimed Omri, the captain of the host, king over Israel in that day in the camp. (17) And Omri went up and all Israel with him from Gibbethon, and they besieged Tirzah. (18) And it came to pass when Zimri saw that the city was taken, that he went into the palace of the king's house, and he set fire to the king's house over him, and he died, (19) because of his sins which he had committed, to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, and to walk in the way of Jeroboam and in his sin with which he made Israel to sin. (20) And the rest of the deeds of Zimri and the conspiracy which he made, are they not written

in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

Fifth King of Israel

ZIMRI

826 B.C.

(*"Courageous, mighty"*)

I K 16:9-20

Synchronism

Zimri = Asa 26

"Whoso walks uprightly shall be saved; but he that is perverse in his ways shall fall at once." Proverbs 28:18

COMMENTS

Zimri was only able to hold the throne of Israel for one week. The army was involved in another campaign to recover Gibbethon³² at the time Zimri assassinated Elah (v. 15). When the army in the field heard the report that Zimri had slain the king, the troops immediately declared their general to be king (v. 16). It is not at all surprising that the army refused to recognize Zimri's authority. First, he was an inferior officer who was not even present on the great campaign at Gibbethon. Furthermore, when Zimri murdered Elah's friends, he doubtlessly made many enemies throughout the army. It is, therefore, natural that the troops turned to the popular general Omri.³³

Omri was not hesitant about accepting the office thrust upon him by his troops. He immediately broke off the siege of Gibbethon and led the army back up through the mountain passes to Tirzah the capital. In a show of force he deployed his troops

³² This same city had been besieged by the armies of Israel some twenty-four years earlier (see on 15:27). It is not known whether it had changed hands during this period, or whether the siege was continuous or intermittent.

³³ The fact that the lineage of Omri is omitted has been taken to mean that the general was of Canaanite extraction or that he was a foreign mercenary. See Gray, OTL, pp. 364-65. It is highly unlikely, however, that in either case he could have gained sufficient support to make good his bid for the throne.

about the capital and no doubt ordered Zimri to surrender (v. 17). Seeing that his position was hopeless, Zimri went into the fortress of the palace—one of the innermost rooms—and committed suicide by setting the place afire (v. 18). Even though Zimri died by his own hand, yet the historian regards his death as being the result of divine retribution. It is obvious that in his brief reign Zimri could not have done much to show his sympathy for the calf worship in the North. Perhaps before he became king he had indicated his zeal for the counterfeit religion introduced by Jeroboam.³⁴ But it is more likely that the historian in verse 19 is trying to drive home the point that all the anarchy in the North was the bitter fruit of Jeroboam's apostasy. Further information about the conspiracy of Zimri and other events of his action packed week of rule were recorded in the prophetic annals of the Northern Kingdom (v. 20).

D. THE OMRI DYNASTY 16:21-34

The Omri dynasty ruled Israel for forty-four years. The closing verses of chapter 16 contain brief notices concerning (1) Omri's rise to power (vv. 21-22); (2) the reign of Omri (vv. 23-28); and (3) the early years of Ahab (vv. 29-34).

Sixth King of Israel

OMRI

885-874 B.C.

(*"Heaping"*)

I K 16:15-28

Synchronism

Omri 1 = Asa 27

"The curse of the Lord is in the house of the wicked; but He blesses the habitation of the just." Proverbs 3:33

³⁴ It is possible that the condemnation applies also to the period when he was captain of the king's chariots. On the other hand, the author may mean no more than that there was no correlation between Zimri's revolt and a desire to repudiate the previous religious policy.

1. OMRI'S RISE TO POWER (16:21-22)

TRANSLATION

(21) Then the people of Israel were divided into two parts. Half of the people followed after Tibni the son of Ginath to make him king, and half followed after Omri. (22) And the people who followed after Omri prevailed over the people who followed after Tibni the son of Ginath; so Tibni died, and Omri reigned.

COMMENTS

The entire nation did not rally to the standard of Omri's sovereignty. For some reason unexplained³⁵ in the text, a rival emerged to challenge Omri's claim to the throne. Tibni was probably the favorite of that part of the army which was not involved in the encampment at Gibbethon. Once the hereditary principle was overthrown, the crown became a prize to be possessed by the strongest. Tibni determined that Omri would not have the throne uncontested, and a fierce civil war erupted between the two factions (v. 21). It appears that the struggle lasted four years. Finally, Omri was able to subdue the forces of Tibni and slay the rival (v. 22).

2. THE REIGN OF OMRI (16:23-28)

TRANSLATION

(23) In the thirty-first year of Asa king of Judah, Omri began to reign over Israel, twelve years; in Tirzah he reigned six years.

³⁵ Gray (OTL, p. 366) again indulges in fruitless speculation, suggesting that this counter-movement was the protest of the religious community against the power of the army, or perhaps the protest by the more conservative elements against the younger men in the army.

(24) And he acquired the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver, and called the name of the city which he built after the name of Shemer, the owner of the hill of Samaria. (25) And Omri did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and did worse than those who were before him. (26) And he walked in all the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in his sins which he caused Israel to sin by provoking the LORD the God of Israel with their vanities. (27) And the rest of the acts of Omri which he did, and his might which he displayed, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? (28) And Omri slept with his fathers, and he was buried in Samaria; and Ahab his son ruled in his place.

COMMENTS

In the thirty-first year of Asa of Judah, Omri won out over Tibni and became sole king in the North. His reign of twelve years is counted however, from the time he was proclaimed king by the army in the twenty-seventh year of Asa. The first six years of his reign he resided in Tirzah (v. 23). But since Tirzah had suffered during the siege against Zimri (vv. 17-18) and possibly in the civil war with Tibni, Omri determined to build a new capital rather than attempt to repair the old one.³⁶ He selected as the site for his new capital a large oval or oblong mound with level surface adapted for building and with steep sides which rendered assault most difficult. Before the invention of gunpowder, the city must have been almost impregnable. The site also enjoys a strategic location. On the north the hill commands the main road to Jezreel, on the west it dominates the road to the coast, and on the east the road to the Jordan.

Samaria, as the new city was named, was forty-two miles north of Jerusalem and twenty-five miles inland. Subsequent history proves the wisdom of Omri's choice of Samaria, for

³⁶ Perhaps the ease with which Omri captured Tirzah (v. 17) made him realize the strategic weakness of the spot.

the city remained the capital of Israel until the fall of that kingdom. The site was purchased from its owner, Shemer, for two talents of silver.³⁷ Probably the sale contract stipulated that the place was to continue to bear the name of the original owner, and hence Omri called the new city Samaria (v. 24).

Omri may also have been moved to purchase this site by dynastic considerations. Samaria became a personal possession of the king just as Jerusalem became a personal possession of David. Omri was free to develop a city-state within a state, and bequeath it to his descendants, so founding a dynasty. Furthermore, the site may have been selected because it was in a Canaanite region and had no Israelite associations. It is significant that the only cult for which provisions were made in Samaria was that of Baal (16:32).

Archaeological excavations confirm the Biblical statement with regard to Omri's founding the city of Samaria. Remains of three places have been found there, the earliest of which dates to the time of Omri-Ahab. The site shows no signs of occupation earlier than 900 B.C.

The religious situation continued to deteriorate under Omri (v. 25). The prophet Micah (6:16) refers judgmentally to the "*statutes of Omri*," which statement may point to a fresh departure during this reign. Perhaps the calf worship was organized into a formal system at this time, or perhaps additional measures were taken to prevent those living in the North from attending the Temple in the South. In any case the practices of this king angered the Lord no less than did those of his predecessors (v. 26).

Much more could have been recorded about the reign of Omri. The Moabite stone, discovered in 1868, mentions Omri as the one who conquered the land of Moab, a feat of no small significance. The Mesopotamian monuments attest to the prominence of Omri in that years after the death of this king the Assyrians referred to this region as "the land of Omri." On

³⁷ According to the Berkely Version, the two talents of silver would be equivalent to about \$4,250.

the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser, king Jehu is called "the son of Omri" even though he was not related to him at all. A further indication of his might can be seen in the fact that his dynasty lasted to the third generation. Thus the chronicles of the kings of Israel must have contained a great deal more information about Omri (v. 27). He may have been the most important king of the Northern Kingdom. Two other significant accomplishments by Omri should be noted: He reinaugurated David's policy of friendly relations with Tyre, and he brought to an end the era of confrontation with Judah. The old general appears to have been a very able diplomat!

3. THE EARLY YEARS OF AHAB (16:29-34)

TRANSLATION

(29) And Ahab the son of Omri began to rule over Israel in the thirty-eighth year of Asa king of Judah; and Ahab the son of Omri ruled over Israel in Samaria twenty-two years. (30) And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the eyes of the LORD more than all who were before him. (31) And it came to pass if it was a light thing to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat,³⁸ that he took as a wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal, and worshiped him. (32) And he raised up an altar to Baal in the house of Baal which he built in Samaria. (33) And Ahab made an Asherah. And Ahab did more to provoke the LORD God of Israel than all the kings of Israel who were before him. (34) In his days Hiel the Bethelite built Jericho; at the cost of Abiram, his firstborn he laid the foundation, and at the cost of Segub, his youngest he set its gates, according to the word of the LORD which He spoke by the hand of Joshua the son of Nun.

³⁸ A more literal rendering: "and it came to pass—was it a light thing his walking in the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat?—that he took. . . ."

COMMENTS

The religious deterioration in the Northern Kingdom continued in the reign of Ahab. The calf cult introduced by Jeroboam was a counterfeit and corrupt version of worshiping Yahweh. Under Ahab, however, positive idolatry was introduced, and thus the evil of the son exceeded that of the father (v. 30).

Ahab married Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal, who ruled over Sidon in those days. Tradition identifies this Ethbaal with the priest of Astarte who assassinated the king and usurped the throne.³⁹ If Jezebel were the daughter of this ruthless king, it would help to explain her fierce character, and at the same time would account for her great devotion to the gods of her country and for her determined efforts to establish their impure rites throughout the realm of her husband.

From the political and commercial standpoint the alliance between Israel and Sidon was wise and necessary. The rising power of Aram made such an alliance desirable from the military standpoint. The Phoenicians needed the agricultural products of Israel, and land-locked Israel needed the markets available to the wide-ranging fleets of the Phoenician. Thus, to the secular historian the marriage of Ahab to Jezebel would be a brilliant diplomatic coup. However, from the religious standpoint, the alliance and marriage were disastrous. Ahab was led into the sin of idolatry, and apparently served and worshiped Baal⁴⁰ as well as Yahweh (v. 31).

Baal was the supreme male god of the Canaanites, the possessor and generator of all. For this deity Ahab erected a temple, an altar and a pillar or image in the capital city of Samaria (v. 32; cf. II K 3:2; 10:27). In addition, the king made

³⁹ Josephus, *Antiquities* VIII, 13.1.

⁴⁰ In the Hebrew text, *Baal* has the definite article. It is, therefore, a proper name and not the generic term of Canaanite gods. The baal being referred to is Melkart, king of the underworld.

an Asherah,⁴¹ i.e., a wooden pillar symbolizing the goddess Asherah, who in Canaanite theology was the consort of Baal (v. 33). In this Ahab was following the dictates of international courtesy which demanded that a foreign queen should have a sanctuary of her own religion in her adopted land. Solomon, it will be recalled, did the same thing for his wives in Jerusalem (I K 11:7).

A concrete example of the effects of counterfeit calf worship and Phoenician idolatry is cited at the end of chapter 16. Hiel from the city of Bethel, which so long had been the national shrine of Northern religion, undertook what no one had dared to do for five centuries, viz., to rebuild the walls of Jericho.⁴² The rebuilding of these fortifications was very likely part of Ahab's program to provide better protection on his southern border. Hiel may have been superintendent for a royal project. The curse of God pronounced by Joshua rested upon anyone who would undertake this project. The daring impiety of Hiel was punished swiftly and severely. His eldest son died when the foundations of Jericho were laid, and by the time he rebuilt the gates, the last of his sons died⁴³ (v. 34). Even in those dark and troublous times God did not leave Himself without a witness. The swift and exact fulfillment of the prophetic threats made through Joshua was a forceful witness to the fact that the Law of God could not be violated with impunity.

The closing verses of chapter 16 which describe the gross degeneracy of the earlier part of Ahab's reign are an appropriate prelude to the account of the ministry of the great prophet Elijah. The unprecedented corruption of that age necessitated the unprecedented outpouring of divine power.

⁴¹ On Asherah, see comments on I Kings 15:13.

⁴² The curse of Joshua seems to have applied only to the *walls* and *fortifications* of Jericho. II Samuel 10:5 and Judges 3:13 seem to imply that Jericho was an inhabited city prior to the time of Ahab.

⁴³ The Hebrew *could* also be taken to mean that Hiel offered his sons as sacrifices during the course of the building operation. This practice is attested by the discovery at ancient Tirzah of two new-born infants in burial jars within the gate-complex. However, the interpretation that the sons died at the hand of God is superior.

Seventh King of Israel

AHAB BEN OMRI

874-853 B.C.

(*“Brother of a father”*)

I K 16:29–17:1; 18:1–22:40; II C 18

Synchronism

Ahab 1 = Asa 38

Contemporary Prophets

Elijah; Micaiah

“When the wicked are multiplied, transgression increases; but the righteous shall see their fall.” Proverbs 29:16

REVIEW OF CHAPTER TWELVE

I. FACTS TO MASTER

A. How do each of the following places figure in the events of this section?

- | | | |
|-----------------|--------------|----------------|
| 1. Brook Kidron | 5. Geba | 9. Dan |
| 2. Ramah | 6. Mizpah | 10. Abel-beth- |
| 3. Damascus | 7. Gibbethon | maachah |
| 4. Tirzah | 8. Samaria | |

B. Three important women are mentioned in this section. Identify them.

- | | | |
|-----------|------------|------------|
| 1. Naamah | 2. Maachah | 3. Jezebel |
|-----------|------------|------------|

C. What role did each of the following men play in this section?

- | | | |
|----------|-------------|------------|
| 1. Hiel | 4. Shishak | 7. Abiram |
| 2. Arza | 5. Benhadad | 8. Segub |
| 3. Tibni | 6. Shemer | 9. Ethbaal |

D. Two prophets are mentioned in this section. How were the prophecies of each of these men fulfilled?

1. Ahijah the Shilonite 2. Jehu son of Hanani
 E. Memorize the ten kings mentioned in this section and one significant fact about each.

KINGS OF JUDAH

1. Rehoboam
2. Abijam
3. Asa

KINGS OF ISRAEL

1. Jeroboam
2. Nadab
3. Baasha
4. Elah
5. Zimri
6. Omri
7. Ahab

II. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. Suppose you were plotting a graph of spiritual highs and lows during the first sixty years of the Divided Monarchy. How would that graph appear for Israel? For Judah?
2. Why was Baal worship so attractive to Israel throughout its history?
3. Describe the history of the relationship between the two kingdoms during the first sixty years of their independent existence.
4. What were the great contributions of the reign of Omri? Why is so little attention devoted to him by the sacred historian?
5. What episode from the reign of Abijam illustrates that he was a hypocrite? (This episode is mentioned only in II Chronicles).
6. Several of the kings are said to have provoked God to anger. How did they do this? How do we provoke God's anger?
7. How can you account for the political tumult and turbulence in the Northern Kingdom and the comparative calm in Judah?
8. Why did Omri make Samaria his capital?
9. What role does Damascus play in the political affairs

- of the first half-century of the Divided Monarchy?
10. Omri has been called “the David of the North.” What parallels do you see between the reigns of these two great kings?

Lessons in Living

THE MAN FOR WHOM GOD IS LOOKING

Text: II Chronicles 16:9

Background: Words of Hanani to Asa

I. The *Intensity* of God’s Search

“For the eyes of the LORD rove (continuous action, Hebrew participle) to and fro throughout the world . . .”

- A. God’s Search is Continuous
- B. God’s Search is Universal

II. The *Object* of God’s Search

“. . . those whose hearts are completely His.”

- A. Like King Asa, Men of Conviction
- B. Like King Asa, Men of Courage

III. The *Purpose* of God’s Search

“. . . that He might show Himself strong on the behalf of those whose hearts are completely His.”

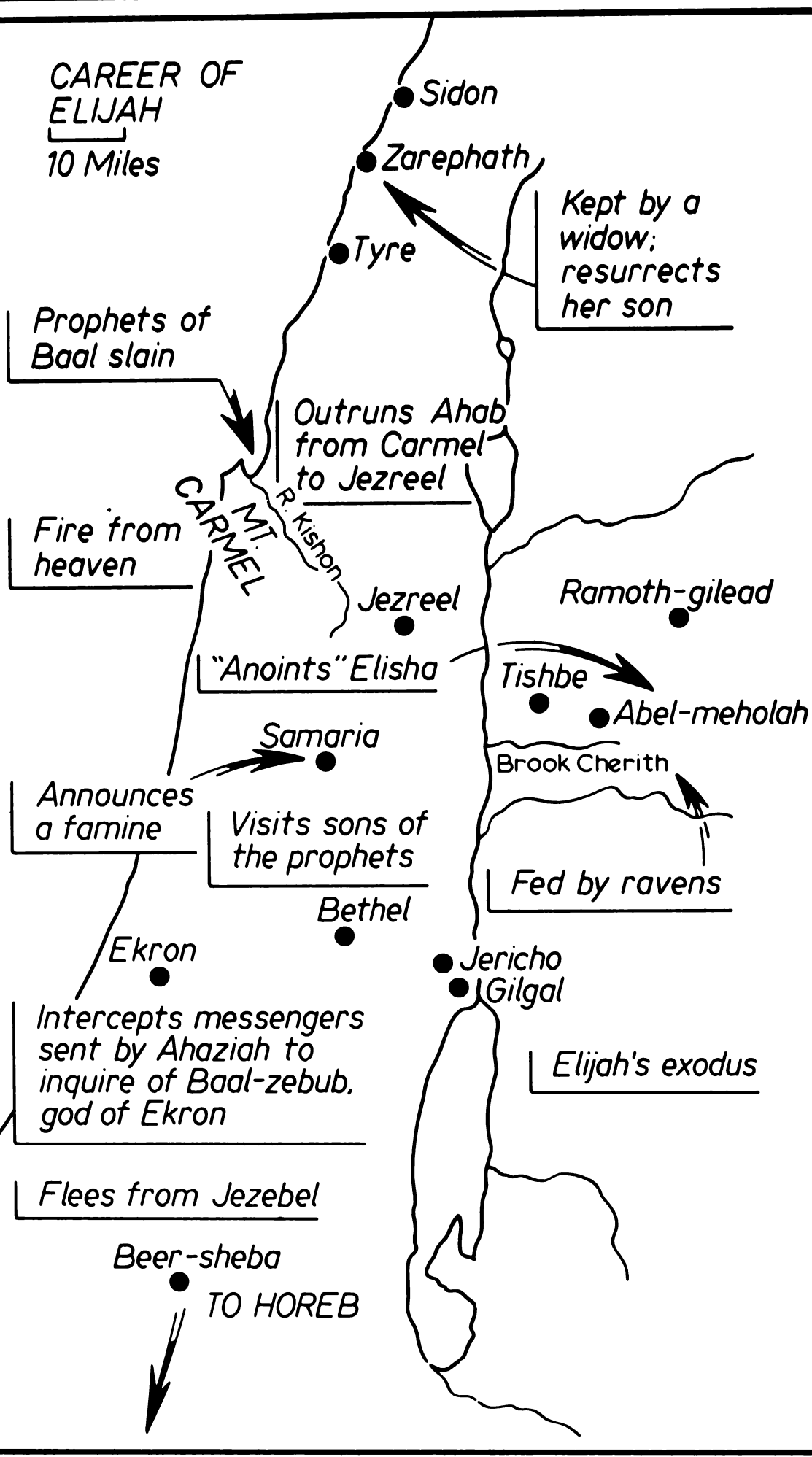
IV. The *Disappointment* of God’s Search

“You have acted foolishly in this. From this day forward you shall have wars.”

Asa the man who once served God with a perfect heart, failed the Lord in his later years.

CAREER OF ELIJAH

10 Miles



Kept by a widow; resurrects her son

Prophets of Baal slain

Outruns Ahab from Carmel to Jezreel

Fire from heaven

CARMEL
R. Kishon

"Anoints" Elisha

Announces a famine

Visits sons of the prophets

Tishbe

Abel-meholah

Brook Cherith

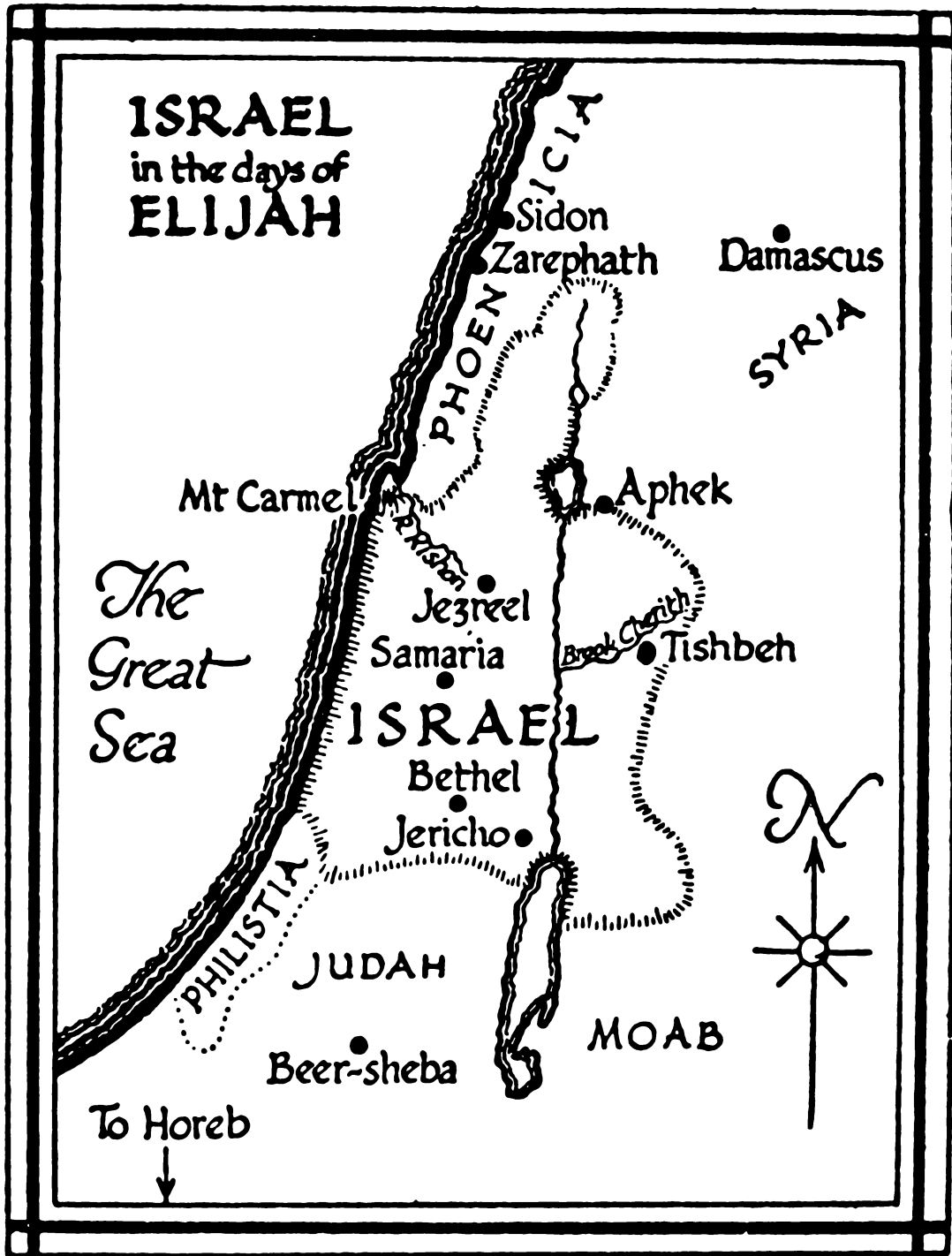
Fed by ravens

Intercepts messengers sent by Ahaziah to inquire of Baal-zebub, god of Ekron

Elijah's exodus

Flees from Jezebel

Beer-sheba
TO HOREB



Drawings by Horace Knowles
from the British and Foreign Bible Society

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

YAHWEH VS. BAAL

I Kings 17-18

Even a superficial survey of the narratives in the final chapters of I Kings and the opening chapters of II Kings reveals that the materials here are quite different from those which thus far have been examined. The ministries of Elijah and Elisha are little more than a series of miracles. Few of their words have survived. It is for their *works* rather than their words that these prophets were remembered. These chapters certainly rank among the finest pieces of prose writing in the Old Testament. In the next sixteen chapters, the author focuses his attention, not upon the king, but rather upon the king's prophetic opponents—Elijah, Micaiah and Elisha. It is not his purpose to relate independent anecdotes, but rather to trace the efforts of Israel's spiritual leaders to help their people emerge triumphant from a spiritual crisis precipitated by governmental policy.¹

Because of the miraculous character of this section of Kings, critics have generally labeled the accounts as legendary. However, the narrative is so sober and circumstantial that, were it not for the supernatural elements, no critic would ever have thought to question its veracity. Furthermore, if there ever was a time when God needed to intervene in a mighty way in the stream of human history, it was in the time of Ahab. In that dark hour a determined effort was being made to stamp out the faith of Israel. The age demanded a messenger; the messenger must have credentials; the credentials could only be miraculous.² Only mighty miracles such as were performed by Elijah and Elisha could have been sufficient to counteract the influence of Jezebel and her eight hundred fifty priests and prophets. The greatest prophet is reserved for the worst age.

¹ Honor, JCBR, p. 244.

² Hammond, PC, p. 380.

Israel had never such an impious king as Ahab, nor such a miraculous prophet as Elijah.³ In the New Testament no prophet is mentioned and extolled so frequently as Elijah. He it was who was selected to represent that holy host of old covenant spokesmen on the Mount of Transfiguration where he, along with Moses, spoke with the Lord about His exodus (Luke 9:31).

One cannot conclude from Elijah's silence regarding the Northern calf cult that the great prophet condoned this apostasy. Nor can it be legitimately argued that the antagonism toward calf worship arose later, long after the time of Elijah. It is best to think that Elijah was concentrating his attention on what he regarded as the greater evil and greater danger.

Chapters 17-18 deal with the early ministry of Elijah. In this unit the author describes (1) the great drought which Elijah announced during the reign of King Ahab (chap. 17); and (2) the great contest in which Elijah engaged on Mt. Carmel (chap. 18).

I. THE GREAT DROUGHT IN ISRAEL 17:1-24

The Ahab-Elijah clash was the epitome of the conflict which had been going on in Israel between king and prophet since the founding of the monarchy. The king had as his primary goals military security, economic expansion and a higher standard of living for his people. The prophets, on the other hand, were concerned first and foremost about fidelity to the Lord. They viewed with suspicion the foreign treaties negotiated by the crown. The indomitable Elijah thundered forth against the flagrant violations of the principles of Sinai—against the new mores imported from prosperous Phoenicia. The process of Phoenicianization threatened to destroy the foundations of Israelite society. The crown promoted the process; the prophets opposed it. These antithetical ideals prompted the struggle

³ *Ibid.*

that is so graphically portrayed in I Kings 17—II Kings 10.

Ahab's Phoenician queen Jezebel was chief promoter of Phoenicianization in Israel. She could not understand the hesitancy on the part of her husband to deal decisively with his prophetic adversaries. Taking matters into her own hands, this wicked woman launched an all out attack against the prophets. Less stalwart men were forced into hiding. But Elijah would not be intimidated and continued to preach and teach in defiance of the queen. His relentless, vehement, flaming indignation bolstered the courage of the faint-hearted and sent chills up the spine of those who hated him.

In chapter 17 the author traces the movements of Elijah in connection with a great drought which came upon Israel. He presents (1) Elijah before the king (v. 1); (2) Elijah at the brook Cherith (vv. 2-7); and (3) Elijah in the village of Zarephath (vv. 8-24).

A. ELIJAH BEFORE THE KING 17:1

TRANSLATION

(1) And Elijah the Tishbite, who was of the inhabitants of Gilead, said unto Ahab, As the LORD God of Israel lives before whom I stand, surely there shall not be dew or rain these years except at my word.

COMMENTS

Whether the name Elijah was the prophet's given name, or whether it was an assumed name, it is most appropriate for this man of God. The very name embodies the credo of this prophet for it means "*my God is Yahweh.*"

Elijah hailed from the town of Tishbe⁴ in the rugged region

⁴ Since Byzantine times Tishbe has been identified with *al-Istib*, eight miles north of the Jabbock. A shrine, *mar Elias*, (St. Elijah) marks the approximate spot today.

of Gilead. Like his great predecessor Moses, the character of Elijah was forged in an unsettled and half-civilized region. Throughout the narrative he is referred to in Kings by his name only, or as the *Tishbite*. Only once is he called *prophet* (18:36). Perhaps his reputation was so well established that the designation *prophet* was regarded as redundant and unnecessary.

The abrupt way in which Elijah appears on the scene without a word of introduction or explanation is certainly remarkable. Not a word is said about his past relations with the king or the people. Such suddenness is appropriate to the character of this prophet whose comings and goings were unexpected and startling. Someone has said, Elijah comes in with a tempest, and goes out with a whirlwind. His sudden appearances and disappearances gave birth to the belief of some in that age that he was borne hither and yon by the Spirit of God (cf. 18:12).

The ministry of Elijah began with a pronouncement of judgment upon wayward Israel. This pronouncement is introduced with an oath formula which is altogether appropriate for that age: "*As the Lord God of Israel lives.*" By these words Elijah was asserting that Yahweh, not Baal, was the God of Israel. Furthermore, Yahweh was a living God and not a figment of vain imagination as was Baal. This was the God that Elijah served. Slaves normally stood to wait upon their masters and, therefore, the words "*before whom I stand*" serve to identify Elijah as the ambassador or spokesman of the Lord.

The judgment announced by Elijah is one that was threatened by Moses if the people should fall into idolatry (cf. Deut. 11:16, 17:18:23): Neither dew nor rain would fall in Israel. The two main sources of moisture in Palestine are noted, the regular rains from November to March and the dew which condenses on the mountains of Palestine in the hot season. The latter may be almost as heavy as a drizzle of rain in the higher regions. This penalty would last "*these years,*" i.e., an indefinite period. The duration of the drought would depend upon Elijah's word, and Elijah's word depended, of course, upon the repentance of the people (v. 1). It was because of the obduracy of the king and

the people that the drought⁵ lasted so long. The prophets of Baal would not be able to remove the curse though they claimed that their god controlled the elements of nature. Their inability to remove the ban would prove the impotency of their god. Thus the announcement of the drought served a polemical, as well as a judicial function.

B. ELIJAH AT CHERITH 17:2-7

TRANSLATION

(2) And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, (3) Go from this place and turn for your sake to the east, and hide yourself at the river Cherith, which is before the Jordan. (4) And it shall come to pass that from the brook you shall drink, and the ravens I have commanded to feed you there. (5) So he went and did according to the word of the LORD, and he went and dwelt at the brook Cherith, which was before the Jordan. (6) And the ravens brought to him bread and meat in the morning, and bread and meat in the evening; and from the brook he drank. (7) And it came to pass at the end of several days, that the brook dried up, for there was no rain in the land.

COMMENTS

Shortly after Elijah announced the drought in Israel he received a divine revelation (v. 2) instructing him to proceed immediately eastward to the brook (lit., *water course*) Cherith. Cherith was one of the lateral valleys which run down to the Jordan river. It was probably located in the region of Gilead in a very secluded area.⁶ There he was to hide himself (v. 3)

⁵ Joesphus (*Ant.* VIII, 13.2) quotes Menander as referring to this drought in his account of Ethbaal, king of Tyre, the father-in-law of Ahab.

⁶ One tradition places Cherith near Jericho at *Wadi-el-kelt*.

both to escape royal punishment and to avoid the importunity of his countrymen who would no doubt cry out to him because of the burden he had laid on the land. From that brook Elijah was to drink; but God would provide his food in a miraculous manner. The ravens would bring his food to him in that secluded spot. The ministry of these birds was prolonged and methodical. Under the commandment of God they acted in an intelligent and rational way: they brought food to the prophet, and they brought it for months together with unfailing regularity. Elijah carried out the instructions of the Lord (v. 5), and the Lord was faithful to the promises which He had made concerning the miraculous provision of the daily food (v. 6).

The miracle of feeding by the ravens has been questioned from earliest times, as for example by Jerome. It is possible by altering the vowel points on the word "*ravens*" to yield the meaning "*Arabs*." According to this view Elijah was cared for by some Bedouins who lived in the region of Cherith. The Arabs even to this day are noted for their generous hospitality and loyalty to strangers.⁷ This interpretation certainly cannot be ruled out because the Hebrew vowel points are not part of the inspired consonantal Hebrew text and were only added to the Hebrew Bible in the Middle Ages. Still another view transliterates the Hebrew consonants and vowels as a proper name. According to this view it was the *Orbites*, i.e., the inhabitants of Orbo who fed Elijah at Cherith. But no town by the name of Orbo is attested in the Bible. The correct reading attested by all the ancient versions of the Old Testament (except the Arabic) is "*ravens*." In the days of Josephus (*Ant.*, VIII, 13.2) at the end of the first Christian century the reading "*ravens*" was accepted. Therefore, the traditional understanding of the text is probably the correct one.

⁷ However, Bedouins eat very little meat, and it would be very strange that they would twice daily share *meat* with Elijah. Skinner (cited in SBB, p. 123) calls this emendation of the text "a rationalistic absurdity."

C. ELIJAH AT ZAREPHATH 17:8-24

As the water supply at Cherith began to fail, God instructed Elijah to leave the land of Israel and journey to the Phoenician village of Zarephath. Two great miraculous occurrences are connected with the prophet's sojourn there—the miraculous provision of food in the home of a widow (vv. 8-16); and the resurrection of the widow's son (vv. 17-24).

1. THE MIRACULOUS PROVISION OF FOOD (17:8-16)

TRANSLATION

(8) And the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, (9) Arise, go to Zarephath, which belongs to Sidon, and dwell there. Behold I have commanded a woman, a widow, to feed you. (10) And he arose and went to Zarephath. And when he came to the gate of the city, behold there was a widow gathering wood. And he called unto her and said, Take I pray you for me a little water in a vessel that I may drink. (11) And as she was going to get it, he called unto her and said, Bring, I pray you, for me a morsel of bread in your hand. (12) And she said, As the LORD your God lives, I do not have a cake, except a handful of flour in a jar and a little oil in a vase; and behold I am gathering a couple of sticks, that I might go and make it for myself and for my son, that we might eat it and die. (13) And Elijah said unto her, Do not fear! Go and do according to your word, but make from it a little cake first, and bring it out to me, and afterwards make one for yourself and for your son. (14) For thus says the LORD God of Israel: The jar of meal shall not diminish, nor shall the vase of oil fail, until the day the LORD shall bring rain upon the face of the ground. (15) And she went and did according to the word of Elijah; and she and he and her house did eat many days. (16) The jar of meal did not diminish nor did the vase of oil fail, according to the word of the LORD which he spoke by the hand of Elijah.

COMMENTS

It is impossible to determine how long Elijah remained at Cherith. Eventually the water supply there was affected by the drought (v. 7) which no doubt also affected the available food supply which the ravens brought to the prophet. A second revelation (v. 8) instructed Elijah to migrate to the Phoenician town of Zarephath situated on the high road from Tyre to Sidon on the seacoast about seven miles south of Sidon. At this spot Elijah would be in the lion's den, the very heart of the dominions of Ethbaal, the fanatical father of Jezebel. There God had arranged for a destitute widow^o to care for His prophet. Jesus suggested that Elijah was sent to this widow for her sake as well as his own (Luke 4:25, 26).

Always obedient to the voice of God, Elijah hastened to Zarephath. It is likely that he kept to the east of Jordan as far as Dan where he crossed the river and took the road directly to Sidon and then southward a few miles to his destination. Upon approaching the gates of the city, Elijah providentially encountered the very woman for whom he was looking, though of course he did not at first realize it. He may have recognized her as a widow by her garments (cf. Gen. 38:14, 19). The woman was gathering sticks—a sign of her poverty—when the weary prophet approached her and requested that she secure for him a cup of water (v. 10). Because Phoenicia is watered by the fresh streams from the Lebanon mountains, the drought does not seem to have affected that area so much as Israel. It is considered a duty almost sacred in that region of the world to supply water to the thirsty. And so the woman scurried off in the direction of the well or water pot.

As the woman was going to fetch the water the prophet also mentioned that he would like some food, a "*morsel of bread*" (v. 11). This request would soon reveal to him whether or not

^o Whereas a childless widow was provided for through the law of Levirate marriage, the widow-mother was dependent on charity alone for her wherewithal.

this was the woman whom God had ordained to sustain him. In responding to the prophet's request, the woman took an oath in the name of Yahweh. Some commentators view this as an indication that the woman was a worshiper of Yahweh—perhaps an Israelite who had married a Phoenician. It should be noted, however, that she used the words, “the Lord (Yahweh) *your* god.” Obviously she recognized Elijah either by his facial features or by his special prophetic garb (cf. II K 1:8) as being a Yahweh worshiper. But had she herself been an Israelite or a proselyte, she would probably have said “the Lord *my* God.” Polytheists could swear in the name of any God since they in effect recognized the existence of all gods. Therefore, there is nothing in the language of this woman to indicate that she was anything other than a typical polytheist. Furthermore, it was customary courtesy in the pagan world to recognize the deity of another people in addressing oneself to a member of that people.⁹

The widow explained her desperate situation to the prophet. She did not have in her possession so much as one small cake of bread. All she had was a handful of meal in a jar and a little oil. At the very moment Elijah approached her, she was gathering a few sticks to make a fire, prepare that bread, that she and her son might eat their last meal (v. 12). Since the Phoenicians were in large measure dependent upon Israel for foodstuffs, the drought in Israel would have created great scarcity of grain in Phoenicia. The poor would have been the hardest hit, and this widow was evidently reduced to the greatest extremities.

It is not clear at what point in the conversation Elijah became aware that the woman with whom he was speaking was in fact the widow to whom God had sent him. Some commentators think his words in verses 13-14 indicate that he had already identified her; others, that these verses represent a further test of the woman. In either case the faith of the woman was put to the test. “Do not be afraid,” the prophet told her. “Take the oil

⁹ Honor, JCBR, p. 251-52.

and make the cake.” The oil was to take the place of butter, and sometimes the cakes were baked in oil. “Feed me first,” the prophet instructed; “then you and your son may eat.” Why would a heathen woman acquiesce in such a demand? Would she not in her desperate circumstances view such a request as unreasonable and selfish? Then to his forthright demand the prophet added a precious promise. If the woman would put God’s servant first, her jar of meal and flask of oil would be miraculously preserved until the rains returned to the land (v. 14).

Perhaps it was the authoritative manner of the man, or his prophetic garb, or the fact that he had spoken an oracle in the name of the Lord which caused this heathen woman to believe and obey. Her faith was rewarded. For many days she, her son, her prophetic friend and “*her house*”—probably friends or poor relatives—ate of that meal and oil (v. 15). All attempts of rationalists to rule out the miraculous in this passage fail.¹⁰ This passage certainly suggests that God was doing more for that widow than merely sustaining her providentially by natural means. The natural and obvious interpretation of verse 16 is that there was a supernatural and inexplicable multiplication of the woman’s food supplies. This widow received a prophet in the name of a prophet, and she received a prophet’s reward (cf. Matt. 10:41).

2. *THE RESURRECTION OF THE WIDOW’S SON* (17:17-24)

TRANSLATION

(17) And it came to pass after these things, that the son of the woman, the mistress of the house, fell sick; and his sickness was

¹⁰ As, for example, Gray (OTL, p. 381) who sees the factual basis of the story being that the generosity of the widow touched the conscience of her better-provided neighbors.

very serious, because there did not remain any breath in him. (18) And she said unto Elijah, What is between me and you, O man of God, that you have come unto me to bring my iniquity to remembrance, and to slay my son? (19) And Elijah said unto her, Give me your son! And he took him from her breast and brought him up to the upstairs where he dwelt, and laid him upon his bed. (20) And he called unto the LORD and said, O LORD my God, Have You also brought evil upon the widow with whom I sojourn to slay her son? (21) And he stretched out upon the lad three times, and he called unto the LORD and said, O LORD, my God, let the soul of this lad return into him I pray You. (22) And the LORD hearkened to the voice of Elijah, and the soul of the lad returned into him and he lived. (23) And Elijah took the lad and brought him down from the upstairs to the house and he gave him to his mother; and Elijah said, See your son lives. (24) And the woman said unto Elijah, Now I know beyond all doubt that you are a man of God, and the word of the LORD in your mouth is true.

COMMENTS

While the prophet was in residence at the widow's home, her son fell desperately ill. The phrase "*there did not remain any breath in him*" (v. 17) has been taken by some commentators to mean that the boy had died of his affliction.¹¹ Others feel that no more than a coma is intended by these words.¹² That the expression need not in itself mean the child was dead is proved by Daniel 10:17 where Daniel is said to have no breath in him while in fact he was very much alive. However, verses 18, and 20-21 certainly point in the direction of actual death.

The woman was quite upset over the loss of her child and immediately jumped to the conclusion that the prophet's

¹¹ Keil, BCOT, p. 239.

¹² Hammond, PC, p. 386-87. Cf. Josephus *Antiquities* VIII, 13.3 "he *appeared* to be dead."

presence had drawn the wrath of God upon her house. “*What is between me and you*” (lit., *what to me and you*) is a formula occurring several times in the Old Testament.¹³ The question may be paraphrased, What business does a saintly man like you have with a sinful woman like me? It seemed to this simple woman that before Elijah had taken up residence in her home that her own shortcomings had passed unobserved; but in the presence of this saint, attention had been focused, by contrast, on her failings. To this woman the death of the child was evidence of divine displeasure—retribution for sins which would never have been noticed had Elijah left her alone (v. 18). “*What have I done?*” i.e., “Is this the result of my association with you?” She felt that the man of God by residing with her had become aware of the sin in her life and had called her sin to the remembrance of the Lord. The death of her son she regarded as a judgment upon her sin (v. 18).

With calm confidence Elijah asked the desperate woman to give him the limp corpse of her son. He took the child from the bosom of his mother and carried him up into the upper chamber¹⁴ where he dwelt and laid the lad on his own bed (v. 19). In mighty intercessory prayer the prophet cried out to God. He began his petition with a rhetorical question: Had God brought misery upon this woman because of the prophet just as He had previously brought misery upon Israel?¹⁵ (v. 20). Then in an “action prayer” the prophet stretched himself upon the child in order to warm the body of the lad in expectation of the return of life into that corpse.¹⁶ Three times the prophet repeated his

¹³ Judges 11:12; II Samuel 16:10; II Kings 3:13.

¹⁴ Probably a flimsy shelter on the flat roof where guests might be accommodated without infringing the privacy of the small, one-room, family dwelling.

¹⁵ Verse 20 may also be interpreted in the following way: Have You brought evil *also* on the widow who has shared her last with me as You have upon the evildoers?

¹⁶ Gray (OTL p. 382) affirms this was “contactual magic” where the *health* of Elijah was magically conveyed to the corresponding organs of the child. Such concepts are, of course, completely foreign to the Old Testament faith. Furthermore, Gray can produce not one example in extrabiblical literature where someone attempted to convey *health* to another through magic!

“action prayer,” and each time he accompanied it with earnest entreaty that God would permit the child’s soul or life to return to his body (v. 21). The Lord heard that prayer of faith and the lad revived and lived (v. 22).

With great joy Elijah descended from that upper chamber with the child and tenderly handed him over to his anxious mother (v. 23). Satisfying herself that the child was indeed alive, the joyous woman burst forth in grateful acknowledgement that Elijah was truly a man of God. Her words should not be taken to mean that she had previously doubted that Elijah was a man of God, but only that she regarded the mighty resurrection miracle as final proof of his authority. The miracle served as Elijah’s credentials, and the pagan woman was now utterly convinced that the message he had been sharing with her was absolutely true (v. 24). These words imply that the woman was genuinely converted to the true faith by the miracle performed in the upper room.

II. THE GREAT CONTEST ON CARMEL 18:1-46

Events in Israel during the years of Elijah’s self-imposed exile are not narrated in any detail. No doubt at first Jezebel and the Baal prophets assured the people that their god controlled the weather and not Yahweh. But as the months and years of drought continued, the people were increasingly filled with apprehension and alarm over the threat which Elijah had pronounced. Ahab scoured the countryside and even surrounding nations in an attempt to locate the Tishbite in order to vent his wrath upon the one who was regarded as the author of all the famine misery. Unable to get her hands on Elijah himself, Jezebel unleashed a fierce persecution on the prophetic order of which he was recognized as the head. But as the drought continued into the third and fourth years it is quite possible that the attitude of the people began to change. Maybe Baal and Asherah were only vanities; maybe Yahweh did control the heavens even as Elijah declared. The stage was set for a most

dramatic confrontation between God and His would-be rivals. The author first discusses (1) the arrangements for the contest (vv. 1-20). He then describes (2) the contest itself (vv. 21-40), and (3) the aftermath of it (vv. 41-46).

A. THE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE CONTEST 18:1-20

When Elijah returned at God's direction to his native land, the first official with whom he had contact was a faithful royal steward name Obadiah. Albeit somewhat reluctantly, Obadiah conveyed the news of Elijah's return and whereabouts to the king. In a brief but highly charged encounter with Ahab, Elijah laid down the gauntlet with regard to the pagan prophets who were on Ahab's payroll. It was a challenge Ahab could not disregard. The narrative moves through Elijah's conversation with Obadiah (vv. 1-16) to his challenge of Ahab (vv. 17-20).

1. *ELIJAH AND OBADIAH (18:1-16)*

TRANSLATION

(1) And it came to pass after many days, that the word of the LORD came unto Elijah in the third year, saying, Go and show yourself to Ahab, that I may send rain upon the face of the ground. (2) And Elijah went to show himself to Ahab. Now the famine was heavy in Samaria. (3) And Ahab had called unto Obadiah who was over the house. (Now Obadiah feared the LORD exceedingly; (4) and it came to pass, when Jezebel cut off the prophets of the LORD, that Obadiah took a hundred prophets and hid them by fifties in a cave, and fed them with bread and water.) (5) And Ahab had said unto Obadiah, Go in the land unto all the wells of water and unto all the brooks; perhaps we shall find grass that the horses and mules might live, that we might not have to cut off some of the beasts. (6) And they divided the land between them to pass through it;

Ahab went one way by himself and Obadiah went the other way by himself. (7) And as Obadiah was in the way, behold Elijah met him, and he recognized him, and fell upon his face and said, Is this you, my lord Elijah? (8) And he said to him, It is I. Go, say to your master, Behold Elijah! (9) And he said, What have I sinned that you are giving your servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me? (10) As the LORD your God lives, there is surely no nation or kingdom where my master has not sent to seek you; and when they said, He is not here, then he made the kingdom or nation swear that it could not find you. (11) And now you are saying, Go and say to your master, Behold Elijah! (12) And it shall come to pass when I shall go from you, then the spirit of the LORD will lift you up where I know not; and when I come and tell Ahab, and he cannot find you, he will slay me; but I your servant have feared the LORD from my youth. (13) Was it not told my lord that which I did when Jezebel slew the prophets of the LORD, that I hid a hundred men of the prophets of the LORD by fifties in a cave and fed them with bread and water? (14) And now you are saying, Go and say to your master, Behold Elijah; he will then slay me! (15) And Elijah said, As the LORD of hosts lives, before whom I stand, I shall appear this day unto him. (16) And Obadiah went to meet Ahab, and he told him; and Ahab went to meet Elijah.

COMMENTS

When circumstances were just right for a dramatic confrontation between Yahweh and Baal, the Lord spoke to Elijah, instructing him to return to Israel and to Ahab because God was ready to send rain upon the land. The phrase "*in the third year*" (v. 1) is difficult because it is not certain from what point the author is counting these years. The New Testament indicates that the famine lasted a total of three years and six months (Luke 4:25; James 5:17). If Elijah spent about a year at the brook Cherith and about two-and-a-half years at Zarephath, then it would be "*in the third year*" of his stay with the widow that God

gave the prophet these new instructions.

The famine was severe in Samaria (v. 2). The people were reduced to virtual starvation and probably were only able to sustain themselves by the importation of grains from Egypt and other less affected regions. At this point the author introduces one of the unsung heroes of the Old Testament, Obadiah, whose name most appropriately means "*the servant of Yahweh*."¹⁷ Obadiah was the governor of Ahab's palace in Samaria, a position of no little importance. It was probably not *in spite of* but rather *because of* Obadiah's religious convictions that he had been entrusted with such an important office. Since he was a god-fearing man (v. 3), Ahab could depend on his fidelity and conscientiousness. As proof of Obadiah's devotion to the Lord, the author recounts the fearless deeds of this man of God during the period when Jezebel was persecuting the prophets of God. Verse 13 suggests that this persecution took place while Elijah was absent from the land. Obadiah took a hundred of the faithful prophets who remained in the land and hid them, fifty to a cave. The division of the prophets into two companies was partly for the sake of security and partly for the sake of convenience. The greater the number to be fed, the greater the chance of detection. Throughout the period of Jezebel's ruthless persecution, Obadiah took care of these men of God by supplying them with food and water (v. 4). Feeding these men during this period of famine was a *remarkable* feat.

It was while Obadiah was on an errand for his king that he encountered Elijah. Ahab had sent his faithful steward throughout the land in search of water near which grass might still be growing. The king was facing the unpleasant prospects of having to slaughter a portion of his livestock if fodder was not soon located (v. 5). The king and Obadiah divided the land between them to facilitate the search (v. 6). This personal inspection by the king and one of his chief officers marks the extreme straits

¹⁷ The Jewish Talmud (*Sanh.* 39b) suggests that this Obadiah may be the prophet whose book is found among the Minor Prophets. There is no basis for this assumption excepting the similarity in name.

to which the Israelites were now reduced. Whether or not the two men were accompanied by a retinue is uncertain.

When Obadiah met Elijah in the way, he instantly recognized the prophet. His humble obeisance and the terms in which he addressed Elijah reveal the profound reverence with which Obadiah regarded the man of God. The question "*Is this you?*" expresses the surprise of Obadiah at seeing Elijah, not any uncertainty as to identity (v. 7). Elijah acknowledged that he was the long-missing prophet, and ordered Obadiah to go and inform the king that he was back (v. 8).

Obadiah was horrified at the thought of announcing to Ahab that Elijah had returned because he knew the disposition of his master (v. 9). In the name of Yahweh, Obadiah swore that Ahab had communicated with all neighboring and accessible courts in search for Elijah, and even had made these foreign kings swear that they had not harbored the prophet (v. 10). It is ironic that Elijah was in Israel seeking an audience with the king while he was being sought for in foreign lands. "*Your God*" (v. 10) implies the recognition of the close association of God and prophet. For this reason Obadiah regarded the request of Elijah to be unreasonable (v. 11). He was afraid that when he went to inform the king of Elijah's whereabouts, that the prophet would disappear. If such should happen, then Ahab would feel that his steward had lied to him or trifled with him and would certainly slay Obadiah. The sudden and mysterious disappearance and the long concealment of the prophet had given birth to the theory that the spirit of God had whisked him away.¹⁸

Obadiah wished to convince Elijah that the refusal to comply with his request was not prompted by a lack of loyalty to the cause of Yahweh. He pointed out that he was and had been from his youth a worshiper of Yahweh (v. 12). In case Elijah had not heard of the noble deed he had performed, Obadiah related to the prophet how he had saved the hundred prophets

¹⁸ Obadiah may be referring to Elijah's astuteness in evading capture which the humble steward attributed to the Spirit of God, i.e. God's wisdom or direction.

(v. 13). Should such devotion be rewarded with such a potentially dangerous assignment? (v. 13). When Elijah took a solemn oath in the name of the Lord of hosts¹⁹ that he would appear to Ahab that day (v. 15), Obadiah went to seek Ahab and the king in turn hastened to confront the prophet (v. 16)

2. ELIJAH AND AHAB (18:17-20)

TRANSLATION

(17) And it came to pass when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Is this you, O troubler of Israel? (18) And he said, I have not troubled Israel, but you and the house of your father in that you have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and you have walked after the Baalim. (19) And now send, gather unto me all Israel unto Mt. Carmel, and the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and the four hundred prophets of Asherah, who eat at the table of Jezebel. (20) And Ahab sent to all the children of Israel, and he gathered the prophets unto Mt. Carmel.

COMMENTS

Ahab did not meet the prophet with a humble and contrite heart, but with sarcasm and belligerence. By means of a rhetorical question Ahab expressed his amazement that Elijah had ventured back into his presence. He addressed the prophet as the "*troubler of Israel*" (v. 17). This term "*troubler*" (*'okher*) is interesting. The verb from which it comes is used in the Old Testament to denote alienation from society (Gen. 34:30) or from God (Josh. 6:18; 7:25; I S 14:29) which results from some

¹⁹ The "*hosts*" refer primarily to the armies of Israel (Cf. I S 17:45). The designation *Lord of Hosts* was first used by Hannah (I S 1:11).

heinous crime or act. Ahab thus charged Elijah with being the one who by his actions had alienated the deity (Baal?) so that the rains had been withheld.

If Ahab thought that Elijah would throw himself on the mercy of the crown and beg pardon for the suffering he had caused the nation, he completely misjudged the man. In words seething with defiance, the Tishbite hurled the epithet back into the teeth of the king. *"It is you and your father's house who have brought the trouble on Israel!"* In the prophet's accusation, *"you have forsaken the commandments of the Lord and you have walked after the Baalim,"* the first "you" is plural and the second is singular. Preceding kings and the people as a whole had broken God's commandments by the calf worship. But Ahab alone had introduced the Baal cult into the land. The plural Baalim (v. 18) probably refers to the various images or statues of this god set up in the land of Israel.

The text does not indicate how Ahab reacted to the defiant response of Elijah. It may well be that the unexpected calmness and boldness of the prophet completely unnerved Ahab so that he could make no reply. In any case, Elijah hurled a challenge at the king. Let all Israel, i.e., the representatives of the nation, gather to Mt. Carmel along with the four hundred fifty prophets of Baal and four hundred prophets of Asherah. These men are called *"prophets"* because they prayed to and spoke in the name of their respective gods. They were Jezebel's ministers, probably imported from Sidon, and they were fed from the bounty of the queen (v. 19).

Mt. Carmel was a most appropriate location for the prophetic showdown. Carmel is a ridge, rather than mountain, some twelve miles in length. Near the summit of the ridge is a plateau where the contest might well have taken place. A spring of water is close at hand which is said to flow even in the driest seasons. The selection of Carmel as the site of the confrontation was also dictated by the fact that it had a central and convenient location; that it was near the sea, from whence the rain-clouds would come; that it was of easy access from Jezreel; and that it was not only a holy place from earlier times (cf. II K 4:23),

but also had its altar of the Lord. Carmel was in every way,²⁰ therefore, a most appropriate locality for the public vindication of Israel's God and His prophet.

Ahab immediately complied with the demands of Elijah and summoned the nation and the prophets of Baal to Mt. Carmel. The king *sent unto* the people, i.e., invited the people to attend the contest. He *gathered* the prophets of Baal, perhaps implying that they were unwilling to come and were forced to do so by the king (v. 20). The prophets of Asherah probably did not attend the convocation because they were under the personal control of the queen, and she would not allow their participation.

B. THE DESCRIPTION OF THE CONTEST 18:21-40

The story of the contest on Carmel is one that has excited the imagination of believers through the centuries. The narrative is somewhat lengthy and may for convenience be discussed under the following heads: (1) The preliminaries of the contest (vv. 21-24); (2) the prayers of the Baal prophets (vv. 25-29); (3) the preparations and prayer of Elijah (vv. 30-38); and (4) the punishment of the false prophets (vv. 39-40).

1. THE PRELIMINARIES OF THE CONTEST (18:21-24)

TRANSLATION

(21) And Elijah came near unto all the people and said, How long are you going to hobble upon two crutches? If the LORD is God, go after Him; but if Baal, go after him. And the people did not answer a word. (22) And Elijah said unto the people, I

²⁰ Gray (OTL p. 395) also suggests that Carmel may have been a favored cult-center of Baal. Since it was near the border of Phoenicia, the hill was an ideal place for Elijah to throw down the gauntlet to Jezebel. Gray's suggestion that Elijah's associates were hiding in the caves of Carmel does not appear to this writer too likely.

alone remain as the prophets of the LORD, but the prophets of the Baal are four hundred fifty. (23) Now give to us two bullocks; and let them choose for themselves one bullock and let them cut it, and put it upon the wood, and put no fire under it; and I will prepare the other bullock, and put it on the wood, and I will put no fire under it. (24) Then call on the name of your god, and as for me, I will call on the name of the LORD, and it shall come to pass that the God who answers with fire, He is God. And all the people answered and said, The thing is good.

COMMENTS

There is no way to know the size of the crowd that assembled on the spacious plateau atop Carmel, but no doubt the dramatic confrontation attracted hundreds if not thousands. It was the masses rather than the king which Elijah hoped to reach on Carmel, and so it is to them that he directed his rhetorical question: How long are you going to hobble upon two crutches, i.e., seeking the support of both Yahweh and Baal simultaneously.²¹ The prophet called for a clear-cut decision. Let the people choose between Baal or the Lord and then commit themselves wholeheartedly to that deity who was truly God. Awed by the presence of the king and prophets of Baal on the one side and by Elijah on the other, the people answered not a word (v. 21). Perhaps also they were convicted in their own consciences and were consequently speechless.

To set the stage for the contest Elijah called the attention of the people to the fact that he stood alone that day as sole representative of the Lord.²² On the other hand, Baal's

²¹ This translation was proposed by Fohrer and followed by Gray (OTL, p. 396). Some difference of opinion exists as to the actual meaning of the word translated "*crutches*"; it is rendered "*opinions*" by KJV, RSV and NASB.

²² It is useless to speculate as to why the one hundred prophets mentioned in verses 4 and 13 were not present. It may be that they were still in hiding in some remote area and had not heard of the contest. During the Jezebel persecution some prophets had died (20:7ff.), some had fled to Judah, some had gone into hiding, and some had knuckled under to the royal policy (22:6-27).

prophets²³ numbered four hundred fifty (v. 22). But why did Elijah call attention to this obvious fact? Perhaps his motives were psychological and he was attempting to cast himself in the role of an underdog to gain the sympathetic support of the masses. It may be also that he wished to underscore the fact of his absolute confidence even though outnumbered. Certainly he was trying to stress the fact that truth is not determined by numbers.

Since his opponents were so numerous, and since they were supported by the crown, Elijah proposed that they supply the two sacrificial bullocks. One was to be selected and prepared by the Baal prophets and one by Elijah. Elijah offered his rivals their choice of the oxen as a guarantee that he would use no sleight of hand and that they would have no excuse that the victim was less fit for sacrifice. The bullocks were to be placed on the altar wood, but no fire was to be set to the wood (v. 23). The people were then instructed to call on the name of their god Baal. The failure of the people to take a clear-cut stand for the Lord in verse 21 is tantamount to their choosing Baal as their god. Elijah, on the other hand, would call on the name of the Lord. Whichever deity responded to the prayers of His worshipers and consumed the sacrificial bullock with fire from heaven would be recognized as true God. Since Baal claimed to be the god of storm and lightning such a proposal could not be rejected by those sympathetic to Baal. So the people, whether eagerly or reluctantly, gave their assent to the proposed test (v. 24).

²³ The prophets of Asherah were not present. Either Jezebel had forbidden their presence, or they shrank from the ordeal.

2. THE PRAYERS OF THE BAAL PROPHETS (18:25-29)**TRANSLATION**

(25) And Elijah said to the prophets of Baal, Choose for yourselves one bullock and prepare it first, for you are many, and call on the name of your god, but put no fire under it. (26) And they took the bullock which was given to them, and they prepared it, and called on the name of Baal from morning until midday saying, O Baal, Answer us! But there was no sound, nor one who answered. And they limped around the altar which had been made. (27) And it came to pass at noon, that Elijah mocked them and said, Cry with a loud voice for he is a god; either he is meditating, or having a bowel movement, or he is on a journey! Perhaps he is asleep and must be awakened! (28) And they called with a loud voice and they cut themselves according to their manner with swords and lances until the blood gushed out on them. (29) And it came to pass when noon was past, that they prophesied until the time of the offering of the sacrifice; but there was no voice, nor any to answer, nor any who heard.

COMMENTS

Having gained the assent of the people, Elijah turned to the splendorously clad prophets of Baal and repeated the proposal (v. 25). The prophet had put them in a position in which they could hardly refuse the test and retain the respect of their constituents. Because the prophets of Baal were so numerous, Elijah suggested that they go first in the contest. He was anxious that the impotency of these Baal prophets be fully manifested before he demonstrated his own power with God. Perhaps the implied argument is that they being so numerous could prepare the sacrificial bullock much more quickly than could the lone prophet of the Lord.

The prophets of Baal declined the opportunity to select the

bullock and took the one which was given them by representatives of the people or by Elijah himself. They prepared the animal in the prescribed manner, and then began to call on the name of Baal. From morning until noon they continued to cry out that Baal would hearken to their prayers, but there was no response of any kind. They then began to limp, i.e., dance about the altar in an attempt to attract the attention of their mute master (v. 26).

At noon Elijah began to needle his opponents with sarcasm: "Cry with a loud voice, for he is a god at least in your estimation!" In condescending tones Elijah offered some possible explanations for Baal's lack of response. Perhaps he was meditating or talking; maybe he was having a bowel movement;²⁴ or maybe he was on a trip; or then again, maybe he was just a late sleeper and needed to be awakened! (v. 27). Elijah's barbs stirred the Baal prophets to renewed vigor as if to testify to their undying faith in their god. Grabbing the swords and spears of soldiers standing nearby they began frantically to cut themselves, hoping by this act of self-mutilation to attract the attention of their god²⁵ (v. 28). These men were absolutely sincere in their faith!

3. THE PREPARATIONS AND PRAYER OF ELIJAH (18:30-38)

TRANSLATION

(30) And Elijah said to all the people, Draw near unto me. So all the people drew near unto him. And he repaired the altar of the LORD which was broken down. (31) And Elijah took

²⁴ Lit., *turn aside*, which in Hebrew is a euphemism for having a bowel movement as is indicated by Judges 3:24 and II Samuel 24:3. Montgomery (ICC, p. 302) calls this "the raciest comment ever made on pagan mythology."

²⁵ Gray (OTL, p. 399) sees this self-laceration of the Baal prophets as an act of imitative magic. By shedding blood, the vital essence, they would magically compel their deity to release the vital waters from the heavens.

twelve stones according to the number of the tribes of the children of Jacob, to whom the word of the LORD had come, saying, Israel shall be your name. (32) And he built with the stones an altar in the name of the LORD, and he made a trench around the altar, which would contain two *seahs* of seed. (33) And he arranged the wood, and cut the bullock in pieces, and put it upon the wood. And he said, fill four barrels with water, and pour them upon the burnt offering and upon the wood. (34) And he said, Repeat this, and they repeated it. And he said, Do it a third time, and they did it a third time. (35) And the water ran around the altar, and also the trench was filled with water. (36) And it came to pass at the time of offering sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet drew near and said, O LORD God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel, today let it be known that You are God in Israel, and I am Your servant, and according to Your word I have done all these things. (37) Answer me, answer me, O, LORD, that this people may know that You, O LORD, are God, and that You have turned their heart back again. (38) And the fire of the LORD fell, and it consumed the burnt offering and the wood and the stones and the dust, and the water which was in the trench it licked up.

COMMENTS

Elijah allowed his opponents all the time he could in view of the great work he himself had to perform that day. The Baal prophets had been prophesying,²⁶ i.e., praying to and praising Baal, for six or more hours—from early morning to the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice about three in the afternoon²⁷ (v. 29). Elijah called the people to him so that they might have a good view of all he was about to do. He wanted

²⁶ Honor (ICBR, p. 262) proposes instead of translating "*they prophesied*" that the Hebrew should be rendered "*they worked themselves into a fit of rage or madness.*"

²⁷ The evening offering was probably offered in Old Testament times when it was offered during the intertestamental period, at the ninth hour or three o'clock in the afternoon. See Acts 3:1; 10:3, 30; Josephus, *Ant.* XIV, 4.3.

eye-witnesses and ear-witnesses so that there could be no suspicion of hoax or magic. The prophet began his demonstration by rebuilding the broken-down altar of the Lord (v. 30). This altar may be one of the high places where Israelites worshiped prior to the establishment of the Temple in Jerusalem. On the other hand the altar may have been built by some of the faithful Yahweh worshipers who would not bow the knee to Baal or to the golden calf. Scarcely any doubt can exist that this was one of the altars which Ahab or Jezebel had ordered torn down (19:10). Elijah's repairing the altar was an act of profound significance. It showed him as the restorer of the law and the true religion.

Twelve stones went into that restored altar, symbolizing the twelve sons of Jacob. This act was both a protest against the schism and a reminder that the ten tribes of the Northern Kingdom had no exclusive rights to the God-given name "Israel" (v. 31). Thus with twelve stones removed from the ruins of the broken down altar, Elijah built a new altar "*in the name of the Lord,*" i.e., by His authority and for His glory. A trench was dug about the altar as deep as the grain measure containing two *seahs* of seed (v. 32). The *seah* was a third of an *ephah* which was slightly larger than a bushel. The sacrificial bullock was cut in pieces and laid on the altar wood. The prophet then ordered that four pitchers of water be poured on the sacrificial animal and the wood beneath (v. 33), and this he ordered repeated two more times (v. 34). So much water was poured over the altar that it ran down and filled the trench²⁸ around the altar (v. 35). The object of these repeated drenchings of the victim and altar was to exclude all suspicion of fraud.^{29,30}

It was about three o'clock in the afternoon (cf. v. 29) when

²⁸ The Hebrew could also be translated, "*he (Elijah) filled the trench*" which would imply that additional water besides the twelve pitchers was used to fill the trench.

²⁹ An ancient tradition has it that the Baal prophets had hidden a man beneath or within their altar who was to ignite the sacrifice at the proper moment; but he died of suffocation. Stanley, LJC, II, p. 258, n. 5.

³⁰ Possibly the pouring out of the water also had symbolic significance. It may have been a symbolic petition for rain, or a symbol of repentance (cf. I S 7:3-14).

Elijah drew near his water-drenched altar, lifted his eyes heavenward, and began to pray. He addressed Yahweh as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Israel. He designedly substituted "Israel" for the more common name Jacob in this formula in order to proclaim Yahweh as the God of Israel (the nation). He prayed that God would vindicate Himself and His prophet. The fire from heaven would indicate that all which Elijah had said with regard to the famine three years earlier and all that he had done with regard to organizing the confrontation with the Baal prophets had been done through the word of the Lord (v. 36).

Earnestly Elijah called upon God to hearken to his prayer that the people might be convinced that Yahweh alone was God and that He still loved them enough to perform this sign to bring about their conversion³¹ (v. 37). This dramatic prayer had no sooner fallen from the lips of Elijah when "*fire from heaven*" (lightening?³²) fell upon that altar. The tongues of fire not only consumed (lit., *ate up*) the sacrificial animal and wood, they also disintegrated the stones, scorched the dust about the altar, and even licked up the water in the trench (v. 38).

4. THE PUNISHMENT OF THE FALSE PROPHETS (18:39-40)

TRANSLATION

**(39) And when all the people saw this, they fell upon their faces and said, The LORD, He is God, the LORD, He is God.
(40) And Elijah said to them, Seize the prophets of Baal! Let**

³¹ Cf. Mal. 4:5-6 where a similar ministry of conversion is to be performed by the antetypical Elijah, John the Baptist.

³² Jon Ruthven (JETS, XII, 111-115) argues persuasively for the likelihood that lightning is meant. He demonstrates that the absence of clouds in the sky need not preclude the possibility of a lightning stroke.

no man escape from them. And they seized them, and brought them unto Elijah unto the brook Kishon; and he slew them there.

COMMENTS

The people reacted to this divine demonstration instantly and decisively. Recognizing in the fire the token of the divine presence, they fell on their faces and continued to shout in unison, Yahweh is God, Yahweh is God! (v. 39). Seizing the initiative of that emotion-packed moment, Elijah ordered the Baal prophets to be apprehended. The prophet then led the throng down to the base of the hill where flows the river Kishon and there *slew* (i.e., instigated the slaying of) the pagan prophets (v. 40). It is not quite certain why the prophet resorted to the Kishon for the slaughter unless it be that he was seeking a means of disposing of the bodies. Perhaps he anticipated that when the great flood of water came shortly, that these bodies would be swept on out to sea.

The slaughter of the Baal prophets has been called an act of gross fanaticism and cruelty by some; others have seen in it a wild and terrible *vendetta* for Jezebel's persecution and possible murder of the Lord's prophets. The following considerations tend to place this action in the proper perspective.

1. The Law of Moses required in three separate passages the execution of those who worshiped false gods and especially those who taught others to so worship (Ex. 22:20; Deut. 13; Deut. 17:2-7). However repugnant this slaughter might have been to Elijah personally, he was under obligation to carry out the Law.

2. Whereas it was normally the duty of the theocratic ruler to carry out such executions, in Elijah's day the king was corrupt, powerless, and himself an idol worshiper.

3. Elijah had just proved that the Lord was God; now he must likewise prove that the Law of God was not dead.

4. These prophets had been instrumental in corrupting the people of God and had thereby threatened the very existence

of true religion.

5. The action was allowed and approved by God who otherwise would hardly have answered the prayer which Elijah offered following the massacre.

6. Idolatry and irreligion are not today to be avenged by sword or fire, not because these sins are any less greivous, but because the duty of punishing these crimes has been reserved for God himself.

7. Whereas the Law specified stoning as the punishment for idolatry (Deut. 13:10; 17:5), the sword was used in this instance because of the numbers involved and the lateness of the afternoon hour.

C. THE AFTERMATH OF THE CONTEST 18:41-46

TRANSLATION

(41) And Elijah said unto Ahab, Go up, eat and drink, for there is the sound of the tumult of rain. (42) Then Ahab went up to eat and to drink. And Elijah went unto the top of Carmel, bowed himself to the ground, and put his face between his knees. (43) And he said unto his servant, Go up, I pray you, Look toward the sea. And he went up and looked, and said, There is nothing. And he said, Return seven times. (44) And it came to pass on the seventh time that he said, Behold a little cloud like the hand of a man going up from the sea. And he said, Go up and say to Ahab, Hitch up your chariot and go down that the rain detain you not. (45) And it came to pass in the meanwhile that the heavens became black with clouds and wind, and there came a great rain. And Ahab rode away, and went to Jezreel. (46) And the hand of the LORD was upon Elijah, and he girded up his loins, and ran before Ahab unto the entrance of Jezreel.

COMMENTS

It would appear that king Ahab had accompanied the crowd to the Kishon. The king was wise enough to realize that he could in no wise intervene to rescue the condemned prophets from the angry throng. It may be too that the king was none too sorry to see these charlatans executed. In the excitement of the day's activities the king had had nothing to eat or drink.³³ Elijah therefore instructed Ahab to go up and have a meal. It is probable that the attendants of the king had spread a tent for him upon the plateau, and had brought food for the whole day with them. By these instructions the prophet was suggesting that there was no longer any cause for anxiety or alarm on the part of the king. Since the people had repented, and the wicked had been cut off from the land, the drought could now be removed. In Elijah's prophetic mind he could already hear the sound of a great rain (v. 41).

After Ahab returned to the plateau to have his meal, Elijah made his way to one of the prominent knolls of Carmel where he could enter into earnest intercessory prayer. The prayer posture of the prophet is somewhat peculiar. He seems to have been squatting with his head between his knees. The purpose here was to induce concentration.³⁴ After some moments of petition, Elijah dispatched his servant to a higher elevation from which the Mediterranean could be clearly viewed. His concentration in prayer was so extreme that Elijah could not stop to scan the sky to see if his prayer had been answered.

Seven times the servant was instructed to return to his observation post (v. 43). God had promised rain (cf. v. 1), and Elijah was confident that He would keep that promise. Without murmur the devoted servant executed the prophet's orders. On his seventh trip to the summit, he spotted a small cloud no bigger than the palm of a man's hand. Such small clouds

³³ It may have been that the king was observing a fast, such as was customary on occasion of intercession in drought (cf. Joel 1:14) or some other calamity.

³⁴ Montgomery, ICC, p. 306.

were harbingers of rain in Palestine (cf. Luke 12:54). Elijah then dispatched his servant to the plateau where Ahab was dining to announce to the king that he should make haste to go to Jezreel lest he be caught in the downpour and be unable to cross the flood-swollen Kishon (v. 44).

In the meanwhile, the sky blackened, a wind arose, and a great rain³⁵ swept across the plain of Esdraelon. Ahab made his way toward Jezreel as fast as he could (v. 45). The hand of the Lord came upon Elijah, which not only implies that the prophet received supernatural guidance, but supernatural strength as well. Girding up his loins, i.e., gathering about his waist his long flowing robe, Elijah set out running toward Jezreel and actually arrived at the gate of the city prior to Ahab and his chariot (v. 46). Over this distance it would not be impossible for a man to outstrip a horse and chariot, especially since the man would run cross-country while the chariot would have to stick to the now muddy road-bed. Elijah believed he had struck the death blow to the pagan practices promoted by the royal court and he wished to be in Jezreel to further any reformation efforts that the hapless Ahab might inaugurate. He knew Ahab would need all the help he could get to bolster his courage as he came face to face with his wicked wife Jezebel.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I. FACTS TO MASTER

A. Important places to identify:

- | | |
|--------------|-----------------|
| 1. Tishbe | 5. Mt. Carmel |
| 2. Cherith | 6. Brook Kishon |
| 3. Zarephath | 7. Jezreel |
| 4. Samaria | |

³⁵ The usual word for rain is *matar*. Here, however the word *geshem* is used which signifies a cloudburst, tempest or deluge. See Honor, JCBR, p. 268.

- B. Important persons to identify in relationship to this chapter:**
- | | |
|------------|------------|
| 1. Ahab | 4. Jezebel |
| 2. a widow | 5. Elijah |
| 3. Obadiah | |
- C. Important numbers to remember:**
1. Number of times Elijah stretched out on a dead child
 2. Number of prophets Obadiah hid in caves
 3. Number of prophets of Baal and Asherah
 4. Number of stones in the altar erected by Elijah
 5. Number of pitchers of water used on Mt. Carmel
 6. Number of times those pitchers were emptied over the altar
 7. Number of times Elijah's servant made the trip to the summit of Mt. Carmel
- D. Key words or phrases which should bring to remembrance the important events of this chapter:**
- | | |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|
| 1. ravens | 5. caves |
| 2. gathering sticks | 6. altar |
| 3. meal and oil | 7. trench |
| 4. upper room | 8. cloud as small as a man's fist |

II. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. Elijah has been called the most important leader of the true worship of Yahweh since Moses and Samuel. How so?
2. What kind of spiritual lesson is contained in the account of the miraculous increase of the widow's oil?
3. What is the missionary implication of Elijah's trip to Zarephath? See Luke 4:26.
4. How would you contrast the religion of Ahab and that of Elijah?
5. What was the Carmel contest designed to demonstrate to Israel?
6. To Elijah, undivided religious loyalty was the only policy. To what degree do modern church leaders emulate Elijah?

7. How does Ahab's address to Elijah, "Troubler of Israel," illustrate the sinner's psychology?
8. Why is the faithfulness of Obadiah especially to be commended? What can one say about those prophets who were hiding in the caves?
9. What does this section reveal about the power of prayer? How many different prayers can you identify in this chapter?
10. Why did the widow blame Elijah for the death of her child? Was the child actually dead?
11. Why was Obadiah so fearful to relate to Ahab that he had seen Elijah?
12. How can the massacre of the Baal prophets at the river Kishon be justified?
13. How was Elijah able to outrun Ahab's chariot back to Jezreel from Mt. Carmel?

Lessons in Living

THE FAITH OF THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH

I K 17:8-16 Luke 4:25-26

I. Her Faith was *Challenged*

"Make me a little bread cake from it first . . . and afterward you may make one for yourself and your son."

II. Her Faith was *Put to Work*

"She went and did according to the saying of Elijah."

III. Her Faith was *Rewarded*

"She and her household ate for many days."

AHAB VS. BENHADAD
I Kings 20-22

5 Miles

R. Kishon

Jezreel

Beth-shan

Ramoth-gilead

Dothan

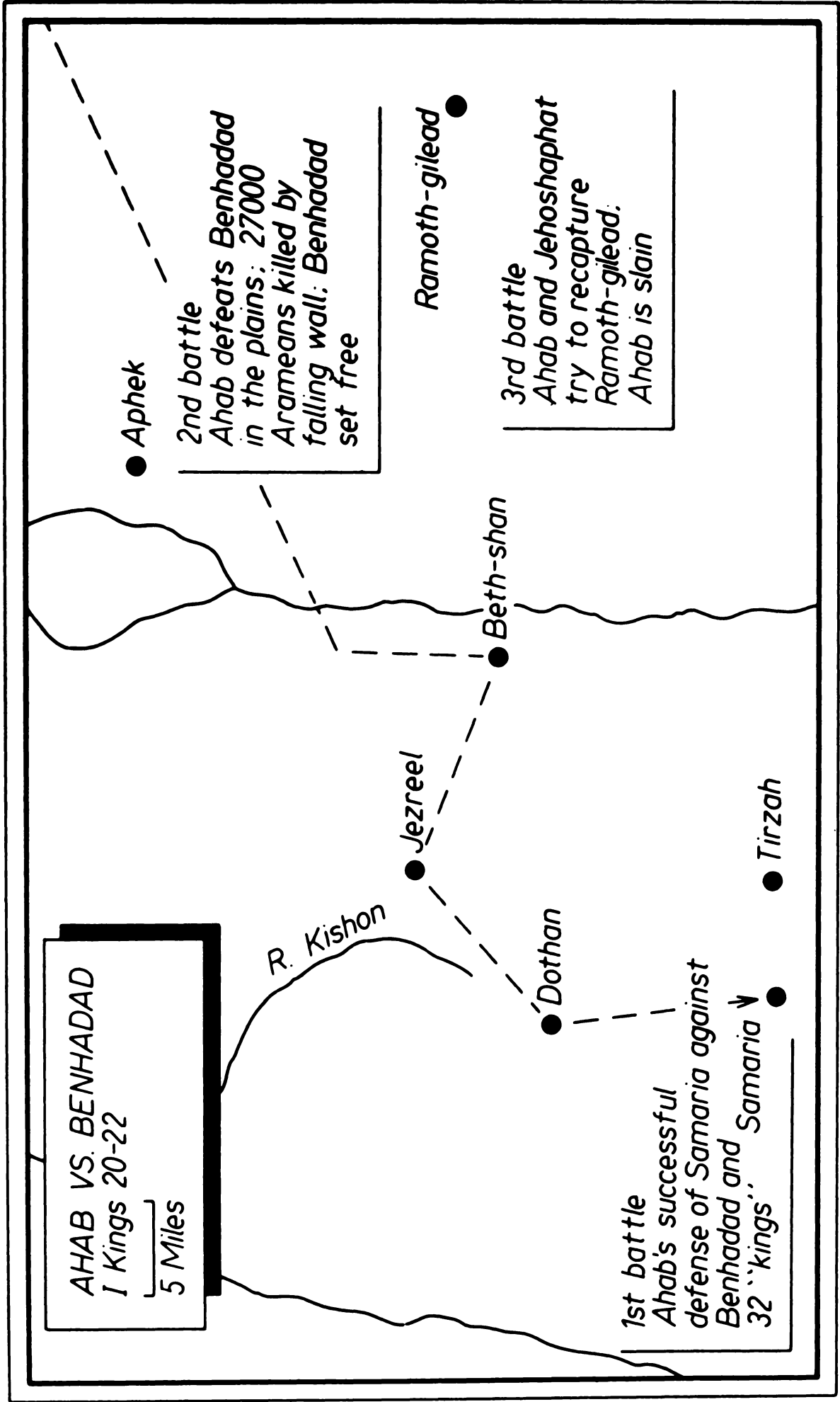
Tirzah

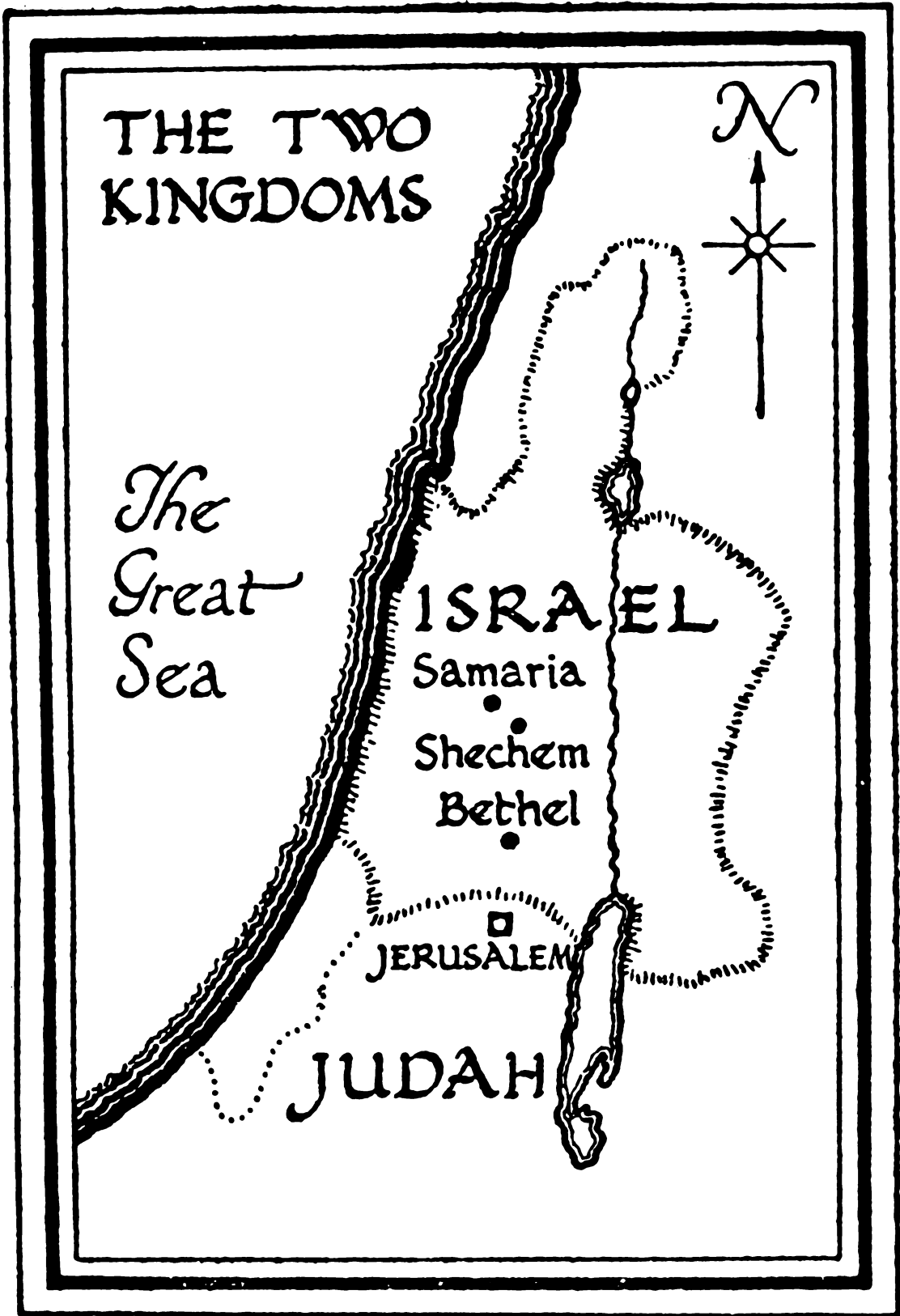
● Aphek

2nd battle
Ahab defeats Benhadad
in the plains; 27000
Arameans killed by
falling wall; Benhadad
set free

3rd battle
Ahab and Jehoshaphat
try to recapture
Ramoth-gilead;
Ahab is slain

1st battle
Ahab's successful
defense of Samaria against
Benhadad and
32 "kings" of Samaria





Drawings by Horace Knowles
from the British and Foreign Bible Society

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

THREE GREAT CRISES IN ISRAEL

I Kings 19:1—21:29

Three great crises which occurred during the reign of Ahab are discussed in chapters 19-21. These crises were very different from one another. The first one was spiritual in nature and pertains to that great theocratic trooper Elijah who, because of overwhelming discouragement, had momentarily become inoperative as far as the great struggle against Baal was concerned (19:1-21). An invasion by Benhadad of Damascus triggered the second crisis (20:1-43). The third crisis—a social one—threatened to disrupt the very fabric of Israelite society (21:1-29).

I. THE GREAT SPIRITUAL CRISIS 19:1-21

In view of the triumph on Carmel, one might expect to read in chapter 19 about a great religious reformation in Israel. Such is not the case. Not until the extirpation of the house of Omri was Yahwism to gain unquestionable ascendancy over Baalism in the North. Upon learning of the defeat of her god and the death of her prophets, Jezebel publicly vowed that she would see Elijah dead. This unexpected turn of events caused Elijah great discouragement and trepidation. In a moment of spiritual weakness he resigned as it were from his prophetic ministry, packed his bags, and fled the country. The present chapter narrates (1) Elijah's flight from Jezebel (vv. 1-8); (2) his reassurance from God (vv. 9-18); and (3) his call of Elisha (vv. 19-21).

A. ELIJAH'S FLIGHT FROM JEZEBEL 19:1-8

TRANSLATION

(1) And Ahab told Jezebel all which Elijah had done, and that he had slain all the prophets with the sword. (2) And Jezebel

sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do and even more if by this time tomorrow I do not make your life like one from among them. (3) And he feared, and arose and went for his life, and came to Beersheba which belongs to Judah where he left his servant. (4) And he went on in the wilderness a day's journey to die, And he said, Enough! Now, O LORD, take my life, for I am no better than my fathers. (5) And he lay down, and slept under a juniper tree. And Behold this angel was touching him, and said to him, Rise up; eat! because the journey is too great for you. (6) And he looked and behold there was at his head a bread cake baked on hot stones, and a jar of water. So he ate and drank and lay down again. (7) And the angel of the LORD came again and touched him and said, Arise, eat, for the journey is too great for you. (8) And he arose, ate and drank, and went in the strength of that food forty days and forty nights unto the mountain of God, Horeb.

COMMENTS

It was no doubt with mixed emotions that Ahab related the account of the Carmel happenings to his headstrong consort. On the one hand, the king must have been excited and anxious to relate the matter to his wife; on the other hand, he must have been trepidant as he anticipated her incredulity and rage. One might think that the account of the total defeat of her deity in the Carmel contest would have brought her under conviction. But no amount of evidence could sway this implacable foe of truth and persecutor of prophets. She listened to Ahab's story, but her one thought was of revenge (v. 1).

A messenger was dispatched to the city gate to find Elijah and convey to him the queen's solemn vow in the name of the gods she revered that she would have his life within twenty-four hours (v. 2). But if Jezebel meant to slay Elijah, why forewarn him by means of this messenger? Perhaps she felt that she would find no one that night who would be willing to carry

out the execution order against a man whose supernatural powers had been so widely heralded. The dispatching of the messenger was more an act of rage than of rationality. In her exasperation she had to give vent to her impotent wrath. Her husband may have been convinced and even converted by what he had seen, but *she* was unconquered and unrelenting.

Sudden panic seized Elijah when the messenger delivered Jezebel's threat. Momentarily he lost his faith in God or else he would certainly have waited for "the word of the Lord" which on previous occasions had given him guidance. No doubt profound depression mingled with the fear in the heart of the prophet. He had expected the contest on Carmel to settle the issue of who was God in Israel. His utopian dream of Israel in the fold of fidelity was smashed by the defiant declaration of the queen. Utterly dispirited and broken, Elijah fled for his life.

At Beersheba, ninety-five miles south of Jezreel on the southern boundary of Judah, the prophet dismissed his faithful servant (v. 3). The journey to that point must have occupied at least three days. Elijah probably left his servant at Beersheba because he wished to be alone with God; possibly because the boy was too exhausted to go further, and there was no reason why he should be subjected to the uncertainties and privations of desert travel. Why Elijah did not seek security within the territory of Judah cannot be ascertained. One might think that Jehoshaphat of Judah might grant him asylum. However it is obvious that Jehoshaphat had an alliance with the Omri dynasty, and it is probable that the treaty between the two lands had extradition provisions.

The prophet himself went on from Beersheba into the great and terrible wilderness of Sinai. It was not merely for personal security¹ that the prophet plunged into the barren wastes. He

¹ The theory has been advanced that Elijah still felt insecure even in Judah on account of the cordial relations between Jehoshaphat of Judah and Ahab. But would Elijah have had anything to fear from godly Jehoshaphat? Would he have left his faithful servant in a place of danger?

needed time to think, to meditate and to be alone with God. Had he done right to run away? Should he have accepted the challenge of Jezebel and continued his struggle to the bitter end? Probably Mt. Horeb was his destination from the very beginning. Like his predecessor, the great lawgiver Moses, the law restorer Elijah was fleeing to the land of Midian where he too might have a face to face encounter with God.

When Elijah came upon a juniper tree, he sat down to rest. The desert juniper, called by modern Arabs, the broom tree, was a most welcome sight for the desert traveler because its bushy branches provided shelter from the desert sun and wind. There Elijah sat alone, exhausted physically and depressed psychologically, and requested that he might die.² He who was destined never to see death was pleading that his life might be taken from him. But why this agonizing outcry: "*I am no better than my fathers*"? (v. 4). He had thought himself to be a special messenger of God, raised up mightily to bring the people of God to repentance. So long as he had a ray of hope that he might influence the moral and religious life in Israel, nothing was too difficult for him. But under that juniper tree Elijah came to feel that his life was fruitless, that he had failed in his mission and hence had nothing further for which to live.

The pathetic prophet closed his eyes and prayed that he would never open them again. But God had other plans for this man. An angel awakened him and directed him to arise and eat (v. 5). Elijah probably had eaten little or nothing during his journey from Jezreel, and probably had fasted for some time before the Carmel contest. His profound depression may have been due largely to his physical weakness. Therefore, before God could deal with his spiritual problem He had to take care of the man's physical problem. Opening his eyes, Elijah found near his head a cake of bread and a cruse of water.

² "*He requested his life to die*" indicates the Hebrew conception that life proceeded directly from God and consequently belonged to Him. A man might wish to die, but he was not at liberty to commit suicide. See Gray, OTL, p. 408.

After partaking, the prophet dozed off (v. 6). Again the angel of the Lord awakened Elijah and bade him partake of the food which God had provided, for he yet had a long journey before him (v. 7). Probably the prophet because of physical and mental fatigue had eaten but little the first time. Some commentators think that the idea of going to Horeb was first suggested at this time by the angel.

Elijah did eat of the food God provided, and from it gained sufficient strength to sustain himself for forty days and nights.³ Like Moses before him (Deut. 9:9) and Christ after him, Elijah fasted for forty days and nights. These three great fasters met gloriously on Mt. Tabor on the night of the Lord's transfiguration. The journey from Beersheba to Mt. Horeb is about a hundred thirty miles, and thus the entire forty days were not spent traveling. Rather the forty days and nights include the entire time the prophet stayed in the wilderness.

B. ELIJAH'S REASSURANCE FROM GOD 19:9-18

TRANSLATION

(9) And he came there unto the cave, and lodged there. And behold the word of the LORD came unto him, and He said to him, What are you doing here, Elijah? (10) And he said, I am very zealous for the LORD God of hosts, for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant. Your altars they have overthrown, and Your prophets they have slain with the sword; and I alone am left, and they seek my life to take it. (11) And He said, Go out and stand on the mountain before the LORD, and behold the LORD will pass by. And a great and strong wind ripped the mountains and brake the rocks before the

³ The primary reference is to the forty days and forty nights that Moses spent in Horeb, during which he "*neither did eat bread nor drink water*" (Deut. 9:9). According to Psalms 128:25 Israel was sustained for forty years in this same wilderness by "*angels' food*."

LORD; but the LORD was not in the wind. And after the wind, an earthquake; but the LORD was not in the earthquake. (12) And after the earthquake, a fire; but the LORD was not in the fire. And after the fire a still small voice. (13) And it came to pass when Elijah heard it, that he wrapped his face in his mantle, and went out, and stood at the entrance of the cave. And behold a voice came unto him and said, What are you doing here Elijah? (14) And he said, I am very zealous for the LORD God of hosts, for the children of Israel have forsaken Your covenant. Your altars they have torn down, and Your prophets they have slain with the sword; and I alone am left, and they seek my life to take it. (15) And the LORD said unto him, Go, return to your way, to the wilderness of Damascus; and you shall go and anoint Hazael king over Aram. (16) Jehu the son of Nimshi you shall anoint king over Israel; and Elisha son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah you shall anoint to be prophet in your place. (17) And it shall come to pass that the one who escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall slay; and the one who escapes the sword of Hazael, Elisha shall slay. (18) And I have left in Israel seven thousand, all whose knees have not bowed to Baal, and whose mouths have not kissed him.

COMMENTS

At Horeb Elijah took up residence in a cave.⁴ There the word of the Lord came to him in the form of a question designed at once to reprove Elijah and to make him analyze his situation. The prophet had been strengthened by God's grace to be brought to this mountain to learn some very important spiritual lessons. At every other point in the ministry of this man, the Lord had been sending him to his destinations. But Elijah

⁴ The Hebrew reads "*the* cave." Montgomery (ICC, p. 317) takes this to be a generic article (i.e., the cave region). Gray (OTL, p. 409) feels the article points to a particular cave, possibly that from which Moses saw the back of Yahweh (Ex. 33:21ff.).

had left Jezreel without such a word, had left in fear and distrust of God, and thus the question, "What are you doing here?" implies that he had deserted the post of duty and had no right to be there.

Elijah did not accept censure without some self-justification. In the face of the terrible apostasy in Israel, Elijah had been very zealous⁵ for the Lord God of hosts.⁶ The children of Israel had broken the covenant with God, thrown down His altars (like the one repaired by Elijah on Carmel), and had slain His prophets. Yet Elijah had stood firm and, so it seemed to his despondent mind, had stood alone. Now Elijah's own life was in jeopardy even though he had won a mighty victory on Carmel. In the words of verse 10, there is tacit reproof of God. Why had God looked upon the deterioration in the Northern Kingdom for so long without divine intervention? Elijah resented the growing corruption of the age and the frustration of his efforts to reverse it. Here is the old cry found throughout the Old Testament, the complaint that God is silent and indifferent, that the righteous are persecuted while the wicked prosper.

If Elijah thought his depression and his desertion of the field of battle was justified, he was mistaken. He was about to experience a theophany, a manifestation of the power and presence of God, through which he would learn a very important lesson. The voice of God instructed the prophet to stand at the entrance of the cave. Though the text is not explicit at this point, it would appear that Elijah obeyed those instructions. As soon as he stepped from the cave, the prophet was confronted with a veritable tempest which ripped rocks loose from the mountain and sent them crashing down the side of the mountain. But the Lord was not in the wind. Then on the heels of the tempest came a fearsome earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake either (v. 11). After the earthquake came fire—perhaps a thunderstorm with bolts of lightning

⁵ The Hebrew word *qana'* is used of the enthusiasm of exclusive devotion; fanatical intolerance. See Gray, OTL, p. 409.

⁶ This title for God, here used for the first time by Elijah, is very appropriate in view of the deification of the heavenly hosts in Canaanite religion.

the likes of which the prophet never had seen before. But the Lord was not in the fire.⁷ Then came the still small voice (lit., *a sound of gentle silence*), and the prophet knew he was standing in the presence of God (v. 12). Wrapping his sheepskin mantle about his face lest he look upon God, Elijah stepped forth from his cave into which apparently he retreated during the manifestations of divine power.⁸

What was the purpose of the succession of signs on Horeb? God was showing the prophet of deeds that while the spectacular and dramatic have their place in God's order of things, most often the divine program is carried out through the still small voice which speaks to the hearts of men. While God is the God of judgment, He is also the God of mercy and grace. Elijah needed to be reminded of that fact. He needed to see that the time of fire, sword and slaughter had passed, and it was now time to proclaim the word of the Lord in gentle silence. The still small voice of protest would become in the course of time a powerful force; it must not be allowed to die! A successor must be chosen to carry on the work.

Again the prophet heard the voice of God raising the same embarrassing question which was asked in verse 9: "*What are you doing here, Elijah?*" (v. 13). Elijah's answer was the same at least as far as the words are concerned, for he repeated verbatim the answer he had given God in verse 10. But it is possible and indeed probable that the tone of his answer changed in verse 14. Formerly defiant, loud and belligerent, he now spoke with the still small voice, the voice of self-abasement. The facts had not changed. He knew of no other way to respond to the divine query. But perhaps now he had reservations about his course of conduct. Elijah had thought that he knew best

⁷ Yahweh's spectacular and supernatural interventions into history are celebrated in many Psalms. These interventions were often accompanied by storm, earthquake and fire (e.g., Ps. 18:12; 68:8).

⁸ Others think that Elijah did not obey the instructions to go forth from the cave (v. 11) until he heard the still small voice. The tempest, earthquake and fire came immediately after the instruction to go forth and thus prevented Elijah from complying with that command.

how God's work should be done. The theophany taught him that he had a faulty understanding of God's goals and methods. That Elijah had indeed repented is indicated by the fact that he was given a new commission.

God's commission for Elijah involved three actions. First, he was told to go to the desert region which stretches south and east of Damascus and there anoint Hazael king of Aram (v. 15). Since Israel was at that time at war with Aram (chap. 20), the Syrian desert would serve as a refuge from hostilities. Also he would be near Hazael the Aramean officer he was instructed to anoint. Secondly, he was to anoint Jehu king of Israel. Finally, he was to anoint his own successor, Elisha⁹ of Abel-meholah, a town of the Jordan valley a short distance from Beth-shean (v. 16). The fact that Elisha's hometown is mentioned suggests that Elijah had not heretofore known the man. Elijah's work had not been fruitless; nor had it come to an end, for here provision was being made for his successor.

The commission given to Elijah has long been a *crux interpretum*, for neither Hazael nor Jehu nor Elisha, so far as the records go, was ever *anointed* by Elijah. Elisha was *called* by Elijah, but the Scriptures are silent about any anointing. Jehu was anointed, but by one of the sons of the prophets under orders from Elisha. Hazael was called in an indirect way by Elisha (II K 8:12-15), but again no *anointing* is mentioned. Two problems, then, exist in reference to the instructions given to Elijah: (1) In two cases no anointing, it would appear, took place; and (2) in only one case was Elijah personally involved.

In regard to the problem of the lack of anointing of Elisha and Hazael, the following might be said: The word "*anoint*" (*mashach*) may have in this passage the more general sense of "*appoint*." That the basic idea of *anointing* was *setting apart* can be seen in the anointing of Aaron (Ex. 29:7) and the Tabernacle (Ex. 30:26ff.).¹⁰ Perhaps later, because of the association

⁹ The name Elisha ("God is salvation") has been found on a seal found in Amman dating from about the seventh century B.C. See Gray, OTL, p. 412.

¹⁰ Cf. Judges 9:8 and Isaiah 61:1.

of anointing and coronation, the word came to signify any act which would lead directly or indirectly to the induction into office.¹¹ The term “*anoint*” in Elijah’s commission may simply mean that he was to make the three individuals—Elisha, Jehu, Hazael—aware of their divinely appointed destiny so that they might take appropriate action to fulfill that destiny.

But why did Elijah himself fail to carry out the commission to *anoint* Jehu and Hazael? Two suggestions can be made. (1) Since Elisha was the official successor of Elijah, the “*you*” of the commission, though singular, might include both men. The work assigned to the one might legitimately be carried out by his official successor. (2) But it is also possible that the key to the problem is to be found in the repentance of Ahab recorded in I Kings 21:29. God honored the repentance of Ahab by temporarily postponing the judgment against his house (which would be executed by Jehu) and the judgment against Israel (which would be executed by Hazael). Elijah was translated before the divinely authorized grace period came to an end. Of necessity, then, the commission had to be carried out by Elisha.

Hazael, Jehu and Elisha would be God’s agents of judgment upon apostate Israel.¹² Jehu would slay those who escaped the sword of Hazael; Elisha, by the sword of the spirit, would “*slay*” those who escaped the physical judgment of Jehu (v. 17). Hazael and Jehu were destined to create in Israel tumultuous upheavals not unlike that created by the tempest, earthquake and fire outside Elijah’s Horeb hideaway. But it would be the preaching and teaching of Elisha—the sword of the word of God—that would constrain men to humble themselves before the Lord. Rightly understood, the commission to Elijah is a concrete application of the great spiritual lesson which he learned through the theophany at Horeb.

In verses 15-18 God answers the complaint which Elijah

¹¹ Honor, JCBR, p. 277.

¹² The notion that God would use the armies of a foreign power, Aram, to chastise His people is a concept which characterizes all the later prophets of God.

had twice raised before Him (cf. vv. 10, 14). The sword of Hazael would punish the children of Israel who had forsaken the covenant (cf. II K 8:12); the king and queen who had thrown down the altars and slain the prophets would be killed, one by Hazael on the field of battle, the other at the command of Jehu. *Sword of Hazael, sword of Jehu, and shall Elisha slay* are to be taken largely as symbolic expressions implying that bold action would be taken against the ruling house and the religion which it fostered. Civil war appears to be the only means by which Baalism could be obliterated in the North.

Elijah's allegation that he alone had remained faithful to the Lord is partially countered by the command to anoint Elisha as his successor, and totally countered by the revelation that there were seven thousand who had not bowed the knee to Baal. This figure is not only a round number, but a symbolic one as well. The still small voice had been at work in Israel; a faithful remnant was still to be found (cf. Rom. 11:5) which had not bowed the knee nor kissed the image of Baal¹³ (cf. Job 31:26, 27; Hos. 13:2).

C. ELIJAH'S CALL OF A SUCCESSOR 19:19-21

TRANSLATION

(19) And he went from there, and found Elisha son of Shaphat while he was plowing with twelve yoke of oxen before him, and he was with the twelfth; and Elijah passed by him and cast his mantle over him. (20) And he left the oxen, and ran after Elijah, and said, Let me, I pray you, kiss my father and my mother that I may go after you. And he said to him, Go, return, for what have I done to you. (21) And he turned from after him and took a yoke of oxen and slew them and with the instruments of the oxen he boiled their flesh and gave it to the

¹³ Perhaps the reference is to kissing the hand toward the idol which was a widespread custom in the ancient world. See Honor, BCJR, p. 279.

people and they did eat. And he arose, and went after Elijah, and ministered unto him.

COMMENTS

Upon returning from Horeb, Elijah set about to carry out the most important duty which God had laid upon him, viz., the appointing of a successor. He came upon Elisha, not in his study, but in the field; not with a book in his hand, but the plow. It would appear that Elisha was a man of substance, for twelve yoke of oxen were working his field. Elijah passed by Elisha who was toiling with the twelfth yoke and cast his mantle upon the young man (v. 19). This rough hairy garment had become the trademark of Elijah and the symbol of the prophetic office. To cast the cloak to or upon Elisha was therefore an appropriate and significant way of designating him to the prophetic office.

After casting his mantle upon Elisha, Elijah strode on, leaving it for the young man to take or reject it as he saw fit. It is clear that Elisha both understood the act and made up his mind at once. No doubt he long had sighed and prayed over the demoralization of the land and the dishonor done to his God. As soon as he realized his call, he left the oxen and eagerly ran after his new master. His request to be allowed to give his mother and father a parting embrace is altogether fitting and indeed touching. Had he asked permission to stay and *bury* his parents as one would-be disciple of Jesus, he would have merited rebuke (cf. Luke 9:59-61). Consequently Elijah granted the reasonable request. Elijah's response to Elisha's request can be paraphrased as follows: "Go back and kiss them; why should you not? *For* what have I done to You? I have summoned you to follow me. But I have not required you to repudiate your own flesh and blood."

Elisha bade farewell to his parents and friends at a hastily prepared meal. He slew a yoke of oxen and boiled the meat thereof over a fire he had built with the wood of his plow. Perhaps

he burned "*the instruments of the oxen*" because of a scarcity of wood in that region. It is also possible that he meant this to be a symbolic act expressive of his entire renunciation of his secular calling. The farewell feast completed, Elisha arose and went after Elijah. The young man became Elijah's attendant as Joshua had been to Moses (Ex. 24:13; Josh. 1:1) and as Gehazi subsequently became to him.

II. THE GREAT MILITARY CRISIS 20:1-43

The account of Elijah's ministry during the reign of Ahab is interrupted by chapter 20 probably because the author is attempting to give a chronological treatment of that king's reign.¹⁴ The policy of harassment had characterized Benhadad's dealing with Israel in the days of Baasha (cf. 15:18). Now the Aramean king was bent on total conquest of Israel. This crisis for Ahab and Israel unfolds in two stages: (1) the Aramean siege of Samaria (vv. 1-22); and (2) the battle of Aphek (vv. 23-43).

A. THE ARAMEAN SIEGE OF SAMARIA 20:1-22

Act One of the great military crisis has two distinct scenes: (1) the demands of Benhadad (vv. 1-12); and (2) the deliverance of the city (vv. 13-22).

1. *THE DEMANDS OF BENHADAD (20:1-12)*

TRANSLATION

(1) Now Benhadad king of Aram gathered all his host, and thirty-two kings were with him, and horses and chariots. And he went up and besieged Samaria, and made war against it.

¹⁴ In some Septuagint manuscripts chapter 20 follows chapter 21 and thus comes at the conclusion of the Elijah material. Some scholars feel this may be the more original order.

(2) And he sent messengers unto Ahab king of Israel to the city, and said to him, Thus says Benhadad: (3) Your silver and your gold belongs to me, along with the goodliest of your wives and children. (4) And the king of Israel answered and said, According to your saying, my lord, O king; I am yours, and all which I have. (5) Then the messengers returned and said, Thus says Benhadad: Although I sent unto you, saying, Your silver, your gold, your wives and your sons you shall give me, yet tomorrow about this time I will send my servants unto you, and they shall search your house and the houses of your servants; and it shall be that all that is desirable in your eyes, they shall put in their hands and take away. (7) And the king of Israel called to all the elders of the land and said, Note, I pray you, that this man is seeking evil; for he sent unto me for my wives and my children and for my silver and my gold, and I denied him not. (8) And all the elders and all the people said unto him, Do not hearken and do not consent. (9) And he said to the messengers of Benhadad, Say to my lord the king, All which you sent unto your servant in the beginning, I will do; but this thing I am not able to do. And the messengers went and brought him word again. (10) And Benhadad sent unto him and said, Thus may the gods do to me and even more, if the dust of Samaria suffice for handfuls for all the people who follow me. (11) And the king of Israel answered and said, Tell him: Let not him boast who puts it on, like the one who removes it. (12) And it came to pass when he heard this word, he was drinking, he and the kings in the booths. And he said unto his servants, Station yourselves. So they stationed themselves about the city.

COMMENTS

With thirty-two vassal kings¹⁵ Benhadad went up and besieged Samaria with the clear objective of humbling and plundering his

¹⁵ The title *king* was sometimes given to heads of extremely tiny principalities. (cf. Josh. 12:9-24).

southern neighbor (v. 1). There is no indication that Ahab had in any way provoked this attack. Possibly Benhadad's sudden invasion was prompted by Omri's conquest of Moab and consequent control of the Transjordanian trade route, the famous King's Highway.¹⁶

Aramean messengers were sent to Ahab with the demands of Benhadad (v. 2). They probably delivered their message to Ahab's representatives at the gates of the city. Benhadad's demands were excessive and were designed to humiliate Ahab and perhaps force him into all-out war. The Aramean demanded Ahab's silver and gold, which is to be expected; but in addition he wanted Ahab's harem and the goodliest of his children as hostages¹⁷ (v. 3). The surrender of a harem was tantamount to surrender of the throne (cf. II S 16:21, 22) and was certainly a surrender of all manhood and self-respect. Faced with an overwhelming Aramean host, Ahab deemed it advisable to make every concession, to cast himself, as it were, on the mercy of Benhadad (v. 4). He may have hoped that a soft answer would turn away the wrath of his adversary. It is not entirely clear that Ahab ever meant to surrender his wives and his children to the Aramean. He assumed that a verbal acknowledgment of the claims of Benhadad would be sufficient to placate the foe.

Since Ahab had yielded so easily and so swiftly to his initial ultimatum (v. 5), Benhadad made yet further demands. The initial proposal was vague and general and allowed for Ahab to select what he would deliver over to the Aramean; the second proposal was definite and immediate and provided that Benhadad's servants would pass through the palaces of Samaria seizing whatever appeared to be valuable to Ahab¹⁸ (v. 6). Realizing that his

¹⁶ Morgenstern, AS, 267f.

¹⁷ Gray (OTL, p. 422) feels that the claim of Benhadad to the possessions and family of Ahab would seem to indicate the vassal status of the latter.

¹⁸ Josephus (*Ant.* VIII, 14.1) assumes that at first Ahab interpreted Benhadad's demand to apply to the royal household exclusively, and that after the second message he realized it applied to all the people. Modern commentators think Ahab interpreted the first message as simply a grandiloquent demand for surrender and tribute; but in the second, Ahab saw that Benhadad intended his terms literally.

previous conciliatory submission had only stirred the Aramean braggart to make greater demands, Ahab called the elders of the land together to seek advice. It now appeared, Ahab pointed out to the council, that Benhadad would be satisfied with nothing less than total capitulation¹⁹ (v. 7). The elders of the nation and the people as well were unanimous in urging Ahab to resist these latest demands (v. 8).

Ahab sent word back to Benhadad that whereas he had been willing to comply with the initial demands, he could not permit enemy soldiers to pillage his palaces. This message the Aramean messengers carried back to their king (v. 9). Infuriated, Benhadad fired back a blustering and boasting reply. He vowed that he would make Samaria a heap of dust, and boasted that his troops were so numerous that this dust would be insufficient to fill the hands of each of his soldiers (v. 10). Ahab responded with a pithy and incisive proverb which consists of only four words in the Hebrew: It is not the one who girds on his harness who should boast, but he that survives to remove it (v. 11). When this curt but appropriate reply was reported to Benhadad, the king and his vassals were drinking in the campaign huts which they had erected. In furious rage the king issued the command—one word in the Hebrew—to commence the siege (v. 12).

2. *THE DELIVERANCE OF THE CITY (20:13-22)*

TRANSLATION

(13) Now behold a prophet drew near unto Ahab king of Israel and said, Thus said the LORD: Have you seen all this great

¹⁹ The accepted practice of war was that a city should be sacked only if its defenders refused peaceful surrender on the basis of tribute in money and/or labor. Ahab had already indicated his willingness to surrender and yet Benhadad was not satisfied. Ahab could only conclude that Benhadad was deliberately goading him to continue what he believed to be a hopeless defense so that he might sack the city.

multitude? Behold I am about to give it into your hand today, that you may know that I am the LORD. (14) And Ahab said, By whom? And he said, Thus says the LORD: By the young men of the cities of the provinces. And he said, Who shall order the battle? And he said, You. (15) And he counted the young men of the cities of the provinces, and they were 232, and after them he numbered all the people, all the sons of Israel were seven thousand. (16) And they went out at noon. Now Benhadad was drinking to the point of drunkenness in the pavillions, he and the kings, the thirty-two kings who were helping him. (17) And the young men of the cities of the provinces went out first; and Benhadad had sent out, and they had told him, saying, Men have come out from Samaria. (18) And he said, Whether they have come out for peace or for war, seize them alive. (19) So these men went out from the city, the young men of the cities of the provinces, and the army which was behind them. (20) And they smote every man his man; and the Arameans fled, and Israel pursued them, and Benhadad king of Aram escaped upon a horse with the horsemen. (21) And the king of Israel went out and smote the horses and the chariots, and he smote the Arameans with a great smiting. (22) Then a prophet drew near unto the king of Israel, and said to him, Go, strengthen yourself, and note and see what you have to do; for at the return of the year the king of Aram will come up against you.

COMMENTS

It is useless to speculate as to the identity of the prophet sent by God with a message of encouragement to Ahab.²⁰ The promise is that Benhadad and his host would be delivered into the hand of Ahab that very day. Whatever other reasons God

²⁰ Josephus identifies the prophet as Micaiah ben Imlah. But if so, how would one account for I Kings 22:8?

might have had for intervention on behalf of Israel, the supreme purpose of this divine help was so that Ahab might know assuredly that Yahweh was God (v. 13). On Carmel Yahweh had appeared as a God of fire, wrath and judgment; now He was about to reveal Himself as God of redemption. On Carmel the Lord had shown Himself to be superior to the idols of Phoenicia; now He would demonstrate His power over the gods of Aram.

Ahab welcomed this word from the Lord, but he was puzzled by it, and so inquired further of the prophet. Who would secure the promised victory and which side would commence the hostilities? In the name of Yahweh the prophet related the strategy. It is the “*young men*” or servants of the district governors who would gain the victory. Apparently these officials and their aids had fled to Samaria upon the approach of Benhadad. Just who these young men were is not clear, and suggestions range from the view that they were “pages” to the view that they were an elite body of troops.²¹ Probably God selected an agency which was purposely weak and feeble in order that the victory might be seen to be of God. This band of young men, whoever they may have been, was to commence the attack against the Arameans (v. 14).

Ahab numbered his troops and found them to be very small by the standards of antiquity: the “*young men*” belonging to the district governors numbered 232, and the rest of the army but seven thousand (v. 15). At noon when normally peoples of the Near East take a lengthy respite from all activity, the tiny force of Ahab marched forth from Samaria. Benhadad and his vassals were carousing and giving little thought to their military endeavors²² (v. 16). Of course the Arameans had posted

²¹ The traditional view is that they were the sons of vassal princes left as hostages as an assurance that they would not rebel. Modern commentators prefer the view that the *princes* were governors of various districts of Israel. The *young men* were cadets who were recruited by these princes and sent to the capital for special training. Gray (OTL, p. 424) pictures the young men as “shock troops” or “commandos.”

²² Gray (OTL, p. 423) has followed the suggestion of Yadin that the Hebrew word translated “*pavillions*” (v. 16) should be rendered as a proper noun, *Succoth*. According to this view, Benhadad was directing the campaign from a headquarters several miles removed from Samaria.

observers, and these observers immediately reported the troop movements out of the gate of Samaria (v. 17). The king gave the orders that the Israelites were to be taken alive, no doubt so that he might torture them and mock them before they were executed (v. 18). It may be that the 232 "young men" were used as a decoy to lull the Aramean troops into a false sense of security. When the Arameans came forward to take these young men into custody, the seven thousand troops poured forth from the city to engage the enemy (v. 19). When several Arameans fell in battle, panic seized the rest, and they fled for their lives with Israel in hot pursuit. Benhadad himself fled by horse in the company of some of his cavalry²³ (v. 20). Thus did Israel defeat the Aramean host with a great slaughter which included the cavalry and chariotry (v. 21).

Shortly after the victory over the Arameans, the unnamed prophet came to Ahab again, this time with a warning. The danger was not over. At the turn of the year, i.e., in the spring of the following year, when oriental kings normally launched their military campaigns,²⁴ Benhadad would return. Therefore Ahab should take every military precaution by strengthening both his army and the fortifications of his capital (v. 22).

B. THE BATTLE OF APHEK 20:23-43

It was not long before the intelligence reports reaching Ahab's military advisers confirmed the warnings of the man of God. Benhadad was massing new troops, reorganizing his forces, and obviously planning a new campaign against Israel. As the narrative of the second crisis unfolds, the historian discusses (1) the Aramean war counsels (vv. 23-25); (2) the confrontation

²³ Among the western allies at the battle of Qarqar (853 B.C.) Damascus contributed by far the largest contingent of mounted cavalry.

²⁴ Compare II Samuel 11:1, "at the return of the year, at the time when kings go out to battle." Also II Chronicles 36:10. Large-scale offensive warfare was not conducted during the rainy season.

at Aphek (vv. 26-30a); (3) the clemency granted Benhadad (vv. 30b-34); and (4) the prophetic condemnation of Ahab (vv. 35-43).

1. THE ARAMEAN WAR COUNSELS (20:23-25)

TRANSLATION

(23) And the servants of the king of Aram said unto him, Their gods are gods of the hills; therefore they are stronger than we; but rather let us fight with them in the plain and we will surely be stronger than they. (24) And this thing do: Remove the kings each man from his position, and put captains in their place. (25) And as for you, number for yourself an army like the army that fell from you, even horse for horse and chariot for chariot. Then we will fight them in the plain, and surely we will be stronger than they. And he hearkened to their voice, and did thus.

COMMENTS

Benhadad's advisers were not long in coming up with an explanation for the humiliating defeat at Samaria. They suggested that the Israelites had been successful because their gods were gods of the hills, whereas the Aramean gods were gods of the plains. If the armies of Israel could be lured out of the hilly terrain of Samaria and into the plains, the Arameans were convinced that they would prove to have the stronger army (v. 23). It would appear that the Arameans depended heavily on their chariotry forces which could be used with crushing effectiveness in the plains region. In addition to the suggestion that the king pick his battlefield more carefully, the advisers also suggested that the thirty-two kings, with their diverse interests and lack of military expertise, be replaced with professional officers over the host (v. 24). Finally, they suggested that

Benhadad, if he would be assured of victory, would need to have an army at least as large as the one he had lost at Samaria. Benhadad listened to this advice, and at the appropriate time implemented it (v. 25).

2. *THE CONFRONTATION AT APHEK (20:26-30a)*

TRANSLATION

(26) And it came to pass at the return of the year, that Benhadad numbered Aram and went up to Aphek to fight with Israel. (27) And the children of Israel numbered themselves, and they were provided with food, and went to engage them. And the children of Israel pitched before them like two flocks of kids; but the Arameans filled the land. (28) And a man of God drew near and said unto the king of Israel: Thus says the LORD: Because the Arameans have said, A god of the hills is the LORD, and He is not a god of the valleys, therefore I will give all this great multitude into your hand, and you shall know that I am the LORD. (29) And they camped opposite one another for seven days. And it came to pass on the seventh day, that the battle was joined, and the children of Israel smote the Arameans, a hundred thousand footmen in one day. (30) And those who remained fled to Aphek into the city, and the wall fell upon twenty-seven thousand of the men who were left.

COMMENTS

In the spring of the year Benhadad mustered his troops and went up to the Israelite fortress of Aphek (v. 26). Several towns named Aphek are mentioned in the Old Testament, and it is not clear which particular Aphek is intended. Probably it was to Aphek located about six miles east of Galilee that Benhadad gathered his forces.²⁵ Emboldened by their previous victory, the

²⁵ Hammond (PC, pp. 487-88) and Gray (OTL, p. 428). Keil opts for the Aphek located in the great plain of Esdraelon.

Israelites went out to meet the invaders. The whole plain swarmed with Aramean legions, and in comparison the Israelites appeared like two bands of stragglers separated from the main body of the flock (v. 27). Under these circumstances Ahab was more than cheered by the appearance of a man of God—perhaps the same prophet who had brought the prophecy of victory the year before (cf. vv. 13, 22). Once again the message from the Lord was positive. Because these Arameans had relegated the Creator God to the level of a tribal deity, because they had said Yahweh was only a god of the hills, therefore the Lord would intervene again on behalf of Israel (v. 28). Neighboring nations would learn of the power of the living God through this deliverance, and wavering Israel would be provided with another incontrovertible proof of Yahweh's divinity.

For seven days the two armies camped opposite one another. The Arameans waited for the Israelites to descend from the mountains; but Israel was reluctant to attack such a great host.²⁶ On the seventh day the men of Israel charged down the hillsides and into the plains. The reason for the delay of seven days is not stated, but it is entirely possible that the sacred number seven had come to be regarded superstitiously as the most advantageous time for attack. In any case, the historian reports that the men of Israel smote a hundred thousand Aramean infantry in that one day of battle. The term "*smote*" may include wounded as well as slain (v. 29). Those who survived the slaughter took refuge in the fortress at Aphek, which at this time would appear to have been in the control of the Arameans. There a second tragedy befell the invading host. A city wall collapsed killing twenty-seven thousand men.²⁷ Probably these soldiers were manning the defenses of the

²⁶ Perhaps both sides were waiting for some favorable omen before mounting the attack.

²⁷ Honor (JCBR, p. 290) thinks the meaning is that the Aramean survivors who fled to the city perished when the wall was captured. Another interpretation is that the Hebrew word '*al*' should be translated "*for*" instead of "*upon*." The meaning would then be that the wall of the city fell cutting off all escape for the Aramean survivors.

city when an earthquake threw down the walls.²⁸

3. THE CLEMENCY FOR BENHADAD (20:30b-34)

TRANSLATION

(30) Now Benhadad had fled and had come into the city, an inner chamber. (31) And his servants said unto him, Behold now we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful kings. Let us put sackcloth now on our loins, and ropes on our heads, and let us go out unto the king of Israel; perhaps he will save your life. (32) So they girded sackcloth on their loins and ropes on their heads, and they came unto the king of Israel, and they said, Your servant Benhadad said, Let me live I pray you. And he said, Is he yet alive? He is my brother. (33) And the men diligently observed whether anything would come, and they hastily caught it and said, Your brother is Benhadad. And he said, Go, bring him. Then Benhadad went out unto him; and he caused him to go up upon his chariot. (34) And he said unto him, The cities which my father took from your father, I will return; and streets you shall make for yourself in Damascus as my father made in Samaria. And as for me, with this covenant I will send you away. So he made with him a covenant and sent him away.

COMMENTS

Following the defeat in the plains about Aphek, Benhadad had fled into the fortress and into an inner chamber (Heb., *chamber within a chamber*), which may refer to some secret hideaway, perhaps a subterranean chamber (v. 30). There his counselors advised that he surrender to Ahab because, they

²⁸ Less likely is the proposal of Gray (OTL, p. 429) that the wall collapsed because of undermining by the Israelites.

argued, the kings of Israel had a reputation for showing mercy²⁹ to their enemies. If the king and his staff were to put on sackcloth as a token of humility and contrition and ropes on their heads, i.e., around their necks, to demonstrate complete submission, there was a good chance that Ahab would allow them all to live (v. 31).

Benhadad had no alternative but to acquiesce in this suggestion, and so the counselors were dispatched so garbed to plead for the life of their master. Ahab seemed surprised to hear that Benhadad was alive, and upon receiving the news immediately declared his willingness to enter into a peace treaty with him by declaring, He is my brother (v. 32). Seizing upon this favorable word, the messengers replied, "*Benhadad is your brother,*" by which they declared the willingness of the Aramean to accept the generous offer of a covenant. Then Ahab ordered that Benhadad be brought to him. When the Aramean king came forth from his place of hiding, Ahab invited him to come up with him into the royal chariot, this being a mark of great favor and reconciliation (v. 33).

All of the details of the covenant worked out between Ahab and Benhadad are not recorded. One thing is certain, Benhadad's utter defeat would necessitate the reconstitution of the territories of Aram and Israel. The Aramean agreed to return to Israelite control the territories his father had taken from Ahab's "*father,*" i.e., predecessor, Baasha³⁰ (cf. 15:20). Furthermore, Benhadad conceded to Ahab the right to establish Israelite bazaars or quarters in Damascus in which Israelites might live and trade. Apparently Aramean trading colonies had been established in Samaria for some time. Ahab was pleased with these concessions. After formalizing the agreement, the

²⁹ In its primary meaning *chesed* refers to loyalty to a covenant. The secondary meaning embraces the idea of mercy or humane treatment. Either meaning would be appropriate in this context.

³⁰ Baasha was not the father or even the ancestor of Ahab, but belonged to a separate dynasty. Benhadad is using the term "*father*" in the sense of predecessor. Others think the reference is to Ahab's literal father, Omri.

Israelite king dismissed his enemy.

Historians are prone to think that Ahab must have had good reason for being so lenient with Benhadad. That reason may have been the rise of a new power in the ancient Near East, the power of Assyria. It is known from Assyrian texts that both Ahab and Benhadad contributed troops to a coalition army which successfully withstood the Assyrian advances in the famous battle of Qarqar in 853 B.C. Perhaps Ahab, anticipating a new and more frightening confrontation, felt that it would be better to have a friend and ally to the north than a belligerent. On the other hand, Ahab may not have been motivated by such political far-sightedness. It may be that Ahab's leniency was motivated by commercial considerations.

4. PROPHETIC CONDEMNATION OF AHAB (20:35-43)

TRANSLATION

(35) And a man from the sons of the prophets said unto his friend in the word of the LORD, Smite me, I pray you; but the man refused to smite him. (36) And he said to him, Because you have not hearkened to the voice of the LORD, behold you are about to leave me, and a lion will smite you. And he went from his presence, and a lion found him and smote him. (37) And he found another man and said, Smite me, I pray you; and the man smote him, smiting and wounding. (38) Then the prophet went and waited for the king by the way, and he disguised himself with a bandage upon his face. (39) And it came to pass as the king was passing by, that he cried out unto the king and said, Your servant went out into the midst of battle, and behold a man turned aside and came unto me and said, Guard this man; if he surely escapes it shall be your life instead of his, or else you shall pay a talent of silver. (40) And it came to pass as your servant was busy here and there that he is gone. And the king of Israel said unto him, So shall your judgment be; you yourself have determined it. (41) And he hastened and removed

the bandage from his face, and the king of Israel recognized him that he was from the prophets. (42) And he said unto him, Thus says the LORD, Because you sent away a condemned man from your hand, your life shall be instead of his life, and your people instead of his people. (43) And the king of Israel went unto his house sullen and angry; and he came to Samaria.

COMMENTS

The prophets were not happy with the actions of Ahab, and a certain member of the "sons of the prophets" went about to bring rebuke to the king. The "sons of the prophets" are mentioned here for the first time.³¹ These men were students of and assistants to the great prophets Elijah and Elisha. This group is in no way connected with the "band of the prophets" which appeared briefly in the days of Samuel (I S 10, 19).

The prophet directed his companion, i.e., one of his fellow prophets, to smite him, i.e., bruise and wound him. Naturally this command to smite a brother prophet, and that for no apparent reason, was abhorrent to this companion, and so he refused to comply (v. 35). But because the companion prophet refused to do as God commanded, a severe judgment was pronounced against him. As soon as the two friends parted a lion would slay the recalcitrant prophet, and that is exactly what happened (v. 36). This now is the second account of a prophet who violated an explicit commandment of God and paid for it with his life, in both cases by being slain by a lion (cf. I K 13).

The question may well be asked as to why the prophet needed to receive this physical wounding prior to confronting the king. Could not the wounds have been faked and the parable be just as meaningful? Not really. The great lesson which this prophet

³¹ Subsequent to the Mt. Carmel contest the prophetic spirit and ministry gained a new foothold in Israel. Canaanite religion does not seem to have the same hold it once had, though Jezebel and her temple were still in Samaria.

was illustrating was that of unquestioning obedience to the commands of God. It was a lesson which the king, the members of the prophetic order, and indeed the whole population in that lawless age needed to learn. Ahab had just transgressed the Law of God by allowing one to escape whom God had appointed to destruction. He had to be taught that he had no right to be generous at the expense of others, that God's will must be done even when it goes against the grain and seems to contradict impulses of kindness. A prophet required to smite a brother, and that for no apparent reason, would no doubt find it repugnant to his feelings to do so. But the prophet who refused to do this, who followed his benevolent impulses in preference to the word of the Lord, died for his sin. It is hardly possible to conceive of a way in which the duty of unquestioning obedience could be more emphatically taught.³²

When the prophet gave the command to another man, he instantly complied (v. 37), probably because he had seen or heard of what had happened to the first man who had rejected that command. The prophet then went to wait for the return of the king with bandages upon his head which served the purpose of concealing his identity (v. 38). As the king passed by, the prophet, playing the role of a wounded soldier, cried out to the king to render a judgment with regard to a penalty which had been assessed against him by a superior officer. "In the heat of battle an important prisoner was committed to my hand," said the prophet, "and I was told that if he escaped I would forfeit my life, or else be compelled to pay a talent of silver"³³ (v. 39). Now as common soldiers would never have so much as a talent of silver,³⁴ the penalty for the possible escape of the prisoner would automatically be death or debtor's slavery.

³² Another lesson being taught here is that Israel should not rely on foreign alliances.

³³ The value of a talent of silver has been computed to be approximately \$2,000. The implication is that the prisoner he was asked to guard was a man of importance.

³⁴ A talent consisted of twenty-five hundred shekels of silver and possibly as many as three thousand. This would be one hundred times the price of a slave as set forth in Exodus 21:32.

“But,” continued the feigning prophet, “as I was busy with other duties, the prisoner escaped.” Upon hearing the circumstances, Ahab declared the judgment against his soldier to be just (v. 40). Then the prophet ripped away his bandage disguise, and the king recognized him immediately as one of the prophets with whom he was acquainted (v. 41).³⁵

Ahab’s heart must have trembled as the man of God slowly and carefully pronounced his doom. God had appointed Benhadad to utter destruction; he was a condemned man. Yet the king to whom God had granted the victory had dismissed Benhadad instead of slaying him. Therefore Ahab would forfeit his life for that of Benhadad, and the lives of his people for those of Benhadad he had allowed to escape (v. 42).

In spite of the clear condemnation of Ahab’s conduct, some commentators seek to commend the king on his generous and merciful dealings with Benhadad. Those who might think that God dealt too harshly with Ahab need to remember three facts: (1) Ahab was not free to do as he pleased with Benhadad. This was God’s war in which God had given the victory. The Lord should have been consulted as to how to dispose of the prisoners. (2) Ahab’s previous dealings with Benhadad (cf. v. 6) should have indicated to him the character of this king. In the interest of future peace and security, Ahab should have slain the Aramean. (3) In the light of numerous Old Testament precedents, Ahab should have executed Benhadad. Surely the fate of Agag and Oreb and Zeeb as well as other aggressors against Israel was known to Ahab.

Under the divine threat and rebuke, Ahab returned to his campaign quarters sullen and angry. He realized that the prophet’s prediction regarding the outcome of the battle had been fulfilled; he was therefore filled with apprehension that this new prediction would also prove true. With all the joy of victory removed, he returned later to the capital in Samaria (v. 43).

³⁵ The dramatic use of a parable through which the prophet forced Ahab to pass judgment upon himself is reminiscent of Nathan’s censure of David (II S 12:1-12).

III. THE GREAT SOCIAL CRISIS 21:1-16

The third crisis³⁶ discussed in chapters 19-21 is of a different nature than those previously treated. Here the threat is not of external military domination, but of internal breakdown of law and order. Chapter 21 shows clearly the social breakdown of Ahab's kingdom. Years of flirtation with pagan practices were taking their toll. The rights of individuals guaranteed in the Sinai covenant were being ignored. The king was no longer under the Law, but was superior to it. The story unfolds in four stages: (1) the covetousness of the king (vv. 1-7); (2) the conspiracy against Naboth (vv. 8-16); (3) the condemnation by Elijah (vv. 17-24); and (4) the contrition of Ahab (vv. 25-29).

A. THE COVETOUSNESS OF THE KING 21:1-7

TRANSLATION

(1) And it came to pass after these things that Naboth the Jezreelite had a vineyard which was in Jezreel beside the palace of Ahab king of Samaria. (2) And Ahab spoke unto Naboth, saying, Give me your vineyard, that it may become my garden of herbs, for it is near beside my house, and I will give you in place of it a better vineyard; or if it is good in your eyes, I will give you in silver the price of it. (3) And Naboth said unto Ahab, Far be it to me from the LORD that I should give the inheritance of my fathers to you. (4) And Ahab came unto his house sullen and angry over the word which Naboth the Jezreelite had spoken unto him when he said, I will not give to you the inheritance of my fathers. And he laid down upon his bed, and turned away his face, and would not eat food. (5) And Jezebel his wife

³⁶ Chapter 21, as far as content is concerned, is a continuation of the Elijah narrative of chapters 17-19. The Septuagint version places this chapter immediately after chapter 19. The author of Kings must have been attempting to give a chronological assessment of Ahab's reign in the way he arranged these chapters.

came unto him, and spoke unto him, **Why is your spirit so sad, that you do not eat food? (6) And he spoke unto her, Because I spoke unto Naboth the Jezreelite, and said to him, Give me your vineyard for silver, or if you desire I will give to you a vineyard instead of it; and he said, I will not give you my vineyard. (7) And Jezebel his wife said unto him, You now are the one who governs the land of Israel! Arise, eat food, and let your heart be merry! I will give to you the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite.**

COMMENTS

From the royal palace in Samaria Ahab and his court would often commute to Jezreel³⁷ twenty-five miles to the north where the king also had a palace. Near his Jezreel palace was a plot of ground, a vineyard, possessed by a man named Naboth which Ahab dearly coveted (v. 1). The king negotiated with Naboth for this property, offering to exchange vineyards with him, or pay him in silver whichever he desired. This vineyard was not required for the public welfare, but to satisfy a purely selfish personal whim (v. 2). Naboth, however, was a devout worshiper of the Lord, and he would not violate the Law of Moses³⁸ by selling his family inheritance to one outside the family³⁹ (v. 3). To pious Israelites, it was a religious duty as well as an obligation to family and tribe to preserve the inheritance. Rebuffed by this devout man, Ahab returned to the palace to give vent to childish grief. Sullen and angry he pouted in his private chamber, refusing to partake of food (v. 4).

Jezebel, noting the absence of the king from the banqueting

³⁷ Jezreel may have been the ancestral home of the Omrides. The place would have served ideally as a base of operations against Ramoth-gilead. Jezreel seems to have served as a winter resort for the king (I K 18:45).

³⁸ Cf. Leviticus 25:23ff.; Numbers 36:7ff.

³⁹ Moreover the status of Naboth as a freeman was bound up with his possession of his ancestral land. To have accepted the offer of Ahab would have made him and his family royal dependents. See Gray, OTL, p. 439.

chamber, went to Ahab's room to inquire as to the reason for his loss of appetite (v. 5). He told his wife how Naboth had refused to sell his vineyard, but he did not mention the reason which Naboth assigned to his refusal (v. 6). Probably he realized that Jezebel would have no understanding of the Israelite laws of family inheritance. The queen did not inquire as to the reasons for Naboth's refusal to dispose of his property. She could not understand why her husband was so upset over the incident. After all, he was the *king*, was he not? So Jezebel urged her husband to leave the matter in her hands (v. 7).

B. THE CONSPIRACY AGAINST NABOTH 21:8-16

TRANSLATION

(8) So she wrote letters in the name of Ahab, and sealed them with his seal, and sent the letters unto the elders and unto the nobles which were in his city, dwelling with Naboth, (9) and she wrote in the letters, saying, Proclaim a fast and set Naboth at the head of the people, (10) and two men, sons of Belial, before him that they may testify against him, saying, You cursed God and king; then they shall take him out, and stone him, that he may die. (11) And the men of his city, the elders and the nobles who were dwelling in his city, did according to that which Jezebel had sent unto them, according to that which was written in the letters which she had sent unto them. (12) They proclaimed a fast, and set Naboth at the head of the people. (13) And two of the men, sons of Belial, came and sat before him, and the men of Belial testified against him, against Naboth, before the people, saying, Naboth cursed God and king! And they brought him without the city, and stoned him with stones, and he died. (14) And they sent unto Jezebel, saying, Naboth has been stoned, and is dead. (15) And it came to pass when Jezebel heard that Naboth had been stoned and was dead, that Jezebel said unto Ahab, Arise, take possession of the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite which he refused to give you for silver; for Naboth is not alive, but dead. (16) And it came to

pass when Ahab heard that Naboth was dead, that he arose to go down to the vineyard of Naboth the Jezreelite to possess it.

COMMENTS

In short order Jezebel set in motion a plot which would eliminate Naboth. Letters were written in the name of the king, sealed with the royal seal, and sent to the elders⁴⁰ and nobles in Jezreel (v. 8). These elders and judges are said to "*sit with Naboth*," probably on the city council. One cannot be absolutely sure, but the fact that the queen used the royal seal suggests that Ahab may have been aware of what his wicked wife was up to.⁴¹

Jezebel's plan was brazen and simple. A fast was to be proclaimed in Jezreel as though the city had come under a curse because of some undisclosed sin. Naboth was to be "*seated on high*," i.e., accorded his usual position as one of the elders and judges of the city (v. 9). There must be no semblance of premeditation. During the assembly two witnesses were to raise an accusation against Naboth and testify against him. These "*sons of Belial*,"⁴² i.e., worthless men, were to accuse Naboth of having cursed⁴³ both God and His representative, the king. Such cursing, according to the Law of Moses, was a capital crime.⁴⁴ Naboth would then be stoned to death (v. 10).

The elders at Jezreel must have been as corrupt and as wicked

⁴⁰ The institution of the monarchy had not divested the elders of their former authority in the various cities. However, it is obvious that these leaders were completely subservient to the crown. They could be depended upon to execute his orders even when called upon to perform a travesty of justice.

⁴¹ On the other hand, Jezebel may have obtained control of the seal without Ahab's knowledge.

⁴² The connotation of this phrase is well known, but the etymology is uncertain. It is not clear whether the false witnesses became sons of Belial by virtue of this testimony, or whether they were worthless men to start with. Probably their past record and reputation were well known.

⁴³ The Hebrew uses a verb which more commonly means "*bless*." Some scholars regard the word as a euphemism. Others feel the word had dual meaning and could refer to either blessing or cursing.

⁴⁴ Exodus 22:28; Deuteronomy 13:11; II Samuel 16:9; 19:21.

as their queen to agree to such a treacherous act as Jezebel had proposed. Their ready compliance (v. 11) shows not only the moral degradation of the day, but also the terror which the name of Jezebel inspired. The fast was proclaimed; Naboth was set at the head of the people in a prominent position (v. 12). The two witnesses presented their tainted testimony in a most convincing manner, and no amount of protest on the part of the pious Naboth could sway the crowd. They were interested in this charge of blasphemy because, if left unpunished, the guilt of such a sin would rest on the entire community. The fast created a mood on the part of the community in which they were prepared to accept the fact that someone through sin had brought the community under Divine wrath. Convinced that Naboth had brought down the curse of God on their city, the crowd pushed and shoved this man of God outside the city walls where they laid their hands on his head (Deut. 24:14) and then stoned him⁴⁵ to death (v. 13). Then the elders returned word to Jezebel, who seems to have been in Samaria, that the dastardly deed had been done (v. 14).

It would seem that in ancient Israel the properties of those accused of treason were automatically forfeited to the crown.⁴⁶ So when Jezebel heard that Naboth had been executed for this crime, she announced to Ahab that the way was clear for him to claim his coveted vineyard. There is irony in the words of the queen, "*which he refused to give you for silver.*" The simple Naboth had refused to sell; now he had lost his life along with his property (v. 15). The moody Ahab was jubilant when he heard that Naboth was dead, and he arose immediately to go down to Jezreel to take possession of the vineyard (v. 16).

⁴⁵ According to II Kings 9:26, it would appear that not only Naboth, but that his entire family was killed.

⁴⁶ It is also possible that the property reverted to the crown because there was no legal heir, since Naboth's entire family was executed.

C. THE CONDEMNATION BY ELIJAH 21:17-24

TRANSLATION

(17) And the word of the LORD came unto Elijah the Tishbite, saying, (18) Arise, go down to meet Ahab king of Israel, who is in Samaria; behold he is in the vineyard of Naboth which he has gone down to possess. (19) And speak unto him saying, Thus says the LORD: Have you murdered; and also taken possession? Then you speak unto him, saying, Thus says the LORD: In the place where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth, the dogs shall also lick your blood. (20) And Ahab said unto Elijah, Have you found me, O my enemy? And he answered, I have found you, because you have sold yourself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD. (21) Behold I am about to bring against you evil, and it will consume after you, and I will cut off to Ahab male descendants, even the one shut up and the one left in Israel. (22) And I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah, because of the provocation with which you have provoked Me, and because you have made Israel to sin. (23) And also of Jezebel the LORD has spoken, saying, The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel. (24) And the dead of Ahab in the city shall the dogs eat, and the dead in the field shall the birds of the heavens eat.

COMMENTS

God would not allow the ruthless murder of Naboth to go unrebuked. Elijah the prophet was reactivated (v. 17) and sent to meet Ahab in the vineyard which he had confiscated (v. 18). That Ahab might realize the full impact of what he had done, the prophet was to open the conversation with a penetrating rhetorical question: "*Have you murdered and also taken possession?*" This indictment was to be followed by a pronouncement of the doom of Ahab: In the place where

dogs licked Naboth's blood, shall dogs lick your blood! (v. 19). The execution of this sentence against Ahab was stayed when the king repented⁴⁷ (cf. vv. 27ff.). But the subsequent folly and sin of Ahab brought down upon this king a judgment of God strikingly similar to that which is here pronounced against him.

Ahab was shocked at the sudden appearance of Elijah whom he had not seen since the Carmel contest. Now at the very moment Ahab was entering on the fruit of his sin, God's prophet of judgment appeared! "*Have you found me out?*" the conscience-stricken king meekly asked. Ahab considered Elijah his enemy because it seemed that this prophet always had been opposed to him and always had thwarted him. Yet it was not because he was the king's enemy that Elijah had sought out Ahab, but because the king had "*sold himself,*" i.e., completely surrendered himself, to do what was evil in the eyes of the Lord (v. 20). Ahab, the supreme judge of the land, the representative of God, *may* have been ignorant of the tactics by which Jezebel proposed to procure the vineyard for him; but he had acquiesced in her infamous crime after its accomplishment, and he was anxious to reap the benefits of it. Thus instead of punishing his guilty wife and those who had carried out her instructions, the king, by his actions, sanctioned and approved the crime. Therefore, the prophetic pronouncement was directed against Ahab.

After he explained the reason for the sentence, Elijah elaborated upon it. The judgment would involve every male descendant of Ahab⁴⁸ (v. 21). Ahab's house was to be exterminated

⁴⁷ This explains the *seeming* contradiction between the prediction of Elijah here and the actual events of I Kings 22. According to I Kings 21:13 Naboth was executed *outside* the city of *Jezreel*. According to I Kings 22:38, Ahab's blood was licked up by the dogs at the pool of *Samaria*. It is also possible that the Hebrew *bimqom 'asher* should be translated not "*in the place where,*" but "*in place of that.*" The point would then be that Ahab's blood would be subjected to a similar fate, rather than that the two occurrences would happen at the same spot.

⁴⁸ The Hebrew reads literally, "*him who urinates against the wall.*" On the phrase, "*the one shut up and the one left in Israel,*" see comments on I Kings 14:10. "*Behold I am about to bring*" is the familiar formula by which the prophets threatened imminent judgment. Cf. I Kings 14:10; 16:3.

like that of Jeroboam, the first king of Israel, and Baasha, founder of the second dynasty of the Northern Kingdom. By his actions Ahab had provoked God to anger, and had also encouraged Israel to sin; therefore he must be punished (v. 22). Furthermore, the queen must also taste the vengeance of the living God. The dogs would eat Jezebel beside the wall of Jezreel, the scene of her latest crime (v. 23). In the prophetic formula used by previous prophets to condemn earlier kings, Elijah closed off his threat against Ahab (v. 24; cf. 14:11; 16:4).

D. THE CONTRITION OF AHAB 21:25-29

TRANSLATION

(25) But there was none like Ahab who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, whom Jezebel his wife stirred up. (26) He erred exceedingly in going after the idols, according to all that the Amorites had done, whom the LORD had driven out from before the children of Israel. (27) And it came to pass when Ahab heard these words, that he tore his garments and put sackcloth upon his flesh and fasted, and lay in the sackcloth and went about softly. (28) And the word of the LORD came unto Elijah the Tishbite, saying, (29) Have you seen that Ahab humbled himself before Me? Because he has humbled himself before Me, I will not bring the evil in his days; in the days of his son I will bring the evil upon his house.

COMMENTS

Verses 25 and 26 seem to be in the nature of a parenthetical remark which is intended to further justify the harsh sentence pronounced against Ahab and his wife. No Northern predecessor had so completely abandoned the ways of the Lord as had Ahab. His gross apostasy is explained by the fact that his wife, a devotee of a pagan deity, stirred him up or incited him to sin

(v. 25). Ahab tolerated, condoned and engaged in the idolatrous practices of the nations⁴⁹ which God had driven out before the mighty armies of Joshua (v. 26). Canaanite Baal worship survived among the Sidonians and by means of Jezebel was reintroduced in the kingdom of Samaria.

Ahab was deeply affected by the dire predictions of Elijah. By several outward signs he manifested his inward repentance for the crimes he had committed. He rent his garments, put on sackcloth,⁵⁰ fasted and even slept in his sackcloth. He also “*went about softly*” (v. 27), which may mean he walked bare-foot, or, to take the expression in a more figurative way, humbly, contritely. Taking note of this royal repentance, the Lord sent an important word to Elijah (v. 28) which in effect cancelled the threat against Ahab. It is not clear whether or not this mitigation of the sentence was ever announced to Ahab himself, but there is no reason to think that it was not. The merciful Lord regarded the repentance of the king as sincere, and because of it, deferred the execution of the sentence unto the days of Ahab’s son (v. 29). This is no example of the innocent suffering for the guilty, for God knew what the son of Ahab would be. Furthermore, that son would have the option of repentance by which still further reprieve could be granted (cf. Ezek. 18:14ff.). Judgment was deferred to give the house of Ahab another chance. How marvelous is the divine patience!

REVIEW OF CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I. FACTS TO MASTER

A. Important persons to identify in relation to this chapter:

⁴⁹ Technically, the term *Amorite* refers to those peoples dwelling in the mountain regions of Palestine as opposed to *Canaanite* which refers to the inhabitants of the valleys. Here, as frequently in the Old Testament, the Amorite is used as a general name for the seven nations which possessed Canaan prior to the Israelite invasion under Joshua. Cf. Genesis 15:16; Ezekiel 16:3; Amos 2:9, 10.

⁵⁰ Mourners seem to have worn sackcloth on the outside where it could be seen; but penitents wore it under the clothes as a form of self-affliction.

- | | |
|-------------|------------|
| 1. Hazael | 5. Ahab |
| 2. Jehu | 6. Naboth |
| 3. Elisha | 7. Jezebel |
| 4. Benhadad | 8. Elijah |
- B. Important places in this chapter to identify:**
- | | |
|-----------------|-------------|
| 1. Beersheba | 5. Aphek |
| 2. Abel-meholah | 6. Damascus |
| 3. Horeb | 7. Jezreel |
| 4. Samaria | |
- C. Important numbers to know:**
1. Number of days it took Elijah to travel from the juniper tree to Horeb
 2. Number in Israel who had not bowed the knee to Baal
 3. Number of pairs of oxen plowing in a field
 4. Number of kings who accompanied Benhadad during his attempted siege of Samaria
 5. Number of young men Ahab used in gaining the victory over Benhadad
 6. Number of troops Ahab had in Samaria
 7. Number of Arameans smitten in the battle of Aphek
 8. Number of Arameans killed when a wall fell
 9. Number of witnesses who testified against Naboth
- D. Words and phrases which should recall to mind key events in this chapter:**
- | | |
|---------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1. juniper tree | 10. a lion will kill you |
| 2. bread cake | 11. bandage over his eyes |
| 3. cave | 12. talent of silver |
| 4. wind, earthquake, fire | 13. vineyard |
| 5. still small voice | 14. seal |
| 6. sword | 15. fast |
| 7. drinking himself drunk | 16. stones |
| 8. gods of the mountains | 17. dogs |
| 9. ropes on their heads | |

II. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. A caption for chapter 19 might be "God's Cure for the

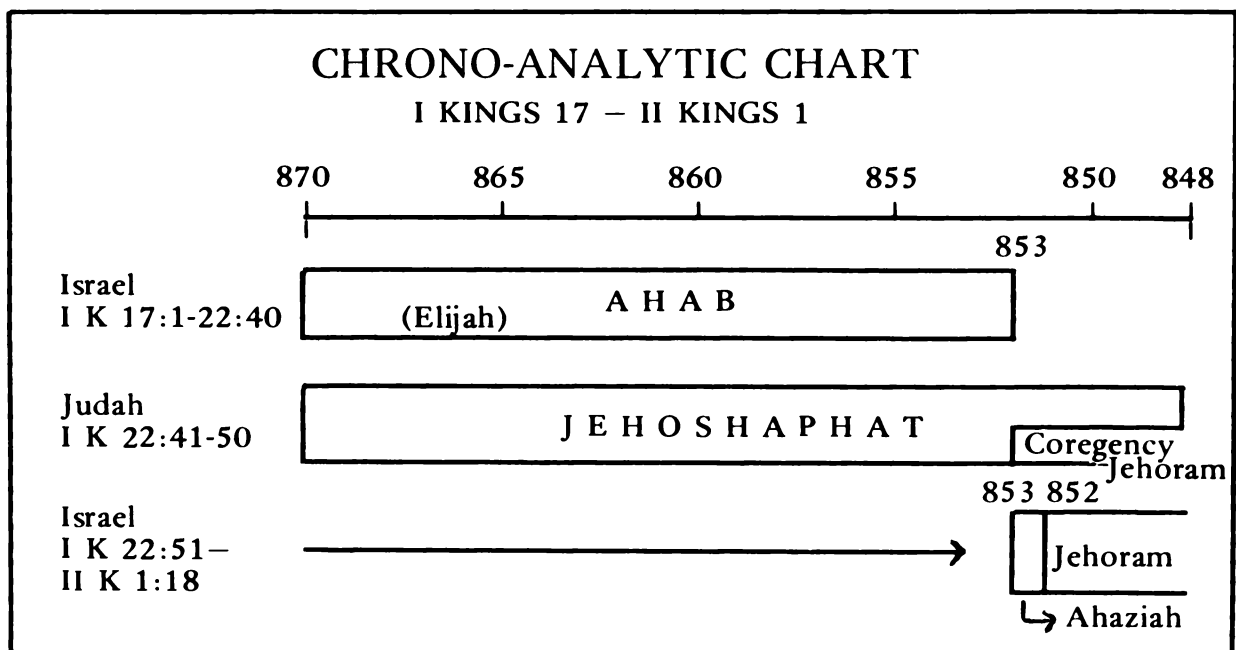
- Blues.” What does God do to aid Elijah in this period of deep discouragement?
2. Why did God provide food for Elijah under the juniper tree? To what extent was Elijah’s mental attitude and outlook affected by his lack of rest and low physical ebb?
 3. What lessons did Elijah learn at Horeb?
 4. Why did Elijah flee all the way to Horeb? What circumstances might make a Christian retreat from the mainstream of life? What does God say to those who wish to practice their religion in safe solitude?
 5. What attributes about Elisha are revealed in chapter 19?
 6. Why was there no rebuke for Elisha when he requested time to say good-bye to his parents?
 7. The Naboth vineyard episode illustrates the difference in the approach of Yahwism and Baalism toward social relationships. What did Baalism champion? Yahwism?
 8. What role do the sons of the prophets play in this section? Were they hostile or favorable toward Ahab?
 9. What tactics did Jezebel use to secure Naboth’s vineyard for her husband? Why the fast?
 10. Why was Elijah’s prophecy against Ahab not literally fulfilled?
 11. Was it fair for God to delay the punishment against Ahab until the reign of his son?
 12. What vital lessons was the wounded prophet trying to drive home to Ahab?

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

FAITHLESS KINGS AND FEARLESS PROPHETS

I Kings 22:1—II Kings 1:18

With the exception of only ten verses, this unit of the text is concerned about two faithless kings—father and son—Ahab and Ahaziah. Both of these monarchs met their death in fulfillment of the prophetic word spoken to them by the fearless prophets Micaiah and Elijah. The material here may be discussed under two major headings: (1) faithless Ahab and fearless Micaiah (I K 22:1-40); and (2) faithless Ahaziah and fearless Elijah (I K 22:51—II K 1:18). Sandwiched in between these major blocks of material is a paragraph summarizing the reign of good King Jehoshaphat of Judah (I K 22:41-50).



I. FAITHLESS AHAB AND FEARLESS MICAIAH 22:1-40

Against the earnest protestations of a faithful prophet, the foolhardy Ahab organized a military campaign to try and recapture the Transjordan border town of Ramoth-gilead which was held by the forces of Benhadad. In this futile effort Ahab lost his life. The historian relates here (1) the proposal for

the campaign (vv. 1-5); (2) the predictions of the court prophets (vv. 6-12), and (3) of Micaiah (vv. 13-28) regarding the campaign; and finally (4) the death of Ahab at Ramoth-gilead (vv. 29-38). To this account is appended a concluding note about the reign of Ahab (vv. 39-40).

A. THE PROPOSAL FOR THE CAMPAIGN 22:1-5

TRANSLATION

(1) And they continued for three years; there was no war between Aram and the children of Israel. (2) And it came to pass in the third year, that Jehoshaphat the king of Judah went down unto the king of Israel. (3) Now king of Israel said unto his servants, Do you know that Ramoth-gilead belongs to us, and we are still doing nothing to take it from the hand of the king of Aram? And he said unto Jehoshaphat, Will you go with me to fight against Ramoth-gilead? And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, I am as you, my people as your people, my horses as your horses. (5) And Jehoshaphat said unto the king of Israel, Inquire, I pray you, at the word of the LORD today.

COMMENTS

Following the second defeat of Benhadad, the Arameans and Israelites remained^{*} at peace for over two years.¹ It was during this period that a new power, Assyria, made its presence felt in the ancient Near East. In 853 B.C. Shalmaneser made a push westward through Syria that caused consternation and alarm in the various petty states of that region. An anti-Assyrian

¹ According to the Hebrew system of time reckoning, any time over two years would be called "three years." Verse 2 clearly shows that the events in chapter 22 took place *in* the third year and thus before the completion of that year.

coalition was formed to which both Ahab and Benhadad contributed forces.² In the famous battle of Qarqar the coalition successfully withstood the Assyrian onslaught and forced the invaders to withdraw. The common danger from the Assyrians had caused a temporary suspension of hostilities between Aram and Israel (v. 1).

After the battle of Qarqar, in the third year of the peaceful relations between the two countries, King Jehoshaphat came down from the mountain-top city of Jerusalem to visit Ahab in Samaria (v. 2). This would appear to be the first time that the monarchs of the sister kingdoms had met, except in battle, since the schism of 931 B.C. three quarters of a century earlier.³ It was perhaps the growing power, first of Damascus, and then of Assyria, that caused Israel and Judah to enter into an alliance with one another. Probably the invitation to visit Samaria had been extended to Jehoshaphat for ulterior motives. Benhadad, it seems, had failed to comply with his treaty obligations to return to Israel the cities which had previously been captured by his father (cf. I K 20:34). Ahab knew he was powerless to enforce the terms of the treaty single-handedly without the help of his Southern ally whose military organization at this time must have been substantial (cf. II C 17:10-19).

The focal point of Ahab's concern was the fortress of Ramoth-gilead located west of the sea of Galilee on the frontier with Aram. Though belonging to Israel, this city had been and continued to remain in the possession of Benhadad in flagrant violation of the treaty of Aphek. Thus far Ahab had remained "*still*," i.e., he had said or done nothing about the situation, for fear of stirring up the wrath of his powerful northern adversary (v. 3).

During the course of Jehoshaphat's royal visit, Ahab broached the question of a possible joint campaign to recapture

² The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser relates that Ahab contributed ten thousand footmen and two thousand chariots to this war effort.

³ The marriage of Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, with Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, had taken place some years before this date. Cf. II Chronicles 18:1, 2.

Ramoth-gilead. The alliance between the two kingdoms was new, and Ahab probably wondered how this proposal would strike the pious prince of Judah. Whereas Jehoshaphat should have forthrightly refused aid to Ahab (cf. II C 19:2), he instead at once expressed his enthusiastic interest⁴ in engaging in this war (v. 4). Probably Jehoshaphat feared the growing power of Damascus and considered that it would be in his own best interest to dislodge Benhadad from his stronghold in Gilead. Being the godly man that he was, Jehoshaphat insisted that the will of the Lord be sought regarding the proposed project⁵ (v. 5).

B. THE PREDICTIONS OF THE COURT PROPHETS 22:6-12

TRANSLATION

(6) And the king of Israel gathered the prophets together, about four hundred men, and he said unto them, Shall I go up against Ramoth-gilead to war, or shall I desist? And they said, Go up, and the Lord will give it into the hand of the king. (7) And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not yet here a prophet of the LORD, that we may inquire from him? (8) And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, There is yet one man by whom we may inquire of the LORD, but I hate him for he does not prophesy good concerning me, but evil—Micaiah the son of Imlah. And Jehoshaphat said, Let not the king say thus. (9) And the king of Israel called an officer and said, Hasten to Micaiah

⁴ On the basis of this verse some have proposed that Jehoshaphat was a vassal of Ahab rather than an ally of equal rank. However, Jehoshaphat's answer may simply be the result of oriental diplomatic courtesy. The statement is not to be taken literally. The fact that Jehoshaphat was given a free choice to accompany Ahab would seem to indicate that he was an ally and not a vassal. See Gray, OTL, p. 449.

⁵ The word "today" in verse 5 should not be overlooked. The thought is: "even if you are not generally accustomed to inquire the word of the Lord, kindly do it on *this* occasion."

the son of Imlah. (10) Now the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat king of Judah were sitting each man upon his throne clothed with robes on the flat place at the entrance of the gate of Samaria, and all the prophets were prophesying before them. (11) And Zedekiah and the son of Chenaanah made for himself horns of iron and said, Thus says the LORD: With these you shall thrust through Aram until you have consumed them. (12) And all the prophets were prophesying thus, saying, Go up to Ramoth-gilead and you will prosper, and the LORD will give it into the hand of the king.

COMMENTS

Having primed his court prophets previously, Ahab was not unwilling to comply with the request of Jehoshaphat. The king assembled four hundred prophets, and put to them the question as to whether or not the campaign against Ramoth-gilead should be undertaken. The four hundred dutifully and unaminously urged Ahab to go up to Ramoth-gilead, and promised him that the Lord (*'adonai*) would give the city into the hands of the king (v. 6). These prophets were not the prophets of Asherah or of Baal, but were renegade prophets of Yahweh who were part of the apostate official calf worship of the Northern Kingdom.⁶ They were king-called rather than God-called prophets.

It is perhaps significant that at first these prophets hesitated to use the name Yahweh in this perverted prognostication, and used instead the more general term *'adonai*—Lord. Since a true prophet always spoke in the name of Yahweh, Jehoshaphat became suspicious of the four hundred, and asked if there might not be another prophet of Yahweh whose advice might be solicited (v. 7).

⁶ It would appear that Jezebel's persecution of the prophets was limited to prophets of Yahweh who were not amenable to her purposes. The prophets called in by Ahab were those who had saved their lives by compromising with the crown.

Indeed there was one prophet⁷ yet to be consulted—Micaiah the son of Imlah.⁸ Ahab frankly admitted that he hated this man of God because he consistently had prophesied evil concerning the king. By this statement Ahab insinuates that Micaiah was motivated by personal dislike for the king and that therefore he was unreliable. Jehoshaphat did not accept this explanation, but instead administered a mild rebuke to Ahab for making such an insinuation about a prophet of God (v. 8). Under the circumstances Ahab could hardly refuse to permit his guest to hear what Micaiah might have to say, and so he dispatched an officer to fetch the man of God (v. 9).

Verses 10-12 depict the scene into which the prophet Micaiah was about to enter. The two kings dressed in their royal robes were sitting on thrones which had been set up on an elevated flat place at the entrance of the gate of Samaria. The four hundred prophets continued their prophesyings even while Micaiah was being summoned (v. 10). In order to convince the dubious king from Judah, Zedekiah, one of the four hundred, hastily constructed "*horns of iron.*"⁹ These symbolic horns may have been nothing more than two iron spikes held on the forehead. The horn of an animal in the Old Testament times was symbolic of power. The symbol was doubly appropriate here because Moses had compared Ephraim, chief tribe of the North, to a bullock, and had made explicit mention of the horns by which Ephraim would "*push the people together to the ends of the earth*" (Deut. 33:17). Zedekiah also underscored

⁷ What has become of Elijah or his successor Elisha? Probably Ahab simply meant there was but one other prophet readily available in the capital.

⁸ To conclude that Micaiah was a "professional prophet" at the beck and call of the king is to misjudge the man. He simply was available—possibly under house arrest in the capital. There is no reason to think he served regularly in the court of Ahab. His independence is manifested by his courage to speak the truth regardless of consequences. How had Micaiah been able to escape the persecution by Jezebel? Probably that persecution was of short duration and confined to the earlier years of Ahab. During the latter years of his reign there does not appear to have been any interference with the inviolable right of a prophet to speak the Word as he perceived it.

⁹ Zedekiah was following customary procedure in thus concretizing his message. Cf. the rending of a new garment by the prophet Ahijah, I Kings 11:30ff.

his prediction by using for the first time the sacred name Yahweh, probably in deference to the incredulity of Jehoshaphat at the first prediction (v. 11). The rest of the four hundred continued to repeat their initial promises of success except that they followed the lead of Zedekiah in substituting the name Yahweh for *'adonai* hoping thus to satisfy the king of Judah (v. 12).

C. THE PROPHECY OF MICAIAH 22:13-28

TRANSLATION

(13) Now the messenger who had gone to summon Micaiah had said unto him, saying, Behold now the words of the prophets are unanimously good toward the king; let your word, I pray you, be like the word of one of them, and speak good. (14) And Micaiah said, As the LORD lives, what the LORD has said unto me, that will I speak! (15) So he came unto the king and the king said unto him, Micaiah, shall we go up against Ramoth-gilead to make war or shall we refrain? And he said, Go up, and you will prosper, and the LORD will give it into the hand of the king. (16) And the king said unto him, How many times have I caused you to swear that you would not speak unto me anything except truth in the name of the LORD? (17) And he said, I saw all Israel scattered upon the mountains like sheep which had no shepherd; and the LORD said, These have no master; let them return each man to his house in peace. (18) And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, Did I not say unto you he would not prophesy concerning me good, but evil? (19) And he said, Therefore hear the word of the LORD: I saw the LORD sitting upon His throne, and all the host of heaven standing beside Him on His right hand and on His left. (20) And the LORD said, Who will entice Ahab that he may go up and fall at Ramoth-gilead? And one said this, and another that. (21) And the spirit went out and stood before the LORD, and said, I surely will entice him. And the LORD said unto him, How? (22) And he said, I will go out and become a lying spirit in

the mouth of all his prophets. And He said, You shall entice him, and also you shall prevail; go out and do so. (23) And now behold the LORD has put a lying spirit in the mouth of all these your prophets, and the LORD has spoken evil concerning you. (24) And Zedekiah the son of Chenaanah drew near and smote Micaiah upon the cheek and said, Where did the spirit of the LORD pass over from me to speak to you? (25) And Micaiah said, Behold you shall see in that day when you shall go into an inner chamber to hide. (26) And the king of Israel said, Take Micaiah and cause him to return to Amon the governor of the city, and unto Joash the king's son. (27) And you shall say, Thus says the king: Put this fellow in the prison, and feed him bread of affliction and water of affliction until I come in peace. (28) And Micaiah said, If you surely return in peace, the LORD has not spoken by me. And he said, Hear, O people, all of you.

COMMENTS

It was very important to Ahab to secure from all the prophets a positive word about the proposed military campaign. Any negative note might cause the pious Jehoshaphat to withdraw from the venture. The messenger sent to fetch Micaiah knew this well, and so he pleaded with the man of God to join the four hundred court prophets by putting his stamp of approval on the campaign (v. 13). Both the king and his messenger completely misunderstood this man of God. He could not be intimidated or bribed. He was not afraid to stand alone. He would speak only what the Lord revealed to him (v. 14).

When Micaiah appeared before him, Ahab put to the prophet the identical question he had put to the four hundred. Just as his question is an echo of the earlier query, so also is Micaiah's response identical with the answer which the court prophets had unanimously and dramatically given¹⁰ (v. 15). Ahab's hollow

¹⁰ The absence of the usual introductory phrase, *Thus says the Lord*, in Micaiah's mocking caricature of the court prophets is to be noted.

tone had revealed the insincerity of his question. He really did not want to know the will of God; he wanted to be deceived. No doubt Micaiah's mocking tone showed that his words were sarcastic. In an effort to impress Jehoshaphat, Ahab pretended to be greatly distressed over the prophet's manifest insincerity. Before he realized what he was saying, Ahab blurted out that what he wanted to hear was the word of the Lord¹¹ (v. 16). Was this a tacit admission that what the four hundred had predicted was *not* the word of God?

At this juncture the tone and demeanor of Micaiah suddenly changed, and the man of God became deadly serious. He had seen a vision of Israel scattered upon the hills with no shepherd; he heard the voice of God directing these scattered ones to return to their homes in peace (v. 17). No one in the royal assembly failed to see that Micaiah was foretelling the dispersion of the Israelite army as a result of the death of the king of Israel. Ahab certainly understood the purport of those words. He had demanded the word of God and had received it. Lest Jehoshaphat be unduly influenced by this dire prediction, Ahab suggested that these words were but further evidence of the prophet's prejudice toward the king (v. 18).

The insinuation that Micaiah spoke out of malice brought forth a vigorous rebuttal from the man of God. At sometime in the past Micaiah had seen another vision relating to Ahab. In this vision¹² he had seen the Lord on His heavenly throne surrounded by all the hosts of heaven, i.e., the angels who inhabit the heaven of heavens (v. 19). In the vision, the Lord asked for suggestions as to how Ahab might be enticed to go up to Ramoth-gilead that he might be slain there. Various schemes were suggested (v. 20), but finally the spirit, i.e., the

¹¹ The form of Ahab's outburst (v. 10) suggests that on previous occasions Micaiah had been accustomed to use sarcasm.

¹² Some take the position that Micaiah in verse 19 continues to speak sarcastically—that he actually had not seen a vision. According to this view, Micaiah was only trying to express the feeling that he alone was speaking the truth, even though the entire body of prophets had expressed a contrary opinion. If they were inspired at all, it must be by a lying spirit.

evil spirit or Satan, affirmed that he would be able to entice Ahab (v. 21). The plan was that this spirit would take control of the mouths of Ahab's prophets and *they* would persuade the king that the Ramoth-gilead campaign should be undertaken. The Lord then granted to this spirit permission to so entice Ahab (v. 22). Thus, declared Micaiah, the Lord had put a lying spirit in the mouths of all Ahab's prophets; they had spoken falsehood. Furthermore, it was not Micaiah alone (cf. v. 18) who had spoken evil against Ahab, but the Lord who had spoken through him (v. 23).

Several important questions remain to be answered concerning Micaiah's vision:

1. How can it be that the Lord of glory would find it necessary to take counsel of the angelic hosts? Prophetic visions are anthropomorphic and do not always correspond to reality. Such visions are the vehicle used to convey a cardinal truth to the mind of the prophet. In this case the truth is that Ahab's death in battle had been foreordained in the counsels of God, and that divine wisdom had devised a means for accomplishing His purpose.

2. Who was the spirit who volunteered to entice Ahab? Keil and others see the spirit as a personification of the spirit of prophecy which takes hold of a man and makes him a prophet. However, the older commentators were probably correct when they identified the spirit with Satan. That Satan has or at least did have access to the heavenly council chambers is suggested by the opening chapters of Job.

3. How can the all Holy One give His sanction to deceit and lying for the purpose of tempting Ahab to his death? Here one must distinguish between the permissive and the positive will of God. God permitted the evil spirit to do his evil work. The same thought is expressed in Ezekiel 14:9 "If the prophet be deceived . . . I the Lord have deceived that prophet." Ahab *wished* to be guided by false prophets, and the justice of God permitted him to be so guided. Sin is punished by sin.

Zedekiah, one of the four hundred, bristled at the charge that he and his cohorts had been possessed by a spirit of lies. Without

warning he stepped forward and smote Micaiah on the cheek, at the same time shouting, Where did the spirit of the Lord pass over from me to speak to you? Apparently Zedekiah was conscious of some force beyond himself which compelled him to speak his prophetic word. How is it that the Spirit of God had spoken one thing by Zedekiah and quite another through the mouth of Micaiah? Zedekiah's scoffing question was intended to counter the story Micaiah had related so dramatically. There is no more effective manner of meeting the argument of an opponent than by subjecting him to ridicule.

Micaiah was not intimidated by the bombastic Zedekiah. He did not answer directly the insolent question, but rather confidently affirmed that one day Zedekiah would *see*, i.e., perceive the truth.¹³ Only then would Zedekiah have the prophetic vision to correctly assess the political situation. In that day when Micaiah's predictions concerning the defeat of the armies of Israel were fulfilled, Micaiah would hasten into hiding out of shame and perhaps fear of reprisals at the hand of the queen (v. 25).

The two kings seem to have looked on the assault of Micaiah without protest or word of displeasure. When the brief prophetic confrontation was over, Ahab ordered Micaiah returned to his prison¹⁴ cell. There he was to remain under the watchful eye of Amon the governor of the city and Joash, one of Ahab's own sons¹⁵ (v. 26). Instructions were given to those officials that Micaiah was to receive only the bread and water of affliction, i.e., the most meager provisions, until the king returned from his campaign in peace (v. 27). It is probably owing to the presence of Jehoshaphat that Micaiah escaped with no more

¹³ Micaiah did not question Zedekiah's sincerity or accuse him of deliberately falsifying his prophecy, but rather of being a false prophet in the sense that he did not *see* or *perceive* the truth.

¹⁴ The Hebrews did not use prisons for punishment; the prison was a place where an individual under suspension was kept pending judgment and verdict (cf. Num. 15:34).

¹⁵ Another interpretation is that "*son of the king*" is a title of an official rather than an actual son. See Gray, OTL, p. 453.

severe sentence. Still Micaiah was undaunted. He was willing to stake his prophetic reputation on the fulfillment of this one prediction. If Ahab returned in peace, then Yahweh truly had not spoken to him, and he was willing to face the capital punishment to which he was liable in that case. Before being dragged from the place, Micaiah shouted forth a call for all peoples to take note of the predictions which he had made (v. 27).

D. THE DEATH OF AHAB 22:29-38

TRANSLATION

(29) And the king of Israel went up along with Jehoshaphat to Ramoth-gilead. (30) And the king of Israel said unto Jehoshaphat, I will disguise myself, and enter into the battle; but as for you, put on your garments. And the king of Israel disguised himself, and entered into battle. (31) Now the king of Aram had commanded his thirty-two chariot commanders, saying, Do not fight small or great, but only the king of Israel. (32) And it came to pass when the chariot commanders saw Jehoshaphat, that they said, Surely he is the king of Israel; and they turned against him to fight; and Jehoshaphat cried out. (33) And it came to pass when the chariot commanders saw that he was not the king of Israel, they turned from after him. (34) And a man drew his bow by chance and smote the king of Israel between the joints and the breastplate. And he said to his chariot driver, Turn your hand, and bring me out of the camp, for I am wounded. (35) But the battle became more furious that day, and the king was made to stand in the chariot against Aram, but he died in the evening; and the blood ran out of the wound into the midst of the chariot. (36) And the shout went up in the camp as the sun was setting, saying, Each man to his city, and each man to his land. (37) And the king died, and was brought to Samaria, and they buried the king in Samaria. (38) And the chariot was washed beside the pool of Samaria, and the dogs licked his blood (now harlots washed there) according to the word of the LORD which He had spoken.

COMMENTS

The ominous threats of Micaiah notwithstanding, the two kings went up to Ramoth-gilead to battle (v. 29). Ahab's action is understandable and in character; that of Jehoshaphat is more difficult to explain. Why did this pious king reject the warning of God's prophet? Some or all of the following considerations may account for his conduct: (1) Jehoshaphat had committed himself to the war effort by the rash promise of verse 4; (2) in view of the royal hospitality extended to him by Ahab he may have felt under some obligation to acquiesce; (3) had he deserted his ally because of a prophecy which threatened that ally with death, he would have subjected himself to the charge of cowardice; (4) those about him were bent on battle, and treated the prophecy of Micaiah with contempt and disdain, and it would be most difficult for Jehoshaphat to swim alone against the current; (5) perhaps Ahab had been successful in convincing the Southern king that the ominous words of Micaiah could be discounted in view of the longstanding animosity which had existed between the king and this prophet; (6) finally, Jehoshaphat's own interests were threatened by the rising Aramean power, and he may well have feared trouble from that quarter if the war efforts were abandoned.

Upon the eve of battle Ahab came up with what he thought was an ingenious plan to circumvent the dire predictions which had been made against him. Micaiah had seen Israel scattered as sheep having no master (v. 17). To thwart this prediction, Ahab decided in effect to relinquish his role of leader of the host. He decided not to lead the army, as kings were accustomed to do, in his royal robes. Rather he would disguise himself as a lesser officer and thus, so he thought, escape all danger. Since Jehoshaphat's life had not been threatened by the prophet, it would be unnecessary for him to take similar precautions (v. 30). By this ingenious move, Ahab in effect put Jehoshaphat in the position of the recognized leader of the troops. If by any chance Micaiah was right in prophesying the death of the leader of Israel, that curse would no longer be on Ahab, but on Jehoshaphat.

Now it so happened that Benhadad had directed his thirty-two chariot officers to concentrate their attack on the king of Israel (v. 31). The Aramean rightly reasoned that the death of the king would terminate the war. Seeing the royal robes of Jehoshaphat, the chariot captains pressed in that direction. When the king of Judah realized he had been singled out for concentrated attack, he cried out in desperation to God (v. 32), and God intervened on his behalf (II C 18:31). The charioteers recognized that it was not the king of Israel that they were pursuing, and so turned away from Jehoshaphat (v. 33).

Ahab's disguise could not avert the judgment of God! During the course of the battle, an Aramean soldier launched an arrow that was destined to find its mark in the breast of Ahab. The king knew his wound was mortal,¹⁶ and so ordered his chariot driver to wheel about and carry him away from the scene of battle (v. 34). He was anxious lest the army discover what had happened and become discouraged. The wound needed attention and had he remained with the host his condition would have been noted very soon. It is quite possible that the charioteer, in the din and confusion of the battle, may not have observed that his master was wounded. However, the fury of the battle increased so that day, that the king's driver could not comply with his request. Lest the troops become discouraged, Ahab's servants propped him up in the chariot. Unable to attend to his wounds, the king slowly bled to death. At evening Ahab died and his blood poured out into the floor of the chariot (v. 35). When the hosts of Israel saw that their master had fallen, a shout went up among the troops as they urged one another to terminate the battle and make their way to their homes (v. 36).

What a sad sight that must have been as the battle-weary, leaderless troops made their way back to Samaria. There they buried the fallen king (v. 37). At the city pool, where harlots¹⁷

¹⁶ The Hebrew reads literally, "*I have been made ill.*" Perhaps Ahab did not wish to reveal even to his trusted chariot driver the fact that he had been smitten by an arrow.

¹⁷ The KJV gives the rendering "*armour*" for this common word meaning "*harlots.*" The KJV rendering involves a slight emendation of the Hebrew text.

customarily bathed,¹⁸ they washed the chariot of the king. Packs of scavenger dogs licked up the blood of the fallen monarch. This fulfilled the word which the Lord had spoken concerning him (v. 38). Not only the prophecy of Micaiah, but in essence, that of Elijah¹⁹ as well was fulfilled on that day.

E. CONCLUDING NOTE ON THE REIGN OF AHAB 22:39-40

TRANSLATION

(39) And the rest of the deeds of Ahab and all which he did, and the house of ivory which he built, and all the cities which he built, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? (4) And Ahab slept with his fathers; and Ahaziah his son ruled in place of him.

COMMENTS

As the account of Ahab's reign concludes, two other brief notices about his accomplishments are given. Ahab, like his father, was a city builder, and apparently was responsible for building several towns. He was perhaps most famous for his ivory palace, i.e., a house with ivory inlays (v. 39). Upon his death Ahab was succeeded by his son Ahaziah whose name means "*whom Yahweh upholds*" (v. 40). This name perhaps suggests that, notwithstanding his flirtation with Baal worship, Ahab remained a believer in Yahweh.

¹⁸ Keil (BCOT, p. 281) suggests that the grammatical construction can only be taken to mean that the harlots were bathing in the pool at the time Ahab's blood was being washed from his chariot.

¹⁹ By his arrogant disregard for the word of God spoken by Micaiah, Ahab brought back upon himself the penalty which Elijah had foreseen, but which had been set aside as a result of Ahab's repentance (cf. 21:29).

II. SUMMARY OF THE REIGN OF JEHOSHAPHAT
22:41-50

TRANSLATION

(41) Now Jehoshaphat the son of Asa began to rule over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel. (42) Jehoshaphat was thirty-five years old when he began to reign, and twenty-five years he ruled in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother was Azubah the daughter of Shilhi. (43) And he walked in all the ways of Asa his father not deviating from it, to do that which was right in the eyes of the LORD. But the high places he did not remove; the people were yet sacrificing and offering incense in the high places. (44) And Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel. (45) Now the rest of the acts of Jehoshaphat, and his might which he demonstrated, and how he warred, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah. (46) And the rest of the male prostitutes which remained from the days of Asa his father he removed from the land. (47) There was no king in Edom; a vassal was king. (48) Jehoshaphat made ships of Tarshish to go to Ophir for gold, but they did not go, for the ships were smashed in Ezion-geber. (49) Then Ahaziah the son of Ahab said unto Jehoshaphat, Let my servants go with your servants in the ships; but Jehoshaphat was not willing. (50) And Jehoshaphat slept with his fathers and he was buried with his fathers in the city of David his father; and Jehoram his son ruled in his place.

COMMENTS

In verses 41-51 the historian takes up again briefly the history of Judah where he left off in 15:24 with the mention of the accession of Jehoshaphat. To the reign of this fine king the Chronicler devotes four chapters; the author of Kings treats

his reign in the briefest possible fashion. The additional information contained in Chronicles about Jehoshaphat's reign may be summarized as follows:

1. Apparently prior to his alliance with Ahab, Jehoshaphat strengthened himself against Israel by garrisoning all his fortified cities (II C 17:1-2).

2. Philistines and Arab tribes brought costly presents to Jehoshaphat (II C 17:5, 10ff.).

3. Judah was invaded by a coalition of Moabites, Ammonites and Edomites. The invaders, however, turned upon and destroyed one another (II C 17:7-9).

4. Jehoshaphat launched certain educational reforms by sending forth qualified leaders to teach the law throughout the land (II C 17:7-9).

5. The king also reformed the system of administering justice (II C 19:4-11).

Fourth King of Judah

JEHOSHAPHAT BEN ASA

870-848 B.C.*

(*"He whom Yahweh judges"*)

I K 15:24; 22:41-50; II K 8:16; II C 17:1-21:3

Synchronism

Jehoshaphat 1 = Ahab 4

Contemporary Prophets

Jehu son of Hanani; Jahaziel the Levite;

Eliezer

Mother: Azubah

Appraisal: Good

"Mercy and truth preserve the king; and his throne is upheld by mercy."

Proverbs 20:28

*coregent from 873 B.C.

Jehoshaphat followed in the footsteps of his father Asa, and did not in his old age attempt to turn aside from the way of righteousness as his father had done. Two flaws in his reign are pointed out by the historian: (1) he did not remove the high places outside Jerusalem where the people worshiped Yahweh contrary to the Law of Moses (v. 43); and (2) he made peace with Ahab of Israel (v. 44) thus ending the state of hostilities between the two kingdoms which had existed for over seventy years. To seal this alliance, Jehoshaphat arranged a marriage between his son Jehoram, and Athaliah the daughter of Ahab (II C 18:1). It was probably the mutual fear of the rising power of Damascus that forced the rival sister kingdoms to seek this reconciliation.

Other outstanding accomplishments of Jehoshaphat were recorded in the primary source utilized by the author of Kings, the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah (v. 45). The account of Jehoshaphat closes out with the mention of three significant facts: (1) Jehoshaphat completed the task that his father had begun in removing the male cult prostitutes from the land (v. 46); (2) he was able to resubjugate the territory of Edom²⁰ and install a vassal king over that territory (v. 47); and (3) he attempted to revive the naval enterprise of Solomon. "*Tarshish ships*," i.e., large sea-going vessels bound for Ophir and Tarshish (cf. II C 20:36), were launched from the Edomite seaport of Ezion-geber. Unfortunately these ships were dashed to pieces by a storm before they got out of the harbor (v. 48). A prophet of God explained the disaster as being the result of an ungodly alliance between Jehoshaphat and Ahab's son Ahaziah (II C 20:37). When the Northern king proposed a second venture in which his subjects would join those of Jehoshaphat,²¹ this

²⁰ Edom seems to have regained its independence soon after the death of Solomon (cf. 11:14); but from this text and II Kings 8:20, 22 it would appear that Edom had again been made subject to Judah probably by Jehoshaphat himself (cf. II C 17:10, 11).

²¹ It would appear that whereas both kings had shared in the building of the first fleet, only the sailors of Judah had manned the ships. Because of their close association with the Phoenicians, some subjects of the Northern Kingdom may have been highly skilled sailors.

godly king rightly rejected it (v. 49). He had learned his lesson. At his death, Jehoshaphat was buried in the city of David with his royal ancestors. His son Jehoram²² succeeded him on the throne (v. 50).

III. FAITHLESS AHAZIAH AND FEARLESS ELIJAH

I Kings 22:52—II Kings 1:18

The last public, i.e., official, prophetic appearance of Elijah occurred during the brief reign of Ahaziah the son of Ahab. After a brief note summarizing the wicked reign of Ahaziah (I K 22:52-54); the author discusses the desperate illness of this king (II K 1:1-8), and his efforts to arrest Elijah (vv. 9-15). The section closes with Elijah's predictions concerning Ahaziah (vv. 16-18).

A. THE WICKEDNESS OF AHAZIAH 22:52-54

TRANSLATION

(52) Ahaziah the son of Ahab began to rule over Israel in Samaria in the seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah; and he reigned over Israel two years. (52) And he did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and walked in the way of his father, and in the way of his mother, and in the way of Jeroboam son of Nebat, who caused Israel to sin. (54) For he served Baal, and bowed down to him, and provoked the LORD God of Israel, according to all which his father had done.

²² Both Jehoshaphat and Ahab had sons named Jehoram (cf. II K 1:17). The two kings may have agreed to use the same name in advance of the birth of the two princes as a symbol of their friendship for one another. See Honor, JCBR, p. 331.

COMMENTS

The introductory note to the brief reign of Ahaziah the son of Ahab is summarized in the chart below. Nothing further need be said except that the author points the finger at Jezebel as being one of the reasons for the evil direction which this king took (v. 52). It would appear that this wicked woman continued to have a powerful influence even after her husband was dead. Ahaziah, just like his father, provoked the Lord to anger by his adherence to the Baal cult (v. 53).

<p style="text-align: center;">Eighth King of Israel AHAZIAH BEN AHAB 853-852 B.C. <i>("whom Yahweh holds")</i> I K 22:40, 49, 51; II K 1 Synchronism Ahaziah 1 = Jehoshaphat 17 Contemporary Prophet Elijah</p> <p><i>"The fear of the Lord prolongs days; but the years of the wicked shall be shortened."</i> Proverbs 10:27</p>

B. THE ILLNESS OF AHAZIAH (1:1-8)

TRANSLATION

(1) Now Moab rebelled against Israel after the death of Ahab. (2) And Ahaziah fell through a lattice in his upper chamber which was in Samaria, and he was sick. And he sent messengers, and said unto them, Go inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron whether I shall recover from this sickness. (3) But the angel of the LORD said unto Elijah the Tishbite, Arise, go up to meet the messengers of the king of Samaria, and speak unto them, Is it because there is no God at all in Israel that you are going to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron? (4) Now therefore thus says the LORD, You shall not go down from the bed to which

you have gone up because you shall surely die. And Elijah departed. (5) When the messengers returned unto him, he said unto them, Why have you returned? (6) And they said unto him, A man came up to meet us, and he said unto us, Go, return unto the king who sent you, and speak unto him, Thus says the LORD: Is it because there is no God at all in Israel that you are sending to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron? Therefore you shall not go down from the bed to which you have gone up because you shall surely die. (7) And he said unto them, What was the manner of the man who went up to meet you, and spoke unto you these words? (8) And they said unto him, He was a hairy man, and girt about with a leather girdle. And he said, He was Elijah the Tishbite.

COMMENTS

The division of the Book of Kings in the middle of the reign of Ahaziah is most unfortunate. The history of Ahaziah's reign began in I Kings 22:51 and is carried forward without any real break in the sense to II Kings 1:18. The division into two books at this point separates what the author obviously intended to be connected, viz., the crimes of this monarch and the consequent punishment which fell upon him. Because of his sins, calamity befell Ahaziah almost from the outset of his reign. A *political* calamity—the revolt of Moab—is only briefly narrated, but the author has amplified the *personal* calamity which also befell this king.

After the death of Ahab the vassal state of Moab rebelled against Israel. The Moabites had been brought under subjection by the warlike Omri some forty years earlier. Under Ahab, they had been forced to pay to Israel exorbitant taxes. When Ahab was slain in the battle of Ramoth-gilead, Mesha king of Moab was encouraged to revolt. The clause "*then* Moab revolted" suggests that this rebellion came subsequent to and in consequence of the sinful disposition of Ahaziah (v. 1).

A second calamity also befell the new king of Israel. Ahaziah accidentally fell through the lattice which enclosed his upper

chamber. This shutter of interlaced woodwork would have been easily broken. As a result of this fall, the king was so injured that he lingered upon his bed hovering between life and death. In this desperate condition, the king sent messengers to Baal-zebub, the god of the Philistine city of Ekron, to inquire as to whether or not he would recover. The king, of course, wanted more than just information; a favorable oracle from a deity would mean that the god would intervene on his behalf and raise him up. While it is no surprise to find the son of Jezebel preferring to consult Baal rather than Yahweh, it is somewhat surprising to find him sending to Ekron to consult this particular Baal god. Just why he chose Baal-zebub is unclear. Perhaps Baal-zebub had a reputation for granting favorable oracular verdicts. On the other hand, perhaps Ekron was the nearest of the ancient Baal shrines. The name Baal-zebub means "*lord of flies*." Apparently this particular Baal was thought to prevent plagues of flies, or else was thought to send such plagues against his enemies.²³

For the second time (cf. I K 19:5, 7) an angel of God visited Elijah the prophet, instructing him to intercept the delegation which had been dispatched to Ekron. It is not clear where Elijah was at the time these instructions came to him, but from the fact he was told to "*go up*," it has been inferred that he was probably down in the plain of Sharon, or perhaps the plateau between those plains and the mountains of Samaria. The actions of Ahaziah were a complete and absolute denial of the lordship of Yahweh. To consult a foreign oracle was tantamount to saying that the voice of God was wholly silent. By means of a penetrating rhetorical question, Elijah was to reflect the gravity of the royal apostasy to the messengers and ultimately to the king himself (v. 3). The God of Israel did have a word for Ahaziah, albeit an unsolicited one. Because he had so grievously apostatized, God sentenced this king to die from the effects of

²³ Gray (OTL, p. 463) feels that the proper name of the deity was Baal-zebul—"Baal the Prince"—and that the orthodox Jewish author deliberately changed the spelling to ridicule this deity.

his fall. Having received these divine instructions, Elijah departed to carry them out (v. 4).

When the messengers returned so soon to the chamber of the sick king, Ahaziah knew that they had not completed their mission to Ekron. He therefore inquired of them as to the reason for their hasty return (v. 5). Whether the messengers did not actually recognize Elijah or were merely withholding his name to be diplomatic cannot be ascertained. In either case the messengers reported to their master the message which the prophet had delivered to them (v. 6). Ahaziah may have suspected already that this one who had been so bold as to announce the impending death of the king was that same man of God who had predicted the doom of his father (cf. I K 21:20-22). Fearing the worst, he inquired further concerning the man (v. 7).

The messengers described the man of God as a hairy man (lit., *a lord of hair*). Some take this to mean that he was rough and unkempt with his hair and beard long. Others picture him as wearing a shaggy coat of untanned skin with the hair outward. The second unusual thing noted by the messengers was that this man of God wore a leather girdle as opposed to the more customary girdle of soft material. This brief description was enough for the king. The dreaded adversary of his father had suddenly reappeared (v. 8).

Just why Elijah dressed the way he did has been the subject of no little discussion. Perhaps he was attempting to show contempt for earthly things. On the other hand, this garb may have been indicative of the sorrow of the prophet over the deplorable condition of his nation.

C. AHAZIAH'S EFFORTS TO ARREST ELIJAH 1:9-15

TRANSLATION

(9) And he sent unto him a captain of fifty and his fifty, and he went up unto him, and behold he was sitting upon the top of a hill. And he spoke unto him, O man of God, The king has

spoken, Come down. (10) And Elijah answered and spoke unto the captain of the fifty, And if I am a man of God, let fire from heaven come down and consume you and your fifty. And fire came down from heaven, and consumed him and his fifty. (11) And again he sent unto him another captain of fifty and his fifty. And he answered and spoke unto him, O man of God, thus says the king: Come down quickly. (12) And Elijah answered and spoke unto them, If I am a man of God, let fire come down from heaven and consume you and your fifty. And the fire of God came down from heaven and consumed him and his fifty. And the captain of the third fifty went up, and came, and bowed down upon his knees before Elijah, and besought him and said, O man of God, let my life, and the life of these fifty your servants, be precious in your eyes. (14) Behold fire came down from heaven, and consumed the first two captains of fifty and their fifties, and now let my life be precious in your eyes. (15) And the angel of the LORD spoke unto Elijah, Go down with him; do not be afraid of him. And he arose and went down with him unto the king.

COMMENTS

No doubt Ahaziah had been instructed by his wicked mother to take strong and immediate action against Elijah should this religious radical reappear. This may well have been the first public appearance of Elijah during the reign of Ahaziah, and the king seems to have felt this was his opportunity to arrest and imprison this troublemaker. Though lying on his bed of affliction under the divine sentence of death, Ahaziah was so hardened, unrepentant and defiant that he ordered a unit of fifty soldiers to hasten immediately to arrest Elijah. The size of this armed body suggests that Ahaziah was directly challenging the power of the prophet his God. Meanwhile, Elijah had positioned himself on a hill on or right near the spot where he had encountered the messengers. The prophet was ready for a showdown with the king, and so made no attempt to conceal

himself. He sat there calmly awaiting the next move that Ahaziah might make.

The captain of fifty approached the prophet, addressed him by his customary title, and ordered him by the authority of the king to come down from the hilltop and surrender (v. 9). Elijah then prayed that God would vindicate his prophetic power and authority by destroying this band of soldiers who had come to arrest him. God heard that prayer, and fire came down from heaven (lightning?) to consume the captain and his fifty (v. 10). Still defiant, Ahaziah sent another fifty to demand that Elijah come down *quickly*. The king had apparently grown impatient (v. 11). Again the prophet prayed, and again the fire from heaven consumed his adversaries (v. 12). A third captain dispatched by the king escaped with his life because he humbled himself before the prophet. He ascended the hill on which Elijah was still seated, and bowed himself before the prophet to beseech his compassion. Having heard of the fate of the previous captains, he acknowledged that this man of God held his life and the lives of his fifty men in his hands. He begged that Elijah would spare these men (vv. 13, 14). The battle was now won. The honor of Elijah and the God he represented had been vindicated. An angel of God intervened at this point, directing the prophet go with this captain and not to fear for his life. Elijah instantly obeyed (v. 15).

D. ELIJAH'S PROPHECY CONCERNING AHAZIAH 1:16-18

TRANSLATION

(16) And he spoke unto him, Thus says the LORD: Because you sent messengers to inquire of Baal-zebub the god of Ekron, is it because there is no God at all in Israel that you may inquire of His word? Therefore you will not come down from upon the bed upon which you have gone up, because you will surely die.
(17) And he died according to the word of the LORD which

Elijah had spoken. And Jehoram ruled in his stead in the second year of Jehoram son of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, because he did not have a son. (18) And the rest of the acts of Ahaziah which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel?

COMMENTS

Whether Elijah was fettered and chained when he went before the king cannot be ascertained. This much is certain: Elijah did not change his tune once he came face to face with this bitter antagonist. Boldly in the name of his God he repeated the message which he had originally sent to the king by his messengers. Because of his gross apostasy which in effect denied the power and divinity of Yahweh, Ahaziah would die from his injuries (v. 16). Shortly thereafter the king expired, never having left that sickbed, just as Elijah had predicted. Because he had no son, his brother Jehoram ruled in his stead. Thus a Jehoram ruled in Israel simultaneously with a Jehoram in Judah, for the Southern Jehoram was in his second year when the Northern one commenced his reign (v. 17). The rest of the acts of Ahaziah, few though they must have been, were recorded in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel (v. 18). These may have included some months of warfare against Mesha of Moab in an attempt to put down the rebellion in that quarter.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER FIFTEEN

I. FACTS TO MASTER

A. Important persons to identify in relation to this chapter:

- | | |
|-------------|----------------|
| 1. Benhadad | 4. Jehoshaphat |
| 2. Ahab | 5. Micaiah |
| 3. Elijah | 6. Zedekiah |

- | | |
|-----------|----------------|
| 7. Amon | 10. Ahaziah |
| 8. Joash | 11. Baal-zebub |
| 9. Azubah | |
- B. Important places to be identified in relation to this chapter:
- | | |
|------------------|----------------|
| 1. Samaria | 4. Moab |
| 2. Ramoth-gilead | 5. Ophir |
| 3. Edom | 6. Ezion-geber |
- C. Important numbers to remember:
1. Number of prophets serving in Ahab's court
 2. Number of chariot captains in Benhadad's army
- D. Words and phrases which should bring back to remembrance important events in this chapter:
- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1. horns of iron | 5. broken ships |
| 2. thrones | 6. girdle of leather |
| 3. scattered sheep | 7. heavenly fire |
| 4. deceiving spirit | 8. an angel |

II. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. What two contrasting attitudes toward prophetism are illustrated by Ahab and Jehoshaphat?
2. What motivated the four hundred court prophets to encourage Ahab to undertake the campaign against Ramoth-gilead? By what means did these prophets attempt to convince Jehoshaphat that the campaign was the will of God?
3. What qualities in the life of Micaiah would a preacher do well to imitate today? What about his use of sarcasm?
4. What theological problems are raised by Micaiah's second vision?
5. By what means did God convince Ahab to go up to Ramoth-gilead to meet his death? How is it that a holy God can employ such devious means?
6. Who was the "deceiving spirit" who filled the mouths of Ahab's prophets?
7. What mistakes characterized the reign of Jehoshaphat?

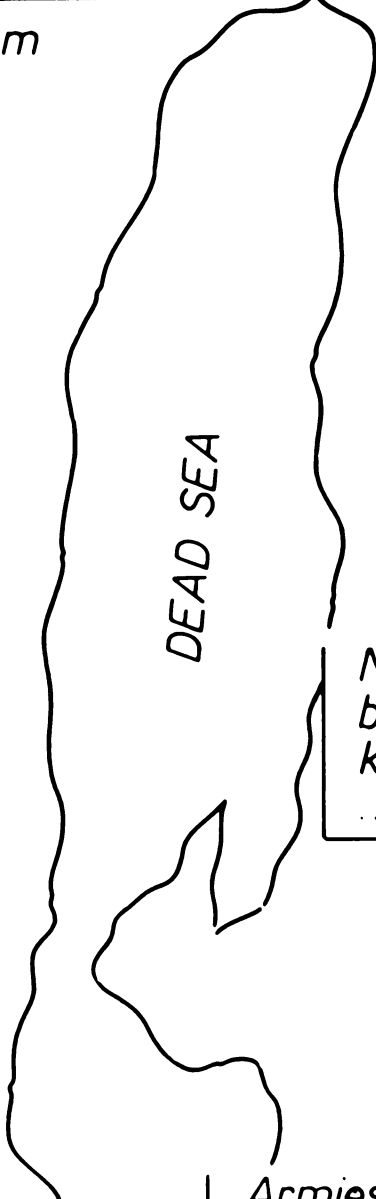
FAITHLESS KINGS AND FEARLESS PROPHETS 1:16-18

In what way are many modern religious leaders like Jehoshaphat?

- 8. Why did Jehoshaphat make his trip to Samaria? Why was Ahab so determined to make the campaign against Ramoth-gilead? Why did Jehoshaphat go along with him even after the fateful predictions of Micaiah?**
- 9. An Aramean soldier shot an arrow by chance, and that arrow became the instrument of divine judgment against Ahab. Do things just happen by chance? How is it that God works through what appears to be mere happenstance to accomplish His will?**
- 10. What were the political and what were the personal consequences of King Ahaziah's sin?**
- 11. How could Ahaziah be so sure that his messengers had actually confronted Elijah?**
- 12. Why did God consume the two companies of soldiers with fire? Why spare the third company?**
- 13. Why did Ahaziah send messengers to Baal-zebub? What kind of god was this?**

THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST MOAB
II Kings 3 6 Miles

● Jerusalem



DEAD SEA

Mesha tries to break through to king of Aram ... fails ... sacrifices his son

MOAB

Kir-hareseth

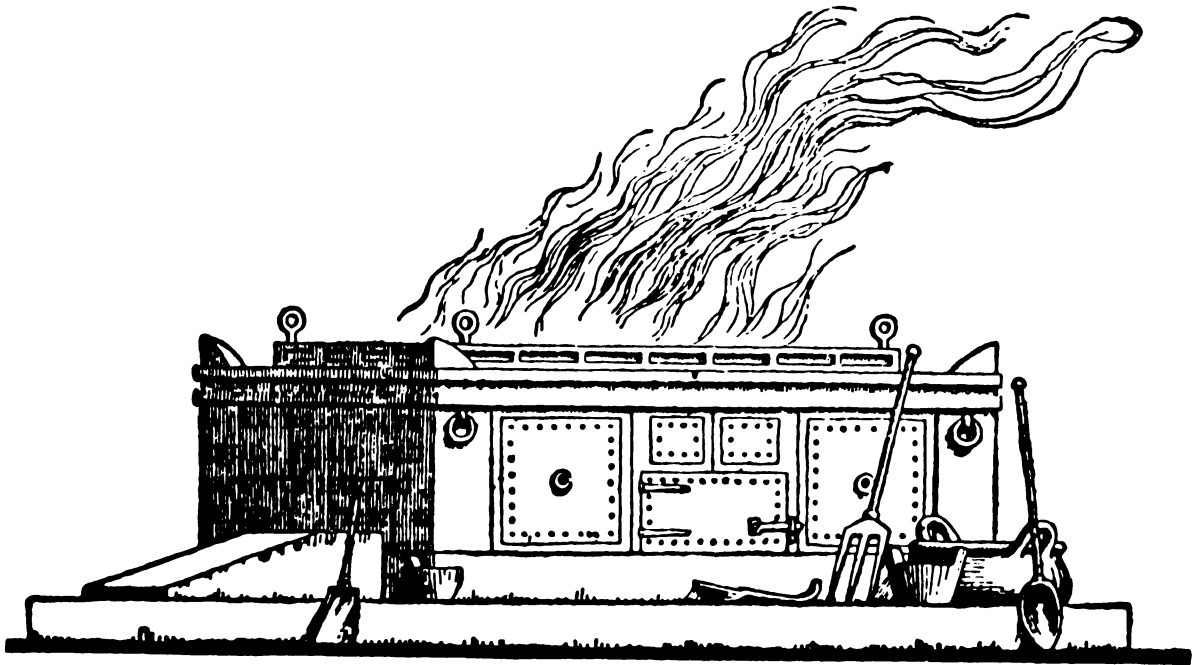


Jehoram of Israel and Jehoshaphat of Judah invade Moab

Armies of the three kings run out of water; Elisha's prediction

Brook Zered

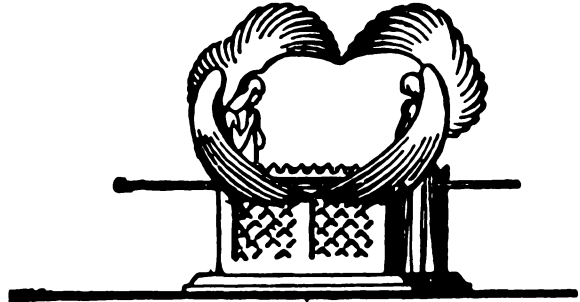
King of Edom assists in the campaign against Moab



The Altar of Burnt Offerings



High Priest



The Ark of the Covenant

Drawings by Horace Knowles
from the British and Foreign Bible Society

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

THE TRANSFER OF THE PROPHETIC MANTLE

II Kings 2:1—3:27

The opening chapters of II Kings relate how the mantle of prophetic authority literally and figuratively fell on the shoulders of Elisha who for some time had been the personal servant of the great prophet Elijah. The material contained in these chapters may conveniently be discussed under the following heads: (1) Elijah's translation and Elisha's commission (2:1-15); (2) Elisha and the sons of the prophets (2:16-25); and Elisha and King Jehoram (3:1-27).

I. ELIJAH'S TRANSLATION AND ELISHA'S COMMISSION 2:1-15

With the dramatic translation of Elijah, the prophetic mantle fell on Elisha. Though the spectacular departure of Elijah is surely one of the most wondrous events of the Old Testament, it is described in the most matter-of-fact way. After a final visit to the prophetic schools (vv. 1-5) and his final words with Elisha (vv. 6-10), Elijah was whisked heavenward in a chariot of fire and a great whirlwind (vv. 11-12). Immediately thereafter Elisha received his commissioning as Elijah's successor (vv. 13-15).

A. ELIJAH'S FINAL VISIT TO THE PROPHETIC SCHOOLS 2:1-5

TRANSLATION

(1) And it came to pass when the LORD was about to take up Elijah in a whirlwind to heaven, that Elijah went along with Elisha from Gilgal. (2) And Elijah said unto Elisha, Stay here, I pray you, for the LORD has sent me unto Bethel. And Elisha

said, As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you. And they went down to Bethel. (3) And the sons of the prophets who were in Bethel went out unto Elisha, and they said unto him, Do you know that today the LORD will take away your master from your head? And he said, I also know that. Be silent! (4) And Elijah said to him, Elisha, stay here, I pray you, for the LORD has sent me to Jericho. And he said, As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I will not leave you. And they went to Jericho. (5) And the sons of the prophets who were at Jericho drew near unto Elisha, and said unto him, Do you know that today the LORD will take your master from your head? And he said, I also know. Be silent!

COMMENTS

Elijah's miraculous ascension is introduced so matter-of-factly in verse 1 that one must conclude that this information was generally known already to the readers for whom the Book of Kings was intended. It is the author's intention here to relate the exact details which surrounded the prophet's dramatic departure.

After his call at Abel-meholah (I K 19:21), Elisha had become the constant companion and faithful attendant of Elijah. The latter had no fixed residence, but wandered from place to place as the Spirit of God led him. In the course of their travels, the prophets had arrived at Gilgal, an ancient sanctuary near Shechem (v. 1). Three times Elijah asked his attendant to remain behind. Elijah knew his days on earth were numbered, and he wished to spend these final days in solitude.¹ Under ordinary circumstances Elisha would have complied with the request of his master. But the younger prophet had a premonition if not a revelation that Elijah would shortly be departing from the earth, and he would not allow himself to be deprived of those

¹ It may also be that Elijah was testing the fidelity and affection of his attendant.

final hours of fellowship and instruction (v. 2). Three times in this narrative Elisha took a double oath that he would not leave the side of Elijah.

From Gilgal the two men of God proceeded to Bethel, the religious capital of the Northern Kingdom. Elijah may have had many reasons for wanting to visit this important city once more before leaving this earth. He may have had instructions to give to the community of prophets who were living there; he certainly would have delivered one last warning to the inhabitants of that city. When the two entered Bethel, the sons of the prophets there called Elisha aside and warned him of what their prophetic instinct assured them was imminent. Elisha was about to lose his master "*from your head*," i.e., from his position as teacher and master. Elisha answered these students curtly. He knew what was about to transpire without being forewarned by this band of students. "*Keep still*," he instructed them. Such a solemn event should not be the subject of idle chatter (v. 3).

At Bethel Elijah again put Elisha to the test, instructing him to tarry at that place. Here he would not be companionless; here there was a great work to do. God had directed the old prophet to take a second journey, down the long rugged descent from the mountains of Ephraim to the Jordan valley and the city of Jericho. But Elisha would not be turned aside. He repeated the same oath he had earlier taken, and once again the master yielded. So the two men of God came to Jericho twenty miles distant (v. 4). Once again the sons of the prophets called Elisha aside and shared with him their prophetic premonition. Once again Elisha administered a gentle rebuke to these impetuous students (v. 5).

B. ELIJAH'S FINAL WORDS WITH ELISHA 2:6-10

TRANSLATION

(6) And Elijah said to him, Stay here, I pray you, for the LORD

has sent me to Jordan. And he said, as the LORD lives and as your soul lives, I will not leave you. And the two of them went on. (7) And fifty men from the sons of the prophets went and stood where they could watch afar off; and the two of them stood beside the Jordan. (8) And Elijah took his mantle, rolled it up, and smote the waters, and they were parted, so that the two of them passed over on dry land. (9) And it came to pass when they had passed over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for you before I am taken from you. And Elisha said, That I may have, I pray you, two portions of your spirit. (10) And he said, You have made a difficult request. If you see me taken from you, it shall be to you thus; but if not, it shall not be.

COMMENTS

At Jericho, Elijah made his third and final attempt to separate himself from his faithful attendant. The Lord had directed the grand old prophet to go to Jordan. Perhaps Elisha should remain at Jericho where there was food and fellowship and shelter. But Elisha was staunch in his insistence that he would spend those last hours with his master regardless of where the Lord might lead (v. 6).

As the two men of God left Jericho, they were followed by fifty of the prophetic students. Out of respect for Elijah's desire for solitude at this moment, these students hung back and finally stopped altogether on a little hill where they had a commanding view of the Jordan valley. From this vantage point they would observe what took place. They watched with eager curiosity as the two prophets—the master and his faithful attendant—reached the bank of Jordan (v. 7). There Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up so that it resembled a rod and with it smote the waters. Instantly the waters parted so that the two men walked across on dry land (v. 8). The miracle is similar to one performed by Moses and for Joshua. It was intended that Israel should regard Elijah and Elisha as a second Moses and Joshua and should therefore yield them a ready obedience.

In this time when true religion was in danger of being snuffed out, God granted to these two men an abundance of miraculous signs so as to substantiate His cause.

With his time on earth drawing very short, Elijah felt an earnest impulse to leave his faithful follower some parting gift as a sign of his appreciation and love. Whatever Elisha desired, if it were within the power, the older prophet would grant. Elisha's request for a double portion (lit., "*double mouthful*") of Elijah's spirit has been interpreted various ways. It surely seems out of character for him, and contrary to the facts of his ministry, to think that Elisha was asking for twice as much spiritual and prophetic power as possessed by Elijah. It seems better to view the request as being for twice as much spirit as would be received by any other of the sons of the prophets. The "*double portion*" was the right of the eldest son who also had authority over members of the family once the father was gone. Asking for the "*double portion*" is equivalent to asking that he be regarded as Elijah's successor.

It was a hard thing which Elisha asked of his master because it was not directly within the power to grant such a request. Had Elisha asked for a prophetic blessing, or for the mantle of his master, or some other possession, the request would have been easy. But only God could designate a man as spiritual leader of the nation. Elijah could do no more than leave this in the hands of God. If God should grant to Elisha the privilege of actually witnessing the translation of a man to heaven, this would be the sign that his request had been granted by the Lord (v. 10). From this it would appear that the chariot and horses were not visible to the physical eye (cf. 6:17) except through special revelation.

C. THE EXODUS OF ELIJAH 2:11-12

TRANSLATION

(11) And it came to pass as they were going, walking and talking, that behold a chariot of fire and horses of fire came between

the two of them, and Elijah went up in a storm into the heavens. (12) Now Elisha was observing this, and he was crying, My father! My father! The chariot of Israel and its horses! And he did not see him anymore, And he took hold of his garments and tore them into two pieces.

COMMENTS

In God's own good time the conversation of these two men of God was interrupted by the appearance of a chariot of fire pulled by horses of fire. Literal fire is probably not intended, but rather the celestial glory that resembles earthly fire or at least brings the concept of fire to mind. The atmosphere was in turbulence at the moment the chariot whisked Elijah away up into the heavens where he was lost from sight (v. 11). Elisha saw this stupendous sight and knew that his request for a double portion had been granted. At first sight of that heavenly chariot, Elisha had cried out in dazed wonder, "*My father, My father! The chariot of Israel and its horses!*" Because Elisha was the pupil of Elijah, and possibly because he regarded himself as the adopted son of this great prophet, Elisha addressed Elijah as "*father.*" Elijah himself was the chariot of Israel and its horsemen. He was the great protector of the nation. Later this same figurative form of address would be used of Elisha (cf. 13:14). When his friend and spiritual father disappeared into the clouds, Elisha tore his clothes in grief (v. 12).

D. THE COMMISSIONING OF ELISHA 2:13-15

TRANSLATION

(13) And he took up the mantle of Elijah which had fallen from upon him, and returned, and stood on the bank of the Jordan. (14) And he took the mantle of Elijah which had fallen from upon him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the

LORD, the God of Elijah, even He? And he smote the waters, and they parted asunder, and Elisha passed over. (15) And the sons of the prophets who were in Jericho opposite saw him and they said, The spirit of Elijah has rested upon Elisha. And they came to meet him and bowed down to him to the ground.

COMMENTS

Sadly Elisha picked up the mantle that had fallen from the shoulders of Elijah as he swept heavenward, and walked back to the edge of Jordan (v. 13). In imitation of the actions of his master, Elisha smote the waters with the mantle at the same time saying, Where is the Lord God of Elijah? Elisha wondered if the all powerful God who had so blessed the ministry of Elijah was still with His people now that Elijah had departed. When the waters instantly parted, Elisha knew the answer to that question. By enabling him to repeat Elijah's last miracle, the Lord gave assurance to Elisha that the divine power would be available to him throughout his prophetic ministry (v. 14).

When the sons of the prophets saw Elisha returning from Jordan alone they concluded that the spirit of Elijah rested upon him. It is not clear on what ground they reached this conclusion. Perhaps they had witnessed the miracle which Elisha had performed at Jordan; or they may have inferred that the leadership had passed to Elisha because he was now wearing the mantle of his master. In any case, they came forth and bowed before him and thus acknowledged him as their master as they had previously recognized Elijah (v. 15).

II. ELISHA AND THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS 2:16-25

With the departure of Elijah, Elisha became the "*father*" of the prophetic schools. The first official acts of the new leader of the "sons of the prophets" are related in the remaining

verses of chapter 2. Here is recorded (1) his decision regarding a request made by the prophetic students (vv. 16-18); (2) his healing of the noxious waters at Jericho (vv. 19-22); and (3) his cursing of the youths at Bethel (vv. 23-25).

A. THE REQUEST OF THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS
2:16-18

TRANSLATION

(16) And they said unto him, Behold, we pray you, there are with your servants fifty men of strength. Let us go, we pray you, that we may seek your master lest the spirit of the LORD lifted him up and cast him down in one of the mountains or in one of the valleys. And he said, Do not send. (17) And they urged him until he was ashamed, and said, Send. And they sent fifty men, and they sought three days, and did not find him. (18) And they returned unto him (now he was waiting in Jericho), And he said unto them, Did I not say unto you, Do not go?

COMMENTS

The sons of the prophets, having been informed of the ascension of Elijah, were quite concerned about the well-being of their former master. They assumed that the Spirit of God had whisked Elijah away only to cast him down in some remote and barren place. Thus they requested that Elisha give permission for fifty of the more robust men among them to make a thorough search of the rocky ridges and ravines of the Transjordan territory. They could not bear the thought of leaving the old prophet in such a barren spot. Elisha knew that the effort would be futile and so he rejected the first petition made of him as leader of the prophetic band (v. 16). The sons of the

prophets, however, continued to urge Elisha to permit them to undertake the search until he was ashamed to refuse them any longer, and he reluctantly gave them the permission which they sought. Fifty men searched for three days, and of course found nothing (v. 17). Elisha waited patiently at Jericho for the zealous young men to return from their futile mission. It was not because of vain pride, but because his veracity and wisdom to some extent had been questioned that Elisha reminded these young men of his previous advice to them (v. 18).

B. THE HEALING OF THE NOXIOUS WATER 2:19-22

TRANSLATION

(19) And the men of the city said unto Elisha, Behold, I pray you, the dwelling of the city is good as my master sees; but the waters are vile and the land miscarries. (20) And he said, Take for me a new vase, and put salt therein. And they took it unto him. (21) And he went out unto the spring of water, and cast there the salt, and he said, Thus says the LORD, I have healed these waters; no more shall death and miscarrying be from that source. (22) And the waters were healed unto this day according to the word of Elisha which he spoke.

COMMENTS

Having heard of the recent miracle performed by Elisha, the civic authorities of Jericho came to the prophet to seek his aid in removing the one unfortunate drawback to their otherwise pleasant community. A bitter and poisonous spring of water gushed forth near Jericho which sent its waters in rivulets across the plain to the Jordan. Nothing could grow near this water; cattle drinking this water would abort (v. 19).²

² Gray (OTL, p. 477) takes note of a recent hydrological survey in Israel in which it was discovered that certain springs there are affected by radio-activity which laboratory tests have demonstrated to cause sterility.

The prophet called for a new vase filled with salt (v. 20). By this action the prophet intended to symbolically teach that impurity can only be cleansed by what is wholly pure and clean. This is the reason he called for a *new* vase, one that had never before been used and hence could not have been defiled. The salt must also have been emblematic of purity, for no other substance would be more inappropriate for purifying water which already contained too much salt. As he poured his vase of salt into the spring, Elisha uttered an oracle in the name of the Lord to the effect that never again would that spring produce death and miscarriage among people and stock (v. 21). The waters of that spring were instantly and permanently made whole (v. 22). The so-called Spring of the Sultan near the ancient ruins of Jericho may be the very spring referred to in this passage.

C. THE CURSING OF THE BETHEL YOUTHS 2:23-25

TRANSLATION

(23) And he went up from there to Bethel; and as he was going up in the way, young men went out from the city, and mocked him, and said to him, Go up, O bald one, Go up, O bald one. (24) And he looked behind him, and saw them, and cursed them, in the name of the LORD; and two she-bears went out from the woods, and tore among them forty-two lads. (25) And he went from there unto Mt. Carmel; and from there he returned to Samaria.

COMMENTS

After a brief stay at Jericho, Elisha visited Bethel, probably to inform the sons of the prophets there about what had transpired in Transjordan. On the outskirts of the city the prophet was

waylaid by a gang of ruffians³ who viciously mocked him. They jeered "Go up," and this may be an allusion to the recent rumor that Elijah had ascended to heaven. These unbelieving urchins were urging Elisha to imitate his master. They also ridiculed the premature baldness of the prophet when they addressed him as "*O baldhead.*"

The juvenile delinquents continued to follow behind, hooting and jeering at this man of God who now was the official representative of God on earth! Having endured this mockery and potential personal danger as long as he could, the prophet turned and calmly "*cursed*" these hoodlums in the name of the Lord. This "cursing" consisted of pronouncing a negative prophecy against them. He may have said something like this: Thus says the Lord: May evil and calamity fall upon you! Under the Law of Moses, God's ministers were required to curse the disobedient (Deut. 27:14-26). Elisha had no way of knowing what would befall them as the result of his curse. That was left in the hand of God. In order to teach these young men a lesson, and at the same time vindicate His prophet in the eyes of the inhabitants of Bethel, God stirred up two she-bears to come out of a near-by woods and attack the offenders. These angry bears "*tore*" forty-two of these fellows. It is not said how far they were injured, whether fatally or not. But the punishment came from the Lord, not the prophet, and there can be no doubt that the Lord of all the earth did what was right (v. 24). This frightening example of God's wrath was no doubt intended to serve as an unforgettable lesson to that new generation which was growing up in contempt of God and true religion.

From Bethel, Elisha went up to Mt. Carmel where presumably another group of the sons of the prophets was located. The purpose of his trip was doubtlessly the same as for his trip to Bethel, viz., to share with these men of God his firsthand knowledge of the exodus of Elijah. Having completed this mission,

³ The unfortunate translation "*little children*" (KJV) has given a very wrong impression of this passage. The Hebrew literally means "*young men.*"

THE TRANSFER OF THE PROPHETIC MANTLE 3:1-3

the prophet returned to the capital at Samaria (v. 25). Elisha did not choose to imitate the semi-ascetic life-style of his master, but stayed for the most part in the capital working with and through the various kings.

III. ELISHA AND KING JEHORAM 3:1-22

Chapter three opens with the standardized introduction to the reign of Ahab's second son, Jehoram (vv. 1-3). The rest of the chapter is devoted to a description of a military campaign against Moab in which Jehoram and his Southern counterpart, Jehoshaphat, were the principal participants. Elisha accompanied the allied kings. As important as the *political* significance of this chapter is, it apparently has been included in Kings because of the role that the prophet of God played in this campaign.

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE REIGN OF JEHORAM 3:1-3

TRANSLATION

(1) Now Jehoram son of Ahab began to reign over Israel in Samaria in the eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat king of Judah, and he reigned twelve years. (2) And he did evil in the sight of the LORD, but not like his father nor like his mother; for he removed the pillar of Baal which his father had made. (3) Nevertheless, he clung to the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who caused Israel to sin; he did not turn away from it.

COMMENTS

A chronological difficulty arises from the synchronization in verse 1. For an explanation of the problem and a suggested solution, see the special note at the end of the chapter. The other information about Jehoram's reign is summarized in the following chart.

Ninth King of Israel

JORAM (JEHORAM) BEN AHAB'

852-841 B.C.

(*"Exalted by Yahweh"*)

II K 1:17; 3:1-27; 6:8-7:20; 9:1-26

Synchronism

Joram 1 = Jehoshaphat 18

Contemporary Prophet

Elisha

"The wicked are overthrown, and are not; but the house of the righteous shall stand." Proverbs 12:7

It is noteworthy that while Jehoram of Israel was considered by the author of Kings to be evil, he was not considered as bad as his father and his mother, Ahab and Jezebel. Jehoram seems to have taken warning from the fates of his father and brother so far as to abolish Baalism as the state religion. He "*put away*" the image of Baal which Ahab had erected in the Baal temple in Samaria (v. 2). The destruction of this image is recorded in 10:27. Jehoram's wickedness lay in the fact that he felt compelled to continue the apostate calf worship introduced by Jeroboam back in 931 B.C. (v. 3).

B. THE JOINT CAMPAIGN AGAINST MOAB 3:4-27

The one major effort of Jehoram's twelve-year reign was his effort to resubjugate Moab. In this effort Jehoram was able to enlist the services of Jehoshaphat of Judah. The good king from Jerusalem does not seem to have learned anything from his disastrous military alliance with Ahab (I K 22) and his equally disastrous commercial alliance with Ahaziah of Israel (II C 20:35f.). In the present section, the Moabite campaign unfolds. The author discusses (1) how the joint effort came to be undertaken (vv. 4-8); (2) the plight of the allied forces (vv. 9-15a); (3) the prophecy of Elisha (vv. 15b-20); (4) the

defeat of Moab (vv. 21-25); and (5) the siege of the Moabite capital at Kir-hareseth (3:26-27).

1. THE PLANNING OF THE CAMPAIGN (3:4-8)

TRANSLATION

(4) Now Mesha king of Moab was a sheep raiser, and he rendered to the king of Israel a hundred thousand lambs, and a hundred thousand rams with regard to wool. (5) And it came to pass when Ahab died, that the king of Moab rebelled against the king of Israel. (6) And King Jehoram went out in that day from Samaria and mobilized all Israel. (7) And he went and sent unto Jehoshaphat king of Judah, saying, The king of Moab has rebelled against me. Will you go up with me against Moab to battle? And he said, I will go up. I am like you, my people like your people, my horses like your horses. (8) And he said, Which way shall we go up? And he said, By the way of the wilderness of Edom.

COMMENTS

Before describing the war to resubjugate Moab, the historian repeats a bit of information as background to what he is about to narrate. In 1:1 he has already related that Moab revolted at the death of Ahab. Here he suggests the reason for that revolt: Moab had been treated oppressively. The Moabites had been forced to render as tribute to Samaria the wool of a hundred thousand sheep and goats annually (v. 4). This extraordinarily heavy tribute drove the Moabites to rebellion at the first opportunity which, as it turned out, was the death of the powerful Ahab (v. 5).

In response to the Moabite rebellion, King Jehoram mobilized his forces for an effort to resubjugate that region (v. 6). Jehoram knew that he would need help, and so he appealed to the old

friend and ally of his father, Jehoshaphat of Judah. In spite of the disastrous results of his two previous joint enterprises with the kings of the North; Jehoshaphat still maintained amicable relations with the Omride dynasty. Since Judah had, it would appear, recently suffered an attack by the combined forces of Moab and Ammon (II C 20:1-35), the Southern king was eager to participate in the operations against Moab. Jehoshaphat responded to the request of his Northern neighbor with a formula which is expressive of his willingness to enter into the closest possible alliance (v. 7).

There were two routes by which Moab could be approached by the allied forces. The kings might cross the Jordan and press southward across the Arnon river, the northern border of Moab; or they might elect to take the circuitous route down around the southern tip of the Dead Sea, and attack Moab from the south. Jehoram sought the advice of Jehoshaphat in determining the direction of the campaign, and Jehoshaphat recommended the circuitous route. There were at least two reasons for this recommendation. First, the king of Edom, being a vassal⁴ of Jehoshaphat, could add a contingent of troops to the allied cause if the two kings took the southern route. Then, too, Moab was probably far less fortified on the southern frontier, and an attack from that direction would perhaps catch Mesha off guard (v. 8).

The events in chapter 3 are chronologically *prior to* the translation of Elijah recorded in the previous chapter.⁵ Even before he became the official leader of the prophetic schools, Elisha was functioning as a prophet. His ministry began, it would seem, during the reign of Jehoram. While at this time Elisha

⁴ When last mentioned, Edom was ruled by a "deputy" appointed by the king of Judah (I K 22:47). There may have been a brief revolt by Edom during the reign of Jehoshaphat (II C 20:22). But the fact that Jehoshaphat could sail his navy out of the Edomite port of Ezion-geber (I K 22:48) suggests that he was in control of that area.

⁵ II Chronicles 21:12 refers to a letter written by Elijah to Jehoram of Judah apparently *after* the death of Jehoshaphat. In the present text Jehoshaphat is an active participant in the campaign against Moab.

was known primarily as an assistant to Elijah (cf. v. 11), in this chapter he functions independently of his master.

2. *THE PLIGHT OF THE ALLIES (3:9-15a)*

TRANSLATION

(9) And the king of Israel went up, along with the king of Judah and the king of Edom, and they went around in the way seven days; and there was no water for the camp, nor for the beasts which followed them. (10) And the king of Israel said, Alas! for the LORD has called these three kings to give them into the hand of Moab. (11) And Jehoshaphat said, Is there not here a prophet of the LORD, that we may inquire of the LORD from him? And one of the servants of the king of Israel answered and said, Elisha the son of Shaphat who poured water upon the hands of Elijah is here. (12) And Jehoshaphat said, The word of the LORD is with him. And the king of Israel and Jehoshaphat and the king of Edom went down unto him. (13) And Elisha said unto the king of Israel, What is there between us? Go unto the prophets of your father and unto the prophets of your mother. And the king of Israel said unto him, No, for the LORD has called these three kings to give them into the hand of Moab. (14) And Elisha said, As the LORD of hosts lives before whom I stand, surely, except for the fact that I respect Jehoshaphat king of Judah, I would not look unto, nor see you. (15) But now bring a musician.

COMMENTS

It took the allied kings seven days to travel the torturous hundred miles through the barren wilderness of Judah and around the Dead Sea to the borders of Moab. What was thought to be a perennial stream in that region had failed due to a lengthy drought, and the allies found themselves facing a

desperate situation without water (v. 9). The impious Jehoram was ready to blame their plight upon Yahweh in spite of the fact that there is no record of any prophet of God having sanctioned the expedition. It was not God who had called together these three kings; they had come together on their own accord, guided strictly by their own political interests. Jehoram assumed that the Lord meant to deliver this army into the hands of the king of Moab (v. 10).

Jehoshaphat, being a man of faith, was not ready to throw up his hands in despair. Even though he had neglected to consult a prophet of God prior to the expedition—a tragic oversight on his part—he was in this desperate hour anxious to turn to the Lord for guidance. When he inquired as to the availability of a prophet, one of the servants of Jehoram informed the kings that Elisha had accompanied the expedition. Apparently King Jehoram was not aware of Elisha's presence with the army. Whether the prophets of God normally accompanied the troops into battle, or whether this was a unique mission of Elisha directed by the Spirit is uncertain. In either case, it was God's good pleasure to deliver the allies through the instrumentality of this man of God. Elisha had been known in time past as the one who "*poured water on the hands of Elijah,*" i.e., had been his minister and servant (v. 11). Now God would demonstrate His power through this man for the first time before the leadership of both Israel and Judah.

Jehoshaphat was delighted to learn that Elisha was present. He was convinced that "*the word of the Lord is with him,*" i.e., that he was a true prophet of the Lord. Just how Jehoshaphat had come to have such regard for Elisha is uncertain. The present incident seems to be chronologically prior to the miracles recorded in chapter two. Perhaps it was the mere fact of Elisha's close association with Elijah which led Jehoshaphat to enthusiastically endorse him as the authorized exponent of God's will at that time. In any case, the allied kings were so humbled by the circumstances that *they* sought out Elisha rather than merely summoning him to their pavillion (v. 12).

Upon the approach of the three supplicants, Elisha unleashed

a sarcastic verbal barrage against Jehoram of Israel. The halfhearted and partial repentance of this monarch had not ingratiated him to this uncompromising man of God. The king had no ground of appeal to the prophet. The two had nothing in common. If Jehoram wanted prophetic counsel, let him seek out the four hundred court prophets of his father, or the pagan prophets still maintained by Jezebel the queen mother.

Jehoram responded to the prophetic sarcasm with meek deportment. In effect, he begged the prophet that his initial response not be his final response. After all, it was not just the king of Israel who was in desperate straits. *Three* kings were in danger of being delivered into the hand of Moab (v. 13). To this Elisha responded with solemn adjuration that it was only because of the presence of the godly Jehoshaphat that he would condescend to help the expedition (v. 14). The prophet then called for a musician to play some soothing song so that he could bring himself into the proper frame of mind to receive the divine revelation. While the musician played, the "*hand of the Lord,*" i.e., the power of the Spirit of God, came upon Elisha (v. 16).

3. THE PROPHECY OF ELISHA (3:15b-20)

TRANSLATION

(15) And it came to pass when the musician played, that the hand of the LORD came upon him. (16) And he said, Thus says the LORD, Make this valley full of ditches. (17) For thus says the LORD, You shall not see wind nor shall you see rain; but that valley shall be full of water, that you may drink, you and your cattle and your beasts. (18) And this is a light thing in the eyes of the LORD, for he will give Moab into your hands. (19) And you shall smite every fortified city and every choice city, and every good tree you shall fell, and every well of water you shall cover over, and every good portion of land you shall ruin with stones. (20) And it came to pass in the morning when

the sacrifice was offered up, that behold water continued to come from the way of Edom, and the land was filled with water.

COMMENTS

Under the influence of the Spirit of God, Elisha revealed to the royal petitioners the means by which the Lord would deliver them from their plight. The kings were to order ditches or pits dug throughout the valley by means of which the precious water which they were seeking might be detained (v. 16). The reason for this command was simple: A great storm would arise many miles from the allied camp, so far away that they would neither see any rain nor feel any wind. The parched valley where the kings were camped would shortly be filled with the runoff of that storm, and both man and beast would find relief from the gnawing thirst (v. 17). To the Lord of nature such manipulation of the natural phenomena was really a very easy matter. But not only would He deliver the allies *from* their present danger, He would also deliver Moab into their hands (v. 18).

Verse 19 is properly interpreted as a prophetic prediction of how the allies would completely overwhelm Moab. At the same time the verse is instructive as to the tactics employed in ancient warfare. The destruction of the fruit trees in an enemy's country was a common feature of the wars of that period.⁶ The stoppage of springs and wells was another common practice in ancient times.⁷ Still another tactic was the ruination of the farm land by spreading stones over the surface of the ground. In the rocky regions of Palestine the stones had to

⁶ It has sometimes been wrongly asserted that the Law of Moses forbade the cutting of enemy fruit trees during war. But the law in Deut. 20:19 only restricts the use of such trees *in siege works*. Furthermore, the grounds of this law are not moral but prudential. If the Israelites spared the fruit trees, then they would be able to enjoy the fruit of these trees.

⁷ The Philistines stopped up the wells of Isaac (Gen. 26:18). Hezekiah stopped up the springs outside Jerusalem when he expected to be besieged by the Assyrians (II C 32:3, 4).

first be cleared from a field. These stones, heaped up at the edges of the field, were to be spread afresh over the surface of the ground. Of course the purpose in all of these actions was to make the enemy suffer as much as possible.

True to the word of the prophet, the next morning about sunrise (*"when the meal offering was offered"*) a mighty stream surged through the channel near the allied camp. The water came *"by the way of Edom"* which suggests that the nocturnal storm had arisen in the mountains of Edom far distant from the borders of Moab. The rushing stream would rapidly have run off had not the allied soldiers prepared in advance the detaining ditches (v. 21).

4. *THE DEFEAT OF MOAB (3:21-25)*

TRANSLATION

(21) And when all of Moab had heard that the kings had come up to fight against them, they had gathered all who were able to gird on girdles, and upward, and they stood upon the border. (22) And they arose early in the morning, and the sun was shining upon the waters, and Moab saw the water on the other side red like blood, (23) And they said, This is blood; the kings have surely been slain, and they have smitten each man his companion, and now to the spoil, O Moab. (24) And when they came to the camp of Israel, the Israelites rose up and smote Moab, so that they fled from before them, but they went forward smiting the Moabites. (25) And the cities they tore down, and on every good portion each man threw stones, and filled it; and every well of water they covered, and every good tree they felled until only in Kir-hareseth the stones were left; but the slingers surrounded it and smote it.

COMMENTS

In the face of this surprise attack, the Moabites had made hasty preparations to defend their land. The king had ordered a total mobilization of "*all who were able to gird on girdles and upward,*" i.e., all the male population of full age. These troops assumed a defensive posture on the southern border of Moab, probably on the bank of the Wady-el-Ahsy (v. 21). Arising one morning, the Moabites spotted what they thought was blood throughout the camp of the allies (v. 22). What they really saw, of course, was the reddish early morning sun reflecting off the water⁸ that had been trapped during the night in the ditches prepared by the allies. Since there had been no rain during the night, the Moabites never suspected that the wady near the allied camp was full of water. The confused movement of men and beasts about the trenches seen from a distance suggested hostilities. The Moabite officers concluded that the three invading armies had turned against and had consumed one another⁹ in a bloody slaughter. Nothing was left to do but to gather the spoil from the allied camp. For this purpose the hosts of Moab surged forward in a disorderly rush (v. 23).

Apparently the allies anticipated the onrush of Moabites and thus kept the main body of their men concealed within the camp that they might ambush their adversaries. When the first wave of greedy Moabites reached the camp, the allies rose up from their ambush to smite and completely rout them (v. 24). True to the prediction of Elisha, the allies destroyed the cities, spread stones over the cultivated land, stopped up the wells, and felled the fruit trees. This devastation continued until finally only the stronghold of Kir-hareseth remained

⁸ Other commentators think the appearance of the water was due to soil discoloration in the region of Edom where the storm had originated, or to the reddish earth in the freshly dug ditches.

⁹ The Moabites knew by personal experience how fragile military alliances could be since they only recently had been involved in a coalition which had dissolved on the eve of battle because of some sharp differences between the members (II C 20:1-25).

untouched. The allies were forced to leave the stones of this place untouched. Nonetheless, allied slingers hurled their missiles over the wall of Kir-hareseth, thus grievously harassing it (v. 25).

5. *THE SIEGE OF KIR-HARESETH (3:26-27)*

TRANSLATION

(26) When the king of Moab saw that the battle was too strong for him, he took with him seven hundred men who drew the sword to break through unto the king of Edom; but he was not able. (27) So he took his firstborn son who would have succeeded him on the throne, and offered him up as a burnt offering upon the wall. And great anger came against Israel, and they departed from him, and returned to the land.

COMMENTS

Even at Kir-hareseth the fortunes of Moab continued to decline, and it soon became apparent to the king that he would not be able much longer to hold even this final fortress. The king of Moab then decided on a desperate gamble. Gathering seven hundred expert swordsmen, he attempted to break through the allied lines to reach the king of Edom. It is not entirely clear what he hoped to gain by this assault. Perhaps he regarded the king of Edom as the weakest member of the coalition and the least likely to offer effective resistance. By a very slight emendation in the text a much more reasonable reconstruction is possible. In Hebrew the words Edom and Aram are quite similar. It is possible that originally the text read "*break through to the king of Aram,*" in which case the text would be pointing to a desperate effort on the part of the king of Moab to break through the allied lines to safety in the territories of Aram.

The attempt to break through to the king of Edom (or Aram) failed, and the Moabites were again forced back into their beleaguered fortress (v. 26). The Moabite king was still not ready to surrender. Perhaps one supreme act of devotion to the deity would bring miraculous deliverance. With this thought in mind, the king of Moab took the crown prince and offered him up as a burnt offering to Chemosh upon the city wall in full view of both those who defended the city and those who attacked it. The sight of their king sacrificing his own firstborn son so stirred up the fury of the remaining Moabites¹⁰ against Israel that they fought with almost superhuman strength and determination. In the face of the determined opposition the allies began to weaken. Finally, the campaign was called off and each of the confederates returned to his own land (v. 27).

SPECIAL NOTE

CHRONOLOGICAL PROBLEM IN THE REIGN OF JEHORAM

According to I Kings 22:41, Jehoshaphat of Judah began to reign in the fourth year of Ahab. Ahab ruled twenty-two years (I K 16:29), and hence, it would seem, must have died in the *nineteenth* year of Jehoshaphat. Ahaziah reigned two years (I K 22:51) and therefore must have died at the earliest in the twentieth year of Jehoshaphat. But Jehoram is said to have begun ruling in the *eighteenth* year of Jehoshaphat. If the reasoning above be correct, it would mean that Jehoram began to rule before his father Ahab died or his brother Ahaziah reigned (II K 31).

¹⁰ Two other interpretations have found support: (1) That it was God who was angry with Israel because of what they had driven the king of Moab to do; and (2) that the allies as a whole, or one of the members of the coalition, became so angry and disgusted with what the king of Moab had done they simply refused to press the attack any further.

The solution to this chronological difficulty lies in the recognition of the following points:

1. During this period Judah and Israel used different systems of reckoning the regnal years of their kings. Israel used the nonaccession year system where the few months of reign prior to the first New Year of a king's reign were counted as year one. In Judah those same months were called the accession year and *not* counted.

2. During this period the Israelite new year began in the spring; the Judaeon new year in the fall.

3. All difficulties are erased if one recognizes that I Kings 22:41 is based on the Judaeon system, and I Kings 16:29, 22:51 and II Kings 3:1 on the Israelite system of reckoning.

The following chart illustrates how all the relevant verses can be harmonized.

THE SYNCHRONISM OF ISRAELITE KINGS WITH THE REIGN OF JEHOSHAPHAT OF JUDAH			
Reference	Judah	Israel	Notes
I Kings 22:41	Jehoshaphat 1	Ahab 4	This synchronism is based on the <i>Judaeon system</i> of counting where the accession year is ignored. Jehoshaphat's absolute rule began in the fall of 870; Ahab's fourth year ended in spring of 869 B.C.
I Kings 16:29	Jehoshaphat 17	Ahab 22	Here the <i>Israelite system</i> of count is used. The accession year is counted as year 1. The twenty-second year of Ahab began in the spring of 853. The seventeenth year of Jehoshaphat ended in the fall of the same year. Ahab must have died late in 853 B.C.

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THE SYNCHRONISM OF ISRAELITE KINGS WITH THE REIGN OF JEHOShAPHAT OF JUDAH			
Reference	Judah	Israel	Notes
I Kings 22:51	Jehoshaphat 17	Ahaziah 1	By the Israelite system of counting, the few months from the death of Ahab to the spring New Year (852) would be counted as year 1 of Ahaziah. The few months he reigned after that New Year would be counted as year 2.
II Kings 3:1	Jehoshaphat 18	Jehoram 1	The eighteenth year of Jehoshaphat began in the fall of 853. It must have been in the summer of 852 that Jehoram began to reign.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER SIXTEEN

I. FACTS TO MASTER

A. Important names to identify in relation to this chapter:

- | | |
|------------|----------------|
| 1. Elijah | 4. Jehoshaphat |
| 2. Elisha | 5. Mesha |
| 3. Jehoram | |

B. Important places to be identified in relation to this chapter:

- | | | |
|------------|---------------|-----------------|
| 1. Gilgal | 4. Jordan | 7. Moab |
| 2. Bethel | 5. Mt. Carmel | 8. Edom |
| 3. Jericho | 6. Samaria | 9. Kir-hareseth |

C. Important numbers:

- Number of the sons of the prophets who observed the miraculous crossing of the Jordan

2. Amount of wool Mesha was forced to render to Israel annually
 3. Number of juvenile delinquents who confronted Elisha at Bethel
 4. Number of kings who invaded Moab
 5. Number of days it took the allied forces to make the trip around the Dead Sea
 6. Number of swordsmen with whom Mesha tried to break through the allied lines
- D. Words and phrases which should bring to remembrance key events in this chapter:
- | | | |
|---------------------|-------------------------|--------------------|
| 1. whirlwind | 5. chariot of fire | 9. bears |
| 2. sons of prophets | 6. My father, My father | 10. pillar of Baal |
| 3. mantle | 7. jar of salt | 11. trenches |
| 4. double portion | 8. baldhead | 12. slingers |

II. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. For what purpose did Elijah make his trip to Gilgal, Bethel and Jericho before his translation? Why did Elisha insist on accompanying him? How did the sons of the prophets know that Elijah would be translated that day?
2. Why did Elisha ask Elijah for a double portion of his spirit?
3. Did the sons of the prophets actually see the chariot of fire sweep Elijah away to heaven? Why did they wish to search for him?
4. Why did the Lord part the waters of Jordan first for Elijah and then for Elisha?
5. What was the purpose of the salt which Elisha poured into the noxious waters at Jericho?
6. Why did Elisha "*curse*" the forty-two young men at Bethel?
7. How would you evaluate the religious policy of Jehoram?
8. Why was Jehoshaphat so eager to accompany Jehoram on his campaign to resubjugate Moab? In what way

- did his presence prove to be a blessing to the Northern king?
9. How was it that God provided water to the allied kings in the wilderness of Edom?
 10. Why did the Moabites so recklessly attack the camp of Israel?
 11. Why did Mesha try to break out to reach the king of Edom?
 12. Why did Mesha sacrifice his eldest son when his capital was under siege?
 13. Did the Moabite campaign end in victory or defeat for the allies? Whose “anger” against Israel caused the termination of the battle?

THE SECOND ELIJAH

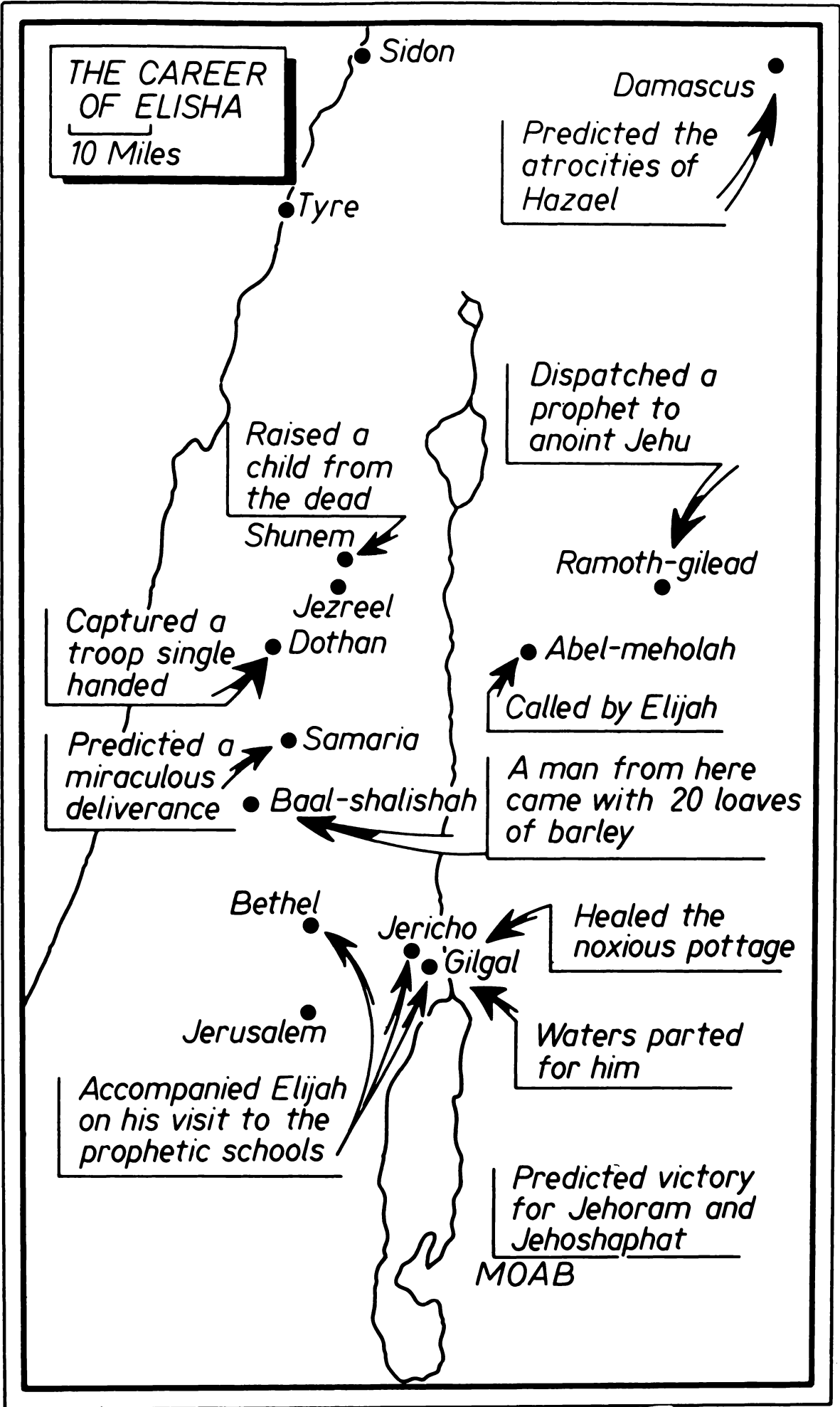
I. The Prophecy

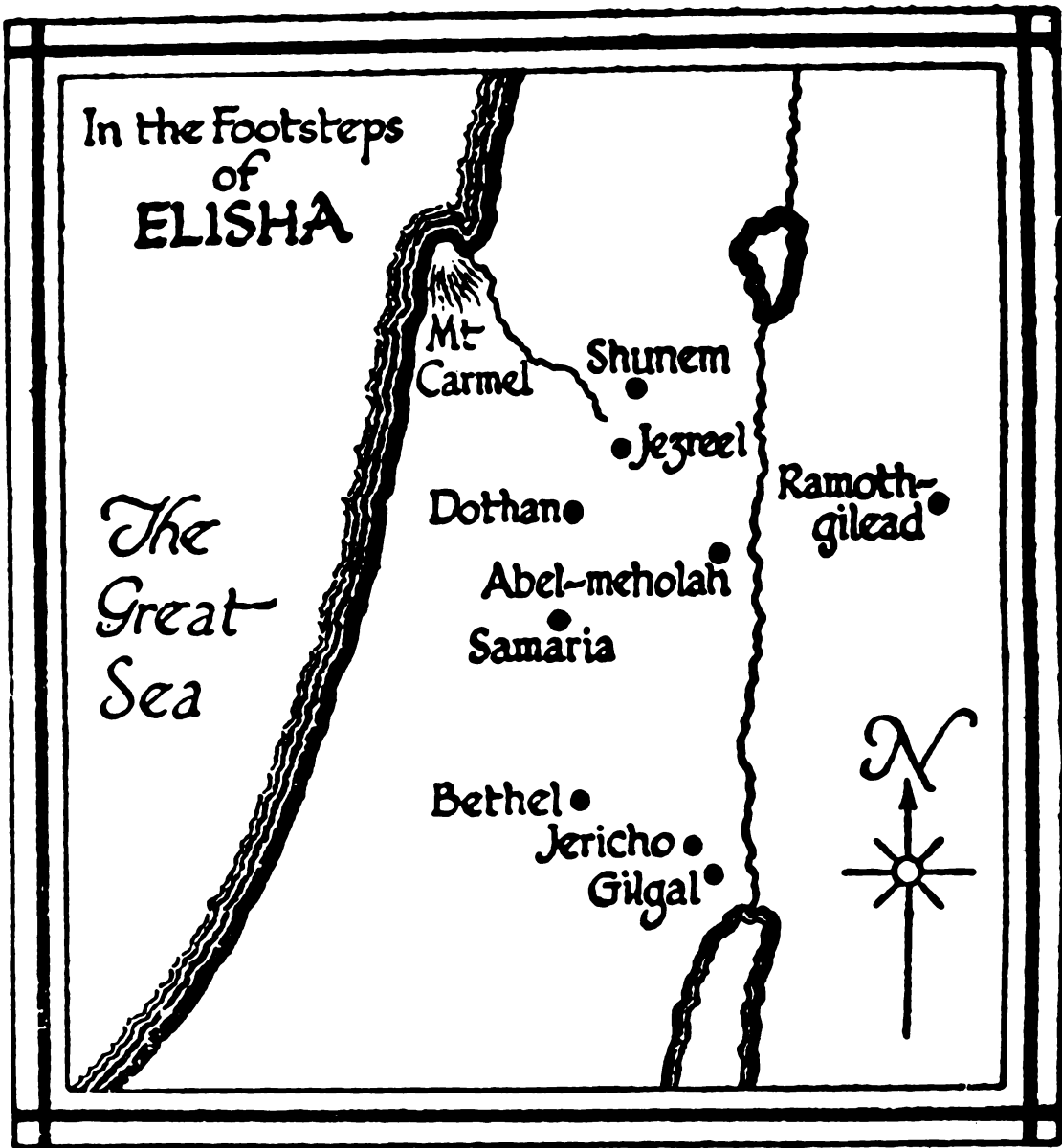
“Behold, I am about to send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and terrible day of the Lord.” Malachi 4:5

II. The Fulfillment

“And if you care to accept it, he himself [John the Baptist] is Elijah, who was to come.” Matt. 11:14

*“And he answered and said, Elijah is coming and will restore all things; but I say unto you, that Elijah already has come Then the disciples understood that he had spoken to them about John the Baptist.”
Matt. 17:11-13*





Drawings by Horace Knowles
from the British and Foreign Bible Society

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

PRIVATE MIRACLES IN THE MINISTRY OF ELISHA

II Kings 4:1—6:7

Elisha was truly God's wonder worker among the Old Testament prophets. His ministry was undergirded by a large number and wide variety of miracles. In 4:1—6:7 eight of his miraculous works have been collected. All eight have to do with individuals or small groups of disciples. All save one were beneficent in character. Classification of these wondrous works is difficult, but perhaps the following breakdown will be useful: (1) miracles on behalf of two faithful women (4:1-37); (2) miracles on behalf of the sons of the prophets (4:38-44); (3) a miracle on behalf of an Aramean general (5:1-19); (4) a judicial miracle (5:20-27); and (5) a levitation miracle (6:1-7).

I. MIRACLES ON BEHALF OF TWO FAITHFUL WOMEN 4:1-37

Elisha performed three miracles for two faithful female disciples. For a destitute widow he performed a miracle of multiplication of oil so that she might have the wherewithal to pay her bills (vv. 1-7). For the wealthy woman of Shunem he made a wondrous prediction (vv. 8-17). Later for the same woman he performed what surely must have been his most stupendous miracle: the resurrection of a child (vv. 18-37).

A. THE MIRACULOUS INCREASE OF OIL 4:1-7

TRANSLATION

(1) Now a woman, one of the wives of the sons of the prophets, cried out unto Elisha, saying, Your servant, my husband died, and you yourself know that your servant was a God-fearing man; but the creditor came to take my two children for himself

for slaves. (2) And Elisha said unto her, What shall I do for you? Tell me what you have in the house. And she said, Your handmaiden has nothing at all in the house except an anointing of oil. (3) And he said, Go and ask for yourself vessels from the outside from all your neighbors, empty vessels not a few. (4) Then come and shut the door on yourself and on your sons, and pour out into all these vessels, and remove the full ones. (5) So she went from him, and shut the door on herself and on her sons, who brought the vessels unto her; and she poured out, (6) And it came to pass when the vessels were full, she said unto her sons, Bring unto me another vessel. And he said unto her, There are no more vessels. And the oil ceased. (7) And she came and told the man of God. And he said, Go sell the oil, and pay your creditor, and you and your sons shall live on that which remains.

COMMENTS

In the first paragraph of chapter 4, Elisha comes to the rescue of a destitute widow. She did not hesitate to ask the prophet for assistance because (1) her husband had been a member of that prophetic order over which Elisha presided; and (2) because he had been a God-fearing man. When her prophet-husband had died, the creditor had demanded immediate payment of some debt which the family owed. Since the widow could not pay off the loan, the creditor took her two sons into slavery in lieu of the loan¹ (v. 1). Elisha immediately recognized his obligation to help the poor woman.² He first inquired whether or not she had anything in her house that he might sell in order to pay off the debt. As it turned out she had only an anointing

¹ In primitive communities, men borrowed upon their personal credit, and the primary security for debt was regarded as being their own persons, the value of their labor, and that of their dependents.

² The Mosaic law often commands care for the widows and fatherless: Ex. 22:22-24; Deut. 14:29; 24:17, 19; 26:12 etc.

of oil, i.e., as much oil as would suffice for one anointing of her body (v. 2). Elisha then instructed the woman to secure from all her neighbors empty vessels of every size and description (v. 3). This not only would test the faith of the woman, but would undergird the eternal principle that God helps him who helps himself. The woman is further instructed to take those empty vessels into the privacy of her home and pour into them the small amount of oil which she possessed. As each vessel became full it was to be set aside and replaced by another empty vessel in order that the pouring might be continuous (v. 4). The miracle was to be performed inconspicuously lest the prophet be overwhelmed with applications for similar aid to others.

The widow obeyed precisely the instructions of the prophet with regard to the secrecy. Her sons would bring her the empty vessels she had collected, and she would pour the oil into them (v. 5). When every last vessel in the house was filled, the oil ceased flowing (v. 6). God will not permit waste. Had the oil continued to flow, it would have spilled upon the floor and been useless for any purpose. The woman did not feel entitled to make use of the oil without further instructions from the "*man of God*," i.e., Elisha. The prophet directed her then to sell the oil and pay off the debt. After satisfying the claims of her creditor with part of the money, she would be able to support herself and her sons on the remainder (v. 7).

B. PREDICTIONS REGARDING THE SHUNAMMITE 4:8-17

TRANSLATION

(8) And it came to pass one day that Elisha passed over unto Shunem, and there was a great lady who constrained him to eat bread. And it came to pass whenever he passed through, he turned aside there to eat bread. (9) And she said unto her husband, Behold now I know that the one who passes by us

continually is a holy man of God. (10) Let us make, I pray you, a small chamber on the wall, and let us put there a bed, table, chair and lamp, and it shall come to pass when he comes unto us, he may turn in there. (11) And it came to pass on the day that he came there, that he turned aside unto the chamber and lay down there. (12) And he said unto Gehazi his servant, Call to this Shunammite. And he called to her, and she stood before him. (13) And he said unto him, Say, I pray you, unto her, Behold you have cared for us with all this care. What is to be done for you? Do you have a matter pertaining to the king or to the captain of the host? And she said, In the midst of my people I continue to dwell. (14) And he said, Then what may be done for her? And Gehazi said, Truly she has no son and her husband is old. (15) And he said, Call to her. And he called to her, and she stood in the entrance. (16) At this season when the time comes around you will be embracing a son. And she said, No, my lord, O man of God, do not deceive your handmaid. (17) And the woman conceived and bore a son at that season when the time came around as Elisha had spoken to her.

COMMENTS

As he traveled about the Northern Kingdom, Elisha would frequently pass through Shunem, a village in Galilee on the edge of the plain of Esdraelon. A "*great woman*," i.e., a woman of substance, lived there who was so zealously hospitable that she constrained the prophet to eat his meals in her home whenever he passed through the village (v. 8). With the passing of time, the wealthy Shunammite became convinced that Elisha was truly worthy of the title he bore, "*man of God*" (v. 9), and she wished to do more for him than she hitherto had done. She suggested to her husband that a special room be built for the prophet "*on the wall*" of their home. By this she probably means a small addition to the existing upper chamber of the house—a tiny room resting partly upon the wall of the house, partly projecting beyond it much like a balcony. The woman

planned to furnish this private apartment in such a way that it could serve not only as a sleeping chamber but as a study as well (v. 10). This understanding woman knew that from time to time the busy man of God would need a retreat where he could rest, study, and perhaps write.

The prophet was overjoyed with the generous provision of his Shunammite hosts (v. 11) and wished to reciprocate. He therefore instructed Gehazi his servant—here mentioned for the first time—to summon the Shunammite woman. It would seem that Gehazi stood in the doorway of the prophet's private apartment and called the woman, perhaps to the foot of the stairs leading up to that chamber. The woman came and stood in his, i.e., Gehazi's, presence (v. 12). From his chamber the prophet directed his servant to inquire what might be done for this woman in return for her gracious hospitality. Would she desire that he use his influence with the king or commander of the army on her behalf? But this woman was no socialite or ladder climber. She was perfectly content to dwell among the people of her native village (v. 13). The Shunammite had not acted out of selfish motivations when she had built this chamber for the man of God, but had done this as an act of devotion to God.

Elisha then addressed Gehazi. If the woman would suggest nothing herself, could Gehazi suggest anything that might be done for her? It would appear that the woman's unselfishness increased the prophet's desire to do something for her. Gehazi pointed out to his master that the woman was barren and her husband was old (v. 14). Though the woman had made no complaint about this matter, Gehazi knew that to be barren was regarded by all Hebrew women as an unbearable reproach. He therefore assumed that the Shunammite must wish offspring. Elisha accepted his suggestion without a moment's hesitation. Gehazi was then directed to summon the woman directly into the presence of the prophet. The Shunammite came and stood in the doorway of Elisha's apartment (v. 15). Out of modesty and respect she would advance no farther. The prophet announced to her that *"about this season when the time comes*

around (lit., *revives*),” i.e., about this time a year hence, she would be embracing a son.

The Shunammite, like Sarah before her, was incredulous in the face of this shocking announcement. She feared that the prophet was toying with her, arousing hopes which were only doomed to disappointment. She begged Elisha not to deceive her (v. 16). Nevertheless, at that very season a year later the woman gave birth to a son just as the prophet had predicted (v. 17).

C. RESURRECTION OF THE SHUNAMMITE'S SON 4:18-37

TRANSLATION

(18) And the child grew, and it came to pass one day that he went unto his father to the reapers. (19) And he said unto his father, My head, my head! And he said unto the lad, Carry him unto his mother. (20) And he carried him, and brought him unto his mother, and he sat upon her knees unto noon and died. (21) And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and shut the door upon him, and went out. (22) And she called unto her husband, and said, Send me, I pray you, one of the servants, and one of the donkeys that I may hasten unto the man of God, and come again. (23) And he said, Why are you going unto him? Today is not the new moon or sabbath. And she said, it will be well. (24) And she saddled the donkey and said unto her servant, Drive, and go forward, Do not slacken for my sake the riding unless I command you. (25) And she went, and came unto the man of God unto Mt. Carmel. And it came to pass when the man of God saw her from afar, that he said unto Gehazi his servant, Behold that is the Shunammite! (26) Now run, I pray you, to meet her, and say to her, Is it well with you, Is it well with your husband, Is it well with the child? And she said, It is well. (27) And she came unto the man of God unto the mount and grasped his feet. And Gehazi drew

near to thrust her away, but the man of God said, Leave her alone; for her soul is troubled, and the LORD has hidden it from me, and has not declared it to me. (28) And she said, Did I ask a son from my lord? Did I not say, Do not deceive me? (29) And he said to Gehazi, Gird up your loins, and take my staff in your hand, and go. If you find a man, do not bless him, and if he bless you do not answer him, and you shall place my staff upon the face of the lad. (30) And the mother of the lad said, As the LORD lives, and as your soul lives, I surely will not leave you. And he arose, and went after her. (31) And Gehazi passed over before them, and put the staff upon the face of the lad, but there was no voice nor hearing. And he returned to meet him, and told him, saying, The lad was not aroused. (32) And Elisha came to the house, and behold the lad was dead, and laid upon his bed. (33) And he came and shut the door upon the two of them, and prayed unto the LORD. (34) And he got up, and lay upon the child, and put his face upon his face, his eyes upon his eyes, his hands upon his hands, and he stretched himself upon him; and he warmed the flesh of the child. (35) Then he turned and walked in the house once to and fro; and he went up and stretched himself upon him, and the lad sneezed seven times; and the lad opened his eyes. (36) And he called unto Gehazi and said, Call unto this Shunammite. And he called her and she came unto him. And he said, Take up your son. (37) And she came and fell upon his feet, and bowed to the ground. And she took up her son and went out.

COMMENTS

A four or five year time gap exists between verse 17 and 18, and the Shunammite's infant has become a young lad. The child delighted in accompanying his father to the grain fields to watch the harvest operation. On one such day (v. 18), tragedy struck. In the heat of the morning sun, the lad became the victim of a sunstroke. The father ordered a servant boy to take the child to his mother, indoors and out of the heat (v. 19). The

mother held the boy on her lap doing what she could for him until noon when he finally expired (v. 20).

The Shunammite took the limp body of her son up into the apartment of Elisha and laid it on the prophet's bed, and shut the door behind her (v. 21). It seems that the woman wished to conceal the death of the child until she had seen what Elisha could do for her. She was not ignorant of the story of how Elijah had once resurrected a lad from the dead, and she had hope that a similar miracle might be performed on her behalf. But fearing that her husband might not share her faith, and that he might refuse to supply her with an animal for transportation, the Shunammite did not tell her husband what had become of the lad.

The woman "*called to her husband*" from the house, without calling him into the house. She expressed her desire to visit Elisha, but did not state the object of her visit. The nearest part of Mt. Carmel being some fifteen miles away, she asked for the necessary riding animal and escort. She needed the donkey so that she might "*hasten*" to the prophet and "*come again,*" i.e., return home before nightfall (v. 22). The husband demurred; he could see no reason to divert a work animal from the harvest work so that his wife might make such a trip. After all, it was not new moon or sabbath, occasions when the pious in the Northern Kingdom assembled to study the word of God at the feet of a prophet. The husband had no idea that his son was dead. He probably had not even realized that the child was in danger, and now in the light of his wife's somewhat unexpected request he must have assumed that the child had recovered. The Shunammite responded to her husband's reluctance with a single word in the original—the word *shalom*, literally, "*peace*" (v. 23). *Shalom* would be equivalent in English to saying, "all right" and indicates a refusal to argue a point. Not wishing to offend his wife, the husband did not press her for an explanation. The donkey and the servant were placed at her disposal without further comment. The Shunammite saddled the donkey and ordered the servant to get the animal moving, and not to slacken the pace except at her instruction (v. 24).

PRIVATE MIRACLES IN THE MINISTRY OF ELISHA 4:18-37

As the woman approached Mt. Carmel, Elisha spotted her from afar (lit., *over against him*). Since it would appear that the Shunammite was a regular attender at the special prophetic holy day gatherings (cf. v. 23), Elisha had probably seen this stately woman approaching his residence at Carmel on numerous occasions (v. 25). He sensed something must be wrong, both from the unexpected nature of the visit and from the obvious haste in which the woman was making her way in his direction. His anxiety aroused, Elisha ordered Gehazi to run forward to meet the woman and to inquire as to her well-being and that of her household. To Gehazi's urgent queries the Shunammite gave the same ambiguous and non-committal answer she had earlier given to her husband.³ She could not unburden her heart to any save Elisha himself.

When she reached the prophet she embraced his feet in a posture of supplication. For the moment she said nothing. Regarding this action as one unduly familiar or unduly importunate, Gehazi stepped forward to thrust the woman away from his master. Elisha saw that the woman was deeply distressed and would not permit his servant to disturb her even though her action may have violated the etiquette of that time. The Lord had not seen fit to reveal to the mind of the prophet the circumstances which would cause such obvious agony on the part of his dear friend, and so Elisha simply had to wait until the woman gained enough composure to relate the matter to him (v. 27).

Through her sobs the woman was finally able to begin her story. Two rhetorical questions are all she needs to speak (v. 28). She had not complained of her childlessness, nor had she requested that the prophet give her a son. At the initial announcement to her, the Shunammite had begged that the prophet not deceive her, not make her the victim of a cruel joke. Her words suggested that something worse than that had now happened.

³ The Shunammite's greeting to Gehazi might have been an expression of her faith—*"all is going to be well."*

It is greater misery to have a child and lose him than not to have had one at all.

The woman needed say no more. Elisha issued orders for Gehazi to hasten immediately to the Shunammite's home. He should take no time out for lengthy greetings or pleasantries en route. When he reached the child, Gehazi was to lay Elisha's staff⁴ upon the lad's face (v. 29). This action was designed to comfort and cheer the mother and to raise in her a firm expectation of the resurrection which the prophet anticipated being allowed to perform. The Shunammite misinterpreted Elisha's instructions to Gehazi. She thought that Elisha intended to do nothing more than trust the child's recovery to such power as might reside in his walking staff. She was not about to return to her home without the prophet, and so Elisha arose and went with her as, no doubt, he had intended to do from the first (v. 30).

Gehazi carried out his master's orders, but the staff produced no results as far as the child was concerned. The boy remained still and silent. Gehazi then retraced his steps to meet Elisha who by this time was well on his way to Shunem, and reported to his master that the child had not revived (v. 31). From this it is clear that Gehazi had expected the staff to effect an awakening; but there is nothing to show that Elisha himself had so expected. While on occasion in Bible history God condescended to allow miracles to be wrought by the instrumentality of inanimate objects,⁵ yet such instances are comparatively rare, and form exceptions to what may be called the usual divine economy of miracles. Miracles are, as a rule, attached in Scripture to intense unwavering faith—faith, sometimes within those that are the objects of them, almost always in those who

⁴ Cf. Luke 10:4. The staff was the symbol of a man's power and prestige (Gen. 38:18). In the case of Moses, the staff was the external vehicle through which miracles were wrought (cf. Ex. 4:1-4; 17:8-13).

⁵ Elisha's bones once revived a dead man (II K 13:21); an infirm woman once was healed by touching the hem of Jesus garment (Mark 5:25-34); handkerchiefs or aprons from the body of Paul were brought to the sick and their diseases left them (Acts 19:12).

are the workers of them. Elisha had a benevolent objective in sending Gehazi ahead with the staff, but that objective was not the resurrection of the lad.

Elisha came to the house and found the dead child lying on the bed in his private apartment (v. 32). The prophet shut the door of the chamber in order that he might not be disturbed during his efforts to revive the boy. Falling to his knees, the inarticulate prayer that had been upon his heart from the moment he left Carmel was verbalized (v. 33). Following the example of his master Elijah (cf. I K 17:21), Elisha stretched himself upon the lad and brought his flesh as close as he could to the flesh of the child. The idea in this seems to have been to prepare the body for re-inhabitation of the soul or spirit by restoring warmth to it. Aside from this practical purpose, the act would also demonstrate the faith of the prophet that God would permit this great miracle to take place. Elisha's efforts accomplished their purpose; the child's body was actually warmed (v. 34). Yet no signs of life appeared. The prophet, somewhat perplexed, got up from his prone position and paced in the room, doubtlessly analyzing the situation and praying as he did so.⁶ Then he again stretched himself upon the child, and shortly the child sneezed seven times—showing the recovery of his suspended respiration—and opened his eyes (v. 35). The Shunammite was summoned, no doubt from the lower story of the house, and bidden to take up her restored child (v. 36). As anxious as the woman was to once again embrace her son, she first bowed before the prophet in humble gratitude; then she took up her son and went out to spend those precious first moments alone with the lad (v. 37).

II. MIRACLES ON BEHALF OF THE SONS OF THE PROPHETS 4:38-44

As the spiritual head of the sons of the prophets, Elisha frequently was called upon apparently to use his powers for the

⁶ Perhaps the walking about was an act of relaxation after the intense physical and spiritual concentration.

benefit of the group. On two occasions he rescued these men from serious sickness and possible death. In the closing verses of chapter 4 the author narrates (1) the healing of the noxious pottage (vv. 38-41); and (2) the multiplication of the loaves (vv. 42-44).

A. HEALING OF THE NOXIOUS POTTAGE 4:38-41

TRANSLATION

(38) And Elisha returned to Gilgal. Now famine was in the land; and the sons of the prophets were sitting before him. And he said to his lad, Set on the great pot, and boil pottage for the sons of the prophets. (39) And one went out into the field to gather herbs, and he found a vine of the field, and gathered from it a garment full of gourds of the field, and he came and sliced them into the pot of pottage; but they knew it not. (40) And they poured out to the men to eat, and it came to pass as they were eating of the pottage, that they cried out and said, Death in the pot, O man of God. And they were not able to eat it. (41) And he said, Take meal and throw it in the pot. And he said, Pour out to the people that they may eat. And there was no evil thing in the pot.

COMMENTS

The next miracle related of Elisha took place during a famine when the prophet was visiting the prophetic school at Gilgal on one of his regular tours of the land. During the course of his lecture, while the sons of the prophets were sitting before him, Elisha ordered that the large communal pot be put on the fire, and pottage or vegetable stew be prepared (v. 38). The sons of the prophets fanned out in the neighborhood to look for wild fruits or vegetables which might be put into the stew. Perhaps because of the famine the men could not be as selective as they

PRIVATE MIRACLES IN THE MINISTRY OF ELISHA 4:42-44

usually were. One young chap came upon some kind of wild vine, the fruit of which looked very appealing.⁷ Gathering as many of these "gourds" as he could carry, he returned to the pot and began to skin and slice them into the pot. The prophetic students standing about were either paying no attention to what their colleague was doing, or else they failed to recognize the gourds as poisonous (v. 39).

As the men were eating of the vegetable stew, they came to realize, either by the bitter taste of the brew or else by the nauseous effects, that they were eating unwholesome food. Jumping to the worst possible conclusion, they thought they were being poisoned, and so cried out to Elisha, "*O man of God, there is death in the pot!*" No one was able to continue eating the stew (v. 40). Elisha took prompt action. He called for some meal and cast it into the pot. Meal, of course, has no power in and of itself to neutralize poison any more than salt has to purify bitter waters (cf. II K 2:19-21). Elisha could as easily have performed this miracle by a spoken word. But under divine direction, he was instructed to employ meal, the most wholesome food of man, to *symbolize* the purification of the pottage. It is possible that the meal might have modified some of the bitterness of the brew and its injurious qualities. But the primary purpose of the meal seems to have been symbolic. At any rate the pottage was served anew, and those who had faith in Elisha and continued to eat of it were harmed in no way (v. 41).

v:

B. MULTIPLICATION OF THE LOAVES 4:42-44

TRANSLATION

(42) And a man came from Baal-shalisha, and he brought to the man of God bread of the firstfruits, twenty loaves of barley

⁷ Dalman (SSW, pp. 81ff.) attempts to identify the particular plant here involved. He points to a vine which grows in the vicinity of Jericho which produces yellow fruits like melons. These melons have powerful laxative properties and if eaten in great quantity may indeed be fatal. The technical name of the plant is *citrullus colocynthus*.

and grain in his sack. And he said, Give it to the people, that they might eat. (43) And his minister said, How shall I place this before a hundred men? And he said, Give it to the people that they may eat, for thus says the LORD: They shall eat, and there shall be leftovers. (44) And he put it before them, and they ate, and there were leftovers according to the word of the LORD.

COMMENTS

Gilgal seems to be the setting for the final miracle recorded in chapter 4. A man came from near-by Baal-shalisha to bring Elisha the firstfruits of his harvest. It would seem from this that the more pious among the Israelites regarded the prophets as having inherited the position of the Levitical priests whom Jeroboam had driven from the land. According to the law, the firstfruits of grain, wine and oil were to be given to the priests (Num. 18:13; Deut. 18:4, 5). The man brought twenty loaves of bread, each loaf being the equivalent of what one man would eat at one meal. Along with these cakes of bread the man brought a few ripe stalks of grain which were a token of his gratitude for God's harvest mercies (cf. Lev. 23:10).

Upon receiving this small gift, Elisha ordered that the loaves be placed before the sons of the prophets who resided at Gilgal (v. 42). Elisha's servant—presumably Gehazi—was incredulous. The amount of food was scarcely sufficient to suffice for a fifth of the hundred men living at Gilgal! But in the face of this objection the prophet repeated his instructions, and added an explanation in the form of a prophetic oracle. God had revealed to him that the quantity of food would prove ample for the hundred men, and that they would show that they had had enough by leaving some of it (v. 43). The result was as the prophet predicted (v. 44).

It is useless to speculate how this miracle was wrought, whether by an augmentation of the quantity of the food supernaturally produced, or by a lessening of the appetites of the

men. A careful study of the feeding miracles attributed to the Lord Jesus would suggest that the former explanation is the correct one. In recording this episode the writer probably had two motives in mind: (1) to demonstrate how the Lord provides for His servants; and (2) to furnish another example of the miraculous powers of Elisha, of a different kind from those previously related.

III. A MIRACLE ON BEHALF OF AN ARAMEAN GENERAL 5:1-19

The account of the healing of the leprous Naaman moves through three stages which may be labeled (1) Naaman's condition (vv. 1-7), (2) Naaman's cleansing (vv. 8-14), and (3) Naaman's conversion (vv. 15-19).

A. NAAMAN'S CONDITION 5:1-7

TRANSLATION

(1) Now Naaman the captain of the host of the king of Aram had become a great man before his master, and was held in honor, because by him the LORD had given deliverance to Aram; and the man was a mighty man of valor, a leper. (2) And the Arameans had gone out in marauding bands, and had taken captive from the land of Israel a young maiden; and she attended the wife of Naaman. (3) And she said unto her mistress, O that my master were before the prophet who is in Samaria, then he would heal him of his leprosy. (4) And he went and told his master, saying, Such and such the maiden who is from the land of Israel said. (5) And the king of Aram said, Go, depart, that I may send a letter unto the king of Israel. And he departed, and took with him ten talents of silver, six thousand pieces of gold, and ten changes of garments. (6) And he brought the letter unto the king of Israel, saying, Now when this letter has

come unto you, Behold I have sent unto you Naaman my servant, that you might heal him of his leprosy. (7) And it came to pass when the king of Israel read the letter, that he rent his garments, and said, Am I God, to kill and to make alive, that this man is sending unto me to heal a man of his leprosy? Surely therefore note, I pray you, and see how he is picking a quarrel with me.

COMMENTS

It seems that Benhadad, who in his younger days had personally led the armies of Aram into the field of battle, had made Naaman⁸ the captain of his host. Naaman had successfully led his forces in some of the initial encounters with Assyria which now was threatening the independence of Aram. Naaman did not realize it, but he was being used for this purpose by the Lord, the God of all the earth. The man was held in honor;⁹ he was a mighty man of valor, i.e., a good soldier; but he was a leper (v. 1). Leprosy had many degrees. Some of the lighter kinds would not incapacitate a man for military service or make him unfit for official court duties. Naaman's "leprosy" (*tsara'at*) may have been more in the nature of an embarrassing skin disease.

Hostilities between Israel and Aram had continued after Ahab's expedition against Ramoth-gilead (I K 22) with the Arameans seemingly having the upper hand. Marauding bands of Arameans would make thrusts deep into Israelite territory from time to time for the purpose of capturing slaves and taking other valuables. On one such raid a little maiden was taken captive who eventually passed into the possession of Naaman's wife (v. 2). With the passing of time, the little maid developed

⁸ Naaman is attested as a proper name in the administrative texts from Ras Shamra. The name means "*gracious, pleasant.*" Gray, OTL, p. 504.

⁹ Lit., "*to lift up the face.*" The phrase refers to the gesture of the king stretching forth his scepter and touching the face of a suppliant who had bowed to the ground before him, and lifting that face up. Gray, OTL, p. 504.

a genuine affection for her kindly captors, and she became genuinely distressed over the grievous affliction of her master. One day in the course of her duties, the little maid expressed aloud the wish that was in her heart, that Naaman might be brought into contact with the powerful and kindly prophet¹⁰ in Samaria. She was confident that Elisha could cure him of his leprosy (v. 3). The sacred historian tells nothing of the animated conversation which must have followed this confident assertion of the curability of Naaman. At first the mistress must have been incredulous, attributing the maid's confidence to her youth and simplicity. But gentle interrogation led to the revelation of dozens of marvelous stories about this man of God. The mistress concluded that she should share this information with her husband and urge him to pursue this possibility of cure, however remote it might seem.

However skeptical Naaman himself might have been, he was finally convinced by his wife's persistence to pursue the matter. He reported the suggestion of the Israelite maid to the king (v. 4), and much to the surprise of Naaman, the king took the whole matter seriously. He too was willing to try anything to restore the health of his friend and captain. The king urged an immediate departure, and added that he would send a letter by the hand of Naaman to the king of Israel urging that he do what he could to cure Naaman of his leprosy. So Naaman departed, taking with him an enormous treasure with which he thought he could pay for his cleansing. Ten talents of silver would be roughly equivalent to \$20,000. The unit of measure is omitted for the gold, but it is likely that the amount would be six thousand shekels' weight which would roughly be equivalent to \$60,000. Finally, in addition to the silver and gold, Naaman took ten changes of garments to bestow upon his benefactor (v. 5).

That Naaman would be able so easily to enter the court of the

¹⁰ It should be noted that the maid refers to Elisha as a "*prophet*" rather than a "*man of God*." Outside Israel the term "*prophet*" would have been more easily understood.

king of Israel with the letter from his king suggests that the state of hostilities between the two nations temporarily had been suspended. Possibly some kind of treaty arrangement existed between Aram and Israel at this time. The sacred historian gives only the gist or drift of that letter which, no doubt, was draped with all the diplomatic niceties of that day. The letter in effect demanded that the king of Israel cure Naaman of his leprosy (v. 6). No mention was made of the prophet. Benhadad assumed that if such a powerful one existed in the realm of Israel, he would certainly be known to the king and would be at his beck and call. He can hardly be expected to have comprehended the relationship that existed between a king of Israel and a prophet of the Lord. Naturally the king of Israel was upset by the letter. He tore his clothes and cried, "*Am I God, to kill and make alive,*" i.e., am I omnipotent? He did not think of Elisha, probably because he gave no credence to the reports circulating about him. The only conclusion he could reach was that Benhadad was making these extravagant demands as a pretext for more hostility (v. 7).

B. NAAMAN'S CLEANSING 5:8-14

TRANSLATION

(8) And it came to pass when Elisha, the man of God, heard that the king of Israel had torn his garments, that he sent unto the king, saying, Why have you torn your garments? Let him come, I pray you, unto me, that he may know there is a prophet in Israel. (9) And Naaman came with his horse and his chariot, and stood at the entrance of Elisha's house. (10) And Elisha sent unto him a messenger, saying, Go and wash seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will return to you, and be clean. (11) And Naaman was wroth, and went away and said, Behold I thought, Unto me he would surely come out, and stand, and call on the name of the Lord his God, and wave his hand over the place, and cure the leprosy. (12) Are not Abanah

and Pharpar, rivers of Damascus, better than all the waters of Israel? May I not wash in them, that I may be clean? And he turned and went away in wrath. (13) And his servants drew near, and spoke unto him, and said, My father, if a great thing the prophet had spoken unto you, would you not have done it? And how much more if he said unto you, Wash and be clean? (14) And he went down, and dipped in the Jordan seven times according to the word of the man of God; and his flesh returned like the flesh of a little lad, and he was clean.

COMMENTS

The king had not attempted to keep his reaction to Benhadad's letter secret. In fact he wanted his subjects to know what an unreasonable and ruthless adversary Benhadad really was. News of the king's distress reached the ears of Elisha. The prophet's word to the king contained first a gentle rebuke. Why had the king torn his clothes? Had he forgotten that God still had His representative in the land? "*Send him to me,*" Elisha suggested, "*that he may discover that there truly is a prophet in this land*" (v. 8). The king may be the head of the state and embody all earthly power, but the prophet was the duly commissioned agent of God and the channel of spiritual power. He alone could help under the circumstances.

In short order Naaman and his entourage arrived at the humble abode of Elisha in the city of Samaria. A man of his station and rank was not about to enter such humble quarters, and so he simply waited impatiently at the door of the house (v. 9). Regarding the pride of his visitor as worthy of rebuke, Elisha remained within the house and sent his servant out to communicate with this dignitary. The prophet was not trying to be impolite; he was trying to impress upon the mind of this general the absolute nothingness of earthly wealth and grandeur, and the dignity of the prophetic office.

If the actions of the prophet insulted the inflated ego of Naaman, his instruction did even more. "*Go wash in the Jordan*

seven times," the servant ordered in the name of his master. What a burden! The nearest point of the Jordan river from Samaria was some twenty miles distant. If Naaman had the faith to go to the Jordan, and there persisted in the formal act of dipping in the river seven times, the scaly leprous skin would disappear and clean flesh would appear (v. 10).

Naaman was shocked, horrified, and angered by the treatment he had received from this as yet unseen prophet. He had expected to have been waited on and to have received every possible attention; but these expectations had been rudely rebuffed by the failure of the prophet even to greet him at the door.¹¹ The general had a very different mental image of what *should* have transpired there that day. He pictured the prophet emerging from his house, and with great fanfare, waving his hand over the leprous spot while he solemnly called upon the name of his God. He *expected* an instantaneous cure, witnessed perhaps by hundreds of the inhabitants of Samaria (v. 11). Instead he was told that *he* must do something—dip in the muddy Jordan! Incredible! The rivers of Damascus—Abanah and Pharpar¹²—were fresh, clear, beautiful, and romantic. If the leprous taint was to be *washed* away, would not the crystal clear waters of his native land have more cleaning power than the turbid, sluggish and often clay-colored waters of Jordan? Disgusted and perturbed, Naaman wheeled his chariot around and departed in a cloud of dust (v. 12).

Fortunately for Naaman, his servants did not share in his wild indignation. When their master had cooled somewhat, one of his servants, acting as a spokesman for the others, reasoned with Naaman. "*My father*" is a deferential and at the same time an affectionate way in which a servant addressed his master. The servant suggested that if Elisha had directed Naaman to do some difficult thing, the general would have attempted to do it. How much more should he be willing to

¹¹ The Hebrew emphasizes in the most forceful way that Naaman regarded it the duty of Elisha to come out to him.

¹² Precise location of these rivers is uncertain. It has been suggested that they are the modern Barada river and one of its tributaries.

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to do the simple, if somewhat silly, thing which the man of God had designated. The logic was unanswerable, and Naaman was persuaded (v. 13). At the first opportunity, he turned his chariot eastward and began to make his way through the rapidly descending valleys toward the Jordan. When he exactly complied with the prophet's instructions, the miracle occurred. Not only was the leprosy removed, his flesh became as soft and tender as that of a little boy (v. 14).

C. NAAMAN'S CONVERSION 5:15-19

TRANSLATION

(15) And he returned unto the man of God, he and all his company. And he came, and stood before him, and said, Behold, I pray you, I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel. Now take, I pray you, a blessing of your servant. (16) And he said, As the LORD lives before whom I stand, I shall take none. And he implored him to take it, but he refused. (17) And Naaman said, Then shall not there be given, I pray you, two mule burdens of earth? For henceforth your servant will not offer burnt offering or sacrifice to another god except the LORD. (18) For this thing may the LORD pardon your servant, when my master goes to the house of Rimmon to worship, and he leans upon my hand, and I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, when I bow myself in the house of Rimmon, may the LORD pardon your servant in this thing. (19) And he said unto him, Go in peace. And he went from him a little way.

COMMENTS

The grateful Naaman was determined to express his appreciation to the man of God even though the return trip to Samaria would take him at least forty miles out of his way and delay his return to Damascus by at least one day. At the Jordan,

Naaman's heart was transformed as well as his flesh. He waded into the waters a worshiper of Rimmon and emerged a worshiper of Yahweh. He had to repay this prophet of God, and all thoughts of personal delay and inconvenience were banished. The once pompous and haughty Aramean was now contrite and humble. He descended from his chariot, went into the prophet's abode, and stood before him. What a change conversion makes in the disposition of a man! The confession of faith made by this foreign general is an acknowledgment of the sole supremacy of Yahweh. Other heathens in Scripture confess that Yahweh is *a god* or *God of Israel*; but Naaman confessed that Yahweh was the one and only God in all the earth. He was anxious that Elisha would take a "*blessing*," i.e., a present, in appreciation for what he had done. Pagan people customarily bestowed great gifts upon the oracles which they consulted, and Naaman quite naturally and reasonably made the offer (v. 15).

Though the Old Testament prophets did not generally object to freewill offerings from those who consulted them, on this occasion Elisha thought it best to decline the proffered reward. Naaman needed to learn that Yahweh was his true healer, Elisha but His representative. It was thus to Yahweh and not Elisha that Naaman owed his gratitude and his offerings. True to the dictates of oriental hospitality, Naaman continued to urge the prophet to accept the gifts; but it soon became obvious to him that Elisha was not simply making a courteous pretense of disinterest. He was absolutely declining to accept any reward for his services (v. 16).

Even though Elisha refused to take from Naaman any gift, the Aramean would request one gift of Elisha—two mule loads of earth. The text does not explain what Naaman intended to do with this soil, but the general opinion is that he intended to spread it on the surface of a plot in Aram so as to consecrate that ground and make it a suitable place upon which to worship the Lord. In the mind of this newly converted heathen, the ground of Israel would be more holy, more appropriate for the worship of the God of Israel.

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That the requested soil was intended for use in creating a place of worship seems to be implied in the declaration which immediately followed the request, viz., that Naaman henceforth would cease to offer sacrifice to any god other than Yahweh (v. 17). His sincerity in this declaration is indicated by the one exception which immediately came to his mind. He knew that as captain of the host he would be required to attend the temple of Rimmon¹³ with his king and would be compelled to bow before the image of that god. He was not willing to offend his master by refusing these formalities, and yet he realized in his heart that this would be inconsistent with the solemn declaration he had just made to worship Yahweh alone. He therefore expressed the hope that the Lord would pardon him of this wrong (v. 18). Elisha did not declare that God would or would not overlook this departure from strict monotheism. He was not called upon to give an answer since Naaman had not asked a question but had only expressed a wish. Elisha's "*Go in peace*" should be taken simply as wishing the peace of God to be on the departing Aramean (v. 19).

IV. A JUDICIAL MIRACLE 5:20-27

TRANSLATION

(20) But Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, thought, Behold my master has spared Naaman this Aramean by not taking from his hand that which he brought. As the LORD lives, I will run after him, and take from him something. (21) And Gehazi pursued Naaman. And when Naaman saw him running after him, he got down from the chariot to meet him, and said, Is all well? (22) And he said, All is well. My master has sent me, saying, Behold now this: Two young men of the sons of the prophets have come unto me from Mt. Ephraim.

¹³ Rimmon ("*pomegranate*") is a parody of Ramman, the title of Hadad, the Aramean Baal. Hadad was god of the storm.

Give, I pray you, to them a talent of silver, and two changes of garments. (23) And Naaman said, Consent to take two talents. And he implored him, and he bound two talents of silver in two bags, and two changes of garments, and put them upon two of his servants; and they bore them before him. (24) And he came unto the hill, and he took them from their hand, and bestowed them in the house. And he sent the men away, and they departed. (25) And he came and stood before his master. And Elisha said unto him, Where are you coming from Gehazi? And he said, Your servant did not go anywhere. (26) And he said unto him, Did not my heart go with you when a man turned again from upon his chariot to meet you? Is it time to receive silver and to receive garments, and oliveyards and vineyards, and sheep and cattle, and servants and handmaids? (27) The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave to you and to your seed forever. And he went out from before him a leper as white as snow.

COMMENTS

Gehazi could not bear the thought of the Aramean going home with all his treasure. He convinced himself that this foreigner deserved to be spoiled because he was an enemy of Israel. He swore an oath that he would run after the general and take *something* of him (v. 20). "*As the Lord lives*" are strange words in the mouth of one who has set his mind on a course of lying and stealing. Often solemn religious formulas, rendered meaningless by frequent repetition, drop from the lips of those who engage in the most indefensible conduct.

Naaman's entourage, traveling at a leisurely pace so as not to exhaust those servants who might have been on foot, was easily overtaken by the fleet-footed Gehazi. Naaman spotted the runner, recognized him, and paid him a supreme honor by descending from his chariot, a sign of respect in the East of an inferior for a superior. By so honoring the servant of the prophet, he was showing honor for the prophet himself. Seeing

Gehazi's haste and anxious looks, Naaman suspected that something had gone wrong in the brief time since he had left Samaria, and he therefore anxiously inquired of Gehazi, "*Is all well?*" (v. 21). The servant replied that all was well, i.e., there had been no accident or calamity. But nonetheless, a circumstance had arisen which had caused Elisha to change his mind with regard to the gifts which Naaman had offered. Two needy sons of the prophets from Mt. Ephraim had happened along, and Elisha would like Naaman to donate to them a talent of silver (\$2,000) and two changes of garments. Gehazi's story sounded plausible, and the amount for which he asked, while rather large for the pretended occasion, was but a trifle compared with the amount which Naaman had expected to expend. Though greedy, Gehazi did not wish to ask for so much as to arouse suspicion. Gehazi (whose name means "*avaricious*") is the prototype of modern religious charlatans who exploit unsuspecting persons on the pretext of giving aid to needy religious causes.

Naaman believed the story of Gehazi and wanted to do even more than the servant had requested. He suggested that two talents (\$4,000) be taken, probably because the strangers who had arrived were two. Following the conventions of the Near East, Gehazi pretended to decline the more generous offer. Naaman took the two talents and put them in bags and, along with the changes of garments, put them upon the shoulders of two of his servants. These servants carried the two heavy bags of silver and garments for Gehazi (v. 23). At a hill just outside Samaria, Gehazi took the money from Naaman's slaves, and dismissed them. He could not run the risk of having these foreigners seen entering Samaria again. Too many questions might be asked. Gehazi took the bags of money and hid them in the house of his master, probably in the courtyard thereof (v. 24).

As soon as he had hidden the things Naaman had given him, Gehazi entered the room where Elisha was sitting as casually as he could, as if he had been busy in another part of the house. He was met, however, with a plain and stern question from

his master which literally in the Hebrew is "*Whence, Gehazi?*" Gehazi probably had not regarded the deception and spoiling of a foreigner as a very grievous wrong; but now his path of chicanery is about to force him to lie to his master: "*Your servant went nowhere!*" (v. 25). Then came the bombshell: "*Did not my heart go with you*" (i.e., was I not with you in prophetic spirit) "*when the man turned again from his chariot to meet you?*" This was enough to prove to the sheepish servant that Elisha knew what had just transpired. But then the prophet went a step further and reflected back to Gehazi his own inner thoughts about what he would do with the newly acquired wealth: purchase oliveyards and vineyards, and sheep and oxen. Was this the time for such worldly ambitions? When Baalism held such a grip on the nation and when so many who claimed to represent Yahweh were hypocritical and mercenary—was this the time to think of acquiring property and luxury for himself? Such actions could bring the prophetic office into contempt with unbelievers and undermine the credibility of Elisha's ministry! (v. 26). Therefore, since Gehazi had taken of Naaman's goods, he would also take of his leprosy. And should this servant decide to marry and father children, they too would be lepers. In that instant the plague fell on Gehazi, his skin turned white as snow, and he departed from the presence of his master to spend his remaining days with the outcast lepers (v. 27).

V. A LEVITATION MIRACLE 6:1-7

TRANSLATION

(1) And the sons of the prophets said unto Elisha, Behold now the place where we sit before you is too cramped for us. (2) Let us go, we pray you, unto the Jordan, and let us take from there each man a beam, and let us construct for ourselves a place in which to dwell. And he said, Go. (3) And one said, Consent, I pray you, to go with your servants. And he said, I

will go. (4) And he went with them. And they came to the Jordan, and cut down trees. (5) And it came to pass as one was felling a beam, the axhead fell into the water; and he cried, and said, Alas, my master! for it was a borrowed one. (6) And the man of God said, Where did it fall? And he showed him the place. And he cut off a stick, and cast it there, and the axhead floated. (7) And he said, Take it up. And he put forth his hand and took it.

COMMENTS

The school of the prophets at Jericho had grown so much that the building it hitherto had occupied was no longer adequate. A larger facility was needed; but the students would make no move without the advice and consent of their prophetic master (v. 1). When Elisha next visited Jericho, the students there proposed to him that a new dwelling be built a few miles from Jericho near the Jordan where trees for such a purpose would be readily available. With each student doing his share of the work, the structure could be completed in short order. Constructing the building near the Jordan would save the trouble of conveying the materials from the river back to Jericho. To this proposal Elisha gave his sanction and encouragement (v. 2). One of the group was not satisfied with Elisha's approval of the project, but wished for his actual presence and supervision. Again in the most simple and direct manner Elisha assented (v. 3).

As the men were working, felling trees and fashioning them into rough beams (v. 4), an axhead (lit., *the iron*) flew from one man's haft and into the murky waters of the river. The man who had wielded that ax was distraught, and cried out to Elisha, "*Alas, my master, for it was a borrowed one!*" (v. 5). What would he tell the owner of that ax! The man made no direct request for assistance, but the tone of his exclamation constituted an oblique call for help. Elisha, being always interested in the personal problems of his disciples, asked to be shown the spot where the axhead entered the stream. The man

of God then cut off a branch and cast it upon the water at that point. The axhead miraculously was caused to rise to the surface of the water (v. 6).¹⁴ In order to test the faith of the student, Elisha then ordered the student to take up the axhead from the water. He must show that he really believed that the axhead was floating on the surface, and that he was not merely experiencing an optical illusion (v. 7).

REVIEW OF CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

I. FACTS TO MASTER

- A. Important names to identify in relation to chapter seventeen:
- | | |
|-----------|-----------|
| 1. Elisha | 3. Naaman |
| 2. Gehazi | 4. Rimmon |
- B. Important places to identify in relation to this chapter:
- | | |
|-------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Shunem | 4. Abanah and Pharpar |
| 2. Mt. Carmel | 5. Damascus |
| 3. Baal-shalishah | 6. Jordan |
- C. Words and phrases which should bring to remembrance key events in this chapter:
- | | |
|------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. creditor | 6. a letter |
| 2. jar of oil | 7. two mule loads of earth |
| 3. upper chamber | 8. an axhead |
| 4. staff | 9. a stick |
| 5. wild gourds | |
- D. Who said?
1. "Your maidservant has nothing in the house except a jar of oil."

¹⁴ Naturalistic explanations of this miracle—that Elisha used the stick to pry the axhead from the bottom of the stream—do violence to the account. Rawlinson (PC, p. 120) rightly comments: "The sacred writers are not concerned to put on record mere acts of manual dexterity."

2. "Truly she has no son and her husband is old."
 3. "My head, my head!"
 4. "Why will you go to him today? It is neither new moon nor sabbath."
 5. "There is death in the pot!"
 6. "Am I God, to kill and to make alive . . . ?"
 7. "Behold, I thought, He will surely come out to me"
 8. "Alas, my master for it was borrowed!"
- E. Important numbers**
1. The amount of gold, silver and changes of raiment Naaman took to Israel
 2. Number of times Naaman was told to dip in Jordan
 3. Number of talents and changes Gehazi received from Naaman
 4. Number of times a dead boy sneezed as he revived
 5. Number of barley loaves brought to Elisha at Gilgal
 6. Number of prophets fed with the few loaves

II. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. What parallels are there between the miracles wrought by Elisha and those previously performed by Elijah?
2. Who were the "sons of the prophets"?
3. What did the meal have to do with the "healing" of the noxious pottage at Gilgal?
4. Why did Elisha send Gehazi on ahead to Shunem when he learned of the lad's death?
5. Why did Elisha stretch out on top of the body of the dead Shunammite boy?
6. What spiritual lessons can be derived from the account of the multiplication of the widow's oil? The multiplication of the loaves?
7. As Naaman sought cleansing from leprosy, he made several mistakes. The same mistakes are often made by those who want cleansing from sin. What are some of these mistakes?
8. Who is the unsung hero of the Naaman story? In what

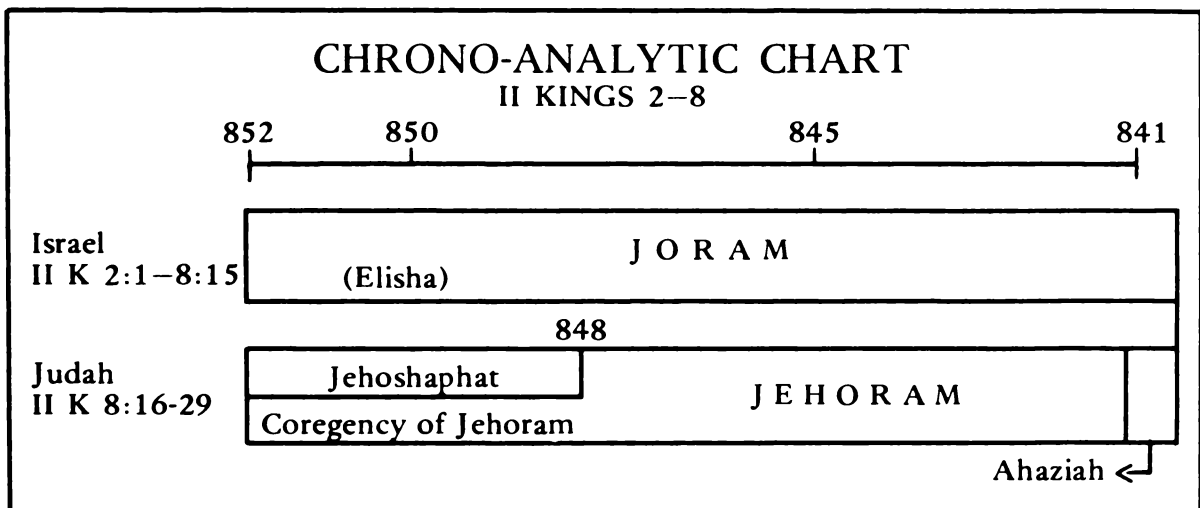
- way does this person challenge our lives?
9. What kind of relations existed between Israel and Damascus during the time of Naaman?
 10. Why did Elisha not go out to greet the Aramean dignitary who came to call on him?
 11. What was there in the waters of Jordan that brought cleansing to Naaman? In this case, would one river have been just as good as another?
 12. For what purpose did Naaman wish to take two mule burdens of earth back to Damascus?
 13. To what degree was Naaman converted by his healing experience?
 14. In what sense was the miracle of Naaman's healing performed for the benefit of the Israelites as well as the Arameans?
 15. What motivated Gehazi to follow Naaman and request a reward? Why the lie? How did Elisha know what Gehazi had been up to? Of what does Gehazi warn us?
 16. Why was the prophetic student so concerned about the axhead he had lost? What purpose did the stick serve in the recovery of the axhead? What spiritual lessons are there in this story?

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

ELISHA AND THE ARAMEANS

II Kings 6:8—8:29

The focus in II Kings 6—8 is still on Elisha, but here a new dimension of his ministry comes into view. The Arameans, who had long been hostile to Israel, began to exert their power in the days of Jehoram the son of Ahab. Israel is definitely on the defensive in these chapters. Here the author of Kings treats (1) two patriotic miracles (6:8-23), and (2) three predictive miracles (6:24—8:15) of Elisha. To this material the author adds brief notes on the reigns of two contemporary kings of Judah (8:16-29).



I. ELISHA'S PATRIOTIC MIRACLES 6:8-23

Elisha was involved in the crisis which his nation faced at the hands of the Arameans. On various occasions Elisha rendered valuable aid to his king by revealing the military plans of Benhadad (vv. 8-12). On one occasion he captured single-handedly a whole troop of Aramean soldiers and brought them to the captial (vv. 13-23).

A. ELISHA REVEALS THE PLANS OF THE ENEMY
6:8-12

TRANSLATION

(8) Now the king of Aram was warring against Israel, and he took counsel with his servants, saying, In such and such a place will be my encampment. (9) But the man of God sent unto the king of Israel, saying, Beware of passing by this place, for there the Arameans are hiding. (10) And the king of Israel sent unto the place of which the man of God told him and warned him, and there he was delivered not once or twice. (11) And the heart of the king of Aram was stirred up¹ concerning this matter, and he called unto his servants, and said unto them, Will you not tell me who among us is for the king of Israel? (12) And one of his servants said, No, my lord, O king, but Elisha the prophet who is in Israel declares to the king of Israel the matters of which you speak in the secret place of your bedchamber.

COMMENTS

Not too long after the captain of the host of Aram found cleansing in the land of Israel (II K 5), Benhadad again resumed hostilities with his neighbor to the south. The king would plan his military strategy with his top advisers (v. 8), but in every case his plans were betrayed to the king of Israel by the man of God Elisha (v. 9). Elisha had a strong personal dislike for Jehoram the son of Ahab, but he did not allow these personal feelings to interfere with his patriotism. The king of Israel would send out scouts to the spots designated by Elisha to see whether or not the Arameans were occupying the region. In each case he found Elisha's warning true, and so he simply avoided that area and the ambush which Benhadad had planned for him.

¹ Lit., "in a whirl," like a whirlwind.

Thus by the supernaturally clairvoyant powers of Elisha, the hostile plans of the Arameans were foiled, not once or twice, but several times (v. 10).

The king of Aram became greatly concerned at the repeated failure of his best laid plans, and concluded that such consistent lack of success could not be mere chance. Benhadad suspected that one of his top officials was guilty of treasonous information leaks. The king summoned his staff and implored them to point out the culprit (v. 11). One of those being interrogated—perhaps Naaman himself—suggested that no one in the king's council was revealing military secrets to the enemy; rather it was the Israelite prophet who through supernatural insight knew all that transpired in the Aramean court, and even in the private bedchamber of the king himself (v. 12). Just how the Aramean officer knew for a fact that it was Elisha who was tipping off the Israelite king is not stated. Perhaps this fact was more or less common knowledge in Israel, and the Aramean had learned this through intelligence agencies in Israel. On the other hand, perhaps this official was merely surmising that a man who could heal the dreaded leprosy would have no difficulty reading the secret thoughts of a man. In either case, the Aramean servant was correct in his analysis of the situation, that Elisha was responsible.

B. ELISHA CAPTURES A TROOP OF SOLDIERS 6:13-23

TRANSLATION

(13) And he said, Go and observe where he is, that I may send, and take him. And someone told him, Behold, in Dothan. (14) And he sent there horses, chariots, and a strong force; and they came by night and surrounded the city. (15) And the minister of the man of God had risen early to go out, and behold a host surrounding the city with horse and chariot. And his servant said unto him, Alas my master! How shall we do? (16) And he said, Do not fear, for more numerous are those with us than

those with them. (17) And Elisha prayed, and said, O LORD open, I pray you, his eyes that he might see. And the LORD opened the eyes of the servant, and he saw, and behold the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire surrounding Elisha. (18) And they went down unto them.² And Elisha prayed unto the LORD, and said, Smite, I pray you, this people with blindness. And He smote them with blindness according to the word of Elisha. (19) And Elisha said unto them, Not this way, and not this city. Come after me, and I will bring you to the man whom you are seeking. And he took them to Samaria. (20) And it came to pass when they had come to Samaria, that Elisha said, O LORD, open the eyes of these men that they may see. And the LORD opened their eyes, and they saw, and behold they were in the midst of Samaria. (21) And the king of Israel said unto Elisha when he saw them, Shall I smite them? Shall I smite them, my father? (22) And he said, Do not smite them. Would you be smiting those you had taken captive with your sword and your bow? Set bread and water before them, that they may eat and drink, that they may go unto their master. (23) And he prepared great provisions for them, and they ate and drank; then he sent them away, and they went unto their master. And the marauding bands of Arameans did not again come into the land of Israel.

COMMENTS

Benhadad did not express any doubt as to the validity of the suggestion that Elisha was responsible for revealing his military plans to the king of Israel. The king issued orders that spies be sent into Israel to ascertain the present residence of the prophet. Benhadad planned to spirit away the man of God so as to put an end to Elisha's betrayal of his plans to Jehoram.

² The object of the preposition is singular but seems to refer to the Aramean host and thus in English it seems best to render "*them*."

The returning spies reported that Elisha was residing in Dothan, a village on the edge of the plain of Esdraelon about twelve miles north of Samaria³ (v. 13). A strong force was dispatched to Dothan with orders to kidnap the prophet. In order to take Elisha by surprise, the Arameans marched by night and encompassed the city (v. 14).

Perhaps the new servant of Elisha had heard the commotion outside the city walls during the night. Arising early in the morning, he discovered the city surrounded by a force which included infantry, cavalry, and even a chariot force. Faced with the prospect of capture and consequent slavery, the young servant rushed to his master to report his alarming discovery. "*How shall we do?*" he cried, i.e., is there any way we can save ourselves? (v. 15).

Elisha was quite calm in the face of this serious threat. He did not need to survey the situation and plan strategy. He knew that God was with him, and it mattered not how many might be arrayed against him without the walls of Dothan (v. 16). But Elisha's servant needed reassurance. Mere verbal assurance that God was nigh would not suffice for this frightened man. He needed some sort of material manifestation of the help that was readily available to the prophet. So Elisha prayed that his servant might be permitted to see that great angelic host that hovers just beyond the realm of sight and sound. The prophet's prayer was answered. The eyes of the servant were opened, and he beheld round about the hill of Dothan a heavenly force—chariots and horses "*of fire,*" i.e., glowing with an unearthly brightness (v. 17).

Rather than waiting for the Arameans to come up the slopes of Dothan to arrest him, Elisha and his servant went down to the attacking host. As they approached the enemy, Elisha prayed that God would smite the Arameans with blindness, i.e., a state of confusion and bewilderment in which they would

³ The ease with which this expedition penetrated Israelite territory indicates that this was a time when the northern frontiers could not be effectively defended.

willingly follow the directions of the prophet. God answered that prayer (v. 18), and as a result, the enemy soldiers were so confused that they allowed Elisha to convince them that they had come the wrong way and had attacked the wrong city. If they would but follow him, the prophet suggested, he would lead them to the man they were seeking. Under this miraculous delusion, the soldiers allowed Elisha to lead them to Samaria, and into the walls of that city (v. 19). The behavior of these soldiers is absolutely inexplicable apart from direct working of God in their mental processes.

Once the prophet had his prisoners within the walls of Samaria, he prayed that God would "*open their eyes,*" i.e., remove the bewilderment which had seized them at Dothan. When their senses returned, how shocked these soldiers must have been to discover that they were within the walls of Samaria and surrounded, no doubt, by a great throng of Israelite soldiers (v. 20). King Jehoram, though in the past not on the most cordial terms with Elisha (cf. 3:11-14), addressed the prophet by the honorable title "*father*" which implied respect, deference, and submission. The king was most eager to slay these helpless invaders, but felt compelled to seek the permission of the one who had delivered them into his hand (v. 21).

Elisha declined permission to slay these men. Whereas it may have been the custom to slay prisoners of war, these men in reality were *not* prisoners of war in the usual sense. If they should be slain, then the whole purpose of the miracle which had just taken place would be frustrated. The ultimate purpose of smiting these men with mental delusion and leading them to Samaria was to teach these foreigners and the king who sent them to fear the God of Israel, and to respect His people and His prophet in particular. Therefore, instead of slaying these men, the king instructed his servants to treat them hospitably and send them back to their master (v. 23). Jehoram followed the directions of the prophet and entertained the Arameans at a great banquet after which they were given leave to return to Benhadad. As a result of this episode, the Aramean raiders, who had heretofore harassed the Israelite countryside, suspended

their activities for a time, and Israel had a respite.

II. ELISHA'S PREDICTIVE MIRACLES 6:24—8:15

Three predictive miracles of Elisha are recorded in connection with this period of Aramean invasion: He predicted (1) the deliverance of Samaria from an Aramean siege (6:24—7:20); (2) a famine in Israel (8:1-6); and (3) the murderous career of Hazael (8:7-15).

A. PREDICTION OF DELIVERANCE FOR SAMARIA 6:24—7:20

Several different stories connected with an Aramean siege of Samaria have been collected in 6:24—7:20. The main purpose of the section, however, is to demonstrate the predictive powers of Elisha. This somewhat lengthy section can be discussed under six heads: (1) the sad plight of Samaria (6:24-29); (2) the personal jeopardy of Elisha (6:30-33); (3) the dramatic prediction of the prophet (7:1-2); (4) the joyous discovery of four lepers (7:3-11); (5) the cautious investigation by the king (7:12-15); and (6) the literal fulfillment of Elisha's prophecy (7:16-20).

1. *THE SAD PLIGHT OF SAMARIA (6:24-29)*

TRANSLATION

(24) And it came to pass after this, that Benhadad king of Aram gathered all his camp, and went up, and besieged Samaria. (25) And a great famine came about in Samaria, and behold besiegers were against it until the head of an ass was worth eighty pieces of silver, and the fourth part of a *qab* of dove's dung was worth five pieces of silver. (26) And as the king of Israel was passing by upon the wall, a woman cried out unto him, saying,

Help, my lord, O king! (27) And he said, If the LORD does not save you, whence shall I save you, from the threshing floor or from the wine vat? (28) And the king said to her, What do you want? And she said, This woman said unto me, Give your son, that we may eat him today, and my son we shall eat tomorrow. (29) And we boiled my son, and ate him. And I said unto her the next day, Give your son that we may eat him, and she had hidden her son!

COMMENTS

Though the nuisance raids of the marauding bands came to an end, Israel was still to suffer much at the hands of Aram. Some considerable time after the memory of Jehoram's kind deed had been forgotten, Benhadad the king of Aram gathered his entire force and invaded Israel. Realizing that he was no match for Benhadad's forces in the field, Jehoram withdrew to his capital at Samaria and prepared for a long siege (v. 24). Benhadad blockaded the city and attempted to starve its inhabitants into submission. The situation in the city deteriorated to such a degree that an ass's head, the worst part of an unclean animal, which would normally never be eaten, sold for eighty pieces of silver (about \$50.00) and a *qab* (pint) of dove's dung for five pieces of silver (\$3.00; v. 25). "*Dove's dung*" may have been the popular name for some food such as roast chickpeas. If actual dove's dung is intended, it was probably sold as fuel.⁴

King Jehoram⁵ made regular inspections of the fortifications and guard posts on the broad walls of Samaria during the siege. On one such tour a woman—possibly one of the inhabitants of the houses which abutted on the wall—cried out to the king for help (v. 26). The king was taken back by this pitiful appeal

⁴ Gray, OTL, p. 522. But Josephus relates that during the Roman siege of Jerusalem people ate dung, *Ant.* IX, 4.4.

⁵ Others think the unnamed king was Jehoahaz or Joash. In this case, the Benhadad of 6:24 would be Benhadad II, the son of Hazael.

and assumed that the woman was seeking relief from the pangs of hunger. What could he do for the woman? Only God could provide food under the circumstances! Did this woman think that the king had secret stores of food or vats full of wine which he had withheld from the populace? The royal stores were as much exhausted as those of the lowliest subjects (v. 27). The woman must have explained that she was not attempting to beg food from the king, but that she was seeking from him a decision as the supreme judicial officer of the land. This being the case, the king asked the woman to relate her complaint. She told a gruesome story of a pact with a neighbor lady to eat their two sons, the one on one day, and the second the following day (v. 28). The one child was boiled and eaten. But the following day the neighbor woman had reneged on the agreement and had hidden her son to avoid the terrible ordeal of seeing him killed and eaten (v. 29).

2. *THE PERSONAL JEOPARDY OF ELISHA (6:30-33)*

TRANSLATION

(30) And it came to pass when the king heard the words of the woman, that he tore his garments. And as he was passing by upon the wall, the people looked, and behold sackcloth upon his flesh within. (31) And he said, Thus may God do to me, and thus may he add if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat remain on him this day. (32) Now Elisha was sitting in his house, and the elders were sitting with him when the king sent a man from before him. But before the messenger came unto him, he said unto the elders, Do you see how this son of a murderer has sent to remove my head? See when the messenger comes, shut the door and hold him fast in the door. Is not the sound of the feet of his master behind him? (33) While he was yet speaking with them, behold the messenger came down unto him. And he said, Behold this evil is from the LORD; why should I wait for the LORD any longer.

COMMENTS

The king was horrified at this terrible tale of the desperate mother, and he realized how deplorable conditions within the capital had become. He tore open his clothes in anguish, and his subjects standing about noticed that he had on sackcloth. These penitential garments were worn close to the skin so as to constantly chastise the flesh. Secretly the king was repenting of his sins, though no doubt he was far from possessing a chastened or humble spirit. No one knew of his personal spiritual struggle until the terrible tale of the distressed woman caused him to rend his robes (v. 30).

In his distress, the king swore an oath⁶ that he would have Elisha decapitated that very day (v. 31). It is not entirely clear why the king blamed the horrors of the famine on Elisha. Perhaps he felt that Elisha should work some mighty miracle to relieve the city of its suffering and to vanquish the enemy. The Law of Moses nowhere sanctioned decapitation, and in taking this oath, Jehoram was assuming the arbitrary power of other monarchs of that day.

Elisha was sitting in his home in Samaria with the elders of the land sitting before him at the time the king dispatched the prophet's executioner. These elders had probably come to consult the man of God about the critical conditions within the city and, if possible, obtain from him some miraculous assistance. Their conversation was interrupted when Elisha received a supernatural revelation of what was about to take place—that an executioner had already been dispatched, but that the king would arrive shortly thereafter. Elisha referred to Jehoram as "*that son of a murderer*" in reference to his father Ahab who had sanctioned all the atrocities perpetrated by Jezebel. By his recent order to have Elisha eliminated, the king had shown the same bloodthirsty disposition as his father. The prophet called upon those present with him to resist the

⁶ The Hebrew oath was an imprecation of evil on oneself if one did, or failed to do, a certain thing.

royal messenger and bar the door to him, because the king himself would shortly arrive, and he would either confirm or countermand that original order (v. 32).

Even while Elisha talked to the elders, the messenger of the king appeared at the door. Apparently the elders did obey Elisha and barred the door to this royal representative. Meanwhile, the king himself seems to have arrived, and he, of course, was admitted to the prophet's abode. The king seems to have repented of his hasty order to slay the prophet and hurried after his own messenger in order to give the prophet a final opportunity to live. The question asked by the king—“*Why should I wait for the Lord any longer?*”—implies that Elisha had previously urged the king to wait for divine interposition. The king interpreted the calamity as being from the Lord. Why should he try to hold out any longer? Why should he not break with God, slay his lying prophet, and surrender the city to the Arameans?

3. THE DRAMATIC PREDICTION OF THE PROPHET (7:1-2)

TRANSLATION

(1) And Elisha said, Hear the word of the LORD: Thus has the LORD said: About this time tomorrow a *seah* of fine flour will be worth a shekel, and two *seahs* of barley will be worth a shekel in the gate of Samaria. (2) Then an officer on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said: Behold, if the LORD were about to make windows in the heavens, would this word come to pass? And he said, You will see with your eyes, but of it you shall not eat!

COMMENTS

Elisha responded to the king in the most solemn manner—a manner which could not help but arrest the attention and

command the respect of Jehoram. The prophet's life was hanging in the balance. Everything depended on whether Elisha, with a half dozen or so words, could change the king's mind. He therefore made such a precise prediction that within a short period of time the whole nation would know whether or not he was a true spokesman for the living God. Within twenty-four hours, declared the prophet, such a quantity of grain would be available to the inhabitants of Samaria that barley and fine flour would again be bought and sold at the pre-siege prices, and this right in the city gate of Samaria (v. 1). A *seah* is roughly equivalent to a peck in modern measures, and the shekel would be worth about a dollar. The gates of ancient cities were spacious places consisting of several buildings where public business was transacted.

One of the officers—the king's personal attendant—was vocally incredulous. With scoffing sarcasm he insisted that the prediction was utterly impossible of fulfillment. Even if the Lord were to make windows in the heavens, and pour down through them grain instead of rain, could this prediction come to pass? The disdain of this officer was directed not only at the veracity of the prophet, but at the power of God. For this reason Elisha answered him sternly: You will see it, but not partake of it. By these words, the officer, if he was wise enough to discern it, was forewarned of his imminent death, and thus given time to set his house in order and make his peace with God.

4. *THE JOYOUS DISCOVERY OF FOUR LEPERS (7:3-11)*

TRANSLATION

(3) And four men, lepers, were at the entrance of the gate. And they said one to another, Why should we continue sitting here until we die? (4) If we think we shall go into the city, the famine is in the city, and we shall die there; and if we remain here, then we shall die. And now come, and let us fall unto the camp of the Arameans! If they allow us to live, we shall live; and if they

slay us, then we shall die. (5) And they arose in the twilight to go unto the camp of the Arameans, and they came to the edge of the Aramean camp, and behold no man was there. (6) The Lord had caused the Aramean camp to hear the sound of chariots and horses and a great host; and they said one to another, Behold the king of Israel has hired against us the Hittite kings and kings of Egypt to go against us. (7) And they arose, and fled in the twilight, and forsook their tents and their horses and their donkeys, the camp as it was; and they fled for their lives. (8) Now these lepers came to the edge of the camp, and they went into the first tent, and they ate, and they drank, and took up silver and gold and garments from there, and went and hid them; and they returned and went into another tent, and took from it and hid it. (9) Then they said one to another, What we are doing is not right! This is a day of good news, but we are remaining silent; if we delay unto the light of morning, punishment will overtake us. Now come, that we may go and tell the house of the king! (10) And they came and called to the gate-keepers⁷ of the city, and told them, saying, We came unto the Aramean camp, and behold no man was there, nor voice of a man; but horses tied, and tents as they were. (11) And the gate-keepers called out⁸ and told the house of the king within.

COMMENTS

Lepers were forbidden by law from dwelling within the cities of Israel. Relatives within the city normally kept them supplied with food, and hence they congregated about the city gates. Because of the extreme scarcity within the city during the siege, these unfortunates were on the verge of perishing (v. 3). As they contemplated their plight, they realized that even if they were

⁷ Though singular in the Hebrew, the word seems to be used here collectively.

⁸ The verb is singular. However context seems to demand, and some manuscripts point to, a plural verb.

able to re-enter the city by some means or the other, they would perish there of the famine. Yet to remain at the city's gate would only bring death. The only alternative was to desert to the enemy. Perhaps they would be able to exchange some intelligence information for food to prolong life awhile longer. And if the Arameans should kill them, they would be no worse off than sitting where they were and dying by degrees (v. 4).

The lepers waited for the lengthening shadows of evening twilight before they began to move toward the Aramean camp. Had they attempted to head for the enemy camp in broad daylight, Israelite soldiers on the walls of Samaria would have shot arrows at them. Entering the outer edge of the Aramean camp, the lepers found no sign of life. Not a soul was to be seen anywhere (v. 5). Shortly before the arrival of the lepers, the Lord had miraculously intervened on behalf of His people by causing the Arameans to hear what they thought was the sound of an enormous army sweeping down upon them. The jittery Arameans thought that Jehoram had hired the Hittite kings from the north and the rival dynasties of Egyptian kings from the south to attack from both directions⁹ (v. 6). In their panic the Arameans never paused to contemplate how remote was the possibility that Jehoram could have arranged a simultaneous attack by two powers so widely removed from one another. The Arameans simply fled for their lives, leaving their camp¹⁰ exactly as it had been (v. 7).

Entering the first empty tent, the lepers grabbed and began to devour the food and drink to be found there. Having satisfied the pangs of hunger, the lepers cast a covetous eye about on the gold, silver, and beautiful garments which the enemy had left behind. Their first impulse was to hide these valuables, for they knew the spoils of war belonged to the nation as a whole and to the king in particular. They knew that when their comrades

⁹ Gray (OTL, p. 524) suggests it may have been one of Elisha's disciples who started a rumor in the Aramean camp.

¹⁰ The horses left behind must have been chariot horses, which they had no time to harness.

discovered the flight of the enemy and descended upon that empty camp, that there would be no consideration for lepers in the distribution of the spoil. From tent to tent the ecstatic men ran, carrying out whatever delighted their eyes to place in their secret catch (v. 8).

During the process of the plundering, the consciences of these lepers began to bother them. Their countrymen and relatives within Samaria were perishing and suffering—mothers eating their children—while they had spent hour after hour enjoying their good fortune. To withhold such good things from their desperate countrymen must surely be a criminal act for which God would punish them. So, belatedly the lepers determined to carry the news to the “*king's house*,” i.e., his officers and court, those through whom the king himself might be approached (v. 9). They first shouted the news to the guard at the gate of Samaria (v. 10), who in turn reported the matter to the royal officials (v. 11).

5. *THE CAUTIOUS INVESTIGATION BY THE KING* (7:12-15)

TRANSLATION

(12) And the king arose in the night, and said unto his servants, Let me tell you now what the Arameans have done to us. They know that we are starving, and they went out from the camp to hide in the field, saying, When they go out from the city, we shall seize them alive; then unto the city we shall go. (13) And one from his servants answered, and said, Then let five of the remaining horses which remain in the city be taken, I pray you, (behold they are as all the multitude of Israel which are consumed) and let us send, and investigate. (14) So two chariots of horses were taken, and the king sent after the Aramean camp, saying, Go and investigate. (15) And they went after them unto the Jordan and behold all the way was filled with garments

and baggage which the Arameans had cast away in their haste. And the messengers returned and told the king.

COMMENTS

The king, aroused from his sleep, greeted the news of the Aramean retreat with incredulity. He knew of no reason for such a sudden turn of events, and suspected that the Arameans were employing some devious stratagem to lure the unsuspecting Israelites from the protection of their walls (v. 12). One of the royal attendants suggested that a small body of horsemen be sent out to reconnoiter. The majority of the Israelite horses had died of starvation, or else had been slain to furnish meat for the soldiers who remained in the city, for the entire city would shortly be dead from starvation. So by means of these persuasive arguments the royal servants convinced Jehoram that he should at least check out the report of the lepers (v. 13).

Two chariots of horses, i.e., two chariots and the accustomed number of horses (normally two horses to a chariot) were dispatched from Samaria (v. 14). These charioteers were probably under orders to make contact with the enemy and ascertain their positions if possible. Finding the Aramean camp deserted, the patrol began to follow the main road toward the Jordan. All along the way they saw the garments, weapons, and baggage discarded by the fleeing troops. By the time they reached Jordan, the Israelite patrol was convinced that the Arameans had truly fled, and that the deserted camp was no ruse. They then hastily returned to Samaria and reported what they had found to the king (v. 15).

6. THE LITERAL FULFILLMENT OF THE PROPHECY (7:16-20)

TRANSLATION

(16) And the people went out and spoiled the Aramean camp. And it came to pass that a *seah* of fine flour was valued at a

shekel, and two *seahs* of barley at a shekel, according to the word of the LORD. (17) Now the king had appointed over the gate the officer upon whose hand he leaned; but the people had trampled him in the gate, and he had died just as the man of God had spoken when the king had come down unto him. (18) And it came to pass just as the man of God had spoken unto the king, saying, Two *seahs* of barley will be worth a shekel, and a *seah* of fine flour worth a shekel about this time tomorrow in the gate of Samaria. (19) And the officer had answered the man of God and said: Behold if the LORD were to make windows in the heavens, would this word come to pass? And he had said, Behold you will see with your eyes, but of it you will not eat. (20) And so did it happen to him; and the people trampled him in the gate and he died.

COMMENTS

By the time the patrol got back to Samaria, morning had arrived. The news of the good fortune spread through Samaria like wild-fire. The whole population *en masse* descended on the near-by Aramean camp to feast and take spoil (v. 16). The officer who on the previous day had scoffed at the predictions of Elisha was trampled by the mob in the gate of the city (v. 17). To underscore the fact of Elisha's prophetic powers and the dreadful consequences that follow upon scornful rejection of a message from God, the sacred writer repeats in the final three verses of chapter 7 the earlier predictions of Elisha with regard to the abundant supply of grain and the imminent death of the royal officer (vv. 18-20).

B. PREDICTION OF FAMINE IN ISRAEL 8:1-6

TRANSLATION

(1) Now Elisha had spoken to the woman whose son he had revived, saying, Arise, you and your household go, and sojourn

wherever you may sojourn; for the LORD has called for a famine, and it shall also come upon the land seven years. (2) And the woman arose, and did according to the word of the man of God; and she went, she and her household, and sojourned in the land of the Philistines seven years. (3) Then the woman returned from the land of the Philistines, and went out to cry unto the king concerning her house and her land. (4) Now the king was speaking unto Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, saying, Relate to me all the great things which Elisha has done. (5) And it came to pass as he was relating to the king how he had revived the dead, then behold the woman whose son he had revived was crying unto the king concerning her house and her field. And Gehazi said, My lord, O king, this is the woman, and this is her son whom Elisha revived. (6) And the king made inquiry of the woman and she answered him. And the king appointed for her an officer, saying, Restore all which belongs to her, and all the produce of her field from the day she left the land until now.

COMMENTS

That a great famine had come about during the reign of Jehoram of Israel has been attested by 4:38. Prior to the approach of that famine Elisha had warned his wealthy Shunammite friend to leave her home and take up residence wherever she might choose in order that she might escape the pressure of the calamity. God had determined to bring a famine upon the land which would last for seven years (v. 1). This faithful woman regarded the prophet as a spokesman for God, and she accepted his instructions as divine commands. The woman and her household migrated to the fertile Philistine plain which, though not totally exempt from famine, did not suffer from such natural calamities nearly as much as did Samaria or Judah. For seven years the Shunammite resided in that foreign land (v. 2).

When the famine abated, the woman returned to her native land to discover that some neighbor had seized her unoccupied

house and land and now refused to return it to its rightful owner. The woman had no recourse but to appeal to the king that her properties be restored (v. 3). The king happened to be talking with Gehazi when the woman came into his presence to plead her case. It would seem that Jehoram had sent for Gehazi to satisfy his curiosity with regard to the miraculous deeds of Elisha (v. 4). This king and the prophet himself had never been on particularly friendly terms, hence the best source for accurate information about the deeds of this man of God was his servant. The present episode must be chronologically prior to infliction of leprosy on Gehazi recorded in chapter 5.

It was just as Gehazi related the most stupendous of all Elisha's miracles—the resurrection of the Shunammite's son—that this woman began to cry for the attention of the king. Divine providence so ordered matters that just when the king's interest in the woman was warmest, the woman appeared to press her claim. Gehazi was pleased to point out his old friend and her son, who by this time must have been a lad of ten years or more (v. 5). The king made inquiry of the woman, not only about the miracle which had been wrought in her house, but also about her property claims. Convinced of the justness of her cause, the king appointed an officer of the court to expedite matters and to see that all the woman's property was returned to her. In addition, he awarded her all the profits which the land had produced during the seven years of her absence (v. 6).

C. PREDICTION CONCERNING THE CAREER OF HAZAEL 8:7-15

TRANSLATION

(7) Now Elisha went to Damascus when Benhadad the king of Aram was sick. And it was told him, saying, The man of God has come here. (8) And the king said unto Hazael, Take in your hand a present, and go to meet the man of God, that you may inquire of the LORD from him, saying, Shall I recover from this

disease? (9) And Hazael went to meet him, and took a present in his hand, even every good thing of Damascus, forty camel burdens, and he came and stood before him, and said, Your son Benhadad, the king of Aram, has sent me unto you, saying, Shall I recover from this sickness? (10) And Elisha said unto him, Go, say to him,¹¹ You shall surely recover; but the LORD has shown me that he will surely die. (11) And he stood before him, and settled his countenance, and set it until he was ashamed, and the man of God wept. (12) And Hazael said, Why is my lord weeping? And he said, Because I know the evil which you will do to the children of Israel. Their fortresses you will set afire, and their young men you will slay with the sword, and their little ones you will dash to pieces, and their pregnant women you will rip open. (13) And Hazael said, But what is your servant, a dog, that he should do this great thing? And Elisha said, The LORD has shown me you as king over Aram. (14) So he went from Elisha, and came unto his master, and he said to him, What did Elisha say to you? And he said, He said to me that you will surely recover. (15) And it came to pass on the next day that he took a thick cloth, and dipped it in water, and spread it over his face so that he died; and Hazael ruled instead of him.

COMMENTS

The reasons for Elisha's visit to Damascus are not given. Some have attempted to link this visit to the commission given many years earlier to Elijah that he was to anoint Hazael. Others speculate that Jezebel was stirring up trouble for the prophet, and so he determined to leave the country temporarily. Still another possibility is that Elisha was spending part of the time of the national famine outside the land even as his predecessor

¹¹ The existing Hebrew text cannot be translated and the slight emendation of *lō'* ("not") to *lō* ("to him") is accepted by almost all authorities.

had once done.¹² Whatever his reasons for going to Damascus, the move was most bold. Not too long previous to this visit, the king of Damascus had made a determined effort to arrest Elisha and punish him for revealing Aramean military plans to Jehoram (cf. 6:13-19). Probably the Lord directed Elisha to make this trip, and the prophet, putting his trust in the Lord, carried out the command.

It so happened that the aged Benhadad was quite ill at the time Elisha visited the city. Since the prophet made no effort to conceal his presence, his coming was soon reported to the king (v. 7). Benhadad, knowing of the reputation of this man of God, immediately dispatched his trusted servant Hazael with presents for the prophet. He was instructed to make inquiry of Yahweh through the prophet concerning the prognosis for the king (v. 8). The miracles of Elisha had convinced even these idolaters that Yahweh was a great and powerful God. Hazael carried out the instructions of his king, taking with him the choice goods of Damascus carried by forty camels. Through his messenger, Benhadad referred to himself as "*your son*" thus indicating the respect he felt toward the prophet (v. 9).

Elisha instructed Hazael to tell his master that he would surely recover from that illness. However God had revealed to Elisha that the king would die, not of his illness, but of another cause (v. 10). After rendering this answer to Hazael, the prophet fixed a hard stare upon his visitor until Hazael became uncomfortable and ashamed. Hazael had already formed a plan to eliminate his master and the stare of the prophet made him realize that his plans were known.

As the prophet mentally observed what lay in store for his people at the hand of Hazael, he began to weep (v. 11). Hazael inquired as to the reason for this unexpected outburst, and in so doing addressed the prophet with the respectful "*my lord.*" Elisha explained his emotional outburst by describing the brutal

¹² Gray, (OTL, p. 529) thinks Benhadad sent for Elisha. If this were the case, one would think that Elisha would have been taken directly into the presence of the king.

warfare which Hazael would launch against Israel—the burning of cities, slaughter of youth, dashing to pieces of little children, and ripping open of pregnant women (v. 12). Hazael shrugged off the implications of this prediction by asking how he, a lowly servant—a contemptible dog—would ever be able to launch war against Israel and do the great things Elisha predicted of him. Elisha responded that Hazael would not continue in his lowly position, for the Lord had revealed that he would one day be king of Aram (v. 13).

Hazael returned to Benhadad and reported only the first half of Elisha's answer to the king. He suppressed the part of the answer that announced that Benhadad would die, but not of the illness (v. 14). On the very next day, Hazael made his move against the king. He took a thick piece of cloth, dipped it in water, and held it over the ailing king's face until Benhadad died of suffocation.¹³ Hazael then usurped the throne¹⁴ (v. 15).

III. CONTEMPORARY EVENTS IN JUDAH 8:16-29

At this point the author picks up the history of Judah from I Kings 22:50 and gives a brief resume of the reigns of (1) Jehoram (vv. 16-24), and (2) Ahaziah (vv. 25-29). These men are the fifth and sixth successors of Solomon on the throne of Judah.

A. THE REIGN OF JEHORAM OF JUDAH 8:16-24

TRANSLATION

(16) Now in the fifth year of Joram son of Ahab, king of Israel, Jehoshaphat being king of Judah, Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat

¹³ A few commentators have proposed that Benhadad committed suicide. But Hazael is the natural subject of the verbs in verse 15. Furthermore, verse 11 would be unintelligible if Hazael entertained no murderous intentions.

¹⁴ Hazael's usurpation is noted in Assyrian inscriptions, which refer to him as "the son of nobody," the regular designation of a usurper.

king of Judah began to reign. (17) He was thirty-two years old when he began to reign, and eight years he ruled in Jerusalem. (18) And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel according to all which the house of Ahab did, for the daughter of Ahab was his wife; and he did evil in the eyes of the LORD. (19) Yet the LORD did not desire to destroy Judah for the sake of David his servant as he promised him to give to him a lamp in respect to his children always. (20) In his days Edom rebelled from under the hand of Judah, and made a king over themselves. (21) So Joram went over to Zair, and all the chariots with him; and it came to pass that he arose by night, and smote the Edomites who were surrounding him, and the captains of the chariots and the people fled to their tents. (22) And Edom rebelled from under the hand of Judah until this day. Then Libnah rebelled at the same time. (23) And the rest of the deeds of Joram, and all which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? (24) And Joram slept with his fathers, and he was buried with his fathers in the city of David; and Ahaziah his son ruled instead of him.

Fifth King of Judah JEHORAM (or JORAM) 848-841 B.C.* ("Exalted by Yahweh") I K 22:50; II K 8:16-24; II C 21 Synchronism Jchoram 1 = Joram 5	
Mother: ?	Appraisal: Bad
"Give not your . . . ways to that which destroys kings." Proverbs 31:3 *coregent from 853 B.C.	

COMMENTS

The reign of Jehoram (Joram) of Judah is somewhat confusing. In the seventeenth year of his father (853 B.C.), Jehoram

was made coregent. This coregency lasted until the death of Jehoshaphat in 848 B.C.¹⁵ The independent reign of Jehoram lasted eight years, 848-841 B.C. (v. 17).

Jehoram departed from the godly paths of his father, and followed in the way of the house of Ahab in the North. This probably means that he introduced the Phoenician Baal and Asherah cults into Judah. This corrupt worship was the bitter fruit of the alliance with the Northern Kingdom forged by Jehoshaphat in which Jehoram had married the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel.¹⁶ The evil which this king did is amplified in II Chronicles 21. Shortly after his accession, he put to death his six brothers in order to solidify his position. At the same time he executed many of the princes of the land, no doubt for the same reason. Soon afterwards he "*made high places in the mountains of Judah, and caused the inhabitants of Jerusalem to commit fornication*" (i.e., to become idolaters) "*and compelled Judah thereto*" (II C 21:11). Such apostasy merited God's rejection and destruction (cf. Deut. 28:15-37). But God had made promises to David and to his seed after him which would not be fulfilled if Judah's candlestick of national existence were now to be removed. The longsuffering of God with respect to David's dynasty was demonstrated in that He bore with Judah for about three centuries longer until at last their cup of iniquity was full (v. 19).

Though God could not yet destroy Judah, in His providence He did bring about certain political chastisements during the wicked reign of Jehoram. For one thing, the Edomites revolted¹⁷ and appointed for themselves an independent king (v. 20).

¹⁵ The historian gives two synchronisms for the commencement of the reign of Jehoram son of Ahab. One is in terms of the reign of Jehoshaphat (II K 3:1) and one in terms of his coregent Jehoram (II K 1:17).

¹⁶ In verse 18 Jehoram's wife is stated to be the daughter of Ahab, in verse 26 the daughter of Omri. In the latter verse, "*daughter*" is used in the sense of female descendant.

¹⁷ Edom had been conquered by David's general Joab (I K 11:15, 16). Solomon seems to have been able to maintain control of Edom during most of his reign, though he was constantly harassed by the nationalist Hadad. At Solomon's death, Edom revolted, and it was not until the time of Jehoshaphat that the land was reconquered (I K 22:47).

Naturally, Jehoram tried to crush this rebellion, but his efforts were not successful and were almost disastrous. Edomites surrounded his position at Zair.¹⁸ Only by a daring night attack was Jehoram able to break through the enemy lines, especially the Edomite chariot forces, and extricate himself from annihilation. His army, however, was so alarmed by the near catastrophe that they dispersed to their homes (v. 21). Jehoram was never in a position to make any further invasion of Edom, and the Edomites remained independent until the time of the writing of the annals from which the author of Kings derived his material. The Chronicler reports on a Philistine invasion during the days of Jehoram (II C 21:16), and it may have been in connection with this invasion that Libnah, located in the lowlands of Judah on the edge of Philistia, revolted (v. 22).

The brief resume of Jehoram's reign ends with the standard formula used for most of the kings of Judah. Some of his numerous other acts have been selected from the prophetic annals for inclusion in the Biblical Book of Chronicles, e.g., his reception of a letter from Elijah the prophet (II C 21:12-15); his wars with the Philistines and the Arabs (II C 21:16); his loss of all his sons but one during his lifetime; his long illness and painful death (II C 21:18,19). Jehoram died after an illness lasting two years of an incurable disease of his bowels. The king was buried in that portion of Jerusalem built by David but not, according to II Chronicles 21:20, in the royal tombs there. He was followed by his son Ahaziah, who is called Jehoahaz in II Chronicles 21:17 and Azariah in II Chronicles 22:6.

B. THE REIGN OF AHAZIAH OF JUDAH 8:25-29

TRANSLATION

(25) In the twelfth year of Joram son of Ahab king of Israel, Ahaziah son of Jehoram king of Judah began to reign. (26)

¹⁸ Montgomery (ICC, p. 396) takes Zair to be the Zoar of Genesis 13:10, in which case the place would be located at the southern end of the Dead Sea.

Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem; and the name of his mother was Athaliah the daughter of Omri the king of Israel. (27) And he walked in the way of the house of Ahab, and did evil in the eyes of the LORD like the house of Ahab, for he was related by marriage to the house of Ahab. (28) And he went with Joram the son of Ahab to war with Hazael king of Aram at Ramoth-gilead; and the Arameans smote Joram. (29) And Joram the king returned to convalesce in Jezreel from the wounds which the Arameans had inflicted on him at Ramah when he fought against Hazael king of Aram; and Ahaziah the son of Jehoram king of Judah went down to see Joram the son of Ahab in Jezreel, because he was sick.

Sixth King of Judah

AHAZIAH (or JEHOAHAZ, or AZARIAH)

841 B.C.

("Sustained by Yahweh")

II K 8:24; 9:29; II C 22:1-9

Synchronism

Ahaziah 1 = Joram 12

Mother: Athaliah

Appraisal: Bad

"For, lo, the kings were assembled, they passed by together." Psalms 48:4

COMMENTS

In the closing paragraph of chapter 8, the author continues the history of Judah through one more brief reign, that of Ahaziah. According to verse 25, Ahaziah began to reign in the *twelfth* year of Joram of Israel; but according to 9:29 it was the *eleventh* year. Such one year discrepancies result from the two systems of counting the regnal years of kings, one of which did not count the months of the accession year. A discrepancy between the text of Kings and Chronicles exists with regard to the age of Ahaziah when he assumed the throne,

the former giving his age as twenty-two, and the latter as forty-two (II C 22:2). The Chronicles figure is manifestly incorrect, for Ahaziah's father was only forty years old when he died.¹⁹

Ahaziah was married to the Jezebel of Judah, Athaliah the daughter of Ahab and granddaughter of Omri (v. 26). Because of the marriage relationship with the Northern dynasty, Ahaziah followed the religious policy of the house of Ahab (v. 27) during his one year reign, i.e., he continued to sanction the Baal worship which had been introduced into Judah by his father Jehoram (cf. v. 18).

From the brief reign of Ahaziah only two incidents are recorded. Following the example of his grandfather Jehoshaphat, Ahaziah joined in a military alliance with Joram of Israel to go to the relief of Ramoth-gilead (or Ramah) which was being attacked by Hazael, the new king of Damascus. It would appear that sometime after the death of Ahab at this same city, the Israelites had successfully wrested Ramoth-gilead from the hands of the Arameans. During the course of the defense of the city, Joram was severely, but not fatally, wounded (v. 28). Thereafter Joram and his cousin from Judah returned to their respective capitals leaving a strong garrison under general Jehu to defend the city. King Joram stopped off at Jezreel in the plains to recuperate in the royal retreat there rather than make the more arduous ascent back to Samaria. After some time passed, Ahaziah of Judah decided to make a royal trip to Jezreel to visit his convalescing relative (v. 29). As things turned out, Ahaziah never returned from that fateful visit.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

I. FACTS TO MASTER

A. Important names to identify in relation to this chapter:

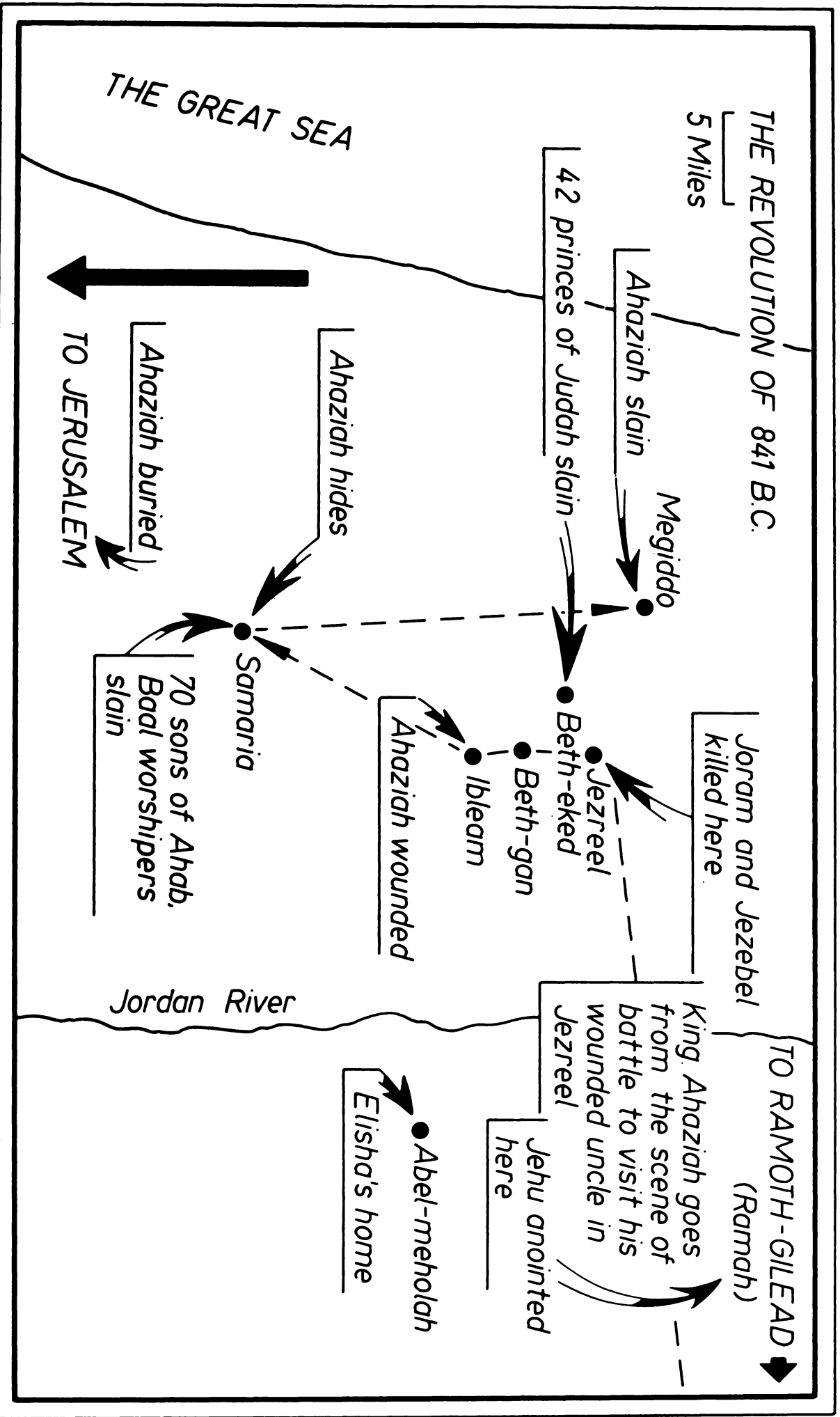
¹⁹ The scribal copying of Chronicles must be at fault here.

- | | |
|------------|-------------|
| 1. Elisha | 5. Benhadad |
| 2. Gehazi | 6. Hazael |
| 3. Jehoram | 7. Athaliah |
| 4. Ahaziah | |
- B. Important places to be identified in relation to this chapter:
- | | | |
|------------|--------------|------------------|
| 1. Samaria | 4. Philistia | 7. Libnah |
| 2. Jordan | 5. Damascus | 8. Ramoth-gilead |
| 3. Dothan | 6. Edom | 9. Jezreel |
- C. Important numbers
1. Number of lepers who discovered the abandonment of the Aramean camp
 2. Number of camel burdens Hazael brought as a gift to Elisha
 3. Number of years Elisha predicted famine in Israel
 4. Number of chariots sent forth from Samaria to investigate the flight of the Arameans
 5. Price of a measure of flour and two measures of barley after the flight of the Arameans
 6. Number of times Elisha revealed the whereabouts of Aramean ambushes
- D. Words and phrases which should call to remembrance key events in this chapter:
- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------|
| 1. chariots of fire | 6. heavenly windows |
| 2. blindness | 7. famine |
| 3. feast | 8. donkey's head |
| 4. a wet cloth | 9. sackcloth |
| 5. a lamp | 10. elders |

II. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. Why did Elisha reveal the military plans of the Aramean raiding parties to King Jehoram? (Remember, Jehoram was quite wicked.)
2. How was Elisha able to know what Aramean plans were?
3. What is symbolized by the horses and chariots of fire on the hills about Dothan?
4. Why did the prophet order his Aramean captives to be

- treated with kindness?
5. Why did Jehoram become so embittered against Elisha during the siege of Samaria?
 6. What missionary lesson can the modern church observe in the actions of the four lepers? (7:8, 9).
 7. What is there in the opening verses of chapter 8 that would suggest these stories from the ministry of Elisha are not in chronological order?
 8. Did the prophecy of Elisha in Damascus cause Hazael to kill his master?
 9. In 8:10 is Elisha instructing Hazael to lie to Benhadad?
 10. Of both Jehoram and Ahaziah of Judah it is said, "*he walked in the way of the house of Ahab.*" How did the house of Ahab come to have such an influence on the kings of Judah?
 11. II Kings 8:26 states Ahaziah was twenty-two when he began to reign; II Chronicles 22:2 states he was forty-two. If the Scriptures are inerrant, how can such a discrepancy be explained?





Cedars of Lebanon for Solomon's Temple



Actual construction of the Temple

**Drawings by Horace Knowles
from the British and Foreign Bible Society**

CHAPTER NINETEEN

THE REVOLUTION OF 841 B.C.

II Kings 9:1—10:27

The revolution of 841 B.C. may well be the most important political development in the history of the Hebrew monarchy since the schism of 931 B.C. Both kingdoms were affected immediately by what transpired. Besides the obvious political changes brought on by the revolution, one can trace the effects of this *coup* in the religious, economic and social realms as well. The story starts with the anointing of Jehu (9:1-13) and continues with the confrontation at Jezreel (9:14-37). The author then discusses the aftermath of the *coup* in Israel (10:1-27).

I. THE ANOINTING OF JEHU 9:1-13

Jehu, the commander of the garrison at Ramoth-gilead, was selected by God to execute the divine wrath against the Omri dynasty. Quite unexpectedly, Jehu was thrust into a position to challenge the reigning monarch by (1) the anointing by a prophet (vv. 1-10); and (2) the acclamation of his fellow officers (vv. 11-13).

A. THE ANOINTING BY A PROPHET 9:1-10

TRANSLATION

(1) And Elisha the prophet called one of the sons of the prophets, and said to him, Gird up your loins, and take this flask of oil in your hand, and go to Ramoth-gilead. (2) When you come to that place, find Jehu the son of Jehoshaphat the son of Nimshi there, and go and make him rise from the midst of his brethren, and take him into an inner chamber. (3) Then take the flask of oil, and pour it out on his head, and say, Thus says the LORD: I have anointed you king over Israel; then open the

door, and flee, and do not tarry. (4) So the young man, even the young man who was a prophet, went to Ramoth-gilead. (5) And he came, and behold the captains of the army were sitting; and he said, I have a word for you, O captain. And Jehu said, Unto which of us? And he said, To you, O captain. (6) And he went into the house, and poured oil upon his head, and he said to him, Thus says the LORD God of Israel: I have anointed you for king over the people of the LORD, over Israel. (7) And you shall smite the house of Ahab your master, that I may avenge the blood of My servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD, at the hand of Jezebel. (8) For all the house of Ahab shall be destroyed, and I will cut off to Ahab male descendants, him that is shut up and him that is left in Israel. (9) And I will make the house of Ahab like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah. (10) And the dogs shall eat Jezebel in the portion of Jezreel, and there shall be none to bury her. And he opened the door and fled.

COMMENTS

In the present paragraph Elisha carries out his commission to transfer the kingdom of Israel from the unworthy dynasty of Omri to that of a new dynasty. The prophet dispatched one of the prophetic students to Ramoth-gilead where general Jehu was commandant (v. 1). He instructed his disciple to single out Jehu, take him behind closed doors (v. 2), and anoint him to be king of Israel. Having done this the young prophet was to hastily depart (v. 3). Secrecy was of extreme importance, lest the king should find out what was happening and prepare himself for resistance. Many years before Elijah had been commissioned to anoint this general as king, but, since the time was not ripe during his ministry, he had delegated this responsibility to his successor. Jehu had served as a soldier under Ahab, and under his two sons Ahaziah and Joram. He had worked his way up the ranks until he was chief captain of the host.

The young prophet carried out the instructions of Elisha and went to Ramoth-gilead (v. 4). There he found the various officers sitting about informally chatting with one another. Looking at Jehu but addressing no one in particular, the prophet announced, "*I have a word for you, O captain.*" To clarify the recipient of the message, Jehu asked which of the officers he wished to address, and the prophet singled out Jehu (v. 5). Jehu then left his seat and led the way from the courtyard where the officers had been sitting, into the house which adjoined the court.

In the privacy of that room the prophet took his flask of oil and anointed Jehu king over Israel in the name of the Lord. Along with the crown came a commission. Jehu was to smite, i.e., utterly destroy, the house of Ahab in order that God might avenge the deaths of his prophets and other worshipers at the hand of Jezebel (v. 7). This general persecution of Yahweh worshipers had at one time reduced the number of the faithful in Israel to a mere seven thousand (I K 19:18). Jezebel was at the bottom of the antagonism toward the people of God, at times taking matters into her own hands (e.g., I K 18:13; 21:8-14), and at times stirring up her husband (I K 21:25) to do evil. For these crimes, all the posterity of Ahab must be cut off (v. 8)¹ so that the house of Ahab would become like the house of Jeroboam (I K 15:29) and the house of Baasha (I K 16:11), both of which had been exterminated because of religious apostasy. As for Jezebel herself, her corpse would be eaten by dogs, and no one would be sufficiently interested in her fate to see that she received a decent burial. These details about the fate of Jezebel previously had been prophesied by Elijah (cf. I K 21:23). Having completed his mission of anointing and commissioning Jehu, the young prophet hastily departed (v. 10).

¹ For an explanation of the phrases in verse 8, see comments on I Kings 14:10.

B. THE ACCLAMATION OF HIS FELLOW OFFICERS
9:11-13

TRANSLATION

(11) And Jehu went out unto the servants of his master and one said unto him, Is all well? Why did this madman come unto you? And he said unto them, You know the man and his message. (12) And they said, Not so. Tell it, we pray you, to us. And he said, Thus and so did he say to me, saying, Thus says the LORD: I have anointed you for king over Israel. (13) And they hastened, and took each man his garment, and placed them under him on top of the stairs, and they blew the trumpet, and said, Jehu reigns!

COMMENTS

When Jehu emerged from the house, his colleagues quizzed him about the crazy-acting messenger who had disappeared almost as suddenly as he had appeared. Jehu suspected that the whole scene had been arranged beforehand by his junior officers—that the young prophet and the officers of the host had banded together to force him to make a move against the unpopular Jehoram (v. 11). The officers firmly and sincerely disavowed any knowledge of what the young man might have said, and pressed their leader to relate it to them. Jehu then reported to them all that the prophet had said (v. 12). The military commanders at Ramoth-gilead received the news enthusiastically and immediately began to render to Jehu royal homage by spreading their garments upon the dust for him to walk upon. They improvised an enthronement ceremony by having Jehu ascend the outside stairs which led to the upper story of the house. When he took his position on the top-most step, they blew the trumpets and proclaimed Jehu to be king (v. 13).

II. CONFRONTATION AT JEZREEL 9:14-37

The historian takes pains to paint the backdrop for the *coup d'etat* in 9:14-16. Then, in a matter-of-fact way, he narrates the bloody deaths of Jehoram of Israel (vv. 17-26), Ahaziah of Judah (vv. 27-29), and Jezebel (vv. 30-37).

A. SETTING FOR THE *COUP D'ETAT* 9:14-16

TRANSLATION

(14) So Jehu son of Jehoshaphat son of Nimshi conspired against Joram (now Joram was keeping Ramoth-gilead, he and all Israel, because of Hazael the king of Aram. And Joram the king had returned to convalesce in Jezreel from the wounds which the Arameans had inflicted upon him when he fought against Hazael the king of Aram). And Jehu said, If your minds are thus, do not let a fugitive escape from the city to go to tell it in Jezreel. (16) So Jehu rode in a chariot and went to Jezreel; for Joram was resting there, and Ahaziah the king of Judah had gone down to visit Joram.

COMMENTS

By the open acts which took place at Ramoth-gilead, Jehu's conspiracy against the crown was launched. These soldiers happened to be at Ramoth-gilead in Transjordan because Joram had ordered the city to be defended against the incursions of the Arameans (v. 14). The king himself, however, was not present, for he had retired to Jezreel to recuperate from battle wounds. After he was proclaimed to be king, Jehu proposed to his supporting officers that they must take all precaution to prevent anyone loyal to Joram from escaping to warn the king of their plans (v. 15). Secrecy was absolutely essential. Had the word reached Jezreel, the king might have been able to field

a sizable army of loyalists, consequently plunging the entire nation into a bloody civil war. This Jehu wanted to avoid at all costs. On the very day of his anointing, Jehu gathered a small chariot force and swiftly made his way to Jezreel, hoping to arrive before any suspicion of rebellion or revolt (v. 16).

B. THE DEATH OF JEHORAM OF ISRAEL 9:17-26

TRANSLATION

(17) Now the watchman was standing upon the tower in Jezreel, and he saw the company of Jehu as he came, and he said, A company I see! And Joram said, Take a horseman, and send to meet them, and let him say, Is all well? (18) So a horseman went to meet him and he said, Thus says the king: Is all well? And Jehu said, What concern is it of yours? Turn in behind me. And the watchman told, saying, The messenger came unto them, and he did not return. (19) And he sent a second horseman, and he came unto them, and said, Thus says the king: Is all well? And Jehu said, What concern is it of yours? Turn in behind me. (20) And the watchman told, saying, He came unto them, and he did not return. And the driving is like the driving of Jehu son of Nimshi, for he drives like a madman. (21) And Joram said, Hitch up! And he hitched up his chariot. And Joram the king of Israel and Ahaziah the king of Judah went out, each in his chariot, and they went out to meet Jehu. And they found him in the portion of Naboth the Jezreelite. (22) And it came to pass when Joram saw Jehu that he said, Is all well, Jehu? And Jehu said, How can it be so long as the harlotries of Jezebel your mother and her many witchcrafts continue. (23) And Joram turned his hands, and fled, and said to Ahaziah, Treachery, O Ahaziah! (24) And Jehu drew his bow, and smote Joram between his shoulders, and the arrow went out at his heart, and he slumped over in his chariot. (25) Then he said to Bidkar his captain, Take up, cast him in the portion of the field of Naboth the Jezreelite; for remember when you

and I rode together after Ahab his father, and the LORD laid this burden upon him: (26) Surely I have seen yesterday the blood of Naboth, and the blood of his sons (oracle of the LORD); and I will recompense you in this portion (oracle of the LORD). Now lift him up, and cast him into the portion according to the word of the LORD.

COMMENTS

A watchman in the tower at Jezreel spied the band approaching and notified the king. Joram was not alarmed, and suspected that the small group of chariots was bringing news from the war front. He dispatched a messenger to find out if the news was good or bad (v. 17). Jehu refused to answer the question of the messenger, but said to him in effect, What does it matter to a common man like you whether or not my tidings are peaceful? He then directed the messenger to fall in behind him, and the messenger had no choice but to obey. The watchman noting this suspicious behavior reported it at once to the king. Joram should now have realized something was amiss, but he seems to have been oblivious to danger (v. 18). A second messenger was sent out with the same question, and he too was rebuffed and ordered to fall in behind Jehu (v. 19). The sending of the second messenger was an indication that the king was displeased with the detention of the first. When the second messenger failed also to return, Joram realized that whoever was leading that chariot band was acting in open defiance of the royal will. From the reckless pace at which the chariots were heading for Jezreel the watchman at Jezreel concluded that General Jehu, who had a reputation for such driving, was leading the group (v. 20).

When Joram heard that Jehu led the company which was approaching, his apprehension disappeared. Jehu was known for his loyalty to the house of Ahab. The king and his nephew from Judah decided to ride out to meet the great general to find out why he had abandoned his post at Ramoth-gilead. It so happened in God's judicial providence that the kings meet

Jehu and his company in the portion of ground which Ahab had so ruthlessly taken away from Naboth (v. 21). Joram asked the same question which the two messengers asked, but perhaps there is a bit different connotation to it. Jehu at any rate interpreted the king's question, "Is all well?" to mean, "Is all well between you and me?" Jehu answered the question in the negative. Now that the king is within bowshot, Jehu threw off his mask and announced, as it were, his conspiracy. No peace between Jehu and Joram could exist so long as the idolatrous influence of the queen mother was allowed to continue. The "*witchcrafts*" of Jezebel would be those magical acts commonly practiced in heathen kingdoms of that day but forthrightly condemned in the Law of Moses (v. 22). By so speaking of the queen mother, Jehu was clearly indicating that he was no longer willing to be a subject of her son.

Joram realized his precarious position and ordered his chariot driver to turn the chariot. At the same time, Joram shouted to Ahaziah to warn him of the treachery (v. 23). Jehu by this time had his bow in hand, and he quickly shot an arrow that penetrated the king's back and came out his heart. The king immediately slumped into his chariot dead (v. 24). Jehu then gave orders to one of his captains to cast the corpse of the king into the portion of ground which had formerly belonged to Naboth. Several years earlier both men had ridden with Ahab in his chariot, and they had heard the burden or sentence pronounced against him by Elijah (v. 25). Due to the lapse of some fifteen years, Jehu could not recall the exact words of the prophecy, but he remembered the gist of it, viz., that in Naboth's plot Ahab would be recompensed for his crime (v. 26). The execution of Naboth's sons was not previously mentioned, but Ahab would have to have had them slain, else he could not have come into possession of the plot. The evil pronounced against Ahab had been deferred to the days of his sons since Ahab did manifest some repentance with regard to the violence done against Naboth.

C. THE DEATH OF AHAZIAH OF JUDAH 9:27-29

TRANSLATION

(27) When Ahaziah king of Judah saw this, he fled by the way of Beth-Gan. But Jehu pursued after him, and said, Also smite him in the chariot. And they did so at the ascent of Gur which is by Ibleam. And he fled to Megiddo, and died there. (28) And his servants carried him in a chariot to Jerusalem, and they buried him in the sepulcher with his fathers in the city of David. (29) Now in the eleventh year of Joram the son of Ahab, Ahaziah had begun to reign over Judah.

COMMENTS

When Ahaziah saw what had happened to Joram, he fled southward toward the land of Judah by the way of Beth-Gan,² a village due south of Jezreel. Jehu ordered that Ahaziah also be slain. Ahaziah was the grandson of Ahab, and hence was part of the house of Ahab which Jehu was to slay. As Ahaziah's chariot slowed down at the steep ascent of Gur at the southern edge of the plain of Esdraelon, Jehu's archers were able to overtake him and inflict a wound upon him. Ahaziah then changed directions and headed west toward Megiddo, partly because he was now in no condition to make the rugged climb back to Jerusalem, and partly because he wished to throw off his pursuers. There he died, either of the wounds he had received at the ascent of Gur, or as a result of some new violence on the part of Jehu (cf. II C 22:8, 9). Ahaziah's servants then transported the body of their master to Jerusalem and buried him in his own sepulcher in the city of David (v. 28). Like Egyptian kings, the kings of Judah seem to have made it their business

² The Septuagint so renders. The KJV has elected to render as two common nouns, "garden house" the meaning of which is dubious.

to see to the construction of their tombs as soon as they mounted the throne. Even though Ahaziah had reigned but a year, he had already prepared his place of burial.³

D. THE DEATH OF JEZEBEL 9:30-37

TRANSLATION

(30) Now when Jehu came to Jezreel, Jezebel heard of it; and she put on eye make-up, and adorned her head, and looked out the window. (31) When Jehu came in the gate, she said, Is all well, O Zimri, who slays his master? (32) And he lifted up his face unto the window, and said, Who is with me? Who? And two or three eunuchs looked out unto him. (33) And he said, Throw her down. And they threw her down, and some of her blood was sprinkled on the wall and on the horses; and he trampled her underfoot. (34) And he went in, and ate and drank, and said, Go, I pray you, and visit this accursed one, and bury her; for she is the daughter of a king. (35) And they went to bury her; but they found nothing of her except the skull, the feet, and the palms of her hands. (36) And they returned, and told him, and he said, it is the word of the LORD which He spoke by the hand of His servant Elijah the Tishbite, saying, In the portion of Jezreel the dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel; (37) and the corpse of Jezebel shall be as dung upon the face of the ground in the portion of Jezreel, so that they shall not say this was Jezebel.

COMMENTS

After pursuing Ahaziah as far as Ibleam, Jehu turned about

³ On the discrepancy between 9:29 and 8:25 as to the year of Ahaziah's accession, see the comments on the earlier passage.

and headed back to Jezreel. About three hours would have elapsed since the death of King Joram. Jezebel, who had probably witnessed from the walls of Jezreel the death of her son, was resignedly waiting for her confrontation with Jehu. When she heard he was coming, she put on eye make-up,⁴ adorned her head, and took up her position near a window (v. 30). Even though she was a grandmother of at least fifty years, Jezebel still hoped to be able to capture the affections of Jehu with her beauty.⁵ The question asked of Jehu by Jezebel is probably to be interpreted as conciliatory rather than inflammatory. The queen asked: *"Is all well now between you and me?"* She probably intended her appellation *"Zimri"* to be an honorific one, recalling the fact that another Israelite general had revolted and slain his master and reigned as king (v. 31).

Jehu was not about to be deterred by the wiles of Jezebel. He was deaf to her flatteries, blind to her seductions. Spying some palace eunuchs behind the queen, Jehu cried out, *"Who is with me?"* (v. 32). The eunuchs stepped forward and peered from the window as if to respond positively to the general's challenge. *"Throw her down,"* ordered Jehu. Though Jezebel was the queen mother, she was nothing more to Jehu than a wicked woman who was in his way. The eunuchs grabbed the screaming queen and flung her to the courtyard below. As she fell her body bounced off certain wall projections at once smearing her blood on those walls, and showering it on the horses that pulled Jehu's chariot. The general then had his chariot driven over her crumpled corpse (v. 33). Rawlinson remarks concerning the treatment afforded this royal personage: *"History presents no parallel to such an indignity."*⁶

Jehu was completely unaffected by the bloodshed in which

⁴ From the earliest times women throughout the Near East would paint a dark dye on their upper and lower eyelids. Such make-up was designed to increase the apparent size of the eye and give it unnatural brilliancy.

⁵ Other commentators think Jezebel was simply preparing to meet death in a manner befitting a queen.

⁶ Rawlinson, PC, p. 196.

he had been involved. He immediately entered the palace and ordered a meal for himself. Not until after he had satisfied his appetite did he give any thought to the corpse of the late queen ignominiously lying untended on the cold earth without. Jehu ordered that this "*cursed woman*," who had instigated and participated in so many crimes, be taken and given a decent burial. After all, in spite of all the trouble she had caused, Jezebel was the daughter of a king (v. 34) and at the least deserved dignified burial. But when the servants went to bury the queen mother, all they could find of her was the skull, the feet, and the palms of her hands (v. 35).

When the servants reported back to Jehu what they had found, the general remembered a prophecy delivered many years earlier by Elijah. That prophecy, recorded in I Kings 21:23, is here expanded, either because Jehu's recollection was not exact, or because the record in I Kings is abbreviated. As Jehu remembered it, Elijah had said four things about the fate of Jezebel: (1) that dogs would devour her; (2) that this would take place in the "portion" of Jezreel, i.e., the cultivated space or portion of land outside the wall of the city; (3) that the carcass of Jezebel would be as dung upon the face of the ground; (4) that the fragments of the body would be so scattered that it would be impossible to bury all her remains in one tomb (vv. 36, 37).

III. THE AFTERMATH OF THE *COUP* 10:1-27

In chapter 10 the historian discusses some of the consequences of the revolution of 841 B.C. He discusses the bloody massacre of the house of Omri (vv. 1-11) and of the royal house of Judah (vv. 12-14). He then inserts a note to show how Jehu gained the support of the more conservative elements of the nation (vv. 15-17). The chapter reaches its climax in the account of how Jehu deceitfully gathered and then slew the Baal worshipers (vv. 18-27).

A. THE EXTERMINATION OF THE HOUSE OF OMRI
10:1-11

TRANSLATION

(1) Now Ahab had seventy sons in Samaria. And Jehu wrote letters, and sent them to Samaria unto the rulers of Jezreel, the elders, and unto those who brought up Ahab's children, saying (2) And now when this letter comes unto you, seeing the sons of your master are with you, and there are with you chariots and horses, a fortified city, and armor; (3) select the best and the most upright of the sons of your master, and set him upon the throne of his father, and fight on behalf of the house of your master. (4) But they feared exceedingly, and said, Behold two kings could not stand before him, how then shall we stand? (5) And he that was over the house, and he that was over the city, and the elders, and those who had brought up the children sent unto Jehu, saying, Your servants are we, and whatever you say unto us, we will do. We will not make any man king. Do that which is good in your eyes. (6) And he wrote unto them a second letter, saying, If you are mine, and you hearken to my voice, take the heads of the sons of your master, and come unto me about this time tomorrow to Jezreel. Now the sons of the king, seventy men, were with the great ones of the city who were bringing them up. (7) And it came to pass when the letter came unto them, that they took the sons of the king, and slew seventy men, and put their heads in baskets, and sent them unto him to Jezreel. (8) And the messenger came, and told him, saying, They have brought the heads of the sons of the king. And he said, Set them in two heaps at the entrance of the gate until morning. (9) And it came to pass in the morning, that he went out, and stood, and said unto all the people, You are righteous. Behold I conspired against my master, and I slew him; but who smote all of these? (10) Know now that there shall fall to the ground nothing of the word of the LORD, which the LORD has spoken concerning the house of Ahab. The LORD has done that which He spoke by the hand of Elijah

his servant. (11) So Jehu smote all who remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel, and all his great ones, and his acquaintances, and his priests, until he left none remaining.

COMMENTS

The immediate question after the death of Joram was—Would any member of his family rise up to claim the throne and dispute the succession with Jehu? Ahab had seventy sons, i.e., male descendants, who lived in the capital, Samaria. Jehu decided to take the initiative in dealing with this potential threat. Letters were sent to the elders of the nation⁷ and those who had tutored and trained Ahab's sons. In them Jehu taunted and challenged his potential adversaries. The sons of the deceased king, the legitimate heirs to the throne, lived in Samaria. Furthermore, the main chariot force of the country, and the chief arsenal containing both armor and arms were there as well (v. 2). Jehu scornfully challenged them to make use of these resources against him. Let them select the boldest and ablest son of Joram, make him king and leader against him. Omri had been able to establish himself on the throne of Israel only after a civil war, and Jehu is fully prepared to fight for the throne if necessary. But he was confident that the garrison at Samaria would not dare to venture forth against the army of Ramoth-gilead which had so recently proclaimed him to be king (v. 3).

The elders in Samaria were men of peace, and not military commanders. They were intimidated by the scornful and ominous tone of Jehu's letters. How could these agents of an unpopular regime hope to be able to rally enough support to challenge a popular general like Jehu? Joram and Ahaziah had not been able to stand before Jehu; how could *they* succeed where two kings had failed? Of course this argument was

⁷ It is not clear why these elders are called "*rulers of Jezreel*." One would expect here "*rulers of Samaria*" which the Septuagint actually reads.

fallacious, for those two kings had been taken by surprise and treacherously murdered. But the most flimsy argument can convince a coward that bold action is inappropriate (v. 4). So the chief officials of Samaria—the majordomo of the royal palace, the mayor of the city, the elders, and those who had raised Ahab's children—sent a letter of capitulation to Jehu. The bluff had worked! The leaders might have simply declined the challenge to put forth a rival king; but they went much further. They placed themselves unreservedly on Jehu's side when they declared, "*We are your servants and will do all that you ask.*" They closed their brief note by urging Jehu to take whatever steps he thought were necessary to confirm himself in the kingdom (v. 5).

The reply of the rulers of Jezreel gave Jehu an opportunity of which he was not slow to take advantage. He fired back a letter which in effect demanded that they demonstrate the loyalty they had so recently professed. If they were really his servants, and if they would follow his orders, then let them decapitate their master's sons and bring their heads to Jezreel within twenty-four hours (v. 6). Heads of rebels and pretenders were generally brought to the sovereign, and then exposed in some public place in order that the public might be convinced that they were really dead. As Jezreel was but twenty miles from Samaria, the order could easily be carried out in the time stipulated. Nevertheless, prompt action would have been necessary, and thus the leaders had little time for consideration and deliberation. Having committed themselves in their letter to obedience, the leaders of Samaria seemed to have no choice but to allow themselves to become the tools of Jehu. Without hesitation they slew the seventy princes, put their heads in baskets, and sent them to Jezreel by messenger (v. 7). Jehu had ordered them to *bring* the heads to Jezreel; but because they so greatly feared Jehu, they decided to send the heads by messenger.

When the heads of Ahab's sons arrived at Jezreel, Jehu ordered that they be put on public display in two heaps at the city gate (v. 8). Such a spectacle must have awakened the morbid

curiosity of the inhabitants of Jezreel and attracted a great throng of spectators. The next morning, Jehu went out to address the crowds at the gate. Since they were upright men, Jehu called upon them to render a judgment. He openly admitted that he had slain his master; but who, he asked, slew all these? (v. 9). He confessed to one murder; but here are seventy murders! Everyone knew by that time how these sons of Ahab had met their death. They were slain, not by Jehu and his soldiers, but by the most trusted officials of the former regime. Did this not prove that all the leaders of the nation were weary of the Ahabites? Did this not clear Jehu of any private or selfish motive in what he had done? Furthermore, Jehu argued, what had transpired had been predicted by Elijah the prophet—Ahab had been requited in the portion of Jezreel; the dogs had eaten the flesh of Jezebel; the house of Ahab was being destroyed. Since the accomplishment had gone so far, Jehu was confident that the entire prophecy of Elijah would shortly be fulfilled. The whole house of Ahab would perish (v. 10)—it would become like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat and like the house of Baasha the son of Ahijah (I K 21:23).

Encouraged by his past success, Jehu proceeded to great lengths. He slew "*all that remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel.*" This no doubt included the princesses as well as the princes. In addition he executed "*his great men,*" perhaps even those who had been used by Jehu to slay the seventy sons of Ahab, and the Baal priests who were on the royal payroll. The details of how these priests met their death is recorded later in chapter 10. Thus did Jehu destroy the entire Ahabite faction from the land (v. 11).

B. THE MASSACRE OF THE ROYAL HOUSE OF JUDAH 10:12-14

TRANSLATION

(12) And he arose, departed, and came to Samaria. When he was at Beth-eked in the way, (13) Jehu met the brethren of Ahaziah

king of Judah, and said, Who are you? And they said, We are brethren of Ahaziah, and we have come down to greet the sons of the king and the sons of the queen mother. (14) And he said, Take them alive! And they took them alive, and slew them at the well of Beth-eked, forty-two men, and he left not a man of them.

COMMENTS

Having eliminated all potential opposition both in Jezreel and throughout the land, Jehu set out for Samaria. At Beth-eked,⁸ an insignificant and unidentified spot en route (v. 12), Jehu happened upon a group of forty-two relatives⁹ of the deceased King Ahaziah of Judah. When interrogated as to who they were and what business they might have, these men indicated that they were on their way to Jezreel to visit their Northern cousins, the children of King Joram and also the queen mother Jezebel (v. 13). This explanation sounds suspicious. For one thing, it would *a priori* be unlikely that *forty-two* princes would set off suddenly to visit relatives at another capital. Furthermore, it is hardly possible that these forty-two men could still be ignorant of the bloody revolution which had taken place in the North. Several days must have passed since King Joram was slain, and it would appear from 9:28 that the body of King Ahaziah had already been brought to Jerusalem and buried. Even if these men had left Jerusalem before the arrival of the king's corpse, surely they would have encountered many travelers who would have filled them in about the bloody deeds perpetrated against the house of Ahab. The only conclusion

⁸ A spot where the shepherds of the area were accustomed to shear their flocks. Beth-eked literally means "*the house of binding*," and takes its name from the practice of tying the sheep's four feet together before shearing.

⁹ The actual "brethren" of Ahaziah had been carried off and slain by the Arabians (II C 21:17; 22:1); the youths here mentioned were their sons (II C 22:8), and therefore Ahaziah's nephews.

to which one can come is that these men from Judah were coming north to give aid and assistance to their relatives of the house of Ahab. But Jehu was not deceived. He at first ordered these men taken alive, but afterwards thought it would be safer to have them put out of the way. And so these forty-two, who were also descendants of Ahab, were slain at the well of Beth-eked (v. 14).

C. JEHU AND JEHONADAB 10:15-17

TRANSLATION

(15) And he departed from there, and found Jehonadab the son of Rechab coming to meet him; and he blessed him, and said unto him, Is your heart right as my heart is with your heart? And Jehonadab said, It is. If it is, give me your hand. And he gave his hand, and he took him up unto him into the chariot. (16) And he said, Come with me, and see my zeal for the LORD. So they made him ride in his chariot. (17) When he came to Samaria, he smote all that remained to Ahab in Samaria, until he had destroyed him according to the word of the LORD which he had spoken to Elijah.

COMMENTS

Between Beth-eked and Samaria, Jehu happened upon the great Kenite chief Jehonadab, the founder of a remarkable sect of conservative Yahwists. Jehonadab was somewhat of an ascetic who required his sons to live in tents, to possess neither house, nor field, nor vineyard, and to abstain wholly from the use of wine (cf. Jer. 35:8-10). Jehu was anxious for the endorsement of this noted leader, and so he "*blessed him,*" i.e., greeted him, and inquired whether or not this zealous servant of the Lord was sympathetically inclined toward the revolution. Without a moment's pause, the Kenite chief cast his lot with Jehu, for

he had chafed many years in the presence of Ahab's religious policy. Having received from Jehonadab a positive and enthusiastic endorsement, Jehu extended his hand to the venerable old man and took him up into his chariot. This action would at once honor the patriarch, and at the same time suggest to the populace that the two men were in accord with regard to the bloody anti-Ahab policy (v. 15).

Jehonadab evidently approved of the measures already taken by Jehu, and the general hinted to him that further severe measures were about to be taken. These acts Jehu referred to as "*my zeal for the Lord.*" Though Jehonadab did not know exactly what Jehu had in mind, he must have had a good idea of what was about to happen. So being in agreement with Jehu's cause, the patriarch agreed to ride to the capital with the general. So they, i.e., Jehu and his attendants, made provision for Jehonadab to ride in the royal chariot (v. 16). When they arrived in Samaria, Jehu slew all that remained of Ahab's house, viz., the daughters of Ahab, and the wives and perhaps families of the seventy sons already slain. This action fulfilled the word which God had spoken against the house of Ahab by the mouth of Elijah the prophet (v. 17).

D. THE MASSACRE OF THE BAAL WORSHIPERS

10:18-27

TRANSLATION

(18) And Jehu gathered all the people, and said unto them, Ahab served Baal a little; Jehu will serve him much. (19) And now call all the prophets of Baal and all his servants and all his priests unto me; let no man be lacking, for I have a great sacrifice for Baal. Any who is lacking shall not live. But Jehu did this deceitfully in order to destroy the servants of Baal. (20) And Jehu said, Sanctify a solemn assembly for Baal. And they proclaimed it. (21) And Jehu sent throughout all Israel, and every servant of Baal came, so that there did not remain

a man who did not come. And they came to the house of Baal; and the house of Baal was full from one end to the other. (22) And he said to the one who was over the vestry, Bring out garments for all the servants of Baal. And he brought forth to them the vestments. (23) And Jehu came along with Jehonadab son of Rechab to the house of Baal; and he said unto the servants of Baal, Search, and look that there be here with you none of the servants of the LORD, but worshipers of Baal only. (24) When they had gone in to make sacrifices and burnt offerings, Jehu appointed outside eighty men, and said, If any of the men whom I have brought into your hand escapes, your life instead of his life. (25) And it came to pass when he had finished making the burnt offering, that Jehu said to the guards and to the officers, Go in, smite them! Let not a man go out! And they smote them with the edge of the sword; and the runners and the officers cast them out, and went unto the city of the house of Baal. (26) And they brought forth the pillars of the house of Baal, and burned them. (27) And they broke in pieces the pillar of Baal, and broke down the house of Baal, and they made it into a dung house unto this day.

COMMENTS

Up to this point, the revolution of 841 B.C. had appeared to be nothing more than a dynastic change such as had been forced upon the nation by Baasha (I K 15:27-29), Zimri (I K 16:9-12), and Omri (I K 16:17-19). No one as yet suspected that deep religious motives were at the root of this revolution. Jehu's remarks about the "*whoredoms*" and "*witchcrafts*" of Jezebel (9:22) were heard only by a few trusted conspirators. His "*zeal for Yahweh*" whispered in the ear of Jehonadab (10:16) had heretofore been kept secret. Thus when Jehu publicly boasted of his intention to serve Baal even more zealously than had his predecessors, there was nothing to prevent the people from giving credence to his words (v. 18). Consequently the prophets, priests, and worshipers of Baal were summoned to

the great sacrifice with which, it was believed, Jehu would inaugurate his reign. The absence of any Baal worshiper would be interpreted as rebellion against the crown, deserving of capital punishment. All of this Jehu did deceitfully, for his intention was to utterly destroy the worshipers of this foreign god (v. 19). Idolaters were liable to death under the Law of Moses, and Jehu would have had a perfect right to eradicate Baal worship throughout the land. However, the end does not justify the means. To draw several hundred of his subjects by false pretenses into a trap and then slay them for doing what he had himself invited them to do, is an act wholly unjustifiable.

Having stated in summary fashion how Jehu assembled the Baal worshipers, the author then proceeds to give the details. The king requested the Baal cult leaders to proclaim a "*solemn assembly*," i.e., a day when worldly business was suspended for the sake of a religious gathering. The Baal officials were only too happy to comply with this order (v. 20). An edict of the king went throughout the kingdom ordering all Baal worshipers to participate in the king's inaugural sacrifice. No doubt the Baal worshipers enthusiastically responded to the royal order. By the hundreds, perhaps thousands, they assembled in the court-yards of the house of Baal which Ahab had built in Samaria (v. 21). It was customary when a king called for a great festival that those who assembled be supplied with appropriate garments so that the festivities might be as colorful as possible. So as not to arouse any suspicion, Jehu complied with this custom and ordered the keeper of the vestry to supply the worshipers with proper garb. Probably the robes were secured both from the wardrobe of the temple itself and from that of the royal palace (v. 22).

Keeping up the pretense that he was a devotee of Baal, Jehu himself entered the house of Baal along with Jehonadab whom he wished to have as a witness to his "*zeal for the Lord*." He then addressed the worshipers and urged that extreme vigilance be exercised to make sure that none but true worshipers of Baal were present. Of course the real object of the king was to spare the lives of any Yahweh worshipers who might have

attended the festival out of curiosity, or to have their share in the revelry which attended the worship of Baal. Jehu's request would not be thought suspicious in view of the general habit of restricting the more sacred rites of a religion to sincere devotees. The worship ceremonies would be profaned by the presence of scoffers or those not truly sincere (v. 23).

When the whole multitude of Baal worshipers had entered the sacred precincts to make the appropriate animal sacrifices, Jehu stationed at the entrance eighty trusted soldiers who were known devotees of Yahweh. These executioners were warned that any man who allowed a Baal worshiper to escape would forfeit his own life (v. 24). When the officiating priest¹⁰ had finished offering the sacrifices, Jehu gave the order to his guards (lit., *runners*) and captains to enter the temple precincts and slay the helpless worshipers. Doubtlessly some of the soldiers guarded the exits while others waded into the unarmed multitude wielding their swords right and left and casting the bodies out of their way as they pressed forward to the slaughter.

From the outer courts where the multitude had assembled, the soldiers entered "*the city of the house of Baal*," i.e., the inner sanctuary where Baal was enthroned surrounded by the images of his fellow gods. This area was probably reserved for priests only, and no doubt many had taken refuge here when the slaughter had commenced (v. 25). The wooden pillars or images representing either various aspects of Baal, or perhaps subordinate deities, were brought forth and burned (v. 26). The stone pillar representing Baal himself was broken in pieces. The house of Baal was virtually torn down, and what ruins that remained were made a "*draught-house*," i.e., a depository for all the filth of the city (v. 27). Thus did Jehu eliminate the worship of the Tyrian Baal from Israel (v. 28).

¹⁰ Some think that Jehu himself is the one who offered the sacrifices. However the Hebrew could equally well be translated, "when *one* finished" or "when *they* finished." Still another possibility is that Jehu might be said to have offered the sacrifice because he furnished the victims offered not because he immolated them with his own hand.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER NINETEEN

I. FACTS TO MASTER

A. Indicate how each of the following figure in the events discussed in this chapter:

- | | |
|------------|--------------|
| 1. Elisha | 6. Bidkar |
| 2. Jehu | 7. Naboth |
| 3. Jezebel | 8. Zimri |
| 4. Hazael | 9. Jehonadab |
| 5. Ahaziah | |

B. Indicate what transpired at each of the following places:

- | | |
|------------------|------------------|
| 1. Ramoth-gilead | 4. Beth-gan |
| 2. Jezreel | 5. Ascent of Gur |
| 3. Megiddo | 6. Beth-eked |

C. Important numbers:

1. Number of the "sons" of Ahab slain
2. Number of Judaeen princes slain
3. Number of soldiers Jehu used to slay the Baal worshippers

II. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. What elements in Israelite society would have been most upset by the policies of the Omri dynasty?
2. Why did not Elisha personally go to anoint Jehu? Why choose this particular time for the *coup*?
3. Why did Joram and Ahaziah ride out to confront Jehu when he approached Jezreel?
4. Why did Jezebel paint her eyes and attire her head when Jehu came to Jezreel?
5. When Jezebel called Jehu "*Zimri*" was she being defiant, or complimentary?
6. In what way were Elijah's predictions about Jezebel fulfilled? Approximately how many years had elapsed since that prophecy had been uttered?
7. How did Jehu get rid of potential rivals among the

THE REVOLUTION OF 841 B.C.

10:18-27

- descendants of Ahab? How was this a masterful stroke?
8. Why did Jehu covet the support of Jehonadab?
 9. Why did Jehu kill the forty-two princes of Judah?
 10. Was Jehu's method of rounding up and executing the Baal worshipers justified?

THE JEHU DYNASTY

841-753 B.C.

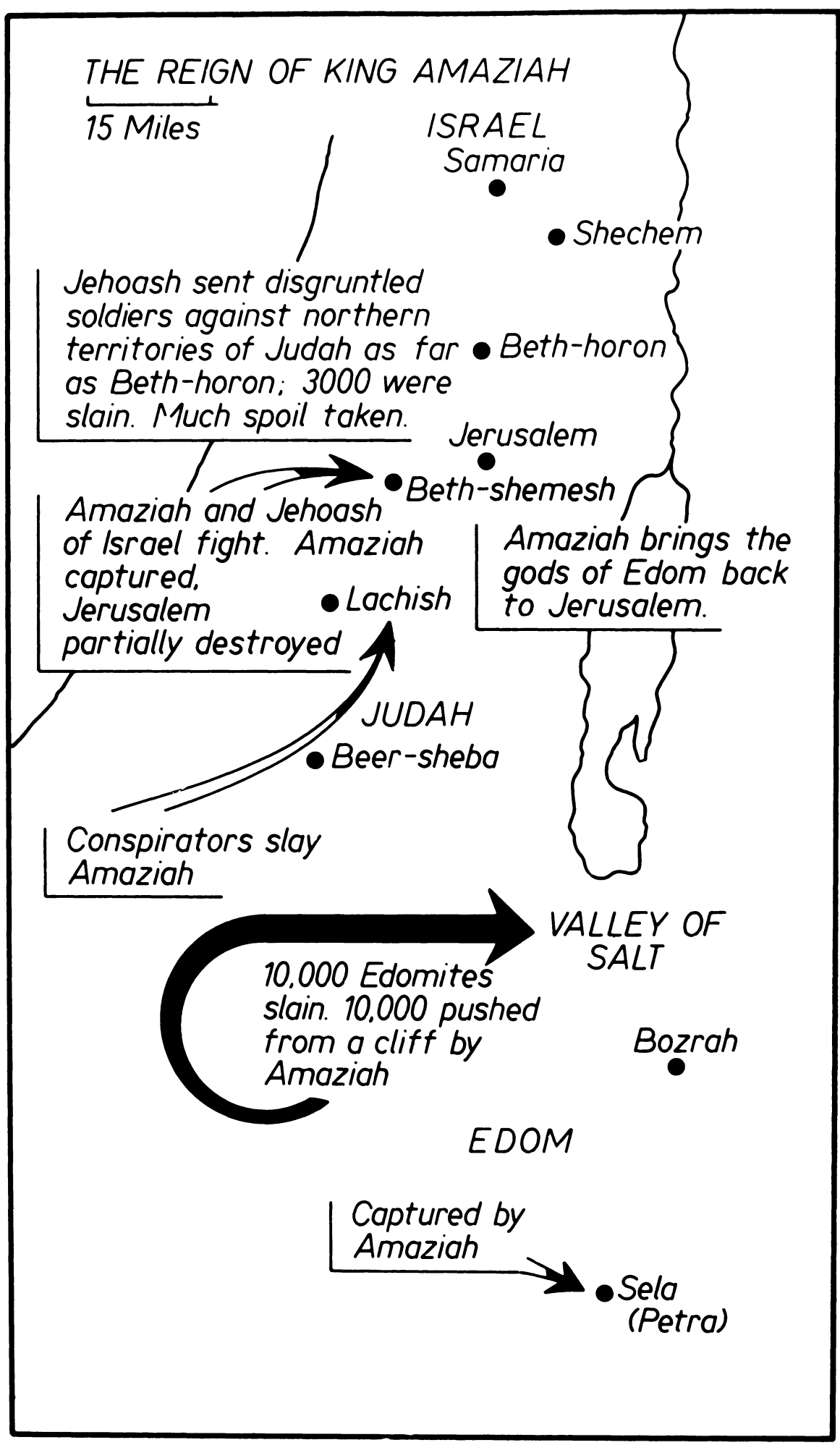
" . . . your sons to the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel."
II K 10:30

JEHU	(841-814 B.C.)	REVOLUTION
JEHOAHAZ	(814-798 B.C.)	RETRIBUTION
JEHOASH	(798-782 B.C.)	RECOVERY
JEROBOAM II	(782-753 B.C.)	RESTORATION
ZECHARIAH	(753 B.C.)	RUIN

"This is the word of the Lord which He spoke to Jehu And so it was."
II K 15:12

THE REIGN OF KING AMAZIAH

15 Miles



ISRAEL
Samaria

● Shechem

Jehoash sent disgruntled soldiers against northern territories of Judah as far as Beth-horon; 3000 were slain. Much spoil taken.

● Beth-horon

Jerusalem

● Beth-shemesh

Amaziah and Jehoash of Israel fight. Amaziah captured, Jerusalem partially destroyed

● Lachish

Amaziah brings the gods of Edom back to Jerusalem.

JUDAH

● Beer-sheba

Conspirators slay Amaziah

VALLEY OF SALT

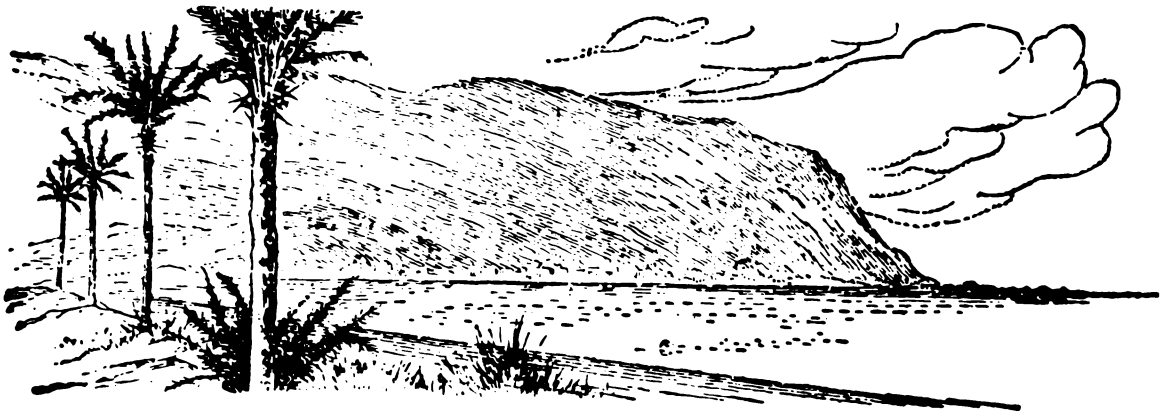
10,000 Edomites slain. 10,000 pushed from a cliff by Amaziah

● Bozrah

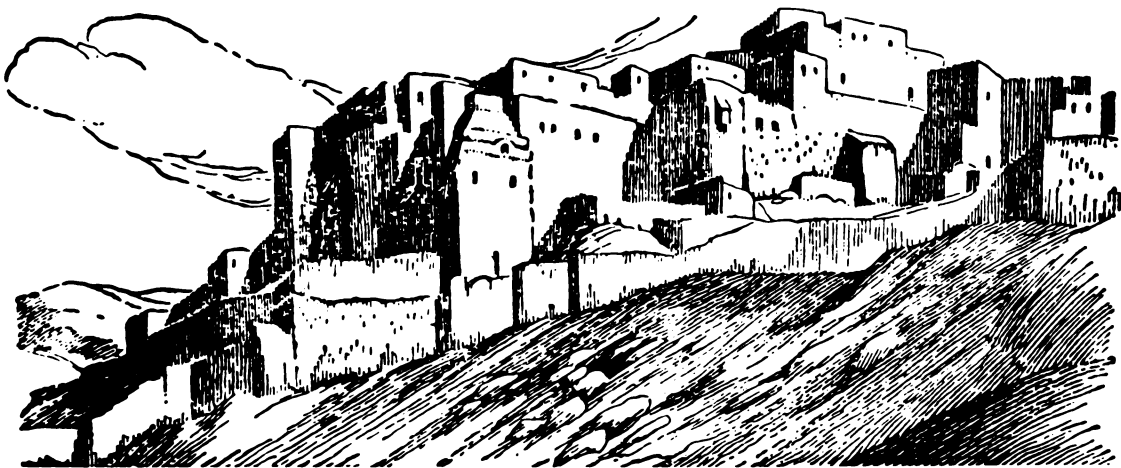
EDOM

Captured by Amaziah

● Sela (Petra)



Mount Carmel



Samaria was a fortified city built on a hill

**Drawings by Horace Knowles
from the British and Foreign Bible Society**

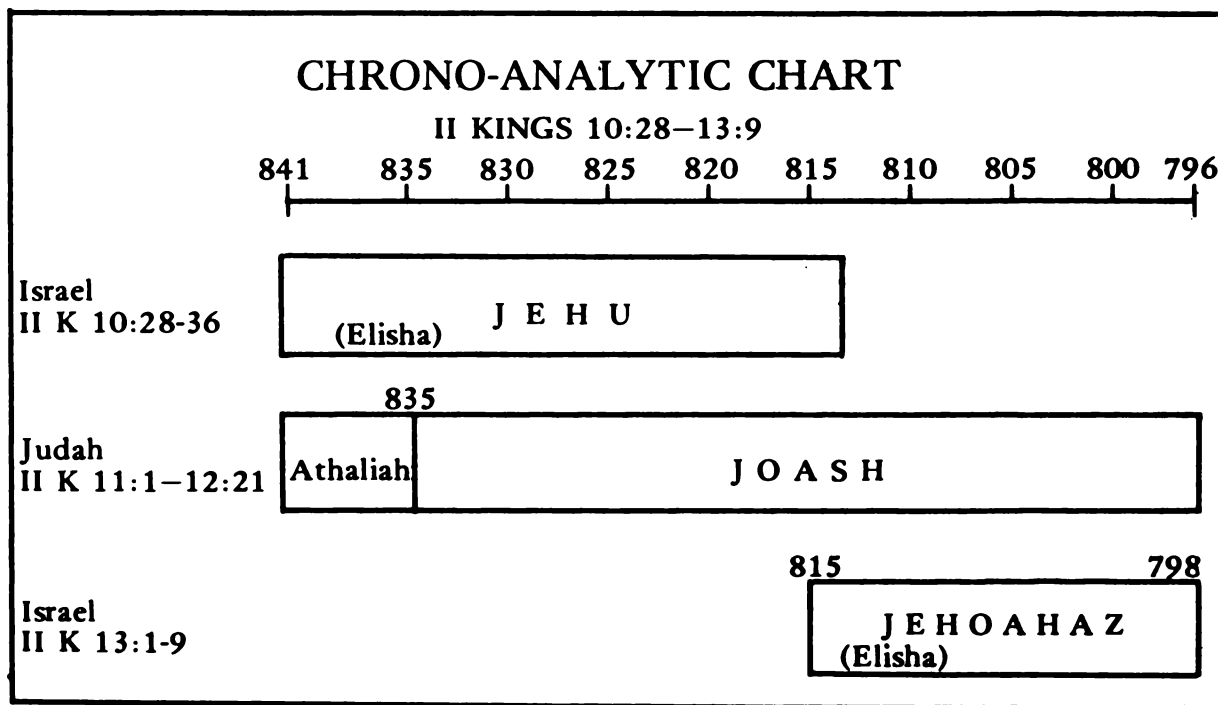
CHAPTER TWENTY

THE KINGDOMS AT LOW EBB

II Kings 10:28—13:9

The revolution of 841 B.C. ushered in a period of decline in Israel. The murder of Jezebel severed the profitable economic arrangements which Omri had worked out with the Phoenicians. The murder of the king of Judah disrupted relations with the sister kingdom to the south. The execution of the house of Ahab and its supporters created a dearth of leadership in the land. Judah too plunged into a sad state of decline in this period. For some forty years the Arameans under the leadership of the vigorous Hazael dominated the politics of the region.

In treating these four decades of humiliation in the two kingdoms, the author speaks of (1) the reign of Jehu in the North (10:28-36); (2) the reign of Athaliah (11:1-20) and (3) Joash (11:21—12:21) in the South; and (4) the reign of Jehoahaz in the North (13:1-9).



I. REIGN OF JEHU IN ISRAEL 10:28-36

TRANSLATION

(28) So Jehu destroyed Baal in Israel. (29) Only Jehu did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin, the calves of gold which were in Bethel and Dan. (30) And the LORD said unto Jehu, Because you have done well in doing what is upright in My eyes, and have done to the house of Ahab according to all which was in My heart, sons of the fourth generation shall sit for you upon the throne of Israel. (31) But Jehu did not take heed to walk in the Law of the LORD the God of Israel with all of his heart; he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam who made Israel to sin. (32) In those days the LORD began to cut short Israel, and Hazael smote them along the frontiers of Israel; (33) from the Jordan eastward, all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, Reubenites and the Manassites from Aroer, which is by the river Arnon, even Gilead and Bashan. (34) Now the rest of the acts of Jehu and all which he did and all of his might, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? (35) And Jehu slept with his fathers and they buried him in Samaria. And Jehoahaz his son reigned in his place. (36) And the time which Jehu reigned over Israel in Samaria was twenty-eight years.

Tenth King of Israel

JEHU

841-814 B.C.

(*"Yahweh is He"*)

II K 9-10

Synchronism

Jehu 1 = Athaliah 1

Contemporary Prophet

Elisha

"The great God that formed all things both rewardeth the fool, and rewardeth transgressors." Proverbs 26:10

COMMENTS

While Jehu was zealous for Yahweh as over against Baal, he was not of a mind to lead a reformation of Yahweh worship. The calf worship of the North had been under the curse of God from its inception (cf. I K 13:2). But the calf worship was thought to be essential to the maintenance of the Northern Kingdom. Abolish it, and all Israel would “*return to the house of David*” (I K 12:26-30). Jehu was not prepared to run this risk. Thus his reformation was a half-reformation, a partial turning to the Lord which brought no permanent blessing upon the nation (v. 29). Through some prophet—most probably Elisha—the Lord spoke to Jehu commending him for executing the divine wrath against the house of Ahab and the Baal worshipers. Nothing, it should be noted, is here said about the *motives* of Jehu which were probably largely selfish. For this external obedience, God rewarded Jehu with an external, earthly honor. God promised him that four generations of his children would rule on the throne of Israel. Counting the reign of Jehu himself, this dynasty ruled for five generations, over a hundred years. No other dynasty in the North ruled for over three generations or for more than fifty years. Yet in spite of this precious promise, Jehu did not serve the Lord with all his heart, and he continued to tolerate the calf worship instituted by Jeroboam (v. 31).

For continuing to maintain the illicit calf worship, the Lord began to “*cut Israel short*” (lit., *to cut off in Israel*). This probably means that certain territories were lost to Hazael the Aramean king, who began to attack along the entire Israelite frontier in the north and east (v. 32). Hazael seems to have wrested the entire Transjordan territory—Bashan and Gilead—as far south as the Arnon river, from the hands of Jehu. This affected most directly the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh (v. 33). Jehu’s only consolation was that he was able to keep Hazael from crossing the Jordan.

Many other events of Jehu’s reign might have been recorded by the author of Kings, and for this additional information

he refers his readers to his resource book, the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. It is strange to find a reference to the "*might*" of Jehu in view of the fact that all of his wars seem to have been unsuccessful. One must conclude that Jehu gained much distinction as a military leader and demonstrated great acts of personal valor in the Aramean wars, even though he was forced to concede territory to his enemy (v. 34). Only one other Northern king reigned longer than the twenty-eight years ascribed to Jehu, that being Jeroboam II who reigned forty-one years. Jehu was buried in the capital at Samaria and was succeeded on the throne by his son Jehoahaz (vv. 34-35).

II. TURMOIL IN JUDAH 11:1—12:21

In 11:1 the history of Judah is taken up where it left off at the end of chapter 8. The forty-five years covered in chapters 11-12 are characterized for the most part by political turmoil. The brief and turbulent reign of Athaliah (11:1-20) was followed by the lengthy but disappointing reign of Joash (11:21—12:21).

A. THE REIGN OF ATHALIAH IN JUDAH 11:1-20

The revolution of 841 B.C. is crucial in the history of Judah as well as of Israel. King Ahaziah and forty-two members of the royal house were slain by the zealot Jehu. This set the stage for a usurper to take over the throne of David in Jerusalem. Chapter 11 tells of (1) the usurpation of Athaliah (vv. 1-3); (2) the coronation of Joash (vv. 4-12); (3) the death of Athaliah (vv. 13-16); and (4) the enthronement of another descendant of David (vv. 17-20).

1. THE USURPATION OF ATHALIAH (11:1-3)

TRANSLATION

(1) When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she arose, and destroyed all the royal seed. (2) But Jehosheba the daughter of King Jehoram, the sister of Ahaziah, took Joash the son of Ahaziah, and stole him from the midst of the sons of the king which were being slain; he and his nurse were hidden in the chamber of mattresses from Athaliah, and he was not slain. (3) And he was with her hidden in the house of the LORD for six years. And Athaliah reigned over the land.

COMMENTS

Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, was married to Jehoram the son of Jehoshaphat the king of Judah. It was her son Ahaziah who was killed by Jehu. This woman inherited much of her mother's evil character. Through her influence, King Jehoram had introduced the worship of the Tyrian Baal into Judah (II K 8:18; II C 21:5, 11). When Ahaziah was slain, the powerful position of Athaliah as queen mother was jeopardized. The regular line of succession would require that one of her grandsons, the eldest son of Ahaziah, would now be enthroned, and this would mean that the position of queen mother would pass on to the widow of Ahaziah. For this reason Athaliah ordered all the members of the house of David put to death.¹ This would include Ahaziah's sons, Athaliah's own grandsons, and probably other descendants of David belonging to branches of the house other than that of Rehoboam (v. 1).

Athaliah's design to wipe out completely the house of David

¹ The royal house had already been greatly depleted by Jehoram's murder of his brothers (II C 21:4), by Arab marauders (II C 21:17) and Jehu's murder of the brethren of Ahaziah (II K 10:14).

was frustrated by the determined efforts of Jehosheba, the sister of Ahaziah.² From the royal nursery she stole away the youngest son of Ahaziah, the infant Joash. The prince and his nurse were safely hidden away in the "*chamber of mattresses*," i.e., the room where the mattresses and blankets were stored, where they escaped the attention of Athaliah's executioners (v. 2). After a few days of concealment there, Jehosheba found an opportunity to transfer the child to one of the numerous chambers in the Temple where he was to remain for six years. Jehosheba was married to Jehoiada the high priest (II C 22:11), and hence would have ready access to the Temple precincts.

For six years Athaliah ruled the land of Judah (v. 3). During that period, Baalism was temporarily triumphant. The Temple of the Lord was allowed to fall into decay (12:5), and a temple of Baal was erected in Jerusalem to rival and supersede it (11:18). The usurper was held in check to some extent by the Yahwistic party. She apparently was afraid openly to challenge the position of Jehoiada, and he was left in charge of the Temple with its treasures and armories (11:10). She allowed the Temple services to continue (II C 23:4-7), and permitted the priests and Levites to serve in their regular courses (II C 23:8). Nonetheless, the zealous Yahwists and royalists chafed under the arrogant and oppressive rule of the Jezebel of Judah.

2. THE CORONATION OF JOASH (11:4-12)

TRANSLATION

(4) And in the seventh year, Jehoiada sent and took the captains over hundreds of the Carites, and the guard, and brought them unto him into the house of the LORD; and he made a covenant with them, and made them swear in the house of

² While she was the sister of Ahaziah, she probably was not the daughter of Athaliah. According to Josephus, she was the daughter of Joram by a secondary wife, not Athaliah, and therefore actually a half-sister of Ahaziah (*Ant.* IX, 7.1.).

the LORD, and then he showed them the son of the king. (5) And he commanded them, saying, This is the thing which you shall do: A third part of you that enter on the sabbath, shall be keepers of the watch of the king's house; (6) and a third part shall be at the gate Sur, and a third part at the gate behind the guard. So shall you keep the watch of the house and be a barrier.³ (7) And two parts of you, all who go out on the Sabbath, even they shall keep watch of the house of God about the king. (8) And you shall compass about the king every man with his weapons in his hand, and the one who comes within the ranks, let him be slain. Be with the king as he goes out and comes in. (9) And the captains of the hundreds did according to all which Jehoiada the priest commanded them; and they took each man his men who were to come in on the Sabbath with those who should go out on the Sabbath, and they came unto Jehoiada the priest. (10) And the priest gave to the captains of the hundreds the spears and shields which belonged to David which were in the house of the LORD. (11) And the guards stood each man with his weapons in his hand from the right side of the house unto the left side of the house, by the altar and the sanctuary, round about the king. (12) And he brought out the son of the king, and put upon him the crown and the testimony; and they made him king, and anointed him; and they clapped their hands, and said, May the king live!

COMMENTS

After waiting impatiently for six long years, and seeing the young prince grow from an infant to a boy of seven years of age, Jehoiada deemed that the time had come to make the effort to restore the throne to the line of David. Of course it

³ The translation of the last word in this verse is uncertain since it occurs nowhere else. The Septuagint omits it altogether.

was necessary for him to make careful arrangements beforehand. His first step was to summon to the Temple the five captains (II C 23:1) of the royal guard for a secret interview. The Carites, here mentioned for the first time, are generally believed to be identical with the Cherethites of earlier times (cf. II S 8:18; I K 1:38), foreign mercenary troops responsible for guarding the person of the king. These men reluctantly had entered the service of Athaliah under the notion that the house of David was extinct. But by long standing tradition, the Carites were strongly attached to David and his seed. Jehoiada made these men take an oath of support to the cause of the young king; then they were introduced into his presence (v. 4).

The account of these events in Chronicles makes it clear that a considerable interval of time separates the events of verse 5 from those of verse 4. The *immediate* arrangement made between Jehoiada and the captains was that they should visit the cities of Judah and gather a strong force of Levites, priests, and other representative men. That force was brought to Jerusalem and placed at the disposal of Jehoiada, under an oath similar to that which the captains had taken. Jehoiada then waited, completed his arrangements, and finally gave two charges—one to the captains which is given here (vv. 5-8), and the other to the force collected from the cities, which is given in Chronicles (II C 23:4-7). All of this was carried out in such a way that the suspicions of Athaliah were not aroused.

The royal bodyguard consisted of five divisions, each probably of a hundred men, and each commanded by its own captain (II C 23:1). It was usual on the sabbath for three divisions out of the five to be on guard around the royal palace complex, and for the other two to be engaged outside, keeping order in the city and around the Temple. For the public coronation of Joash, Jehoiada deployed the royal guard as follows: one company was assigned to the palace—its courts, halls and antechambers; a second was stationed at the palace entrance called Sur; and the third company was placed at the gate of the guard, which seems to have been towards the

east, where the palace fronted the Temple. The object of this deployment was to prevent the queen from leaving the palace until all was in readiness (vv. 5, 6).

Jehoiada commanded the remaining companies of guards to enter the Temple and protect the young king (v. 7). According to Chronicles (II C 23:7) the large force recruited from the cities of Judah was also to be in the Temple to assist in the protection of the young monarch. The guard was to take up a position in front of and behind the king, and they were to extend their ranks across the Temple court from one wall to the other. Anyone who tried to penetrate those ranks was to be slain. Whatever movements were made by the king during the coronation ceremonies were to be carefully guarded (v. 8). On the appointed day, all of the captains carried out the exact instructions which Jehoiada had given them (v. 9). To those guards Jehoiada issued shields and spears which David many years earlier had captured in battle and had deposited in the Temple (v. 10). Nothing could have been more appropriate than for the restoration of the Davidic house to be effected with the aid of weapons which belonged to David himself. Armed with these weapons the guards took up their positions in ranks stretching from one side of the Temple court to the other, both before and behind the king, in the area immediately in front of the altar of burnt offerings and the porch of the Temple (v. 11).

When all was ready, Jehoiada brought forth the young king and placed the crown upon his head. The crown was probably a band of gold, either plain, or set with jewels. At the same time the high priest laid on the head of Joash a copy of the Law of Moses, or some significant portion thereof.⁴ This was a symbolic act designed to demonstrate that the king must rule in subjection to and in accordance with the Word of God. So far as can be determined, this ceremony was a new feature of Israelite coronations. Then the priests (cf. II C 23:11)

⁴ The decalogue is often called "*the testimony*." See Exodus 16:34; 25:16, 21 etc.

anointed the young prince with oil and declared him to be king. The people present expressed their appreciation and approval by clapping their hands and shouting, "*May the king live!*" (v. 12).

3. *THE DEATH OF ATHALIAH (11:13-16)*

TRANSLATION

(13) And Athaliah heard the sound of the guards and the people; and she came unto the people in the house of the LORD. (14) And she saw, and behold the king was standing upon the platform as the manner was, and the princes and the trumpeters by the king; and all the people of the land rejoiced and blew trumpets; and Athaliah tore her garments, and cried, Treason! Treason! (15) And Jehoiada the priest commanded the captains of hundreds, officers of the army, and he said unto them, conduct her out between your ranks, and the one who goes after her, slay with the sword; for the priest said, Let her not be slain in the house of the LORD. (16) And they formed two lines on either side of her, and she went by the way which horses came into the king's house, and she was slain there.

COMMENTS

When Athaliah heard the noise accompanying the coronation she was naturally suspicious. Though it was not her custom to enter the Temple of Yahweh, on this occasion she hurried across the short distance from the palace to the house of God to learn the cause of the commotion. It does not appear that she brought any guards or attendants, but it is possible that both were with her (v. 13). Entering the courtyard, she was astonished to see young Joash standing upon the special platform which, it would appear, the king occupied when he

attended Temple services. Beside him were the captains of the guard and royal trumpeters. People of the city had heard rumors of what was to transpire that day, and had come prepared with trumpets to join in the festivities.

In a single glance Athaliah assessed the scene and realized that the fatal hour had come. In utter dismay she ripped her royal robes and shouted "*Treason!*" Jehoiada then ordered the soldiers to close ranks about the queen and conduct her out of the courtyard. This order probably was intended to protect the queen from violence at the hands of the people within the Temple precincts, and at the same time to discourage those who might be inclined to attempt to rescue her. Anyone who made any attempt on her behalf was to be slain; but the queen herself was not to be slain in the Temple (v. 15). The soldiers escorted Athaliah from the Temple, and when the party reached the gate which gave access to the royal stables, she was slain (v. 16). The location of this gate is unknown.

4. *THE ENTHRONEMENT OF JOASH (11:17-20)*

TRANSLATION

(17) And Jehoiada made a covenant between the LORD and the king and the people, that they would be the people of the LORD; also between the king and the people. (18) And all the people of the land came to the house of Baal, and broke it down; his altar and his images they smashed thoroughly, and Mattan the priest of Baal they slew before the altars. And the priest appointed officers over the house of the LORD. (19) And he took the captains of hundreds, and the Carites, and the guards, and all the people of the land, and they brought down the king from the house of the LORD; and they came by the way of the gate of the guards to the house of the king, and he sat on the throne of the kings. (20) And all the people of the land rejoiced; and the city was quiet when they had slain Athaliah with the sword at the house of the king.

COMMENTS

In Jehoiada's view, three things needed to be done immediately after the death of Athaliah. First, some solemn covenants needed to be made—the old covenant between king and people on the one hand, and with God on the other. The apostasy of Jehoram, Ahaziah, and Athaliah was regarded as having put an end to the old covenant, and therefore it was now remade or renewed. This covenant pledged the people to maintain the worship of the Lord. A second covenant was then made between the king and his subjects. This covenant probably bound the king to govern the people according to the Law, and the people to remain faithful to the king (v. 17).

The second post-coronation act, probably suggested by Jehoiada, was the destruction of the Baal temple which had been erected during the six years Athaliah had ruled the land. The people who had come to Jerusalem from various cities of the land marched to the house of Baal and razed it. The altars and images of Baal were smashed, and the priest of Baal slain.

The third action taken by Jehoiada after the coronation was the appointment of officers over the house of the Lord (v. 18). The Chronicler amplifies this action of Jehoiada (II C 23:18, 19). The officers included priests and Levites who would officiate in the sacrificial services ordained by Moses and who would provide the elaborate musical accompaniment ordained by David. Porters were also set at the gates of the Temple to prohibit any who were ceremonially unclean from entering those sacred precincts. During Athaliah's reign, Temple services had been curtailed, breaches had been broken in the outer walls, and neither the priests nor the porters had served in their regular order. Apparently there had been no morning or evening sacrifice and no antiphonal psalm-singing during that period. Jehoiada re-established the regular courses of officers and the worship.

The final activity on that busy coronation day was the removal of Joash from the Temple, and his installation in the

palace of his ancestors. The high priest formed a procession from the five captains and their men—the Carites and the guards—and the people, which escorted the young king to the royal palace. The “*gate of the guard*” (cf. v. 6) must have been the main entrance to the palace on its eastern side. The long day ended when Joash was finally seated on the throne of the kings of Judah (v. 19). The whole land was content with the revolution which had taken place. No opposition showed itself. Tranquility settled over the capital once Athaliah was removed from the scene (v. 20).

B. THE REIGN OF JOASH IN JUDAH 11:21—12:21

Like so many of the Hebrew monarchs, Joash got off to a great start. As long as his protector and adviser Jehoiada was living, the young king pursued the right course. But when the old priest died, Joash fell into the snare of pride and apostasy. After a brief introductory note (11:21—12:3), the author discusses at length the major accomplishment of the reign of Joash, the repair of the Temple (12:4-16). He then briefly narrates Joash’s humiliating capitulation to Hazael the Aramean (12:17-18), and the ignominious death of this king at the hand of conspirators (12:19-21).

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE REIGN OF JOASH (11:21—12:3)

TRANSLATION

(21) Joash was seven years old when he began to reign. (1) In the seventh year of Jehu, Joash began to reign; and forty years he reigned in Jerusalem; and his mother’s name was Zibiah from Beersheba. (2) And Joash did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD all the days in which Jehoiada the priest instructed him. (3) Only the high places he did not remove;

yet the people were sacrificing and burning incense in the high places.

Seventh King of Judah

JEHOASH (or JOASH)

835-796 B.C.

(*"Yahweh-gifted"*)

II K 11, 12; II C 22:10–24:27

Synchronism

Jehoash 1 = Jehu 7

Contemporary Prophet

Zechariah son of Jehoiada

Mother: Zibiah

Appraisal: Good and Bad

"It is He that giveth salvation unto kings; who delivers David His servant from the burtful sword." Psalms 144:10

COMMENTS

The author of Kings treats the reign of Joash with great brevity and tenderness, and one must go to Chronicles (II C 24) to gain a true perspective of the character of this king and his reign. For over half of his reign of forty years the priest Jehoiada was his adviser. During those years the king did what was right in the sight of the Lord (v. 2). Chronicles relates the sad story of Joash's apostasy after the death of Jehoiada, an apostasy which reached its climax when the king ordered Zechariah the son of Jehoiada slain in the Temple precincts. The only negative note in the report here is that Joash tolerated the continued use of the high places outside Jerusalem where people made sacrifices and burned incense to Yahweh (v. 3). It was not until the reign of Hezekiah that this practice was banned by royal decree.

2. REPAIR OF THE TEMPLE (12:4-16)

TRANSLATION

(4) And Joash said unto the priests, All the money of the holy gifts that is brought unto the house of the LORD, the money of the one who passes the account, the money that every man is set at, all the money which shall go up upon the heart of a man to bring to the house of the LORD, (5) let the priests take it to them, each man from his acquaintance; and let them repair the breaches of the house wherever a breach shall be found. (6) But it came to pass in the twenty-third year of King Joash that the priests had not repaired the breaches of the house. (7) And King Joash called to Jehoiada the priest and to the priests, and he said unto them, Why have you not repaired the breaches of the house? Now take no money from your acquaintances, but give it for the breaches of the house. (8) And the priests consented to take no more money from the people, neither to repair the breaches of the house. (9) And Jehoiada the priest took a chest, and bored a hole in its lid, and placed it beside the altar on the right as one comes to the house of the LORD; and the priests who kept the door put there all the money that was brought to the house of the LORD. (10) And it came to pass when they saw that there was much money in the chest, the king's scribe went up and the high priest, and they put it in bags; and they counted the money that was found in the house of the LORD. (11) And they gave the money after weighing it into the hands of those who did the work, the overseers of the house of the LORD; and they paid it out to the carpenters and builders who were working on the house of the LORD, (12) and to the masons and the stonecutters, and for buying timber and hewn stone to repair the damages to the house of the LORD, and for all which went out upon the house to repair it. (13) But there was not made for the house of the LORD bowls of silver, snuffers, basins, trumpets or any vessel of gold or vessel of silver of the money that was brought into the house of the LORD;

(14) but it was given to those who did the work, and they repaired with it the house of the LORD. (15) Nor did they think about the men to whom they gave the silver to give to those who did the work; for they were men who dealt faithfully. (16) The guilt money and the sin money was not brought to the house of the LORD; it belonged to the priests.

COMMENTS

When the minority of Joash came to an end and the king succeeded to the administration of the affairs of state, his first order of business was the repair of the Temple. It seems somewhat strange that Jehoiada had made no repair efforts when he was the regent and practically had sole management of affairs. The high priest must have had good reason for refraining from this much needed project. At any rate, after taking full control of the reins of government, Joash regarded the Temple repairs as the most pressing business of the state. Perhaps the six years he had spent within the Temple precincts had inspired him with a love of those sacred buildings.

When he was in a position to do so, the king ordered the priests to utilize all that they received from the people in the way of money for making the repairs on the Temple. This money accrued from three sources which are mentioned in verse 4: (1) "*the money of every one who passes the account,*" i.e., the census money—the half-shekel received from the males over twenty whenever a census was taken (Ex. 30:12-16); (2) "*the money at which every man is set,*" i.e., the redemption money derived from the redemption of the firstborn (Num. 18:15, 16) or of persons who had vowed themselves to God (Lev. 27:2-8); and (3) the free-will offerings. This money was to be gathered out of all the cities of Judah (cf. II C 24:5). The priests in each locality would make the collections from their "*acquaintances,*" their neighbors. These monies would be used to repair the damages which had befallen the Temple building both as a result of the neglect of that place and by the willful violence of Athaliah (II C 24:7).

By the twenty-third year of the king, the job still had not been completed. The text in no way suggests that the priests throughout the land had embezzled funds; they simply had been negligent in collecting the money. Probably very little money had been received and once the funds necessary for maintaining the Temple services had been subtracted, there just was not enough left to vigorously pursue the refurbishing of the Temple. It is not said that no repairs were made, but rather that the priests did not "*hasten*" (II C 24:5) to complete the task.

Greatly concerned about the lack of progress in the Temple project, the king summoned Jehoiada the high priest and consulted with him about the best steps to be taken to expedite the repairs. The lower priests were rebuked for having ceased to make any effort to get the job done. The king then revoked his earlier order authorizing the local collections to be used for the building fund, and outlined a new procedure for raising the necessary funds (v. 7). The priests agreed to relinquish the local collections and, along with them, the responsibility for dispensing the funds in the repair operation (v. 8).

The new plan worked out by Jehoiada and the king is revealed in verse 9 (cf. II C 24:8). A public chest was set up conspicuously in the Temple court near the great altar, and the people were invited to bring their contributions to the Temple. The priests received the money from those who offered it at the gate of the Temple court and placed those contributions immediately in the chest (v. 9). The chest was tangible evidence to the people of the purpose to which their money would be applied and naturally stimulated their giving.

Periodically the high priest and a royal secretary would empty the chest and count the money by putting it in bags each of which would hold a definite amount (v. 10). Since the lumps of silver which passed for shekels in this period were of very uncertain weight, it was necessary not only to count the individual pieces, but to weigh each bag to ascertain its precise weight and value. These monies were then handed over to the superintendents who had been placed over the

Temple, and these officers in turn purchased the materials and paid the laborers (vv. 11-12). Carpenters, builders, masons and stone-cutters are mentioned by the author of Kings; "*workers in iron and brass*" are mentioned by the Chronicler (II C 24:12). The Temple had been standing for a century and a half, and so far as the records go, no other repair work had ever been undertaken. Doubtlessly as the work went on it was found that repairs of all sorts and kinds were needed.

While the repair work was in progress, no monies from the chest were used to purchase sacred vessels for the Temple services (v. 13). After the repairs were completed, then the surplus money was expended in this way (II C 24:14). The Temple had been spoiled by successive kings to buy off enemies—by Rehoboam to pay Shishak (I K 14:26), by Asa to bribe Benhadad (I K 15:18), and by Joash himself to procure the retreat of Hazael (II K 12:18). These vessels needed to be replaced, and it is no wonder that the surplus monies were used for this purpose. But the repair of the Temple structures took precedence (v. 14).

Everyone had complete confidence in those who had been appointed by Jehoiada to oversee the work and dispense these funds, for they "*dealt faithfully,*" i.e., honestly (v. 15). But in all the enthusiasm for the repair work, the priests themselves were not forgotten. The trespass money which the Law required to be paid in compensation to an injured party (Lev. 6:2-6; Num. 5:6-8) apparently was given to the priests if the injured party was dead and left no kinsman. The "*sin money*" seems to have been a customary but not obligatory offering brought by a worshiper to the priest who officiated in a sacrificial service. Such freewill offerings the priests was entitled to receive (Num. 5:10). These monies were not required to be put in the chest, nor applied to the repair operation; they belonged exclusively to the priests.

3. THE INVASION OF HAZAEL (12:17-18)**TRANSLATION**

(17) Now Hazael king of Aram went up, and fought against Gath, and captured it; then Hazael set his face to go up against Jerusalem. (18) And Joash the king of Judah took all the dedicated things which Jehoshaphat, Joram, and Ahaziah his fathers, kings of Judah, had dedicated, and his own dedicated things, and all the gold that was found in the treasures of the house of the LORD and the house of the king, and sent it to Hazael king of Aram; and he went away from Jerusalem.

COMMENTS

A considerable time gap occurs between verses 16 and 17 for which the Chronicler supplies some of the particulars. Jehoiada died and, because of the contribution he had made to the national life, was highly honored by being buried in the sepulchers of the king (II C 24:16). Influenced now by the Jewish aristocracy, Joash allowed the reintroduction of idolatry (II C 24:18). Zechariah the son of Jehoiada vigorously protested these developments, but was slain by order of the king right in the Temple court. The invasion of Judah by Hazael seems to be regarded by the Chronicler as divine judgment for this murderous deed.

After conquering and taking from Israel the Transjordan region, Hazael cast his eye upon the coastal plain. It would appear that the city of Gath fell easily to him. When last mentioned, Gath was a Judaeian possession (II C 11:8); but by this time the city may have been once again under Philistine control. The route back to the Transjordan territories would take Hazael near Jerusalem. Encouraged by his easy victory at Gath, the brash Aramean decided to make a bid at Jerusalem (v. 17). With a very small army, Hazael was able to inflict

a defeat on a much more numerous Judaeen army (II C 24:24). Much spoil was taken by the invaders from the north (II C 24:23). Then Hazael commenced a siege of Jerusalem itself.

Like Rehoboam and Asa before him, Joash bought off the Aramean with the treasures from the Temple of the Lord. These were valuables placed there by the pious Jehoshaphat and even by the apostates Joram and Ahaziah who, for superstitious reasons more than anything else, had continued to make contributions to the Temple. Even the items which he himself had given to the Temple he was forced to retrieve as well as the few objects of gold made with the residue of the money given for the Temple repair earlier in his reign (cf. II C 24:14). Valuables from the royal palace also were collected and sent to Hazael. The palace had been plundered in the days of Jehoram by the Arabs and Philistines (II C 21:16, 17), but plenty of time had elapsed for fresh accumulation of valuables. Hazael was sufficiently satisfied with the tribute rendered to him and withdrew from Jerusalem (v. 18).

4. *THE ASSASSINATION OF JOASH (12:19-21)*

TRANSLATION

(19) And the rest of the acts of Joash and all which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? (20) And his servants rose up, and planned a conspiracy; and they smote Joash in the house of Millo which goes down to Silla. (21) And Jozachar the son of Shimeath and Jehozabad the son of Shomer his servants smote him; and he died, and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David. And Amaziah his son reigned in his place.

COMMENTS

As in the case with most of the kings of Judah, the author refers his readers to the records which he utilized in compiling

this book (v. 19). The author apparently deliberately has chosen to ignore the darker side of the reign of Joash. He hints, however, that all was not right by relating how Joash met his death. It would seem that Joash was sorely wounded in the battle against Hazael. For some time he was confined to a room in the house of Millo, a fortress built by David and Solomon (II S 5:9; I K 9:15, 24). Apparently Millo was a massive wall which extended down to an otherwise unlocated spot called Silla. While the king was confined there, two of his servants conspired against him and slew him (v. 20). The conspirators are named in verse 21, and the Chronicler points out that both men had foreign mothers. What might have motivated these servants to this act of violence is not indicated in the text. Joash was buried "*with his fathers*," i.e., in the city of David (v. 21), but not in the royal tombs (II C 24:25). He was succeeded by his son Amaziah.

III. THE REIGN OF JEHOAHAZ IN THE NORTH 13:1-9

TRANSLATION

(1) In the twenty-third year of Joash son of Ahaziah king of Judah, Jehoahaz the son of Jehu began to reign over Israel in Samaria; and he reigned seventeen years. (2) And he did that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD, and walked in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin; he did not turn from it. (3) And the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and He gave them into the hand of Hazael king of Aram, and into the hand of Benhadad the son of Hazael all those days. (4) And Jehoahaz sought the face of the LORD, and the LORD hearkened unto him; for He saw the oppression of Israel, because the king of Aram oppressed them. (5) And the LORD gave to Israel a deliverer, and they went out from under the hand of Aram, and the children of Israel dwelt in their tents as in former days. (6) But they did not turn from the sins of the house of Jeroboam

who made Israel to sin, but walked therein; and also the Asherah remained in Samaria. (7) Neither did he leave to Jehoahaz any people except fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand infantry; for the king of Aram had destroyed them and had made them like the dust by threshing. (8) And the rest of the acts of Jehoahaz and all which he did, and his valor, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? (9) And Jehoahaz slept with his fathers, and they buried him in Samaria; and Jehoash his son reigned in his place.

COMMENTS

In chapter 13 the account of the Northern Kingdom is taken up where it left off at the end of chapter 9 with the death of Jehu. Jehoahaz succeeded his father on the throne and ruled for seventeen years (v. 1). Like all previous kings of Israel, Jehoahaz sinned by continuing to condone the calf worship at Dan and Bethel. Jehu had been chastised by God for failing to purge the land of this theological corruption (10:32, 33), and Jehoahaz, because of his obstinacy in this respect, was punished even more severely (v. 2). God delivered Israel into the hand of the ruthless Aramean kings Hazael and Benhadad II "*all the days*," i.e., all the days that God had appointed for the calamity⁵ (v. 3).

In the midst of this Aramean oppression, Jehoahaz repented and cried out to God for deliverance. It is true that Jehoahaz did not abandon the practice of the calf worship, perhaps because he did not suspect that this was the sin which had provoked the anger of the Lord. But he did repent; and God accepted that repentance as imperfect as it was. God delivered

⁵ The phrase "*all the days*" might be taken to mean all "the days of Jehoahaz" were it not for the fact that Hazael outlived Jehoahaz and therefore there would be no opportunity for Benhadad, Hazael's son, to fight against him. Of course it is possible that Benhadad warred against Jehoahaz in the capacity of a general in the army of his father.

His people from the destruction which they otherwise might have experienced at the hands of the Aramean kings (v. 4). But that deliverance did not come during the reign of Jehoahaz. God raised up one who would deliver His people from their oppressors. The deliverer referred to in verse 5 may be Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz, who began to extricate Israel from the grasp of the Arameans. But more likely the reference is to Jeroboam II who was able to restore all the borders of Israel. Following the deliverance from the Aramean hegemony, the people of God "*dwelt in their tents as in former days.*" The word "*tents*" is a mere idiomatic way of referring to their homes. The peaceful conditions which prevailed "*in former days,*" i.e., prior to the Aramean oppression, were restored (v. 5).

Eleventh King of Israel

JEHOAHAZ BEN JEHU

814-798 B.C.

(*"Yabweh-seized"*)

II K 13:1-9

Synchronism

Jehoahaz 1 = Jehoash 23

Contemporary Prophet

Elisha

"When the righteous are in authority, the people rejoice; but when the wicked bear rule, the people mourn." Proverbs 29:2

After jumping ahead to the repentance of Jehoahaz and the subsequent deliverance which God granted to Israel, the author reverts to the theme of the failings of this king. Again he mentions that Jehoahaz walked in the sinful paths of the

house of Jeroboam by which he refers to the calf worship which had persisted in the Northern Kingdom from the days of Jeroboam I. The author now adds that Jehoahaz did not remove the Asherah—the wooden image of the consort of Baal—from Samaria. This Asherah (KJV, “grove”⁶) had been set up at Jezebel’s suggestion (I K 16:33) by Ahab. It is surprising that Jehu did not remove this last vestige of the Ahab-Jezebel era during his long reign; but for some reason or other, it was spared and was still standing in the days of Jehoahaz (v. 6).

Verse 7 amplifies the thought of the Aramean oppression alluded to already in verse 4. Hazael had such control over Israel that he was able to limit the standing army of the nation to fifty horsemen, ten chariots, and ten thousand infantry men. Jehoahaz was, it would appear, a vassal subject of Hazael. This sad state-of-affairs had come about because the Arameans had inflicted heavy casualties upon the Israelite army. The phrase “*had made them like the dust by threshing*” (v. 7) may be a figurative way of describing the utter destruction which Hazael had inflicted on the armies of Israel. The phrase may also be an allusion to the execution of prisoners by driving threshing implements over them—a barbaric practice known to have been practiced by the Arameans (cf. Amos 1:3). Though humiliated and reduced to subjection by the Arameans, Jehoahaz had distinguished himself by personal courage in the course of the war (v. 8). When he died, Jehoahaz was buried in Samaria where all the kings since the time of Omri were buried (v. 9).

REVIEW OF CHAPTER TWENTY

I. FACTS TO MASTER

A. How do each of the following figure in the events of

⁶ The mistranslation “grove” originated with the Septuagint translators who uniformly rendered the Hebrew word by *alsos*.

this chapter?

- | | | |
|-------------|--------------|---------------|
| 1. Jehu | 5. Benhadad | 9. Mattan |
| 2. Hazael | 6. Jehosheba | 10. Zibiah |
| 3. Jehoahaz | 7. Joash | 11. Jozachar |
| 4. Athaliah | 8. Jehoiada | 12. Jehozabad |

B. Each of the following terms should bring to mind some significant statement or event in this chapter:

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|--------------|--------------------|
| 1. golden calves | 4. crown | 8. trumpeters |
| 2. sabbath | 5. testimony | 9. a chest |
| 3. David's spears
and shields | 6. covenant | 10. house of Millo |
| | 7. a pillar | 11. Asherah |

C. What of importance transpired in each of the following places mentioned in this chapter?

- | | | |
|-----------|------------|--------------|
| 1. Bethel | 4. Aroer | 7. Jordan |
| 2. Dan | 5. Bashan | 8. Gath |
| 3. Gilead | 6. Samaria | 9. Jerusalem |

D. Important numbers

1. The age of Joash when he began to reign
2. Number of horsemen, footmen and chariots which the Arameans left to Israel

II. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. Evaluate the religious reformation launched by Jehu. How far did Jehu go in bringing the nation back to God?
2. What promise did God make concerning Jehu? Why make this promise? How was the promise fulfilled?
3. When did the Aramean domination of Israel begin? How serious did this domination become?
4. In what way did Athaliah reflect the character of her mother Jezebel?
5. Why does the author go to such length in narrating the rescue of Joash?
6. How extensive was the religious reformation which swept the land of Judah under the leadership of Jehoiada the priest? Under what previous kings had reformation efforts been made?

7. Why did King Joash's initial effort to raise money for Temple repair fail?
8. What principles of giving are illustrated in the successful use of the "Joash box"?
9. How was Joash able to avoid a siege of Jerusalem by Hazael? What previous kings had resorted to the same means?
10. Why did the Lord have regard to the repentance of Jehoahaz when that repentance was so imperfect?
11. Who was the deliverer God raised up for Israel during the time of the Aramean oppression?

Lessons in Living

RESTORING GOD'S TEMPLE

II Kings 12:4-16

I. We Must Recognize the Need for this Work

"Repair the breaches of the house, wherever any breach shall be found " (v. 5).

II. We Must Realize that the King has Commanded this Work

"And Jehoash said to the priests . . ." (v. 4).

III. We Must Not Allow Negligent Leaders to Thwart this Work

"Why do you not repair the breaches of the house?" (v. 7).

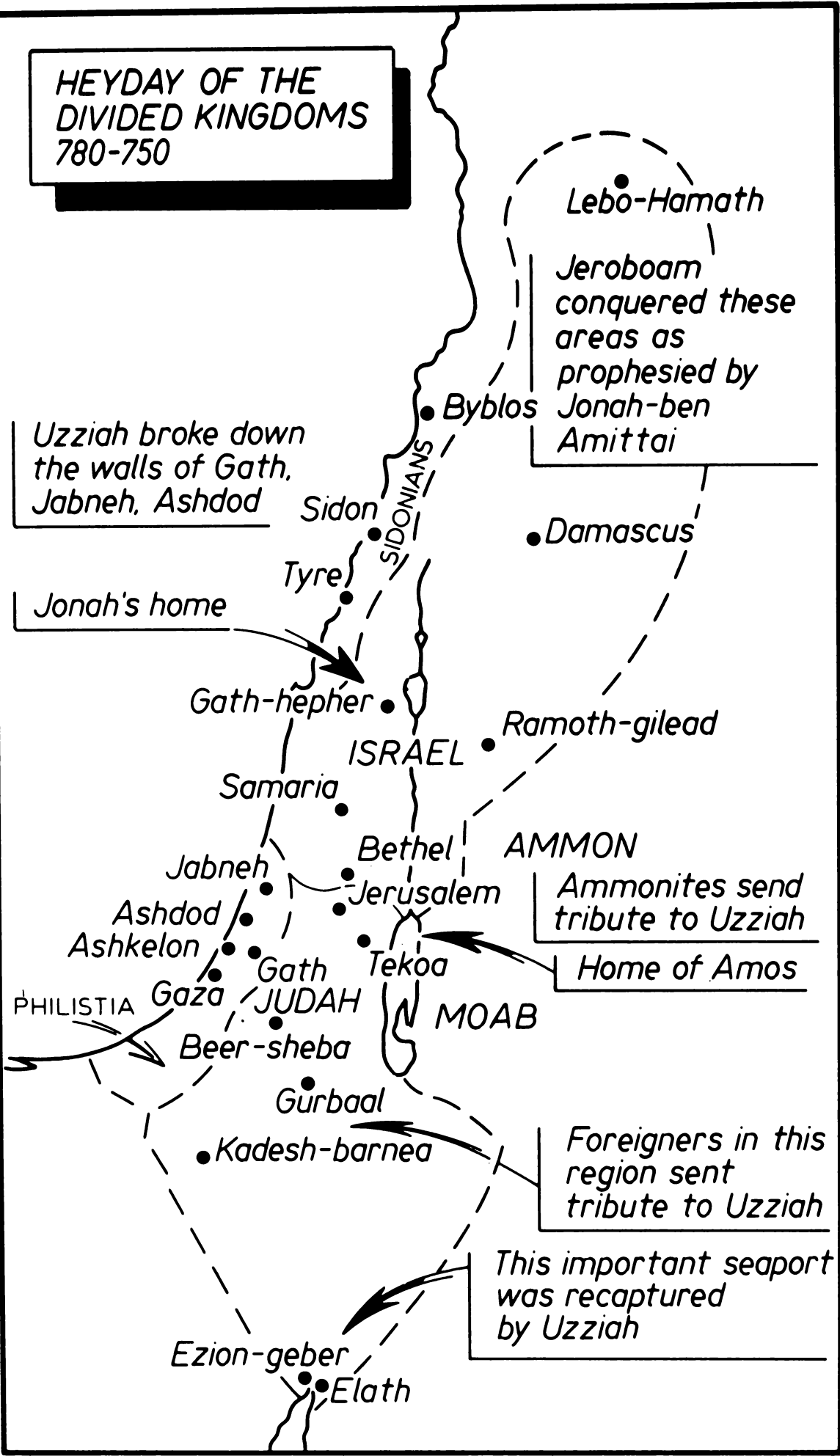
IV. We Must Rally to the Support of this Work

". . . they saw there was much money in the chest" (v. 10).

V. We Must Raise up Faithful Men to Lead in this Work

"Moreover they reckoned not with the men into whose hands they delivered the money to be bestowed on workmen, for they dealt faithfully" (v. 15).

**HEYDAY OF THE
DIVIDED KINGDOMS
780-750**





Damascus, the capital of Syria

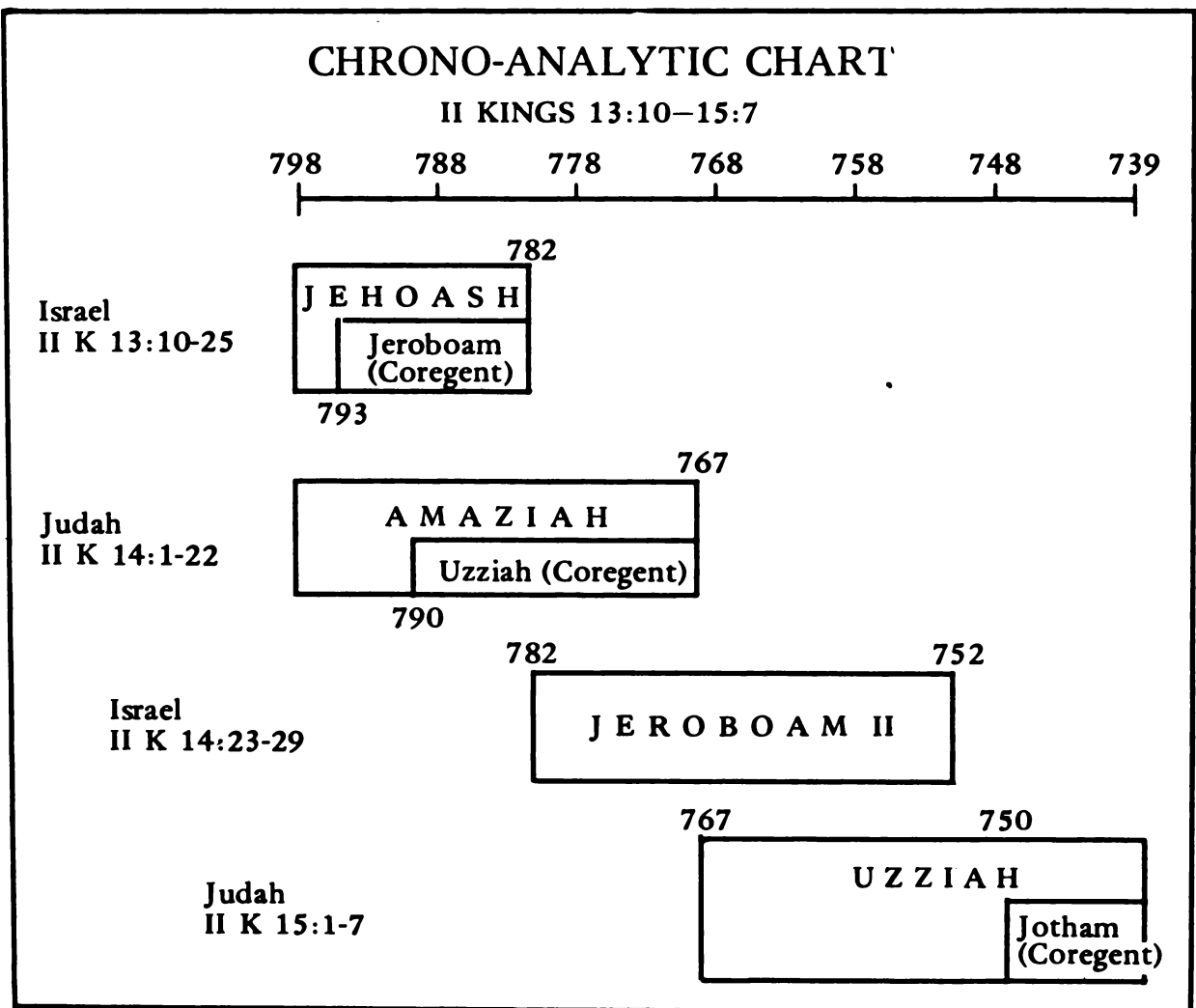
Drawings by Horace Knowles
from the British and Foreign Bible Society

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

THE KINGDOMS AT HIGH TIDE

II Kings 13:10—15:7

Help came to Israel in the midst of the Aramean oppression from an unexpected quarter. In 802 B.C. the Assyrian king Adadnirari III attacked Damascus and inflicted serious casualties on Benhadad II. From that point on, Israel began to gradually recover her lost territories and emerge from the half century of humiliating submission to Damascus. The text under study in this chapter deals with (1) the period of recovery (13:10—14:22); and (2) the heyday period of both Israel and Judah (14:23—15:7).



THE KINGDOMS AT HIGH TIDE 13:10-13

I. THE PERIOD OF RECOVERY 13:10—14:22

The reigns of Jehoash in Israel (13:10-13) and Amaziah in Judah (14:1-22) may be regarded as transitional. During their reigns, Israel and Judah gradually began to recover from the almost half century of total domination by the Arameans. Sandwiched between the discussion to these two transitional kings is the last narrative pertaining to Elisha (13:14-25).

A. THE REIGN OF JEHOASH OF ISRAEL 13:10-13

TRANSLATION

(10) In the thirty-seventh year of Joash king of Judah, Jehoash son of Jehoahaz began to reign over Israel in Samaria; and he reigned sixteen years. (11) And he did evil in the eyes of the LORD, and did not turn from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin; he walked in it. (12) And the rest of the acts of Joash and all which he did, and his might with which he fought with Amaziah king of Judah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the king of Israel? (13) And Joash slept with his father, and Jeroboam sat upon his throne. And Joash was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel.

COMMENTS

Joash is the shortened form of Jehoash. According to verse 10 both the Northern and Southern kingdoms were ruled by monarchs who bore the name Joash. This coincidence in names lasted for the space of three years—from the thirty-seventh to the fortieth and final year of the Southern Joash. The Northern Joash (Jehoash) ruled on after the death of his Southern namesake for thirteen years (v. 10). A problem in the synchronisms between the two kingdoms occurs in verse 10

which has been painstakingly worked out by Edwin Thiele.¹

Twelfth King of Israel

JOASH (or JEHOASH)

798-782 B.C.

(*"Yabweh-gifted"*)

II K 13:10-25; 14:8-16

Synchronism

Jehoash 1 = Joash 37

Contemporary Prophet

Elisha

"A man shall not be established by wickedness, but the root of the righteous shall not be moved." Proverbs 12:3

Jehoash followed in the footsteps of his father by continuing to condone and participate in the calf worship inaugurated by Jeroboam (v. 11). Verses 12-13 are cast in the form of the concluding summary with which the author usually closes out his discussion of the individual kings. No further information about Jehoash is given here save that he fought with Amaziah king of Judah—an episode which the author will discuss in detail in chapter 14—and that he was buried in Samaria. Following this concluding summary the author does not follow his usual practice of moving on immediately to the next king, but on the contrary relates further information about the reign of Jehoash.

B. THE FINAL PREDICTION OF ELISHA 13:14-25

The prophetic ministry of Elisha which had spanned over half a century, came to a close in the early years of Jehoash

¹ Thiele, MNHK, tables VI and VII. Thiele proposed to solve the discrepancy in the mathematics of the Jehoahaz-Joash synchronism by postulating a *change* in the method of tabulating regnal years in both kingdoms in the year 798 B.C. When this is taken into account, no discrepancy exists in the Biblical text.

of Israel. His death-bed prophecy concerned the recovery of Israelite territories from the hands of the Arameans. The author relates (1) how Elisha ordered the king to perform certain symbolic acts (vv. 14-19); (2) how the power of Elisha was manifested even after his death (vv. 20-23) and (3) how the final prophecy of Elisha was fulfilled (vv. 22-25).

1. THE PREDICTIVE SYMBOLIC ACTIONS (13:14-19)

TRANSLATION

(14) Now Elisha became ill with a terminal illness, and Jehoash king of Israel went down unto him, and wept over his face, and said, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof. (15) And Elisha said unto him, Take a bow and arrows. And he took unto him a bow and arrows. (16) And he said to the king of Israel, Put your hand upon the bow; and he put his hand upon the bow; and Elisha put his hand upon the hand of the king. (17) And he said, Open the window toward the east; and it was opened. And Elisha said, Shoot. And he shot. And he said, The arrow of the deliverance of the LORD, even the arrow of the deliverance against Aram; for you shall smite Aram in Aphek until you have consumed them. (18) And he said, Take the arrows. And he took them, And he said to the king of Israel, Smite the ground. And he smote three times, and stopped. (19) And the man of God was wroth with him: Had you smitten five or six times then you would have smitten Aram until you consumed it; but now three times you shall smite Aram.

COMMENTS

By the time Jehoash ascended the throne of Israel the prophet Elisha must have been at least eighty years of age. The terminal illness referred to here must be the result of the

natural deterioration of his body. The visit of a king to the bedside of a prophet must have been unprecedented. Such kindness, sympathy and consideration seem out of character for monarchs of that time. What a pathetic scene is described in verse 14—the king leaning over the dying prophet and weeping. Realizing that the old man of God was departing the earth, the king bestowed upon him the familiar titles which were addressed to Elijah upon his exodus: "*My father, my father, the chariot of Israel and its horsemen.*" The term "*father*" recognized Elisha as the spiritual leader and teacher of the nation; "*chariot*" depicted him as national defender. When Elijah left the earth he left a capable successor; but now with the death of Elisha, there was no one to take up the reins of spiritual leadership. The king realized that a great era of God's dealings with man was coming to an end.

Moved by the compassion of the king, Elisha mustered his strength to give Jehoash assurance that God would still stand by His people. The old prophet instructed the king to take a bow and arrows from one of the soldiers who naturally would have accompanied the king on this visit (v. 15). The prophet then instructed the king to place his hands on the bow as one would normally do when about to shoot that weapon. When the king assumed this position "*Elisha put his hands upon the king's hands,*" i.e., he arose from his bed and also took the position of an archer covering the king's two hands with his own. The shooting of the arrow would then appear to be a joint act of the prophet and the king (v. 16). The prophet then ordered one of the servants to open the shutter on the window facing the east. This was the direction of Gilead and Bashan where the Arameans had won such impressive victories. The king was then instructed to release the arrow, and as he did so Elisha explained the symbolic significance of what was taking place. The arrow symbolized deliverance from the cruel Aramean oppression. The abstract and symbolic is immediately followed by a concrete prediction: Israel would inflict an utterly crushing defeat upon the Aramean at Aphek in Gilead, a spot where once before Israel had defeated these same invaders

(I K 20:26-30). Aphek was on the direct route between Samaria and Damascus, and thus would be a likely spot for such a decisive battle (v. 17). No record exists of the fulfillment of this prophecy, but this victory is doubtlessly alluded to in verse 25.

A second symbolic act was to follow on the first. The king was instructed to take in hand the arrows remaining in the quiver and to smite them upon the ground.² Jehoash smote the arrows against the floor three times and then paused thinking he had done enough. He did not enter into the spirit of the symbolic act, which represented the smiting and slaying of enemies. Perhaps he had not much faith in the virtue of the symbolism which he may have even thought to be childish (v. 18). Elisha was angry at this evident lack of enthusiasm. If this king had been earnestly desirous of victory and had had faith in the symbolical action as divinely directed, he would have kept smiting until instructed to stop, or at any rate would have smitten the floor five or six times instead of three. From his prophetic perspective Elisha could see the great opportunity which was forfeited because of Jehoash's lethargic response. Had the king entered into the spirit of this occasion, the complete extrication from the Aramean yoke might have been anticipated by fifteen or twenty years. As it was, it remained for Jeroboam, Jehoash's son, to recover completely the territory lost to Aram. Jehoash would only enjoy partial success against the enemies. He would defeat them but thrice (v. 19).

2. *THE POST-MORTEM POWER OF ELISHA (13:20-21)*

TRANSLATION

(20) And Elisha died, and they buried him. And bands of Moabites came into the land at the coming of the year. (21)

² Keil thinks the command is to shoot the arrows from the window into the ground beneath. But the most ancient explanation, that of the Septuagint, is to be preferred, viz., strike upon the ground.

And it came to pass as a man was being buried, that behold they saw a band, and they cast the man into the grave of Elisha; and when the man came and touched the bones of Elisha; he revived, and rose upon his feet.

COMMENTS

Shortly after the visit of Jehoash, Elisha died of his ailment. Unlike his predecessor Elijah, he was buried near his home. Josephus (*Ant.*, IX, 8.6) says his funeral was magnificent. Because of the weakness of Israel at this time, marauding bands of Moabites invaded Israel at the beginning of each year, i.e., in the spring of the year³ (v. 20). Some time after the death of Elisha, some Israelite men were carrying the corpse of some unidentified man out for burial when the funeral party spotted one of these bands of raiders. With no time for ceremony, the burial party hastily and perhaps somewhat roughly cast the corpse into the nearest sepulcher which just happened to be the one where lay the bones of Elisha. When that corpse touched the bones of Elisha, the dead man revived and stood up inside the sepulcher (v. 21).

3. *THE FULFILLMENT OF THE PROPHECY OF ELISHA* (13:22-25).

TRANSLATION

(22) Now Hazael king of Aram had oppressed Israel all the days of Jehoahaz. (23) But the LORD was gracious to them, and had compassion on them, and He turned unto them for the sake of His covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and

³ The first month of the Hebrew year corresponds roughly to what in the modern calendar would be March/April. Amos 2:1 may allude to these Moabite raids.

He did not desire to destroy them nor cast them away from His presence as yet. (24) And Hazael the king of Aram died; and Benhadad his son ruled in his place. (25) And Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz again took the cities from the hand of Benhadad the son of Hazael which he had taken from the hand of Jehoahaz his father in war; three times Jehoash smote him and recovered the cities of Israel.

COMMENTS

Having parenthetically related the extraordinary miracle wrought through the instrumentality of Elisha's corpse, the author returns to the subject of the Aramean oppression. The closing verses of chapter 13 are intended to demonstrate how the final predictions of Elisha were fulfilled. To reintroduce this subject, the author repeats what he has already stated in verse 3, viz., that Hazael oppressed the children of Israel throughout the days of Jehoahaz (v. 22). But even in His wrath, the Lord was gracious to Israel and preserved His people from total destruction at the hands of Hazael. For the sake of his covenant with the grand patriarchs of Genesis, He kept the cause of Israel before His mind continually. That covenant had pledged the Lord to be the God of Israel—to watch over and to protect them—so long as they did not utterly cast off their allegiance to Him (cf. 17:7-18). There would be a time, so the author now hints, when God would be forced to cast off this people, but not as yet (v. 23). That tragic blow would fall upon Israel within a century.

Hazael had given his eldest son the name of the great king from whom he had usurped the throne, and this son, Benhadad, succeeded his father on the throne in Damascus (v. 24). For a time Benhadad was able to intensify the Aramean oppression of Israel by capturing certain unidentified cities from Jehoahaz.⁴

⁴ Whether Benhadad captured these cities after he ascended the throne or as general of the armies of his father is difficult to determine. Verse 22 suggests (but does not necessitate) that Hazael outlived Jehoahaz, in which case Benhadad could only have captured cities referred to in verse 25 in his capacity as general. However John C. Whitcomb in his chart on the Old Testament Kings and Prophets has Benhadad coming to the throne three years prior to the death of Jehoahaz.

Sometime subsequent to the predictions made by Elisha on his death-bed, these cities were retaken by Jehoash. Three times Jehoash defeated Benhadad, though he was not able to completely extricate the nation from the Aramean grip. Much, if not most, of the Transjordan territories remained firmly under the control of Benhadad until the reign of Jeroboam II (v. 25).

C. THE REIGN OF AMAZIAH IN THE SOUTH 14:1-22

Amaziah the "thistle king," is another example of a good start and a tragic end. The account of his reign moves through three stages: (1) his hopeful beginning (vv. 1-7); (2) his disastrous defeat (vv. 8-14); and (3) his treacherous death (vv. 15-22).

<p>Eighth King of Judah AMAZIAH BEN JOASH 796-767 B.C. <i>("Strength of Yahweh")</i> II K 14:1-20; II C 25 Synchronism Amaziah 1 = Joash 2 Contemporary Prophets Several unnamed</p>	
Mother: Jehoaddan	Appraisal: Good & Bad
<i>"A king ready for battle"</i> Job 15:24	

1. AMAZIAH'S HOPEFUL BEGINNING (14:1-7)

TRANSLATION

- (1) In the second year of Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz king of Israel, Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah began to reign.
 (2) Twenty-five years old was he when he began to reign, and

he ruled twenty-nine years in Jerusalem; and the name of his mother was Jehoaddan of Jerusalem. (3) And he did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD, yet not like David his father; according to all which his father Joash did, so did he. (4) Only the high places he did not remove; yet the people were offering sacrifices and burning incense in the high places. (5) And it came to pass when he had the kingdom firmly in his control, that he smote his servants who had smitten his father the king. (6) But the sons of the assassins he did not slay according to that which is written in the book of the Law of Moses which the LORD commanded, saying, The fathers shall not be smitten on account of the sons, nor the sons on account of the fathers; but each man shall be executed for his own sin. (7) He slew of Edom in the vale of salt twenty thousand, and took Selah by war; and the name of it is called Joktheel unto this day.

COMMENTS

The authors of both Kings and Chronicles place Amaziah of Judah among the good kings, and yet in his reign there was much amiss. His reign bears quite a marked similarity to that of his father Joash (v. 3). Both kings started out better than they ended. Both were zealous for the Lord at first, but turned to idolatry at last. Both opposed themselves to prophets and treated their rebukers with scorn. Both roused conspiracy against themselves by their misconduct and were murdered by malcontents. Further, both were unsuccessful in war, had to withstand a siege on their capital, and bought off their enemy by the surrender of the greater part of their wealth, including the treasures of the Temple.

Only on one score does Amaziah receive the reproof of the author of Kings: He failed to remove the high places (v. 4). It was not until the reign of Hezekiah that any attempt was made to abolish the use of these local shrines and enforce the law that insisted on a central sanctuary for national worship. On the other hand, the author specifically points to one very

commendable action of this king. When Amaziah had the kingdom firmly under his control he ordered those who had assassinated his father to be executed (v. 5; cf. 12:20). But he refused to follow what was standard policy among rulers in the ancient Near East and have the sons of the assassins slain. Here Amaziah was submitting to the Law of Moses which stipulated that sons were not to be executed for the sins of their fathers (v. 6). The particular law referred to is found in Deuteronomy 24:16. The reference to Amaziah governing his conduct by this law is fatal to the modern critical notion that Deuteronomy was written by some anonymous persons sometime early in the reign of Josiah over a century after the times of Amaziah.

Edom had revolted against Judah and had recovered its independence during the reign of Jehoram some forty years before the time of Amaziah (cf. 8:20). Since subjugation of Edom was vital to the prosperity of Judah, Amaziah resolved to launch a massive effort once again to conquer that land. According to Chronicles, he mustered an army of four hundred thousand men, which included a hundred thousand mercenaries from the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Rebuked by a prophet for want of faith in enlisting the services of the Israelite mercenaries, Amaziah consented to dismiss them and lead his army, now reduced by twenty-five per cent, into battle against the Edomites and other southern tribes.

The campaign met with great success. Ten thousand of the enemy fell in battle and an equal number were captured and ruthlessly executed by being thrown from a high cliff (II C 25:12). The "*valley of salt*" which was the scene of the battle is usually identified with the sunken plain at the southern extremity of the Dead Sea. The climax of this campaign was the capture of the almost impregnable Edomite capital of Selah, later known to the Greeks as Petra. Following the lead of many great conquerors, Amaziah gave the city a new name—Joktheel, i.e., "*subdued by God*." While the new name persisted until the time that the annals of Amaziah were written (v. 7), it did not attach itself permanently to the place. By

the time of Isaiah, Obadiah and Jeremiah, the city was again known as Selah.

**2. AMAZIAH'S BOASTFUL CHALLENGE
AND DISASTROUS DEFEAT (14:8-14)**

TRANSLATION

(8) Then Amaziah sent messengers unto Jehoash the son of Jehoahaz son of Jehu king of Israel, saying, Come let us look at each other face to face. (9) And Jehoash king of Israel sent unto Amaziah king of Judah, saying, The thistle which was in Lebanon sent unto the cedar which was in Lebanon, saying, Give your daughter to my son for a wife. And a wild beast of the field which was in Lebanon passed by and trampled the thistle. (10) You have indeed smitten Edom, and your heart has lifted you up; glory in this, and remain in your house. Why should you mess around with misfortune that you might fall, you and Judah with you? (11) But Amaziah did not hearken, and Jehoash king of Israel went up and they looked one another in the face, he and Amaziah king of Judah in Beth-shemesh which belongs to Judah. (12) And Judah was smitten before Israel, and they fled each man to his tent. (13) And Jehoash king of Israel took Amaziah king of Judah the son of Joash, son of Ahaziah, in Beth-shemesh, and he came to Jerusalem, and tore down the wall of Jerusalem from the Ephraim gate unto the corner gate, four hundred cubits. (14) And he took all the gold and silver and all the vessels found in the house of the LORD, and in the treasures of the king's house, and the hostages; and he returned to Samaria.

COMMENTS

Upon returning to Judah, Amaziah discovered that the Israelite mercenaries whom he had dismissed had vented their

anger by rampaging through cities of Judah killing some three thousand men and taking much spoil (II C 25:13). His confidence bolstered by his successes in Edom, Amaziah determined to avenge the actions of those Israelite soldiers by challenging the Northern king, Jehoash, to a military showdown (v. 8). Josephus adds that Amaziah's message demanded that the Northern state submit to the authority of the Davidic dynasty or else face military action (*Ant.* IX, 9.2).

Jehoash responded to the challenge of Amaziah by means of a fable. The thistle, the lowest and most despised plant of the forest, sent to the mighty and stately cedar to request the hand of his daughter in marriage. In antiquity to request a man's daughter in marriage was tantamount to a claim to be his equal. But a mere beast of the field happened by and trampled the thistle into the dust of the earth (v. 9). The application of the fable is obvious: Amaziah had enjoyed a measure of success against Edom and now, like the thistle, thought he was equal to the cedar, the mightiest of kingdoms. Amaziah had best stay at home and glory in his past triumphs. If he ventured forth against Israel he would find himself as easily crushed as the thistle beneath the feet of a wild animal (v. 10). Jehoash was as confident of success as was Amaziah. His three triumphs over the powerful Arameans was just as good evidence of his military might as Amaziah's one victory over Edom.

The note from Jehoash did not deter Amaziah, but, if Josephus can be believed, spurred him on the more to make his expedition. Jehoash anticipated that confrontation was inevitable and decided that the best defense was an offense; and so his armies crossed the border to carry the battle into Judah. The two forces met at Beth-shemesh, which lies almost due west of Jerusalem on the western frontier of Judah (v. 11). Apparently Jehoash decided to avoid the direct line of attack along the mountain highway and led his troops through the Philistine plain in what must have been planned as a sneak attack.

In this test of strength between the two kingdoms—the first

since the days of Abijam over a hundred years earlier—the armies of Judah were utterly crushed with each soldier fleeing to his “*tent*,” i.e., his home (v. 12). Amaziah himself was captured and brought to Jerusalem where, under threat of death, he was forced to order the gates of Jerusalem opened to Jehoash. The king of Israel broke down the walls of Jerusalem, not as a result of siege operations, but as a conqueror who desired to leave his enemy as defenseless as possible. The “*gate of Ephraim*” was the main gate on the north side of the city, known elsewhere as the Benjamin gate (cf. Jer. 37:13; Zech. 14:10). The “*corner gate*” is generally thought to have been at the northwestern angle of the wall where it turned southward, but this is uncertain. What is certain is that Jehoash destroyed some four hundred cubits, i.e., two thousand yards, of the northern wall of Jerusalem (v. 13). The spoils of war fell to the conqueror—the objects of value which had accumulated in the Temple since Joash of Judah had bribed Hazael with its treasure. The treasures of the king’s house, including all the spoils Amaziah had captured in Edom, were also taken, as well as hostages which would discourage a retaliatory attack by Judah at a later time (v. 14).

3. AMAZIAH’S TREACHEROUS DEATH (14:15-22)

TRANSLATION

(15) Now the rest of the acts of Jehoash which he did, and his might, and how he fought with Amaziah king of Judah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? (16) And Jehoash slept with his fathers, and he was buried in Samaria with the kings of Israel; and Jeroboam his son reigned in his place. (17) And Amaziah the son of Joash king of Judah lived after the death of Jehoash son of Jehoahaz king of Israel fifteen years. (18) And the rest of the acts of Amaziah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? (19) And they made a conspiracy against

him in Jerusalem; and he fled to Lachish. And they sent after him to Lachish, and they slew him there. (20) And they put him upon horses, and he was buried in Jerusalem with his fathers in the city of David. (21) And all the people of Judah took Azariah who was sixteen years old, and they made him king in the place of his father Amaziah. (22) He built Elath, and restored it to Judah, after that the king slept with his fathers.

COMMENTS

Having just related what must be regarded as the most dramatic and decisive accomplishment of the reign of Jehoash of Israel, the author repeats with only slight variation 13:11, 12 which is the concluding statement regarding his reign (vv. 15, 16). Amaziah outlived his Northern adversary by fifteen years (v. 17).

Like his father before him, Amaziah died in a conspiracy. He had aroused much dissatisfaction by his importation of foreign idols (II C 25:27), and no doubt by his military inaction after his defeat by Jehoash of Israel. Through the last fifteen years of his life Amaziah seems to have remained passive, cowed by his one defeat. When he got wind of the conspiracy, Amaziah fled to Lachish on the southwestern frontier of Judah. But his enemies were too numerous and too powerful, and Amaziah was assassinated in Lachish (v. 19). Though he had died in disgrace at the hands of his own servants, the conspirators were minded to treat the royal corpse with respect. The body of Amaziah was brought back to the capital "*upon horses,*" i.e., upon the horse-drawn chariot, and buried in Jerusalem (v. 20).

For the first time in the history of Judah the record states that the "*people*" took the initiative in selecting the ruler. They elevated Azariah to the throne (v. 21). Elsewhere this king is called more frequently, Uzziah.⁵ Both names are similar in

⁵ Azariah occurs eight times in II Kings and once in Chronicles; Uzziah occurs four times in II Kings, twelve times in II Chronicles and in Isaiah, Hosea, Amos and Zechariah.

meaning, Uzziah meaning "*he whose strength is Yahweh*" and Azariah meaning "*he whose help is Yahweh.*" Some think that upon becoming king the boy changed his name; but the evidence is that this king was known indifferently by two names.

The statement that Azariah was sixteen at the time he was made king raises certain chronological problems. Verse 21 seems to relate what the people did after the death of Amaziah. However, chronological considerations demand that this action of making Azariah king must have taken place during the lifetime of his father, perhaps not long after Amaziah's ignominious defeat at the hands of Jehoash of Israel. Thiele has Azariah (Uzziah) coming to the throne as coregent in 790 B.C., twenty-three years *before* the assassination of his father. If this chronology is correct, then Azariah was sixteen years old in 790 B.C. when he became coregent, and thirty-nine when he became sole king.

Verse 22 seems to confirm the notion that Azariah served as coregent with Amaziah for a time. Azariah built Elath *after* the king (i.e., Amaziah) slept with his fathers. This statement would be superfluous unless Azariah had spent some time as coregent. The reconstruction of Elath would have opened the southern sea lanes to Judah for the first time since the days of Jehoshaphat.

II. THE HEYDAY PERIOD

14:23—15:7

Israel and Judah achieved their greatest glory under the reigns of Jeroboam II in the North (14:23-29), and Azariah (Uzziah) in the South (15:1-7). This somewhat unexpected turn of events resulted from two factors. About 800 B.C. the Assyrians withdrew to their own territory where they remained politically dormant until 745 B.C. The sacred historian passes over this period somewhat briefly. However, the writings of

Jonah, Amos, and Hosea paint a vivid backdrop for the heyday period.

A. THE REIGN OF JEROBOAM II IN ISRAEL 14:23-29

TRANSLATION

(23) In the fifteenth year of Amaziah son of Joash king of Judah, Jeroboam son of Jehoash king of Israel began to reign in Samaria. He reigned forty-one years. (24) And he did that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not turn from all the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin. (25) He restored the border of Israel from the entrance of Hamath unto the sea of the plain according to the word of the LORD God of Israel which He spoke by the hand of his servant Jonah son of Amittai, the prophet who was from Gath-hepher. (26) For the LORD saw that the affliction of Israel was very bitter; for there was neither bound nor free, nor was there any helper for Israel. (27) And the LORD did not say that He would blot out the name of Israel from under heaven, but he delivered them by the hand of Jeroboam son of Joash. (28) Now the rest of the acts of Jeroboam, and all which he did, and his might with which he fought, and by which he restored to Israel Damascus and Hamath which belonged to Judah, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? (29) And Jeroboam slept with his fathers, with the kings of Israel; and Zechariah his son reigned in his place.

COMMENTS

Jeroboam II was perhaps the greatest king of the Northern Kingdom, and yet his reign is passed over with great brevity by the author of Kings. He commenced his reign as sole king in the fifteenth year of the Southern king Amaziah; but many scholars conclude that he had been coregent with his father

from the third year of Amaziah (v. 23). He, like all the kings of the Jehu dynasty, continued to follow the apostate calf worship, and hence Jeroboam is said to have done evil in the eyes of the Lord (v. 24). But the military successes of Jeroboam II were considerable. He was able to restore the borders of Israel as they had been in the earliest days of the Northern Kingdom. The entering of Hamath refers to the high slopes in the valley between the two ranges of the Lebanon mountains, the point at which the mountain streams begin to flow northward to form the Orontes river. Hamath itself would be about eighty-five miles farther north. The "*sea of the plain*" is undoubtedly the Dead Sea. The territory recovered no doubt included all the Transjordan area as far south as the river Arnon, the border of Moab. Some think that Moab itself may be included in this general description of the territorial conquests of Jeroboam II.

Thirteenth King of Israel

JEROBOAM II

782-753 B.C.*

(*"whose people are many"*)

II K 14:23-29

Synchronism

Jeroboam 1 = Amaziah 15

Contemporary Prophets

Hosea, Jonah, Amos

"The froward is an abomination to the Lord: but his secret is with the righteous." Proverbs 3:32

*coregent from 793 B.C.

The success of Jeroboam II is attributed to the guidance of Jonah the prophet. This is the same prophet famous for what happened to him as he tried to flee the responsibility to preach the Word in Nineveh. The present passage suggests that Jonah should be dated about 780 B.C., the early part of the reign of Jeroboam II. Gath-hepher, the hometown of Jonah, was located in the tribal territory of Zebulun not far from Mount Tabor. But why did the Lord aid this king who

maintained the worship of the calves? The author explains it as being due to the unfathomable compassion of God. God saw the extreme suffering of His people under the Arameans and thus raised up His prophet to give inspired advice and encouragement to Jeroboam in his efforts finally to free Israel from that oppression. The Lord had to help His people, for no other helper was available to them; no other nation was in a position to come to their aid⁶ (v. 26). God's decision was not to blot out the name of Israel at this time, although the nation was entirely deserving of such judgment. In His grace He gave the nation a grace-period, an opportunity to repent, an Indian summer before the winter of retributive judgment. He gave to Israel the deliverance promised by Elisha (cf. 13:17) and later by Jonah (14:25)—deliverance from the Arameans, recovery of their borders and triumph over their enemies. This deliverance, which began under Jehoash, was brought to a successful completion by Jeroboam II. Thus one Jeroboam founded the kingdom; another refounded it, restored its ancient glories, and gave it its old dimensions (v. 27).

The concluding statement about the reign of Jeroboam II brings out more important information about his reign concerning which one might wish that more detail was given. He is said to have recovered Hamath and Damascus,⁷ cities which had belonged to Israel during the United Monarchy period under David and for a while under Solomon. He probably was not able to hold these places for long after he conquered them. The phrase in verse 28 "*which belonged to Judah*" has occasioned commentators the greatest difficulty. How could Hamath and Damascus be said to have belonged to Judah? Some think the text is hopelessly corrupt and others resort to

⁶ On the phrase "*not any shut up nor any left*" see I Kings 14:10.

⁷ Some try to argue that this verse means nothing more than that Jeroboam was able to recover territories which had been conquered by these powerful kingdoms. Amos 1:3, 4 is sometimes cited as proof that Damascus had an independent existence in the days of Jeroboam. But the prophecy of Amos may have been delivered prior to Jeroboam's conquest of the place.

hermeneutical gymnastics and dubious translations. For the time being the question of the relationship between Judah and the kingdoms of Hamath and Damascus in the north must be left open.

At Jeroboam's death he was buried with his fathers in Samaria and his son Zechariah reigned in his place. With the accession of this Zechariah, the prophecy made to Jehu almost ninety years earlier, that his sons would sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation, was fulfilled (v. 29).

B. THE REIGN OF AZARIAH (UZZIAH) IN JUDAH 15:1-7

TRANSLATION

(1) In the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam king of Israel, Azariah the son of Amaziah king of Judah began to reign. (2) He was sixteen years old when he began to reign and fifty-two years he reigned in Jerusalem; and the name of his mother was Jecholiah of Jerusalem. (3) And he did that which was upright in the eyes of the LORD according to all which Amaziah his father had done. (4) Only he did not remove the high places. (5) But the LORD smote the king and he became a leper until the day of his death, and lived in the house of separation; and Jotham the son of the king was over the house, judging the people of the land. (6) And the rest of the acts of Azariah and all which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? (7) And Azariah slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David; and Jotham his son reigned in his place.

COMMENTS

Azariah's reign, which in Kings occupies only seven verses, in Chronicles fills an entire chapter of twenty-three verses (II C 26). Uzziah began his independent reign over Judah in

the twenty-seventh year of Jeroboam of Israel, i.e., 767 B.C. (v. 1). He had reigned as coregent with his father from the time he was sixteen years old and had already served in this capacity for some twenty-three years before the death of his father. The total length of his reign was fifty-two years, and thus Azariah (Uzziah) died in 739 B.C. at the age of sixty-eight (v. 2). The author of Kings rates Azariah as a good king (v. 3) with the one exception that he failed to confine the worship of Yahweh to the place which the Lord had designated (v. 4). The Chronicler (II C 26:5) mentions the positive influence of a prophet by the name of Zechariah upon his life.

Eighth King of Judah
 UZZIAH (AZARIAH)
 767-739 B.C.*

II K 15:1-7; II C 26

Synchronism
 Uzziah 1 = Jeroboam 27

Contemporary Prophets
 Zechariah (II C 26:5);
 Isaiah; Hosea; Amos

Mother: Jecholiah

Appraisal: Good

"He (the LORD) shall cut off the spirit of princes: He is terrible to kings of the earth." Psalms 76:12

*coregent from 790 B.C.

The Chronicler provides the details which explain why the Lord smote King Azariah (Uzziah). The marvelous prosperity which this king enjoyed caused him to be filled with pride. Azariah (Uzziah) attempted to usurp the position and prerogatives of the priesthood. He took a censer, entered into the Temple, and proceeded to burn incense on the golden altar before the veil (II C 26:16-18). A number of priests tried to persuade the king to turn back, but he persisted in this proud act of defiance of the Law of Moses. It was then that God smote him with leprosy. Due to this dread disease, the king was forced to spend the final years of his reign in a "house of separation" isolated and alone. Probably this house was built especially

for the king out in the open country apart from other houses. His son Jotham then assumed the royal functions of administering the affairs of the palace and judging the people (v. 5). According to the best authorities, Azariah's sin and the beginning of Jotham's coregency took place in 750 B.C.

With these brief notices the author of Kings closes his account of the mighty King Uzziah. The Chronicler relates further information about him: that he recovered Elath from the Edomites (II C 26:2); that he waged successful war with the Philistines and took from them Gath, Jabneh and Ashdod and dismantled them (II C 26:6); that he defeated the Arabians and the Maonites (II C 26:7); that he forced the Ammonites to pay him tribute and caused his power to be known and feared far and wide (II C 26:8); that he had a standing army which numbered 307,500 men and which was well-trained and well-armed (II C 26:12-14). Upon his death, Azariah (Uzziah) was buried "*with his fathers,*" i.e., in the same sepulcher (II C 26:23). No doubt it was because of his leprosy that he was buried apart from the other kings. Naturally Jotham, who had for about eleven years been serving as coregent, succeeded his father as king of Judah (v. 7).

REVIEW OF CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

I. FACTS TO MASTER

A. How did each of the following figure in the events of this chapter?

- | | | |
|-------------|-------------|------------|
| 1. Jehoash | 4. Elisha | 7. Azariah |
| 2. Amaziah | 5. Hazael | 8. Jonah |
| 3. Jeroboam | 6. Benhadad | 9. Jotham |

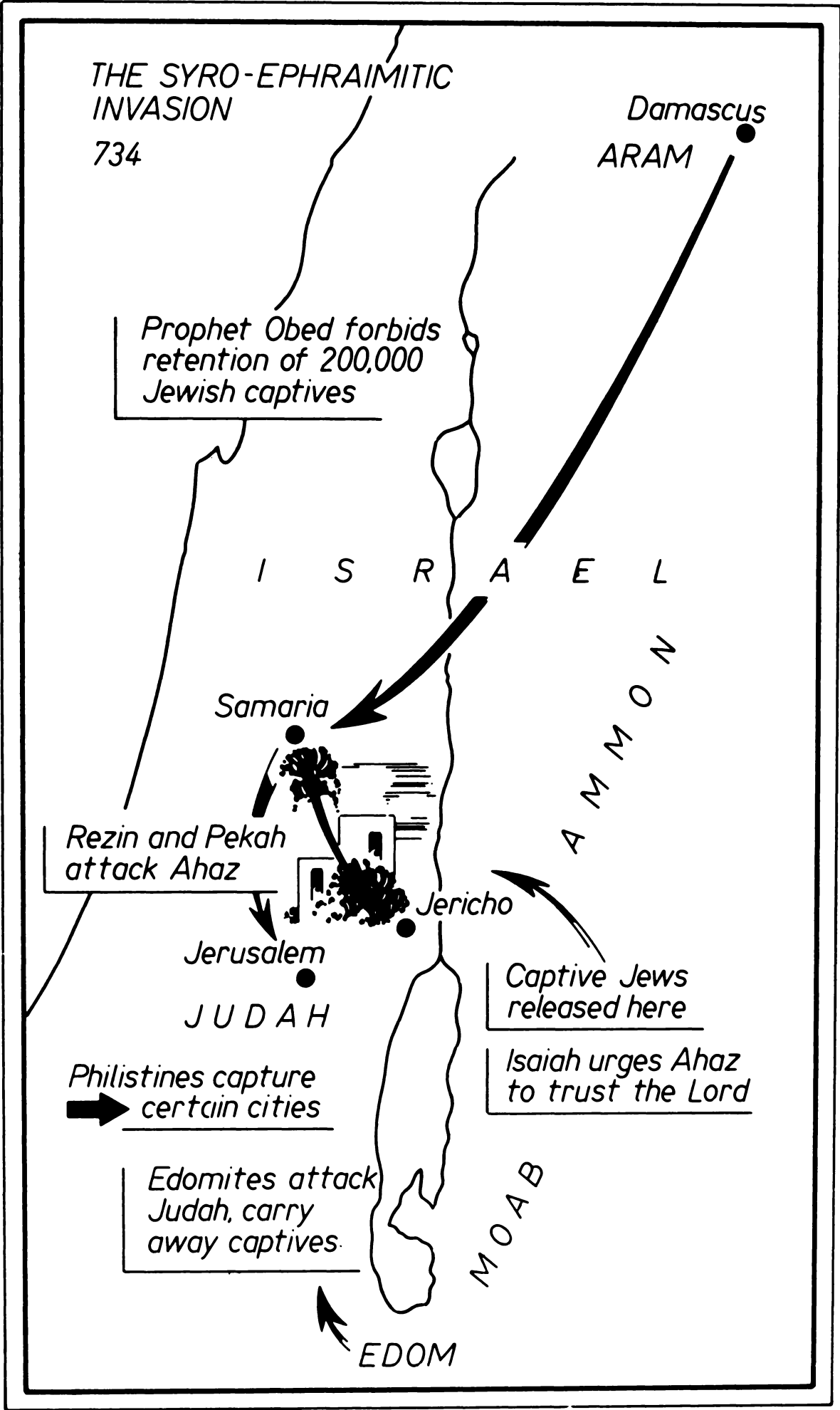
B. What happened at each of the following locations?

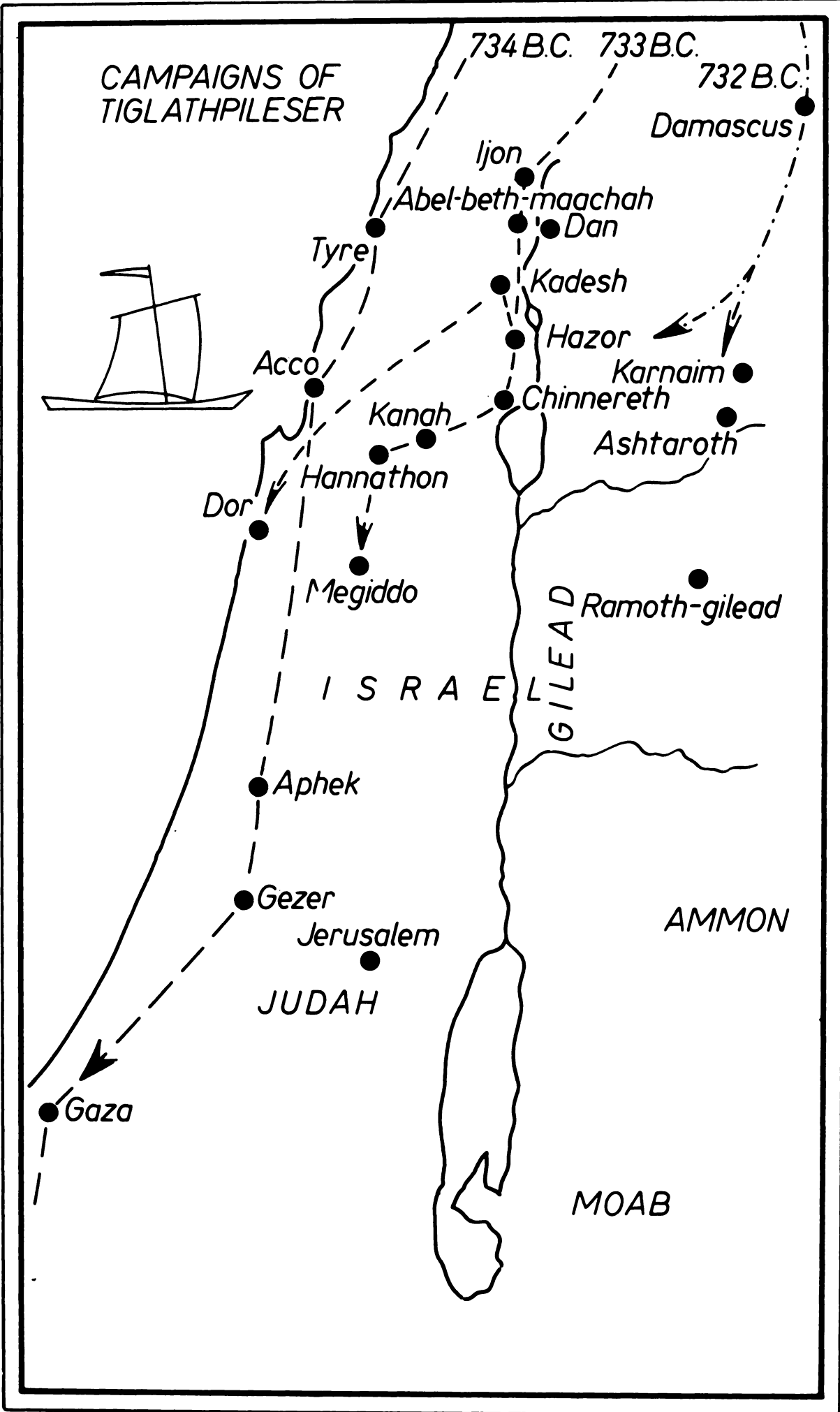
- | | | |
|------------|-----------------|----------------|
| 1. Samaria | 4. Joktheel | 7. Lachish |
| 2. Aphek | 5. Edom | 8. Elath |
| 3. Selah | 6. Beth-shemesh | 9. Gath-hepher |

- C. Of what importance were each of the following?
- | | |
|-------------------|------------------------|
| 1. bow and arrows | 4. ten thousand men |
| 2. bones | 5. four hundred cubits |
| 3. three times | |

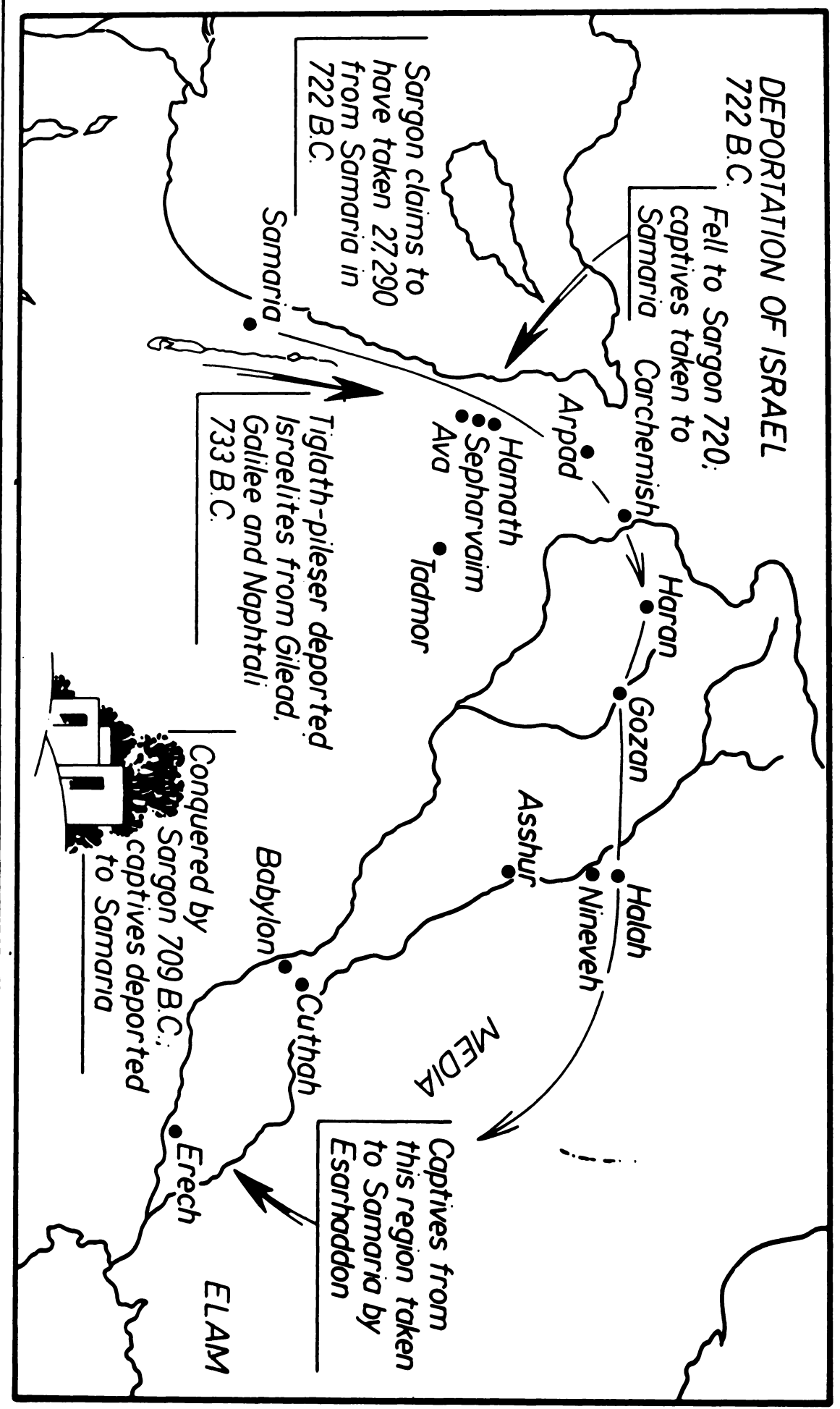
II. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. Why did king Joash refer to Elisha as "*the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof*?"
2. Explain what was meant by the two symbolic acts performed in the death chamber of Elisha.
3. How did Amaziah manifest obedience to the Lord in the early part of his reign?
4. What war crime did Amaziah commit in Edom?
5. How does the career of Amaziah illustrate the folly of pride?
6. Explain the fable which Jehoash of Israel wrote in reply to a challenge from Amaziah.
7. Why does the author of Kings devote so little attention to the prosperous reigns of Jeroboam and Azariah (Uzziah)?
8. How did Azariah come to be a leper?





DEPORTATION OF ISRAEL 722 B.C.



Fell to Sargon 720:
captives taken to
Samaria Carchemish

Sargon claims to
have taken 27,290
from Samaria in
722 B.C.

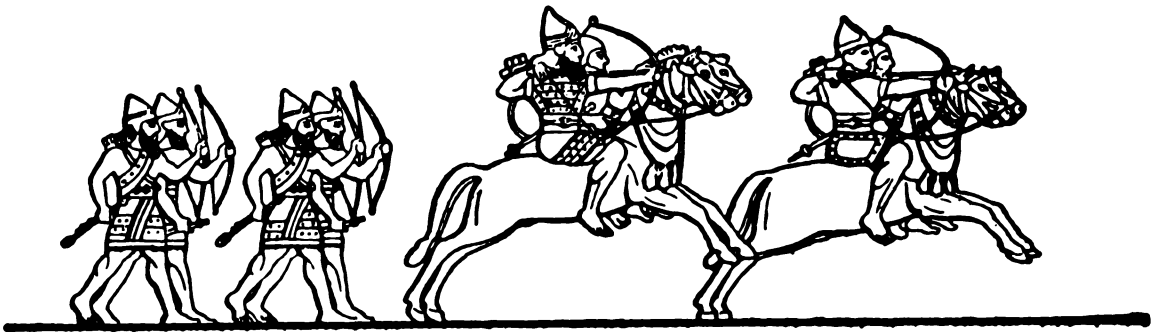
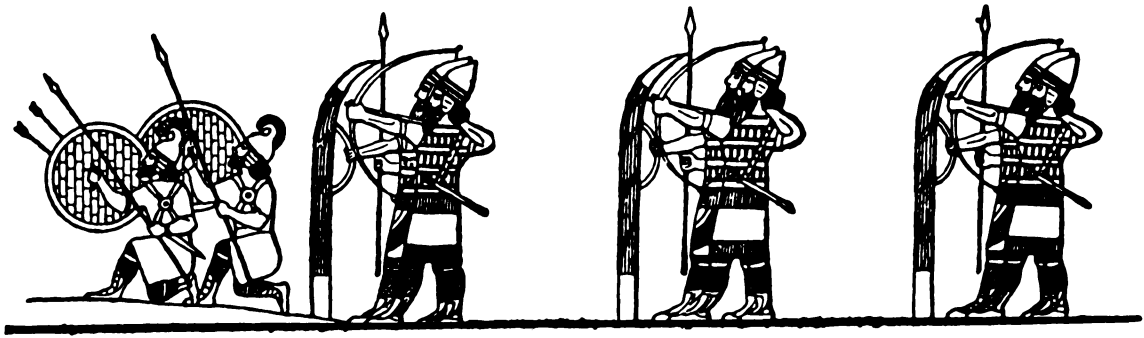
Tiglath-pileser deported
Israelites from Gilead,
Galilee and Naphtali
733 B.C.

Conquered by
Sargon 709 B.C.:
captives deported
to Samaria

Captives from
this region taken
to Samaria by
Esarhaddon

MEDIA

ELAM



Drawings by Horace Knowles
from the British and Foreign Bible Society

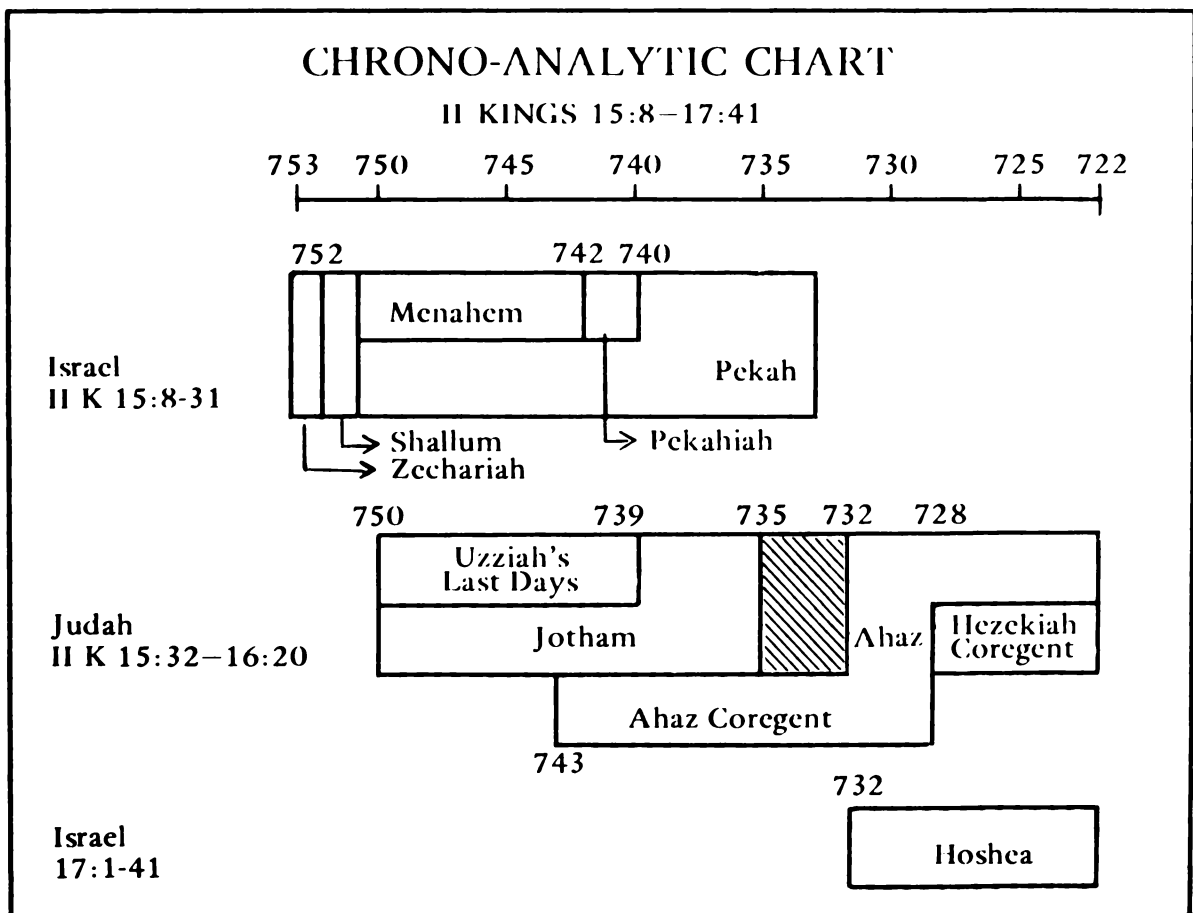
CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

THE GREAT ASSYRIAN CONQUEROR

15:8—17:41

The history of Israel and Judah was radically affected by the rise of the imperialistic Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria. Heretofore the Assyrian military thrusts into Syria-Palestine were merely tribute-gathering raids. But a new policy was inaugurated by Tiglath-pileser. This monarch was determined to build an empire. It was he who introduced the policy of massive population deportation. By removing the upper classes of a conquered nation and resettling them in some remote portion of his empire, Tiglath-pileser was able to reduce the threat of local rebellions throughout his domain.

In 15:8—17:41 the author describes (1) how Israel (15:16-31) and then Judah (15:32—16:20) submitted to Tiglath-pileser. The author then discusses the Assyrian conquest of Samaria and deportation of ten tribes (17:1-41).



I. ISRAEL SUBMITS TO ASSYRIA 15:16-31

The heyday period for Israel ended abruptly with the death of Jeroboam II. In the period from 753-722 B.C. Israel had six kings representing *five* dynasties. In 15:8-31 five of these kings are discussed: (1) Zechariah (vv. 8-12); (2) Shallum (vv. 13-15); (3) Menahem (vv. 16-22); (4) Pekahiah (vv. 23-26); and (5) Pekah (vv. 27-31).

A. THE SIX-MONTH REIGN OF ZECHARIAH 15:8-12

TRANSLATION

(8) In the thirty-eighth year of Azariah king of Judah, Zechariah the son of Jeroboam reigned over Israel in Samaria six months. (9) And he did that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD just as his fathers had done; he did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who caused Israel to sin. (10) And Shallum the son of Jabesh conspired against him, and smote him before the people; and he slew him, and reigned in his place. (11) Now the rest of the acts of Zechariah, behold they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel. (12) This was the word of the LORD which he had spoken unto Jehu, saying, Sons to the fourth generation shall sit for you upon the throne of Israel. And so it came to pass.

Fourteenth King of Israel
ZECHARIAH BEN JEROBOAM
753 B.C.

("Yahweh has remembered")

II K 15:8-12

Synchronism

Zechariah = Uzziah 38

Contemporary Prophet

Hosea

"Righteousness keepeth him that is upright in the way: but wickedness overthroweth the sinners." Proverbs 13:6

COMMENTS

In the thirty-eighth year of Azariah (Uzziah), i.e., 753 B.C., Zechariah, the last king of the Jehu dynasty began to reign in the North (v. 8). Because he failed to remove the calf cult from his kingdom, he is labeled as a king who did what was evil (v. 9). After a reign of but six months Zechariah was openly and publicly slain by Shallum the son of Jabesh (v. 10). The fact that Zechariah succeeded to the throne at all was a fulfillment of promises made to the founder of that dynasty, Jehu. To that king God had given assurance that his sons would hold the throne of Israel to the fourth generation. Jehu was succeeded by his son Jehoahaz who in turn was followed by Jehoash, Jeroboam II and finally Zechariah. In more recent years the doom of the Jehu dynasty had been pronounced by Hosea (Hos. 1:4) and Amos (Am. 7:9).

B. THE ONE MONTH REIGN OF SHALLUM 15:13-15

TRANSLATION

(13) Shallum the son of Jabesh ruled in the thirty-ninth year of Uzziah king of Judah; and he reigned a full month in Samaria. (14) And Menahem the son of Gadi went up from Tirzah, and came to Samaria, and smote Shallum the son of Jabesh in Samaria, and slew him, and reigned in his place. (15) And the rest of the acts of Shallum, and the conspiracy which he made behold they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.

COMMENTS

The thirty-day reign of Shallum receives, as might be expected, scant attention from the author of Kings. Hearing of his conspiracy, Menahem, "the general" as Josephus calls

15:16-22

II KINGS

him, marched from Tirzah to Samaria, got Shallum into his power, and put him to death (v. 14). The account of Shallum then concludes with the usual formula (v. 15).

Fifteenth King of Israel
SHALLUM BEN JABESH
752 B.C.

("Requital")

II K 15:13-15

Synchronism
Shallum = Uzziah 39

Contemporary Prophet
Hosea

"An evil man seeketh only rebellion: therefore a cruel messenger shall be sent against him." Proverbs 17:11

C. MENAHEM SUBMITS TO ASSYRIA
15:16-22

TRANSLATION

(16) Then Menahem smote Tiphsah and all who were in it and its borders from Tirzah; because they did not open unto him therefore he smote it; and all the pregnant women he ripped open. (17) In the thirty-ninth year of Azariah king of Judah, Menahem the son of Gadi began to reign over Israel; and he reigned ten years in Samaria. (18) And he did evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not turn all his days from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin. (19) And Pul king of Assyria came against the land; and Menahem gave to Pul a thousand talents of silver, that his hand might be with him to strengthen the kingdom in his hand,

(20) And Menahem secured the money from Israel, from all the wealthy land owners, to give the king of Assyria, fifty shekels of silver for each man. And the king of Assyria returned, and did not remain there in the land. (21) And the rest of the acts of Menahem and all which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel? (22) And Menahem slept with his fathers; and Pekahiah his son ruled in his place.

Sixteenth King of Israel
 MENAHEM BEN GADI
 752-742 B.C.

("Comforter")

II K 15:16-22

Synchronism
 Menehem 1 = Uzziah 39

Contemporary Prophet
 Hosea

"By the blessing of the upright the city is exalted: but it is overthrown by the mouth of the wicked." Proverbs 11:11

COMMENTS

The only town known to history or geography as Tiphseh is the famous city on the Euphrates river (cf. I K 4:24). It would appear that Zechariah had intended to continue the expansionist policies of his father. At the very time Zechariah was assassinated, the armies under Menahem were garrisoned at Tirzah awaiting orders to march northward. After rather easily disposing of Shallum the assassin, Menahem immediately launched the expedition which had previously been planned. In the early days of Menahem, Assyria was weak and unable to resist these incursions. All the territory from Tirzah in Israel to Tiphseh fell temporarily under the control of Menahem.

When the city of Tiphseh refused to surrender, Menahem treated it in a most cruel way. Even pregnant women were ripped open and their unborn children bandied about on the swords of his soldiers!¹

Menahem's conquests in the north were short-lived. In 745 B.C. the mighty Tiglath-pileser, known in Babylonia as King Pul, came to the throne of Assyria. In one of his early campaigns Tiglath-pileser invaded Israel and forced Menahem to pay an enormous tribute of a thousand talents of silver (about \$2,000,000).² This payment in effect made Menahem a vassal of Tiglath-pileser and placed his throne under the protection of the Assyrian monarch (v. 19). To secure this tribute money, Menahem taxed the wealthy land owners fifty shekels each.³ The tax would have to be levied on a thousand men. Content for the moment with his take, Tiglath-pileser returned to Assyria (v. 20).

Nothing more is known of the life and reign of Menahem. He appears to have died a natural death. Menahem was succeeded by his son Pekahiah (vv. 21, 22).

D. THE TWO-YEAR REIGN OF PEKAHIAH 15:23-26

TRANSLATION

(23) In the fiftieth year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekahiah the son of Menahem began to reign over Israel; and he reigned in Samaria two years. (24) And he did that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not turn from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin. (25) And

¹ On this cruel practice of ancient warfare see II K 8:12; Isa. 13:8; Hosea 10:14; 13:16; Amos 1:13.

² The figure of \$2,000,000 is based on the Berkeley Version. An inscription of Tiglath-pileser mentions the tribute of Menahem. See ANET, pp. 282ff.

³ Fifty shekels of silver (\$2,000) was about the price of a slave in this period. See D.J. Wiseman, *Iraq XV*, (1953), p. 135.

Pekah the son of Remaliah, his captain, conspired and smote him in Samaria in the tower of the king's house along with Argob and Arieah; and with him fifty men of the Gileadites; and he slew him and reigned in his place. (26) Now the rest of the acts of Pekahiah and all which he did, behold they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.

Seventeenth King of Israel

PEKAHIAH BEN MENAHEM.

742-740 B.C.

(*"Yahweh has observed"*)

II K 15:23-26

Synchronism

Pekahiah 1 = Uzziah 50

Contemporary Prophet

Hosea

"The righteousness of the upright shall deliver them: but transgressors shall be taken in their own naughtiness." Proverbs 11:5

COMMENTS

The short reign of Pekahiah was wholly uneventful. He held the throne for parts of two years and performed no action that the historian thought worthy of record. One of his captains, Pekah the son of Remaliah, conspired against him and slew him in the tower (i.e., loftiest part) of the royal house. Along with the king two other prominent personages—Argob and Arieah—died. Joining Pekah in this conspiracy were fifty Gileadites who may have been part of the royal bodyguard at this time (v. 25).

E. PEKAH, THE GREAT NATIONALIST 15:27-31

TRANSLATION

(27) In the fifty-second year of Azariah king of Judah, Pekah the son of Remaliah began to reign over Israel; he reigned

in Samaria twenty years. (28) And he did that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD; he did not turn aside from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat who caused Israel to sin. (29) In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came and took Ijon, Abel-bethmaachah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee—all the land of Naphtali—and carried them captive to Assyria. (30) And Hoshea the son of Elah made a conspiracy against Pekah the son of Remaliah, and smote him, and slew him, and reigned in his place in the twentieth year of Jotham the son of Uzziah. (31) And the rest of the acts of Pekah and all which he did, behold they are written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Israel.

Eighteenth King of Israel

PEKAH BEN REMALIAH

740-732 B.C.*

(*"Watch"*)

II K 15:27-31

Synchronism

Pekah 1 = Uzziah 52

Contemporary Prophet

Hosea

"Righteousness tendeth toward life: so he that pursueth evil pursueth it to his own death." Proverbs 11:19

*Ruled in Transjordan from 752 B.C.

COMMENTS

The assassination of Pekahiah took place in the last year of the long reign of Uzziah of Judah. The *"twenty years"* attributed to Pekah must be counted from 752 B.C., the first year of Menahem (v. 27). No other way of fitting this twenty years into the chronological framework appears possible. This means, in effect, that throughout the reigns of Menahem and his son Pekahiah, Pekah maintained a rival dynasty, perhaps in Transjordan. Gray refers to this as *"partisan dating."*

Pekah appears to have been radically anti-Assyrian in his foreign policy. He joined with Rezin of Damascus in forming a coalition of western states which hopefully would be able to withstand further Assyrian incursions. Fearful of reprisals at the hands of the ruthless Assyrians, Ahaz of Judah refused to join the coalition. Pekah and his ally Rezin then attacked Judah with the purpose of deposing Ahaz and putting someone more sympathetic to the anti-Assyrian cause on the throne (Isa. 7:2-6). Ahaz summoned Tiglath-pileser to his aid. The great Assyrian monarch attacked the Northern Kingdom in 734 B.C., annexing much territory and deporting many captives. In 732 B.C. he attacked and destroyed Damascus. He probably would have destroyed Israel as well had it not been for the fact that Pekah was assassinated by Hoshea who was willing to pledge allegiance to Tiglath-pileser. Nonetheless, the Great King did take away captive great masses from the northern parts of Israel. Ijon and Abel-bethmaachah were towns near the waters of Merom (Lake Huleh) as were also Janoah, Kedesh and Hazor. It is disputed whether Gilead was the entire region east of Jordan or a small district near the waters of Merom.⁴ Galilee was the region which later gave its name to the lake located there (v. 29).

II. JUDAH SUBMITS TO ASSYRIA 15:32—16:20

Under military pressure to join an anti-Assyrian coalition, Judah appealed to Tiglath-pileser for assistance. This brought the Southern Kingdom under the domination of Assyria. The events leading to this submission began during the reign of Jotham (15:32-38), and culminated in the reign of Ahaz (16:1-20).

⁴ The deportation of Transjordan alluded to in I Chronicles 5:26 is likely the same as mentioned here. This campaign is mentioned in three different Assyrian texts. See Gray, OTL, p. 626.

A. THE REIGN OF JOTHAM 15:32-38

TRANSLATION

(32) In the second year of Pekah the son of Remaliah king of Israel, Jotham the son of Uzziah king of Judah began to reign. (33) He was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and twenty-six years he ruled in Jerusalem; and the name of his mother was Jerusha the daughter of Zadok. (34) And he did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD according to all which Uzziah his father had done. (35) Only the high places he did not remove; yet the people were sacrificing and offering incense in the high places. He built the higher gate of the house of the LORD. (36) Now the rest of the acts of Jotham and all which he did; are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? (37) In those days the LORD began to send against Judah Rezin the king of Aram and Pekah the son of Remaliah. (38) And Jotham slept with his fathers, and they buried him with his fathers in the city of David his father; and Ahaz his son ruled in his place.

Tenth King of Judah
 JOTHAM BEN AZARIAH
 739-732 B.C.*
 ("Yabweh-perfect")
 II K 15:32-38; II C 27:1-4
 Synchronism
 Jotham 1 = Pekah 2
 Contemporary Prophets
 Isaiah; Micah

Mother: Jerusha

Appraisal: Good

"Mercy and truth preserve the king: and his throne is upholden by mercy."

Proverbs 20:28

* coregent from 750 B.C.
 emeritus king from 735 B.C.

COMMENTS

The chronology of Jotham's reign is problematic. He is said to have commenced to reign in the second year of Pekah of Israel. This probably refers to the absolute or sole reign of both kings. Pekah began his sole reign over Israel in 740 and Jotham in 739 B.C. (v. 32). Jotham is said to have reigned sixteen years (v. 33), which are probably counted from the time Jotham was appointed regent in 750 B.C. Jotham actually lived four more years and in some sense continued to reign as is indicated in verse 30.

Jotham is evaluated as a good king. He is said to have done according to all that his father did (v. 34) except that he did not repeat the tragic mistake of attempting to enter the Temple (II C 27:2). Yet Jotham made no effort to destroy the high places which were so offensive to the Lord. He did, however, build the "high gate" of the Temple which probably was on the north side of that structure. This gate was probably intended to serve as further fortification against possible attack from the north. The Chronicler relates that Jotham also restored other fortifications (II C 27:3) and "*built cities in the mountains of Judah, and in the forests he built castles and towers.*"

The author of Kings passes over in silence the principal event of Jotham's reign, his war with Ammon. The Chronicler relates: "*He fought also with the king of the Ammonites, and prevailed against them. And the children of Ammon gave him the same year an hundred talents of silver and ten thousand measures of wheat and ten thousand of barley. So much did the children of Ammon pay unto him, both the second year and the third*" (II C 27:5).

The account of Jotham here ends with the note that the pressure of the Pekah-Rezin coalition began to exert itself during those days (v. 37). When Rezin and Pekah launched their invasion of Judah in 733 B.C., Jotham was still alive, but Ahaz seems to have been handling the affairs of state.

The conspiracy against Pekah is said to have taken place

in the twentieth year of Jotham of Judah. However verse 33 declares that Jotham reigned but sixteen years. Both the twenty and the sixteen years are to be counted from the time when Jotham assumed the reins of government from his leprous father. This would appear to be in the year 750 B.C. However during the last four years of Jotham's reign he seems to have virtually relinquished control of the government to his son Ahaz. Thus the total length of Jotham's reign was twenty-one years; but the effective period of his ruling power was but sixteen.

B. THE REIGN OF AHAZ 16:1-20

Considerable attention is devoted to Ahaz because of the religious significance of his reign. For the first time since the bloody reign of Athaliah, the Davidic dynasty faced the threat of removal from the throne in Jerusalem. To preserve himself on the throne, Ahaz appealed for aid from Assyria. He thus brought Judah under the political influence and—what is worse—the religious influence of the Mesopotamian superpower. After a brief introduction to the reign of Ahaz (vv. 1-4), the author discusses the Syro-Ephraimitic invasion of Judah (vv. 5-9), and the Temple alterations made by Ahaz (vv. 10-18).

1. INTRODUCTION TO THE REIGN OF AHAZ (16:1-4)

TRANSLATION

(1) In the seventeenth year of Pekah the son of Remaliah, Ahaz the son of Jotham the king of Judah began to reign. (2) Twenty years old was Ahaz when he began to reign, and sixteen years he reigned in Jerusalem; he did not do that which was upright in the eyes of the LORD his God like David his father. (3) But he walked in the ways of the kings of Israel, and even his son he caused to pass through the fire according

to the abominations of the nations which the LORD drove out from before the children of Israel. (4) And he sacrificed and burned incense in the high places and on the hills and under every green tree.

Eleventh King of Judah

AHAZ BEN JOTHAM

735-720 B.C.*

(*"Possessor"*)

II K 16; II C 28

Synchronism

Ahaz 1 = Pekah 17

Contemporary Prophets

Isaiah, Micah, Oded

Mother: ?

Appraisal: Bad

"It is an abomination to commit wickedness: for the throne is established by righteousness." Proverbs 16:12

* coregent from 743 B.C.
emeritus king from 720 B.C.

COMMENTS

Ahaz seems to have usurped the reins of government from his father Jotham in 735 B.C., the seventeenth year of Pekah of Israel. His sixteen years of effective rule should be dated 735-720 B.C. However, Ahaz served as coregent with Jotham from as early as 743 B.C. He was still living and occupying an emeritus position from 720-715 B.C.

Ahaz was the most wicked king who to this point had reigned in Judah. Of all the kings of Judah only Manasseh and Amon receive greater condemnation. Ahaz reintroduced and personally participated in the worship of Canaanite deities. Like the kings of Israel, he made molten images for Baal (cf. II C 28:2), and, even worse, made his son to pass through the fire. The irony of this action is pointed out by the author: it was because of such abominable practices as these that God had driven

the Canaanites out of the land before the armies of Israel⁵ (v. 3). Ahaz not only tolerated the continued existence of the worship in the high places and groves, he himself took part in that worship (v. 4). This illegitimate and unregulated worship, while in many cases ostensibly directed to Yahweh, was very corrupt and paganized.

A further comment is necessary on the practice of passing one's son through the fire. This was no symbolic ceremony in which a child might be dedicated to the service of some pagan god as some commentators imagine. The Chronicler clearly states that Ahaz "*burnt*" his children (plural!) in the fire (II C 28:3).⁶ The sacrificial burning of children was a practice particularly associated with Moloch the god of Moab. The theory was that a man should offer to his deity what was nearest and dearest to himself. The sacrifice as it was performed at the Phoenician colony of Carthage is described by the Roman writer Diodorus Siculus (XX, 14). In the Temple there was an image of Moloch, a human figure with a bull's head and outstretched arms. This image of metal was made glowing hot by a fire kindled within it; and the children laid in its arms, rolled from thence into the fiery lap below. If the children cried, the parents stopped their noise by fondling and kissing them; for the victim was not supposed to weep, and the sound of complaint was drowned in the din of flutes and drums. It is not certain whether the children were first slain or whether they were placed alive in the glowing arms of the image. Ezekiel 16:21 suggests the former, but the precise ritual may have varied from time to time and place to place.

⁵ See Lev. 18:21; Deut. 12:31; 18:9, 10.

⁶ Compare Jeremiah 19:5 and Ezekiel 16:21.

2. *THE SYRO-EPHRAIMITIC INVASION OF JUDAH* (16:5-9)

TRANSLATION

(5) Then Rezin king of Aram and Pekah the son of Remaliah king of Israel went up to Jerusalem to war; and they besieged Ahaz, but were not successful. (6) At that time Rezin king of Aram recovered Elath for Aram, and drove the Jews from Elath; and the Arameans came to Elath where they dwell to this day. (7) And Ahaz sent messengers to Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria, saying, Your servant and your son am I! Come up and deliver me from the hand of the king of Aram and from the hand of the king of Israel who are rising up against me. (8) And Ahaz took the silver and gold which was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasures of the king's house, and sent it to the king of Assyria as a present. (9) And the king of Assyria hearkened unto him, and the king of Assyria went up against Damascus, and took it, and carried it captive to Kir, and he slew Rezin.

COMMENTS

The alliance between Rezin of Damascus and Pekah of Samaria was briefly noticed in 15:37 in connection with the reign of Jotham. This alliance is an extraordinary and somewhat unexpected political development. Not since the early days of Benhadad I had either Judah or Israel been allied with the Aramean state. For a century and a half the kings of Damascus had been bitter enemies of the people of God. However, the military resurgence of Assyria under the dynamic leadership of Tiglath-pileser in 745 B.C. forced the states of Syria-Palestine into a political realignment. For reasons which are not entirely clear, Ahaz of Judah rejected the overtures of this coalition and refused to lend his support to any military effort against Assyria. He either did not feel threatened by

Assyria, or else he feared Tiglath-pileser so much that he did not wish to offend the Great King in any way.

Ahaz's refusal to participate in the newly formed coalition brought down upon him the wrath of Rezin and Pekah. Jerusalem was besieged, but did not fall (v. 5). The fortifications of Uzziah (II C 26:9) and Jotham (II C 27:3) had, no doubt, greatly strengthened the city since the time it was captured so easily by Jehoash (cf. II K 14:13). Frustrated at Jerusalem, Rezin roamed farther south and captured Elath and drove out the Jewish garrison which had been stationed there since the days of Uzziah (cf. 14:22). From that time on the Arameans (or perhaps Edomites⁷) occupied this important seaport city (v. 6).

In his extreme desperation, Ahaz turned to Tiglath-pileser of Assyria for relief from his two antagonists. This reliance on man rather than God is exactly what the prophet Isaiah had tried to forestall when he confronted Ahaz just before the Syro-Ephraimitic attack (Isa. 7:1-9). But the king was not a man of faith, and to him it appeared that the only logical and reasonable course of action was to submit willingly to the Assyrian. Better to be the vassal of a distant power than to lose his throne altogether. So Ahaz submitted himself completely to Tiglath-pileser, and at the same time asked the mighty king to deliver him from the Syro-Ephraimitic threat (v. 7).

Sacred treasuries and royal treasuries were drained in order to send to Nineveh the appropriate gift which would seal the alliance between the two countries (v. 8). Tiglath-pileser welcomed this overture. His imperialistic policy called for the eventual subjugation of Aram and the submission of Judah. In 732 B.C. the Assyrian attacked and captured the city of Damascus just as Amos the prophet had previously foretold

⁷ The difference in the Hebrew spelling of "*Edomites*" and "*Arameans*" is so slight that it is conceivable that a scribal error occurred here. It is difficult to imagine Arameans from Damascus still remaining in far distant Elath for any length of time. It is far more reasonable to regard the capture of Elath as a blow against Judah. Once the city fell, it was returned to the native people.

(cf. Amos 1:4, 5). A great host of captives—thirty thousand according to the Assyrian annals—was carried away to Kir,⁸ a district in the eastern Assyrian empire the location of which has not been positively identified, Rezin himself was slain when the city fell (v. 9).

3. TEMPLE ALTERATIONS BY AHAZ (16:10-18)

TRANSLATION

(10) And King Ahaz went to meet Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria in Damascus, and he saw an altar that was in Damascus; and King Ahaz sent unto Urijah the priest the pattern of the altar, and the specification for all its workmanship. (11) And Urijah the priest built the altar according to all which King Ahaz sent unto him from Damascus. (12) And the king came from Damascus; and the king saw the altar, and the king approached the altar, and offered burnt offerings on the altar. (13) And he offered burnt offerings and meal offerings, and poured out drink offering, and sprinkled the blood of his peace offerings upon the altar. (14) And the bronze altar which was before the LORD he removed from before the house, from between the (new) altar and the house of the LORD, and put it on the north side of the (new) altar. (15) And king Ahaz commanded Urijah the priest, saying, Upon the great altar offer the morning burnt offering and the evening sacrifice, the burnt offering of the king and his sacrifice, and the burnt offering of all the people of the land and their sacrifice and their drink offerings; and all the blood of the burnt offering and all the blood of the sacrifice you shall sprinkle upon it; and as for the bronze altar, it will be for me to inquire concerning it. (16) And Urijah the priest did according to all which King Ahaz commanded. (17) And King Ahaz cut off

⁸ According to Amos 9:7 Kir was the original home of the Arameans.

the borders of the bases, and removed from upon them the laver; and the sea he took down from upon the bronze oxen which were under it, and put it upon a pedestal of stone. (18) And the covert for the sabbath which they had built in the house, and the entry of the king without, he turned from the house of the LORD from before the king of Assyria.

COMMENTS

Following the conquest of Damascus, Tiglath-pileser summoned Ahaz and other vassal kings to confirm officially their submission to him through a formal treaty. While in the city, Ahaz saw an altar—almost certainly an Assyrian altar—which struck his fancy. The Assyrian kings were accustomed to carry altars about with them and to have them set up in their fortified camps or in other convenient places. Ahaz may have been required by Tiglath-pileser to order this Assyrian altar to be set up in Jerusalem; on the other hand, he may have volunteered to do so knowing that this would greatly please his new master. At an earlier time Ahaz had sacrificed to the gods of Damascus because that city had proved militarily superior to Judah (II C 28:23). But with the destruction of Damascus, the gods of Damascus had been discredited. Pagan mentality viewed the gods of the prevailing military force to be superior deities. Furthermore, vassal treaties generally compelled recognition of the gods of the suzerain. For these reasons Ahaz sent back to Jerusalem to Urijah the high priest detailed instructions for making this altar which differed in size and workmanship from the altars which Solomon had constructed (v. 10).

Being a man with no backbone, Urijah⁹ does not seem to have thought even of remonstrance, much less of resistance

⁹ Urijah is almost certainly the Uriah of Isaiah 8:2 who earlier had served as a witness to one of Isaiah's most dramatic predictions.

to the royal orders. He did just as Ahaz ordered (v. 11). Upon return from Damascus, the king personally made use of the new altar for his private sacrifices¹⁰ (vv. 12, 13). One sin led to another, and shortly Ahaz ordered the Solomonic bronze altar which stood directly in front of the Temple moved to one side. This left the space clear between the Temple and the new altar. Solomon's altar, shifted to one side, was put, as it were, in the background; the eye rested on the new altar, right in front of the porch of the Temple (v. 14). By virtue of its position immediately before the sacred house, the new altar, which was probably smaller than the Solomonic altar, became the great altar. The king ordered Urijah to offer all the regular and occasional sacrifices upon that new altar. The king was probably afraid to completely remove or break up the old altar which by this order had become superfluous. He therefore said that he would take time to inquire, i.e., consider what he would do with it (v. 15). Again the high priest acquiesced in the demands of the king (v. 16).

With the passage of time, Ahaz became ever more bold in the innovations which he introduced into God's Temple. He removed the "*border of the bases*" of the ten bronze lavers which were used in the Temple court. These "*borders*" seem to have consisted of ornamental panels on which were carved in relief figures of lions, oxen and cherubim (cf. I K 7:29). What may have motivated the king in this action is not clear. Perhaps he was merely being destructive. On the other hand he may have wished to use these beautiful panels for some other decorative purpose. The king also took the lavers off their bases, which in effect made these lavers immobile. Solomon's molten sea or giant laver was taken off the backs of the twelve bronze oxen which supported it (cf. I K 7:23-26) and placed on a pedestal of stone (v. 17). Once again the king's motives are obscure. The most likely guess is that he wished to

¹⁰ The words might be construed to mean that Ahaz, like Uzziah, usurped priestly functions; but if such had been the case it would seem that the author would have made this perfectly clear.

use the bronze oxen for decorative purposes elsewhere.

The "*covert for the sabbath*" was probably a covered place or stand in the court of the Temple which was used by the king whenever he visited the Temple on sabbath days or festival days. It probably was richly ornamented. "*The entry of the king without*" probably refers to "*the ascent into the house of the Lord*" which Solomon constructed for his own use (I K 10:5). The queen of Sheba marveled over this work of art. Ahaz is said to have "*turned*" them from the house of the Lord "*from before,*" i.e., because of, or for fear of, the king of Assyria. Commentators have had a great deal of trouble interpreting this sentence and any suggestion as to its meaning would be pure speculation. Perhaps the meaning is that Ahaz was forced to destroy these works of art in order to meet his tribute obligations to Tiglath-pileser (v. 18).

4. THE DEATH OF AHAZ (16:19-20)

TRANSLATION

(19) Now the rest of the acts of Ahaz which he did are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah?
(20) And Ahaz slept with his fathers, and he was buried with his fathers in the city of David, and Hezekiah his son reigned in his place.

COMMENTS

The Book of Chronicles adds some important information about Ahaz which is not recorded in Kings. The most significant information is as follows: (1) The complete defeat of Ahaz by Pekah (II C 28:5-8); (2) the losses he sustained at the hands of the Edomites and Philistines (II C 28:17, 18); (3) the fact that at one point in his life Ahaz adopted the worship of the Aramean gods (II C 28:23); (4) the fact that in his

latter years he shut up the Temple and suspended the sacrificial offerings and burning of incense (II C 28:24; 29:7); (5) the fact that he set up additional high places so that each city would have its own place of worship (II C 28:5). When he died, Ahaz was buried in the city of David (v. 20), but not in the sepulchers of the kings (II C 28:27). Like Uzziah before him, he was not considered worthy of a sepulcher in the royal catacomb.

III. THE ASSYRIAN DESTRUCTION OF ISRAEL AND THE DEPORTATION OF THE TEN TRIBES 17:1-41

Chapter 17 relates the sad story of how the Northern Kingdom fell to the Assyrian superpower. After narrating the political facts relating to the reign of the last king of Israel (vv. 1-6), the author of Kings undertakes a lengthy explanation of *why* the calamity of captivity befell this portion of God's covenant people (vv. 7-23). The author then describes the syncretistic practices of the foreigners who were forced to repopulate Samaria (vv. 24-41).

A. HOSHEA: THE LAST KING OF ISRAEL 17:1-6

TRANSLATION

(1) In the twelfth year of Ahaz king of Judah, Hoshea son of Elah began to reign in Samaria over Israel; and he reigned for nine years. (2) And he did that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD, only not like the kings of Israel who were before him. (3) Against him Shalmaneser king of Assyria went up, and Hoshea became a servant to him and rendered to him tribute. (4) And the king of Assyria found conspiracy in Hoshea because he had sent messengers unto So king of Egypt; and he brought no tribute to the king of Assyria as he had done year by year; therefore the king of Assyria shut him up and

bound him in prison. (5) And the king of Assyria went up in all the land, and went up to Samaria, and laid siege to it for three years. (6) In the ninth year of Hoshea, the king of Assyria captured Samaria, took Israel captive to Assyria, and made them dwell in Halah, and in Habor by the river Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes.

Nineteenth King of Israel

HOSEA BEN ELAH

732-722 B.C.

(*"Deliverer"*)

II K 15:30; 17:1-6

Synchronism

Hoshea 1 = Jotham 20

"Scornful men bring a city into a snare: but wise men turn away wrath."

Proverbs 29:8

COMMENTS

Hoshea came to the throne in 732 B.C., the twentieth year of Jotham (II K 15:30) and the twelfth year of the coregency of Ahaz (II K 17:1).¹¹ He reigned for some nine years over the Northern Kingdom (v. 1). Like his predecessors, Hoshea did evil in the eyes of the Lord. He continued the apostate calf worship, leaned upon the arm of flesh, and turned a deaf ear to the voice of God's prophets. But he was not guilty of any special wickedness like some of those who had occupied that throne before him (v. 2). When Tiglath-pileser died, Hoshea tried to regain his independence by withholding the annual tribute money. But the new king, Shalmaneser, came up against him and forced him to resume his position of Assyrian

¹¹ For a discussion of the problem in this synchronism, see the special study at the conclusion of the next chapter.

tributary.¹² These events probably transpired in the year 727 B.C.

Though forced back into the Assyrian orbit, Hoshea searched for some means by which he might extricate himself. Grasping at straws, he was persuaded to enter alliance with a certain King So of Egypt. This So is probably to be identified with Sib'e, a commander of one of the small monarchies of the Egypt delta.¹³ King So must have made certain commitments to Hoshea. With this backing the Israelite monarch tried once again to withhold tribute from Shalmaneser. This act of rebellion brought down the wrath of the Assyrian upon Samaria. The text as it stands gives the impression that Hoshea may have gone out to meet Shalmaneser to sue for peace and pardon. He was then arrested and imprisoned (v. 4).¹⁴

The king of Assyria came with a vast army to besiege the kingless capital of the country. According to the Hebrew mode of reckoning parts of years as full years, the siege lasted three years. Actually the siege need not have lasted longer than one full year and parts of two other ones, i.e., a little over one year. Samaria held out as long as it could, awaiting the promised aid from Egypt (v. 5). Finally in 722 B.C. Samaria fell to "*the king of Assyria*," either Shalmaneser, or to Sargon who claimed the throne that same year.¹⁵ The Assyrian records relate that 27,290 persons were carried captive from Samaria, and doubtlessly many others from smaller villages round about. These captives were taken and distributed in the distant eastern provinces of the Assyrian empire.

¹² This may have been the time when "*Shalman spoiled Beth-arbel in the day of battle*" (Hos. 10:14), defeating Hoshea near that place and taking the city.

¹³ J. A. Wilson, "So," IDB, vol. R-Z, p. 394. Gray (OTL, p. 642) thinks "So" is not a person, but a place—the Egyptian capital of this period, Sais. The Hebrew text as it stands suggests that a person is intended.

¹⁴ Others think that verse 4 gives the ultimate result, and verses 5, 6 the details of how that result came about.

¹⁵ In various texts Sargon claims to have captured Samaria. However A. T. Olmstead makes a strong case that Shalmaneser was still king at the time the city fell. "The Fall of Samaria," AJSL, XXI (1904, 5), 179-82.

**B. EXPLANATION OF THE CAPTIVITY OF ISRAEL
17:7-23****TRANSLATION**

(7) And it came to pass because the children of Israel had sinned against the LORD their God who brought them up from the land of Egypt from under the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt; but they feared other gods. (8) And they walked in the statutes of the nations which the LORD had driven out from before the children of Israel, and (in the customs of) the kings of Israel which they had introduced. (9) And the children of Israel did secretly the things which were not right against the LORD their God, and built for themselves high places in all their cities from the tower of the watchmen unto the fortified city. (10) And they set up for themselves pillars and Asherim upon every high hill and under every green tree. (11) And they burned incense there in all the high places like the nations which the LORD had carried away from before them; and did evil things to provoke the LORD. (12) And they served idols which the LORD had said to them, Do not do this evil thing. (13) Yet the LORD testified against Israel and against Judah by the hand of all His prophets and all the seers, saying, Turn from your evil ways and keep My commandments, My statutes and all the instruction which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent unto you by the hand of My servants the prophets. (14) Yet they did not hearken, but hardened their necks like the neck of their fathers who did not believe in the LORD their God. (15) And they rejected His statutes and His covenant which He had made with their fathers, and His testimonies which He testified against them; and they followed after vanity and became vain, and acted like the nations which were round about them concerning which the LORD had commanded them that they should not do like them. (16) And they forsook all the commands of the LORD their God, and made for themselves molten images, two calves, and they made an Asherah, and they worshiped

all the host of the heavens, and served Baal. (17) And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and practiced divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the eyes of the LORD to provoke Him. (18) And the LORD became exceedingly angry with Israel, and removed them from His sight; not one was left except the tribe of Judah alone. (19) Also Judah did not keep the commands of the LORD their God, and walked in the statutes of Israel which they made. (20) And the LORD rejected all the seed of Israel, and afflicted them, and gave them into the hand of spoilers until He had cast them from before Him. (21) When he had torn Israel from the house of David, they made Jeroboam the son of Nebat king; and Jeroboam drove Israel from following the LORD, and made them to commit a great sin. (22) And the children of Israel walked in all the sins of Jeroboam which he did; they did not turn from it. (23) Until the LORD removed Israel from His sight as He had spoken by the hand of all His servants the prophets. So Israel was carried away captive from off their land to Assyria until this day.

COMMENTS

In verses 7-23 the writer ceases to be mere historian and becomes a prophetic teacher, interpreting for future generations the calamitous fall of the Northern Kingdom. Verses 7-12 contain a general statement of Israel's wickedness. After God had delivered his people from the oppression in Egypt they had taken up the worship of other gods (v. 7). They followed the "*statutes of the heathen*," i.e., their customs and religious observances, even though it was these very "*statutes*" which caused the Holy God to order the Canaanite nations driven from that land. The kings of the Northern Kingdom had also been a negative influence upon the people as a whole, introducing into the nation the apostate calf worship as a substitute for the pure worship which the Lord had ordained to be conducted in Jerusalem (v. 8).

In secret, i.e., private, the Israelites participated in all kinds of rites which were not pleasing to the Lord. High places were built throughout the land in open violation of the divine command that there be one Temple and one altar. The proverbial expression, "*from the tower of the watchman to the fortified city*" (v. 9), means from the smallest and most solitary place to the largest and most populous. Stone pillars such as used in heathen symbolism were set up along with Asherim (not "*groves*" as in KJV), the wooden poles emblematic of the female deity Asherah (v. 10). The worship in the high places followed the pattern of Canaanite worship with the offering of incense (v. 11). By these actions the men of Israel were indicating their allegiance to the idols. The word for "*idols*" in verse 12 is a term of derision rarely used except by Ezekiel. The basic meaning of *gillulim* seems to be something like "*things of dung*" or "*odorous ones.*"

In spite of the blatant apostasy of Israel, God graciously continued to plead with them and warn them through His spokesmen. "*Prophets*" and "*seers*" are terms used interchangeably in the Old Testament (cf. I S 9:9). One thinks of the ministries of Ahijah the Shilonite (I K 14:2); Jehu the son of Hanani who prophesied concerning Baasha (I K 16:1); Elijah and Micaiah who were active during the reign of Ahab; Elisha who bore testimony during the first half of the Jehu dynasty; Jonah and Amos who ministered during the prosperous reign of Jeroboam II; and Hosea who labored the last half-century of Israel's history. In Judah one thinks of Shemaiah who was contemporary with the first king of the Divided Monarchy; of Micah and Isaiah who labored in the eighth century; and of a whole host of lesser known prophets mentioned by the Chronicler.¹⁶ All of these men of God pleaded urgently with the inhabitants of the land to heed the divinely revealed Law of Moses (v. 13). But in spite of these efforts the people continued to "*harden their necks,*" i.e., to be obstinate,

¹⁶ E.g., Iddo (II C 13:22); Azariah (II C 15:1); Hanani (II C 16:7); Jehu (II C 19:2); Jahaziel (II C 20:14); Eliezer (II C 20:37); Zechariah (II C 24:20).

just as their "*stiff-necked*" fathers who failed God so often in the period of the wilderness wanderings (v. 14). Rejecting the "*statutes*" of God, the people of Israel had in effect rejected the covenant with God into which they had entered at Mt. Sinai (cf. Ex. 19:5-8). His "*testimonies*"—those commandments which witness of Him and reveal His nature—they also rejected. The people chose to follow "*vanity*," the empty, futile, impotent pagan gods, and as a result they themselves became vain, i.e., impotent. Whereas God had commanded and expected His people to be separate and distinct from all nations, they chose instead to follow the way of the heathen (v. 15).

The inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom forsook the commands of the Lord and made for themselves molten images, viz., the two calves. How devoted they were to these symbols of their apostate worship! Every king of Israel had maintained the calf cult, and Bethel had become known as the king's chapel (Amos 7:13). In the days of Ahab, Phoenician deities were introduced alongside the apostate calf worship, and for a time both Baal and his consort Asherah had companies of prophets in Samaria. At some stage, astral deities had been introduced into Israel—the host of heaven—worship of the various planets. Such worship must have been imported from Mesopotamia (v. 16). With the pagan deities came the pagan practices—child immolation (see II K 16:3), and various magical practices (see II K 9:22). They had sold themselves to do evil with the deliberate intention, it would seem, of provoking the Lord (v. 17). When their cup of iniquity was full, God's wrath, long restrained, descended upon them. God removed them out of His sight. They were cast off, removed from their land, and declared no longer to be the people of God (Hos. 1:9). Judah alone was left to become God's peculiar people (v. 18).

By God's grace the Southern Kingdom was preserved for a few short years after the destruction of the Northern Kingdom. But Judah rejected the commandments of the Lord for the "*statutes of Israel*," i.e., the Baal worship and all the vile practices connected with it (v. 19). The only sin of Israel not attested in Judah is that of the calf worship. Since God is no

respector of persons, He rejected all the seed of Israel—Judah as well as Israel—and afflicted them by the hand of foreign oppressors—the Arameans, the Assyrians and finally the Chaldeans. The “*spoilers*” would include in addition to the powers just mentioned, the neighboring nations which took advantage of the weakness of Israel and Judah and attacked and plundered them. This divine program of harassment and humiliation lasted until Judah as well as Israel had been removed from God’s land and God’s favor (v. 20).

The rejection and punishment of “*all the seed of Israel*” took place in two great stages. God had torn the ten Northern tribes away from the house of David in the schism of 931 B.C. Those tribes had made Jeroboam the son of Nebat their king. The political separation alone might not have had any ill result. But under the leadership of Jeroboam the Northern Kingdom fell into religious apostasy. The calf worship introduced by this king had the effect of driving the people of the Northern tribes away from strict obedience to the Lord (v. 21). Throughout the history of the Northern Kingdom, the people continued to walk in the sins of Jeroboam which, in addition to the golden calves, also included the appointment of priests who were not of the seed of Aaron (I K 13:33). Even in the reform movement of Jehu in 841 B.C. no effort was made to correct this basic apostasy (v. 22). Warnings of punishment and deportation had been given by all the prophets of God—by Moses (Deut. 4:26, 27), Ahijah (I K 14:15, 16), Amos (7:17), Hosea (9:3, 7), and others. The inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom experienced the fate of which they had been warned. They were carried away in large numbers to the far reaches of the Assyrian empire where they were still residing at the time the Book of Kings was compiled (v. 23).¹⁷

¹⁷ A great deal of speculation has arisen about the fate of these Northern tribes. Many of these people returned with Zerubbabel to Palestine in 538 B.C. and others with Ezra in 458 B.C. (See Ezra 2:70; 3:1; 6:16, 17; 7:13; 8:35; I C 9:2, 3; Zech. 8:13). Those who remained in the lands of the captivity either united with the Jewish colonies which were later established there, or else they simply adopted fully the practices of the heathen, intermarried with them, and disappeared as a distinct group.

C. THE REPOPULATION OF SAMARIA 17:24-41

TRANSLATION

(24) And the king of Assyria brought people from Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath and from Sepharvaim, and made them dwell in the cities of Samaria in place of the children of Israel; and they possessed Samaria, and dwelt in her cities. (25) And it came to pass at the beginning of their dwelling there, they did not fear the LORD. And the LORD sent against them lions which slew some of them. (26) And they said to the king of Assyria, saying, The nations which you carried away and caused to dwell in the cities of Samaria do not know the manner of the God of the land, and He has sent among them lions; and behold they are killing them because they do not know the manner of the God of the land. (27) And the king of Assyria commanded, saying, Cause one of the priests which you carried away from there to go there, and let them go and dwell there that he may teach them the manner of the God of the land. (28) And one of the priests who had been carried away from Samaria came, and dwelled in Bethel, and taught them how they might fear the LORD. (29) But each nationality made its own gods; and they put them in the houses of the high places which the Samaritans had made, each nationality in the cities where they were dwelling. (30) And the men of Babylon made Succoth-benoth, and the men of Cuth made Nergal, and the men of Hamath made Ashima. (31) And the Avites made Nibhaz and Tartak; and the Sepharvites continued to burn their children in fire to Adremmelech and Anammelech, the gods of Sepharvaim. (32) So they feared the LORD, while they made for themselves from the lowest of them priests of the high places who made offerings for them in the houses of the high places. (33) They feared the LORD, while they served their own gods according to the manner of the nations from which they were carried away. (34) Unto this day they are doing according to the former manner; they do not fear the LORD, neither do they do after their statutes and their

judgments, or the instruction and commandments which the LORD commanded the children of Jacob whom He named Israel. (35) And the LORD made a covenant with them and commanded them, saying, Do not fear other gods, and do not bow down to them, nor serve them, nor sacrifice to them, (36) But the LORD who brought you up from the land of Egypt with great strength and outstretched arm, Him you shall fear, and to Him bow down, and to Him make sacrifice. (37) And the statutes and the judgments and the instruction and the commandment which He wrote for you, you shall observe to do forever; and you shall not fear other gods. (38) And the covenant which I made with you, do not forget, and do not fear other gods. (39) But fear the LORD your God, and He will deliver you from the hand of all your enemies. (40) Yet they did not hearken, but did according to their former manner. (41) So these nations feared the LORD, and served their graven images; also their sons and the sons of their sons; as their fathers did, so do they unto this day.

COMMENTS

In keeping with imperial policy, the Assyrian king replaced those Israelites taken into captivity with subjects from other parts of his empire. It would seem that this resettlement started not long after the fall of Samaria in 722 B.C.¹⁸ Five areas are named as having furnished the foreign settlers of Samaria. Babylon and its near neighbor Cuthah were conquered by Sargon in 709 B.C. Hamath on the Orontes river fell to Sargon in 720 B.C. and its inhabitants were carried off. The location of Ava and Sepharvaim is disputed, some scholars feeling they were Mesopotamian towns, and others, that they

¹⁸ In his annals Sargon mentions deporting people from Mesopotamia to the "Hatti land" (Syria-Palestine) in his first year of reign (721 B.C.). A similar repopulation of Samaria took place in his seventh year (715 B.C.). In the days of Esarhaddon (681-669 B.C.) the resettlement of Samaria was still taking place (Ezra 4:2).

were located in Syria.¹⁹ The Assyrian policy of national transplantation which had been introduced by Tiglath-pileser was practiced on an even larger scale by Sargon. By separating people from their native lands and from their leadership, the Assyrians hoped to be able to prevent rebellions from subject peoples (v. 24).

The foreign colonists were ignorant of Yahweh and therefore neglected to pay Him the proper respect. To teach these idolaters a much-needed lesson, the Lord sent against them lions. These beasts are no longer found in Palestine, but apparently in antiquity they were quite numerous in this region. The rural areas of the Northern Kingdom had become so depopulated by war and deportation that conditions were favorable for the rapid increase of the lion population. Several of the colonists lost their lives (v. 25) and the situation became a matter of grave concern. Word came to the Assyrian king along with the suggestion that the colonists needed to learn the proper ritual to perform in order to please the God of Israel and thus bring about the end of the lion plague (v. 26). The king then ordered that one of the priests of Yahweh be sent back to instruct the colonists in the ways of the Lord. Since the priests were such prominent personages in ancient society, they had all been carried away to other parts of the Assyrian empire. While there was a remnant of Israel left in the land (II C 34:9), they would not have been familiar with the details of the religious ritual practiced in the temples. This priest, along with his entourage (note the plural "*them*" in verse 27), returned to dwell in Bethel. He taught the new settlers to "*fear the Lord*" (v. 28) by which is most certainly meant the perverted parody of the true worship practiced in Jerusalem. No positive evidence exists, however, that this priest set up a new calf image to replace the one which had been carried off to Assyria (Hos. 10:5).

¹⁹ In II Kings 18:34 Ivvah is probably the same as Ava here. It is there mentioned with various Syrian locations. That Sepharvaim is a Syrian town is suggested by II Kings 18:34 and 19:13.

Those who had settled in the region of Samaria were polytheists and, in spite of the teaching of the priest of Yahweh, they continued to worship their native deities. They set up their idols in the high places which had been constructed by the Samaritans (i.e., the inhabitants of the Northern Kingdom) throughout their cities (v. 29). The Babylonians worshiped Succoth-benoth which is generally regarded as a corruption of the name of the goddess who was the wife of Marduk, viz., Sarpanitu.²⁰ The men of Cuth (Cuthah of v. 24) continued to honor Nergal the god of war which was the titular deity of their native city. The colonists from Hamath worshiped Ashima, a deliberate misvocalization of Asherah, the name of the Canaanite mother goddess (v. 30).

The names of the gods of the Avites are unfamiliar, but this is to be expected in view of the fact that nothing is known of the religion of that particular city. Nibhaz and Tartak may have been purely local gods, or they may have been local names for gods worshiped elsewhere under other appellations. The Sepharvites worshiped Adram-melech ("*the glorious king*"), which may have been a special title of Shamash the sun god. Anammelech ("*the arranging king*") may be an intentional Hebrew corruption of the name of the goddess Anunit who was the consort of Shamash.²¹ In honor of these particular gods, the Sepharvites committed the most abominable rite of antiquity, the sacrifice of their children (v. 31).

It is in the very nature of polytheism to be syncretistic. Thus it is not strange to find that the foreign colonists in the territory of Samaria "*feared the Lord and served their own gods.*" To the author of Kings this mixed religion was so inexplicable and repugnant that he dwells upon it. While they "*feared,*" i.e., worshiped, the Lord, the Samaritans followed the apostate practice of recruiting priests from all ranks of society, even the lowest (cf. I K 12:31). These priests were

²⁰ This goddess was popularly titled Zir-banitu ("seed-creating").

²¹ Gray (OTL, p. 655) thinks Anammelek means "*Anu* (the Mesopotamian sky-god) *is king.*"

willing to officiate in the illegitimate high places which were maintained contrary to the Law of Moses (v. 32). The Samaritans continued to mix with this apostate Yahwism the worship to which they were accustomed prior to being transplanted by the Assyrian authorities to Samaria (v. 33). At the time Kings was written, this syncretistic religion was still being practiced in the North.

While in an external sense the Samaritans "*feared the Lord*" (vv. 32, 33, 41), in reality they did not, for genuine fear of the Lord demand the elimination of all who would rival His deity. Had these people really wanted to serve Yahweh they would have attended to "*their statutes and ordinances,*" i.e., the divine commandments which are binding upon all who would pretend to worship the Lord (v. 34). With the children of Jacob (Israel), God had made a covenant in which He had stipulated that they should not worship any other god (v. 35). All religious devotion belonged exclusively to Yahweh who had brought these people out of the land of their bondage (v. 36). To all of His commandments they must forever give heed and never must they fear, i.e., serve, other gods (v. 37). Never were they to forget that Sinai covenant (Ex. 19:5-8) which had been so solemnly ratified by the sprinkling of blood and by a covenant feast (Ex. 24:3-11). For the sake of emphasis again, the author reiterates that God's people were not to fear other gods (v. 38). God's promise of deliverance and protection for His people was conditioned upon their faithfulness to Him (v. 39). The colonists in Samaria refused to hearken to the warnings of the Law, but continued to maintain the syncretism described in verses 28-33.

The final verse of chapter 17 sums up the spiritual condition of the foreign colonists who were brought by the Assyrians to Samaria. They feared the Lord (externally) and at the same time continued to serve their graven images. In Mesopotamia the images of the gods generally assumed human form. The syncretistic worship of the Samaritans continued right down to the time of the author (v. 41). But by the time of Christ, the Samaritans had become devoted followers of Yahweh and

followers of the Law of Moses in most respects. To this day a small colony of these Samaritans still can be found in Nabulus Israel.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER TWENTY- TWO

I. FACTS TO MASTER

A. Know one fact about each of the following:

<i>Kings</i>	<i>Foreign Kings</i>	<i>Non-Kings</i>	<i>Gods</i>
Zechariah	Pul	Argob	Succoth-benoth
Shallum	Tiglath-pileser	Arieh	Nergal
Menahem	Rezin	Urijah	Ashima
Pekahiah	Shalmaneser		Nibhaz
Pekah	So		Tartak
Hoshea			Adrammelech
Jotham			Anammelech
Ahaz			

B. Places mentioned in this chapter:

- | | |
|-------------|------------------------------------|
| 1. Samaria | 8. Ijon, Abel-bethmaachah, Janoah, |
| 2. Tirzah | Kadesh, Hazor, Gilead, Galilee, |
| 3. Tiphseh | Naphtali |
| 4. Elath | 9. Halah, Habor, Gozan |
| 5. Damascus | 10. Babylon, Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, |
| 6. Kir | Sepharvaim |
| 7. Bethel | |

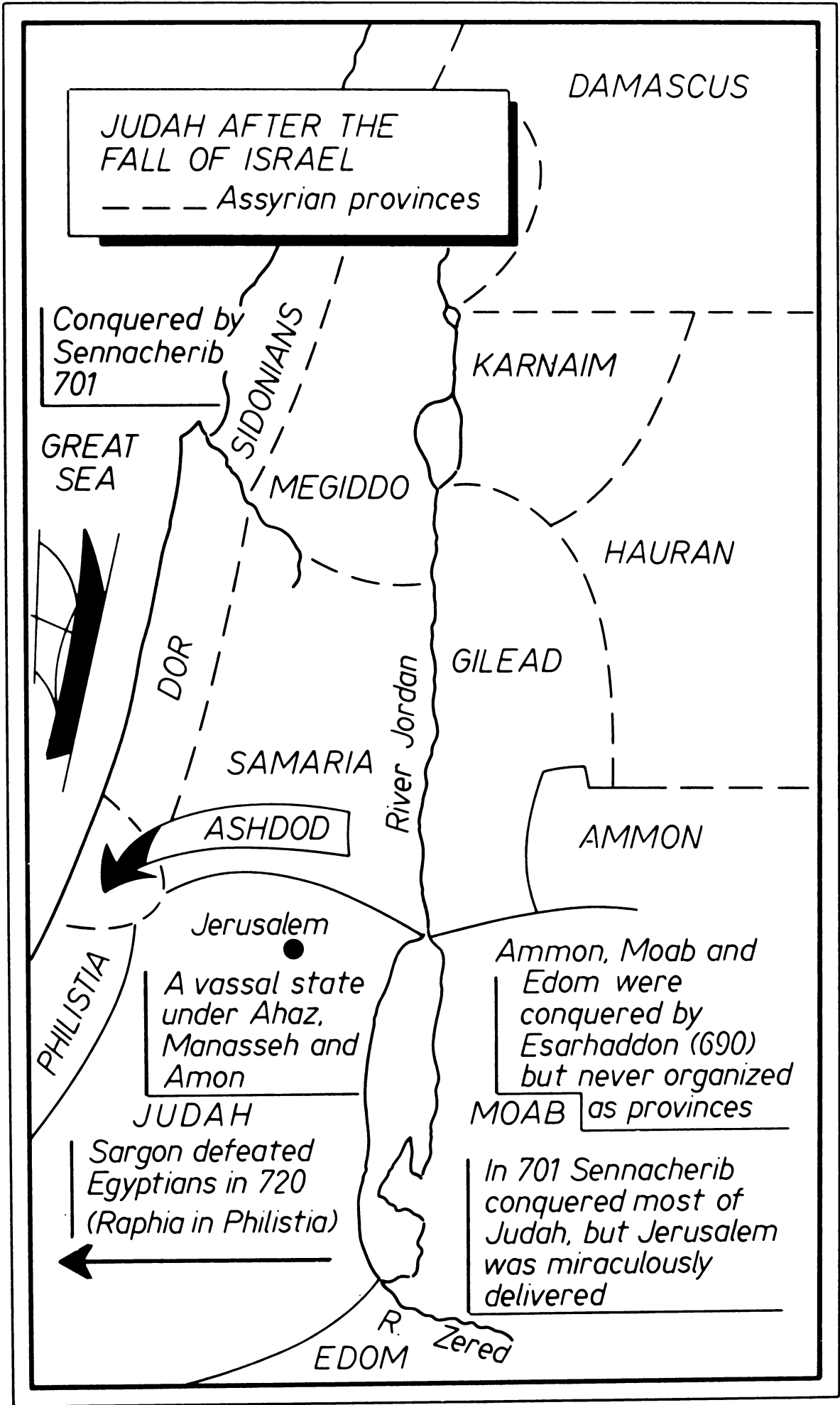
II. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. What promise had God made to Jehu back in 841 B.C.? How was that promise fulfilled?
2. How many different dynasties ruled in Israel after the fall of the Jehu dynasty? How can you account for such turmoil?
3. What surprising shifts in political alliance took place in

Israel during the last days of that kingdom?

4. What was the Syro-Ephraimitic war? What great prophecy has its background in this war? What additional details about this war are found in Chronicles?
5. Explain the chronological problem relating to the reign of Pekah.
6. To whom did Ahaz turn for aid when pressed by the armies of Israel and Aram? Why?
7. What terrible acts of apostasy are said to have taken place during the reign of Ahaz?
8. Explain what is meant by the phrase "*made his son to pass through the fire.*"
9. What textual alteration *may* have taken place in 16:6? In what other passages did a similar alteration likely take place? (See II K 3:26; II S 8:13).
10. In what way did Assyrian foreign policy change under Tiglath-pileser? Why is this king called Pul in the Bible?
11. What motivated Ahaz to order a foreign altar to replace the Solomonic bronze altar as the center of Temple worship?
12. How many different heathen customs are alluded to in 17:7-23? How many different words for false gods or symbols of worship can you find in these verses?
13. How can you explain the lion plague which came against the Samaritans? How was this problem solved?
14. In what way is much modern day religion like that of the Samaritans?

SYNOPSIS OF PART THREE – THE SURVIVING KINGDOM					
II KINGS 18-25					
722-587 B.C.			136 YEARS		
JUDAH INDEPENDENT	ASSYRIAN DOMINATION	JUDAH INDEPENDENT	EGYPTIAN DOMINATION	BABYLONIAN DOMINATION	605-587 B.C.
722-686 B.C.	686-640 B.C.	640-609 B.C.	609-605 B.C.	605-587 B.C.	
Hezekiah	Manasseh Amon	Josiah	Jehoahaz Jehoiakim	Jehoiakim Jehoiachin Zedekiah	
II Kings 18-20	II Kings 21	II Kings 22:1– 23:30	II Kings 23:31- 37	II Kings 24:1– 25:30	
Chapter Twenty-three The Struggle for Independence	Chapter Twenty-four The Last Great Reformation			Chapter Twenty-five The Dying Days of Judah	



INVASION OF
SENNACHERIB
701 B.C.

THE GREAT SEA

Byblos

Sidon

Tyre

SAMARIA

Hezekiah sends
tribute to
Sennacherib

Joppa

Ashdod

Ekron

Jerusalem

Ashkelon

Libnah

Lachish

Hezekiah shut
up "Like a bird
in a cage"

185,000
Assyrians die
in one night

Sennacherib
battles
Tirhakah

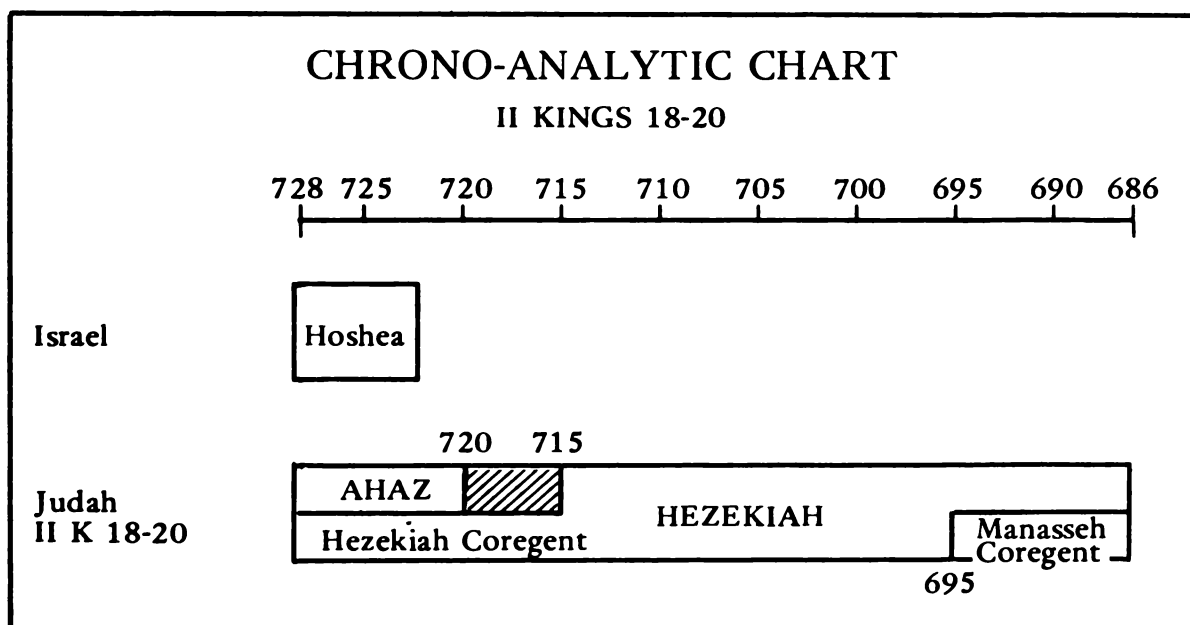


CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

THE STRUGGLE FOR INDEPENDENCE

II Kings 18:1—20:21

Three chapters of Kings are devoted to the reign of good King Hezekiah. After a somewhat lengthy introduction to the reign of this king (18:1-12), the author discusses a political crisis (18:13—19:37) and a personal crisis (20:1-19) during which Hezekiah manifested exemplary faith. A brief and stereotyped conclusion brings the discussion of this reign to a conclusion (20:20-21). The theme throughout these chapters is that of tiny Judah attempting to extricate itself from the shackles of tributary allegiance to mighty Assyria.



I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION TO THE REIGN OF HEZEKIAH 18:1-12

TRANSLATION

(1) And it came to pass in the third year of Hoshea the son of Elah king of Israel, that Hezekiah the son of Ahaz king of Judah began to reign. (2) He was twenty-five years old when

he began to reign, and he reigned twenty-nine years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother was Abi the daughter of Zechariah. (3) And he did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD according to all which David his father had done. (4) He removed the high places, and broke in pieces the pillars, and cut down the Asherah, and smashed the bronze serpent which Moses had made; for unto those days the children of Israel were burning incense to it; and they called it Nehushtan. (5) In the LORD God of Israel did he trust, and after him there was none like him among all the kings of Israel, nor among those who were before him. (6) For he clung to the LORD; he did not turn aside from after Him, and he kept His commandments which the LORD commanded Moses. (7) And the LORD was with him; whenever he went forth he prospered; and he rebelled against the king of Assyria, and did not serve him. (8) He smote the Philistines unto Gaza, and its borders from the tower of the watchmen unto the fortified city. (9) And it came to pass in the fourth year of King Hezekiah—it was the seventh year of Hoshea the son of Elah king of Israel—Shalmaneser king of Assyria went up against Samaria and besieged it. (10) And they captured it at the end of three years. In the sixth year of Hezekiah—that was the ninth year of Hoshea king of Israel—Samaria was captured. (11) And the king of Assyria carried Israel away captive to Assyria, and made them settle in Halah and in Habor at the river Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes; (12) because they did not hearken to the voice of the LORD their God, but transgressed His covenant, all which Moses the servant of the LORD commanded, and would not hear them, nor do them.

COMMENTS

From the narrative of the destruction of the Northern Kingdom the writer turns with evident relief to the accession of good King Hezekiah of Judah. On the synchronism between

Hezekiah and Hoshea, see the special study at the end of this chapter. Hezekiah began to reign when he was twenty-five and reigned a total of twenty-nine years in Jerusalem, fourteen years before his severe illness and fifteen afterwards (v. 2). He receives unqualified praise from the prophetic author of Kings (v. 3). Such praise is assigned only to two other kings of Judah—Asa (I K 15:11) and Josiah (II K 22:2). It is curious that all three of these godly men were the sons of wicked fathers. Hezekiah's godliness is due, no doubt, to the influence of the prophet Isaiah.

Twelfth King of Judah

HEZEKIAH BEN AHAZ

720-686 B.C.*

(*"Strength of Yahweh"*)

II K 18-21; II C 29-32; Isa. 38, 39

Synchronism

Hezekiah 1 = Hoshea 3

Contemporary Prophets

Isaiah; Micah

Mother: Abi

Appraisal: Excellent

"The king by judgment establisheth the land: but he that receiveth gifts overthroweth it." Proverbs 29:4

* coregent from 728 B.C.

According to the Chronicler, the reformation of Hezekiah began on the very first day of his reign. He first reopened the Temple which Ahaz had shut up, removing all the *"filthiness"* which Ahaz had allowed to accumulate there (II C 29:5). The Temple services were re-established with all due solemnity (II C 29:20-35). In the second month of his reign, a grand

Passover celebration was observed to which he invited not only his own subjects, but also the Israelites in the North who had not been carried off into captivity (II C 30:9, 11, 18). It was only at this juncture that the first act of reformation mentioned in Kings took place—the high places of the land were removed. A multitude of those who had kept the Passover feast went forth with religious zeal into the cities of Judah and even several cities of Israel, and cut down the Asherim and smashed the pagan images (cf. II C 31:1). Even the bronze serpent which Moses had erected in the wilderness was destroyed by Hezekiah because it had become an object of worship. For over seven hundred years this serpent had been preserved probably among the furniture of the Tabernacle. The people affectionately referred to it as Nehushtan, “*the little bronze thing*” (v. 4).

Hezekiah put his trust wholly in the Lord. This was exactly what God required as the condition upon which He would give his aid against the Assyrian (cf. Isa. 30:1-7). No other king before or after Hezekiah manifested such complete confidence in the Almighty (v. 5). Throughout his life he clung to the Lord and did not at the end of his reign fall into transgression like Asa and Azariah before him (cf. II C 16:7-12; 26:16-21). He faithfully observed the Law of Moses (v. 6), and because of his obedience, *the Lord was with him*. Of no other king except David is this statement made (cf. II S 5:10). The Lord caused the reign of Hezekiah to be prosperous, a point on which the Chronicler elaborates at length (II C 32:27-30).

From the very outset of his reign, Hezekiah “*rebelled*” against the king of Assyria by withholding the annual tribute from him (v. 7). He also attacked certain Philistine cities. These cities had been captured by the Assyrian king Sargon and were ruled by Assyrian partisans. Hezekiah’s Philistine campaign (v. 8) does not seem to have aimed at territorial expansion, but was intended to free the area from Assyrian influence. His efforts in this direction succeeded as far as Gaza, and he was able to liberate the entire area from the

smallest and most solitary place (*"tower of the watchman"*) to the largest and most populous (*"fortified city"*).

It was while godly King Hezekiah was ruling in Jerusalem that God brought the final judgment on Samaria in the person of King Shalmaneser (v. 9). The siege lasted parts of three years. At the end of that period, *"they"* (not Shalmaneser, but the Assyrian army) took Samaria (v. 10). The writer here hints at what generally is held by historians, viz., that it was Sargon rather than Shalmaneser who actually captured Samaria. The king of Assyria—Sargon—carried the people of Israel away to the distant eastern provinces of his empire (v. 11; cf. 17:6). While he who obeyed the Law of Moses and honored the prophets of God prospered in Jerusalem, those who disobeyed that law, broke the covenant and disregarded the servants of the Lord were punished most severely (v. 12).

II. A POLITICAL CRISIS: THE ASSYRIAN INVASION OF 701 B.C.

18:13—19:37

In 701 B.C. the Assyrian king Sennacherib was able to turn his attention to the rebellious vassal in Jerusalem. It is not easy to correlate all the details of this section with Sennacherib's own account of the campaign. Some scholars feel that in 18:13—19:37 *two* Assyrian attacks against Jerusalem have been combined without the slightest indication of the time interval of some twenty years between them.¹ However, it is probably best to follow those scholars who assign all the data here given to the 701 B.C. invasion. The author first describes how Hezekiah met the tribute demands of Sennacherib (18:13-16). Next he narrates in some detail how the Assyrian made two efforts to force Hezekiah to surrender (18:17—19:7 and

¹ Bright HI, pp. 269ff.

19:8-34). He then relates how God delivered His people from the might of the powerful Sennacherib (19:35-37).

A. HEZEKIAH'S TRIBUTARY PAYMENT TO SENNACHERIB 18:13-16

TRANSLATION

(13) In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, Sennacherib king of Assyria went up against all the fortified cities of Judah, and seized them. (14) And Hezekiah king of Judah sent unto the king of Assyria to Lachish, saying, I have offended; turn from me, that which you require of me I will bear. And the king of Assyria set upon Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. (15) And Hezekiah gave to him all the silver which was found in the house of the LORD and in the treasuries of the king. (16) At that time Hezekiah stripped the doors of the Temple of the LORD and the pillars which Hezekiah king of Judah had overlaid, and gave them to the king of Assyria.

COMMENTS

In the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's independent reign (i.e., 701 B.C.) he came under attack by the mighty Assyrian king Sennacherib. On the famous Taylor Prism,² the Assyrian royal scribes recount the details of this campaign. The Great King first smashed Tyre, one of the leading cities involved in this western rebellion. Most of the confederates then capitulated, but Ashkelon, Ekron and Judah refused to submit. Sennacherib subdued these plains cities and an Egyptian relief column which attempted to come to their aid. He then apparently

² For a translation of this inscription see DOTT, p. 66f. or ANET, p. 287f.

launched an attack against the southern Judaeen city of Lachish,³ a city which at this time was actually larger than Jerusalem.

With his outlying fortified cities under Assyrian control, Hezekiah decided that it was pointless to continue the rebellion. He acknowledged his transgression in rebelling against his overlord, and entreated Sennacherib to withdraw his forces. Whatever penalty the Great King chose to impose upon him, Hezekiah was willing to bear. Sennacherib pretended to be willing to accept Hezekiah's offer of surrender, and imposed upon his rebellious vassal the enormous tribute of three hundred talents of silver (\$600,000 BV) and thirty talents of gold (\$900,000 BV; v. 14).⁴ According to the Assyrian records, Hezekiah was also compelled to (1) make certain territorial concessions; (2) surrender an Assyrian vassal king who was being detained in Jerusalem; and (3) send two or more of his daughters to Nineveh to become part of Sennacherib's harem.

In order to meet the tribute demands of Sennacherib, Hezekiah emptied treasuries of both the Temple and the palace (v. 15). Only some thirty years before (cf. II K 16:8) Ahaz had emptied these same treasuries in order to hire the services of Tiglath-pileser. Apparently Hezekiah had little or no gold readily available and so he was forced to strip the gold from the pillars and doors which he himself had overlaid with the precious metal (v. 16). Sennacherib relates that in addition to the two large sums of gold and silver, Hezekiah sent to him at this time "woven cloth, scarlet, embroidered; precious stones or large size; skins of buffaloes; horns of buffaloes; and two kinds of woods."

³ The Assyrian account of this invasion does not specifically mention the siege of Lachish, but wall reliefs depicting the conquest of Lachish were discovered in Sennacherib's fabulous palace-temple at Nineveh.

⁴ Sennacherib states that he imposed on Hezekiah a tribute of thirty talents of gold and eight hundred talents of silver. Gray (OTL, p. 674) suggests that the three hundred talents mentioned in the Bible was the amount available in stamped ingots, and the extra talents mentioned in the Assyrian inscription is that obtained from other sources, such as the dispoilation of the Temple.

**B. SENNACHERIB'S INITIAL SURRENDER DEMANDS
18:17—19:7**

The Assyrian king was not satisfied with the tribute paid by Hezekiah. He wanted nothing less than the total surrender of Jerusalem. While he himself was engaged in military operations in the lowland region of Palestine, he sent an embassy to Jerusalem to demand capitulation (18:17-37). In response to the bombastic demands and blasphemous assertions of these pagans, Isaiah delivered an oracle promising deliverance for Judah (19:1-7).

Whereas older commentators viewed the actions and words of the Assyrian envoys in this section as improbable, more recent scholars have been forced to concede the historical verisimilitude of 18:17—9:7.⁵ The details of this section and the diplomatic arguments of Rab-shakeh have an analogy in a siege of Babylon by Tiglath-pileser III.⁶

1. THE ARROGANT ASSYRIAN DEMANDS (18:17-37)

TRANSLATION

(17) And the king of Assyria sent Tartan, Rabsaris and Rabshakeh from Lachish unto King Hezekiah with a heavy force to Jerusalem; and they went up, and came to Jerusalem, and stood by the aqueduct of the upper pool which is in the highway of the fuller's field. (18) And they called unto the king; and Eliakim the son of Hilkiyah who was over the household, and Shebna the scribe, and Joah the son of Asaph the remembrancer went out unto them. (19) And Rabshakeh said unto them, Say now unto Hezekiah, Thus says the Great King, the king of Assyria: What is this confidence in which you trust?

⁵ Gray, OTL, p. 684.

⁶ See Childs, IAC, pp. 69-103.

(20) You have said (but they are merely words), Counsel and might for war! Now upon whom do you trust that you have rebelled against me? (21) Now behold you trust for your sake upon the staff of this bruised reed, upon Egypt, on which if a man leans it will go into his hand and pierce it. Thus is Pharaoh king of Egypt to all who trust in him. (22) And if you say unto me, Upon the LORD our God we will trust: Is it not He whose high places and altars Hezekiah has removed, and has said to Judah and to Jerusalem, You shall worship before this altar in Jerusalem? (23) And now make a wager, I pray you, with my lord, the king of Assyria, and I will give to you two thousand horses if you are able on your part to set riders upon them. (24) And how will you turn away the face of one captain of the least of the servants of my lord, and trust for your part in Egypt for chariots and for horsemen? (25) Now have I come up without the LORD against this place to destroy it? The LORD said unto me, Go up against this land and destroy it. (26) Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah and Shebna and Joah said unto Rab-shakeh, Speak unto your servants in Aramaic, for we understand it; do not speak with us in the language of the Jews in the presence of the people who are upon the wall. (27) And Rab-shakeh said unto them, Did my master send me to speak these words unto your master and unto you? Did he not send me unto the men who sit on the wall, that they might eat their own dung and drink their own urine with you? (28) And Rab-shakeh stood and cried in a loud voice in the Jew's language, and spoke, and said, Hear the word of the Great King, the king of Assyria: (29) Thus says the king: Do not let Hezekiah deceive you for he is not able to deliver you from my hand. (30) Neither let Hezekiah make you trust in the LORD, saying, the LORD will surely deliver us, and this city shall not be given into the hand of the king of Assyria. (31) Do not hearken unto Hezekiah for thus says the king of Assyria: Negotiate with me by a present, and go out unto me, that each may eat from his vine and each from his fig tree, and each may drink water of his cistern, (32) until I come and take you unto a land like your land, a land of grain and new wine,

a land of bread and vineyards, a land of olive trees and honey that you might live and not die. Do not hearken to Hezekiah, for he has enticed you, saying, the LORD will deliver us. (33) Have the gods of the nations delivered each his land from the hand of the king of Assyria? (34) Where are the gods of Hamath and Arpad? Where are the gods of Sepharvaim, Hena and Ivah? Have they delivered Samaria from my hand? (35) Who is it among all the gods of the lands that has delivered their land from my hand that the LORD should deliver Jerusalem from my hand? (36) But the people were silent and answered him not a word for it was a commandment from the king, saying, Do not answer him. (37) Then came Eliakim the son of Hilkiah who was over the house, and Shebna the scribe and Joah the sons of Asaph the recorder to Hezekiah with their clothing rent; and they told him the words of Rab-shakeh.

COMMENTS

Historians and Biblical commentators are not in agreement as to the time setting of 18:17-37. Some think that even after receiving the tribute money from Hezekiah, Sennacherib was not satisfied, and that he was determined to punish this rebellious vassal. Consequently he sent a contingent of troops to Jerusalem in an effort to get Hezekiah to surrender. Others think that a time gap may exist between verses 16 and 17. According to this view, Sennacherib withdrew from Palestine in 701 B.C. Because of certain overtures from Egypt, Hezekiah determined again to extricate himself from the Assyrian grip. Sennacherib then reappeared in the region about 688 B.C. marching through the Philistine plain to confront any Egyptian force that might attempt to march northward. A small contingent was dispatched to Jerusalem to hold Hezekiah in check and to wage psychological warfare against him.⁷

⁷ Among recent Evangelical writers, Finley (BBC, p. 480-81) has presented a powerful defense of the two invasion theory.

At the head of the contingent which was dispatched to Jerusalem were three officers bearing the titles Tartan, Rabsaris and Rab-shakeh. All three titles are known from Assyrian records. The Tartan was the commander-in-chief of the field army. It is not certain what the precise functions of the other two officers might have been.⁸ The Assyrian officers positioned themselves by the aqueduct (KJV, "conduit")⁹ which carried water from the spring Gihon, the main source of water for the city, to the "upper pool," probably the Pool of Siloam. This aqueduct was located on the road which led to the "fuller's field," an area adjacent to En-rogel south of Jerusalem¹⁰ (v. 17).

From their vantage point on the east side of the city, the Assyrian officers shouted to the Jewish guards that they had a message for the king. Hezekiah sent out to the wall three of his highest officials: Eliakim who was "over the household," i.e., prime minister;¹¹ Shebna the scribe, perhaps something equivalent to a secretary of state; and Joah the recorder or remembrancer.¹²

Rab-shakeh took the lead in speaking for the Assyrians probably because he could speak Hebrew fluently. His rude and abrupt order to the Jewish officers was stripped of all diplomatic niceties. Throughout the address he spoke of Sennacherib as "the Great King" while to Hezekiah he ascribed no title whatsoever. Rab-shakeh came right to the point: What was this confidence in which the Jews trusted? (v. 19). Hezekiah had withheld tribute. He had fortified his capital (II C 32:2-5); he had collected arms and soldiers and had shut himself up in Jerusalem, having made every preparation for a siege. How

⁸ The Rabsaris was probably the chief of the king's bodyguard. Rab-shakeh means "chief officer."

⁹ This aqueduct is mentioned also in Isaiah 7:3.

¹⁰ On the location of En-rogel, see comments on I Kings 1:9-10. According to Finley (BBC, p. 482) this field was the place where newly shorn wool and woven cloth were processed by the use of an alkaline cleanser.

¹¹ Eliakim had displaced Shebna in this office just as Isaiah the prophet had predicted (Isa. 22:15-23).

¹² On the duties of the "remembrancer" see comments on I Kings 4:3.

had he dared take those steps? What was the basis for his confidence?

Beginning in verse 20, Rab-shakeh attempts to eliminate one by one the possible grounds upon which Hezekiah based his rebellion. First, he imagines Hezekiah boasting of his counsel and strength for war, i.e., of the wisdom of his advisers and his military capabilities. Such boasts were "*merely words,*" or one might say in modern idiom, so much hot air (v. 20). Sennacherib apparently knew of Hezekiah's efforts to secure an alliance with Egypt (Isa. 30:2-7) and rightly judged that he was expecting to receive aid from that quarter. Rab-shakeh ridiculed this expectation. Egypt was nothing but a "*bruised reed*"¹³ which will snap the moment any weight is applied to it. The sharp jagged casing of that broken reed might well injure the man who tried to use it for a staff (v. 21). The Assyrians were entirely justified in their contempt for the military capabilities of Egypt. Pharaoh had never yet given effective aid to any state which had come under attack by Assyria.¹⁴

Sennacherib had also heard of Hezekiah's great religious reformation and of his boasts concerning the God of Israel (cf. II C 32:8). He either had been told or had concluded that this reformation was not popular with all segments of the population, and therefore Rab-shakeh was instructed to attempt to exploit this issue. How could Hezekiah confidently rely on the protection of the God of the nation when he had for years been desecrating and destroying the high places and altars of this God? To the pagan Sennacherib it seemed inconceivable that any deity could condone such action.

Were it not for the explicit command of the Law of Moses concerning a centralized place of worship, the argument of the Assyrian would make excellent sense. Certainly there would have been many of those who were within earshot of

¹³ This characterization of Egypt is repeated in Ezekiel 29:6.

¹⁴ King So gave no aid to Samaria in 722 B.C. Though Pharaoh came to the aid of Gaza in 720 B.C., the city fell easily to Sargon. Egyptian efforts to aid Ashdod in 711 B.C. and Ashkalon in 701 B.C. were equally unsuccessful.

Rab-shakeh who probably would have agreed with his line of thinking. Jews from rural areas would have flocked to Jerusalem during the emergency and no doubt many of them resented the fact that Hezekiah had made a determined effort to centralize the worship of Yahweh in Jerusalem (v. 22). The illicit high places had been winked at for so long that they had become in the eyes of many a perfectly legitimate facet of formal worship.

To this point Rab-shakeh proceeded with logical precision. He could not, however, resist the temptation to ridicule the military capabilities of the Jews. If Hezekiah would wager two thousand men, Sennacherib would supply horses for them to ride upon (v. 23). By this remark Rab-shakeh was mocking the fact that the Jewish army lacked any cavalry. He was also suggesting that Hezekiah was facing a shortage of fighting men. Without such a force the Jews could not hope to be able to turn back even one unit of the Assyrian army, and for such a force the Jews were dependent upon undependable Egypt (v. 24). Furthermore, the Assyrian armies were invincible because, boasted Rab-Shakeh, Yahweh Himself had dispatched Sennacherib against Jerusalem (v. 25). Perhaps the Assyrian king had heard of the prophecies of Isaiah (Isa. 7:17-24; 10:5-12) which foretold the Assyrian invasion of Judah.

The three Jewish officials stood on the wall and listened to the threats and boasts of Rab-shakeh. They could sense the uneasiness of the soldiers who manned the wall. The propaganda of Rab-shakeh was having its intended effect. Eliakim, Shebna and Joah interrupted the Assyrian officer at this point and requested that he speak to them in the diplomatic language of the day—the Aramaic tongue. Hebrew and Aramaic are closely related languages, but sufficiently different to be distinct languages which were only intelligible to those who had learned them. The common people of Jerusalem would not know Aramaic; the diplomats would. The Jewish officials desperately desired that any further negotiations be conducted in the international language of the time (v. 26). Rab-shakeh, of course, refused to comply with this request. The very

purpose of his coming to Jerusalem was to intimidate the soldiers and weaken the resolve of the citizens to resist. He had come to make the men who defended Jerusalem's walls realize that before long they would be brought to the last extremity of hunger and thirst—they would be forced even to consume their own excrement (v. 27).

The urgent request of the Jewish diplomats only stirred Rab-shakeh to greater efforts. He rose—he must heretofore have been seated—and addressed himself directly to the citizens on the walls (v. 28). He urged the people not to allow Hezekiah to deceive them particularly with his assurances of supernatural deliverance (v. 29). The Assyrians knew that Hezekiah had been stirring up the people to militant resistance with promises that God would not allow Jerusalem to fall to the Assyrians (v. 30). Hezekiah based these assurances on the definite prophecies of Isaiah (Isa. 31:4-6; 33:20-22).

From threat Rab-shakeh turned to grandiose promises. If Jerusalem would but come to terms with Sennacherib and surrender, everybody in the city would be allowed to return to his own land where for a time he might live a peaceful and happy life (v. 31). Then after a time, Sennacherib would come and transplant them to a new land. Such national deportations were so common in the Assyrian empire that Rab-shakeh knew he must mention it if his remarks were to enjoy any measure of credibility. So he attempted to place this practice in the best possible light. He tried to persuade the Jews that being transported hundreds of miles from their homes really would not be so bad—that they were to be envied rather than pitied for being about to experience it. The king of Assyria would see to it that they were taken to a land as nearly as possible like their own land. In describing the land of Judah the Assyrian used glowing terminology which was designed to win the sympathy of the Jews within earshot. If they followed Rab-shakeh's advice they would live; if Hezekiah's, they would die (v. 32).

Again Rab-shakeh repeated his warning: Do not let Hezekiah persuade you that your God will deliver you (v. 32). Recent

history provided crushing evidence that Hezekiah's faith was fanatical and unrealistic. No local deity thus far had been able to deliver his people from the mighty Assyrian army (v. 33). From the Assyrian point of view it was sheer madness to think that the insignificant god of this insignificant people could do what the mighty Moloch, Chemosh, Baal and Bel had been unable to do. To make his point more emphatically, Rab-shakeh ticked off the recent victories of the Assyrian war machine: Hamath and Arpad in Syria had been conquered about 720 B.C. by Sargon. The Syrian cities of Sepharvaim, Ivah (Ava in 17:24), and Hena¹⁵ also had easily been conquered, probably about 710 B.C. The idols of Samaria had not been able to deliver that city either when the Assyrians conquered it in 722 B.C. (v. 34). Rab-shakeh challenged his auditors to produce a single example of a national god who had been able to withstand the Assyrian might. If no such example could be produced then the Jews should have abandoned their hope of supernatural deliverance from Sennacherib (v. 35). Rab-shakeh could not conceive of the idea of Yahweh being anything but a local god, on a par with the idols of surrounding nations.

In the face of these outrageous and blasphemous assertions, the Jews of Jerusalem maintained a resolute silence. Rab-shakeh's efforts to generate some sort of insurrection within the city failed. Upon hearing of the arrival of this Assyrian psychological warfare team, Hezekiah had given strict orders that no matter what was said, his subjects were to maintain strict silence (v. 36). Horrified at the blasphemies of Rab-shakeh, Hezekiah's three ministers ripped their robes and returned to the royal palace to report all that had been said (v. 37).

¹⁵ Hena and Ivah are problematical. They are not mentioned in the parallel account in Isaiah 36 nor in the Greek translation of the present passage. The Targum renders these words as though they were verbal forms, "he sent them wandering and caused them to stray."

2. *THE ANNOUNCEMENT OF ISAIAH THE PROPHET*
(19:1-7)

TRANSLATION

(1) And it came to pass when King Hezekiah heard, that he tore his garments, and covered himself with sackcloth, and went to the house of the LORD. (2) And he sent Eliakim who was over the house, and Shebna the scribe, and the elders of the priests covered with sackcloth unto Isaiah the prophet the son of Amoz. (3) And they said unto him, Thus says Hezekiah: A day of trouble, chastisement and abhorrence is this day, for children have come to the time of birth and there is no strength to bring forth. (4) Perhaps the LORD your God will hearken unto all the words of Rab-shakeh who was sent by the king of Assyria his master to revile the living God, and will reprove the words which the LORD your God heard. now lift up a prayer on behalf of the remnant that is left. (5) And the servants of King Hezekiah came to Isaiah. (6) And Isaiah said unto them, Thus say unto your master: Thus says the LORD: Do not be afraid because of the words which you have heard with which the lackeys of the king of Assyria blaspheme Me. (7) Behold I am about to send a blast against him and he shall hear a report, and return to his land; and I will cause him to fall by the sword in his land.

COMMENTS

When Hezekiah heard the report of his ministers, he too was terribly upset. Following their example, he tore his garments and donned sackcloth—a sign of grief and self-humiliation.¹⁶ He then took his troubles to the Lord as he went to the Temple to seek divine counsel and solace (v. 1). At the same time the

¹⁶ By this action the king may have initiated a public fast.

king dispatched an embassy to the great prophet Isaiah¹⁷ who resided in Jerusalem. Isaiah had been an adviser to Ahaz and most certainly would have been among the counselors of Hezekiah. The embassy wore sackcloth to emphasize the horror and grief which Rab-shakeh's threatening boasts had engendered (v. 2).

The king's message to the prophet is summed up in verses 3-4. This, said the king, is a day of trouble for the nation, a day of rebuke or chastisement for the sins we have committed against God, and a day of abhorrence in which God has allowed His people to be insulted by their enemies. The expression "*children are come to birth, and there is not strength to bring forth*" is a proverbial expression, probably meaning that the nation is facing a dangerous crisis and has no strength to face up to it (v. 3). Perhaps, suggested the king, the Lord would take note of the contemptuous words which Rab-shakeh had spoken against the living God and then reprove those words in some mighty act of judgment. To this end Hezekiah urged Isaiah to pray on behalf of the remnant who had not yet fallen into the hands of Sennacherib. The Assyrian king claims to have carried away 200,150 persons in this expedition. He also had taken away from Hezekiah certain cities and assigned them to more friendly monarchs. Thus, only a remnant of the people of Judah were left (v. 4). With this message the embassy came to seek the help of the prophet (v. 5).

Isaiah seems to have already formulated a reply to the king even before the delegation arrived at his home. Hezekiah did not need to be afraid of the blasphemous words which the lackeys (lit., *foot-boys*) of the king of Assyria had spoken (v. 6). God would send a blast (lit., *a wind*) against Sennacherib—the destruction of his army. The report of this disaster would send the Assyrian king into full retreat.¹⁸ When he returned

¹⁷ Isaiah is the first canonical (writing) prophet to be mentioned in the historical books of the Old Testament.

¹⁸ Keil thinks the report or rumor which Sennacherib heard was the news of Tirhakah's advance from Egypt.

to his own land Sennacherib would be assassinated (v. 7).

C. SENNACHERIB'S SECOND SURRENDER DEMAND 19:8-34

By means of a personal letter to Hezekiah King Sennacherib intensified the pressure to secure the surrender of Jerusalem (vv. 8-13). This new development sent Hezekiah to the Temple and to his knees in prayer (vv. 14-19). Because of this letter, Isaiah delivered a more lengthy oracle promising the safety of Jerusalem (vv. 20-34).

1. *THE LETTER OF SENNACHERIB (19:8-13)*

TRANSLATION

(8) So Rab-shakeh returned, and found the king of Assyria fighting against Libnah, for he had heard that he had departed from Lachish. (9) And he heard concerning Tirhakah king of Ethiopia, saying, Behold he has gone out to fight with you. And he sent messengers unto Hezekiah, saying, (10) Thus say unto Hezekiah king of Judah, saying, Do not let your God in whom you are trusting deceive you, saying, Do not give Jerusalem into the hand of the king of Assyria. (11) Behold you certainly have heard that which the kings of Assyria have done to all the lands, utterly destroying them, and shall you surely escape? (12) Have the gods of the nations which my fathers destroyed delivered them—Gozan, and Haran and Rezeph and the children of Edom which are in Thelasar? (13) Where is the king of Hamath and the king of Arpad and the king of the city of Sepharvaim, of Hena and Ivah?

COMMENTS

Failing in his mission to secure the surrender of Jerusalem, Rab-shakeh returned to his master. Sennacherib successfully had taken Lachish and was at that time warring against Libnah, the exact location of which is uncertain (v. 8). When the Assyrian king heard that the Ethiopian general Tirhakah was marching against him, he knew that he might be forced to make a strategic retreat from Palestine. For this reason he made one last effort to bring about the immediate surrender and consequent punishment of Hezekiah. Messengers were dispatched to Jerusalem (v. 9) who, in accord with the custom of that day, carried a written communication which would first be read aloud and then handed over to the recipient, in this case Hezekiah.

Sennacherib's letter suggested that Hezekiah had been deceived by the prophets of God who were promising that Jerusalem would be delivered from the hand of Assyria (v. 10). It reminded Hezekiah of the fact that every other nation which had tried to match might with Assyria had been utterly crushed. How then could Hezekiah entertain any hope of deliverance? (v. 11). As if to underscore this point, Sennacherib rattled off a list of Assyrian conquests: Gozan, Haran, Rezeph and the "children of Eden," i.e., the inhabitants of the city called Bit-Adini located in the region of Thelasar, i.e., "the hill or fort of Asshur." All of these Aramean cities had fallen according to Assyrian records over a century prior to this attack against Jerusalem (v. 12). More recent conquests over the king of Hamath, Arpad and the kings of the cities of Sefarvaim, Hena and Ivah were also mentioned (cf. 18:34).

2. THE PRAYER OF HEZEKIAH (19:14-19)

TRANSLATION

(14) And Hezekiah received the letter from the hand of the messengers, and read it; and Hezekiah went up to the house

of the LORD, and spread it before the LORD. (15) And Hezekiah prayed before the LORD, and said, O LORD God of Israel who dwells between the cherubim, You are God, You alone, to all kingdoms of the earth; You surely have made the heavens and the earth. (16) O LORD, incline Your ears and hear! Open Your eyes, O LORD, and see, and hearken to the words of Sennacherib which he has sent to revile the living God. (17) Truly, O LORD, the kings of Assyria have made desolate the nations and their lands, (18) and they have thrown their gods into the fire, for they are not gods, but the work of the hands of men, wood and stone; therefore, they have destroyed them. (19) And now, O LORD our God, deliver us, I pray you, from his hand, that all kingdoms of the earth may know that You are the LORD, God alone.

COMMENTS

Hezekiah received the letter from the Assyrian messengers and, when he had read it, took it to the Temple and spread it before the Lord. By this action, Hezekiah, as it were, laid his evidence before the Judge of all the earth (v. 14). Then the king prayed. He addressed God as the One who "*dwells between the cherubim*," i.e., in the Holy of Holies of the Temple. But he went beyond that, addressing the Lord as universal God, Creator of heaven and earth (v. 15). Petition followed praise in this lovely prayer. Hezekiah called upon God to take cognizance with both eye and ear, i.e., take full cognizance, of that which Sennacherib had now dared to do. The Assyrian had directly challenged the authority and power of the living God! (v. 16).

In his prayer, Hezekiah admitted that the Assyrian monarchs had an impressive list of conquests to their credit (v. 17). The gods of these numerous conquered nations had been carried off as trophies of war and had, on occasion, been burned as worthless. But this only proved that the gods of the nations were nothing but the creation of man's hands.

Gods of wood and stone could not help themselves let alone their worshipers. It was no wonder then that these deities had been destroyed (v. 18). But Yahweh the God of Israel was not to be put in the same category with the idols of men. The living God was "*our God.*" He was bound to Israel by a covenant. For this reason Hezekiah called upon the Lord to intervene and save His people from the blasphemous invader. But the king's prayer went beyond mere parochialism. He prayed for such a dramatic act of vengeance against Sennacherib, not so much for the sake of Israel, as for the vindication of God's honor among the nations of the earth. He did not desire that Yahweh would be acknowledged as a mighty God, but as the *only* mighty God in all the earth (v. 19). God's people desire nothing so much as that His glory should be recognized in ever widening circles.

3. *THE ORACLE OF ISAIAH (19:20-34)*

TRANSLATION

(20) And Isaiah the son of Amoz sent unto Hezekiah, saying, Thus says the LORD the God of Israel: That which you have prayed unto Me concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard. (21) This is the word which the LORD has spoken concerning him: The virgin daughter of Zion has despised you, laughed at you; the daughter of Jerusalem has shaken her head after you. (22) Whom have you reproached and blasphemed? Against whom have you raised a voice and lifted your eyes on high? Against the Holy One of Israel! (23) By your messengers you have reproached the Lord and you have said, With the multitude of my chariots I have gone up to the height of the mountains, to the extremities of Lebanon, and will cut down its tall cedars, the choice of its cypress trees, and I will enter the lodge of its borders, the forest of its Carmel. (24) I have dug and drunk strange waters, and with the sole of my feet I have dried up all the rivers of besieged places. (25) Have you not heard from afar that I have done it, from

ancient days that I formed it? Now I have brought it to pass that you should lay waste fortified cities as ruinous heaps. (26) And their inhabitants were of small power, they were confounded and dismayed; they were as the grass of the field and as the green herb, as the grass of roof tops, blighted before it has grown up. (27) But your abode, your going out and your coming in, I know; and your raging against Me. (28) Because your raging against Me and your arrogancy has come up into My ears, therefore I will put My hook in your nose and My bridle in your lips, and I will cause you to return in the way in which you came. (29) And this will be a sign for you: You shall eat this year the things which grow of themselves, and in the second year that which springs from it; but in the third year you shall sow, and reap, and plant vineyards, and eat their fruit. (30) And the remnant of the house of Judah who remain shall again take root downward and produce fruit upward. (31) For from Jerusalem a remnant shall go out, and they who escape from Mt. Zion. The zeal of the LORD shall perform this. (32) Therefore thus says the LORD concerning the king of Assyria: He shall not come unto this city, nor shall he shoot there an arrow, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a mound against it. (33) In the way which he came, he shall return, and unto this city he shall not come (oracle of the LORD). (34) For I will defend this city to save it for My sake and for the sake of David My servant.

COMMENTS

As Hezekiah prayed, Isaiah was made cognizant of his prayer through divine revelation, and the prophet was instructed to answer it favorably. In accordance with his high status as God's representative, Isaiah sent the message to Hezekiah rather than taking it himself. First of all, Hezekiah was assured that God had heard his prayer (v. 20). The answer itself follows in fourteen verses, which, according to Rawlinson, are arranged in four stanzas.

The first stanza (vv. 21-24) is addressed to Sennacherib. The tone here is one of scorn and contempt. The prophet pictured Jerusalem personified as a fragile "*virgin daughter*" laughing at the threats of Sennacherib and contemptuously wagging her head at the once ominous monarch (v. 21). Does this Assyrian know who it is that he had blasphemed and "*lifted up his eyes on high,*" i.e., looked down upon? It is none other than the Holy One of Israel (v. 22). By the boisterous and blasphemous conduct of Rab-shakeh and his other servants, Sennacherib had reviled Yahweh. Furthermore, he had offended the Lord by the proud thoughts within his heart. Isaiah attributes to Sennacherib the impossible dream of taking his huge chariot force into the most remote areas of Lebanon and cutting down the magnificent trees there to be taken back to the woodless plain of Assyria. "*The lodge of its borders*" may refer to some palace in the vicinity of the Lebanon forest region. "*The forest of its Carmel*" probably refers to the choicest part of the Lebanon forest (v. 23). Mountains cannot stop the mighty Sennacherib, nor can deserts either. He digs wells in them, and drinks water "*strange*" to the soil—never before seen there. If rivers try to stop him, he will find a way of drying them up (v. 24). Thus the essential thrust of verses 23-24 is that no natural barrier can stand in the way of this mighty king.

The second stanza of the oracle (vv. 25-28) is again addressed to the proud Assyrian ruler. Was this king so ignorant that he did not realize that Yahweh was the One who determined the rise and fall of kingdoms? Long ago the Almighty planned the Assyrian conquests; more recently He had brought these plans to fruition, thus enabling Sennacherib to lay waste fortified cities (v. 25). This was the reason that the peoples of the world were not able to make effectual resistance to the Assyrian advance. God had placed a terrible fear within the hearts of the peoples whom the Assyrians attacked. These peoples had been as weak as grass which swiftly withers in the face of the hot Eastern sun; or as frail as grain which contacts some disease and dwindles without even asserting

itself (v. 26).

The omniscient God of Israel knew every movement of Sennacherib and every thought of his heart. He knew of the "rage" of the Great King against Hezekiah and against the God in whom Hezekiah put his trust (v. 27). Because this rage and arrogance had come to the attention of Yahweh, He would take action against the Assyrian. He would treat Sennacherib just as Assyrian kings were wont to treat their captives. He would force a hook through his nose and a bridle through his lips. Assyrian monuments depict captives being led into the king's presence by means of ropes attached to rings which had been forced through the cartilage of the nose or through the fleshy part of the lower lip. The threat here is not to be taken literally, but only as a declaration that God would humble this proud king and reduce him to a state of abject abasement. God would turn him back. Sennacherib would not be allowed to come near Jerusalem. He would be forced to return home hastily along the same route by which he had entered Palestine (v. 28).

Verse 29 introduces the third stanza (vv. 29-31). Here the prophet turned from Sennacherib to Hezekiah, and proceeded to give him a sign. In this case the prediction of a near event became the pledge or evidence that God would keep His word with regard to a prediction more distant. Since the Assyrians had come in the spring of the year, the Jews had not been able to plant their crops that year. They would be forced to eat "*such things as grow of themselves,*" i.e., such grain as might be found growing in the unsown fields. The next year—probably a sabbatical year—they would have to do the same.¹⁹ But in the third year things would return to normal. The sign was not given with reference to the departure of Sennacherib which belonged to the first year, but with reference to the promise that Jerusalem would be free from

¹⁹ Finley (BBC, p. 486) suggests that the loss in human and natural resources to the Assyrians would be so great that it would be necessary to depend in the second year on such grain as was found in unsown fields.

any further attack on his part. Sennacherib reigned twenty-four years, but never again after 701 B.C. did he come to harass Jerusalem (v. 29).

The gracious promises to Hezekiah continue in verses 30-31. The "*remnant*" which had escaped deportation and death at the hands of Sennacherib would again be firmly fixed and established in their land, like a tree that puts forth its roots deeply into the ground. That remnant would once again "*bear fruit,*" i.e., exhibit all the outward signs of prosperity (v. 30). Those who had taken refuge in Jerusalem during the emergency would gladly go forth to reclaim and recultivate their lands. From the human point of view such a prospect seemed dim indeed at the time Isaiah compiled this oracle, but the "*zeal of the Lord,*" i.e., His zealous love and concern for His people, would bring about this restoration to prosperity and glory (v. 31).

The fourth stanza of Isaiah's oracle is a general announcement addressed to all who might be concerned with the present distress. Sennacherib would not come unto Jerusalem to besiege that city. Such operations generally began with a barrage of arrows to clear the walls of defenders. Then the enemy would advance on the walls under the protection of huge shields in order to raise scaling ladders, undermine the walls or set fire to the gates. As a last resort the attackers would build a bank of earth on an incline up to the wall and plant upon them their battering rams for the purpose of making a breach in the walls. But Jerusalem would witness none of those terrible actions (v. 32). Sennacherib would be forced to leave off operations in Palestine and retrace his steps to his homeland. He would not, the prophet again emphatically declared, come unto the city of Jerusalem (v. 33). God would defend that city because His own honor was at stake, especially in view of the taunts of Sennacherib. Also God would intervene in defense of Jerusalem because of the great love which He had toward David (v. 34).

D. THE DELIVERANCE OF JUDAH 19:35-37

TRANSLATION

(35) And it came to pass in that night that the angel of the LORD went out and smote in the camp of Assyria 185,000 men; and they arose in the morning and behold they were all dead corpses. (36) So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went, and returned, and dwelt in Nineveh. (37) And it came to pass as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer, his sons, smote him with the sword; and they fled to the land of Armenia. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his place.

COMMENTS

On the very night following Isaiah's dramatic prediction, the divine stroke fell against the armies of Sennacherib. The angel of the Lord passed over the Assyrian camp and smote 185,000 of the enemy. When the survivors awoke in the morning they found their comrades absolutely dead, not sick or dying (v. 35). Various explanations of this calamity have been put forward, the most popular of which is that a pestilence of some sort struck the Assyrian camp. But the narrative points rather to a sudden and silent death during sleep which would be very difficult to explain in purely naturalistic terms. One can only attribute the destruction of Sennacherib's army to a direct act of divine judgment.²⁰

His army decimated, Sennacherib could do nothing other than beat a hasty retreat to Nineveh (v. 36). Some twenty years

²⁰ In secular history no parallel account of this destruction has been found. Herodotus (II, 141), however, records a tradition that mice infested the Assyrian camp and caused Sennacherib speedily to withdraw. Since mice are notorious carriers of plague, the tradition in Herodotus may reflect the pagan, face-saving version of the humiliating Assyrian withdrawal.

later as he was worshiping in the temple of Nisroch²¹ he was assassinated by his own sons.²² Thus was fulfilled the prediction of Isaiah (19:7) that Sennacherib would “*die by the sword in his own land.*” Having slain the king, the assassins fled to the land of Armenia (lit., Ararat). Esarhaddon, a younger son of Sennacherib, then assumed the throne (v. 37).

III. HEZEKIAH’S PERSONAL CRISIS 20:1-19

The chronological placement of the episode related in chapter 20 is problematic. That the events of this chapter are earlier than the crushing defeat of Sennacherib’s army is suggested by verse 6. Since fifteen years were added to the life of Hezekiah and since that king died in 686 B.C., his miraculous healing must have taken place in 701 B.C. the very year of the Assyrian invasion. Another chronological clue is found in the fact that in this chapter Hezekiah still is in possession of his treasure (vv. 13-17), i.e., these treasures had not yet been carried off to Nineveh. The chapter relates (1) Hezekiah’s serious illness and miraculous recovery (vv. 1-11); and (2) his foolish mistake and subsequent rebuke (vv. 12-19).

A. HEZEKIAH’S SERIOUS SICKNESS AND MIRACULOUS RECOVERY 20:1-11

TRANSLATION

(1) In those days Hezekiah was sick unto death. And Isaiah the son of Amoz the prophet came unto him, and said unto

²¹ Nisroch is thought to be a Hebrew spelling for the southern Mesopotamian fire-god Nisku who is mentioned in Assyrian texts. See Gray, OTL, p. 695. Others identify Nisroch as Marduk whose image had been taken from Babylon to Ashur in 689 B.C.

²² It is not certain whether the two assassins were brothers or father and son. Assyrian sources attest that Sennacherib died by assassination, but do not directly state that it was by the hands of his sons. See ANET, pp. 288-89.

him, Thus says the LORD: Set your house in order, for you shall die and not live. (2) And he turned his face to the wall, and prayed unto the LORD, saying, (3) I beseech You, O LORD, Remember, I pray You, how I have walked before You in truth and in perfect heart, and have done that which is good in Your eyes. And Hezekiah wept with great weeping. (4) And it came to pass before Isaiah had gone out into the middle court, that the word of the LORD came unto him, saying, (5) Turn back and say to Hezekiah the leader of My people, Thus says the LORD the God of David your father: I have heard your prayer, I have seen your weeping. Behold I will heal you. On the third day you shall go up to the house of the LORD. (6) And I will add to your days fifteen years, and from the hand of the king of Assyria I will deliver you and this city; and I will defend this city for My sake and for the sake of My servant David. (7) And Isaiah said, Take a lump of figs; and they took it, and put it upon the boil, and he recovered. (8) And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, What is a sign that the LORD will heal me and that I may go up on the third day to the house of the LORD? (9) And Isaiah said, This is the sign for you from the LORD that the LORD has done the thing which He has spoken: Shall the shadow go forward ten steps or backward ten steps? (10) And Hezekiah said, It is a light thing for the shadow to move ten steps forward; no, but let the shadow go backward ten steps. (11) And Isaiah the prophet called unto the LORD, and the shadow went backward ten steps by which it had gone down on the steps of Ahaz.

COMMENTS

In those crucial days just prior to the Assyrian invasion, Hezekiah was smitten with a malady which in the ordinary course of nature would have proved to be fatal. To the royal chambers, Isaiah the prophet was dispatched with a message

of warning: "*Set your house in order,*²³ *for you shall die and not live!*" (v. 1). In the face of this shocking announcement the king turned on his bed away from his numerous attendants and faced the wall so that he might pray to his God with more concentration and earnestness. Hezekiah was a great man of prayer, and in this crisis it was perfectly natural for him to cast his burden upon the Lord (v. 2).

The king's prayer is a model for those who are afflicted with serious illness. He first of all called upon the Lord to remember how he had tried his very best to walk throughout life so as to meet the approval of the Lord. This is not presumptuous self-righteousness. Hezekiah knew that he had honestly endeavored to serve God and do His will. Whatever had been his shortcomings, his heart had always been right towards God. Under the old covenant, length of days was promised to the righteous (Prov. 3:2; 9:11; 10:27). Hezekiah could not comprehend why he should be cut off in middle age—he would have been thirty-nine—when kings far less righteous had lived two and more decades longer.²⁴ The king's opening statement is thus a form of expostulation and laying hold on divine promises.

The earnestness of the king was manifested in the tears which accompanied his prayer. Besides the natural fear of death—death for the Old Testament saint being a somewhat shadowy and uncertain existence—there were other good reasons for Hezekiah's earnest petition. For one thing, it would appear from II Kings 21:1 that at this point in his life Hezekiah had no male offspring to succeed him on the throne. This of course would be of grave concern to any citizen of the Old Testament world and particularly to the king. Furthermore, Hezekiah knew that his early reformation efforts would most surely bring upon Judah the wrath of the mighty Sennacherib. He wished to live to see his country through this crisis (v. 3).

Before Isaiah had reached the second of the three courtyards

²³ Gray (OTL, p. 697) renders: "*Give last injunctions to your family.*"

²⁴ Uzziah lived to be sixty-eight, Rehoboam to be fifty-eight.

which surrounded the royal palace, he was arrested by the reception of a new divine communication (v. 4). The prophet was ordered to retrace his steps, enter the king's bedchamber, and reverse the thrust of the oracle he had delivered only moments before. Hezekiah is here called by the somewhat unusual title *nagid*, a title which means "leader," one who goes in front.²⁵ The Lord here refers to Himself as "God of David your father." These two titles, the one given to Hezekiah and the one assumed by God, suggest that Hezekiah was spared from his ailment because he was the leader of God's people and because he was David's son, both biologically and spiritually.

Hezekiah's fervent prayer was effectual; God heard it and was mindful to grant the petition of His servant. God promised the king complete healing. Within three days Hezekiah would be able to be up and about and able to worship the Lord in the appointed place (v. 5). But God did more than the king had asked or even dreamed. He had asked for nothing more than immediate escape from death. God granted him fifteen additional years of life which, in effect, would more than double the length of his reign. Furthermore, God promised to deliver Hezekiah and Jerusalem from the hand of the king of Assyria. The inclusion of this promise in the divine answer suggests that part of the motivation for Hezekiah's prayer petition was concern over the forthcoming and inescapable reprisals of the Assyrian king. For the sake of His reputation both in Judah and among the heathen, and for the sake of His commitment to David, Almighty God pledged Himself to be Jerusalem's defender (v. 6).

Isaiah directed those present in the room to place a lump of figs on the malignant boil. Figs were used as a remedy for such boils.²⁶ However, neither Isaiah nor those present thought that the figs alone could effect the cure. The prophetic order

²⁵ Saul was called *nagid* (I S 9:16; 10:1) as was David also (I S 13:14; II S 5:2).

²⁶ So attested by Pliny, *Hist. Nat.* XXII, 7 and also in the Ras Shamra texts. See Gray, OTL, p. 698.

seems to have been more in the nature of a symbolic act such as prophets were wont to perform. The figs symbolized that from that moment forward God would gradually heal the king of his terminal malady. The servants complied with Isaiah's instructions, and the king recovered by degrees after the manner of natural remedies. It was three days before he was well enough to leave his quarters and offer thanks in the Temple for his miraculous recovery (v. 7).

Even the prophet's symbolic act did not fully set the mind of Hezekiah at ease with regard to his healing. Under the old covenant God frequently offered miraculous signs to substantiate promises which He made to people in desperate straits. It was well known that Isaiah had instructed Ahaz to ask for a sign to substantiate the promise that God would deliver Jerusalem from the Syro-Ephraimitic armies which invaded the land about 735 B.C. Hezekiah therefore assumed that such a sign would be granted to him and simply asked his prophetic friend what the sign was to be. Three days would be a long weary wait and the king craved some more immediate evidence that his prayer had been favorably answered. Neither God nor the prophet was angry with this request (v. 8). It would be faithless now for Christians to demand signs; but in an age of miracles, when there were prophets upon the earth empowered to give signs, faithful men might request them without incurring God's displeasure.

Isaiah indicated that God would use the sundial of Ahaz, perhaps clearly visible from the window of Hezekiah's bed-chamber, to give his faithful king a sign. The king could pick his sign: Shall the shadow go forward or backward ten steps? (v. 9). Hezekiah viewed it as a comparatively easy matter for the shadow which was already descending the steps to accelerate its pace and rapidly descend ten steps. For this reason the king requested that the shadow change its direction and ascend the steps. Hezekiah's request was natural, if not strictly logical (v. 10). Isaiah then cried out fervently in intercessory prayer to the Lord, and God brought the shadow ten steps backward. This miracle would not necessarily involve the temporary

reversal in the rotation of the earth. It is clear from II Chronicles 32:31 that the miracle was local, "*done in the land of Judah*" and hence not visible elsewhere. Probably a very abnormal refraction of the rays of the sun caused the retreat of the shadow on the sundial (v. 11).

B. HEZEKIAH'S FOOLISH MISTAKE AND SUBSEQUENT REBUKE 20:12-19

TRANSLATION

(12) At that time Berodach-baladan the son of Baladan king of Babylon sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah, for he had heard that Hezekiah was sick. (13) And Hezekiah hearkened unto them, and showed them all the house of his precious things, the silver, the gold, the spices and precious oil and the house of all his armor and all that was found in his treasuries. There was not a thing which Hezekiah did not show them in his house and in his domain. (14) And Isaiah the prophet came unto King Hezekiah and said unto him, What did these men say? From whence did they come unto you? And Hezekiah said, From a distant land, they came from Babylon. (15) And he said, What have they seen in your house? And Hezekiah said, All which is in my house they have seen; there is not a thing which I did not show them in my treasuries. (16) And Isaiah said unto Hezekiah, Hear the word of the LORD: (17) Behold days are coming when all which is in your house and which your fathers have stored away unto this day shall be carried away to Babylon. Nothing shall be left, says the LORD. (18) And they shall take some of your sons who shall come forth from you which you will beget, and they shall become eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. (19) And Hezekiah said unto Isaiah, Good is the word of the LORD which you have spoken. And he said, Is it not so if peace and steadfastness shall come to pass in my days?

COMMENTS

Following his recovery, Hezekiah was visited by an embassy from Berodach-baladan whose name in the Book of Isaiah is spelled Merodach-baladan (Isa. 39:1). For some twenty years this Babylonian king had been a thorn in the flesh for the Assyrian rulers. Merodach-baladan was anxious to cultivate the friendship of any king who might be minded to rebel against the powerful Assyrians. So this king of Babylon sent letters and a present unto Hezekiah upon the occasion of his recovery. Scholars have generally concluded that the object of the embassy must have been to conclude, or at any rate to pave the way for, an alliance between Judah and Babylon. How this embassy was able to make its way from distant Babylon without being intercepted by Assyrian forces is not indicated. Some feel that because the embassy pretended to be concerned only with congratulating Hezekiah upon his recovery, the Assyrians did not attempt to interfere (v. 12).

Hezekiah was dazzled by the attention bestowed upon him by these visitors from Babylon. He "*hearkened unto them,*" i.e., listened to their suggestions of an alliance between Judah and Babylon. Hezekiah showed the Babylonian emissaries all of his treasure. While a certain amount of pride motivated this action, Hezekiah was probably moved primarily by more practical considerations. He may have been trying to convince these guests that he would indeed be a valuable ally. No doubt the Babylonians were quite impressed with the silver, gold, spices, and precious oil and other valuables which comprised the wealth of the Judaeian king. In addition to his Jerusalem treasures and armorments, Hezekiah gave orders that these ambassadors be shown the collections of arms and stores which existed in other strongholds throughout the land (v. 13).

When the Babylonian embassy had left Jerusalem, Isaiah the prophet appeared before Hezekiah with a message of rebuke. In order to elicit from the king a confession about what had taken place, the prophet inquired concerning the visitors: What did these men say? From where did they come unto

you? Hezekiah ignored the first question probably because he was unwilling to make known the overtures that he had received from them since he knew that Isaiah repudiated any reliance upon the "arm of flesh." The second question the king answered somewhat smugly as he identified distant Babylon as the embassy's point of origin (v. 14). The prophet's next question got to the heart of the matter: What have they seen in your house? By this the prophet means to ask whether Hezekiah had treated his guests as ordinary ambassadors, or whether instead he had courted an alliance with their master. To the credit of the king, he answered forthrightly and made no effort to conceal what had taken place. He readily acknowledged that he had shown these particular guests *everything* (v. 15).

The king having admitted his folly, the stage was set for the divine word of rebuke. "*Hear the word of the Lord*" is a formula which generally introduced such solemn words of condemnation (v. 16). Isaiah pulled back the curtain of time to reveal what the future held in store for Judah. In this case it was the very revelation which was Hezekiah's punishment—the knowledge that he had gotten involved with that nation which ultimately would destroy Judah. All the treasures he had boastfully displayed to the ambassadors would one day be carried off as plunder to far off Babylon (v. 17). Hezekiah's "sons," i.e., descendants, would be carried off to become eunuchs in the court of the king of Babylon (v. 18).

This prophecy is indeed unique and completely inexplicable in terms of human prescience. Here for the first time, it would seem, Babylon and not Assyria was identified as the true and ultimate enemy of Judah. It would be Babylon which would bring to fulfillment all the predictions of the prophets since the days of Moses concerning the deportation of the people of God and the destruction of the holy city. Yet at this period in history, Babylon was merely one of several kingdoms bordering on Assyria. From the time of Tiglath-pileser, Babylon almost continually had been under Assyrian domination. Merodach-baladan had at best a tenuous hold on independence.

Human foresight would never have suspected that within a century, insignificant Babylon would have completely turned the tables on mighty Assyria.

Hezekiah accepted the prophetic rebuke, thereby acknowledging that he had been in the wrong. As far as Hezekiah was concerned, the pronouncement was “good” because he himself was not personally involved. The king felt that God might have justly brought down on him personally some affliction or calamity in punishment for his political indiscretion. It was a relief to hear that the blow would not fall during his lifetime. The self-centeredness of this evaluation of the prophecy caused the attendants standing nearby to raise their eyebrows. Noticing their chagrin, Hezekiah turned to his courtiers to ask the rhetorical question, “*Is it not good, if peace and steadfastness be in my days?*” (v. 19). It is not very statesman-like for the king to appear so unconcerned about the future fate of his land. But the irony here is that Isaiah said nothing about Hezekiah having “*peace and steadfastness*” during his reign. Shortly he would face the mighty Sennacherib and every fiber of his faith would be tested. Chapter 19 describes in some detail the trials of Hezekiah at the hands of Sennacherib and the sufferings experienced by Judah at that time.

IV. CONCLUSION TO THE REIGN OF HEZEKIAH 20:20-21

TRANSLATION

(20) And the rest of the acts of Hezekiah and all of his might, and how he made a pool and a conduit that the water might come to the city, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? (21) And Hezekiah slept with his fathers; and Manasseh his son reigned in his place.

COMMENTS

Hezekiah was a powerful as well as a pious king. The author of Kings declines to discuss his "*might*" but refers the reader to his source of information, the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah. Hezekiah's might was chiefly displayed in the early part of his reign during which time he was able to make incursions into Philistine territory (cf. 18:8). Hezekiah was, of course, no match for Assyria, and would have been crushed by them were it not for the miraculous deliverance of God.

Hezekiah also constructed a pool or reservoir within the city of Jerusalem. That pool is probably to be indentified with the pool of Siloam. Water from the Well of the Virgin in the Kidron valley was transported to this pool by an amazing conduit carved out of solid rock beneath Mt. Ophel. This twisting tunnel is 1708 feet in length and has a height varying from four to five feet and a width of about two feet. In this marvelous engineering feat, workmen began at either end of the hill and tunneled through the rock until they met in the middle. At that point they left an inscription which recounts the joy which marked the completion of the project.²⁷

To the brief death notice of verse 21, the Chronicler adds, "*And they buried him in the chiefest (i.e., top most) of the sepulchers of the sons of David*" (II C 32:33). It would seem that the catacomb of David was now full and that Hezekiah had to be buried over that catacomb or perhaps on the ascent which led to it.

SPECIAL STUDY

CHRONOLOGICAL PROBLEMS IN THE LAST HALF
OF THE EIGHTH CENTURY

The period from Uzziah to Manasseh bristles with difficulties. These seven decades present the most perplexing problems to

²⁷ For the inscription see DOTT, p. 210. The inscription is now preserved in the Museum of the Ancient Orient at Istanbul.

be found in Hebrew chronology. In this period even Edwin Thiele goes astray and concludes that the Hebrew text in at least four verses (17:1; 18:1, 9, 10) is in error.²⁸ The most satisfactory reconstruction of this chronology is that offered by Harold G. Stigers.²⁹ The brief notes which follow and the chart which accompanies this special study are based on the study of Stigers.

The following explanatory notes should be studied carefully along with the accompanying chart. For amplification and defense of the various points made, see the article by Stigers cited above.

1. II Kings 15:27. Pekah commenced his *independent* reign in the fifty-second year of Uzziah (Azariah). Pekah ruled a *total* of twenty years counting from 752 B.C. when he set up a rival dynasty in Gilead. Thus his rule *in Samaria* actually lasted twelve years.

2. II Kings 15:30. Hoshea began to reign in the twentieth and final year of Jotham (732 B.C.). Jotham's reign is counted from the time he virtually assumed the reins of government from his father in 750 B.C.

3. II Kings 17:1. Hoshea ruled nine years, from 732-722 B.C. The beginning of his reign fell in the twelfth year of Ahaz. In this synchronism the years of Ahaz are counted from the beginning of his coregency in 743 B.C.

4. II Kings 15:32-33. Jotham reigned sixteen years, commencing in the second year of Pekah, 750 B.C. The last four years of the reign of Jotham are here disregarded (cf. II K 15:30) because Ahaz had seized all the royal power from his father in 735 B.C. As the prophetic historians in Israel viewed things, Jotham reigned twenty years; but the prophetic historians in Judah regarded his *active* or effectual reign as being only sixteen years.

5. II Kings 16:1-2. Ahaz ruled sixteen years commencing

²⁸ Thiele, MNHK, pp. 118ff.

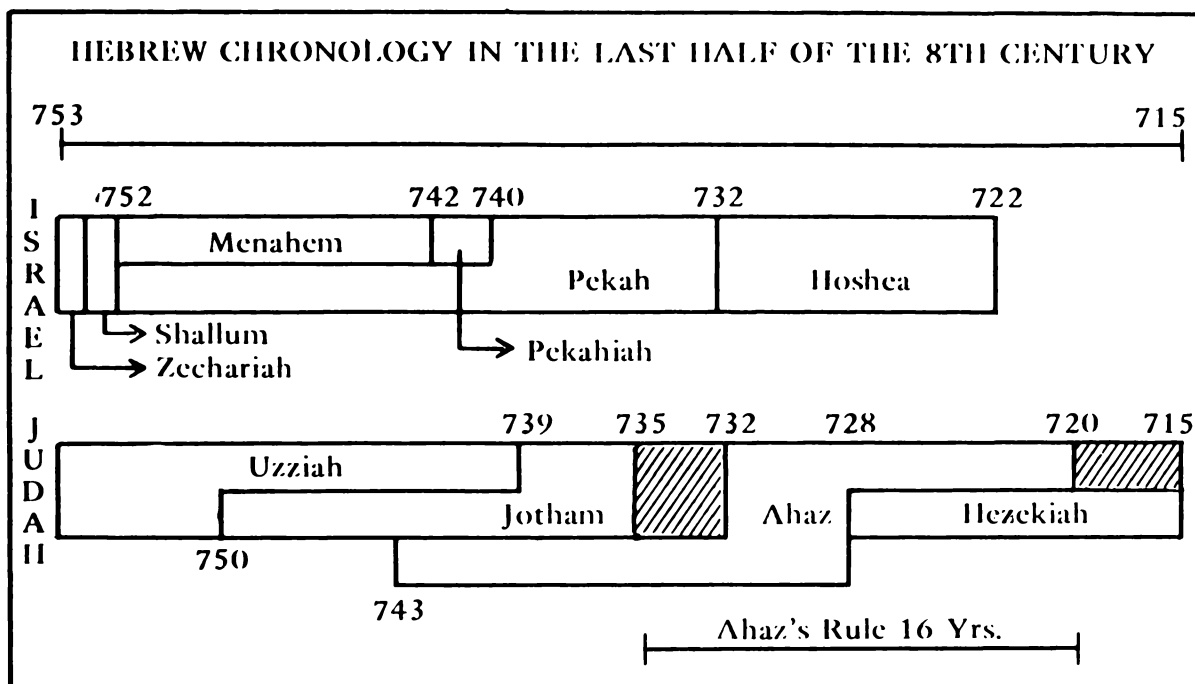
²⁹ "The Interphased Chronology of Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah and Hoshea," BETS, IX- (Spring, 1966), pp. 81-90.

in the seventeenth year of Pekah (735 B.C.). Here again the Judaeen prophetic historians were concerned only with the actual years of Ahaz's power. They disregard here twelve years of his coregency with Jotham and four years of his emeritus reign after his son Hezekiah had seized the royal power. The sixteen years in view here are 735-720 B.C. Counting the years of Ahaz's coregency and his emeritus years his dates would be 743-715 B.C.

6. II Kings 18:1-2. Hezekiah began to reign as coregent in the third year of Hoshea (728 B.C.). But his absolute reign of twenty-nine years is counted from 715 B.C. when Hezekiah became sole king. Thus the twenty-nine years of Hezekiah would terminate in 686 B.C. The key here is II Kings 18:13 which indicates that the 701 B.C. invasion of Sennacherib took place in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah.

7. II Kings 18:9, 10. The seventh and ninth years of Hoshea are here equated with the fourth and sixth years of Hezekiah's *coregency*.

8. The total number of years assigned to the kings following Hezekiah and down to the deportation of Jehoiachin in 597 B.C. is ninety-nine years and six months. Yet from the end of Hezekiah's reign in 686 unto 597 B.C. is ninety years. Therefore, one (or more) of the six kings who reigned between 686 and 597 B.C. must have ruled for nine years as coregent with his father. Because of the circumstances of their accession, five of these kings could not possibly have reigned as coregents. By the process of elimination one can conclude that Manasseh must have served as coregent with Hezekiah for about nine years before he ascended the throne in 686 B.C.



REVIEW OF CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

I. FACTS TO MASTER

A. Identify each of the following:

- | | | |
|----------------|---------------|----------------------|
| 1. Abi | 7. Rabsaris | 13. Esarhaddon |
| 2. Nehushtan | 8. Rab-shakeh | 14. Nisroch |
| 3. Shalmaneser | 9. Eliakim | 15. Adram-melech |
| 4. Sennacherib | 10. Shebna | 16. Berodach-baladan |
| 5. Hezekiah | 11. Joah | 17. Sharezer |
| 6. Tartan | 12. Tirhakah | |

B. Of what significance are each of the following places?

- | | | |
|----------------|----------------|--------------|
| 1. Gaza | 7. Egypt | 13. Libnah |
| 2. Samaria | 8. Hamath | 14. Ethiopia |
| 3. Halah | 9. Arpad | 15. Lebanon |
| 4. Habor | 10. Sepharvaim | 16. Carmel |
| 5. River Gozan | 11. Hena | 17. Armenia |
| 6. Lachish | 12. Ivah | 18. Babylon |

C. Of what significance was each of the following?

- | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------|
| 1. a pool | 6. figs |
| 2. a conduit | 7. cherubim |
| 3. letters and a present | 8. bronze serpent |
| 4. sundial | 9. bruised reed |
| 5. boil (sore) | 10. a letter |

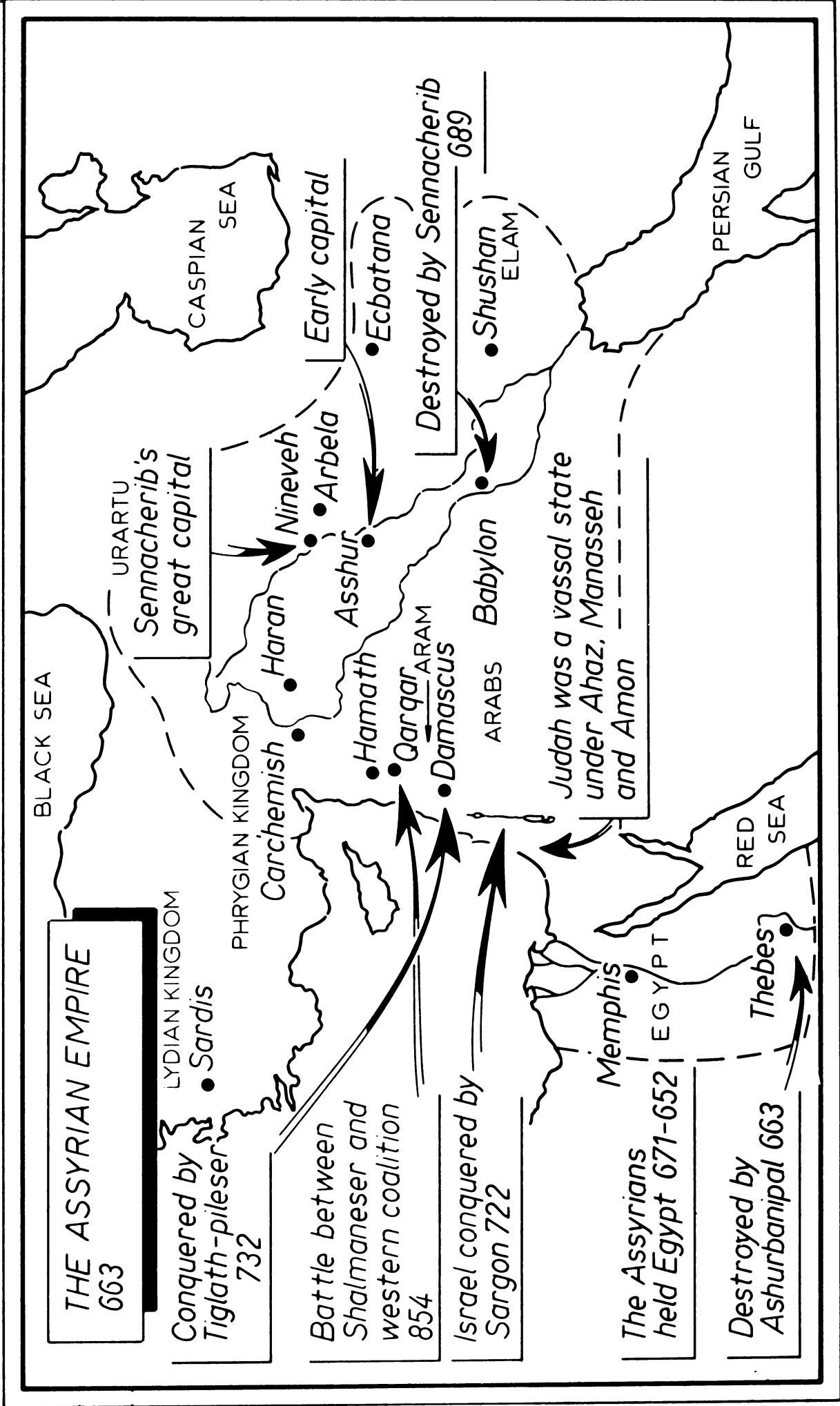
D. How do the following numbers fit into the narrative?

1. Fifteen years
2. Third day
3. Ten degrees (steps)
4. Three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold
5. Two thousand horses

II. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. The sixth year of Hezekiah was the ninth year of Hoshea (18:10)—that is, 722 B.C. But in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah—which must be 701 B.C.—Sennacherib invaded Judah (18:13). How would you explain this chronological discrepancy?
2. In what way does the Assyrian account of Sennacherib's invasion supplement the Biblical account? What problems are raised by the secular account?
3. Why do some scholars feel that Sennacherib must have invaded Judah twice? Is this reconstruction necessary?
4. For what purpose did Sennacherib send his officers to the walls of Jerusalem? Why did they deliver their ultimatum in Hebrew rather than Aramaic, the language of diplomacy?
5. What are the major arguments put forth by Rab-shakeh to induce the Jews to surrender?
6. What position did Isaiah take with regard to the invasion of Sennacherib in 701 B.C.
7. On what occasions did Hezekiah pray? Why did he on one occasion spread the letter of the Assyrian king before the Lord?

8. Two signs were granted to Hezekiah. What were they? How did these signs differ from one another?
9. How did the Assyrian threat against Judah come to an end? What is the chronological relationship between the decimation of the Assyrian army and the death of Sennacherib?
10. Why did God reveal to Hezekiah that he would die of illness? Besides the natural desire to live, what other factors contributed to Hezekiah's earnest prayer regarding his illness?
11. Chronologically, when did Hezekiah's illness occur?
12. If you knew you had only fifteen more years to live, how would you reorder your life? How did Hezekiah use his fifteen grace years?
13. For what purpose did Isaiah order a lump of figs to be put on Hezekiah's sore?
14. Why did Hezekiah ask for a sign to verify the promise of his speedy recovery? Is it wrong for believers to ask for miraculous signs from God?
15. How was it that the shadow on the sundial went back ten steps? What evidence is there that the effects of this miracle were observable only in Palestine?
16. What motivated the king of Babylon to send an embassy to Hezekiah? Why did Hezekiah show these visitors all his treasures?
17. How was Hezekiah rebuked for his indiscretion with regard to the Babylonians?
18. Why did Hezekiah regard the negative prophecy of Isaiah as "good"? 20:19
19. Describe the water tunnel constructed during the reign of Hezekiah.



THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE
663

Conquered by Tiglath-pileser 732

Battle between Shalmaneser and western coalition 854

Israel conquered by Sargon 722

The Assyrians held Egypt 671-652

Destroyed by Ashurbanipal 663

Judah was a vassal state under Ahaz, Manasseh and Amon

Destroyed by Sennacherib 689

URARTU
Sennacherib's great capital

Early capital
Ecbatana

Nineveh
Arbela

Asshur

Haran

Hamath

Qarqar

DAMASCUS

ARABS

Babylon

Shushan
ELAM

BLACK SEA

PHRYGIAN KINGDOM
Carchemish

LYDIAN KINGDOM
Sardis

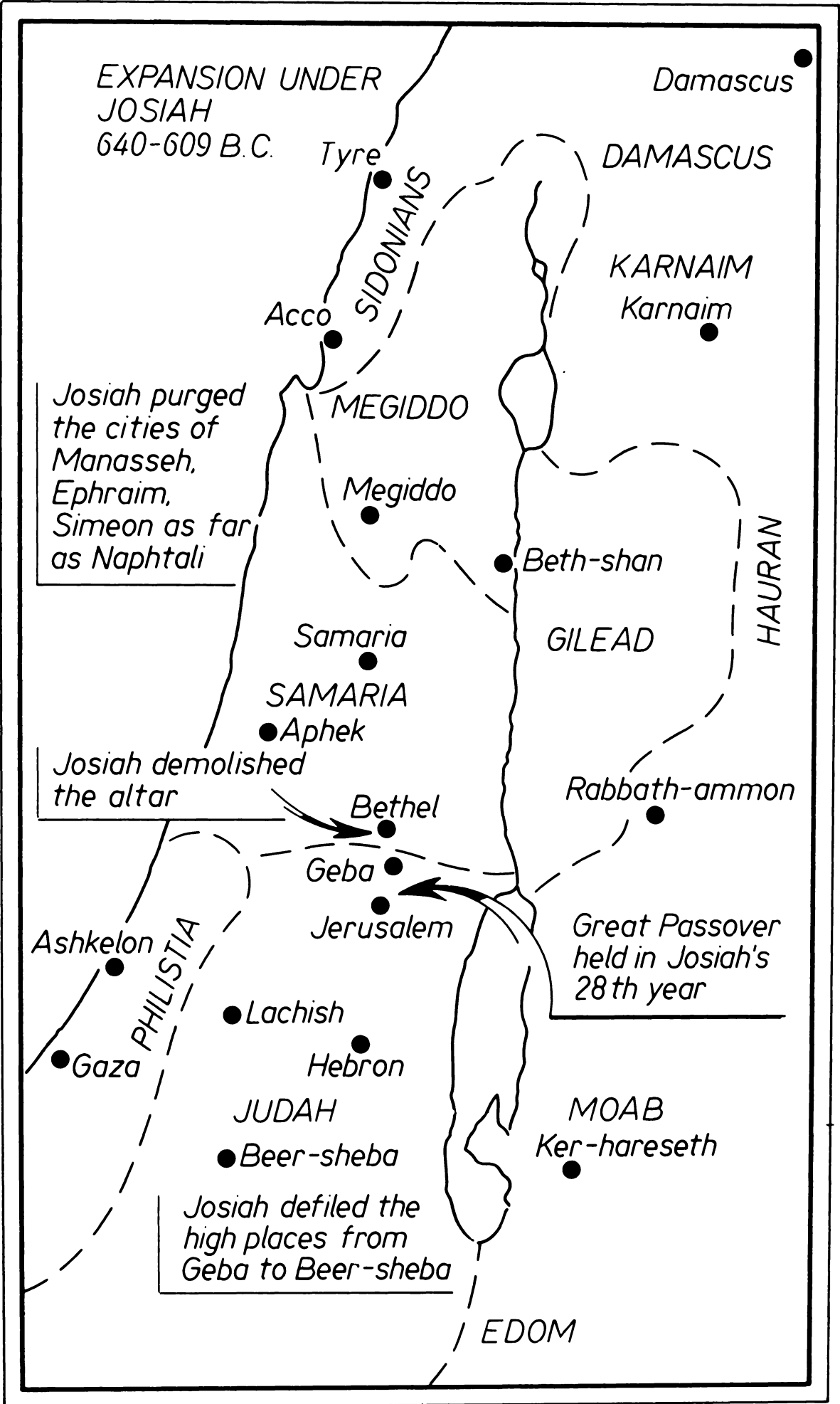
CASPIAN SEA

PERSIAN GULF

RED SEA

Memphis
EGYPT

Thebes

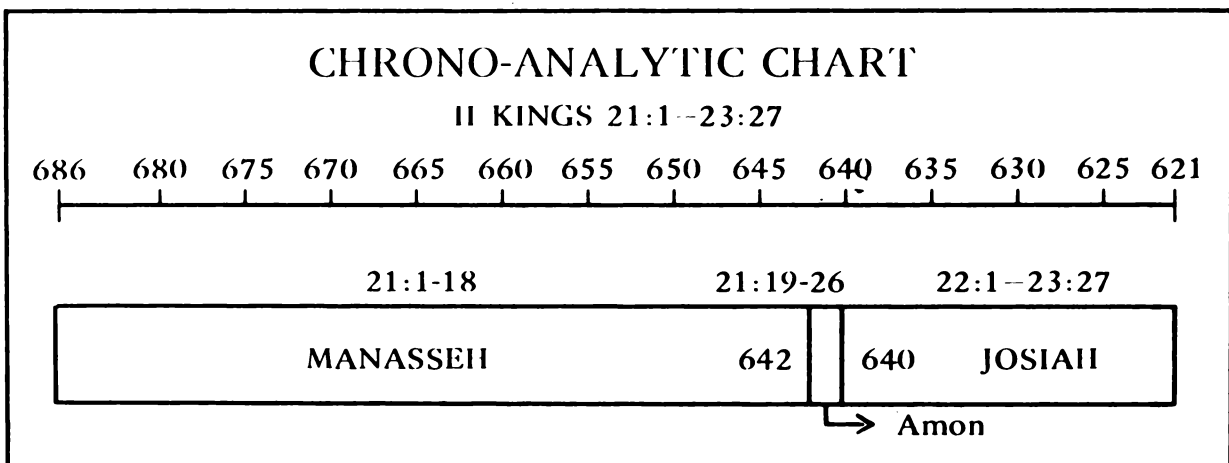


CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

THE LAST GREAT REFORMATION

II Kings 21:1—23:27

Good King Hezekiah was followed on the throne by the most wicked king to ever rule Judah. All the religious gains effected by Hezekiah were soon lost, and the nation plunged anew into idolatry and all its attendant evils. Political independence, so bravely engineered by the father, was willingly surrendered by the son. Judah again fell into the orbit of Assyrian vassal kingdoms. For over half a century the abcess of sin festered in spite of the eleventh-hour effort of a chastened Manasseh to heal the wound. But with the assassination of Manasseh's son Amon after a brief reign the stage was set for the last and greatest reformation in the history of Judah.



I. THE REPROBATION AND REPENTANCE OF MANASSEH 21:1-18

Considering the length of his reign, very little is known about Manasseh. After a brief and somewhat general introduction to his reign (vv. 1-9), the author of Kings inserts a summary of the prophetic preaching during these days (vv. 10-15). With the addition of a couple more important facts about Manasseh, the account of this king comes to an end (vv. 16-18).

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE REIGN OF MANASSEH
21:1-9

TRANSLATION

(1) Manasseh was twelve years old when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty-five years in Jerusalem; and the name of his mother was Hephzibah. (2) He did that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD like the abominations of the nations which the LORD had driven out before the children of Israel. (3) For again he built up the high places which Hezekiah his father had destroyed, and he erected an altar to Baal, and made an Asherah as did Ahab king of Israel; and he worshiped all the host of the heavens, and served them. (4) And he built altars in the house of the LORD of which the LORD had said, In Jerusalem I will put My name. (5) And he built altars for all the host of heaven in the two courts of the house of the LORD. (6) And he made his son to pass through the fire, and was an observer of times; he used enchantments and placed in office necromancers and wizards. He did much evil in the eyes of the LORD to provoke Him. (7) And he set a graven image of the Asherah which he had made in the house of which the LORD had said to David and unto Solomon his son, In this house and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen from all the tribes of Israel, I shall put My name forever. (8) And I will not again move the feet of Israel from the ground which I gave to their fathers; only if they be careful to do according to all which I commanded them, and to all the instruction which Moses My servant commanded them. (9) But they would not hearken, and Manasseh seduced them to do evil more than the nations which the LORD had destroyed from before the children of Israel.

COMMENTS

Since Manasseh was only twelve years old when he began to reign, he must have been born during that grace period which

God added to the life of Hezekiah. His name means “*forgetting*,” and perhaps was bestowed upon the babe because God had caused Hezekiah to forget the grief of his near-fatal illness and the humiliating circumstances of Sennacherib’s invasion. The fifty-five year reign of Manasseh was the longest of any king of Israel or Judah. The name of Manasseh’s mother—Hephzibah¹—means “*My delight is in her*” (v. 1). It has been conjectured by some that she probably served as regent during the minority of her son.

Thirteenth King of Judah

MANASSEH BEN HEZEKIAH

686-642 B.C.*

(“*Forgetting*”)

II K 21:1-18; II C 33:1-20

Contemporary Prophets

Isaiah: Nahum

Mother: Hephzibah

Appraisal: Worst

“*The king sent and loosed him; even the ruler of the people, and let him go free.*” Psalm 105:20

*coregent from 695 B.C.

The accession of this boy-king was no doubt joyfully hailed by those who had taken issue with Hezekiah’s reform efforts and Isaiah’s preaching. These wicked princes were able to sway Manasseh to their more liberal point of view. As a result this king justly has received the reputation as the worst king to ever sit on the throne of David. He followed all the abominations of the heathen, the very practices for which the Almighty

¹ Isaiah gave this name to restored Jerusalem. Cf. Isaiah 62:4.

had brought judgment upon the Canaanites (v. 2). High places dedicated to the Canaanite deities reappeared. The worship of the Tyrian Baal, first introduced by Ahab in Israel and by Athaliah in Judah (cf. 11:18), again made its appearance. A wooden image symbolic of the goddess Asherah was erected by the king. Worship of the heavenly bodies which had been so popular in the days of Ahaz again was tolerated (v. 3).

With brazen and blasphemous daring, Manasseh introduced into the precincts of the Temple—that spot at which Yahweh had graciously condescended to reside—altars to other gods (v. 4). These altars were used in the worship of the host of heaven. Some of them were placed in the outer court where the people gathered for worship, and some, or at least one, in the inner court where the priests ministered at the great bronze altar² in the divinely ordained rituals of Mosaic religion (v. 5).

The catalog of Manasseh's crimes continues in verses 6-9. This king dedicated his first born son (or sons according to the Chronicler) to the god Moloch, and offered him up as a burnt offering. Manasseh was superstitious. He kept close check on his lucky and unlucky days. He resorted to enchantments, i.e., spells and the like. Necromancers (those who call up the dead) and wizards (those who supposedly had supernatural insight into the future) he placed in official positions in his court. Manasseh was determined to restore every outlawed pagan practice, and import new ones as well (v. 6). He even set up in God's Temple an elaborately wrought Asherah, symbol of the goddess of sex and fertility. Not content with permitting idolatry in the land, Manasseh brought it right into Yahweh's special city and shrine. The lust provoking emblem was placed "*in the house,*" possibly within the Holy of Holies itself. By these blasphemous acts Manasseh annulled God's promises to permanently abide in that Temple (v. 7).

God's promise to give the land of Canaan permanently to

² Ahaz had for a time removed this great altar from its place of prominence (II K 16:14), but Hezekiah had most certainly restored it to its rightful place.

Israel was conditional. Only so long as the people faithfully obeyed the Law of Moses would they be allowed to remain in the land. Manasseh's improprieties forfeited this promise as well (v. 8), for the people had been seduced by their king into the wiles of idolatry. This priestly nation which was intended to be sanctified to the Lord became worse than those indigenous nations which were destroyed by Joshua's armies. While the outward acts may have been the same, the sin of God's people was the greater because they sinned against light and in spite of God's revelation through Moses and the prophets (v. 9).

B. THE PROPHETIC PRONOUNCEMENT AGAINST JERUSALEM 21:10-15

TRANSLATION

(10) And the LORD spoke by the hand of His prophets, saying, (11) Because Manasseh king of Judah has done these abominations, and has done evil more than all which the Amorites that were before him had done, and has caused Judah to sin with his idols, (12) therefore thus says the LORD the God of Israel: Behold I am about to bring evil upon Jerusalem and Judah which all who hear of it, both of their ears shall tingle. (13) And I will stretch out over Jerusalem the line of Samaria and the plummet of the house of Ahab; and I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping and turning it upside down. (14) And I will forsake the remnant of My inheritance, and I will give them into the hand of their enemies, and they shall become spoil and prey to all their enemies. (15) Because they did evil in My eyes that they might provoke Me, from the day that their fathers went out of Egypt, even unto this day.

COMMENTS

God did not leave Himself without a vigorous voice of protest during the corrosive reign of Manasseh (v. 10). The names of

those who preached the Word during that terrible time are unknown. Isaiah may have preached in the early years of Manasseh, Nahum possibly toward the close of his reign. But the great heroes of that day remain anonymous. The author of Kings however gives a summary of the message which they were preaching. Because Manasseh had done more evil than the Amorites, the pre-Israelite inhabitants of the land (v. 11), God would bring a great calamity upon the nation. News of the extraordinary judgment would shock and pain all who heard of it like a piercing note pains one's ears (v. 12).

The line of Samaria would be stretched over Jerusalem, i.e., Jerusalem would experience the same fate as Samaria which had been destroyed in 722 B.C. God applies the measuring line, a perfectly uniform standard, to all nations. The plummet which God had placed alongside the house of Ahab in the North would now be placed alongside the house of David.³ Jerusalem would be emptied of inhabitants as a man empties scraps from a dish into a garbage pan (v. 13). The "*remnant*" of His people—the nation Judah—would now be forsaken by the Lord just as He had abandoned the ten tribes of the kingdom of Israel. As a result, the people of Judah would be conquered and spoiled by their enemies (v. 14). This terrible tragedy would come about because of the moral and spiritual depravity of Judah which had its roots in the long-distant past and which culminated in the reign of Manasseh (v. 15).

C. CONCLUSION OF THE REIGN OF MANASSEH 21:16-18

TRANSLATION

(16) And also Manasseh shed very much innocent blood until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to the other, besides his

³ Buildings in Palestine had to be checked periodically by "*line and plummet*" to determine damage that had been done by earthquakes. Bulging walls were a public menace which had to be destroyed.

sin in which he made Judah to do evil in the eyes of the LORD. (17) Now the rest of the acts of Manasseh, and all which he did, and his sin which he committed, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? (18) And Manasseh slept with his fathers and he was buried in the garden of his house, in the garden of Uzza; and Amon his son reigned in his place.

COMMENTS

The national decadence culminated in a bloody persecution of the faithful by the ruthless Manasseh. The Holy City was filled with blood and violence from one end to the other (v. 16). Josephus (*Ant.*, X, 3.1) declares that Manasseh cruelly put to death all the righteous of the nation and “did not even spare the prophets.” A widespread ancient tradition names Isaiah as one of the victims of this persecution.

Important additional information concerning the reign of Manasseh comes from the Assyrian monuments and from the Biblical Book of Chronicles. In the annals of the Assyrian Esarhaddon it is noted that Manasseh was a faithful vassal, even contributing supporting troops for the Great King’s invasion of Egypt. At some point in his reign—perhaps toward the very end—Manasseh must have rebelled against his overlord. The Assyrians took Manasseh captive to Babylon.⁴ While in his “*affliction*” there, Manasseh repented of his sins against God and man. When the Assyrians restored him to his throne, Manasseh made a valiant effort to put away the idolatrous practices and paraphernalia which he himself had introduced into the land. He repaired the altar of the Lord which had gone to decay, and re-established so far as he could the worship of the Lord (II C 33:11-17). It is not entirely clear why the author of Kings chose to omit the account of

Supplemental information can be found in ANET, p. 289.

Manasseh's late repentance.

After referring his readers to the standard book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah (NOT the Biblical book of Chronicles), the author closes His account of this king by noting that he was buried "*in the garden of his own house.*" (v. 18). This "*garden of Uzza*" may have been purchased by Manasseh with the object of converting it into a burial ground.⁵ The garden has been located in the general vicinity of the Pool of Siloam on the east side of Jerusalem.⁶

II. THE ACCESSION AND ASSASSINATION OF AMON 21:19-26

TRANSLATION

(19) Amon was twenty-two years old when he began to reign, and two years he reigned in Jerusalem; and the name of his mother was Meshullemeth the daughter of Haruz of Jotbah. (20) And he did evil in the eyes of the LORD as Manasseh his father had done. (21) And he walked in all the ways in which his father had walked, and he served the idols which his father had served, and he worshiped them. (22) And he forsook the LORD the god of his fathers, and did not walk in the way of the LORD. (23) And the servants of Amon conspired against him, and they slew the king in his house. (24) And the people of the land slew all who had conspired against Amon, and they made Josiah his son king in his place. (25) And the rest of the acts of Amon which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? (26) And he was buried in his sepulcher in the garden of Uzza; and Josiah his son reigned in his place.

⁵ Manasseh and his son Amon are the only two kings said to have been buried in this garden. Was there no more burial space in the royal necropolis? Or did the idolatry of these two kings disqualify them from burial there?

⁶ Finley, BBC, p. 491.

Fourteenth King of Judah

AMON BEN MANASSEH

642-640 B.C.

(*"Training, or skilled"*)

II K 21:19-26; II C 33:21-25

Contemporary Prophet

Nahum?

Mother: Meshullemeth

Appraisal: Bad

"Is it fit to say to a king, You are wicked? and to princes, You are ungodly?"

Job 34:8

COMMENTS

Considering the lengthy reign of his father, Amon was quite young when he came to the throne at the age of twenty-two. His short two year reign is given but scant attention by the author of Kings.⁷ Like his father, Amon did evil in the sight of the Lord (v. 20). Amon restored all the idolatrous and wicked practices which his father had upheld during most of his reign, including child sacrifice. He served, i.e., worshiped, all the idols his father had served—Baal, Ashtoreth, Moloch, and Asherah (v. 21). While other wicked kings of Judah continued to worship Yahweh along with the idols of heathendom, Amon made no pretense of worshiping the Lord. Of only Manasseh and his son does the author of Kings say, *"he forsook the Lord God of his fathers"* (v. 22).

Palace intrigue was not as common in Judah as it had been in Israel. No clue is given as to what might have triggered the conspiracy against Amon. Probably Amon's allegiance to Assyria aroused the indignation of many patriots who desired freedom.⁸ In any case, the attendants of the king fell upon

⁷ It is apparent that Amon was not elevated to coregency in the reign of his father. The failure of Manasseh to appoint a coregent in spite of his age is the first lapse of this custom in Judah since Azariah (Uzziah) became coregent with Amaziah in 790 B.C.

⁸ Gray (OTL, 712) suggests the assassins were Egyptian agents.

CHURCH OF CHRIST 700
1223 E. DANA AVE.
MESA, ARIZONA

him in his own house and slew him (v. 23). These conspirators apparently did not have the support of the powerful "*people of the land*," i.e., the landed gentry, for those who had murdered the king were swiftly executed.⁹ If the conspirators had intended to bring about a change of dynasty, their plot failed. The people of the land sought out the rightful heir, though he was but a lad of eight, and made him king (v. 24).

No information about any other significant acts of Amon has survived, though there must have been additional material in the annals from which the author derived his material (v. 25). Amon probably remained a submissive vassal of the Assyrian king Ashurbanipal during his two years on the throne. Amon was buried in the sepulcher which his father had constructed in what formerly had been the garden of Uzza (v. 26).

III. THE REIGN AND REFORMATION OF JOSIAH 22:1—23:27

In view of the corrupt conduct of his father and grandfather, it is surprising that Josiah determined at such an early age to follow the path of righteousness. It has been suggested that the prophet Zephaniah may have exercised considerable influence on the young lad after the assassination of his father. After (1) a brief introduction to his reign (22:1-2), the author describes various developments in the last great reformation in Judah: (2) the Temple repair (22:3-7); (3) the discovery of a lost law-book (22:8-13); (4) the prophetic threat of Huldah (22:14-20); (5) the renewal of the covenant (23:1-3); (6) the intensification of the reformation (23:4-23). To this discussion the author adds (7) an appraisal of the Josianic reformation (23:24-27).

⁹ A. Malamat suggests that the assassins were slain out of fear of reprisals from the powerful Ashurbanipal who was campaigning in the west at this time. See IEJ. III (1953), pp. 26-29. Cf. also JNES, XII (1953), pp. 56-58.

A. INTRODUCTION TO THE REIGN OF JOSIAH 22:1-2

TRANSLATION

(1) Josiah was eight years old when he began to reign and he reigned in Jerusalem thirty-one years; and the name of his mother was Jedidah the daughter of Adaiah of Boseath. (2) And he did that which was right in the eyes of the LORD and he walked in all the ways of David his father and did not deviate to the right or to the left.

Fifteenth King of Judah

JOSIAH BEN AMON

640-609 B.C.

("Supported by Yahweh")

II K 22-23; II C 34-35

Contemporary Prophets
Jeremiah; Zephaniah; Huldah
Nahum; Habakkuk

Mother: Jedidah

Appraisal: Excellent

"A wise king scatters the wicked, and brings the wheel over them."

Proverbs 20:26

COMMENTS

Josiah was only eight years old when he began to reign. This would mean, since his father died at age twenty-four, that Josiah was born when his father was only sixteen years old. Josiah reigned thirty-one years, from 640 to 609 B.C. (v. 1). This was one of the most important periods of world history. The mighty Assyrian empire was crumbling, and the Median and Chaldean empires were forming. It was providential that during this crucial period of history a godly king sat on the throne of David. Concerning Josiah the author of Kings uses an expression used of only one other king, King Hezekiah. He says Josiah did *"that which was right in the sight of the Lord and walked in all the way of David his father."* He never deviated from the right path (v. 2).

Josiah, according to the Chronicler, began his reform movement in the eighth year of his reign, and that movement gained momentum in his twelfth year (628 B.C.).¹⁰ At that time the pious young king began *“to purge Judah and Jerusalem from the high places, and the Asherim and carved images and molten images”* (II C 34:3). The next year Jeremiah the prophet began his ministry which must have given powerful impetus to the king’s reform efforts. The reformation reached its climax in the eighteenth year of Josiah (621 B.C.).

B. THE TEMPLE REPAIR 22:3-7

TRANSLATION

(3) And it came to pass in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, the king sent Shaphan the son of Azaliah the son of Meshullam, the scribe, to the house of the LORD saying, (4) Go up to Hilkiah the high priest that he may report the silver which is brought to the house of the LORD which the keepers of the door have gathered from the people. (5) And let them deliver it over to the workers, those who have been appointed over the house of the LORD; and let them give it to the workers who are in the house of the LORD to repair the dilapidation of the house, (6) to the carpenters and builders and masons in order to purchase timber and hewn stone to repair the house. (7) However, no thought was taken of the silver which was given into their hand because they worked faithfully.

COMMENTS

In his eighteenth year, the king dispatched the scribe Shaphan¹¹ (v. 3) to the Temple to take a count of the monies

¹⁰ The reformation may have proceeded in stages so as to test the reaction of Assyria, which would doubtlessly have regarded such reform as tantamount to rebellion.

¹¹ Chronicles adds that Shaphan was accompanied by Maaseiah the governor of the city and Joah the royal recorder or remembrancer (II C 34:8).

which had been collected to pay for much needed repairs in and around the Temple. This collection must have been accumulating in a box or boxes placed at the entrance of the Temple complex for perhaps as long as six years, i.e., from the twelfth year of Josiah. The order was now given for the high priest to count the collection (v. 4) and to distribute it among the superintendents who were in charge of the Temple renovation. They in turn were to hire the skilled laborers (v. 5) and to purchase the necessary building materials that would be required to repair and renovate the dilapidated Temple (v. 6). The superintendents were men of impeccable honesty in whom full confidence was placed to properly administer the funds (v. 7). Their names are recorded in Chronicles along with the fact that they were all Levites (II C 34:12).

C. A LOST BOOK RECOVERED 22:8-13

TRANSLATION

(8) And Hilkiah the high priest said unto Shaphan the scribe, The book of the law I have found in the house of the LORD! And Hilkiah gave the book unto Shaphan, and he read it. (9) And Shaphan the scribe came unto the king, and brought the king word again, and said, Your servants have gathered the silver that was found in the house, and they have given it into the hand of the workers, the ones who have been appointed in the house of the LORD. (10) And Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest has given to me a book, and Shaphan read it before the king. (11) And when the king heard the words of the book of the Law, he rent his garments. (12) And the king commanded Hilkiah the priest and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Achbor the son of Michaiah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asahiah the servant of the king, saying, (13) Go inquire of the LORD for me and for the people and for all Judah concerning the words of this book which was found, for great is the wrath of the LORD which is kindled against us because our fathers have not

hearkened unto the words of this book to do according to all that which is written concerning us.

COMMENTS

On the very day that the royal order came to commence the renovation, Hilkiah sent word back to the king of a striking discovery. During the preliminary surveys which preceded the building operation, an ancient law book had been discovered. Opinions differ as to exactly what this book was. Some think that it was only the Book of Deuteronomy or some part thereof. Others think the book may have been the entire Pentateuch.¹² Hilkiah handed the ancient document over to Shaphan who read enough from it to determine that the book was exceedingly valuable and should be brought to the attention of the king (v. 8).

Returning to the royal palace, Shaphan reported that the king's orders concerning the Temple collection had been carried out (v. 9). Then Shaphan told the king of the book which had been found in the Temple and read excerpts from that document (v. 10). When the king heard the tone and contents of the book, he was quite upset and demonstrated his state of mind by tearing his garments (v. 11). He recognized the language of this book to be that of the Law of God. Even though that book had for many years been lost, yet much of its contents had been preserved and handed down orally by the pious of the nation.

In order to confirm his own personal view of the book, the king appointed a committee to make further investigations regarding it. Apparently Hilkiah the high priest was the chairman of this committee. Shaphan the scribe and his son Ahikam¹³

¹² It was the official Temple copy of the sacred book which was found. It would not necessarily be the only existing copy of the Law. Cf. Finley, BBC, p. 493.

¹³ Ahikam once rescued Jeremiah when he was on trial for his life (Jer. 26:24). He was the father of Gedaliah who was appointed governor of the land after Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem (Jer. 39:14; 40:7).

were on it as were a certain Achbor and Asahiah¹⁴ (v. 12). The committee was charged to “*enquire of the Lord*” on behalf of the king concerning the document. Prior to the time of David such inquiry was made through the high priest as he utilized the Urim and Thummim. But since David’s day, one normally consulted a prophet of God in order to ascertain the divine will.¹⁵

It was not the purpose of this committee to determine whether or not the book was authentic. Of this there was no doubt. Rather the king wished to ascertain whether the threats which the book contained were to have an immediate fulfillment. Josiah recognized that the nation had been doing, and to some extent continued to do, those very things which were so forthrightly condemned in the Book of the Law. In view of the grave threats which Moses had made against practioners of idolatry and immorality the king could not help but feel that the wrath of the Lord had already been kindled against the nation. Because of the disobedience of their fathers, the apostasy had continued now for some time. Was the cup of iniquity now full? Would the wrath of the Lord burst forth against Judah any day? (v. 13).

D. THE PROPHETIC WORD OF HULDAH 22:14-20

TRANSLATION

(14) And Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asahiah went unto Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah the son of Harhas, the one who kept the garments (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the second city); and they spoke unto her. (15) And she said unto them,

¹⁴ These names are spelled Abdon and Asaiah in II Chronicles 34:20. Animal names were in vogue at this time. Shaphan (“*rock-badger*”), Huldah (“*mole*”), and Achbor (“*mouse*”) are examples.

¹⁵ See I Kings 22:5-8; II Kings 3:11; 8:8; Jeremiah 21:2; 37:7 etc.

Thus says the LORD God of Israel, Say to the man who sent you unto me, (16) Thus says the LORD: Behold I am about to bring evil against this place and against its inhabitants, all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read, (17) because they have forsaken Me, and have made offerings to other gods in order to provoke Me with all the deeds of their hands. And My wrath is kindled against this place, and it shall not be extinguished. (18) But to the king of Judah who has sent you to inquire of the LORD, Thus you shall say unto him: Thus says the LORD God of Israel: With regard to the words which you have heard: (19) Because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard that which I spoke concerning this place and concerning its inhabitants, that they should be a desolation and a curse, and you have rent your garments, and wept before Me, also I will hearken (oracle of the LORD). (20) Therefore, behold I will gather you unto your grave in peace, and your eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place. And they brought word to the king.

COMMENTS

It is not entirely clear why the royal representatives chose to consult with Huldah the prophetess. Jeremiah and Zephaniah were the two great prophets of this time. But Jeremiah lived in Anathoth, and Zephaniah may have passed on to his reward before the eighteenth year of Josiah. In short, Huldah may have been the only person immediately available who possessed the prophetic gift. Huldah is said to have lived in the second, i.e., the lower, city of Jerusalem (v. 14). She is the only example of a prophetess in Israel who seems to rank on an equal footing with the prophets.¹⁶

¹⁶ Miriam (Ex. 15:20), Deborah (Jud. 4:4), Isaiah's wife (Isa. 8:2) and Anna (Luke 2:36) are called "prophetesses," but in a secondary sense, as holy women, having a certain gift of song or prediction from God.

After examining the contents of the scroll, Huldah sent a prophetic oracle back to Josiah (v. 15). The king's worst fears were justified. All the threats in the book would shortly befall Jerusalem and its inhabitants (v. 16). The parallel passage in Chronicles uses the phrase "all the *curses* that are written in the book" which suggests that the particular passage which had most strongly affected the king was Deuteronomy 28 which begins with a series of curses. Such drastic punishment was justified in view of the fact that Judah had completely turned from God. They burned incense to other gods and constructed abominable images with what appeared to be a determined effort to provoke the wrath of God. The unquenchable wrath of God had been kindled by this apostasy, and that wrath was about to be poured out on Jerusalem (v. 17).

The Lord was mindful of the piety of Josiah and the determined reformation effort which he had launched, and so God sent a message of consolation for the godly king (v. 18). God had taken note of the inward repentance which Josiah had manifested when the scroll was read in his presence. The king had humbled himself, rent his garments and wept when God's threatening words against Judah were read before him. Since Josiah had hearkened to the word of God, the Lord had hearkened to the words of Josiah (v. 19). Huldah was divinely authorized to assure Josiah that the national destruction threatened in the Law would not occur during his reign. Josiah would "*die in peace,*" i.e., he would not personally see the evil time (v. 20). It was some three years after the death¹⁷ of Josiah that the divinely appointed agents of Jerusalem's destruction made their first appearance in Judah.

¹⁷ Josiah died in battle against Pharaoh Necho at Megiddo in 609 B.C., but he was buried in peace in Jerusalem (II C 35:24, 25). The point that Huldah was making was that Josiah would not experience the terrible fate which would befall his nation. He would not be carried off into a foreign land or have his corpse mutilated and abused. Josiah was the last king of Judah to be buried in peace in Jerusalem.

E. THE COVENANT RENEWED 23:1-3

TRANSLATION

(1) And he sent and gathered unto him all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. (2) And the king went up to the house of the LORD and all the men of Judah and all the inhabitants of Jerusalem with him, and the priests and the prophets and all the people both small and great; and he read in their presence all the words of the book of the covenant which had been found in the house of the LORD. (3) And the king stood upon the platform, and made the covenant before the LORD to walk after the LORD, and to keep His commandments, His testimonies, and His statutes with all their heart and with all their soul, to perform the words of this covenant which was written in this book. And all the people stood in the covenant.

COMMENTS

After receiving the word from Huldah that the threats in the recently discovered law-book would shortly be fulfilled, the first action of the king was to call a great assembly of the nation. The elders of the nation were officially summoned (v. 1). However a great host of men of all classes of society also attended, including representatives of the priests and prophets. In the courts of the Temple the king read or caused to be read the book which had been discovered. *“All the words of the book of the covenant”* were read to the assembly (v. 2). The entire Pentateuch could scarcely be read through in less than ten hours. For this reason many scholars feel that the book which is referred to here is Deuteronomy. However, the reading of the entire Pentateuch cannot be ruled out entirely.

Standing upon the platform (not “pillar” as in KJV) the king made or renewed the old covenant with God which had

been broken during the grossly wicked reigns of Manasseh and Amon. He renewed this covenant "*before the Lord,*" i.e., the platform upon which he was standing was directly opposite the entrance to the Temple. The king pledged to obey from the heart the totality of the Law of Moses. To this commitment the representatives of the people gave their assent and thus became parties to the covenant (v. 3).

F. THE REFORMATION INTENSIFIED 23:4-23

The author deals with the reformation launched by Josiah geographically rather than chronologically. He discusses (1) the cleansing of the Temple (vv. 4-7); (2) the reforms in Jerusalem and Judah (vv. 8-14); (3) the reforms in the territory which had formerly belonged to the kingdom of Israel in the North (vv. 15-20); and (4) the great passover celebration in which Jews and Israelites jointly shared in Jerusalem (vv. 21-23).

1. *THE CLEANSING OF THE TEMPLE (23:4-7)*

TRANSLATION

(4) And the king commanded Hilkiah the high priest and the priests of the second order and those who kept the door to bring out from the Temple of the LORD all the vessels which had been made for Baal and for Asherah and for all the host of heaven; and he burned them outside Jerusalem in the fields of Kidron and carried their ashes to Bethel. (5) And he made to cease the pagan priests whom the kings of Judah had appointed that they might offer incense in the high places of the cities of Judah and the environs of Jerusalem; and them who offered incense to Baal, to the sun and to the moon and to the planets and to all the host of heaven. (6) And he brought out the Asherah from the house of the LORD

outside Jerusalem unto the brook Kidron, and he burned it in the fields of Kidron, crushed it to dust, and cast its dust on the graves of the children of the people. (7) And he tore down the houses of the male Temple prostitutes who were in the house of the LORD where women would weave hangings for Asherah.

COMMENTS

The reformation began with the cleansing of the Temple. The high priest, the common priests and the Levites who kept watch at the other Temple gates were commissioned to remove from the house of God all vessels that had been made for and dedicated to Baal, Asherah and the host of heaven. The Hebrew term translated "*vessels*" is broad enough to include the entire paraphernalia of pagan worship including the two altars which had been set up in the inner and outer courts (cf. 21:5). The worship of Baal and Asherah was closely related from the earliest times in Canaan; the host of heaven cult may have been imported from Assyria.

In compliance with the law of Deuteronomy 7:25 and 12:3, Josiah burned this pagan paraphernalia. The burning took place in "*the fields of Kidron,*" i.e., in the upper part of the Kidron valley, to the northeast of Jerusalem, in order that not even the smoke should pollute the town. He then carried the ashes of this material to Bethel so as to remove them completely from the vicinity of the Holy City. The idolatrous impurities which had penetrated both kingdoms had to large measure originated in Bethel. Josiah reasoned that that which had proceeded from Bethel might well be returned to that spot (v. 4).

Josiah also put down the pagan priests—the *kemarim*—who had been imported during the reigns of Manasseh and Amon to burn incense throughout the land. From the very early times in Judah the *people* had illegally burned incense

in high places; but here for the first time the author mentions the official sanction of and organization of this illicit worship. These priests must have been imported by Manasseh when he re-established the high places of Baal which his father Hezekiah had destroyed (cf. II K 21:3, 21). The *kemarim* offered incense to Baal, the sun, the moon and the planets and other heavenly bodies (v. 5).

The wooden symbol of the goddess which had been erected in the Temple of the Lord was brought out and burned. Manasseh had originally set up this idol (II K 21:3, 7) and then, after his repentance, removed it (II C 33:15). It had subsequently been replaced by his son Amon (II C 33:22). Following the earlier example of Asa, Josiah took this abominable image to the brook Kidron where he burned the wooden parts to ashes and crushed the metal parts to a fine powder. This powder was then sprinkled on the graves of the common people who were buried in graves similar to those used today. Burial places were regarded as unclean and were thus fit receptacles for any kind of impurity (v. 6).

Josiah tore down the houses of the male Temple prostitutes (lit., *consecrated ones*). Male prostitutes were an essential element in the worship of Astarte and accompanied that worship wherever it was introduced. The houses of these prostitutes were in close proximity to the house of the Lord, suggesting that the Temple was profaned by the foul lust of these "*consecrated ones*." The "*women who wove hangings for Asherah*" are doubtless the priestesses of Asherah, themselves prostitutes. These curtains which were used in the shrines where the impure fertility rites were performed were of dainty fabrics of many colors (cf. Ezek. 16:16).

2. THE REFORMS IN JUDAH AND JERUSALEM (23:8-14)

TRANSLATION

(8) And he brought all the priests from the cities of Judah, and defiled the high places where the priests had burned

incense, from Geba to Beersheba; and he broke down the high places of the gates which were in the entrance of the gate of Joshua the governor of the city, and also that which was on the left-hand side of the gate of the city. (9) The priests of the high places did not go up unto the altar of the LORD in Jerusalem, but they ate bread in the midst of their brethren. (10) And he defiled Topheth which was in the valley of the son of Hinnom that no man might make his son or his daughter to pass through the fire to Moloch. (11) And he removed from the entrance of the house of the LORD (beside the chamber of Nathan-melech the officer, in the outskirts), the horses which the kings of Judah had given to the sun, and burned the chariots of the sun with fire. (12) And the altars which were on the roof of the upper chamber of Ahaz which the kings of Judah had made and the altars which Manasseh had made in the two courts of the house of the LORD, the king tore down, and beat them down from there, and cast their dust into the brook Kidron. (13) And the king defiled the high places that were before Jerusalem which were on the right of the mount of corruption which Solomon king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians, for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination of the children of Ammon. (14) He broke in pieces the pillars, and cut down the Asherim, and filled their places with the bones of men.

COMMENTS

In order to prevent further illicit worship at the outlying high places, Josiah summoned to Jerusalem the Levitical priests who had served at these shrines and forced them to remain there. Throughout Judah, from Geba a village near Bethel, to Beersheba in the south, Josiah "*defiled*" or desecrated the high places.¹⁸ where these Levites had served. This action he

¹⁸ Hezekiah had "*removed the high places*" throughout his domain (II K 18:4), but under his son Manasseh the worship at these high places arose anew.

hoped would render these shrines permanently unsuitable for religious services. The high-place type worship had even invaded, so it seems, the city of Jerusalem. Altars and other religious paraphernalia had been set up in the large open buildings which were part of the gates of the city. Two city gates where this type of unauthorized ritual was performed are named: the gate of Joshua the governor and the gate known simply as the "*city gate*" (v. 8).

Josiah did not permit the apostate Levitical priests who had been summoned to Jerusalem to approach the altar of the Lord or to have any part in the Temple ritual. Nevertheless, they were permitted to partake of the priestly revenues. They were allowed to eat of the unleavened bread which only the priest could touch, and probably the portions of the sacrificial animals which were designated for the priests¹⁹ (v. 9).

"*Tophet*" was the name given to the place in the valley of Hinnom where sacrifices were offered to Moloch. The exact meaning of the word is unknown. The valley of Hinnom is that depression which sweeps around the more western of the two hills whereon Jerusalem was built. The sons of Hinnom are thought to have been Canaanites who occupied this valley in the days of Joshua. This spot, sacred to Moloch, was defiled by Josiah so that the abominations practiced there would forever have to cease (v. 10).

One of the idolatries introduced during the Manasseh-Amon era was the worship of the sun. Sacred chariots and horses were stationed near one of the entrances of the Temple to be ready for use in pagan processions. The particular entrance of the Temple is more precisely identified as being the one "*by the chamber of Nathan-melech the officer*" (lit., *eunuch*). Various chambers surrounded the Temple area some of which were used for storage, and some for residences. In Josiah's day, an important royal officer named Nathan-melech occupied one of these chambers. The sacred horses were

¹⁹ See Lev. 6:9, 10, 22.

“removed,” i.e., deprived of their functions; the wooden chariots were burned (v. 11).

The location of the “*upper chambers of Ahaz*” is not certain, but most scholars think that they were within or in close proximity to the Temple.²⁰ Manasseh and Amon apparently had erected altars upon the roof of this structure. Roof-top altars seem to have been a new innovation particularly connected with the worship of the host of heaven. The altars which Manasseh had made and placed in the courts of the house of God were probably also connected with astral worship. These altars had been removed by Manasseh when he repented toward the end of his life, but they apparently had been replaced during the short reign of Amon. All of these astral altars Josiah completely destroyed, crushing them to dust and casting that dust into the brook Kidron (v. 12).

Josiah also destroyed the high places which Solomon had established in the vicinity of Jerusalem for the benefit of his pagan wives. The entire ridge of hills on the east of the city of Jerusalem came to be known as the “*mount of corruption*” because of the evil rites which Solomon had permitted to be practiced there. On the “*right hand,*” i.e., southern part of that hill, Solomon had erected shrines for three pagan deities: Ashtoreth, Chemosh and Milcom. The worship of Ashtoreth was prevalent throughout Phoenicia, but she was particularly venerated at Sidon, the seat of her worship. Chemosh is mentioned on the famous Moabite Stone as being the chief deity of Moab.²¹ Milcom is one of the Israelite spellings for the name of the god Moloch. He seems to have been the only god revered by the Ammonites.²² These ancient shrines Josiah defiled (v. 13) by breaking the sacred pillars there in pieces, cutting down the Asherim—the wooden symbols of the goddess

²⁰ Owing to the fact that the pollutions mentioned immediately before and immediately after verse 12 are pollutions belonging to the Temple.

²¹ The Moabite Stone is dedicated to Chemosh, and the inhabitants of Moab are referred to as “the people of Chemosh.”

²² See I Kings 11:5; Jeremiah 49:3 compared with Jeremiah 48:7; Amos 1:15; and Zephaniah 1:5.

Asherah which were associated with Canaanite shrines—and by filling these areas with human bones. From the earliest times bones were considered unclean. These symbols of death would be a special defilement to shrines where the gods worshiped were deities of productivity and generation (v. 14).

3. *THE REFORMS IN THE NORTH (23:15-20)*

TRANSLATION

(15) Moreover the altar which was in Bethel, the high place which Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin had made, even that altar and the high place he tore down, and he burned the high place; he crushed to powder and burned the Asherah. (16) And Josiah turned and saw the graves which were there in the mount; and he sent and took the bones from the graves, and burned them upon the altar, and defiled it according to the word of the LORD which the man of God had proclaimed who had proclaimed these things. (17) And he said, What marker is that which I see? And the men of the city said unto him, The grave of the man of God who came from Judah and proclaimed these things which you have done against the altar at Bethel. (18) And he said, Let him alone; let no man move his bones. So they left his bones with the bones of the prophet who came from Samaria. (19) And also all the houses of the high places, which were in the cities of Samaria which the kings of Israel had made to provoke the LORD, Josiah removed, and did to them according to all the deeds which he had done in Bethel. (20) And he slew all the priests of the high places which were there upon the altars, and he burned human bones upon them, and returned to Jerusalem.

COMMENTS

When Jeroboam set up his altar at Bethel, he in effect made that city a high place. The buildings connected with this high

place were torn down by Josiah. It is not certain whether the Bethel temple was still being used in the days of Josiah or whether it had been abandoned. It is likely, however, that the mixed race which had been imported by the Assyrians to the former territory of Israel continued to worship at the spot. The pagan Asherah which was there Josiah crushed to powder and burned (v. 15). From Israelite sepulchers excavated in the rocky sides of near-by hills, Josiah ordered human bones to be brought out and burned on the Bethel altar. By this action Josiah was unconsciously fulfilling the prophecy made by the unnamed man of God some three hundred years before (v. 16; cf. I K 13:2).

The king then spotted a pillar or obelisk in the area of the tombs and inquired of the local inhabitants about the significance of this marker. He was told that this pillar marked the sepulcher of the man of God from Judah who had predicted the very things which Josiah had done to the altar (v. 17). Upon being reminded of the message of that prophet, Josiah gave orders to leave that particular sepulcher and the bones of the two prophets buried therein undisturbed (v. 18).

Josiah and his men roamed at will throughout the former territory of the Northern Kingdom²³ destroying and defiling the high places (v. 19). This was the period of Assyrian decline, and the kings in Nineveh were no longer able to defend their outlying provinces. Taking advantage of this weakness, Josiah seems to have established his hegemony over the Assyrian provinces to the north of Judah. He seems to have been able to reunite under his own headship all the scattered portions of the old Israelite kingdom, except, perhaps, the Transjordan area. He levied taxes in Samaria as freely as in Judah (II C 33:9). Throughout these territories Josiah slew the pagan priests of the high places and defiled the altars at these heathen

²³ The Chronicler gives more details. Josiah carried out his destruction of the high places, the Asherah and the images "in the cities of Manasseh, and Ephraim, and Simeon, even unto Naphtali" (II C 34:6).

shrines by burning human bones upon them just as he had done at Bethel (v. 20).

4. *THE GREAT PASSOVER CELEBRATION (23:21-23)*

TRANSLATION

(21) And the king commanded all the people, saying, Prepare the Passover to the LORD your God as it is written in the book of this covenant. (22) Surely we have not done according to this book from the days of the Judges who judged Israel nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and the kings of Judah. (23) But in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, this Passover was conducted to the LORD in Jerusalem.

COMMENTS

The account of Josiah's Passover celebration is given in much more detail in the Book of Chronicles. The king ordered that all the regulations contained in the newly discovered "*book of the covenant*" should be observed (v. 21). Since the ordinances for the observation of Passover are contained chiefly in Exodus (12:3-20; 13:5-10), it is reasonable to assume that the "*book of the covenant*" contained the book presently called Exodus.²⁴ Not since the days of the Judges had a pass-over been so numerously attended²⁵ and so meticulously observed (v. 22; cf. II C 35:6).²⁶ This great observance occurred in

²⁴ Passover regulations are repeated but with much less fullness in Deuteronomy 16:1-8.

²⁵ The festival was attended not only by the Judaeans, but by many Israelites from among the ten tribes who still remained intermixed with the Assyrian colonists in the area of Samaria (II C 35:17, 18)

²⁶ Two other great passover observances are recorded since Israel left Sinai. See Joshua 5:10, 11 and II Chronicles 30:13-26.

THE LAST GREAT REFORMATION 23:24-27

the eighteenth year of Josiah, 621 B.C.—the same year in which the lost law book was discovered in the Temple (v. 23).

G. AN APPRAISAL OF THE JOSIANIC REFORMATION 23:24-27

TRANSLATION

(24) Moreover those with familiar spirits, the wizards, the teraphim, the idols, and all the abominations which were found in the land of Judah and in Jerusalem Josiah removed in order to fulfill the words of the Law which was written in the book which Hilkiyah the priest had found in the house of the LORD. (25) Like him there was not before him a king who turned unto the LORD with all his heart, with all his soul, and with all his might according to the Law of Moses; and after him one did not arise like him. (26) Nevertheless, the LORD did not turn from the fierceness of His great anger with which He was angry against Judah because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked Him. (27) And the LORD said, Also Judah I will remove from before My face like I removed Israel, and I will reject this city which I have chosen, viz., Jerusalem, along with the house of which I have said, My name shall be there.

COMMENTS

Occult practices had flourished during the long reign of Manasseh. Josiah was determined to banish these devilish deeds from the land. Those with familiar spirits, i.e., mediums, and wizards who pretended to possess supernatural knowledge, were removed. The teraphim or household gods were destroyed whenever possible. Idols (*gillulim*—shapeless, formless things) probably again refers to objects used in private, perhaps figures used as amulets. Private superstitious practices—

“*abominations*”—were uncovered and banished. Josiah conscientiously tried to fulfill all of the precepts of the Law of Moses with regard to these matters (v. 24). In his exact obedience to the Law, Josiah was without equal among the kings of Judah²⁷ (v. 25).

In spite of Josiah’s valiant efforts to reform the nation, the anger of the Lord was not turned aside from Judah. The king meant well; but it was too late for the nation to repent sincerely and heartily. At best, the reformation only gained a temporary reprieve for Judah. The wicked practices introduced by Manasseh provoked the Lord to wrath, and the corruption of that sin had not been removed from the hearts of the people. God was not about to punish one generation for the sins of another. The sinister shadow of Manasseh still hovered over the hearts of the men of Judah in spite of all that Josiah had attempted to do (v. 26).²⁸ Therefore, God determined to remove Judah “*from His sight*” just as He earlier had removed Israel. Jerusalem, the city chosen by God as the residence of His ark and His Temple, would be abandoned (v. 27)²⁹

REVIEW OF CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

I. FACTS TO MASTER

A. Identify each of the following:

²⁷ In II Kings 18:5 the writer makes a similar comment about Hezekiah. A close examination, however, indicates that Hezekiah is praised for his trust in God and Josiah for his obedience to the Lord.

²⁸ See especially Jeremiah 5.

²⁹ God “*chose*” Jerusalem when he led David to bring the ark there. He confirmed the choice of Jerusalem when at the Temple dedication fire came down and consumed the burnt offering and “*the glory of the Lord filled the house*” (II C 7:1).

THE LAST GREAT REFORMATION 23:24-27

- | | | |
|------------------|-------------|-------------------|
| 1. Manasseh | 7. Baal | 13. Asahiah |
| 2. Amon | 8. Asherah | 14. Huldah |
| 3. Josiah | 9. Shaphan | 15. Joshua |
| 4. Moloch/Milcom | 10. Hilkiah | 16. Nathan-melech |
| 5. Ashtoreth | 11. Ahikam | |
| 6. Chemosh | 12. Achbor | |

B. Identify each of the following places:

- | | |
|-------------------|------------------------|
| 1. garden of Uzza | 6. Topheth |
| 2. Kidron | 7. Valley of Hinnom |
| 3. Bethel | 8. Samaria |
| 4. Geba | 9. mount of corruption |
| 5. Beersheba | |

C. How did each of the following figure in the events of this chapter?

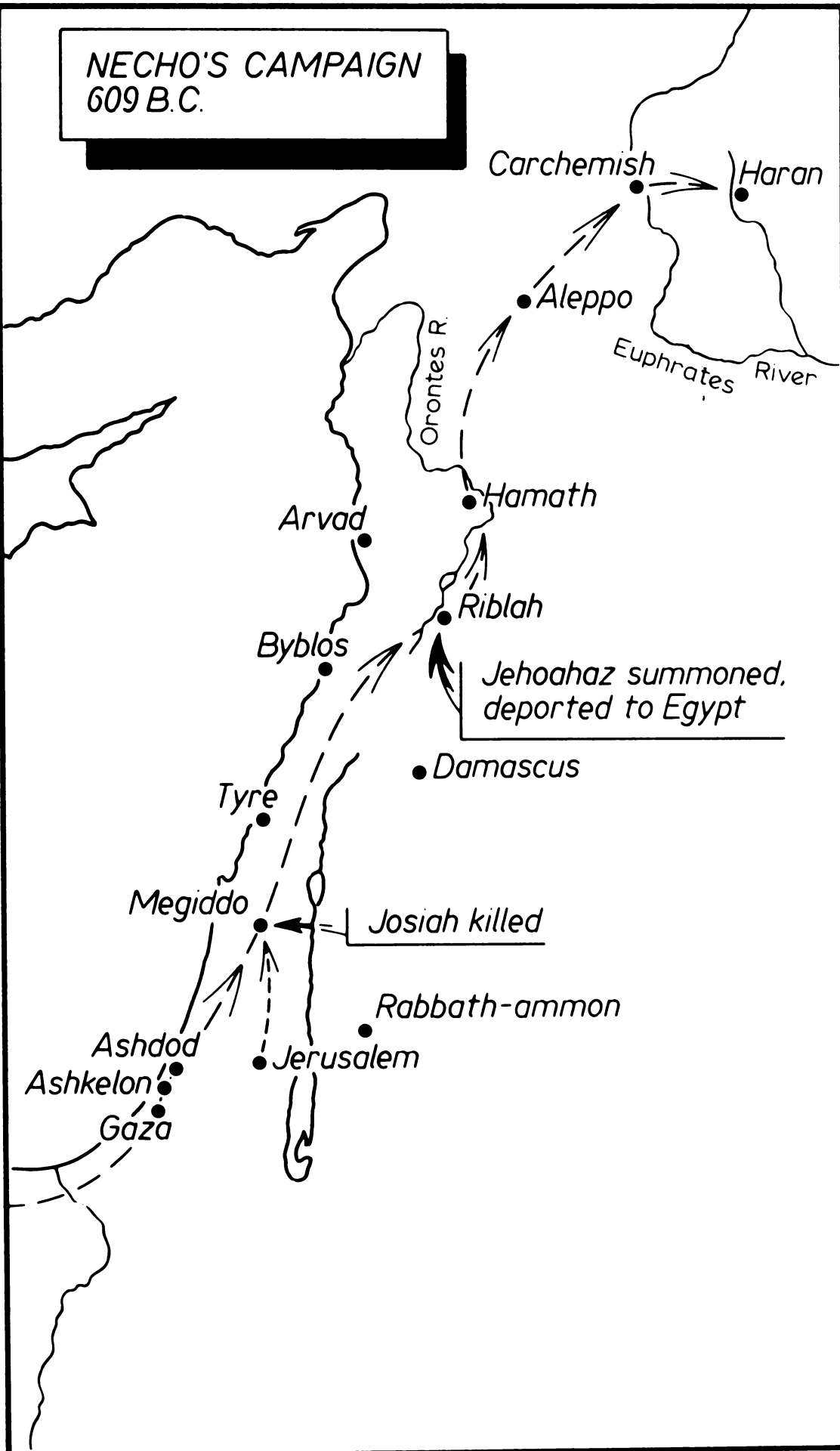
- | | |
|---------------------|------------------------|
| 1. line and plummet | 6. unleavened bread |
| 2. a dish | 7. horses and chariots |
| 3. a book | 8. bones |
| 4. ashes | 9. Passover |
| 5. powder | |

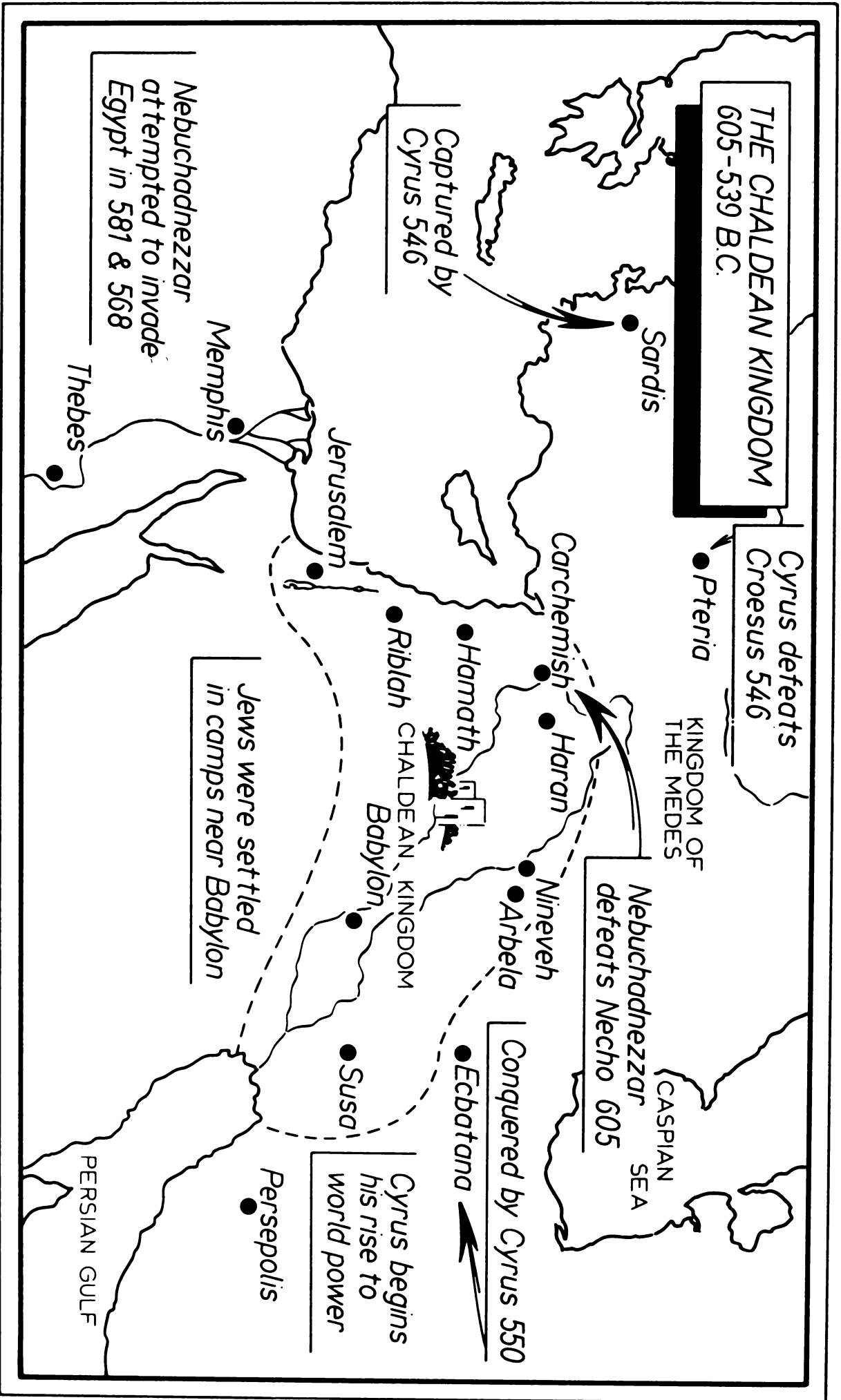
II. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. Manasseh was the wicked son of a righteous king; Josiah was the righteous son of a wicked king. What factors may account for this situation?
2. Manasseh reigned longer than any other king of Judah. Why did God permit such a wicked man to retain the throne for so long?
3. Was the decree pronounced against Judah and Jerusalem during the reign of Manasseh irrevocable?
4. How old is the tradition that Isaiah the prophet was slain by Manasseh? How would you assess the historicity of this tradition?
5. Manasseh repented of his wayward life toward the end of his reign. What success did he have in undoing his own life of sin? What lesson is there in this?
6. How can you account for Josiah's righteousness at such

- a young age?
7. Josiah began his reforms in his eighth year, yet it was not until his eighteenth year that repair work on the Temple commenced. Why this delay?
 8. What was the book found in the Temple in 621 B.C.? For what purpose was this book taken to Huldah?
 9. Huldah is called a prophetess. What other Biblical women have this title?
 10. What was Jeremiah's relationship to the reform of Josiah?
 11. Huldah predicted that Josiah would die in peace (22:20), but in fact he died in battle at Megiddo. How is this to be explained?
 12. What was Josiah's intention when he burned bones on altars throughout the land?
 13. In what sense was the Passover celebrated in Josiah's day unlike any Passover celebrated since the days of the Judges? (23:22)
 14. Scripture states there was no king like Josiah before or after him (23:25). Virtually the same thing is said of Hezekiah (18:5). How can the statement be true with regard to both kings?

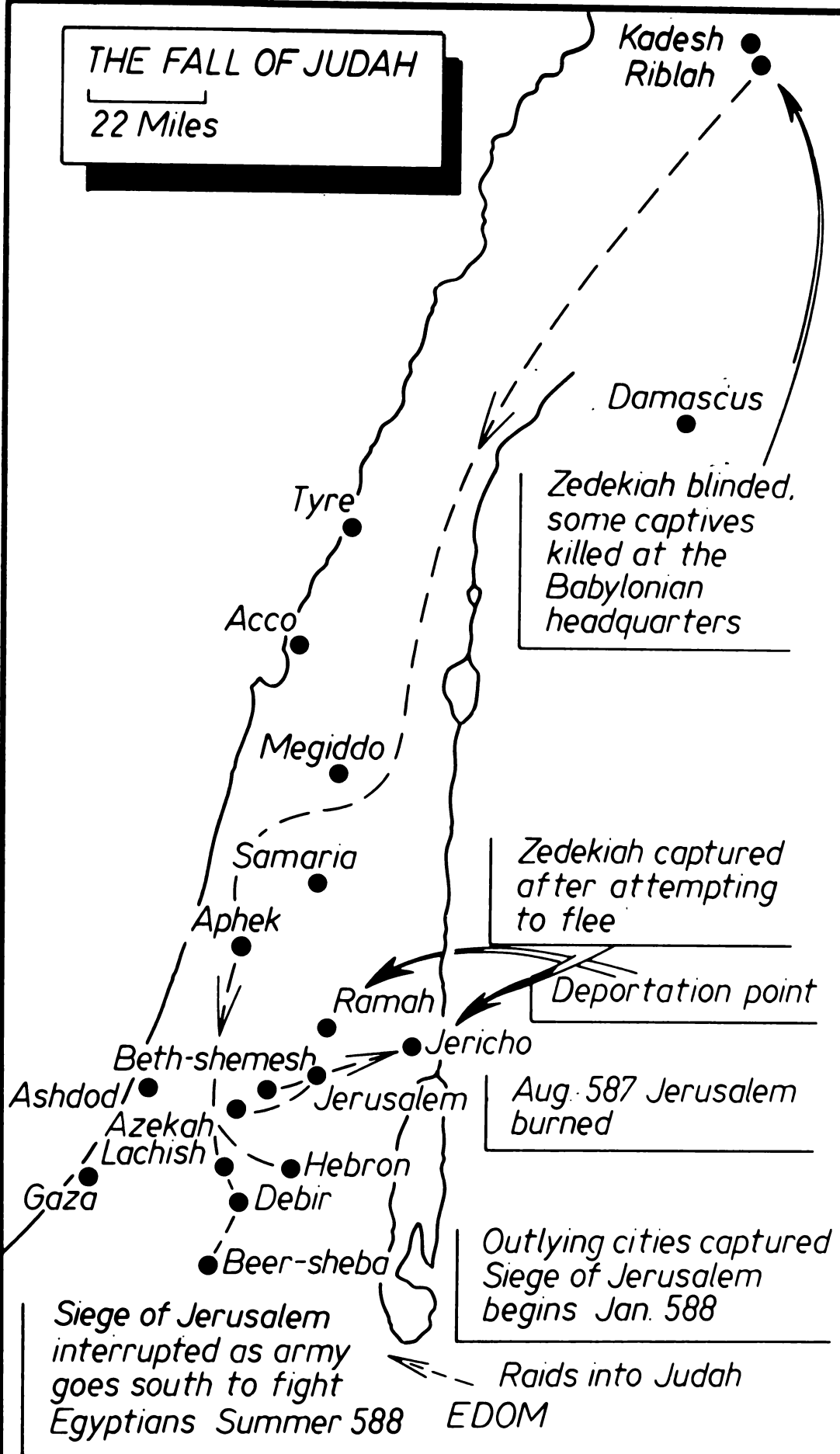
**NECHO'S CAMPAIGN
609 B.C.**





THE FALL OF JUDAH

22 Miles



Zedekiah blinded, some captives killed at the Babylonian headquarters

Zedekiah captured after attempting to flee

Deportation point

Aug. 587 Jerusalem burned

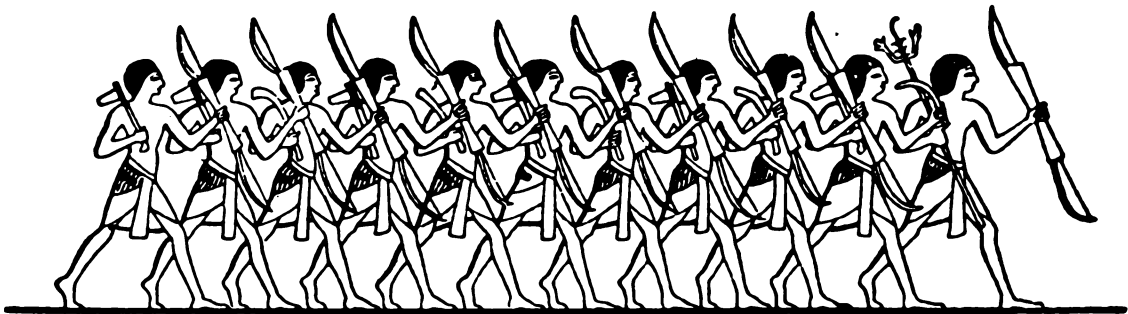
Outlying cities captured
Siege of Jerusalem begins Jan. 588

Siege of Jerusalem interrupted as army goes south to fight Egyptians Summer 588

Raids into Judah EDOM



A city gate of Jerusalem



Armed forces in the days of the King



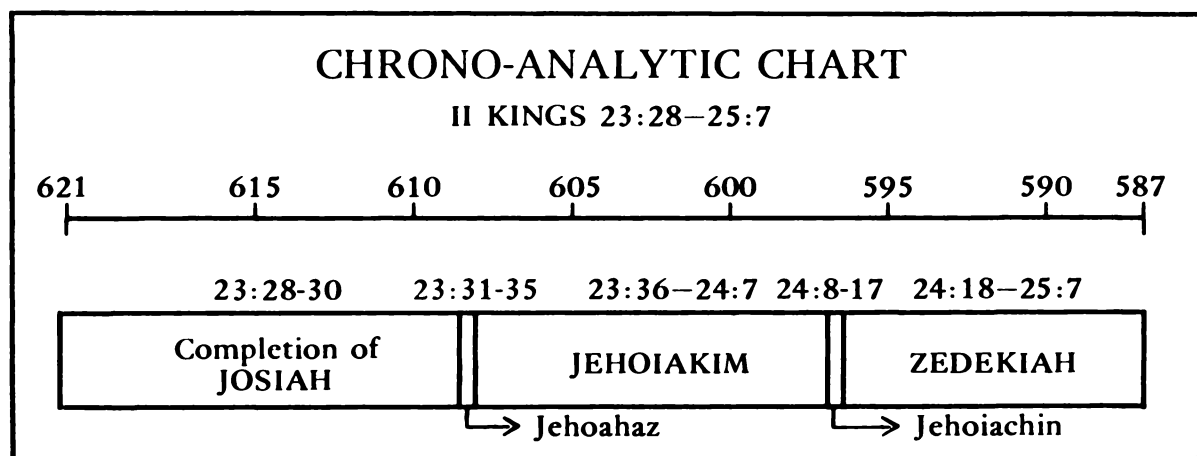
Drawings by Horace Knowles
from the British and Foreign Bible Society

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

THE DYING DAYS OF JUDAH

II Kings 23:28—25:30

The twenty-three years following the death of Josiah were the “dying time” of the kingdom of Judah. These were tragic days when petty politicians repeated foolish mistakes which drug the nation down to oblivion. In spite of the heroic preaching of Jeremiah, the nation sunk ever deeper into apostasy and rebellion. The final scenes unfold like those in a Shakespearian tragedy: (1) the death and burial of Josiah (23:28-30); (2) the reign and removal of Jehoahaz (23:31-35); (3) the reign and rebellion of Jehoiakim (23:36—24:7); (4) the reign and deportation of Jehoiachin (24:8-17); (5) the revolt and punishment of Zedekiah (24:18—25:7); and (6) the aftermath of the fall of Jerusalem (25:8-30).



I. THE DEATH AND BURIAL OF JOSIAH 23:28-30

TRANSLATION

(28) Now the rest of the acts of Josiah, and all which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? (29) In his days Pharaoh Necho king of Egypt went up on behalf of the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates. And

King Josiah went to confront him, and he killed him in Megiddo when he had seen him. (30) And his servants brought him in a chariot as he was dying from Megiddo; and they brought him to Jerusalem and they buried him in his sepulcher. And the people of the land took Jehoahaz the son of Josiah, and anointed him king in place of his father.

COMMENTS

Much more information about Josiah was contained in the prophetic annals of Judah (v. 28). This king was remembered by his people for his goodness rather than his greatness. No mention is made of his "might." The Chronicler mentions his "*kindness*" or "*his good deeds*" (II C 35:26).

With the fall of Nineveh to the Medo-Babylonian coalition in 612 B.C., a refugee Assyrian government was established at Haran. In 610 B.C. Haran also fell to the Chaldean king Nabopolassar. Fearing that the international balance of power was about to be upset, Pharaoh Necho (609-593 B.C.) decided to intervene in the struggle on behalf of the tottering Assyrian kingdom. The King James and American Standard versions give the impression that Necho marched north to fight *against* the Assyrians. However a Babylonian text published by Wiseman in 1956 has made it clear that the purpose of Necho was to fight *on behalf of* the Assyrians.¹ The Hebrew preposition used in verse 29 can be translated either "*against*" or "*on behalf of*."² Here is a case where the texts from antiquity have actually aided modern scholars in producing a more accurate

¹ The relevant portions of this text have been translated in DOTT, p. 17. Older interpreters understood "*the king of Assyria*" in verse 29 to be Nabopolassar the father of Nebuchadnezzar who was then king of Babylon. On this interpretation, the Jews regarded Nabopolassar as the inheritor of the Assyrian empire, just as they later regarded the Persian kings (Ezra 6:22).

² Gray (OTL, p. 748) recognizes this possible translation, but still insists on the translation "*against*." He then charges the author of Kings with failure to understand the political situation of that time.

translation of the Hebrew Scriptures. Necho had to go through the narrow pass at Megiddo in northern Palestine. It is not entirely clear why Josiah decided to take his tiny army to Megiddo in an attempt to stop the advance of Necho. Probably he simply resented this Egyptian incursion into the territory which he had recently annexed.³ Had he allowed Egyptian armies to march uncontested back and forth across his land, he would not long be able to maintain his independence. However, Necho tried to dissuade the Jewish king from this foolish confrontation. Necho assured Josiah that he had no quarrel with Judah. The Egyptian insisted that God had directed him to undertake this mission, and he warned that should Josiah persist in resisting his advance, he would be fighting against God. The Chronicler seems to concur that the action of Josiah was contrary to the will of God for he declares that Josiah "*hearkened not unto the words of Necho from the mouth of God*" (II C 35:22). The battle was joined and Josiah was mortally wounded (v. 29).

When Josiah was wounded, his servants put him in his "*second chariot*" (II C 35:24)—a chariot of much lighter construction and drawn by fleet horses—and hastened toward Jerusalem. The Chronicler implies that Josiah succumbed to his wound en route to the capital (II C 35:23, 24). He was buried in his sepulcher, i.e., "*the sepulcher of his fathers*" (II C 35:24). Jeremiah seems to have led the nation in lamenting the death of this good king (II C 35:25).⁴ The people of the land, i.e., the landed gentry, then took Jehoahaz, otherwise named Shallum (I C 3:15; Jer. 22:11), and made him king in place of his father (v. 30). On what grounds the people preferred this son to his elder brother Eliakim is not known.⁵

³ Others contend that Josiah opposed the Egyptians in support of the Chaldeans. See JNES, XII (1953), pp. 56-58.

⁴ For many years the anniversary of the death of Josiah was marked by weeping and lamentation. Cf. Zechariah 12:11.

⁵ Jehoahaz was twenty-three when he began to reign (v. 31) and his brother, three months later, is said to have been twenty-five (v. 36).

Commentators generally speculate that the elder son was pro-Egyptian and therefore was passed over in favor of the next oldest who was committed to an independent Judah. But if this be the case, why was Jehoahaz so willing to go to Riblah and meet with the Pharaoh? Rawlinson offers the hypothesis that Eliakim had accompanied his father to Megiddo and had been captured by Necho.⁶

II. THE REIGN AND REMOVAL OF JEHOAHAZ 23:31-35

TRANSLATION

(31) Jehoahaz was twenty-three years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem; and the name of his mother was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. (32) And he did evil in the eyes of the LORD according to all which his fathers had done. (33) And Pharaoh Necho restrained him in Riblah in the land of Hamath from reigning over Jerusalem, and appointed a tribute upon the land, a hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. (34) And Pharaoh Necho made Eliakim the son of Josiah king in place of Josiah his father, and he changed his name to Jehoiakim. And he took Jehoahaz away; and he came to Egypt and he died there. (35) And the silver and the gold Jehoiakim gave to Pharaoh; but he taxed the land to give the silver according to the word of Pharaoh. Each man according to his assessment, he exacted the silver and the gold from the people of the land to give to Pharaoh Necho.

COMMENTS

Upon assuming the throne, Shallum adopted the name Jehoahaz. He reigned but three months in Jerusalem (v. 31).

⁶ Gray (OTL, p. 748) thinks the selection was made on the grounds that Jehoahaz was stronger in character than his older brother (actually, his half-brother).

Even in this short reign, Jehoahaz showed himself to be an irreligious man. Ezekiel hints that he was also a persecutor (cf. Ezek. 19:3). He did according to all that his fathers had done, i.e., he participated in idolatrous practices (v. 32).⁷ Jehoahaz was summoned by Necho to the Egyptian military headquarters at Riblah in the land of Hamath about two hundred miles north of Jerusalem. It is not certain why the new king left the safety of Jerusalem to comply with the wishes of Necho. But whatever his reasons for going, that trip to Riblah proved an ill-fated one for Jehoahaz. The Jewish king was deposed and his land was ordered to pay to Pharaoh a tribute of a hundred talents of silver (\$200,000 BV) and a talent of gold⁸ (\$30,000 BV; v. 33).

Sixteenth King of Judah
 JEHOAHAZ BEN JOSIAH
 609 B.C.
 (“*Yahweh-seized*”)
 II K 23:30-34; II C 36:1-4
 Contemporary Prophet
 Jeremiah

Mother: Hamutal Appraisal: Bad

“In the place where they led him captive there he will die and not see this land again.” Jeremiah 22:12

Necho installed his own man, Eliakim, the older son of Josiah, on the throne. The Pharaoh required his vassal to take a new name as a symbol of submission and subjection, and

⁷ His sin may have been that he was too ready to go to Necho at Riblah.

⁸ The tribute was very moderate compared to the three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold demanded by Sennacherib (II K 18:14). Perhaps the Pharaoh was trying to be conciliatory toward Judah in anticipation of his confrontation with Babylon.

yet Eliakim himself seems to have had the right to select what that new name might be. He chose the name Jehoiakim (*"Yahweh will set up"*) which is only slightly different in meaning from his given name of Eliakim (*"God will set up"*). The deposed King Jehoahaz was carried away by Necho to Egypt where he died (v. 34). Jeremiah the prophet had clearly predicted this fate for Shallum-Jehoahaz (Jer. 22:10-12). The vassal King Jehoiakim was unable to meet Necho's tribute demands from the national treasuries which apparently were exhausted. He was forced to impose a real estate tax upon the land owners in order to meet his obligations (v. 35).

III. THE REIGN AND REBELLION OF JEHOIAKIM

23:36—24:7

TRANSLATION

(36) Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. And the name of his mother was Zebudah the daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah. (37) And he did evil in the eyes of the LORD according to all which his fathers had done. (1) In his days, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his vassal three years; then he turned away and rebelled against him. (2) And the LORD sent against him bands of Chaldeans and bands of Arameans and bands of Moabites and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it according to the word of the LORD which He spoke by the hand of His servants the prophets. (3) Surely on account of the word of the LORD it came on Judah to remove them from before His face for the sins of Manasseh, according to all he had done. (4) And also for the blood of the innocent which he shed when he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; and the LORD would not pardon this. (5) Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim and all which he did, are they not written in the book of the chronicles of the kings of Judah? (6) And Jehoiakim

slept with his fathers and Jehoiachin his son ruled in his place. (7) And the king of Egypt did not again go out from his land because the king of Babylon had taken the land from the brook of Egypt to the river Euphrates, all which had belonged to the king of Egypt.

Seventeenth King of Judah

JEHOIAKIM BEN JOSIAH

609-597 B.C.

(“*Yabweh will set up*”)

Contemporary Prophets
Jeremiah; Uriah; Daniel

Mother: Zebudah

Appraisal: Bad

“He will be buried with a donkey’s burial, dragged off and thrown out beyond the gates of Jerusalem.” Jeremiah 22:19

COMMENTS

Since Jehoiakim was twenty-five years old when he began to reign, he was therefore older than his deposed half-brother.⁹ He reigned eleven years over Judah, from 609-597 B.C. (v. 36). Under Jehoiakim, all the idolatrous practices of the Manasseh era were reintroduced (v. 37). In spite of the national poverty, this petty little king spent huge sums of money on himself. In one of Jeremiah’s blistering sermons he condemned Jehoiakim for building for himself a fancy new palace (Jer. 22:13-14). Jehoiakim was the villain of the closing years of Judah’s history. He was everything that is despicable in a national leader. He was a spend-thrift, a bigot, an arrogant and irreverent tyrant who brooked no criticism, not even when that criticism came from a man of God. A prophet named Uriah was too bold in his denunciation of the king, and paid for his boldness with his life (Jer. 26:21). Jeremiah was in danger on more than

⁹ The mother of Jehoahaz was Hamutal (v. 31); the mother of Jehoiakim was Zebudah (v. 36). Rumah, the hometown of Zebudah, was in the vicinity of Shechem.

one occasion during the reign of this king.

Jehoiakim carefully watched the political developments on the Euphrates River to the north. From July 609 to June 605 B.C. the armies of the Babylonians and the Assyro-Egyptian coalition sparred. For the most part during those years the Babylonians were on the defensive. Finally, the Babylonian army under the brilliant young crown prince Nebuchadnezzar was able to launch a mighty offensive which was to have world-wide significance. The focus of the attack was the fortress of Carchemish on the Euphrates. Nebuchadnezzar won a crushing victory. The tattered Egyptian armies fled southward from Carchemish in disarray. Nebuchadnezzar was able to roam at will through Syria-Palestine, the Hatti-land as he calls it in his annals.

Shortly after Carchemish Nebuchadnezzar went up and besieged Jerusalem. According to one system of counting regnal years, this siege fell in the third year of King Jehoiakim (Daniel 1:1-3).¹⁰ It is not entirely clear whether or not Jehoiakim actually swore allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar at this time. It may be that Jehoiakim merely tried to bribe the Chaldean prince by sending to him some of the valuable Temple vessels and some prize youth of the land, viz., Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego.

Nebuchadnezzar's campaign in the Hatti-land was cut short by the death of his father, King Nabopolassar, on August 16, 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar hastened immediately back to Babylon where he was crowned on September 6, 605 B.C. Upon assuming the throne, Nebuchadnezzar returned to the Hatti-land (Syria-Palestine) to continue his conquests. The Babylonian records do not indicate precisely what cities he conquered at this time. A third campaign to the Hatti-land took place in the late spring and early summer of 604 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar's official scribe declares that on this occasion

¹⁰ Using a different system, Jeremiah 46:2 dates the battle of Carchemish to the *fourth* year of Jehoiakim. For a discussion of the two dating systems, see Thiele, MNHK, p. 162ff.

*"all the kings of the Hatti-land came before him and he received their heavy tribute."*¹¹ It was probably at this time that Nebuchadnezzar bound King Jehoiakim to take him to Babylon (II C 36:6). No evidence exists that Jehoiakim was actually taken to Babylon, and so one must conclude that for some reason Nebuchadnezzar changed his mind about the matter. Perhaps Jehoiakim took a solemn and sacred oath of allegiance to the Great King, and so Nebuchadnezzar decided to leave him on the throne of Jerusalem as his vassal.¹²

Jehoiakim had no intention of remaining permanently the vassal of Nebuchadnezzar. He did serve the Babylonian for three years.¹³ But since Pharaoh Necho was regaining strength down in Egypt, Jehoiakim was encouraged to rebel against his overlord. In 601 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar brought his armies down the coastal plain of Palestine apparently intent on invading Egypt and destroying Necho once and for all. However, it appears from a Babylonian text that Nebuchadnezzar met with a stinging defeat on the borders of Egypt.¹⁴ This meant that for the last years of his reign Jehoiakim was an independent ruler.

That Nebuchadnezzar had received a rather severe blow in his battle with the Egyptians in 601 B.C. is indicated by the fact that for some eighteen months he was unable to personally attend to his rebellious vassal in Jerusalem. In the meanwhile, he sent bands of Edomites, Moabites and Ammonites and

¹¹ DOTT, p. 79.

¹² It cannot be known for certain on which of the three campaigns of 605-604 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem and bound Jehoiakim. However in both Chronicles and Kings he is called "king" at the time he came against Jerusalem. This would suggest that he had already been crowned king and would thus eliminate the first campaign to the Hatti-land when he was only crown-prince.

¹³ It is not certain at exactly what time Jehoiakim took his vassal oath to Nebuchadnezzar. What little evidence there is points to the summer of 604 B.C. Gray (OTL, pp. 756f.), however, thinks Jehoiakim was left independent from 604-601 B.C. Only in 601 B.C. when Jehoiakim showed signs of sympathy with Necho did Nebuchadnezzar impose tribute on him. Thus in Gray's view, the three years of vassalage were 601-599 B.C. In the opinion of the present writer, 604-601 B.C. is more likely.

¹⁴ See ANET, p. 564.

local contingents of Chaldean soldiers to harass the Judaeans. Though these small units were probably unable to do much damage to the fortified cities of Judah, they did force the rural people to seek refuge in Jerusalem (Jer. 35:11). By authorizing these raids of reprisal, Nebuchadnezzar was unconsciously beginning to fulfill the threats which the Lord had made against Judah through his great prophets. In reality it was the Lord through His permissive will who sent these raiders against Judah (v. 2).

The final destruction of Judah had been decreed by the mouth of the Lord. Judah was to be removed from His sight—carried off to a foreign land—because of the sins of Manasseh (v. 3). This should not be interpreted to mean that the nation was being punished for the sins of a man long since dead. Rather the meaning is that the class of sins introduced by Manasseh still persisted in the nation. The "*sins of Manasseh*" included: (1) idolatry, accompanied by licentious rites; (2) child sacrifice to Moloch; (3) sodomy; (4) occult practices; and (5) the shedding of innocent blood. This shedding of innocent blood would include child sacrifice, but would also embrace the persecution of righteous saints. This kind of bloodshed continued under Jehoiakim. Reference has already been made to the execution of Uriah the prophet (Jer. 26:23). The blood of innocent saints cried out to God for vengeance. God could no longer overlook or pardon those crimes (v. 4).

The author of Kings closes out his brief treatment of the reign of Jehoiakim by referring his readers to the prophetic chronicles of his reign (v. 5). The Book of Jeremiah relates several other facts about Jehoiakim: (1) that he executed Uriah the prophet (Jer. 26:23); (2) that he destroyed the scroll of Jeremiah's sermons (Jer. 36:20-23); and (3) that he ordered Jeremiah and Baruch to be arrested (Jer. 36:26).

Jehoiakim died on December 9, 598 B.C. The circumstances of his death are not entirely clear. Jeremiah had predicted that he would be "*buried with the burial of a donkey.*" His death, said the prophet, would be unlamented (Jer. 22:18, 19). These words suggest that Jehoiakim was assassinated, or at

least that his body was dishonored after death by his own countrymen. It is also possible that when the Chaldeans arrived in force at Jerusalem to punish the rebellious city they disinterred the corpse and exposed it to the indignities here described.

Whether by violence or natural death, Jehoiakim was dead when the Chaldeans arrived. His young son Jehoiachin¹⁵ was left to face the wrath of the mighty Nebuchadnezzar (v. 6). No further aid from Egypt was forthcoming. Even though Necho had successfully defended his land in the face of the Babylonian campaign of 601 B.C., the Egyptians did not have sufficient power to challenge Nebuchadnezzar's hegemony over Syria-Palestine. All the territories between the River of Egypt and the Euphrates to which Pharaoh had laid claim after his campaign of 609 B.C. the Babylonians now controlled (v. 7).

IV. THE REIGN AND DEPORTATION OF JEHOIACHIN 24:8-17

TRANSLATION

(8) Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem; and the name of his mother was Nehushta the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. (9) And he did that which was evil in the eyes of the LORD according to all which his fathers had done. (10) At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon went up to Jerusalem; and the city came under siege. (11) And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city, and his servants set siege against it. (12) And Jehoiachin king of Judah went out unto the king of Babylon, he, his mother, his servants, his princes and his officers; and the king of Babylon took him in the eighth year of his reign. (13) And he brought out from

¹⁵ Jehoiachin has two other names: Jeconiah (I C 3:16, 17; Jer. 27:20 etc.) and Coniah (Jer. 22:24, 28 etc.). The two longer forms both mean "*Yahweh will establish*"; the shorter form means "*Yahweh establishes.*"

there all the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the house of the king; and he cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the Temple of the LORD as the LORD had spoken. (14) And he took captive all Jerusalem and all the princes and the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives and all the craftsmen and the smiths; none was left except the poor of the people of the land. (15) And he took away Jehoiachin to Babylon; the mother of the king, the wives of the king, his officers, and the mighty of the land he carried captive from Jerusalem to Babylon. (16) And all the men of might seven thousand, the craftsmen and the smiths a thousand, all the mighty men who were warriors; and the king of Babylon brought them captive to Babylon. (17) And the king of Babylon made Mattaniah his uncle king in his place and changed his name to Zedekiah.

Eighteenth King of Judah

JEHOIACHIN BEN JEHOIAKIM

597 B.C.

(*"Yahweh will establish"*)

II K 24:8-17

Contemporary Prophets
Jeremiah; Ezekiel; Daniel

Mother: Nehushta

Appraisal: Bad

"Write this man down childless, a man who will not prosper in his days."

Jeremiah 22:30

COMMENTS

Some confusion exists as to the age of Jehoiachin when he became king, but the figure eighteen must surely be correct.¹⁶ His reign lasted three months, or to be more precise, three months and ten days (II C 36:9). Jehoiachin's mother Nehushta

¹⁶ II Chronicles 36:9 gives his age as *eight*. In Hebrew the number eighteen is written with two words, the word for eight and the word for ten. In the process of copying the manuscript of Chronicles, some scribe must have accidentally omitted the word for ten.

was of the powerful family of Elnathan, one of the chief princes under Jehoiakim (Jer. 26:22; 36:12, 25). Nehushta was probably the ruling spirit of the time during her son's short reign¹⁷ (v. 8).

In spite of his brief reign, the author of Kings declares that Jehoiachin did that which was evil in the eyes of the Lord. As in the case of similar evaluations of short-reigned kings, this statement probably means the Jehoiachin made no attempt at a religious reformation, but allowed the idolatries and superstitions which had prevailed under Jehoiakim and Jehoahaz to continue. Jeremiah called this king "*a despised broken idol*" and "*a vessel wherein is no pleasure*" (Jer. 22:28).

During most of the short reign of Jehoiachin, the armies of Nebuchadnezzar were encamped about the walls of Jerusalem.¹⁸ The Great King himself was temporarily detained in a siege at Tyre, and so sent his servants to deal with Jerusalem (v. 10). While the siege conducted by his generals was still going on, Nebuchadnezzar himself appeared on the scene, probably bringing with him additional forces (v. 11). The Holy City was well fortified and could have withstood several months of siege. But Jehoiachin realized that further resistance would only bring upon his people incalculable hardship. Perhaps he hoped that if he surrendered Nebuchadnezzar would allow him to retain his throne as a vassal king. Whatever his motives, Jehoiachin and the leading citizens of Jerusalem walked through the gates of the city and surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar on March 16, 597 B.C., the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar¹⁹

¹⁷ Nehushta is mentioned in Jeremiah 22:26; 29:2.

¹⁸ The precise day on which the Chaldean forces arrived at Jerusalem cannot be determined. But the Babylonian Chronicle indicates that the siege began sometime after December 18, 598 B.C.

¹⁹ The author here (as later in 25:8) uses the non-accession year method of computing the regnal years of Nebuchadnezzar. In this system, the first *year* of Nebuchadnezzar was only a few months long, from September 7, 605 till New Years (March-April) of 604 B.C. According to this system of counting, the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar began in the spring of 598 B.C. Jehoiachin surrendered on Adar 2 (the second day of the twelfth month) of that eighth year. Jeremiah 52:28 uses the standard Babylonian system of counting—where the months up until the first New Years were not counted—and places this deportation in the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar.

(v. 12). This is the first instance in Kings of dating in terms of a foreign king. The Biblical record of Jehoiachin's surrender to Nebuchadnezzar is substantiated and supplemented by the Babylonian Chronicle.²⁰

In addition to the royal captives, Nebuchadnezzar carried off from Jerusalem additional treasure from the Temple and palace.²¹ These treasuries had been exhausted in the days of Hezekiah when the Assyrian Sennacherib demanded heavy tribute (II K 18:15). But fresh accumulations had been made during the long reigns of Manasseh and Josiah. The vessels of gold made originally by Solomon were "*cut in pieces*," i.e., had the gold stripped from them. These "*vessels*" would include articles of furniture, like the altar of incense and the table of showbread which were covered with golden plates, and other articles made wholly of the precious metal such as the lampstand, tongs, spoons, etc. This confiscation of the wealth of the nation had been prophesied by a long line of prophets.²²

The statement that Nebuchadnezzar carried away "*all Jerusalem*" like so many other universal statements in the Bible is not intended to be taken literally. "*All Jerusalem*" means all that was important in the population of the city—the upper classes. This included the princes or nobles of the city, the professional soldiers and the skilled craftsmen²³ (v. 14). Most prominent among the captives was Jehoiachin and his mother and wives and officers. All the "*mighty of the land*," i.e., all the prominent citizens, were taken away to Babylon (v. 15). The professional soldiers taken captive numbered some seven thousand, the skilled workmen another thousand and other ranking citizens two thousand making a total of ten thousand captives (v. 16; cf. v. 14).

²⁰ See ANET, p. 564.

²¹ According to Daniel 1:1, he had carried away some of the sacred Temple vessels in 605 B.C.

²² II Kings 20:17; Isaiah 39:6; Jeremiah 15:13; 17:3 etc.

²³ There are still "princes" in Jerusalem under the last king (Jer. 38:4, 25, 27), and courtiers of rank (Jer. 38:7), and "captains of forces" (Jer. 40:7) and "men of war" (Jer. 52:7).

After the deportation of Jehoiachin, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Mattaniah as king of Judah. Mattaniah was the third son of Josiah²⁴ to reign on the throne of David. The Great King demanded that his new vassal change his name. Mattaniah (*"Gift of Yahweh"*) chose the throne name of Zedekiah (*"Righteousness of Yahweh"*). This last king of Judah certainly made no attempt to live up to his new name; he made no effort to establish the righteousness of Yahweh in the land.

V. THE REVOLT OF ZEDEKIAH AND PUNISHMENT OF ZEDEKIAH 24:18—25:7

TRANSLATION

(18) Zedekiah was twenty-one years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem; and the name of his mother was Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah. (19) And he did evil in the eyes of the LORD according to all which Jehoiakim had done. (20) For through the anger of the LORD it came to pass in Jerusalem and in Judah that Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon until He cast them out from His presence. (1) And it came to pass in the ninth year of his reign, in the tenth month, the tenth day of the month, that Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came, he and all his army, against Jerusalem; and he camped against it, and built siege towers round about. (2) And the city was besieged unto the eleventh year of King Zedekiah. (3) On the ninth day of the (fourth) month the famine was strong in the city, and there was no bread for the people of the land. (4) And the city was broken into and all the men of war fled by night by the way of the gate between the walls which were beside the garden of the

²⁴ II Kings 24:18 makes it clear that Mattaniah-Zedekiah was a son of Josiah (Hamutal the daughter of Jeremiah of Libnah, was the wife of Josiah and mother of Jehoahaz). See also I Chronicles 3:15. The Hebrew text of II Chronicles 36:10 calls Zedekiah the *brother* of Jehoiachin. "*Brother*" is used here in the general sense of "relative."

king; (now the Chaldeans were against the city round about) and he went by the way of the Arabah. (5) And the Chaldean army pursued after the king, and they caught up with him in the plains of Jordan; and all his army were scattered from him. (6) So they seized the king and they brought him unto the king of Babylon to Riblah; and they pronounced judgment upon him. (7) And the sons of Zedekiah they slew before his eyes; then the eyes of Zedekiah were blinded, and they bound him in bronze fetters, and took him to Babylon.

Nineteenth King of Judah
ZEDEKIAH BEN JOSIAH
597-587 B.C.

(*"Righteousness of Yahweh"*)

II K 24:17–25:21; II C 36:11-21

Contemporary Prophets
Jeremiah; Ezekiel; Daniel

Mother: Hamutal

Appraisal: Bad

"As I live, says the Lord God, Surely in the country of the king who put him on the throne, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he broke, in Babylon he shall die." Ezekiel 17:16

COMMENTS

Zedekiah reigned from 597-587 B.C.²⁵ He was the full brother of Jehoahaz who had been deported to Egypt by Pharaoh Necho in 609 B.C. (cf. II K 23:31). He was the half brother of Jehoiakim (cf. II K 23:36). His father-in-law, *"Jeremiah of Libnah,"* is not the prophet who was of Anathoth (v. 18). Zedekiah allowed the people of Judah to continue their pollutions and abominations (II C 36:14). He ignored the prophetic warning to submit willingly to Babylon and

²⁵ Thiele argues for the date 586 B.C. for the termination of Zedekiah's reign and the fall of Jerusalem.

sought instead by political maneuverings to extricate himself from the grip of Nebuchadnezzar. For these reasons it is said that he did evil in the eyes of the Lord as did Jehoiakim his half brother (v. 19). It was because of God's righteous anger that He permitted this perverse and faithless monarch to sit on the throne of David. The Almighty permitted Zedekiah's stupid and stubborn rebellion against Nebuchadnezzar to proceed unimpeded until finally the cup of Judah's iniquity was full to overflowing. Judah was "*cast out from the presence of the Lord,*" i.e., Judah lost the protecting power of God and thus was left defenseless against national enemies. Yet in spite of the precarious predicament of his people, Zedekiah broke his solemn vassal oath to Nebuchadnezzar and rebelled against his overlord (v. 20).

The reign of Zedekiah was in many respects the most tragic in the history of the people of God. The territory of Judah was diminished, and many of the cities of the land were severely damaged. The population had been drastically reduced through deportation, the upper classes being completely depleted. Zedekiah himself seems to have been at the mercy of his princes. The royal court was bent on rebellion. Jeremiah the prophet thundered forth against the folly of resistance against Babylon,²⁶ but still the political leaders clung to their suicidal course. A brief insurrection in Babylon sparked renewed hope in the western part of the empire. When a new Pharaoh, Psamtik II, came to power in 594 B.C. the little states of Syria-Palestine began to make plans for a concerted effort against Babylon. Ambassadors from Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Sidon met in Jerusalem to plan the rebellion (Jer. 27:3ff.). The plan must have been uncovered, for that very year Zedekiah was summoned to Babylon to reaffirm his allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 51:59ff.). Zedekiah's first major effort to break with Babylon was nipped in the bud.

²⁶ Unlike the Assyrians, the Babylonians did not include worship of their gods as a condition of servitude, and thus there was no theological reason why Judah should not render homage to the Chaldeans. Cf. Finley, BBC, p. 500.

A still more boastful and aggressive Pharaoh took the throne of Egypt in 588 B.C. Pharaoh Apries—Hophra, as he is known in the Bible—actively encouraged a western coalition against Babylon. But the revolt does not seem to have been wide-spread in Syria-Palestine. So far as is known, only Tyre and Ammon seem to have committed themselves. Zedekiah, however, sent ambassadors to Egypt (Ezek. 17:15), and entered wholeheartedly into the rebellion.

The author of Kings is very precise in dating the events of the last days of Judah. Only in chapter 25 does he give the year, month and day of any event, and this he does three times. Extreme exactness with respect to a date indicates the extreme importance of the event dated. Chronologists have computed that the Babylonian army arrived at Jerusalem on January 15, 588 B.C. They blockaded the city and began to systematically eliminate the outlying strong points. The fortified towns of Lachish and Azekah were among the last to fall to the Chaldeans²⁷ (Jer. 34:7). With the fall of these two villages, Zedekiah's communication lines to Egypt were cut. The siege of Jerusalem now began in earnest. Siege towers (KJV "*forts*") were constructed (v. 1). These towers were movable ones, made of planks, which were pushed up to the walls of the city. Such towers enabled the assailants to attack their adversaries with better advantage, being now on a level with the top of the walls. Sometimes these towers contained battering rams.

The author of Kings omits all details of the siege of Jerusalem and passes immediately to the final catastrophe (v. 2). Jeremiah and Ezekiel add significant information at this point. In the summer of 588 B.C. an Egyptian army marched northward toward Jerusalem with the intention of relieving the pressure on Zedekiah. Nebuchadnezzar was forced temporarily

²⁷ In 1935 eighteen ostraca which date to this very time were discovered in the ruins of the ancient fortress city of Lachish. In the main these ostraca are military communiques between a field commander by the name of Hoshayahu and his superior in Lachish whose name was Yaosh. For a discussion of the significance of these letters, see Smith, *JL*, pp. 22-24.

to lift the siege of the city in order to deal with the Egyptian threat (Jer. 37:5; Ezek. 17:17). Apparently with little effort, Nebuchadnezzar was able to send the Egyptians scurrying back home. He then resumed the siege of Jerusalem. The defenders of the city began to suffer from famine (Jer. 21:7, 9; Lam. 2:12, 20). All the bread in the city was consumed by July of 588 B.C.²⁶ (v. 3). Famine was followed by pestilence (Jer. 21:6-7), and after a time the city was reduced to the last extremity (Lam. 4:10).

On July 29, 587 B.C. after a siege of eighteen months, the Babylonians were able to make a breach in the walls of Jerusalem, probably on the north side of the city. Zedekiah and the men of war who were left fled from Jerusalem on the south side by means of a gate which opened into the Tyropoeon valley, between the two great walls that guarded the town on either side of it. The escape route took Zedekiah and his men by the "*king's gardens*" which were located near the Pool of Siloam. Under cover of darkness, the desperate Jews slipped past the Babylonian outposts and made their way in the direction of the Arabah, the plains region near Jordan. "*The way toward the Arabah*" is the ordinary road from Jerusalem to Jericho. It would appear that Zedekiah was attempting to reach one of the friendly lands beyond the river.

When the escape of Zedekiah and his soldiers was discovered, the Babylonians set out in hot pursuit. Doubtless, the commander at Jerusalem was incensed to learn that the king had successfully abandoned the city. A company of soldiers was dispatched immediately to pursue the fugitives. When the Babylonians came within sight, the troops of Zedekiah deserted him (v. 5). The king was taken captive without any resistance and was transported north to Riblah where Nebuchadnezzar had made his headquarters. There the rebel stood trial before the Babylonian princes (v. 6). The judgment against Zedekiah

²⁶ From the information given here and in Jeremiah 52, it cannot be determined whether the bread was exhausted in the fourth month of Zedekiah's *tenth* year (July, 587) or fourth month of his *eleventh* year (July 587 B.C.).

probably corresponded to the self-maledictions which he had pronounced at the time he swore allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar. He was forced to witness the execution of his young sons.²⁹ This turned out to be the last sight Zedekiah had on earth, for the Babylonians blinded him, probably by means of a red-hot iron rod.³⁰ The Babylonians then put Zedekiah in fetters of bronze and carried him away to Babylon (v. 7) where he remained in prison until the day of his death (Jer. 52:11).

VI. THE DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM AND THE DEPORTATION OF THE JEWS 25:8-17

TRANSLATION

(8) And in the fifth month, the seventh day of the month, it being the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard the servant of the king of Babylon came to Jerusalem. (9) And he burned the house of the LORD and the house of the king and all the houses of Jerusalem, and every great house he burned with fire. (10) And all the army of the Chaldeans which was with the captain of the guard broke down the wall of Jerusalem round about. (11) And the rest of the people who remained in the city, both the deserters who had gone over to the king of Babylon and the rest of the multitude, Nebuzaradan carried away. (12) But the captain of the guard left some of the poor of the land to cultivate vineyards and till the soil. (13) And the bronze pillars which were in the house of the LORD and the bases and the bronze sea which was in the house of the LORD the Chaldeans smashed, and they carried the bronze of them to

²⁹ As Zedekiah was no more than thirty-two years old (cf. 24:18), his sons must have been minors.

³⁰ Zedekiah's loss of eyesight reconciled the two apparently conflicting prophecies—that he would be carried captive to Babylon (Jer. 22:5), and that he would never see Babylon (Ezek. 12:13).

Babylon. (14) And the ash pans and the shovels and the knives and the incense cups and all the vessels of bronze with which they ministered they took. (15) And the small dishes and the bowls, those which were of gold in gold, and those which were of silver in silver, the captain of the guard took. (16) The two pillars, the one sea, the bases which Solomon had made for the house of the LORD, the bronze of all these vessels was without weight. (17) Eighteen cubits high was the one pillar and the capital upon it was bronze; and the height of the capital was three cubits, and the wreathen work and pomegranates upon the capital round about all of bronze; and like unto this was the second pillar with wreathen work.

COMMENTS

Following the capitulation of Jerusalem, the Babylonian soldiers awaited further instructions concerning the fate of the city. A month after the successful breaching of the walls, Nebuzaradan, the captain of the guard, arrived from Riblah with the orders of Nebuchadnezzar. The text of Kings and Jeremiah seem to be at variance as to the date that Nebuzaradan arrived at Jerusalem. According to the former account he arrived on the seventh day of the month, while in the latter it is said to have been the tenth day of the month (Jer. 52:12). The simplest solution is that Nebuzaradan arrived *at* Jerusalem on the seventh day and for some unexplained reason did not enter Jerusalem until the tenth day of the month.³¹ The author adds the important chronological note that Jerusalem fell in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar.³²

Nebuzaradan's orders were to destroy Jerusalem and prepare its inhabitants for deportation to Babylon. The entire

³¹ In the Hebrew the word Jerusalem has no preposition attached to it in II Kings 25:8 but has the preposition *beth* in Jeremiah 52:12.

³² Cf. Jeremiah 52:12. The nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar, counting by the non-accession year method, would have begun in the spring of 587 B.C.

city was burned, including the palace of the king, houses of the nobles, and the Temple itself (v. 9). The Babylonians had no regard for the sacred precincts of conquered peoples. To prevent the city from ever again becoming a haven for rebels, the massive walls of Jerusalem were broken down (v. 10).³³

The people who remained behind in Jerusalem when Zedekiah and the soldiers fled, and those who had deserted to the Babylonians during the course of the siege were ordered to prepare for deportation (v. 11). Only the very poorest of the citizens were allowed to remain in the land (v. 12). The Babylonians did not wish the area to lie waste, since it could then have paid no tribute.

Before setting fire to the Temple, the Babylonians had plundered that edifice of all its treasures. The giant pillars of bronze—Jachin and Boaz—cast by Hiram under the directions of Solomon (I K 7:15-22) were broken up to facilitate transportation to Babylon. The same applies to the ornate bases which Solomon had constructed for the portable lavers (cf. I K 7:27-37) as well as the mammoth laver called the sea of bronze (v. 13). Bronze was of great value in this period, being used for vessels, arms and other implements. All of the smaller items of bronze which were used in the sacrificial ritual were also carried off by the Babylonians (v. 14), along with what few vessels of gold and silver that still remained from the previous spoils of the Temple in 605 and 597 B.C. (v. 15).

Babylonian scribes usually noted the weight of all captured precious metals very carefully. But so much bronze was carried away by the conquerors that it was thought to be an impossible task to weigh it all (v. 16). An enormous amount of bronze came from the two massive pillars, each of which was eighteen cubits (twenty-seven feet) tall and surmounted by a capital

³³ Some commentators think that several massive portions of the wall may have been destroyed but not the entirety. However, the text gives the impression that the entire wall was destroyed.

three cubits (4½ feet)³⁴ tall, which was in turn decorated with a bronze wreathen work or network (v. 17). An even more elaborate description of these pillars is given in Jeremiah 52:21.

VII. THE AFTERMATH OF THE FALL OF JERUSALEM 25:18-30

Chapter 25 closes with a series of notices which are somewhat in the nature of an appendix. The author speaks here of (1) the execution of certain Jewish leaders (vv. 18-21); (2) the appointment and assassination of Gedaliah (vv. 22-26); and (3) the release of King Jehoiachin (vv. 27-30).

A. THE EXECUTION OF JEWISH LEADERS 25:18-21

TRANSLATION

(18) And the captain of the guard took Seraiah the chief priest and Zephaniah the second priest and three of the keepers of the threshold; (19) and from the city he took an officer who was appointed over the men of war, and five men from those who had served in the presence of the king which were found in the city, and the scribe of the captain of the host, the one who mustered the people of the land, and sixty men from the people of the land which were found in the city; (20) and Nebuzaradan the captain of the guard took them, and brought them unto the king of Babylon to Riblah. (21) And the king of Babylon smote them, and slew them in Riblah in the land of Hamath. So Judah went captive from upon their land.

³⁴ According to I K 7:16 and Jeremiah 52:22 the capitals were *five* cubits high. Perhaps the smaller figure represents the actual height of the capital *above* the pillar while the larger figure represents the total height of the capital including the part thereof that lapped over the top of the pillar.

COMMENTS

To the account of the fall of Jerusalem is appended a listing of the prominent persons taken to Riblah and executed before Nebuchadnezzar. Nebuzaradan selected those who were highest in authority and therefore most responsible for the prolonged resistance of Jerusalem. First, the author mentions the religious leaders who met this untimely death. At the head of these officials was Seraiah "*the chief of priests.*" Seraiah came from a noble line of priests, being the grandson of the great priest Hilkiah who had assisted so ably in the reforms under good King Josiah. After Seraiah, Zephaniah "*the second priest*" is named. It is not entirely clear what the office of "second priest" entailed. According to II Kings 23:4 there were several second priests. This Zephaniah is probably the Zephaniah son of Maaseiah of whom so much is said in the Book of Jeremiah.³⁵ Three "*keepers of the threshold*" were also among those executed at Riblah. These must have been high-ranking clergy who supervised the four thousand Levites (I C 23:5) whose duty it was to prevent any disturbance or desecration of the Temple (v. 18).

In the second category of those executed at Riblah are certain officials of state. The first such official is not named but is designated as "*the officer that was set over the men of war.*" Some commentators have suggested that this gentleman was the general who commanded the city garrison; others propose that he was a civilian official equivalent to minister of defense or the like. "*Five men who saw the king's face,*" i.e., who were part of the king's personal entourage, were also executed.³⁶ The "*scribe of the captain of the host*" is next listed among the officials who were slain. His job had been to "*muster the people of the land.*" A scribe in Old Testament times was not merely

³⁵ See Jeremiah 21:1; 29:25-29; 37:3.

³⁶ Jeremiah 52:25 mentions *seven* such courtiers who were slain. Perhaps two such officials were slain either sometime before or sometime after the massacre being narrated in II Kings 25. Jeremiah would then be giving the totals whereas Kings would be giving only partial figures of one specific execution.

a stenographer. Some of the highest officials of state are called scribes. This particular "scribe" was likely the head of the war department of Judah (v. 19). All these prisoners were brought before King Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah (v. 20) and were slain.³⁷ All the other important people of Judah were deported to Babylon (v. 21).³⁸

B. THE APPOINTMENT AND ASSASSINATION
OF GEDALIAH 25:22-26

TRANSLATION

(22) As for the people who were left in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left, he appointed over them Gedaliah son of Ahikam son of Shaphan. (23) When all the captains of the armies heard, they and the men, that the king of Babylon had appointed Gedaliah, they came unto Gedaliah to Mizpah, even Ishmael son of Nethaniah, Johanan the son of Kareah, Seraiah son of Tanhumeth, (the sons of Ephai) the Netophathite, and Jaazaniah son of a Maachathite, they and their men. (24) And Gedaliah swore to them and to their men, and said to them, Do not fear because of the servants of the Chaldeans. Dwell in the land and serve the king of Babylon, and it shall be well with you. (25) And it came to pass in the seventh month, that Ishmael son of Nethaniah son of Elishama of the royal seed and ten men with him came and smote Gedaliah, so that he died along with the Jews and the Chaldeans who were with him in Mizpah. (26) And all the people from the least to the greatest, and the captains of the armies arose, and went to Egypt; for they feared because of the Chaldeans.

³⁷ Whether or not this was the same day on which Zedekiah's sons were slain and his eyes blinded cannot be determined.

³⁸ For a discussion of the problems relating to the numbers of Jews carried away to Babylon, see Smith, JL, pp. 832-34.

COMMENTS

After the fall of Jerusalem, Judah became a province of the Babylonian empire. The Holy City had been completely destroyed, reduced to a heap of ashes. But it was not the intention of Nebuchadnezzar to leave the whole land desolate. The Great King appointed Gedaliah, a member of a prominent Jewish family, as governor over the poor of the land whom he had left behind. Gedaliah was an ideal choice. He came from a God-fearing and influential family³⁹ which through the years had supported the contention of Jeremiah that Nebuchadnezzar had been appointed by God to be ruler of the world. Some conjecture—and they are probably correct—that Gedaliah had followed the advice of Jeremiah and defected to the Chaldeans early in the siege of Jerusalem. Under the leadership of Gedaliah, Nebuchadnezzar intended to create in Judah a self-governing commonwealth under Babylonian sovereignty. The Great King hoped to maintain the loyalty of the new colony by granting to them as much freedom as possible, especially freedom of religion. Thus he hoped to create a state in western Asia upon which he could depend in any future showdown with Egypt (v. 22).

The wisdom of Nebuchadnezzar's choice of Gedaliah became evident at once. Gedaliah immediately launched into a program of reconstruction. His first goal was to unite the various factions into which the remnant of the people was divided. Scattered throughout the land were small guerrilla bands which had somehow escaped capture and destruction by the Chaldean army. Once the main body of foreign troops withdrew, these guerrilla units either came voluntarily or were summoned to Mizpah. Among those named as meeting with Gedaliah at Mizpah are Ishmael who later turned traitor and murdered Gedaliah; Johanan the son of Kareah who later led the remnant

³⁹ Gedaliah's father, Ahikam, had once protected Jeremiah when he was on trial for his life (Jer. 26:24). His grandfather Shaphan had been secretary of state under the godly King Josiah (II K 22:8).

to Egypt; Seraiah the son of Tanhumeth; the sons of Ephai⁴⁰ who hailed from the town of Netophah near Bethlehem; and Jaazaniah (called Jezaniah in Jer. 42:1) the son of Hoshai⁴¹ who hailed from the Aramean region of Maachah which adjoined Bashan on the north (v. 23).

Gedaliah honestly and forthrightly presented his program to those captains, and urged them to use their influence to secure peace throughout the land. First, he assured these soldiers that they had no reason to fear serving the Chaldeans. It may be that Gedaliah used his influence to secure from Nebuchadnezzar amnesty for all those who participated in the war against Babylon. In the second place, Gedaliah called upon these leaders and their followers to dwell peacefully in the land and render service to the king of Babylon. If they continued to do this, he promised them a life of peace (v. 24).

The tranquility of the tiny remnant in Palestine was soon shattered. Ishmael, a member of the royal family, began plotting behind the scenes to assassinate Gedaliah. Just what motivated Ishmael in this ruthless plot is not clear. It may be that he resented the fact that Gedaliah had been appointed governor rather than a member of the royal family. On the other hand, Ishmael may have despised and hated Gedaliah for collaborating with the Babylonians. Whatever the explanation for the dastardly deed which he committed, it is clear that Ishmael was being used as a political pawn of Baalis, the king of Ammon. Baalis must have coveted the territory of Judah for himself and decided that Gedaliah was standing in the way (cf. Jer. 40:14).

Gedaliah was warned of the treacherous plot against him but gave no heed to the report (Jer. 40:13, 14). In the seventh

⁴⁰ The words "*and the sons of Ephai*" have apparently dropped out of the text of Kings and are to be supplied from the parallel passage in Jeremiah 40:8.

⁴¹ Jeremiah 42:1.

month⁴² Ishmael set his plan in motion. He and ten cutthroats proceeded to Mizpah. Suspecting nothing, Gedaliah entertained these men hospitably (Jer. 41:1). During the course of the banquet, Ishmael and his men rose up suddenly and slew the governor, the Jewish officials who served with him, and his Babylonian bodyguard (v. 25). Josephus the Jewish historian adds the tradition that Gedaliah was intoxicated at the time he was murdered. Throughout the exile the Jews observed the third day of the seventh month as a fast day to commemorate the assassination of Gedaliah (cf. Zech. 7:5; 8:19).

The Book of Jeremiah expands at great length on the events associated with the death of Gedaliah. On the very next day Ishmael massacred seventy innocent pilgrims who were making their way to the ruins of the Jerusalem Temple to worship (Jer. 41:4-9). The women, children and older men who were left in Mizpah were taken captive by Ishmael before the murderer and his men hastily made their way toward Ammon. Fortunately Johanan and the other guerrilla captains heard of what had happened and intercepted Ishmael at Gibeon. The hostages were rescued, but Ishmael and his men escaped (Jer. 41:10-16). Fearful of Babylonian retaliations, the scared remnant departed immediately for Egypt. At their first camping spot near Bethlehem, Jeremiah pleaded with them to trust the Lord and remain in the land (Jer. 41:17—42:22). But the worldly captains accused Jeremiah of attempting to deceive them, and so they pushed on toward Egypt⁴³ (v. 26).

⁴² Unfortunately the narrator has failed to mention the year in which the assassination took place. Does he mean that Gedaliah was assassinated in the same year in which Jerusalem was captured and burned? If so, then Gedaliah's governorship lasted only about three months. It is perhaps better (though certainly not necessary) to think here in terms of a governorship which lasted a few years. The Babylonians attempted to avenge the death of Governor Gedaliah in 582 B.C. (Jer. 52:30). If Gedaliah died in the seventh month of 587 B.C. it would be difficult to explain why it took the Babylonians six years to respond to the new rebellion in Judah.

⁴³ On the activities of the remnant in Egypt and Jeremiah's prophecies against them, see Jeremiah 43:8—44:30.

C. THE RELEASE OF KING JEHOIACHIN 25:27-30

TRANSLATION

(27) And it came to pass in the thirty-seventh year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-seventh day of the month, that Evil-Merodach king of Babylon in his accession year lifted up the head of Jehoiachin king of Judah from the prison. (28) And he spoke kindly with him, and he put his throne above the kings which were with him in Babylon. (29) And he changed his prison garments, and did eat bread continually before him all the days of his life. (30) And his allowance was a continual allowance given him by the king day by day all the days of his life.

COMMENTS

The Book of Kings closes with an account of the release of King Jehoiachin who had been taken to Babylon in 597 B.C. Until the end of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Judah was kept in prison. But when the Great King died in 562 B.C. his son Evil-Merodach⁴⁴ ("stupid one of Marduk") "*lifted up the head of Jehoiachin,*" i.e., restored him to royal favor, and ordered him released from prison. According to the precise chronological information recorded here, this encouraging development occurred on the twenty-seventh day⁴⁵ of the twelfth month in the thirty-seventh year of Jehoiachin's captivity (v. 27). It may be that Daniel and the other highly esteemed Jews at the Babylonian court used their influence to secure the release of the imprisoned king. This might also

⁴⁴ Evil-Merodach is a parody on the actual name of this king which was Amel-Marduk ("man of Marduk").

⁴⁵ Jeremiah 52:31 reads "*twenty-fifth day.*" Perhaps Jeremiah refers to the day the official decree was signed which laid the legal foundation for the release; the other account, the actual day that King Jehoiachin left the prison.

account for the favor bestowed upon Jehoiachin when his throne was placed above the thrones of the other captive kings in Babylon. The presence of these kings each on a throne of honor was thought to enhance the dignity of Evil-Merodach (v. 28).

The Babylonian king supplied suitable garments to the released monarch and invited him to dine daily at his royal table. Jehoiachin enjoyed this dignity until the day of his death (v. 29). In addition, Jehoiachin received a daily allowance⁴⁶ of all that he needed for himself and his family, besides the food which he enjoyed at the royal table (v. 30). The release and subsequent elevation of Jehoiachin no doubt bolstered the morale of the Jewish captives and made them ever more confident that one day God would fulfill His promise to put an end to their banishment and restore them to their native land.

THE CHRONOLOGY OF JUDAH ⁴⁷			
609-587 B.C.			
YEAR	MONTH/DAY	REFERENCE	EVENT
609	June ?	II K 23:29-30 II C 35:20-24	Josiah killed at Megiddo
609	June- August ?		Reign of Jehoahaz
609	August ?		Jehoiakim became king. His first official year began in October 609.
605	May/June	Jer. 25:1; 46:2 DOTT, p. 79	Battle of Carchemish—fourth year of Jehoiakim. Nebuchadnezzar smashed army of Pharaoh Necho.
605	August 15	DOTT, p. 79	Nabopolassar died in Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar returned home to be crowned king. He ascended the throne on September 7.
604	May/June	DOTT, p. 79 Dan. 1:1 II K 24:1	Jehoiakim submitted to Nebuchadnezzar. The first deportation to Babylon.

Continued on next page

⁴⁶ Contemporary economic documents discovered in Nebuchadnezzar's palace contain lists of the daily rations of food given to the royal prisoners from various lands. Jehoiachin and his five sons are mentioned in these texts. In comparison to the quantity of rations given to other prisoners, Jehoiachin and his sons fared very well indeed.

THE DYING DAYS OF JUDAH 25:27-30

Continued from previous page

<p>At this point Jehoiakim seems to have adopted the Babylonian method of counting regnal years from the spring. Presumably Jehoiakim's fifth year was extended to the following spring, i.e., the spring of 603 B.C. The key to the chronology of Judah during this period is Jeremiah 25:1 which equates Jehoiakim year 4 with Nebuchadnezzar's accession year.</p>			
YEAR	MONTH/DAY	REFERENCE	EVENT
601		ANET, p. 564 II K 24:1	Nebuchadnezzar defeated the Egyptians; Jehoiakim rebelled after serving Nebuchadnezzar three years—604-601 B.C.
598	Dec. 9	II C 36:6 II K 24:6	Jehoiakim died.
598-597	Dec. 9- March 16	II C 36:9	Jehoiachin reigned three months and ten days.
598	After Dec. 18	DOTT, p. 80	Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem.
597	March 16	DOTT, p. 80	Jerusalem surrendered to Nebuchadnezzar. Jehoiachin taken captive.
597	March 16- April 13		The accession year of Zedekiah.
597	April 13		The first day of Nisan when Zedekiah began his first official year of reign.
588	Jan. 15	II K 25:1 Jer. 39:1 Ezek. 24:1	Beginning of the final siege of Jerusalem.
587	July 29	II K 25:2-4	Babylonians make a breach in the walls of Jerusalem.
587	August 25	II K 25:8 Jer. 53:12	Jerusalem burned.

REVIEW OF CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

I. FACTS TO MASTER

A. Names of Importance:

⁴⁷ Based on information contained in Finegan, HBC.

- | | | |
|-------------------|-----------------|---------------|
| 1. Necho | 8. Mattaniah | 15. Ishmael |
| 2. Josiah | 9. Zedekiah | 16. Johanan |
| 3. Jehoahaz | 10. Jeremiah | 17. Jaazaniah |
| 4. Eliakim | 11. Nebuzaradan | 18. Evil- |
| 5. Jehoiakim | 12. Seraiah | Merodach |
| 6. Nebuchadnezzar | 13. Zephaniah | |
| 7. Jehoiachin | 14. Gedaliah | |

B. Places of Importance:

- | | |
|--------------|----------------------|
| 1. Euphrates | 5. Babylon |
| 2. Megiddo | 6. Plains of Jericho |
| 3. Riblah | 7. Mizpah |
| 4. Egypt | 8. Brook of Egypt |

C. Important Dates and Numbers

- | | |
|-------------|----------------|
| 1. 605 B.C. | 4. 582 B.C. |
| 2. 597 B.C. | 5. 10,000 |
| 3. 587 B.C. | 6. three years |

II. QUESTIONS TO PONDER

1. Why did Pharaoh Necho march north through Palestine in 609 B.C.? Why did Josiah attempt to withstand Necho at Megiddo?
2. When Josiah was killed, why did the people of the land bypass the heir apparent (Eliakim) and make Jehoahaz king?
3. List the events in the Book of Jeremiah which transpired during the reign of Jehoiakim. (See Jeremiah volume, in *Bible Study Textbook Series*, pp. 73-74.)
4. Evaluate the character of Jehoiakim.
5. How did Jehoiakim meet his death? What happened to his corpse?
6. What problem exists as to the age of Jehoiachin when he assumed the throne? How is the problem solved?
7. What archaeological finds shed light on the reign and captivity of Jehoiachin?
8. How many different Chaldean campaigns against Judah can be documented? On which of these were Jews

THE DYING DAYS OF JUDAH 25:27-30

- carried away to Babylon?
9. How long did the final siege of Jerusalem last? What additional information about the siege can be gleaned from sources outside the Book of Kings?
 10. What tragic fate befell Zedekiah? What lessons are underscored by his fate?
 11. Why was Gedaliah selected to govern Judah after the fall of Jerusalem? Evaluate his administration.
 12. Why was the remnant of Jews so determined to emigrate to Egypt after the assassination of Gedaliah? What advice did Jeremiah give them? What warning?
 13. Why did the author of Kings choose to close his book with the account of the release of Jehoiachin?

DEPORTATIONS TO BABYLON			
Date	References	Numbers	Notes
605	Daniel 1:1 II Chron. 36:6, 7		Daniel and his three friends taken
597	II Kings 24:13-16 Jeremiah 52:28 Ezekiel 1:2 II Chron. 36:10a	10,000 3,023	Ezekiel taken
587	II Kings 25:3-7 Jeremiah 52:29	832	Zedekiah blinded, taken captive
582	Jeremiah 52:30	745	

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- ABH Joseph P. Free, *Archaeology and Bible History* (ninth edition; Wheaton, Illinois: Scripture Press, 1966).
- AI Roland deVaux, *Ancient Israel, Its Life and Institutions*, trans. John McHugh (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961).
- AJSL *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*.
- ANET James B. Pritchard (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (third edition; Princeton, New Jersey: University Press, 1969).
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