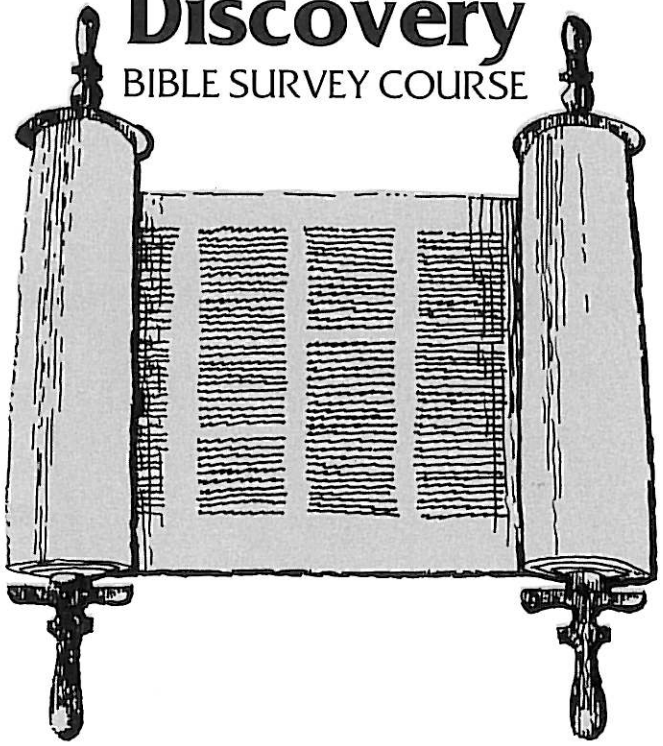
Discovery
BIBLE SURVEY COURSE



Book 2

Discover the Kingdom People

Maynard Shelly

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Table of Contents

Open the Bible, and you find words. Taking meaning from these words and the sentences that they form, we've come to a notion of what the Bible has to tell us. An understanding of Scripture based on a reading of its words has served us well. Yet we are sometimes puzzled. Some words conceal when we want them to reveal.

We need not read far into the Bible before we sense that behind its words are people—men and women with, we suppose, feelings and fears much like ours. Yet they lived two to three thousand years ago. After such a long time, do we really share their view of the world? Can we brush aside the mists of the centuries that have passed and reach out to the people behind the words?

Can we flesh out the words of the Bible with the women and men who encountered the God of Scripture? To meet those people in their world brings the Bible right into experiences within our own lives.

So much to learn about the Bible people

Discoveries about the people of the Bible have exploded in recent years and decades. The fruits of these explorations have filtered down to us ever so slowly and in piecemeal form. Snatches of these studies have been cloaked in controversy and have been confounded by arguments about meaning and value. Too often, well-meaning leaders of the church have decided that people should be protected from knowledge which might be unsettling. Yet, for the most part, such information enlightens and enriches.

To the four books in this *Discovery* series, we have tried to bring the most important results of the revival of Bible research in our day. We want to share those findings that over the years are commonly agreed to be reliable without entering into all the technical details. Much of this material is still under study and future research may change or improve the insights about the people of the Bible and the ways in which the Bible came to be. Only as we enter into that ongoing journey, can we be part of that continuing search for the people of the Bible and their understanding of the God who met them on their pilgrimage.

Introduction

What *Discovery* is not

This series of books is not a Bible study nor a study of the books of the Bible. Neither is it a commentary on the Bible to interpret its meaning and teaching. Here, we intend only to give you the people of the Bible and a piece of the world in which they lived. Having met them, you can enter into your own study of the Bible as you begin with the meaning that these writings first had for these Bible people.

We have not handled matters of doctrine or theology, not because we feel these have little value, but because we regard them as so important that all who come to discuss them should first know the witness of the Bible itself. As we broaden the base of our Bible knowledge, we are better able to understand what the Bible teaches and how to apply those doctrines to our day.

Yahweh in the Bible text

We have made one change in the text used for quotations from the Bible (RSV). From earliest times, the Israelite name for God was Yahweh. Yet, when the words of Scripture were fixed on paper, a time had come in the life of Israel when the name of God was no longer spoken,

the syllables being regarded as too holy to be sounded on human lips. It was not even written, being recorded only in the form of a code which is translated and written in our traditional versions as LORD.

Knowing now the earlier form of the name of God in the life of Israel, we have chosen to use that title to recall the feeling for the power of the holy name. Yet we also want to remember the link between Yahweh and LORD, for when we come to the people of the New Testament, and we find them speaking of Jesus as Lord, we feel something more of their witness and conviction.

Themes that carry meaning

As you walk with the people of the Book, you will discover words and ideas important to them. Here are several that you will find.

Covenant. Abraham, Moses, David, and their people had a conviction of a special relationship with God, a feeling of being chosen. The covenant was their link to God. Much of their journey included a search for the meaning of this special bond. Whom did it include? What did it mean to be included? Was anyone left out? Through the covenant, they came to learn about God. And as they experienced God in their own lives, they began to see covenant in a new light.

Kingdom. King and kingdom sparked debate: should the people of God have a king or not? The question wasn't answered even after the people took a king and the king took them. Wasn't God their king? Was the kingdom the same as the covenant? And when the kingdom of God's people fell before a pagan empire, could they hope for a kingdom restored? When we meet the people of the New Testament, we find them still working with the meaning of kingdom.

Grace and salvation. The people of the New Testament moved on to talk about grace and salvation, yet they had not left covenant and kingdom behind. They only added new dimension to the former questions of belonging and response. They had found new ways of knowing God and understanding the plan of God.

Jerusalem. The convictions of the Bible people had important links with history, the most outstanding of which were related to Jerusalem. The two disasters that befell the holy city—the first fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. and the second in A.D. 70—bracket a most important era. Each fall of Jerusalem left its stamp on the soul of the people. The first gets much mention in their writings. The second receives no direct reporting at all, but its shadow hovers over much of the New Testament.

We have entered into their lives when we wrestle with them about these watershed events which shaped so much of what they came to affirm about God and the way in which they reponded to their God.

Revelation and history

In the Bible, we find a history, albeit, a special kind of history. In one sense, it is God's history, but it is also our history. That's what makes the Bible so special. It belongs both to God and to us. The Bible is the history of God's revelation—a revelation through history.

God entered into history, making it the arena of revelation: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father" (John 1:14); " 'his name shall be called Emmanuel' (which means, God with us)" (Matt. 1:23).

The faith that Jesus Christ is Lord of Scripture has special application not just when we come to study the teachings of the Bible. That faith also has a special meaning for revelation. The Christ-event confirms that history is God's arena and God's way of revealing. Through Jesus, God entered into the life of our world as Jesus "himself likewise partook of the same nature" (Heb. 2:14) and became a part of our life.

In the incarnation of Jesus, God shared our flesh and our history. If within the humanity of Jesus lies a profound understanding of God's revelation, the divine use of history has an equally important application for the way we study the Bible.

Since the Bible is history, we can come to it using the methods that we have learned for understanding our world. This makes this book different from many other surveys of the Bible which have seen history as less important.

The historical method opens up the Bible. It brings meaning to the words of the Bible by introducing us first of all to the people behind the words and the world in which they lived. This approach to the Bible is both simple and profound. It is simple because each living person is a historian and has a sense of his or her own history. Such a study is also profound because through it, revelation overtakes us. Within the sum of words, people, and events, we find God at work. Yesterday's people of faith called this revelation as do all believers today.

Discovery with inspiration and authority

The journey we undertake here promises many rewards. We will make new friends from an ancient time because we will have traveled with them. Our lives will be broadened by sympathy for their witness and their loyalty and by our own sharing in the rigors of their test of faith.

The inspiration and authority of Scripture will have new meaning for us for we will find it more than a proposition about the meaning of words, but something made real by the living witness of people who received a revelation from God and carried it faithfully from generation to generation. The power of this witness will be multiplied many times over as we discover how wonderfully God has worked.

How to Use This Series

This study will require dedication and discipline from individuals and groups. The emphasis here is on learning. The mastery of facts requires careful reading and study, but the effort invested is small compared to the rewards.

As aids for learning, three features are included with each chapter: Journal, Inventory, and Discovery.

JOURNAL—For individual study at home

The journey begins with the reading of the portion of Scripture assigned in Journal. After that, follow the directions for making entries into a notebook. Putting your observations into words and writing them down is the first step in getting a firm grip on facts. What you write will stay with you many times longer than what you have only read and left unwritten. A notebook will help you keep your work together in one place for quick reference and encourage you to stick to the job.

In your readings, we want you to sample each type of literature and gain experience in making your own observations of the words read. At the same time, you will begin to make connections between the Bible people and the world in which they lived. Before long you will have a diary (or journal) of your journey into the world of the people of the Bible.

After your work with your Journal, you will be ready to read the chapter. You will find places where your observations will be confirmed. You may also come upon material that may differ from what you have written. Note these in your Journal. You may wish to report these items to your Discovery group meeting for testing and perhaps for further research and study.

INVENTORY—Measuring your factual knowledge

With each chapter, we have included Inventory, a review of some of the important items given in the chapter. This self-test will help you to hold onto facts both old and new, and to store them in a ready place in your mind.

Make Inventory a part of your Journal. The answers to these questions are within the text of the chapter itself. If you find you have overlooked a particular item, a quick review of the chapter should turn up the needed data.

DISCOVERY—Sharing and learning from others

As writing helps us to learn, telling someone else about what we have found makes that discovery a nearly permanent part of our lives. Those who have studied the chapter and recorded their findings will profit from meeting together with others who have done the same. The purpose of the meeting will not be to hear a lecture on the material covered but to review what each person has learned in his or her individual study of the chapter.

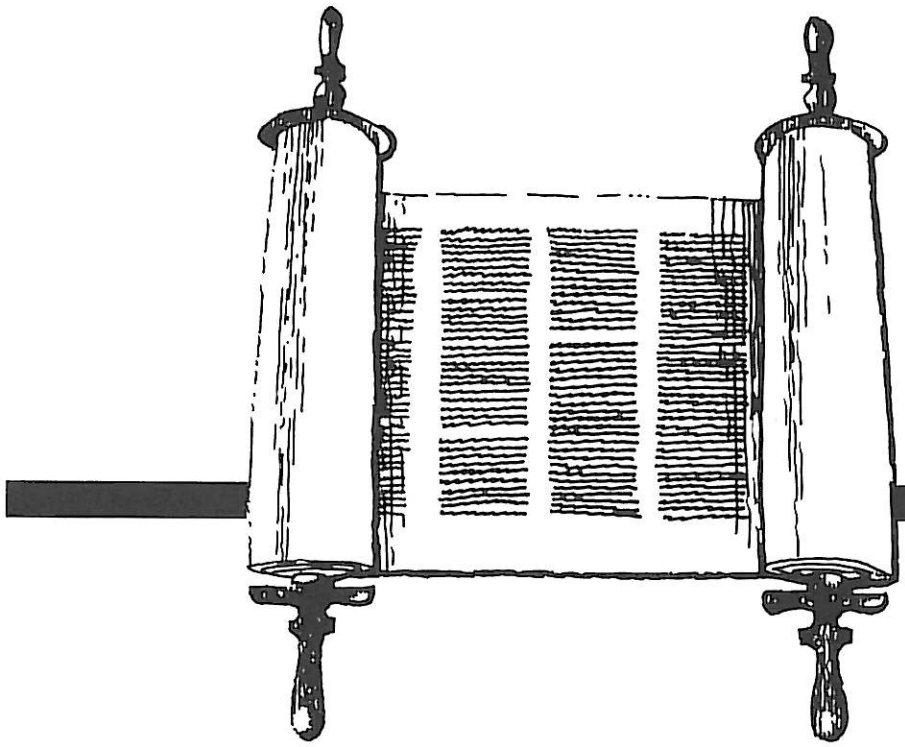
The leader of this session can be a fellow learner and does not need to be one who has mastered all the material. In this class of learners, the members will examine each other on what they have studied and learn from each other. Some groups may want to rotate leadership of the Discovery meetings among some or all of the members of the group.

Start each meeting by collecting each person's leading insight gained from the study of the chapter. Take time to discuss this list, which you may wish to post on a chalkboard or a large sheet of paper.

Then, list each person's chief unanswered question arising out of the study of the chapter. Help each other find answers to these questions. If no answers seem available, check the resource readings or other materials in your church or public library.

Then, discuss the questions and issues suggested in Discovery. Do not feel that you need to cover one chapter in each meeting. You may find it more profitable to spend two sessions on a particular chapter rather than to rush through the book.

Remember that the aim of this study is to learn about the Bible people and the world in which they lived. You will be tempted sometimes to discuss matters of interpretation and application of various biblical teachings. These are important and deserve treatment. But we are better able to deal with these issues once we have broader background in the experiences of the people who first received the revelations recorded in Scripture. Thus, there is value in keeping to the purpose of this particular series of studies.



PART IV

The Beginning of Nationhood

CHAPTER 9

The Settlement of the Land

2

Gist

The tribes of Israel came to Canaan at a good time. God fought for them and gave them the land. But they did not enter into their inheritance easily. Most trying was the task of building the community that would serve Yahweh. Beset by enemies and temptations, the people were often defeated and overcome by sin. Sometimes, spirit-filled judges appeared to save them, heroes who might have been models for the kings who were to come later.

Had the story of Israel come to an end when the people arrived in the Promised Land? So it must have seemed to the scribe who put this benediction on Israel's history: "Thus Yahweh gave to Israel all the land which he swore to give to their fathers; and having taken possession of it, they settled there. . . . Not one of all the good promises which Yahweh had made to the house of Israel had failed; all came to pass" (Josh. 21:43, 45).

Promises all fulfilled? Far from it. This was just the beginning. In the Hebrew Old Testament, Joshua begins the section called the *Former Prophets* which also includes Judges, Samuel, and Kings. These books comprise what is sometimes called the *Deuteronomistic history* because the writers who assembled these records have a point of view similar to that of the Book of Deuteronomy.

These editors worked during the years after the fall of Jerusalem. They took the old records of the conquest of the land and added their own material and comments. Writing from a time when Israel no longer possessed the land, they had a critical view of what had taken place more than five hundred years earlier.

Thus, when we come to Joshua and Judges, we need to read history with two eyes. With one eye, we look as best we can at what really happened. With the other, we look at these events from the point of view of God's people during a painful period wanting to see what went wrong in their history. They were, in a sense, trying to show how the people should act should they ever get a chance to run their own affairs once more.

The big powers were powerless

During the mid-thirteenth century B.C., Canaan was relatively free from outside interference from the big powers of the Fertile Crescent. Egypt had just beaten back an invasion from the People of the Sea (the Philistines). But in order to defend its homeland, Egypt had to pull its forces back from the outer edges of its empire, including the city-states of Canaan.

The major power in the north had been the Hittite Empire with the

center of its strength in the highlands of what is now eastern Turkey. But the People of the Sea were also moving into the Hittite domain and in 1240 B.C., the Hittite empire fell, never to rise again.

In Mesopotamia, the king of Assyria had been assassinated, and the country would be in turmoil for almost a century. Assyria, barely able to defend its own borders, was not able to take over in Palestine and Syria what Egypt had let slip from its grasp.

So, as the tribes of Israel were approaching from the desert, the city-states of Canaan were somewhat independent, absorbed with their own internal problems. No longer able to obtain help from the Egyptians, the kings found their grip on their little kingdoms slipping away. According to the letters written by the Canaanite kings to the pharaohs of Egypt (which are in the file of Amarna letters), some of the people causing the most trouble were the Habiru, the group of poor people, slaves, and mercenary soldiers who appeared at various times in Mesopotamia and Egypt, as well as Canaan.

Advanced culture and backward religion

Though politically weak, the Canaanites had reached a high state of cultural development. Their cities were well built, their gates and fortifications strong. They had good drainage systems and deep wells inside their walls to assure a safe supply of water in case of siege. The rich lived in luxurious houses, while the many poor people lived in hovels.

The Canaanites of the city of Byblos had already developed a syllabic script for writing their language. They also had a linear alphabet which eventually became the standard for other languages, including English. Without a doubt, theirs was a literate and progressive society.

But when it came to religion, the Canaanites were less advanced. Their worship of Baal centered in fertility rites aimed at resurrecting the gods and nature through imitative worship that included debasing sexual acts. It was the kind of religion that the prophets of the people from the desert would find repulsive. Though the Israelites would take over many things from the Canaanite culture, they would resist its religion.

The people of Canaan were no strangers to the Israelites because they were both of Semitic and Amorite ancestry. The language of the Hebrews was a dialect of the Canaanite family of language.

At this time, the Canaanites were settled mostly along the seacoast and in the plain of Esdraelon and in the valleys of Jezreel and Jordan. The hill country was still mostly forested and was only sparsely settled. But that was beginning to change. Waterproof lime that could be used to line rock cisterns had just been discovered and that was making it possible to build cities at places that had no natural source of water.

The conquest according to Joshua

The Book of Joshua shows us the land being conquered by the unified action of all the people. They invade the land from the east, crossing the Jordan in a manner similar to the crossing of the Reed Sea under the leadership of Moses.

Through bold attacks on Jericho and Ai, and then with campaigns through the center of the land (chaps. 7—9), to the south, (chap. 10), and to the north (chap. 11), all of Palestine came under Joshua's control (11:16-23). Except for the Gibeonites who made a treaty with Israel

Journal

Sample some of the adventures in Joshua and Judges and note your observations in your journal. Include in your reading the following passages:

Joshua 24. The covenant ceremony at Shechem. Note especially the form of the covenant.

Judges 2:6—3:6. Here the editors of the Deuteronomistic history give their evaluation of this era. Note the things they approve and the things they disapprove.

Judges 5. This is an ancient poem from the earliest days of nationhood, from the time of the tribal league. Note that some tribes are being denounced because they didn't answer the call to support other members of the league.

Judges 8:22—9:15. Here we hear the opponents of kingship speaking.

3

Hebrews/Habiru

Only in Genesis 14:13 is Abraham called a Hebrew. The term was applied to the Israelites by outsiders. They never used the term except to identify themselves to foreigners (Gen. 39:14, 17; 40:15; Exod. 2:6; 3:18; 5:3; 1 Sam. 4:6, 9).

Habiru were a mixed multitude of people scattered across the Fertile Crescent during the second millennium B.C. If the Israelites were not numbered with these peoples, they may have drawn recruits from the ranks of the Habiru.

Seed

And Joshua took all these kings and their land at one time, because Yahweh God of Israel fought for Israel (Josh. 10:42).

You [Joshua] are old and advanced in years, and there remains yet very much land to be possessed (Josh. 13:1).

I said to you, "I am Yahweh your God; you shall not pay reverence to the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell." But you have not given heed to my voice (Judg. 6:10).

Whenever Yahweh raised up judges for them, Yahweh was with the judge, and he saved them from the hand of their enemies all the days of the judge. . . . But whenever the judge died, they turned back and behaved worse than their fathers, going after other gods (Judg. 2:18, 19).

In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes (Judg. 17:6).

And the people said to Joshua, "Nay; but we will serve Yahweh" (Josh. 24:21).

through a sly deception, all the inhabitants were killed, and so the land was ready to be divided (chaps. 13—21).

Throughout this recital, we hear the theme of holy war, the idea that Yahweh led the people and won the victory for them, often without effort on their part. All the faithful needed to do was to follow God's orders. Such was the case at Jericho. Marching around the city in praise of Yahweh and in obedience to Yahweh's commands, the Israelites saw the walls of the city fall flat (6:1-21). Yahweh won the victory without the aid of human strength.

Judges sees a different side

But when we come to the Book of Judges, we see that the campaign to take up settlement in the land was not short, sharp, and quick. And it rarely happened through a unified effort of all the tribes. Most gains were the work of individual tribes and the process was far from complete.

Even the Book of Joshua, not one unified record itself, has a number of passages that betray an awareness that the conquest was incomplete (Josh. 13:2-6; 15:13-19, 63; 23:7-13). But Judges states the case more openly, beginning its account with a list of cities left in control of the Canaanites (1:27-36).

The conquest was really a long drawn-out campaign which was not completed until the time of David when Jerusalem was finally taken. The archaeological record shows that some cities were taken by military action, probably by Israelites. The fact that most of these get only brief mention in the text may also be a key to the correctness of the reports. Hazor (Josh. 11:10), which was the chief city of Galilee and the largest city in all of Palestine at the time, was one such conquest. It was followed by a poor settlement of the type that invaders fresh from the desert might have built.

In the south, Lachish and Debir show that they suffered much in the same kind of attack and in the case of Debir, the same kind of rebuilding followed (Josh. 10:31, 32, 38, 39). Lachish was not rebuilt for several centuries.

Invasion sometimes an inside job

Missing from the record is an account of the taking of any cities in the central hill country except for Bethel (Judg. 1:22-26). A major city in this region was Shechem. Though never attacked, Shechem appears in Joshua 8:30-35 in Israelite hands. The sanctuary located between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, Shechem was the site of a covenant ceremony both on this occasion and also in Joshua 24.

Some of the central hill country towns may have been in the control of Israelite tribes since the time of the patriarchs. These tribes may never have gone to Egypt. Genesis 34 contains a tradition of an attack on Shechem by Simeon and Levi before the descent into Egypt.

Another possibility is that the dissatisfied elements in many of the Canaanite city-states may have chosen the time of the arrival of the Israelites from the desert as a time to revolt against their rulers. The Semite invaders and the poor and oppressed already in the land may have joined forces to oust the tyrants of Canaan in the name of Yahweh. Whole towns and villages may have gone over peaceably to Israel. In

other cases, dissident elements may have betrayed certain cities, as in the case of Bethel (Judg. 1:22-25), or joined in Yahweh's holy war.

So, the nation of Israel that was a mixed group of people when it left Egypt and became more mixed in the desert as it was joined by other clans looking for a home, now added groups of people oppressed by the Canaanite kings. All were willing to accept the name of Israel. In a real sense, they were converts. The covenant ceremony recorded in Joshua 24 at Shechem may have been their initiation and a formation of the confederation of some of the tribes of Israel.

While the major invasion of Canaan, according to the Joshua report, was from the east, it is possible that other tribes invaded from the south. According to the Book of Numbers, the Israelite attempt to enter Canaan from the south by way of Hormah met with defeat (Num. 14:44, 45). But a later account of a battle at the same place reports a great victory (Num. 21:1-3).

The first stage of the conquest left the Israelites in control of the central hills and the hill country of Galilee. But the coastal plain, the plain of Esdraelon, and the Jezreel Valley still belonged to the Canaanites who were always more firmly established there. The Israelites were foot soldiers and were at home in the hills. They could not cope with the chariots of iron that the Canaanites could bring out against them on level terrain (Josh. 17:16; Judg. 1:19).

The struggles of the pioneer years

Those early years were difficult times for the new settlers. They came as poor people. The quality of the buildings from this early era show that they lacked both technical and artistic skills. But gradually, their economic condition improved as they came to terms with the land and as they took part in the trade and commerce of the region.

But religious conflicts began to develop. While the mixed multitude was committed by covenant to Yahweh, they had yet to shake off their pagan past and learn to resist the enticements of the pagan culture that surrounded them. The conquest was still far from complete. Some combined the worship of Yahweh with the practices of the fertility cults of Baal (Judg. 3:7; 6:26-30).

Sanctuaries for Yahweh worship appear first at Gilgal (Josh. 4:19-24) and then later at Shiloh (Josh. 18:1; Judg. 18:31). Shechem and Bethel also seem to have been sites for shrines.

But according to the witness of Judges, the moral fiber of the tribes was low. Besides the barbarism of warfare, there was the theft of Micah's household gods (Judg. 18:14-17) and the sexual abuse of the Levite's concubine (19:22-30). The kidnapping of the maidens from the Shiloh festival dance was hardly evidence of any great ethical sensitivity (21:16-23).

Tribal confederation and agitation for a king

Though the tribes were isolated from each other by distance, by hills, and by the Canaanite cities that surrounded them, they did have a bond that held them together. This was the council of elders that was formed at Shechem (Josh. 23:1; 24:1). According to the editors of the history, the confederation worked while Joshua was alive, for Joshua functioned much like a king.

After the death of Joshua, however, Israel had no consistent, firm

Twelve Tribes and Their Territories

Judah: Josh. 15:1-12
Benjamin: 18:11-20
Ephraim (one of the two tribes of Joseph): 16:1-9
Manasseh (the other Joseph tribe, with land on both sides of Jordan): 13:29-31; 17:7-12
Issachar: 19:17-23
Naphtali: 19:32-39
Zebulun: 19:10-16
Asher: 19:24-31
Gad (one of three Transjordan tribes): 13:24-28
Reuben (the third tribe east of Jordan): 13:15-23
Dan (relocated from south to north): 19:40-47; Judg. 18:27-29
Simeon: Josh. 19:1-9
[Levi was a landless tribe whose heritage was in the priesthood (13:14)]

The Twelve Judges and Their Foes

Othniel and Cushan-rishathaim (Judg. 3:7-11)
Ehud and the Moabites (3:12-30)
Shamgar and the Philistines (3:31)
Deborah and the Canaanites (4:1—5:31)
Gideon and the Midianites (6:1—8:32)
Tola (10:1, 2)
Jair (10:3-5)
Jephthah and the Ammonites (10:17—12:7)
Ibzan (12:8-10)
Elon (12:11, 12)
Abdon (12:13-15)
Samson and the Philistines (13:1—16:31)

leadership. Though the judges tried to bring some order out of confusion, it was a continuous cycle of idolatry, oppression, prayers for deliverance, divine intervention through a spirit-filled leader, and return to idolatry after the death of the leader.

The recurring theme is strongly underlined by the editors: "And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh and served the Baals" (Judg. 2:11; cf. 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1). Finally, the editors could no longer hide their bias: "In those days there was no king in Israel; every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judg. 17:6; 21:25).

Resisters to the monarchy

But embedded in this record is also an antimonarchy streak that the editors could not omit because it was so well known and associated with well-known people. After Gideon, in his role as a spirit-guided savior of Israel from the Midianites, was approached to accept the kingship and begin a ruling dynasty, he curtly rejected the offer, saying, "I will not rule over you, and my son will not rule over you; Yahweh will rule over you" (Judg. 8:23).

But Abimelech, Gideon's son, did attempt to make himself king (Judg. 9:1-6). In the course of Abimelech's effort to set up a throne, his brother Jotham told the parable of the search of the trees for a king. In the parable, all the noble trees refuse the office which is finally accepted by the bramble, clearly a scathing attack on the idea of a monarchy (9:7-15).

Instead, Gideon made a final witness against kingship before his death. He gathered gold from the people to make an ephod. He probably intended to imply that God would rule the people directly rather than through the agency of a king, if the ephod is understood as a device to divine the will of God (Judg. 8:24-27). But the historians note that the ephod failed in its purpose, actually causing the people to sin (v. 27).

Samson and the shrinking power of the judges

The tradition of old Israel was to rely on the tribal league. A call to come to the aid of a tribe in need was considered a call from Yahweh and they had sworn an oath in the covenant to obey the voice of their God (Josh. 24:24). However, it rarely worked that way. The battles of the judges were usually battles waged by individual tribes. The victory song of Deborah and Barak laments the refusal of Reuben, Gilead (Gad), Dan, and Asher to rally to the fight against Sisera and the Canaanites (Judg. 5:15-17).

That the tribal confederation survived for 200 years is most remarkable. The league typified the spirit of early Yahwism. That Israel could, in times of crisis, call forth leaders such as the twelve heroes whose names are recorded in Judges is heartening.

Of the six of whom we have narratives, five (Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, and Jepthah) were leaders who won military victories. The most significant victory was that of Deborah (Judg. 4:2—5:31), who with Barak challenged the iron chariots of the Canaanites in the Plain of Esdraelon. They gained a measure of control over the plain and access to the tribes in Galilee.

Samson was an exception to the pattern of military leaders. He was himself a one-man army. His encounters with the Philistines were an omen of later struggles with this group of Sea People who began moving

Joshua in Judges

The first chapter of the Book of Judges carries a number of passages that have parallels in Joshua:
Caleb captures Hebron: 1:10-15, 20 = Josh. 15:13-19
Jerusalem unconquered: 1:21 = Josh. 15:63
Beth-shean unconquered: 1:27, 28 = Josh. 17:11-13
Gezer unconquered: 1:29 = Josh. 16:10
The second chapter also has a parallel report:
Joshua dismisses the people: 2:6-9 = Josh. 24:28-31

into the coastal plain at about the same time that the Israelites were moving into the hill country.

The growing power of the Philistines would eventually change almost everything for the Israelites.

Discovery

1. The historians who edited Joshua and Judges had a bias for the monarchy though some of the material they collected contained views opposing kingship. Why did some people favor having a king and why did others oppose the idea?

2. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the council of elders? How did the judges relate to the council of elders?

3. What seems to have been the quality of life among the tribes of Israel after they settled in the land? In what ways was their life nurtured and enriched? In what ways was their way of life threatened? Would a king have been a benefit or a hindrance to the growth of the Israelite community?

Resources

Anderson, Bernhard W. "The Promised Land," *Understanding the Old Testament*. Chapter 4, pages 98-135.

Inventory

1. Contrast the view of the conquest of Canaan as reported by the Book of Joshua with the report from the Book of Judges.

2. What conditions on the international scene in the thirteenth century B.C. gave assurance that the city-states of Canaan would not have outside aid in their defense against invasion by the tribes of Israel?

3. What were the conditions inside Canaan that made the country vulnerable to invasion?

4. Identify:

Amarna
Barak
Bethel
Deborah
Deuteronomistic history
Ephod
Esdraelon
Gideon
Habiru
Holy war
Jericho
Jezreel
People of the Sea
Shechem
Shiloh

CHAPTER 10
The Rise of Kingship

8

Gist

The time came when the tribal league of Israel led by judges called out in times of crisis could no longer assure the defense of the prospering settlements. The Philistines with their professional soldiers armed with iron weapons threatened their independence. Many people felt that only a centralized government headed by a king could meet the challenge. Those who resisted the change accepted kingship only with the understanding that the king be obedient to Yahweh.

Out of the west and from across the sea, came the Philistines. They settled on the coastal plains of Canaan and quickly asserted their power over the city-states of that region. The Bronze Age had come to an end and the Iron Age was dawning. Philistines and iron—those two elements ended Israel's age of judgeship and changed the order of its life for all time to come.

Unlike copper, out of which bronze was forged, iron was in abundant supply in Asia. Thus, it could be used for farm tools as well as for weapons and luxury goods. Wood, stone, and bone began to give way to iron for plowshares, mattocks, axes, and sickles (1 Sam. 13:19-23). This new technology soon increased the harvests on Israelite farms.

The hill country of Galilee and central Canaan had been thinly populated before the coming of the Israelites. Now, these new settlers were growing in wealth and power. They worked hard, happy to be settled on their own land. But their sharp new implements were an extra boon.

As they prospered, they also grew in self-assurance. Under Deborah and Barak, they invaded the Plain of Esdraelon and claimed the land bridge between their central hill country and Galilee in the north. Samson's daring raids into the range of low hills along the coastal plain held by the Philistines was still more evidence of Israelite assertiveness.

Israelites ill-equipped to hold back the Philistines

Looking toward the high country from their garrisons on the plains, the Philistines must have been tempted by the growing prosperity of the Israelite villages and towns. They may also have feared that these active tribesmen would attack the camel caravans moving goods between Egypt and from Mesopotamia along the plains and through the valleys. Therefore, the Philistines with their superior military power—chariots, iron swords and spears, and disciplined troops—moved into the hill country. From their outposts, they collected tools and taxes from

the Israelites. They had already subdued the Canaanite city-states on the plain and they were now on their way to extending their power into the hill country as well.

Up until this time, the tribes of Israel had been able to defend themselves from invading bands of Midianites, Amalekites, and other desert tribes with whom they were about equal in terms of weapons and warfare skills. But they were ill-equipped to meet the Philistines who came up against them not with conscripted troops but with seasoned soldiers bearing advanced weapons.

Soon many people in Israel began to say that Israel needed a king who could unite the tribes in a central organization and train a military force to throw off the threats of Philistine bondage. That seemed clear to almost everyone. But some saw the move toward kingship as a rejection of their faith in the God of Israel who fought their battles for them. Samuel, a wise and respected leader from the tribe of Ephraim, challenged the institution of kingship as it began to take uncertain shape in the person of Saul, a warrior from Benjamin.

The saga of the rise of kingship comes to us in 1 Samuel, a book that with 2 Samuel once formed just one book about the early kingdom period that reached its high watermark in David. The Samuel books are themselves a part of the longer Deuteronomistic history which except for Ruth, extends from Joshua through Kings and was called in the Hebrew Bible the *Former Prophets*.

Samuel—partisan for the power of Yahweh

The oldest record shows Samuel as a local holy man who gave advice for a fee to people who had problems. Saul consulted him when he couldn't find the lost asses that his father had sent him out to bring home (1 Sam. 9:6-13). At that time, Samuel was not widely known for Saul needed to explain to his servant who Samuel was. He called him a seer, for the word *prophet* was then unknown.

But to the editors who compiled the book, Samuel had a national reputation. In a later record, he is known from Dan to Beersheba as a prophet who spoke for Yahweh from the shrine at Shiloh (3:20, 21). Later, Samuel took on the role of a judge after the manner of Gideon. He gathered the people together at Mizpah and led them in a holy war against the Philistines (7:5-14).

This was the second battle of Ebenezer (7:12, cf. 4:1). In the first battle, the Israelites had been badly mauled by the Philistine professionals. The Ark of the Covenant had been captured (4:10, 11, 17), and Shiloh, the main sanctuary in central Israel, destroyed (Jer. 7:12-14; 26:6; Ps. 78:60-64). But now, as a result of Samuel's intercession, Yahweh worked a miracle and Israel won a resounding victory.

Thus, as a response to the call for kingship, this story offers its own alternative: choose Samuel and the power of Yahweh instead of Saul and Jonathan with their iron weapons (1 Sam. 13:19-22).

The proposal is supported by the recital of the ancient Ark Narrative which begins with the first battle of Ebenezer where the Ark of the Covenant was captured by the Philistines and installed in the temples of Dagon in their strongholds at Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron. But the Philistines, beset by plagues, returned the ark to the Israelite border town of Kiriath-jearim (4:1—7:2).

Journal

Page through 1 Samuel and note its scope. Locate the passages familiar to you and sample some of the material that attracts your attention.

Read 4:1—7:2. Write a short summary for your journal of about twenty-five words, noting the main object of attention and what happened to it.

Read 10:24—11:15. What is this passage's view of kingship? Summarize in a sentence or two.

Read 8:4-22; 10:17-19. Summarize in a sentence or two the attitude toward kingship in these passages.

Read 1 Samuel 15. Write out one or two general principles to help kings work in harmony with prophets. Find a verse that summarizes the expectations of the prophets for kings.

The Big Three of 1 Samuel

Samuel (1—7)
Saul (8—15)
David (16—31)

Oil for Anointing

The formula for the making of anointing oil appears in Exodus 30:22-32, a special holy oil to be used only for consecrating priests and the objects used in worship (Exod. 40:9-15; Lev. 8:10-13, 30). The ceremony rendered persons cleansed and ready for the service of God.

Seed

And the people of Israel said to Samuel, "Do not cease to cry to Yahweh our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines" (1 Sam. 7:8).

Now appoint for us a king to govern us like all the nations . . . and go out before us and fight our battles (8:5, 20).

"Pray for your servants to Yahweh your God, that we may not die; for we have added to all our sins this evil, to ask for ourselves a king" (12:19).

Yahweh has sought out a man after his own heart; and Yahweh has appointed him to be prince over his people (13:14).

"Has Yahweh as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,/ as in obeying the voice of Yahweh?/ Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice,/ and to hearken than the fat of rams" (15:22).

After the ark had been returned through the power of Yahweh, Samuel could speak the words of the Deuteronomistic editor who believed that all of Israel's ills would have been cured if the people had worshiped Yahweh rightly and had put away their false gods (7:3, 4; cf. Judg. 2:11-15; 3:7; 10:6; and especially 13:1).

Indeed, the kingship crisis with all its economic and political results also represented a crisis in the soul of Israel. The loss of the Ark of the Covenant was symbolic of this upheaval. Though the ark came back to a border town, it was not installed in a shrine. Not only had the central shrine at Shiloh been destroyed and its priesthood discredited, but the people lacked the spiritual vigor to renew their covenant. The prospect of a judgeship from the family of Samuel seemed unlikely for his sons were corrupt (8:1-3).

In the absence of a central shrine and the leadership that it once provided, a new religious movement began—a prophetic movement of which Samuel may have been a leader (10:5-13; 19:18-24). Out of this movement of early prophets came the later prophets.

Saul—a popular king nagged by a prophet

Saul appeared on the national scene not first of all in combat with the Philistines, but in a contest with the Ammonites, a desert tribe that was molesting Jabesh-gilead in the land across the Jordan. As in the days of the Judges, the Gileadites (who were part of the tribe of Manasseh) appealed to the other tribes. Under the leadership of Saul, the tribe of Benjamin responded and the invaders were quickly dispatched (11:1-11).

In joyful response, the people crowned Saul king at Gilgal (11:15). And so it was that Saul and his son Jonathan came to apply their zeal against the Philistines. They gained a measure of success, brought unity to the country, and renewed the people's sense of national purpose. The demoralized tribesmen, who had joined with the enemy, had hidden in caves, or had even fled the country, now came over to the side of Saul and Jonathan (14:1-22).

But Saul's conquest was not complete. Although he did establish security in the central hill country, his kingdom was open to attack by the Philistines from the north and the south throughout his reign.

Excavations have shown Gibeah, Saul's capital (10:26), to be a small town with a modest fortress. Saul had no palace or grand court system (22:6). He organized a small standing army that could be supported from the booty captured in his military campaigns (14:52). He may not have had the full support of all the tribes, though he had his own tribe of Benjamin behind him as well as the larger tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, and possibly Judah.

Saul made a successful beginning as Israel's first king. He fashioned his kingdom after the models of Edom, Moab, and Ammon which favored the tribal and democratic traditions of Israel. He avoided the style of the Canaanite city-states where kings had absolute authority and promoted the power and luxury of its ruling families.

Even so, Saul could not put together a government that would combine the new form of authority with the revered traditions of Yahwism that the people had brought with them from the desert. To meet this expectation, the ruler of the nation would need to be obedient to the

Early Source

First Samuel includes material from an Early Source composed in the time of Solomon and material from a Late Source that took form during the Exile. The following passages are from the Early Source:
Ark Narrative: 4:1b—7:2
Secret Choice of Saul: 9:1-10:16
Saul defeats the Ammonites: 11:1-15
Saul's war on the Philistines: 13:1-7a, 15b—14:52
David in Saul's court: 16:14-23

voice of God as it came through the priests and prophets who had been entrusted with the word of Yahweh.

The wish that the king would be guided by the prophet comes through strongly in the story of Saul. Such was also the central concern of the Deuteronomistic editors who looked back on these events from the vantage point of the Exile. The nation would not have gone down in defeat, they believed, had the kings listened to the prpohets. They used Samuel and Saul to illustrate their case.

Twice Saul failed to come up to the prophetic standard of kingship and therefore Yahweh rejected him. When Samuel called for holy war against the Amalekites, he ordered Saul to "utterly destroy all" (15:3). The campaign was a stunning success militarily but a miserable failure religiously. Under pressure to provide support for his army, Saul overlooked the strict application of holy warfare and saved some of the booty. For this disobedience, Samuel pronounced a curse on Saul—kingship would be taken away from him (15:26).

The second confrontation was, if possible, even more severe (13:7b-15a). When Samuel failed to arrive at the appointed time to perform the religious rites needed before the Israelties could do battle with their foe, Saul himself performed the priestly services. This time not only the kingship but also the dynasty was taken away from Saul (13:14). Samuel announced that Yahweh had found someone else to take his place: "Yahweh has sought out a man after his own heart." The words carry the Deuteronomistic prescription for the right kind of king: one who had the approval of Yahweh because he obeyed the counsel of Yahweh's prophet.

David—the man God chose

After these stormy confrontations, Saul's kingship began to decline and the fortunes of his chosen successor began to rise. Saul's reign came to an end with the last chapter of 1 Samuel and David's possession of the throne became complete in 2 Samuel 5.

Having announced that Yahweh wanted a man of God's own choosing, Samuel set out to find that person in the family of Jesse the Bethlehemite (16:1-13). The description emphasizes the central role of the prophet in king making. For when David was found and anointed, "the Spirit of Yahweh came mightily upon David from that day forward" (16:13).

David's rise was gradual but steady. He first appeared in public as a member of Saul's court, a musician to soothe the troubled monarch in his declining years and raise him from his dark moods. It was quite likely that Saul's spirit was broken under the pressures of his task and the opposition that he had to endure.

The competitiveness between Saul and David grew until David needed to withdraw from the court to avoid open combat. He fled into the wilderness of Judah. There he was quickly joined by other refugees: "And every one who was in distress, and every one who was in debt, and every one who was discontented, gathered to him; and he became captain over them" (22:2). Clearly, the country was in turmoil and in great need of social reform to cure its ills, a task in which Saul had failed.

The scenes of David's small band of outcasts and mistreated people wandering in the wilderness recall the picture of a larger group of runaway slaves and victims of Egyptian oppression led by Moses for

David forced to flee: 19:11-17
David at Nob: 20:1-9
David at Adullam: 22:1-13
David saves Keilah: 23:1-13
David, Nabal, and Abigail: 25:1b-44
David spares Saul's life: 26:1-25
David joins the Philistines: 27:1—28:2
Saul at Endor: 28:3-25
David rejected by the Philistines: 29:1-11
David pursues the Amalekites: 30:1-31
Battle of Gilboa and death of Saul: 31:1-13

Late Source

Birth of Samuel: 1:1-28
Sons of Eli: 2:12-26
Samuel as prophet: 3:1—4:1a
Samuel as judge: 7:3-17
"Give us a king": 8:1-22
Saul chosen king: 10:17-27
Samuel's farewell: 12:1-25
Saul's rejection by Samuel: 15:1-35
David anointed: 16:1-13
Saul's jealousy of David: 18:1-30
Saul seeks David's life: 19:1-10
David flees to Gath: 21:10-15
David spares Saul's life: 23:14—24:22

Twice Told Tales

Saul with the ecstatic prophets: 10:9-13; 19:19-24
Saul anointed secretly (10:1) and installed twice in public: 10:21; 11:15
Saul meets David: 16:14-23; 17:31-33; 17:55-58
Goliath killed: 17:1-54; 19:5; 21:9. See also 2 Sam. 21:19
Saul rejected by Samuel: 13:14; 15:23
David anointed: 16:1; 2 Sam. 2:4; 5:3
David flees Saul's court: 19:12; 20:42
David spares Saul's life: 24:3-22; 26:5-25

From Judges to Kings

B.C.

- **1250. Israelites arrive in Canaan.**
- **1200. Philistines appear on Palestine coast. Beginning of period of Judges.**
- **1050. Fall of Shiloh. Samuel appears.**
- **1020. Reign of Saul.**
- **1000. Reign of David.**
- **961. David dies.**

forty years through the wilderness of Sinai. Out of the refugees who joined him in his exile, David fashioned a fighting force that would later become the nucleus of this private army. This band that eventually grew to 600 warriors fought first against the Philistines and then later in alliance with Achish, the Philistine king of Gath (23:1-5; 27:1-4), all the while eluding Saul who tried to capture David.

David distributed the spoils of his battles to the cities of Judah, thus building a political alliance for the future. The encounter of David with Nabal, the rich landowner of Carmel, shows that David, like an early Robin Hood, took from the rich to support his poor followers (chap. 25). Nabal's wealth is also further evidence of the class distinctions that had already developed during those early years of Israelite history. Wealth had accumulated in the hands of a few while many others went without.

How to measure a king

In contrast to the dark gloom that settled over Saul until he was defeated at Mount Gilboa (chap. 31) was David's rise toward kingship which was painted in much brighter hues. The attitude of the editors toward David was much more optimistic. In David, they had come to embrace kingship.

Within the pages of 1 Samuel, we have almost the full scope of the debate over kingship that went on all during the monarchy and long afterward. We hear the voices of those who support kingship and those who oppose it. The issue seems especially confused when those two voices are heard coming from one person: Samuel. While this may well show that Samuel had been the spokesman for both sides, the possibility remains that Samuel's understanding did mature and his acceptance did grow.

In one strand, kingship is regarded as a divinely ordained blessing (10:24-27; 11:14, 15). Saul, in spite of his personal failures and his illness, is a noble figure who puts the enemies of the nation to flight. Samuel plays a minor role in these early narratives recorded in the early days of the monarchy, probably during the reign of Solomon.

In another strand, Samuel appears as a judge and a ruler of Israel (7:7-17), a model of God's preferred method of leadership. In the speeches of Samuel, we hear kingship described as an error (8:10-22) and the people repent and ask Yahweh's forgiveness (12:19).

Out of this history comes a picture of the role of the prophet in the life of a king. As Saul had his Samuel, so David would have Nathan and Gad, a pattern that would continue up until the fall of Jerusalem when Jeremiah would be the prophet to confront King Zedekiah.

No matter how good the king and how acceptable the king's behavior (and there were only a few who got good marks from the historians), a note of judgment would always hang heavy in the air. In demanding a king, the people rejected God (10:19), rejected Yahweh "from being king over them" (8:7).

Discovery

1. Evaluate the administration of Saul. Where did he succeed? Where did he fail? What were his lasting contributions?

2. What were the forces at work on Israel that came from without? What were the internal forces that were changing Israel during the days of Samuel?

3. What was happening in the religious life of Israel at this time? How was religious devotion being expressed? What were the issues of faith? Why did prophecy begin to develop? How did it express itself?

4. Describe the portrait of an ideal king as seen by editors of 1 Samuel.

Resources

Anderson, Bernhard W. "The Struggle Between Faith and Culture," *Understanding the Old Testament*. Chapter 5, pages 136-64.

Inventory

1. Who are the three main characters of 1 Samuel? Identify each person briefly. How was each person related to the other two? What was each person's view of the other two?

2. What things in the experience of Israel led toward kingship? Why did some people resist kingship?

3. Identify:

Amalekites
Ark Narrative
Deuteronomistic history
Ebenezer
Ephraim
Gibeah
Gilboa
Jabesh-gilead
Jesse the Bethlehemite
Philistines
Shiloh

CHAPTER 11
The Kingdom United

Gist

The new monarchy lived up to its promises: the Philistines were pushed back and Israel had secure borders once more. Saul started the job and David finished it with a grand flourish pushing the borders of Israel up to the Euphrates and down to the Brook of Egypt. He also took control of the Canaanite cities like Jerusalem that had resisted Israelite control ever since the days of Joshua. Under David and Solomon, the country enjoyed a new pros-

Once Saul had gone down in defeat before the Philistines, the people of Israel turned to David. Ever after that, the kingdom belonged to David.

Clearly, 2 Samuel also belongs fully to David. He is the central character of the book, the hero who lives in the memory of his descendants. The historians of ancient days were kind to David, showing him as a noble leader of his people, yet a person human and fallible.

His realm became in Israelite memory the greatest of kingdoms, the gift of God, and therefore an enduring kingdom. David's impress on the hearts and lives of the people rivaled that of Moses. The promise to Abraham had been fulfilled in David—for now Abraham's children had become a great nation and blessings were flowing out of Jerusalem to the nations (Gen. 12:1-3).

Last days of the house of Saul

Though David was destined to be the great king of Israel, the domain did not fall easily or quickly into his hands. Israel had been soundly defeated at Mount Gilboa and the Philistines once more established control over the hill country. An enemy garrison appeared near Bethlehem (2 Sam. 23:14, a passage chronologically out of place; cf. 1 Chron. 11:11-47).

Before the country could be united, the succession to Saul's throne had to be settled. Saul's son Ishbosheth (also known as Ishbaal) claimed his father's throne and set up a refugee government in Gilead, east of the Jordan, a part of Israel not under Philistine control. Ishbosheth had behind him the uncertain support of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin, the tribes that had been his father's mainstay. But he was a weak king and depended heavily on Abner who had been the leader of Saul's army.

Meanwhile, David built up his base of power by having himself crowned king over Judah at the shrine in Hebron (2 Sam. 2:1-4). Judah

was David's tribe and the source of his earliest support. Yet the growing power of Judah foreshadowed a challenge to the rest of the tribes of Israel that had been bound together under Saul. The names of Judah and Israel would in later days come to define the rivalry born in the lopsided struggle between David of Judah and Ishbosheth of Israel.

The war between the two men lasted for two years (2:10; 3:1) and left deep wounds, though David tried to limit the fury of the combat. David formed alliances with Geshur (through marriage) and with Ammon (3:3; 10:2), kingdoms to the north and south of Ishbosheth's Gilead, bringing diplomatic pressure to bear against Saul's son. However, Ishbosheth fumbled early. He quarreled with Abner, who, in anger, delivered the support of Israel to David (3:12-21).

So, the elders of Israel came to Hebron and pledged their allegiance to David. They recognized him as one vested with God's spirit in a way not evident in Ishbosheth (5:1-3). David's leadership of the poor and exploited in the wilderness showed him to be a special kind of person. He proved himself a leader of Israel, coming to the throne with the support of the people and the religious leaders.

David's Jerusalem—late for greatness

Almost immediately, David began to make his mark on Israel. He set out to capture Jerusalem, the Canaanite city in the heart of the hill country that had remained outside Israelite control for over two centuries. Now, David was able to subdue the city with his own private army (5:6, 7), and thus Jerusalem became the "city of David," his own special possession rather than the common property of the tribes of the fledgling kingdom.

In making Jerusalem the capital of a united Israel, David moved wisely. As an independent city, it did not belong to either Judah or to Benjamin. And being in the borderland between the northern and southern tribes, the city could serve both groups.

Jerusalem, also to be called *Zion* (5:7), became more than a name and a place. It became a spirit and a lasting influence on Israel, capturing the imagination and loyalty of endless generations. David's power and wealth, his personality and his heritage, have all blended with the meaning of Jerusalem.

Yet Jerusalem did not come to Israel as a city empty of history and culture. David saved many of its original citizens and did not deport them. The non-Israelite people contributed to the strengths and weaknesses of the kingdom in ways that we may never be able to identify. But we know that in Jerusalem the new order of Israelite kingship was being formed, and that the people and institutions of Jerusalem became part of the ingredients.

Days of empire arrive with King David

The first order of business for David as the leader of a united Israel was to break free from the domination of the Philistine garrisons. His victory over these mighty warriors from the coastal plain was quick and resounding (5:17-25; 23:13-17). The Israelites overwhelmed the Philistines and captured their idols (5:21), avenging the taking of the Ark of the Covenant in the first battle of Ebenezer (1 Sam. 4:11). Never again would the Philistines seriously threaten the security of Israel as they took their place on the list of nations and tribes that David subdued (2 Sam. 8:12).

perity and power. The new nation's proudest gift was the temple built to house the Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of Yahweh's presence among the people. But on the dark side there were forced labor, high prices, and unemployment. These too fulfilled the promises and warnings of those who had opposed the coming of kingship.

Journal

Sample both the highs and the lows of the united monarchy under David and Solomon. Read the following two pairs of passages and for each one list the strengths and the weaknesses of the ruler:
David's kingdom: 2 Samuel 5—7; 1 Kings 1—2.
Solomon's kingdom: 1 Kings 3; 1 Kings 11.

Seed

Then all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron, and said, "Behold, we are your bone and flesh . . . it was you that led out and brought in Israel; and Yahweh said to you, 'You shall be shepherd of my people Israel, and you shall be prince over Israel.' " (2 Sam. 5:1, 2).

Moreover, Yahweh declares to you that Yahweh will make you a house. . . . I will raise up your offspring after you. . . . He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever (2 Sam. 7:11-13).

Now these are the last words of David. . . . The God of Israel has spoken/ . . . When one rules justly over men,/ ruling in the fear of God,/ he dawns on them like the morning light. . . . Yea, does not my house stand so with God?/ For he has made with me an everlasting covenant (2 Sam. 23:1, 3-5).

And Judah and Israel dwelt in safety . . . every man under his vine and under his fig tree, all the days of Solomon (1 Kings 4:25).

Philistines/Pelethites

Soldiers from Philistia appear as mercenary soldiers in David's army where they are called *Pelethites* (2 Sam. 8:18; 15:18; 20:7, 23; 1 Kings 1:38, 44). Benaiah was commander of these mercenaries who served as David's bodyguard and private army separate from the army of Israel led by Joab.

Along with Jerusalem, David must have eventually taken over the other unconquered Canaanite cities in the land, including those listed in Judges 1:27-35. Many of these cities had been held by the Philistines, and with their defeat these cities may have changed their allegiance from their former overlords to David and the Israelites. Thus, large groups of Canaanites suddenly became part of Israel, a factor which would change the life of Israel.

Having taken control of the Philistine lands on his west, David extended his hold over the lands to the east. His first conquest was Ammon. The Israelite army captured its capital Rabbah (today the site of the modern city of Amman) and David was crowned king of Ammon (2 Sam. 12:26-31). Also on David's list of Transjordan conquests were Moab and Edom (8:2, 13), kingdoms which he brutally suppressed with mass executions of all men of fighting age (1 Kings 11:15-18).

Even Syria, which would later become a source of great trouble to Israel, was overrun by David's army. Part of the Syrian loot included 1,000 horses—more than the Israelites had need for, so they kept only 100 for their chariots and hamstrung the rest (8:3-8).

With the taking of Syria, the borders of Israel stretched from the Euphrates in the northeast to the edge of Egypt on the southwest. David seems to have had good relations with Egypt, which at the time had no interest in extending its empire. The pharaoh seems to have been glad that someone had broken the power of both the Philistine warlords and the Transjordan tribes, groups which had long troubled Egypt's borders.

Home for the ark and a house for David

All during the reign of Saul, the Ark of the Covenant gathered dust in Kiriath-jearim, where it had been dropped after the Philistines had released their hold on it following the first battle of Ebenezer (1 Sam. 6:21). David saw in the ark something that Saul had overlooked—the spiritual heritage of the nation. David brought the ark to his capital city in an effort to make Jerusalem the spiritual as well as the political center of Israel.

During its days in Shiloh, the ark had been kept in a temple (1 Sam. 1:9; 3:3), but when brought to Jerusalem, it was sheltered in a tent (2 Sam. 6:17), likely in imitation of the way it had been housed in the desert tradition. Along with the ark, David also revived the priesthood of Shiloh in the appointment of Abiathar (2 Sam. 20:25; 1 Sam. 22:20-25; 14:3). Also named to the priesthood was Zadok, whose origin is unknown, coming possibly from the shrine at Hebron.

To further enhance his reputation as the protector of the faith of Israel, David intended to build a temple for the ark as he had already built a cedar palace for himself (5:11; 7:1). But in this plan, he met with opposition for the first time from Yahweh. The message arrived in the form of a prophetic oracle: "Thus says Yahweh" (7:5).

The prophet Nathan had at first supported the idea of a temple, but later opposed it. His appeal was to the old desert tradition (7:4-7), a tradition that also opposed new institutions like kingship.

Out of this meeting with the prophet came a second and more favorable oracle for David. While God refused to accept a house for the symbol of Yahweh's presence, God did promise an everlasting house for David: "Yahweh declares to you that Yahweh will make you a house" (7:11). *House* is used here in the sense of dynasty as also in verses 16,

19, 25-27, and 29. The later history of Israel would turn on the meaning and obligation implied in this house of David oracle.

Many losers in the scramble for the throne

The most remarkable aspect of David's empire was David himself. He was the new element in the development of kingship, for he more than the tribes themselves became the center of the union which was now the nation of Israel. The foreign empire had been won by David's professional troops trained in the wilderness. The booty of his conquests along with the tribute from these vassal states supported both the army and the government. The power of Israel flowed no longer from the councils of the tribal elders but from the court of David.

Having brought Israel to its peak of greatness, David faced the most difficult challenge of all—to pass the throne on to one of his sons. Saul had failed, but then Saul's failures had been many. But even David, who had been so successful in all other ventures, in this one area came close to failure. A large section of 2 Samuel and part of Kings has been given over to this worrisome issue. "The History of the Throne Succession" (2 Sam. 9—20; 1 Kings 1—2) is one of the most remarkable and dramatic sections of the Bible, approaching the quality of a historical novel.

All this history is given to explain why Adonijah, David's eldest surviving son after the death of Absalom, was passed over in favor of Solomon. In the end, the narrative meant to make legitimate Solomon's claim to the throne and assure doubters that Solomon had a right to be David's successor. Yet the tale cannot cover up the fact that Solomon was not chosen by popular acclaim. He became David's choice in his father's dying hours only after a palace intrigue of queen mother and factions of priests, prophets, and army officers had grouped around Solomon and after other obvious candidates had discredited themselves.

The earlier revolt of Absalom (2 Sam. 15—18) which nearly succeeded showed that David's administration had much unfinished work. It had not really provided proper justice for the poor and exploited of the kingdom (15:1-4). The growth of the kingdom was fostering an economic system that was oppressing the lower classes and swelling the ranks of the poor.

But if injustice was present under David, it would only increase when Solomon took up the scepter.

Wise was Solomon but also crafty

Solomon—a product of the palace—lacked the contact with the people that both Saul and David had had as persons born on the land who had fought shoulder to shoulder with their people. Solomon became a king like the rulers of other oriental empires with an appetite for wealth and the trappings of power. More and more he led the people away from their traditional tribal values of justice for everyone and allegiance to Yahweh.

The court leadership wanted a king who would not threaten the growing prosperity of the ruling class. Adonijah, like Absalom, saw the need to appeal for support from those who were suffering from the new policies of the empire (1 Kings 1:5; cf. 2 Sam. 15:1-4). The way in which Solomon dealt with his rivals shows the great fear that the power structure had of those who challenged the system. Solomon quickly executed

Ishbosheth/Eshbaal

Saul's son is called Ishbosheth in 2 Samuel 2:8, 10, but Eshbaal, which was his real name, in 1 Chronicles 8:33. Eshbaal means "man of the Lord," but editors of the Samuel material must have found the name repulsive because it included the name "Baal," which was the name of the despised god of the Canaanites. "Ishbosheth" avoided the use of the name "Baal" and also provided an editorial putdown on Saul's son, since Ishbosheth means "son of shame."

Features in the History of the Throne Succession

***Anecdotes: David meets Bathsheba (2 Sam. 11:2-5); Absalom's death and David's mourning (18:9—19:8a).**

***Psychological dimensions: Amnon's feelings before and after he raped his half-sister Tamar (13:1-17).**

***God as all-knowing, all-judging, and all-rewarding (11:27b; 12:7-12; 17:14).**

The Temple and the Jebusite Connection

Araunah, a descendant of the non-Jewish Jebusites, the native people of Jerusalem, sold his threshing floor to David to celebrate the end of a dreadful pestilence that had killed many in Israel. The place, also known as Mount Moriah, later became the site of Solomon's temple. (See 2 Sam. 24:16-25; 1 Chron. 21:28 — 22:1; 2 Chron. 3:1.)

Saul, David, Solomon

B.C.

- 1050. Fall of Shiloh
- 1020. Saul's reign begins
- 1000. David's reign begins
- 961. Solomon's reign begins
- 922. Solomon dies; kingdom divided

Adonijah and then Joab, the commander of the army of Israel, who had supported Adonijah. He also exiled Abiathar, a leading priest and another of Adonijah's supporters, to his ancestral home in Anathoth (1 Kings 2:22-34).

Solomon soon took steps to show that his reign had divine approval. He led the nation in a massive religious assembly that saw the offering of a thousand burnt offerings at Gibeon, a shrine outside Jerusalem where the Ark of the Covenant was kept (1 Kings 3:2-15; 1 Chron. 21:29; 2 Chron. 1:3, 5).

It is here that Solomon in a dream had a vision of Yahweh saying, "Ask what I shall give you" (1 Kings 3:5). By modestly asking for wisdom, Solomon showed that he was not grasping for riches, long life, or power over his enemies. For this merit, he was given all these things along with wisdom.

The words of God in this episode have a parallel in Psalm 2, a Royal Psalm in which Yahweh says to the newly crowned king, "Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage" (v. 8). Solomon's vision showed that he was king by the grace of God. This was the first time such an appeal was made for an Israelite king, though it was commonly used for kings of Egypt who were esteemed as gods or sons of gods.

The historians have divided Solomon's history into two parts: Solomon under God's blessing (chaps. 3—10); and Solomon under the curse (chap. 11). Both sections begin with reference to Solomon's marriage to the daughter of Pharaoh, showing that the same event can be interpreted in different ways. And even those things claimed as strengths and positive gains by Solomon may, in fact, cover up events that did not bode well for the empire and for the people of God.

Solomon did make his mark as a wise man, particularly as a patron of culture (1 Kings 4:29-34). Science, art, and philosophy brought to Israelites a new dimension of life. The people were becoming a part of the larger world in a new way which enriched Israelite life as it also opened itself to corrupting influences.

Temple for a mixed multitude

Solomon was a builder of palaces, cities, fortifications, industries, and, most singularly, the temple. For this latter edifice he is best remembered though it was certainly among the smaller of his endeavors.

Solomon built the temple which David had been forbidden to build for the Ark of the Covenant. Solomon asserted his primacy over the religious life of the nation. His dismissal of Abiathar, the representative of the priestly line of Shiloh and of the tradition of Eli and Samuel, was the first step in this direction. He then took charge of the national worship, exercising a priestly role to offer thousands of sacrifices on the altar (3:4, 15).

Solomon built the temple after the Canaanite model, using architects and craftsmen from Phoenicia (1 Kings 5:1-12). The three-part structure of the temple with vestibule, hall, and holy of holies followed the pattern of Canaanite temples found in excavations in Shechem and Hazor in Palestine and in other places in Syria. The temple was begun and completed (6:1, 37; 8:2) on the dates set in Canaanite mythology for the building and dedication of temples. Foreigners did the planning and design of the temple; all that the Israelites contributed was unskilled labor and their wealth.

In the building of the temple, however, Solomon did give to the nation a powerful symbol that united the religious traditions of the people with the new nation which David had fashioned. The temple would dominate the religious thinking of the Israelites for centuries to come. The warm approval with which the Deuteronomistic historians greeted the temple shines through Solomon's prayer of dedication (1 Kings 8:14-61). The temple is seen as the fulfillment of Yahweh's earlier covenant with David to establish David's dynasty (8:20; 2 Sam. 7:13). Even all the promises made to Moses come to their climax in this holy shrine (8:56). The golden temple was the crown of the golden age.

Though dedicated to Yahweh, the God of Israel, the temple, because of its Canaanite form, held an appeal for the mixed multitude of people conquered by David and now a part of the Israelite realm. The temple served both Yahweh and the cause of nation building.

Solomon's other building projects, like his palace next to the temple, overshadowed the shrine for Yahweh. He rebuilt the Canaanite cities which David had conquered: Hazor, Megiddo, Gezer, Beth-horon, Baalath, and Tamar. He fortified them with horses and chariots and with troops as a line of the nation's defense structure (9:15-19). Thus fortified and never really integrated into the life of Israel, these Canaanite cities were a potential future danger.

Trade in Solomon's enterprises replaced military conquests as the means of enriching the empire. Good relations with Egypt allowed Israel to control the trading routes from south to north and to the east. An alliance with the Phoenician city-state of Tyre gave Solomon access to the seagoing traffic that reached to Cyprus, Spain, and North Africa.

It was likely for the purpose of arranging a trade treaty that the Queen of Sheba came to Solomon with samples of her wares: gold, jewels, and spices (10:1-10, 13). With the help of Phoenician ship-builders, Solomon built a fleet of seagoing vessels that sailed from Ezion-geber (Elath) and brought back the luxury goods of distant lands (9:26-28; 10:11, 12, 22). Foreign trade was a royal monopoly, enriching the coffers of the king.

Israel had never seen the like. Little more than a century earlier, Israel had been a poor backward nation under the heel of the Philistine warlords. Now, the Israelites were a nation that even Egypt had to treat with respect, the pharaoh giving a daughter to Solomon in marriage.

It was also a time of newfound security. Grain storage pits were no longer located behind town walls. With iron-tipped plows more readily available (the Philistine monopoly on smelting iron having been broken), the land was more productive. Since the time of Saul, the population had nearly doubled.

In Solomon, Israel had a king who was worldly wise and astute. Yet the wisdom of Solomon was not without its challengers. While the empire was prospering at its center, it was beginning to crumble around the edges.

Down on the farm not all was well

The Deuteronomistic editors responsible for exposing the folly of the wise king laid the blame on Solomon's foreign wives who introduced the worship of strange gods into the court life at Jerusalem. Yet the king's political and economic policies as well as his religious practices were misguided.

David's Priest

As he was going into exile, David begged food and a sword from Ahimelech, the priest at the sanctuary at Nob, which had apparently taken the place of the fallen shrine of Shiloh. (Ahimelech's father Ahitub is identified as one of the priests at Shiloh in 1 Sam. 14:3.) For his hospitality to David, Ahimelech was killed on Saul's order along with all of his family except for his son Abiathar who fled to the wilderness to join David (1 Sam. 21:1-9; 22:6-25). Abiathar served David as his priest during the exile years. He brought with him to the desert the ephod from Nob (23:6) to divine the will of Yahweh for David.

When David became king, he made Abiathar a priest in Jerusalem along with Zadok (2 Sam. 20:25). The names of the two priests and those of Abiathar's father and grandfather are scrambled in the Hebrew text of 2 Samuel 8:17 (corrected in the NEB), giving the impression that Abiathar and not his father had been the priest at Nob, a misreading carried over to Mark 2:26.

Solomon's Temple

Entry into the temple was from the east through a vestibule flanked with pillars of bronze.

The altar of burnt offering stood in the courtyard in front of the temple.

The main part of the temple was a long hall in which were ten lampstands, a table for the bread of the presence, and the altar of incense.

Beyond the hall was the holy of holies, the inner sanctuary, a chamber thirty feet by thirty feet by thirty feet. It contained the Ark of the Covenant and two cherubims, fifteen feet high, made of olive wood and overlaid with gold.

The increase in the number of large landholders as a result of the conquest of the Canaanite cities and their properties began to change the pattern of land tenure. The landlords had an advantage over the small cultivators for they could survive crop losses due to drought, blight, and pestilence. When disaster destroyed the crops of the peasants, they were forced to borrow and when they could not redeem their debts, their lands became part of the larger estates.

The economic position of the small farmer was further eroded by taxation and conscripted labor, practices which Solomon introduced. David had been able to support the empire through his foreign conquests, a source no longer available to Solomon. So Solomon divided the empire into financial districts. There were twelve districts but they were not the same as the twelve tribes, a scheme to also break down the power and influence of the tribal leaders. Each district was responsible for the support of the court for one month out of the year (4:7-19).

When the taxes did not cover the expenses for all the work of the empire, labor was conscripted for the state. *Corvee*, or forced state service (4:6; 11:28), was a practice new to Israel, but old in Egypt. Labor gangs were sent to Lebanon to fell the trees needed for building temples and palaces. These crews worked not just one month out of the year, but four—one month every quarter (5:13, 14). Other crews worked in the quarries and in transporting these materials. The historians protest that Solomon used no Israelites for slaves (9:22), though to those who were absent from their farms one-third of each year, the difference between slavery and forced service must have seemed a fine distinction indeed.

So the poor became poorer and more of their lands became part of the large estates that now grew crops for export rather than food grains for local use. The vineyards and olive orchards provided a more lucrative use for the hill country land. Wine and oil were worth more than grain per unit of weight or volume and thus were more valued for the foreign trade market.

The landless peasants were twice victims of this switch to a more "efficient" agriculture. They were not only underpaid day laborers in the fields they once owned, but during the long periods when their labor was not needed, they were unemployed. Yet they needed to buy grain in the marketplace for cash, grain that was imported from the estates on the plains. When they bought, they were often the victims of adulteration and of rigged scales.

From centralized power to centralized abuse

The hard times faced by the peasants foreshadowed hard times for the nation. In spite of the income from trade and taxes, funds were never quite enough to cover all the expenses of the empire. In an effort to raise more funds, Solomon sold to the king of Tyre a number of towns along Israel's northern border near the Bay of Acre (9:10-14). When a nation needs to sell off part of its territory, bankruptcy cannot be far behind.

The outlying provinces of the empire began to rebel and assert their freedom. Damascus was restless and Edom was on the edge of revolt (11:14-25). All this meant that revenues from these sources had begun to dry up. The kingship and the expanded empire had brought far more changes than even a wise Solomon could handle. No one had envisioned that centralized leadership would be so quickly abused.

Ezekiel Scores the Temple

Writing during the Exile and after Solomon's temple had been destroyed, Ezekiel, without mentioning Solomon's name, records Yahweh's criticism of a palace and temple built too closely together: "their threshold and their doorposts beside my doorposts" (Ezek. 43:6-9).

In the last days of Solomon, a new trend appeared in the person of Jeroboam. He came to the nation as a leader of the conscripted laborers from "the house of Joseph" and like Moses of many generations earlier, he saw the oppression of his people (11:26-40).

Under the influence of a man named Ahijah, Jeroboam moved to liberate his people. Ahijah was from Shiloh, the shrine where Samuel had once lived.

Ahijah was a prophet.

Discovery

1. What were David's most important achievements?
2. What were Solomon's most important contributions to the kingdom? How does Solomon compare with David?
3. The monarchy and the tribes were united under Solomon and David. What were the growing ills that threatened harm to the nation?
4. How did the conquest and addition of the Canaanite cities to the nation of Israel change the life of Israel? What clues do we have about the way these cities (one example might be Jerusalem) were made a part of the life of Israel? How might it have been better done?

Resources

Anderson, Bernhard W. "The Throne of David," *Understanding the Old Testament*. Chapter 6, pages 167-97.

Inventory

1. How was Jerusalem different from the other cities in Israel?

2. What was the nature of the armed forces under David's command? How were they supported?

3. How did Solomon come to be chosen king?

4. Identify the following persons or places:

Abiathar
Absalom
Adonijah
Ahijah
Bathsheba
Gibeon
Hebron
Hiram
Ishbosheth
Jebusites
Jeroboam
Joab
Nathan
Shiloh
Tyre
Zadok

CHAPTER 12

The Theology and Politics of Zion

Gist

The Deuteronomistic historians were writing a serious and critical history of the monarchy. But in the marketplace and in the courts of the temple, kingship received exuberant praise. For a balanced view, we need to hear the praise of the royal partisans. Israel felt positive about its kings, seeing that in them the promises of Yahweh had been fulfilled and that the nation had a mission to the rest of the world.

Patriots appear in two varieties. One patriot loves the nation openly and uncritically. This person gives full loyalty to the flag and endorses the national purpose. The second patriot is equally committed, believes in the national destiny just as fervently, but sees that mistakes have been made in the past and feels that corrections must be made if the national goals are to be met.

So far, we have read the history of Israel through the eyes of this second group of patriots. The writers that we meet in the historical books (called the *Former Prophets* in the Hebrew Bible) tested the monarchy and warned of its abuses. Though they supported the monarchy, they reserved the right to test and examine each king's record, praise the good, and condemn the evil. And when the nation was in peril, the incentive became even greater to analyze critically and subject the nation and its leaders to intense scrutiny.

But to see people only through an x-ray film, like a physician seeking a suspected cancer, is to miss the health of the body, its joy, and its strength. Writings outside the historical and prophetic record put us in touch with the patriots of the first variety. They are the authors who wrote the Royal Psalms and composed the Songs of Zion as their expression of devotion to their country. If their presentations of kingship are less critical, they give us a fuller understanding of the love that the people had for their community.

Psalm 2—the king as God's son

As a people install a new king on the throne, we see and hear their hopes for their king. Psalm 2 is one such acclamation.

The song was composed for the crowning of King David or one of his descendants. The day was a time of crisis. The nations that had been ruled by Israel were in a state of rebellion, hoping to gain their freedom under a new king who might be weaker than the old king (vv. 1-3).

But they hadn't counted on Yahweh. For, Yahweh gave authority to the new king who was able to assert the authority of God (6-9). The rebelling kings saw that they could not stand against Yahweh. They agreed to live in peace.

Note how the song describes the king: "Yahweh and his

anointed" (v. 2) and Yahweh says to the king, "You are my son." Zion, Yahweh's "holy hill," is the site of the king's installation (v. 6).

Other psalms make equally strong claims for the king, with God affirming the king as "my first-born, the highest of earthly kings" (89:27, Anchor Bible); "his anointed" (18:50; 20:6). Psalm 45 is a wedding poem sung for the king and his bride. In this song, the king is addressed as "Elohim" or "God": "Your throne, O God, will last for ever and ever" (45:6, NIV; cf. RSV margin and citation in Heb 1:8). David is acclaimed as "the man who was raised on high" (2 Sam. 23:1). And in the covenant with David, God says of the king who succeeds David, "I will be his father, and he shall be my son" (2 Sam. 7:14—this oracle of the prophet Nathan in 2 Sam. 7:4-17 forms the nucleus of the royal theology. It has its parallel in the psalmlike passage in 2 Sam. 23:1-7).

Now, the pagan nations around Israel looked up to their kings as gods. Such was the case in Egypt, as well as in Babylon and Assyria. When the Israelites first sued Samuel for a change in leadership, they said, "Now appoint for us a king to govern us like all the nations" (1 Sam. 8:5; cf. Deut. 17:14), so they admitted from the very beginning that kingship had pagan origins. But Israel made some changes.

In the mythical stories told about the Canaanite kings, the non-Israelites saw their kings as sons of the gods who had suckled at the breasts of goddesses, and who as gods took part in the pagan rites of the dying and rising of the god of fertility. Ishtar, the goddess of fertility, was the mythical consort of the king.

The Israelites firmly rejected this mythology of pagan kingship, especially the godship of the king. Some of the language did carry over, but with new and more limited meaning. The king was God's son by adoption through the anointing ceremony. The ruler was divinely elected, a chosen representative of God, but in no way a member of the heavenly court.

Even though the king had a special status and a special quality, it was not for the honor of the king but in order that the king might carry out God's mission of justice and righteousness. The element of "chosenness" is emphasized in the early references to the king (Deut. 17:15; 1 Sam. 10:24; 16:1; 2 Sam. 6:21). But God and the king are never put on the same level.

The title of the monarch shows the simplicity of Israelite understanding of kingship. They called their ruler simply "the king" or "the king of Israel (or Judah)." The king carried no titles that linked him to God or the heavenly court. If a special name was used it was "the anointed of Yahweh" showing that the king had been set apart for a special task.

Psalm 72—justice and righteousness as the king's glory

Many of the royal psalms are prayers of the king or prayers for the king. Most pertinent of all these is the prayer for the king's mission of justice and righteousness in Psalm 72:

> May he judge thy people with righteousness,
> and thy poor with justice! (v. 2).

With this prayer from the patrons of the court, all the prophets would fully agree. Justice was the prime service expected from the king. The office of the Israelite king was not one of being a lawmaker or a lawgiver. Such was not needed for the laws had been given by God.

Journal

Following are examples of the three types of writings we will be reviewing in this chapter: Psalms 2, 72, 46, and Genesis 12.

Read each chapter and write a few sentences about each to summarize its view of the king and of the nation.

The Royal Psalms

Psalms most commonly identified as *Royal Psalms* are: 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 61, 63, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, 144.

Language similar to the Royal Psalms has also been noted in the following: 3, 22, 27, 41, 54, 56, 57, 58, 86, 91, 92, 102, 116, 118, 127, 131, 138, 143.

Seed

I will tell of the decree of Yahweh:/ He said to me, "You are my son,/ today I have begotten you" (Ps. 2:7).

Give the king thy justice, O God,/ and thy righteousness to the royal son! (Ps. 72:1).

His line shall endure for ever,/ his throne as long as the sun before me (Ps. 89:36).

Yahweh swore to David a sure oath/ from which he will not turn back:/ "One of the sons of your body/ I will set on your throne./ If your sons keep my covenant/ and my testimonies which I shall teach them,/ their sons also for ever/ shall sit upon your throne" (Ps. 132:11, 12).

In Judah God is known,/ his name is great in Israel./ His abode has been established in Salem,/ his dwelling in Zion./ There he broke the flashing arrows,/ the shield, the sword, and the weapons of war (Ps. 76:1-3).

For there is no enchantment against Jacob,/ no divination against Israel;/ now it shall be said of Jacob and Israel,/ "What has God wrought!" (Num. 23:23).

Enthronement Psalms and Reign of the Lord Hymns

The following psalms may have been used for the enthronement of a king or for the anniversary celebration of that event: 47, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99.

Some of the above have been designated "Reign of the Lord Hymns": 93, 96, 97, 98, 99.

These laws decreed that there should be justice and equality and that the needy be cared for.

May he defend the cause of the poor of the people,
give deliverance to the needy,
and crush the oppressor! (v. 4, cf. vv. 12-14).

If this were done, then there would be prosperity in the land as well as the greatest of all blessings—peace. Justice was the sign that God's will was being done on earth, so the prayer for justice was really rooted in the nature of God.

The king was roundly praised for his support of justice and righteousness. The tributes to the king are generous when he has fulfilled this mission: "abundance of grain in the land . . . fruit . . . like Lebanon" (v. 16).

Pleas for justice and righteousness appear in other royal psalms, even in the wedding celebration for king and queen: "Your royal scepter is a scepter of equity;/ you love righteousness and hate wickedness" (Ps. 45:6, 7). This is the earnest desire of the king because it is of the nature of Yahweh to "Hear the desire of the meek . . . to do justice to the fatherless and the oppressed" (Ps. 10:17, 18 cf. Gen. 18:19), and so Yahweh's agent would do the same.

The royal glory was in this service to God's people: "So David reigned over all Israel; and David administered justice and equity to all his people" (2 Sam. 8:15).

Psalm 101, another royal psalm, shows what a king can do to promote justice. He only hires honest people for the nation's service (v. 6) and closes the door on cheats and liars (vv. 7, 8; cf. 89:30-32).

Psalm 132—celebration of the Davidic covenant.

David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem in a triumphal procession (2 Sam. 6:13-19). Psalm 132 celebrates this event as a most important act in David's career. He had rescued the symbol of Israel's faith and installed it prominently in Jerusalem.

The care of the ark became a passion for the king:

I will not enter my house
or get into my bed . . .
until I find a place for Yahweh,
a dwelling place for the Mighty One of Jacob (vv. 3, 5).

This psalm repeats in epic form the narrative of 2 Samuel 7. Because David so earnestly wanted to build a house for Yahweh, God made a covenant that David's dynasty (or house) should last forever:

One of the sons of your body
I will set on your throne. . . .
their sons also for ever
shall sit upon your throne (132:11, 12).

This was the Davidic covenant and the central affirmation of the royal theology. It was the "sure oath" from which Yahweh "will not turn back" (v. 11). The covenant was a special grant to David for his unique devotion to his God: "Remember, O Yahweh, in David's favor,/ all the hardships he endured (132:1).

The Davidic covenant was firmly fixed in Judah and the dynasty did last as long as the southern kingdom endured—for four centuries. By that time, the idea was so firmly set that even the Exile could not shake the commitment of the true Israelite to the promise.

The conviction found echoes in other royal psalms:

> I have made a covenant with my chosen one. . . .
> I will establish his line for ever. . . .
> I will not remove from him my steadfast love
> (Ps. 89:3, 29, 33; cf. vv. 34, 36).

The everlastingness of the covenant appears in other parts of Scripture. In the last words of David is the affirmation: "For he has made with me an everlasting covenant" (2 Sam. 23:5). Israel's faith was undergirded by the security of the Davidic covenant: "If you can break my covenant with the day and . . . night . . . then also my covenant with David my servant may be broken" (Jer. 33:20, 21).

Jerusalem—the habitation of the Most High

In both Psalms 89 and 132, the commitment of Yahweh to David is intertwined with a pledge to Zion. The bond to Jerusalem becomes more firm as the link to David's line becomes more fixed:

> For Yahweh has chosen Zion;
> he has desired it for his habitation (132:13).

Jerusalem served as the site for the throne of David (89:29, 36) and thus the city's future was tied to David's. And with Yahweh's choosing of David came also the choosing of "Mount Zion, which he loves" (78:68).

Since the temple served as the shelter for the Ark of the Covenant, the symbols of Yahweh's presence, it was not long until the temple became known as the house of God. To find God, people came to Jerusalem. And in the temple, they heard the royal psalms, for the palace and the temple were side by side. Words about Mount Zion and the temple became part of the way of speaking about the faith of Israel. Certain convictions fixed themselves upon the temple.

Though the elevation on which the temple was built was but a low hill, praise for Yahweh acclaimed the God of Israel as a God mightier than the gods of the Canaanites whose mythical home was in a high mountain far to the north of Canaan. Yahweh, being greater than the gods of the Canaanites in the language of faith, would possess a home higher than all others. So, the hill of Zion became "the mountain of the house of Yahweh . . . the highest of the mountains" (Isa. 2:2); "a very high mountain" (Ezek. 40:2). The Songs of Zion praise Jerusalem as Yahweh's "holy mountain, beautiful in elevation" (Ps. 48:1, 2).

Likewise, the modest springs of Jerusalem feed the mighty river of paradise: "There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God,/ the holy habitation of the Most High" (Ps. 46:4) which brings joy to the city and fertility and healing to God's people (cf. Ezek. 47:1-12; Joel 3:18; Zech. 13:1; 14:8; Rev. 22:1, 2).

Water sometimes serves as the symbol of disaster and chaos. Such is the case in the fearful metaphor in Psalm 46, yet God transforms the raging waters into waters of peace: "God is in the midst of her, she shall not be moved" (46:5).

Songs of Zion

The following psalms are classed as *Songs of Zion*: 15, 24, 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122, 134.

Zion in Other Places

Jerusalem/Zion has been celebrated as Yahweh's royal city and seat of world-wide rule in passages outside the Psalms:

Joel 3:16, 17
Zechariah 14:8, 9
Matthew 5:35

Because God's house and God's king are in Jerusalem, the holy city will be saved from defeat. God will make peace with the kings who come to attack the city. Thus, war will be abolished and an era of prosperity will begin: "He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth" (46:9; cf. 76:3-9). This theme receives elaboration in other parts of the Bible: Isaiah 14:32; 17:12-14; 29:1-8; 31:4-9; Ezekiel 38—39; Joel 3:9-21; Zechariah 12:1-10; 14:3, 12-15.

The nations of the world will make a pilgrimage to Zion, to the house of God, to worship Yahweh and to pay tribute:

> Make your vows to Yahweh your God, and perform them;
> let all around him bring gifts (Ps. 76:11).

A national epic in praise of promise

History and not poetry was used by the Yahwist to state his case for the monarchy. The Yahwist (or J) is the writer whose document has become known as one of the three main sources for the first four books of the Pentateuch. His work begins with Genesis 2 and continues through Numbers, intermingled with material from the other sources. In these books, the work of the Yahwist can almost always be singled out by his use of Yahweh for the name of God (written as LORD in those versions and translations that follow the tradition of the King James Version).

The Yahwist compiled his history of Israel during the reign of Solomon to express the faith that Yahweh had fulfilled the promises given to Abraham. This writer also believed that Yahweh would continue to lead the people in their new situation if they would but trust in Yahweh.

The united monarchy brought the world to the doorsteps of the Israelite people. Once they had been poor and oppressed, wandering in a wilderness. Later, they scratched out a bare existence on the rugged hillsides of Canaan. All the while, the powerful and mighty passed by with their armies going out to conquer and bring back new riches. Then, almost overnight, the Israelites had armies and caravans and fleets of sailing ships. They governed distant colonies and they were building palaces, cities, temples, and fortresses. The shock wave must have been shattering.

How could they absorb all this? What could they make of it? What did it mean to have a king? Was it good to have a king, or, as some people seemed to feel, was it bad to have a king?

The Yahwist ordered the traditions of Israel to show his people that in their past experiences was a road map for their future. He started with their prehistory. In Genesis 2—11, he showed that world history had been under a curse. Adam and Eve sinned and were barred from Eden. Cain killed his brother Abel. The flood destroyed a sinful generation and the pride of power scattered the nations at Babel.

Then came Abraham and Sarah, people of faith. They began a new era of blessing. Yahweh made a covenant with them to make them a great nation, to give them a great name, and to make them a blessing to the world (Gen. 12:1-3). And God had fulfilled that covenant. The Abrahamic covenant had been concerned with the land and the land had been given. From "the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. 15:18) described the empire under David and Solomon (cf. 2 Sam. 8:3; 1 Kings 4:21, 24; 8:65; Deut. 11:24). The people of Israel had multiplied and become a great nation and in Solomon, they had a great name (1 Kings 1:47; 10:1-10).

Blessings but not without peril

Through the history of the covenant with Abraham, the Yahwist spoke of his own age during the days of Solomon. Abraham became the pattern for the future kings of Israel and their people, and the covenant with Abraham for the covenant with David: "I will raise up your offspring after you. . . . He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son" (2 Sam. 7:12-14).

The promise to Abraham centered around the promise of a son—a promise that seemed almost impossible to fulfill. In fact, much of the experience with the Abrahamic promise was fraught with dangers and perils to its fulfillment. Infertility plagued Isaac and Rebekah as well as Abraham and Sarah. And when the children were born, the sons faced even worse peril. Abraham came near to sacrificing Isaac on Mount Moriah. Isaac and Rebekah's sons quarreled over the birthright. When the feud was settled, the inheritance went the riskier route with Jacob, the younger son.

Famine always stalked the families. Immediately after the covenant, Abraham and Sarah went to Egypt because of famine (Gen. 12:10). Famine followed Isaac and Rebekah also (Gen. 26:1). But the most perilous famine came in the time of Jacob and his family when they had to go to Egypt once more, only to discover that through the providence of Yahweh, Joseph, whom they had thought to be dead, had been sent ahead to provide for them.

Of course, the perils of bondage in Egypt, the threat of drowning in the Reed Sea, and the specter of starvation in the desert of Sinai still awaited them. But in spite of all these dangers, they survived. They were blessed and not cursed.

For the Yahwist, the covenant was sealed with the oracle given by Balaam, the non-Israelite prophet hired by King Balak of Moab to curse the Israelites on their way to possess the Promised Land:

> How can I curse whom God has not cursed? . . .
> Behold, I received a command to bless:
> he has blessed and I cannot revoke it (Num. 23:8, 20).

The covenant given to Abraham offered blessings without conditions. In this, it differed from the covenant made at Sinai which had a condition: the people needed to respond to God's grace by obedience to the Law.

In the popular mind, the Davidic covenant, like the covenant to Abraham, was an unconditional promise. God was bound to it regardless of the response of the people. "I will not take my steadfast love from him" (2 Sam. 7:15) was indeed one of the promises in the Davidic covenant. But before these words came a stern warning: "When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men" (v. 14). The consequences of breaking the Davidic covenant could also be severe. Jeremiah would later contend that the Davidic covenant could be ended just as another covenant was ended "in Shiloh, where I made my name dwell at first" (Jer. 7:12).

And the possibility of the ancient curse was still not completely gone. The curse from the time of prehistory may have been foreshadowed in the life of the royal family with David's seizure of Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah, a simile for the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the

Inventory

1. Identify the following items in a sentence and give an example:
Royal Psalm
Song of Zion
The J Document

2. What was the meaning of the king as God's son as defined by Canaanite mythology and by Israelite belief?

3. What was the major responsibility of the Israelite king?

garden (1 Sam. 11—12). Amnon's murder by Absalom (2 Sam. 13—14) surely recalled the curse on Cain for the killing of Abel. Absalom's rebellion against David (2 Sam. 15—19) was a calamity equal to the deluge during the days of Noah. Solomon's grasping for power and his ruthless suppression of his rivals (1 Kings 1—2) invited the curse of Babel.

But to all of this, the Abrahamic history and model provided an alternative and hope for blessing. The Yahwist had a strong affirmation to make about history. The acts of faith by persons like Abraham and Sarah could make a difference. People were not the victims of predetermined cycles set up by the gods. They were persons who could influence the course of events by the decisions that they made.

Even in the days of Solomon, the Yahwist along with the singers of the Royal Psalms and the Songs of Zion could affirm that Israel had a mission to the nations of the world.

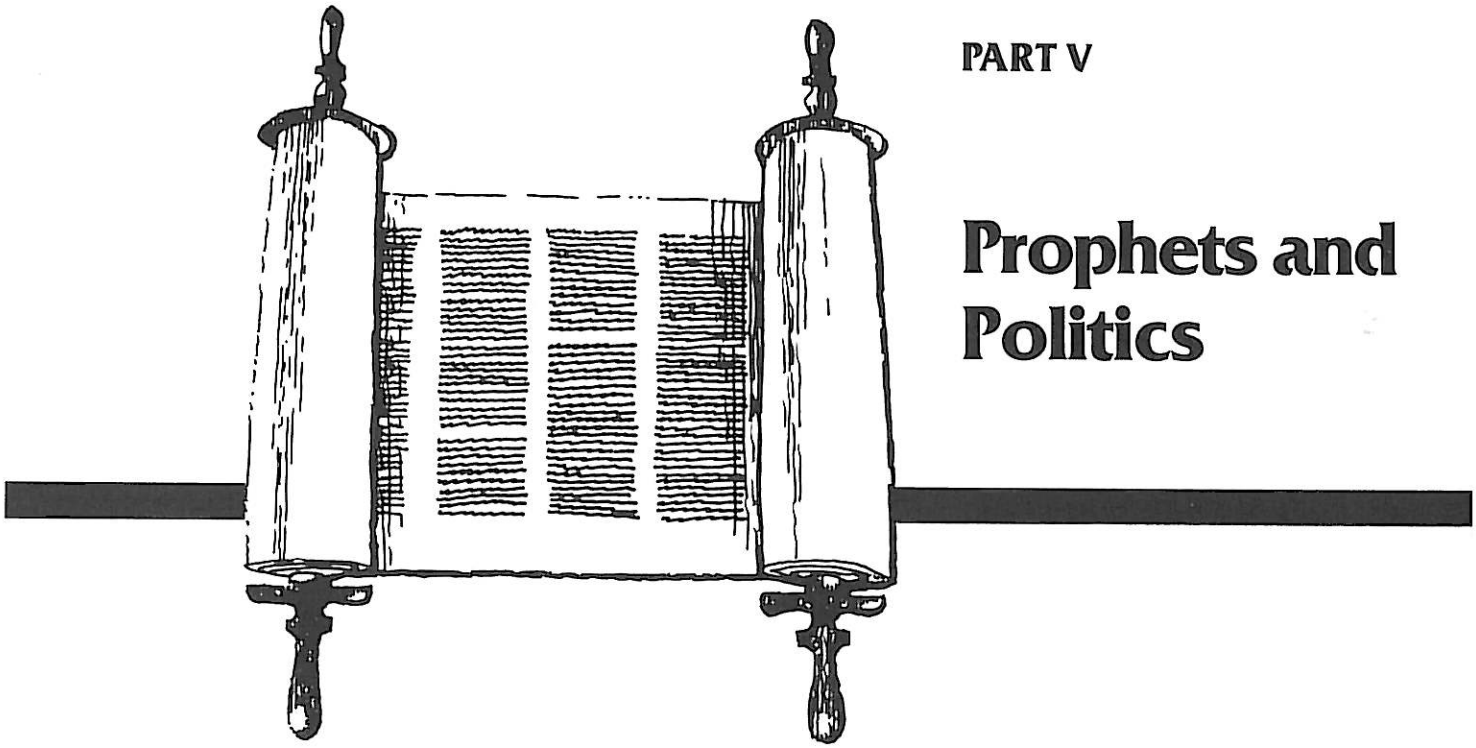
Discovery

1. What new ideas have come to you as a result of your study of these four chapters on "The Beginnings of Nationhood" which have covered conquest, rise of kingship, united monarchy, and the theology of Zion? List the ideas and questions. Discuss those mentioned most often and those that relate most directly to the themes of these chapters.

2. What were the strengths and weaknesses of the institution of kingship? What were the strengths and weaknesses of Saul? of Solomon? of David?

Resources

Anderson, Bernhard W. "Israel's National Epic," *Understanding the Old Testament*. Chapter 7, pages 198-225.



PART V

Prophets and Politics

CHAPTER 13

Agitators for Reform and Fomenters of Rebellion

Gist

After Solomon came the great divide: the ten northern tribes broke away to form the kingdom of Israel; the remaining two tribes were left to become the kingdom of Judah and carry on the traditions of David. Israel prospered under Omri and Ahab in most every way except in religion. Generation after generation, the prophets protested the mixing of the true faith of Israel with that of Baal. In the end

Solomon made many mistakes. His son Rehoboam made only one—he decided to continue on in the same course of empire building begun by his father.

So, it was that after the death of Solomon, the united kingdom of Israel fell apart. These northern tribes that had once been allied with Saul once more went their own way. Judah, in the south, from which the house of David had arisen, continued to be loyal to David's family.

In order to support his empire, Solomon had taxed the people heavily and conscripted their labor for his building projects and their sons for his army. The burden fell more heavily on the northern tribes, and they were quick to rebel at the first chance. When Rehoboam proposed even more taxation, that was their opening. Agitators for reform and fomenters of rebellion came from the ranks of the prophets of Israel.

Prophet Ahijah picks King Jeroboam

Now, the history of the divided kingdom can make for some dismal reading. That's because the Books of Kings highlight the failures of all the rulers in Israel and most of those in Judah.

Ahijah, from Shiloh, was the prophet who encouraged Jeroboam, the son of Nebat and an official in Solomon's government, to lead the northern tribes who had grown discontented under the heavy taxation and conscription levied on them by Jerusalem (1 Kings 11:26-39). In this, Ahijah was only following the example of Samuel who had gone out and anointed David once Saul had fallen from favor.

Ahijah did not support the notion that David's family had the right to rule forever. Coming from Shiloh, he had not been gripped by the royal theology of Judah or by the Songs of Zion.

Solomon's growing militarism had come to rely more and more on professional soldiers who took pride in their new technology—war chariots drawn by horses. But taxes went up as the commanders hired more of the "Cherethites and Pelethites" (1 Kings 1:38, 44), the non-Israelite mercenaries who made up the backbone of the nation's army.

Down on the Israelite farms, hay and grain were in short supply. The plow oxen went hungry so that the war horses could be well fed. The level of farm production dropped as more and more iron and bronze needed for farm tools went into weapons and into empire building. The splendor of Solomon's palaces and the might of his fortress cities could not ease the hunger in the bellies of the Israelite farm families.

So, the northern tribes, at the suggestion of Ahijah, chose Jeroboam for their king. Rehoboam, Solomon's son, who had been installed

on the throne in Jerusalem, moved to crush the rebellion. But Shemaiah, a prophet from Judah, advised Rehoboam not to make war on the seceding tribes, and conflict was postponed for a time (1 Kings 12:21-24).

Prophets surprised by golden bulls

Jeroboam faced a large task. Having cut the northern tribes off from the apparatus of government in Jerusalem, he had to scurry to set up a whole new state. First, a king needed a palace. Jeroboam built his capital near the ancient city of Shechem (1 Kings 12:25), later moving it to Tirzah, a city famed for its beauty (14:17; Song of Solomon 6:4).

But just as important to an oriental king as an army and palaces was an official shrine. Jeroboam could not allow his people to make pilgrimages several times a year to Jerusalem. There they would hear the Songs of Zion proclaiming the kings of the house of David as the only true rulers of God's people. So, Jeroboam created his own holy places: Bethel in the south and Dan in the north. Both cities figured in the early history of Israel and their shrines were staffed with priests and supplied with a schedule of festivals (1 Kings 12:28-33).

Most unique at these temples were the golden calves (or bulls) that quickly became the center of attention and for which they have been long remembered. For the golden calves, Jeroboam lost his prophetic support (1 Kings 14:7-11). The calf symbol had ancient roots in Israel, appearing in the desert days under the sponsorship of Aaron (Exod. 32:1-4). Though the critics of the northern kingdom, particularly the Deuteronomistic historians who compiled the Books of Kings, regarded the calves as idols, they were no more such than were the cherubim of the Jerusalem temple. Both cherub and calf served as pedestals for the invisible presence of Yahweh, the God of Judah and Israel.

Israel and Judah—for richer, for poorer

The days of Judah and Israel as separate kingdoms began with a period of border wars to establish their boundaries. In the end, Judah was able to hold on to the territory of the tribe of Benjamin, land needed to protect Jerusalem from the north (1 Kings 12:20, 21).

With Benjamin under its control, Judah had relative secure borders in the southern hill country of Palestine. Such a luxury was never enjoyed by Israel, which had scarcely any defensible borders. So, geography along with history conspired to make Israel an unstable kingdom, subject to invasion from without and troubled by unrest from within.

Judah was well on its way toward developing a predictable line of succession through the house of David. Thus Judah was spared the turmoil Israel suffered following the death of each reigning monarch. In its 200-year history, Israel went through eight crises as first one family then another plotted to gain control of the throne usually with the help of the army. In one fifty-year period, Israel's throne changed hands by violence three times. Often the same prophets who had worked to seat a particular king worked later to oust him. Such was the case with Jeroboam and later Baasha (14:1-16; 15:29; 16:1-7, 12).

Judah was the smaller and poorer of the two sister states. Isolated as it was in the hills, Judah was able to maintain its traditions with a

and in spite of it all, Israel fell to the rising power of Assyria and its identity as a nation was lost.

Journal

The following passages cover key events in the life of Israel. Write three or four sentences on each passage to summarize the high points.

1 Kings 12:1-20
1 Kings 21:1-19
2 Kings 9:1-36
2 Kings 17:1-6

The following passages represent a key event or excerpt of a message from the ministry of several prophets. Write three or four sentences on each passage to summarize the event or the message and its meaning.

1 Kings 18
2 Kings 5
Hosea 11
Amos 5

The following passage is a summary by the Deuteronomistic historians giving the reasons for the fall of Israel. List these reasons in your journal:

2 Kings 17:7-23

Seed

Omri did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and did more evil than all who were before him. For he walked in all the way of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, and in the sins which he made Israel to sin, provoking Yahweh, the God of Israel, to anger by their idols (1 Kings 16:25, 26).

And Elijah came near to all the people, and said, "How long will you go limping with two different opinions? If Yahweh is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him" (1 Kings 18:21).

"I hate, I despise your feasts,/ and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies./ . . . Take away from me the noise of your songs;/to the melody of your harps I will not listen./ But let justice roll down like waters,/ and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream" (Amos 5:21-24).

"So you, by the help of your God, return,/ hold fast to love and justice,/ and wait continually for your God" (Hos. 12:6).

measure of purity and even nurture the growth of the cult of Yahweh in relative peace.

Israel was larger and richer. Many more caravans crossed its territory allowing it to be active in commerce. But it was also more open to outside influences. With many of its citizens of Canaanite and foreign ancestry, Israel was prone to lose its grip on its own traditions.

Egypt grabs the temple gold

With the power of the Hebrew kingdom divided, the two nations declined in power just as key nations around them were coming to life. Egypt which had long been weak, got a new infusion of energy from a Libyan family that founded the country's twenty-second dynasty. Shishak, its leading pharaoh, came to power in the last days of Solomon's reign (935 B.C.).

In Rehoboam's fifth year, Shishak moved toward Palestine with a large army to assert Egypt's power over the region. He ranged widely, capturing over 150 cities from Edom and the Negeb in the south to the Transjordan in the east and to Esdraelon in the north.

Rehoboam kept Shishak away from Jerusalem's gates by buying him off with a large tribute of gold treasures and shields from the temple and the palace (1 Kings 14:25-28). After this close call, Rehoboam built a series of fortified cities along Judah's west and south borders (2 Chron. 11:5-12). The line of defense indicates how the large realm of Solomon had shrunk in just a few years.

But while Judah became ever more isolated, it never threw off the pagan influences that had been introduced by Solomon. Rehoboam introduced pagan rites into temple worship including male cult prostitutes (1 Kings 15:12).

Asa (913-873 B.C.) and his son Jehosphaphat (873-849 B.C.) were the firt reformers among the kings of Judah. They moved to rid their country of some of the most obnoxious pagan cults (1 Kings 15:11-15; 22:43). Jehoshaphat also reformed the courts, appointing judges and setting up a court of appeals in Jerusalem presided over by a priest (2 Chron. 19:4-11).

During Asa's reign, the southern kingdom had to defend itself from an attack by Israel which thrust southward into Benjamin. Asa had to make an alliance with the king of Syria to prevent being overrun. David and Solomon had both ruled over Syria, but with the division of the monarchy, Syria had claimed its independence. Now it had returned with power to rival the Israelites and was only too glad for an excuse to raid Israel and pick up territory in the Transjordan that it had once owned.

Yet Yahweh warned Israel and Judah by every prophet and every seer, saying, "Turn from your evil ways and keep my commandments and my statutes, in accordance with all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by my servants the prophets" . . . Therefore Yahweh was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight; none was left but the tribe of Judah only (2 Kings 17:13, 18).

The rise of the house of Omri

Eventually, Israel pulled itself out of turmoil and found prosperity. After fifty years, Omri, general of the army, seized power. He quickly subdued his rivals (1 Kings 16:15-22). The Bible carries only six short verses about Omri (1 Kings 16:23-28), yet more than anyone else in Israel's history, Omri brought the country up to a level of power and influence like that known in Solomon's days. He made peace with Judah, extended Israel's control over lands east of the Jordan, and entered into a treaty with the Phoenician city of Tyre to build up trade and commerce with the Mediterranean world.

Omri bought the hill of Samaria and there began the building of a new capital city for Israel. Samaria, like Jerusalem, became the property of a royal family. Excavations at Samaria and other cities built and fortified by Omri and his son Ahab show that they were master builders and wealthy too. Samaria was noted for its ivory house (1 Kings 22:39; Amos 3:15). Carved inlays of ivory used in the furnishings of the palace have been found in great numbers in recent explorations of Samaria.

The genius of Omri and Ahab and that of their architects has also been confirmed by Megiddo and Hazor. These fortress cities in Galilee were fitted with massive walls and had water systems complete with deep tunnels chiseled through rock to provide a safe supply of water during siege by enemy troops. Samaria itself had fortifications unequaled in Palestine and was able to endure a three-year siege before it was finally taken, a century after Ahab's day (2 Kings 17:5).

The famed stables of Megiddo once thought to have been built by Solomon for 450 chariot horses were really the work of Ahab's builders. When in alliance with Syria and others, Ahab went out to fight the Assyrians at the battle of Qarqar in 853 B.C., the Assyrian records show that he commanded a force of 2,000 chariots, more than the sum of all those put into the field by all the other kings who were with him, a force larger than Solomon ever commanded (1 Kings 10:26; cf. 2 Chron. 9:25).

Yet Ahab had to support this enlarged military establishment (which also included 10,000 foot soldiers) on a land area that was smaller and had fewer people than Solomon's kingdom. Clearly, this meant increased hardship on the people of Israel. The high priority given to the military came to light during the great drought when Ahab took urgent steps to secure fodder for his horses and mules (1 Kings 18:1-6).

The Omrides meet Elijah

But the house of Omri is remembered for the prophets of its day and not for its building genius, its military prowess, or the economic prosperity that it fostered. Rather, the prophets looked past all this and reviled the Omrides for their promotion of Baal worship and for mixing it with the worship of Yahweh.

The cult of Baal came to new prominence in Israel with the marriage of Ahab to Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, the king of Tyre and a priest of Baal (1 Kings 16:31). The union was to seal a treaty between the two kingdoms. When Jezebel came to Israel, she brought her religion with her as had the foreign wives of Solomon. But unlike the women of Solomon's harem, Jezebel was a zealous missionary for her faith. She brought hundreds of prophets of the cult with her and supported them out of her allowance (1 Kings 18:19). And Ahab built a temple to Baal in Samaria (16:32).

Ahab himself probably thought of himself as devoted to the God of Israel. He named his sons: Ahaziah and Jehoram, names in the Yahwist tradition. He only intended to add the cult of Baal to the religion of his ancestors. But this mixing of religions was exactly what the prophets of Yahweh could not abide.

Yahweh as the only God of Israel exercised a power that could be shared with no other. This was the stirring proclamation of Elijah, the Tishbite, who appeared during the reign of Ahab to resist the campaign

Tales of the North

Within the Book of Kings is a special unit, 1 Kings 17:1—2 Kings 10:31, identified as "Tales of the North." This history was written in Israel from the point of view of the people in the northern kingdom and tells the stories of Ahab, Elijah, and Elisha.

Kings of Israel

[Judah's kings in brackets]
Prophets in CAPS

B.C.

- 922 Jeroboam
  [Rehoboam]
- 913 [Asa]
- 901 Nadab
- 900 Baasha
- 877 Elah
- 876 Zimri. Omri
- 873 [Jehoshaphat]
- 869 Ahab
  ELIJAH
  ELISHA
- 850 Ahaziah
- 849 Jehoram
- 843 Jehu
- 837 [Joash]
- 815 Jehoahaz
- 802 Jehoash
- 800 [Amaziah]
- 786 Jeroboam II
- 783 [Uzziah]
  AMOS
  HOSEA
- 745 Shallum. Menahem
- 736 Pekahiah. Pekah
- 732 Hoshea
- 722 Fall of Samaria

for Baal being pressed by Jezebel. Elijah came from the edge of the desert east of the Jordan and was steeped in the tradition of Moses.

As a sign of Yahweh's punishment for Israel's great apostasy, Elijah called for a great drought (1 Kings 17:1). Then, in a dramatic gesture, he confronted the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel in a test to discover which deity was able to bring rain to the land. As the god of fertility, Baal was considered the source of prosperity, yet Elijah was able to show that Yahweh alone could provide for the people.

The contest on Mount Carmel harked back to the ancient assemblies of the tribes of Israel. It pitted Yahweh against Baal, and Yahweh won handily (1 Kings 18).

Prophets manage rebellion

Elijah was not the first prophet to appear in Israel, yet he became the model for all later prophets. An outstanding example in a movement never short on colorful characters, Elijah spoke in the name of Yahweh. He called for unqualified obedience to Yahweh and rejection of all other gods. For him obedience went along with justice and righteousness.

In his seizure of Naboth's vineyard (1 Kings 21), Ahab placed himself above the covenant law, an abuse of kingship which no prophet could allow. Already the poor of Israel were at the mercy of the rich and were being enslaved by them (2 Kings 4:1). For all these wrongs, the blame was laid at the door of the king.

The burden of Elijah's mission, as that of his disciple Elisha who followed him, was directed against the royal house. When Ahab called him the "troubler of Israel," Elijah replied, "I have not troubled Israel; but you have, and your father's house, because you have forsaken the commandments of Yahweh and followed the Baals" (1 Kings 18:18).

So, Elijah and Elisha acted to replace the dynasty of Omri with another king. Like Ahijah, who anointed Jeroboam to displace Solomon, and Samuel who chose David to take the place of Saul, Elisha anointed Jehu, commander of the army of Israel, to replace the sons of Ahab (2 Kings 9:4-6).

With this token of prophetic support, Jehu and the army mounted a fierce revolt against Jehoram, Ahab's son. In a bloody insurrection, the king and queen and all the members of the ruling family were assassinated at Jezreel, one of the royal cities of Israel, along with Ahaziah, the king of Judah, who was a visitor at the court. Jezebel, the queen mother, was murdered by being thrown from an upstairs window. Seventy sons of Ahab were decapitated. Later, the worshipers of Baal were lured into the temple of their god and the building was set afire (2 Kings 9:14—10:27).

The excessive bloodletting paralyzed the country and brought it to the edge of ruin. Even the pious were shocked at the fury visited on the house of Omri and its supporters. A century later, Hosea, a prophet native to Israel, would say with loathing, speaking for Yahweh, "I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel" (Hos. 1:4).

Already weakened, Israel had to face the growing power of Syria which stripped the country of its holdings in Transjordan. During the reign of Jehu's son, Israel was little more than a puppet of Syria. Israel's army was disbanded and the king was left with only ten chariots, fifty horsemen, and a security force of 10,000 militiamen. In spite of it all, pagan worship flourished in the land (2 Kings 13:6, 7).

Prophets thrive on kingship

The practice of prophecy goes back to the days of Samuel when we discover bands of ecstatics "prophesying" to the sound of music (1 Sam. 10:5-13; 19:18-24). The tradition of such activity was found in other countries in the region, so we know that prophecy as an institution had roots outside Israel. But, as in other cases, Israel took over a foreign custom and transformed it into a movement unique to its own spirit and faith, one with power and creativity. The prophets made it a means for the revival of their ancient faith as well as a road to survival in the future.

Intensely patriotic, the prophets carried on the traditions of Israel's tribal days and proclaimed the ancient truths of their history. Their creed: Yahweh is the ultimate authority. But the exercise of kingship threatened this faith. Solomon and then Ahab began to fashion their kingdom after the model of other oriental monarchies in which the king had absolute power and possessed the land as well as the people.

At first, the prophets moved to counteract the rise of such absolute rule by taking aim at the king. They hoped to find new kings who would be obedient to the covenant law of Yahweh, kings who would be reformers. It was a hope that vested all its attention on the king, believing that this one person was the agent of justice and righteousness. Later prophets would apply a different remedy when they would appeal to all the people to break with the ways of injustice and oppression.

Jeroboam II and two sizes of houses

By a quirk of history, Israel found its way back to recovery after the massacre of the house of Omri and even escaped from Syrian bondage. Most of Israel's good fortune was due to the rise in Mesopotamia of Assyria after a decline of more than a thousand years.

During the days of Omri, Assyrian armies had marched across Syria and up to the shores of the Mediterranean. They withdrew without taking possession of any land, but the wise and thoughtful knew that one day, the Assyrians would be back.

Just at the beginning of the eighth century B.C. and shortly after Joash, Jehu's grandson, had become king of Israel, Assyria returned again to the west and crushed Damascus, the Syrian capital. Internal unrest back home eventually brought the military machine of the Mesopotamian kingdom to a momentary halt just short of the borders of Israel.

With Syria under Assyrian control, Israel was free to exercise its will in a way not open to any Israelite power since the days of Solomon. Joash (also known as Jehoash) moved to reclaim the territories that Syria had taken in earlier raids (2 Kings 13:25). He even turned against the kingdom of Judah and brought it under his control, advancing as far as Jerusalem and breaking down its walls (2 Kings 14:11-14; 2 Chron. 25:17-24).

It was under Joash's son, Jeroboam II, who came to power in 786, that Israel entered into a time of unsurpassed prosperity. During his forty-year reign, Jeroboam made peace with Judah. Together, the two sister states controlled an area almost equal to the land mass ruled by Solomon. Tolls from the caravan trade alone greatly enriched both countries. The cities of both states grew and splendid residences were built and decorated with costly ivory inlays imported from Phoenicia and Damascus.

We would be left with a rather positive record of life in Israel during

the days of Jeroboam II if it were not for Amos and Hosea, the first of the writing prophets. In plain words, they exposed the internal decay in the life of Israel during the eighth century. For prosperity was enjoyed only in the palaces of the nobles and the merchant class. The small traders had been edged out of the economy, and the small farmers, once the backbone of the country's power, had been driven from their ancestral lands to make way for large estates.

A social revolution had taken place. Excavations at Tirzah show that during the reign of the first Jeroboam in the tenth century, all the houses had been of the same size. But two centuries later in the reign of Jeroboam II, one-fourth of the houses were spacious and palatial, while the rest of the dwellings were small and crowded together. Quite clearly, Israel had become a nation of two sharply opposing classes—a small class of rich who enjoyed the propserity of the age, and a large class of poor who lived in misery.

First writing prophet spells out injustice

Amos spoke up first against this outrage in Israel. He came from the wilderness town of Tekoa in Judah. In Bethel, the royal shrine of Israel, and Samaria, the capital, he delivered a withering attack on the dishonesty and cruelty of the wealthy who had ground the poor into the dust (Amos 2:6, 7; 5:10-12; 8:4-6). He was outraged by the excesses of the prosperous in their mindless pursuits of luxury (4:1-3; 6:1-6).

True, the affluent of Israel were no more heartless than others of similar status in neighboring countries. But Amos was doubly harsh on these people because Yahweh had saved their ancestors from oppression through the Exodus and had given them the gift of the land. Now, they had betrayed the trust and the covenant that they had with Yahweh (2:9-12).

Amos and the prophets who followed him came with a new message. Where Elijah had preached judgment because of idolatry sponsored by the king, Amos proclaimed judgment because the whole society was immersed in moral corruption.

Amos no longer looked to the king to end injustice. He preached no revolution nor did he seek out a reform candidate to anoint to replace the ruling monarch. (In Amos 7:10-13, the priest at Bethel accused Amos of just this kind of conspiracy, a charge he vigorously denied.) Amos believed that the kingdom of Israel could not be saved unless the people practiced justice (5:14, 15), therefore, he targeted his mission to the people and not just to the king.

While the prophets no longer had hope in the king, the people still did. They expected that the right king could save them (Hos. 13:10). They had fulfilled the requirements of worship and had paid their dues at the shrines. So, God would save them, they were sure.

Although the Assyrians were growing in power and might indeed come to crush Samaria as they had so recently pulverized Damascus, Israelites felt they were different. They had a history of being rescued by Yahweh who saved their ancestors in the Exodus, sustained them through the wilderness years, and won the land for them by fighting holy war.

This represented their faith in what they called the "day of Yahweh," (Amos 5:18-20). With a certain degree of theological correctness, the people felt that the nation could not fall because God once

more would work a miracle and save them. But they were only half correct.

Hosea's shepherd bites back

Earlier prophets had considered the possibility that the nation could come to an end. They also had a strong faith in the "day of Yahweh." But Amos and Hosea saw the future with different eyes. So deep and evil were the nation's sins against the poor, said Amos, that Israel had been rejected by God (5:2; 7:7-9; 9:1-4, 8a). The day of Yahweh would be a day, not of salvation, but of judgment (5:18-20).

Hosea, the only eighth-century prophet native to Israel, affirmed the same theme. Israel had a covenant with Yahweh, much like the pledge of love between a husband and a wife. But Israel had been unfaithful and broken its part of the covenant.

Because of the moral decay in Israel (Hos. 4:1-3; 6:8-10), the nation would be destroyed. The people had hope that as in the past, Yahweh would prove to be their shepherd and would save them from the wild beasts. But in a fearsome reversal of one of the Bible's most cherished parables, Hosea said this shepherd would turn on the sheep, tear open their breasts, and devour them (13:4-8). The shepherd-savior had turned into a ravaging beast.

Hosea reversed other symbols of salvation. He turned the Exodus into a metaphor of judgment. Israel would be returned to captivity, a captivity this time in Assyria (Hos. 7:16; 8:13; 9:3, 6, 17; 11:5-7).

Conspiracies and frantic schemes

With the death of Jeroboam II in 746, the era of prosperity came to an end and the time of judgment began. It would all be over in a short twenty-five years, but they would be years of turmoil with six kings following each other in quick succession, each trying to save the tottering nation.

In 745, a new and aggressive king came to the throne of Assyria with a determination to extend his empire all the way to Egypt. His name was Tiglath-pileser III (known as *Pul* in the Bible, 2 Kings 15:19). On his way to the kingdom on the Nile, Israel and Judah stood across his path. Their fate was sealed; it was only a question of when.

Israel's wait was agonizing, filled with futile conspiracies and frantic schemes to keep the ax from falling. The nation might have made a deal with the Assyrians, but its moral fiber was weak and its judgment of its resources unrealistic. Meanwhile, Israel itself was engaged in a civil strife of frightful meanness (2 Kings 15:15, 16, 25).

Finally, the Assyrian king moved to restore the empire's hold on Syria. Israel was able to escape invasion at first by buying off the Assyrians with a tribute of a thousand talents of silver (2 Kings 15:19, 20). The tax fell heavily on the wealthy landowners who resented it and plotted to escape it.

As soon as they could, the conspirators assassinated the king and placed Pekah, an army officer, on the throne. They formed an anti-Assyrian coalition with Syria and also invited Judah to join them, something the Judean king refused to do, seeing the folly of the scheme.

But Israel and Syria couldn't take no for an answer. Fearing that a neutral Judah at their rear could do them harm in a war with Assyria, they turned their troops on Judah. Judah called on Assyria for help, and in

Inventory

1. Name four of the kings of Israel.

2. Name the prophets active in the life of Israel and the kings active during their years of prophesying.

3. Where were the official shrines of Israel established? What was the notable feature of these shrines?

4. In what year did the kingdom of Israel come to an end? How many years had it survived as an independent nation?

5. Identify the following persons or places:

Ahab
Ahijah
Asa
Assyria
Bethel
Dan
Elijah
Elisha
Hoshea
Hosea
Jehoshaphat
Jehu
Jeroboam, son of Nebat
Jeroboam (II), son of Joash

735 B.C., Tiglath-pileser pounced on the Syrians and the Israelites, something he would have done eventually (2 Kings 15:29). He captured many of the cities of Israel including Megiddo and Hazor and took many of the people to Assyria as captives.

But Samaria, the hilltop fortress, remained untouched, largely because Hoshea killed King Pekah and then surrendered to Assyria (15:30). For his crime, Hoshea was granted the questionable honor of serving as the last king of Israel during its last ten years. Yet he did his conniving best to stretch out the days and the hours.

Last days of a silly dove

Tiglath-pileser died and Hoshea thought Israel had a chance to regain its losses if it could get aid from Egypt (17:4). The prophet Hosea derided the move as "silly-dove" diplomacy (Hos. 7:11; 12:1), with Israel flitting now to Egypt for help as it had once fluttered in the direction of Assyria. Hoshea's ploy didn't work. As soon as Shalmaneser V, the new king, heard of the plot, he fell on the dove like a hungry cat.

Samaria proved that Ahab had built a superior fortress, for the city was able to survive the siege of the Assyrian army for three years (2 Kings 17:5, 6). But eventually, starvation took its toll and the Israelites surrendered their last stronghold. The northern kingdom came to an end in 722, two hundred years after the death of Solomon. The gruesome prophecy of Hosea had been fulfilled (Hos. 13:16).

The conquerors, according to Assyrian records, carried away 27,290 captive Israelites and replaced them with settlers from Babylonia, Hamath, and other conquered lands. These colonists with their own customs and religions mingled with the remaining Israelites in the land to form a new race later known as *Samaritans*.

The Israelite deportees in Mesopotamia also mingled with the people in the land of their exile and never again returned to the community of Yahweh of which they had been a part for so many centuries.

But Judah escaped the Assyrian assault. It could henceforth claim sole ownership to the name of Israel.

Discovery

1. Why did Solomon's empire break apart after his death?

2. How did Judah and Israel differ from each other in resources and in history? How did these things influence later events?

3. How did the practice of selecting a king differ in the north from the pattern in the south? What bearing did this have on the future of both countries?

4. What role did the prophets fill in the life of Israel? What were the chief concerns of the prophets? How did they proclaim their message?

Resources

Anderson, Bernhard W. "Prophetic Troublers of Israel" and "Fallen Is the Virgin Israel," *Understanding the Old Testament*. Chapters 8 and 9, pages 226-95.

2 Kings 18-25. Isaiah 1—39. Ezekiel 1-24. Obadiah. Micah. Nahum. Habakkuk. Zephaniah.

CHAPTER 14
Kings as Reformers

39

Gist

The fall of Israel should have been a warning to Judah to set its own house in order. King Uzziah brought a new prosperity to the land but at the expense of the poor. Ahaz, the next king, compromised his country by adopting Assyrian pagan rituals into temple worship. Hezekiah swept the temple clean, but Manasseh, his son, dragged the nation ever deeper into idolatry. Then, came Josiah who introduced the most far-reaching reforms, centralizing the worship of Yahweh in the temple at Jerusalem.

Judah, nestled in the hill country to the south of Israel, escaped the clutches of Assyria. So it survived for another 135 years after the fall of Samaria before it would become the victim of another world empire and of its own folly.

The horror of the events that befell its northern sister state troubled Judah. The prophets leaned hard on the lessons to be learned from Samaria's destruction. Here were vivid illustrations for their sermons on judgment. Their nagging proclamations of doom and gloom had chapter and verse of frightening dimension.

Reform was what they called for, and reform is what they got, not just once, but twice. But in the end, it wasn't enough. Although Judah went the way of Israel, the nation made its exit prepared to change defeat into survival and survival into victory.

Prosperity as a plague for the poor

The king of Judah during the reign of Jeroboam II in Israel was Uzziah, a remarkable king. According to the records of Tiglath-pileser III of Assyria, Uzziah headed up a coalition of Palestinian states at the time of Assyria's first expedition through western Asia (743 B.C.). Well-respected abroad, Uzziah also had a strong hand on the economy of Judah. He began a program of intensive agriculture, digging cisterns for irrigation. He grew grain on the plains, put cattle out on the hills to graze, and planted vineyards and orchards (2 Chron. 26:10).

This trend toward farming on a large scale meant that Judah was beginning to embrace the plague that had sickened Israel. The land was falling into the hands of a few wealthy families favored by the royal family. The small farmers were being crowded off their land and pushed into poverty. As they became landless laborers, they were further exploited by the class who held property.

But on the battlefield, Josiah met an untimely death and deprived the house of David of one of its most vigorous leaders. Isaiah, Micah, and a number of other prophets looked for a deep-going revival of repentance and justice, but they could not stave off the fateful day for Jerusalem.

Journal

Read the following passages and describe what happened and tell why:

2 Kings 18:1-12
2 Kings 21:1-9
2 Kings 22—23
2 Kings 25:1-26

The following prophets commented on events in Judah. Identify the events in each passage as best you can and summarize the prophet's opinion.

Isaiah 1:1-20
Isaiah 20:23-25
Ezekiel 5:1-17
Micah 4:1-3. [Isaiah 2:2-4]
Habakkuk 1:1-11

Both Isaiah and Micah attacked this trend that made a few rich at the cost of misery for the many (Isa. 3:13-15; 5:8; Mic. 2:1-2, 9). The plight of the poor was made even worse because the judges were corrupt and the rights of the oppressed were being ignored (Isa. 1:21-23; 10:1-4; Mic. 3:1-4, 9-11). The abuse of wealth raised the ire of these prophets and they breathed out the wrath of God for such heartlessness (Isa. 3:16—4:1; 5:11, 12; 20-23).

Just as in Israel, the people felt that all would be well if they paid their respects to Yahweh through worship at the various shrines on the appropriate holy days and festivals. But the prophets held out for deeds of justice and righteousness instead of empty rituals (Isa. 1:10-17).

One step forward and two steps back

Uzziah was followed by Ahaz (735-715 B.C.), who was king of Judah during the last days of Israel. It was he who refused to join the anti-Assyrian coalition with Israel and Syria, causing those two nations to turn and make war on him. Because Ahaz kept Judah out of direct conflict with Assyria, the southern kingdom was spared from the disaster that fell on its sister state.

But because Ahaz, over the strong and bitter objections of Isaiah (Isa. 7:1—8:15), appealed to Assyria for defense, he had to pay a high price in tribute to Tiglath-pileser. Stripping the temple of its gold and bronze to pay the tribute (2 Kings 16:8, 17), Ahaz traded off the independence of his country to save his throne and his life.

Even so, the economy of the country survived. Judah's social framework, though criticized by the prophets, was still in better shape than that of Israel during its last days. The villages and towns had many craftsmen whose hard work made the country productive.

The religious life of Judah suffered the most telling blow from Ahaz's pro-Assyrian policies. The king remodeled the temple after the style of shrines in Assyria (2 Kings 16:10-18). He also introduced pagan rituals (Isa. 2:6-8, 20; 8:19, 20; Mic. 5:12-14). Most shocking of all, he brought back the ritual of human sacrifice and offered his own son on the Assyrian altar (2 Kings 16:3).

In spite of Ahaz's failures, Isaiah cherished the faith that a good king would come from David's line to change the system (Isa. 9:2-7; 11:1-9) and provide the justice that Ahaz had failed to find. Isaiah was sure that Yahweh controlled events. Though the country was in bondage to Assyria, this was only to purge the people of their sin (1:24-26; 4:2-6).

The classical prophets of the eighth century directed their message less at the king and more at the people and the system of which they were a part. But the change in the system sometimes meant a change to a king who would reform society. Isaiah found such a king in Ahaz's son, Hezekiah, who came to the throne in 715, shortly after the fall of Samaria.

Hezekiah sweeps the temple clean

The pro-Assyrian policies followed by Ahaz were certainly never popular with most of the people of Judah. The yearly tribute that had to be sent to Nineveh drained everyone's resources. So, patriotic zeal was added to the prophets' call for religious reform. The prophets began making predictions about a coming messianic king who would bring in an era of peace and justice (Mic. 5:2-6).

Just as Samaria fell, a new emperor, Sargon II, came to the throne in Assyria. At once, he was faced with a revolt in Babylon, a major part of the Assyrian empire. The Babylonian rebels led by Merodach-baladan even reached out toward Hezekiah in an apparent bid for help in their effort to free themselves from Sargon (2 Kings 20:12; Isa. 39:1). Sargon had to spend the first twelve years of his reign trying to bring the unruly Babylonians back under his control.

Meanwhile Egypt, which had been weak politically, gained a new king who united Egypt under his firm control and thus established the twenty-fifth dynasty, also known as the Ethiopian dynasty after the origin of its royal family. Hezekiah considered a defense treaty with Egypt, a move that Isaiah opposed as vehemently as he had resisted Ahaz's supplication to Assyria (Isa. 19—20). Apparently Isaiah's advice was followed, for Judah escaped the punishment that Assyria later meted out to other Palestinian states allied with Egypt.

Hezekiah took this time to pursue policies independent of Assyrian control. He even enlarged his kingdom by making war on Philistia to gain some new territory (2 Kings 18:7, 8). Freedom from Assyria, as it turned out, did not last long, but Hezekiah had some time to make some internal reforms.

Even though the reforms did not endure long, Hezekiah set a precedent that others could build on. He revived the worship of Yahweh in Jerusalem. Ahaz had desecrated the temple and closed its doors (2 Chron. 28:24). Hezekiah's first act was to open the doors of the temple once more (29:3).

Cleaning out the temple meant sweeping away not only the reminders of the Assyrian cults, but also the pagan elements that had attached themselves over the years to the worship of Yahweh. Hezekiah cut down the pillars and the images in the "high places," the shrines in the villages and towns where Yahweh was worshiped. And he took from the temple the bronze serpent from the time of Moses and broke it because of its pagan associations with the fertility religion of Baal (2 Kings 18:3-6).

Bidding for favor from the north

A reform under the influence of the prophets could not stop with a repair of the temple, for Isaiah and Micah were much more concerned with social sins than with ritual matters. Hezekiah, we know, gave ear to the words of the prophets, so the reform certainly had deeper significance (Jer. 26:16-19; Mic. 3:12; 1:2-9; 3:1-3, 9-12; 6:1-8).

But Hezekiah had a political motive for the reform. His efforts to close down the local shrines were intended to centralize worship in the temple at Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:22). That did more than assure purity of religion and control over ritual. It tied the people closer to the royal family, for in Hezekiah's day as in the time of Solomon, the temple was closely related to the king.

Hezekiah also had his eye on the remnant of Yahwists who still lived in the former territory of Israel, now a province of Assyria. He dared to write a letter to the people of the northern state inviting them to worship in Jerusalem (2 Chron. 30:1-12). He had hopes of adding this territory to that of Judah and to do this he needed the support of the people who had once been a part of Israel. What better way to appeal to them than on the basis of the Yahwistic faith that the people in the region had always

Kings of the Last Years of Judah

[Prophets in CAPS]

B.C.

- 783 Uzziah
  - AMOS
  - HOSEA
- 742 Jothan
  - ISAIAH
  - MICAH
- 735 Ahaz
- 722 *Fall of Samaria*
- 715 Hezekiah
- 701 Assyrian siege
- 687 Manasseh
- 642 Amon
- 640 Josiah
  - JEREMIAH
  - ZEPHANIAH
  - NAHUM
- 612 *Fall of Nineveh*
- 609 Johoiakim
- 597 First exile
  - EZEKIEL
- 587 *Jerusalem falls*
  - Second exile
- 582 Third exile

Seed

The ox knows its owner,/ and the ass its master's crib;/ but Israel does not know,/ my people does not understand (Isa. 1:3).

Yahweh enters into judgment with the elders and princes of his people:/ "It is you who have devoured the vineyard,/ the spoil of the poor is in your houses./ What do you mean by crushing my people, by grinding the face of the poor?" (Isa. 3:14, 15).

Thus says the Lord God: This is Jerusalem; I have set

shared. But the Assyrians had anticipated this kind of temptation and had restored the shrine at Bethel and staffed it with qualified priests (2 Kings 17:27, 28).

How the caged bird flies

But north or south, Hezekiah's reforms and advances didn't have much time to take root. In Assyria, Sargon was succeeded by his son Sennacherib in 704. To the several states in Palestine, this seemed a good time to join forces and declare their independence from Assyria. Hezekiah was a ringleader in the conspiracy. Egypt offered its support, being in favor of any diversion that would weaken the empire and keep Assyria away from its borders.

When Hezekiah proposed signing a treaty with Egypt, Isaiah opposed the move (Isa. 30:1-7; 31:1-3). But Hezekiah was ready to take on the Assyrians. He dug the famed Siloam tunnel under Jerusalem to bring water into the city from an outside spring to assure the city of a safe supply of water should the Assyrians besiege the city (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chron. 32:30).

Sennacherib struck in 701. According to Assyrian records, he destroyed forty-six of Judah's walled cities in a campaign that was extremely ferocious. One of the cities was Lachish, where excavations provide signs of much violence. A large pit was found which contained the remains of 1,500 bodies covered with pig bones, the apparent refuse of Assyrian army kitchens. Isaiah noted the fury of Sennacherib's assault on Judah (Isa. 1:4-9).

Sennacherib moved on toward the capital saying that he had Hezekiah and his army shut up in Jerusalem "like a bird in a cage." The record in 2 Kings 18 seems to contain reports of two different sieges of Jerusalem by Assyria because two endings to the blockade are reported, one in verses 14-16, and the other beginning in verse 17 and continuing through to 19:37.

If this is so, the first siege ended in defeat and surrender for Hezekiah. For while Sennacherib was still at Lachish, and before he approached Jerusalem, Hezekiah sued for peace. Assyria exacted such a heavy tribute that the king had to empty the treasury of all its silver and strip the gold from the gates and doorposts of the temple (18:14-16). The Philistine cities that Hezekiah had conquered were taken away and the territory of Judah reduced. According to Assyrian records, daughters of the king were sent to Nineveh for the royal harem.

The second report of the resolution of a siege had a happier ending. It may have happened some time after 690 when Tirhakah became pharaoh of the Ethiopian dynasty in Egypt (19:9), while back in Mesopotamia, Sennacherib was still having trouble keeping the Babylonians in line. Joined by the kingdom of Elam, Babylon drove the Assyrians from its turf. Again, the time seemed right to Hezekiah to shake Judah loose from the Assyrian grip.

Once again Sennacherib returned to Palestine. After striking down the Judean outposts, he blockaded Hezekiah inside Jerusalem. The general of the Assyrian troops appeared outside the city and demanded surrender under the harshest of terms (18:17-37). But this time, Hezekiah, though greatly troubled, decided to stand and fight. Even Isaiah, who usually preached neutrality or accommodation, now advised resistance, predicting that Yahweh would deliver the city (19:5-7;

cf. 19:29-34; Isa. 14:24-27; 17:12-14; 31:4-9). And indeed, Jerusalem was saved by one of two miracles, perhaps by both. Sennacherib got a message that he was urgently needed in Nineveh (v. 7), and an epidemic struck the besieging army leaving a large number of Assyrian soldiers dead and the commanders unable to continue the war (v. 35). Jerusalem escaped unharmed and Hezekiah was free.

It was both a fortunate and an unfortunate victory for Judah: fortunate because Jerusalem escaped the fate of Samaria; unfortunate because the theology of Zion that Jerusalem as the city of David would never fall was confirmed. The stubbornness of this belief would become a vain hope in future years and would serve only to guarantee the final destruction of Jerusalem.

But that time was still far away—one hundred years after the death of King Hezekiah in 687 B.C.

Reform becomes counterreformation

Extremes of different kinds measured out the last century of Judah's existence—ups and downs, successes and defeats. For half of the period, Judah was under the heel of Assyria. Then, for a short period, it was free and independent, only to fall into the clutches of Egypt. After that came the grip of Babylon, the new power on the world scene. And, finally, in a desperate effort to shake free from Babylon, Judah virtually destroyed itself.

One prophet, Jeremiah, lived through parts of every chapter in this history. Other prophets of the period were Zephaniah, Nahum, Habakkuk, and Obadiah. Ezekiel appeared in the final days and became the first prophet to do all his work outside the borders of Israel.

Hezekiah was followed by his son Manasseh who reversed almost every one of his father's achievements. He immediately made peace with Assyria, probably his only option. During Manasseh's time on the throne, Nineveh reached its peak. Assyria invaded Egypt in 671 B.C. and occupied Memphis, the chief city of lower Egypt. When a later pharaoh refused to honor the commands of the Mesopotamian empire, Assyria rolled over Egypt in 663, and moved up the Nile as far as Thebes, destroying that ancient capital and putting an end to the Ethiopian dynasty (Nah. 3:8).

With mighty Egypt powerless before the power of Assyria, the smaller states like Judah could only bow in submission and hope to escape total ruin.

Manasseh also reversed the Yahwist restoration begun by Hezekiah, bowing more to internal pressure than to outside force. Judeans were of two minds on this issue. The reform party included such prophets as Isaiah, Zephaniah, Jeremiah, and the temple priests. The party opposing reform counted the royal family, members of the court, the priests of Baal, Assyrian administrators, and persons of foreign ancestry. During Manasseh's long administration, this latter group had the upper hand.

Religious affairs returned to the status of the days of Ahaz and even worse. Hezekiah's reform was turned into counterreformation. The local shrines were restored, and Assyrian altars appeared in the temple along with Canaanite fertility rites complete with sacred prostitution (2 Kings 21:6, 7; 23:4-7; Zeph. 1:4-6). Idolatry such as had not been

her in the center of the nations, with countries round about her. And she has wickedly rebelled against my ordinances more than the nations, and against my statutes more than the countries round about her, by rejecting my ordinances and not walking in my statutes (Ezek. 5:5, 6).

Its heads give judgment for a bribe,/ its priests teach for hire,/ its prophets divine for money;/ yet they lean upon Yahweh and say,/ "Is not Yahweh in the midst of us?/ No evil shall come upon us."/ Therefore because of you/ Zion shall be plowed as a field;/ Jerusalem shall become a heap of ruins,/ and the mountain of the house a wooded height (Micah 3:11, 12).

And the surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward, and bear fruit upward; for out of Jerusalem shall go forth a remnant, and out of Mount Zion a band of survivors. The zeal of Yahweh will do this (2 Kings 19:30, 31).

practiced in Judah before became commonplace now that it had official endorsement.

With corruption in religion came oppression and violence in daily life so that people doubted the power of Yahweh (Zeph. 1:12; 3:1-7). Many people must have protested the excesses of this period and they were dealt with violently (2 Kings 21:16). The Deuteronomistic historians were outraged (21:9-15; 24:3, 4). Jeremiah was furious (15:1-4).

Josiah mounts the great reform

In Hezekiah and in Manasseh, the pendulum of reform had swung both ways. Now in Josiah who came to the throne in 640 B.C., the swing was back to reform and more thorough cleansing of the temple than ever before. By the time of Josiah, Assyria had passed the zenith of its power. Assyria's long and drawn out struggle with Babylon went on all during the time of Josiah and was coming down to its last gasp which would leave Assyria on the rubbish heap of history. (The defeat of Assyria finds a memorial in the Bible in the oracles of Nahum who says a poetic "good riddance" to Israel's most fearful foe.)

With Assyria writhing in the throes of death, Judah again found itself independent, and able to control its own affairs. Assyria's grip on the province of Samaria, the former territory of the northern kingdom of Israel, was so weak that Josiah was able to work his will over this land as well. He may even have been able to reach into the province of Megiddo (Galilee) and into Gilead as well.

With the support of the reform party, Josiah set out with patriotic zeal to rid his nation of all foreign and pagan religions, all Assyrian cult objects, as well as all reminders of native pagan cults (2 Kings 22:3—23:25; 2 Chron. 34:1—35:19). He executed the pagan priests and the prostitutes of the fertility cults and burned their bones on their own altars (2 Kings 23:5, 20; 2 Chron. 34:5). And what he did in Judah, he did also in the province of Samaria where he broke down the shrine at Bethel that the first Jeroboam had built and which Judah had loathed for 300 years (2 Kings 23:15).

In a bid to centralize all worship in the temple at Jerusalem, Josiah destroyed the local shrines (the high places). The rural priests were invited to come to Jerusalem and take their place in the service of the temple (2 Kings 23:8). It was a triumph of the royal theology to have all roads lead to Zion as an expression of the nation's unity.

Josiah's reform was fueled by an element not available to Hezekiah. As the temple was being restored, a copy of "the book of the law" was found. The reading of this book, now regarded to be the core of Deuteronomy, helped to shape and reinforce the direction of Josiah's program. While centralization of worship may have been Josiah's intention all along, he found additional reason for pursuing such a policy once the book was read.

This "book of the covenant" (23:21) called for the observance of the passover in Jerusalem. This Josiah instituted. For the first time, a book became part of the ritual of the Yahweh cult. (In Chapter 15, "Covenant Renewed and Covenant New," we will discuss the meaning of Deuteronomy in the history of Israel.)

Because Assyria was preoccupied with the rising power of Babylon, Josiah was able to restore the worship of Yahweh to a level never

experienced before. But, then, Josiah lost his life when he allowed himself to be drawn into the crossfire of this power struggle.

Egypt, allied with Assyria in hope that it could prop up its old foe as a check to the growing power of Babylon, marched north along the coast to go to the aid of Assyria. It was 609 B.C. and Assyria was making its last stand at Carchemish on the Euphrates. Josiah, with the army of Judah, set out to cut off the Egyptians as they would pass by Megiddo near the Carmel range.

The battle at Megiddo went badly for Judah. Josiah took to the field with his troops and received a fatal wound from an arrow. His body was carried back to Jerusalem in his chariot. Josiah's reform was dealt a stunning blow—a good king struck down in his active and creative years. It was an omen of bad things to come.

The last days for a doomed city

Josiah had not been able to stop the advance of the Egyptian army toward Mesopotamia, but the Babylonians did so with ease. Babylon was now master of its own growing world empire.

Egypt, knowing that it had to defend itself against Babylon, set out to turn the little kingdoms of Palestine and Syria into buffer states. Jehoiakim, Josiah's son, came to the throne pledging allegiance to Egypt. But he needed to tax his people heavily to raise the tribute that Egypt required (2 Kings 23:31-35).

Jehoiakim was a petty and selfish tyrant, incompetent as a leader. He let the reforms begun by his father lapse. He was so insensitive to the needs of his people that he squandered the resources of the country to build a lavish palace for himself using forced labor in the process. Jeremiah was livid with rage (Jer. 22:13-19).

But Egyptian bondage didn't last long. It was replaced by Babylonian bondage in 603 B.C. Among the prophets of the period was Habakkuk who saw in the Babylonians the instrument of God's judgment: "I am rousing the Chaldeans [Babylonians],/ that bitter and hasty nation,/ who march through the breadth of the earth,/ to seize habitations not their own" (Hab. 1:6). Earlier, Isaiah had seen the Assyrians as the instruments of God's wrath. It was a hard message to accept, but the prophetic counsel was: "the righteous shall live by his faith" (Hab. 2:4).

The new rulers of Mesopotamia drove the Egyptians out of Palestine. Jehoiakim changed his allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon (2 Kings 24:1). But two years later, when Nebuchadnezzar tried to invade Egypt and was pushed back, Jehoiakim thought Babylon in a decline, or effectively checkmated by Egypt, so he rebelled.

Babylon didn't take the insult lightly. Nebuchadnezzar set out to discipline Judah, first with raids and then with a full-scale invasion beginning in December 598. Just then, Jehoiakim died and was replaced by his eighteen-year-old son, Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:7, 8) whose reign in Jerusalem lasted only three months. Jehoiachin's major political act was to surrender Jerusalem on March 16, 597 (2 Kings 24:11, 12; 2 Chron. 36:10; Ezek. 17:12). He saved the city from destruction, but the country came under the control of Babylon.

Jehoiachin along with his mother and members of his family and leading citizens of the country—landowners, military leaders, artisans, priests, and prophets—were deported to Babylon. Among the exiles was the prophet Ezekiel (2 Kings 24:14-16; Jer. 24:1; 27:20; 52:28; Ezek.

The World of the Seventh Century B.C.

In Egypt, the pharaohs tried to recreate the Pyramid Age. In Assyria, the king set out to gather ancient documents for the library at Nineveh. Official inscriptions were written in the dead language of Sumer. All over Asia, people felt that an end of a cycle had come and doom was impending, judgment coming. Many looked for security in the ancient traditions.

1:1-3). The number was not large (10,000 according to Kings; 3,023 according to Jeremiah) but they were the cream of Judean society, the people the country needed for its leadership. Jeremiah, who was not among the exiles, said that the good figs had been taken and the poor figs left (24:1-10).

Thus, the nation was poorly equipped to prepare itself for the coming disaster or even to understand what was going on. Because the city had been so miraculously saved a hundred years earlier when the Assyrians had hammered on the gates of Jerusalem, the people of Judah were sure that another miracle would now save them from the Babylonians. The deportation of several thousand citizens and the looting of the temple were regarded as the punishment of Yahweh for their past sins that Isaiah had threatened. But now that it had happened, all would be well.

Without the luck of Hezekiah

But things were really getting worse. Edom, the ancient enemy of Judah took advantage of Jerusalem's weakened condition and took possession of the Negeb. Edom also supported Babylon in its invasion of Judah. Obadiah scolded the Edomites for their offense (Obad. 11-14), and so did Jeremiah and Ezekiel (Jer. 49:7-22; Ezek. 25:12-14; 35:1-15).

Writing from exile in Babylon, Ezekiel had a fresh view on the theology of Zion. The promises to David were still reliable, he was sure, but they were not tied to Jerusalem. In fact, Jerusalem was no longer the place of the house of God, because God's presence had left the temple and come with the exiles (Ezek. 9:3; 10:15-19; 11:22-23).

Ezekiel, who had seen the surrender of Jerusalem, saw the eventual destruction of David's city as God's just judgment on the people for their sin of ignoring the Law. Ezekiel saw the entire history of Jerusalem as one of continuous rebellion against Yahweh. Though the city had escaped once from the fire, the second fire would surely consume it (Ezek. 15:7, 8).

Judah, now with Zedekiah, a third son of Josiah, as its resident king, believed that Egypt would support him. With a blind confidence that Jerusalem would never fall, Judah turned against Babylon in 589. Zedekiah, in his conversations with Jeremiah, reflected an almost child-like faith that Yahweh would save the city, yet he felt uneasy (Jer. 21:1-7; 37:3-10, 17; 38:14-23). But Jeremiah had only one message: the temple would be destroyed as was Shiloh and the city would become a ruin (Jer. 26:7-11).

Once Jerusalem rebelled, Babylon acted swiftly to blockade the city. Frightened by the great army outside the walls, Zedekiah proclaimed a belated sabbatical year to release all slaves. It was a last-minute desperate effort to honor the nation's covenant with Yahweh which they had long neglected. After the slaves were set free, the Babylonians lifted the siege temporarily. News had come to them that the Egyptian army was on its way to rescue Jerusalem. So, the Babylonians went off to quash the pharaoh's forces.

The people of Judah must have felt that Yahweh had indeed rescued the city as in the days of Hezekiah. Yet, they were so depraved that they could not honor the covenant freely even in gratefulness, for they turned around and repossessed the slaves so recently emancipated (Jer. 34:6-17; 37:6-10).

Having disposed of the Egyptian army, Nebuchadnezzar returned to Jerusalem, breached the walls, and overran the city. In August 587, a Babylonian army commander put a torch to the city, burned it down, and leveled its walls (2 Kings 25:1-12; Jer. 39:1-14; 52:1-16; Ezek. 33:21; Neh. 2:13).

Jerusalem, the city of David, had fallen.

Discovery

1. Evaluate and compare the work of the reformer kings of Judah. Who was most successful? Where did each one fail? What were the forces they were dealing with?

2. In the 135 years from the fall of Samaria to the fall of Jerusalem, Judah was attacked by two of the superpowers of the day. The prophets wanted the nation to stay out of entangling foreign alliances. What would have been the best foreign policy for Judah? What could have been done to avoid the fall of Jerusalem?

3. The prophets were concerned about both religion and the doing of justice. On a scale of one to ten, how did Judah measure up in each of these areas?

Resources

Anderson, Bernhard W. "Judah's Covenant with Death" and "The Doom of the Nation," *Understanding the Old Testament*. Chapters 10 and 12, pages 296-331; 367-96.

Inventory

1. Identify these persons and write a sentence about each one's claim to fame:

Ezekiel
Hezekiah
Isaiah
Josiah
Micah
Nebuchadnezzar
Uzziah

2. Name the kings of Judah who were also reformers.

3. What was the year of the fall of Samaria? What was the name of the country that captured Samaria? What was the year of the fall of Jerusalem? What country brought about the downfall of Jerusalem?

CHAPTER 15
Covenant Renewed and Covenant New

Gist

During the days of Josiah, a book discovered in the temple brought a revival of interest in the Mosaic covenant. A comparison between the events and words that followed, including a special covenant ceremony led by the king, seems to suggest that the book was Deuteronomy with its special covenant theme. In any event, the Mosaic law took new root in the life of the people of Yahweh. While some prophets praised the

Few books have shaped history more profoundly than the book of law and covenant found in the temple at Jerusalem during Josiah's reign. The book brought new life to the religion of Israel. It laid the foundation for the Judaism that would survive the fall of the city of David.

The northern kingdom had been gone for one hundred years and its people scattered never to return to the family of Yahweh again. Yet the lasting legacy of the northern tribes came to light when the neglected scroll was unrolled and read to King Josiah. Written in the book was an elaboration of the Mosaic covenant which had been remembered in the sister state of Israel, but which had been overshadowed in Judah by the Davidic covenant. Now the law of Moses took possession of the city of David.

Promise with obligation

The royal theology had its roots in the Davidic covenant, the promise of God that David's dynasty would always possess the throne in Israel (2 Sam. 7:13, 14). The covenant with David was like the covenant that God had made with Abraham, an unqualified promise of land and prosperity which God was pledged to honor. The covenant sealed at Mount Sinai in the time of Moses was a promise with obligation for obedience. If the covenant were kept, prosperity and blessing would follow. If it were broken, judgment would follow.

The book found in the temple was called "the book of the law" (2 Kings 22:11) and also "the book of the covenant" (23:2). This book has been identified as some form of Deuteronomy, probably including much of the core of this book from chapters 5 to 28. Deuteronomy comes in the form of sermons delivered by Moses at the end of his life and just before the Hebrews entered the Promised Land. The book identifies Moses as a prophet (Deut. 18:15) and the words of the book are his oracle.

Clues that seem to point toward Deuteronomy

Overall, Deuteronomy has the language and form of covenant and has many parallels to the covenant treaties used between nations and between kings and their subjects in the Near East. Chapters 1 to 11 provide the historical introduction and the conditions of the treaty are

stated in 12 to 26. The curses that would come to those who break the covenant appear in 27 to 28.

Mention is made of curses and threats appearing in the book found in the temple (2 Kings 22:16, 17; 2 Chron. 34:24). While elements of the covenant treaty form are used in other places in the Old Testament, Deuteronomy is the only book to include curses as a part of the covenant. Among the curses found in Deuteronomy is the threat of exile and destruction (Deut. 28:36, 37; 63-66).

The command to centralize worship in one place appears only in Deuteronomy (12:5). A major achievement of Josiah's reform was to abolish the local shrines and require that Jerusalem be the sole site of the worship of Yahweh.

During Josiah's reform, centralization was tied to the Passover feast. Deuteronomy also rules that the Passover sacrifice should be offered only in the central place of worship (Deut. 16:5-8).

In Deuteronomy, the law and the prophets come together. The Mosaic covenant is the leading theme of the book with the obligations made plain in the law given at Sinai. Related to covenant is the theme of election, a major emphasis in Deuteronomy (7:6-11).

In their challenge of the national theology based on the Davidic covenant, the prophets leaned heavily on election and covenant in the Mosaic tradition. Deuteronomy both identifies Moses as a prophet and indicates that future prophets will resemble Moses (18:15). The law of Moses and the words of the prophets were thus wed in Deuteronomy.

Reformers cleanse the temple

Acceptance of the covenant would be sealed if the people hearing the preaching of Moses the prophet would themselves enter into a covenant. Josiah led his people in doing this. He stood by the pillar of the house of God in Jerusalem and in the presence of the priests and the prophets called to the people for a sign from each person to "walk after Yahweh and . . . keep his commandments and his testimonies, with all his heart and all his soul" (2 Kings 23:3). By this covenant, the book found in the temple became the law of the land. In this ceremony, the power and the influence of the state were put behind the covenant law.

Though the reform of Josiah did not fully succeed, he did set a pattern for future eras. The covenant obligations of Judaism were ever after tied to the law code. The covenant ceremony became a part of the ritual of Israel. It was renewed every seventh year at the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut. 31:10-13).

When the law which had been carried for so long in oral tradition and had been expounded in the voices of the prophets was finally put into written form, the first step had been taken to make it the organizing principle for the religion of the future. And so it became in the Judaism that developed after the Exile.

The written word which had been so much the product of the spoken preaching of the prophets eventually took the place of the prophets themselves. Once people were assured that the written word had authority, prophets were needed less and less.

But problems of formalism and legalism had begun to surface already in the time of Jeremiah. He saw that idolatry of the book could replace the idolatry of the temple (Jer. 8:8, 9) and nothing had been

reforms of the period, Jeremiah offered a more penetrating critique: the emphasis of the renewed covenant was too much on ritual and on the temple, leaving injustice and oppression uncorrected. Jeremiah called for a new covenant, written on the heart, so that God's will and the people's will would at least become one and the same.

Journal

Read the following passages and summarize the main points in three or four sentences:

Deuteronomy 6
Deuteronomy 27, 28
Jeremiah 7:1-15 [Jer. 26:4-6]
Jeremiah 26:7-24
Jeremiah 31:15-37

Jerome on Deuteronomy

Jerome, the scholar who translated the Bible into Latin at the end of the fourth century, identified the law book found in the temple in the eighteenth year of Josiah as the Book of Deuteronomy.

Seed

To you it was shown, that you might know that Yahweh is God. . . . And because he loved your fathers and chose their descendants after them, and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power . . . know therefore this day, and lay it to your heart, that Yahweh is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other. Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments (Deut. 4:35, 37, 39, 40).

Then Yahweh spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. . . . And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the ten commandments; and he wrote them upon two tables of stone (Deut. 4:12, 13).

For if you truly amend your ways and your doings, if you truly execute justice one with another, if you do not oppress the alien, the fatherless or the widow, or shed innocent blood in this place, and if you do not go after other gods to your own hurt, then I will let you dwell in this place, in the land that I gave of old to your fathers for ever (Jer. 7:5-7).

"Behold, the days are coming, says Yahweh, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah. . . . I will put my law within them, and I will write it upon their hearts; and I will be their God and they shall be my people" (Jer. 31:31, 33).

gained. Something had been lost if people no longer gave ear to prophetic preaching (8:4-7).

Well intended as Josiah's reform may have been, the reformers were too quickly satisfied with external changes that did not root out sin in the life of the nation. Increased activity in the temple did not mean that people had really returned to the ancient paths (Jer. 6:16-21). The sins of society continued to abound and the priests and prophets condoned injustices and did not protest them (Jer. 5:20-31).

Jeremiah scores Josiah's gains

Jeremiah does not appear at all in the course of Josiah's reform. Nor does he comment directly on it, on the finding of the book, the making of the covenant, or the keeping of the passover. Since Jeremiah was a leading prophet who lived through this experience, one would have expected more than a passing comment.

Jeremiah's direct comments about Josiah are few. He did give Josiah a positive rating and held him up as a champion of justice and righteousness to his wayward son (22:15). He must have found much in Deuteronomy that paralleled his own preaching. He appealed to the Mosaic covenant (Jer. 2:5-13). He called on people to repent and return to the family of Yahweh (3:12-14; 31:2-6, 15-22). But Jeremiah seems to have felt that the reform was done with insincerity (3:10).

His most telling oracle, the Temple Sermon (7:2-15), expands on this sentiment. He spoke in the year that Jehoiakim, Josiah's son, had become king. Jeremiah looked around and saw that oppression of the poor, injustice, and violence were still a way of life. The commandments on stealing, murder, adultery, and false swearing were being broken and people continued to worship Baal.

The meaning of Deuteronomy must have been misunderstood or ignored. The faith of the people was still in ritual and in the external symbols of religion. This was the root of the deception. Jeremiah's rebuke was harsh: "Do not trust in these deceptive words: 'This is the temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh, the temple of Yahweh' " (7:4).

It was an attack on the official theology, the belief that because Jerusalem had the temple, it would never fall (7:10). Jeremiah dared to stand in the court of the temple and call it a "den of robbers"—a refuge of hiding after bandits had robbed a caravan. Such a temple Yahweh would destroy as certainly as God had destroyed Shiloh.

Such words were treason and Jeremiah's life was threatened for saying them. And treason it was to both God and country, implying that Yahweh would break the covenant with David. The priests and prophets laid hands on Jeremiah and would have stoned him had not friends with influence in the court spoken in his behalf (26:7-24).

The impact of Jeremiah's preaching seems to have been that the old covenant had been so broken and shattered by the people that it could not be restored. Josiah's reform had been a revival of the old Mosaic traditions. But the old covenant would not serve. A new covenant was needed.

A new tablet for a new covenant

The high point of Jeremiah's teaching comes in his new covenant (31:31-34). This is his response to Josiah's reform and even to Deuteronomy.

The Josian reform had brought forth for the people the law written in a book, but Jeremiah promised a law written on the heart. The law in the book brought a revolution. It was new in its day. It became the source of endless reformations and revivals through the years.

Jeremiah drew on the theology of the Exodus and of Sinai for his oracle on the law in the heart. He had preached about the Exodus (Jer. 2:4-8), yet it became only the source of doom and judgment when he had finished with it.

The new covenant written on the heart was so far beyond the understandings of the days of Jeremiah that no one else in the Old Testament ever commented on it. It remained for the New Testament to return to its promise.

The law within

The law given at Sinai had been written on tablets of stone (Exod. 24:12; 34:1). The law within will be written on the heart, imprinted on the center of life. The heart, in Old Testament thought, in contrast to modern usage, has more to do with the will than with the emotions.

The outward law lies beyond the person. Being on the outside, it can be accepted or rejected. One can decide whether to obey the command or to disobey it. And if the choice is made to obey, the obedience may still be grudging or insincere. Not so with the law inside the heart. People respond not because they are expected or urged to do so, but because they want to. God's will and the people's will have become one and the same.

This produces a oneness with God, a fulfilling of the covenant relationship: "I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Jer. 31:33). From the beginning, it was intended to be so: "I will take you for my people, and I will be your God; and you shall know that I am Yahweh your God (Exod. 6:7); "I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people" (Lev. 26:12). But for so long, the longed for bond had been broken. Great was the pain that the joy had not been realized (Hos. 1:9; Jer. 12:7).

The result of the bond with God in the new covenant will be that reminders to do God's will will no longer be necessary. All will know without needing to be prodded what is right and good to do. The need for the law itself will have passed because people will know God and know the will of God in a most intimate way. "Know" in the Old Testament has overtones (Gen. 4:1) which imply not just knowledge, but a close kinship.

This special relationship with God assumes forgiveness. Sin had led to the breaking of the covenant. But now God can heal that rupture. God will no longer remember sin. But God will remember the fond devotion of earlier days, the love of the honeymoon that was once enjoyed by the people and by their God.

The idea of a new covenant seems so simple, yet its simplicity hides a radical stroke of genius by the prophet and also by God. For to suggest that something new is needed is to imply that the old didn't work. Does this mean that the old covenant was flawed? Did God offer the people something less than the best? The figure of a God who needs to continue to perfect and mend the fabric of relationships with people may seem to contradict the primary definition of God as all wise, all knowing, and unchanging. Yet the God of the law written on the heart

Hittite Treaty Form

Preamble: The king identified himself, giving his name and title.

Prologue: The king reviewed past experiences between himself and his underlings.

Stipulations: specific acts that the king expected from his subjects which often included tribute and a call to arms.

Deposit of treaty: a copy of the treaty was placed in a shrine and it was to be read publicly at regular intervals.

Witnesses: various gods as well as mountains, rivers, heaven, and earth were called to witness the treaty and assure that it would be fulfilled.

Blessings and curses: to provide a guarantee that the treaty would be remembered and honored.

Treaty Elements in Deuteronomy

Historical introduction (including preamble and prologue): Deuteronomy 1—11
Specific notes: 4:13; 37-40

Stipulations and conditions of the treaty: Deuteronomy 12—26

Blessings and curses: Deuteronomy 27—28

Deposit and reading of treaty: Deuteronomy 10:5; 31:9-13

Witnesses: Deuteronomy 32:1

Treaty Elements Outside of Deuteronomy

Preamble and Prologue: Exodus 20:2; Joshua 23:2-13; 24:2; 1 Samuel 12:1, 6

Stipulations: Exodus 23:14-17 (tribute); Judges 5:14-18, 23; 21:8-12 (call to arms)

Witnesses: Joshua 24:22, 27

Blessings and curses: Judges 5:23

may prove to be more knowable and more forgiving in the experience of the new covenant.

The old covenant was made to be everlasting and to last for a thousand generations (Ps. 105:8; Gen. 17:7, 13, 19). The task of modifying the old covenant may seem insurmountable and contrary to tidy reason, yet the new covenant with its forgiveness and its intimate knowledge and its more profound response to the will of God may yet overcome all such obstacles.

Two covenants that lived

The agony of the last days of the Judean kingdom brought on a period bursting with creativity. Filled as it was with the strident voices of the prophets pronouncing doom and of the patriots who felt secure and denied the reality of the impending crisis, new light broke forth.

Two ways of understanding the covenant surfaced in these days: the old covenant from the book that Josiah read; and the new covenant that burst from the soul of Jeremiah. The old covenant was given a trial, a test that finally lapsed. The new covenant was passed over and forgotten for many years.

But the initial rejection didn't mean failure for either, but eventual success for both. Both were preparation for the fall of Jerusalem and survival in exile. For the covenants provided an understanding of what had happened in the great disaster of the loss of the nation.

All the harangues of the prophets and the readings in the last day from Deuteronomy provided a mooring for the people of Judah. In the remembrance of the covenant, they saw in the smoking ruins of Jerusalem not the death of their faith in God or even the failure of the covenant. Actually, the covenant had worked as predicted—when the people had sinned, true to God's word, judgment had come (Deut. 29:22-28; 1 Kings 9:8-10).

Those who had understood the words of the prophets and Deuteronomy, did not lose their faith in Yahweh as a result of the fall of Jerusalem. It became the foundation on which to build a new theology and a different understanding of the covenant. That different understanding did not turn out to be the new covenant of Jeremiah 31, but the new covenant remained an option for later on.

Discovery

Inventory

1. With what book of the Old Testament may the book found in the temple during the Josianic reform be identified?

2. What are the special literary forms used in this book?

3. In which chapters of Jeremiah are the following found:

The Temple Sermon?

The New Covenant?

1. How was the Mosaic covenant unique? How did it compare and differ with the Davidic covenant? Which one is superior to the other?

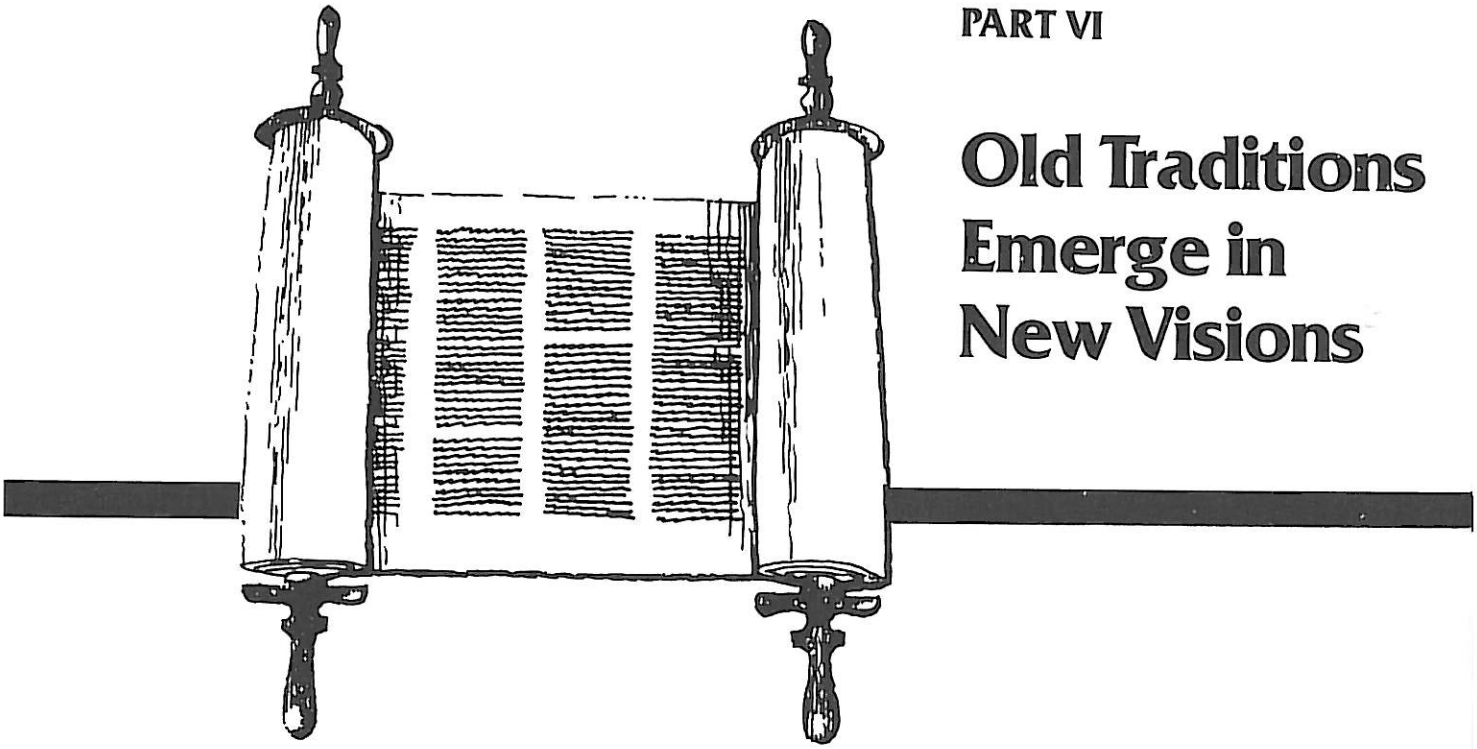
2. Why did Jeremiah offer a new covenant to replace the old? What are the features of the new covenant that correct the failures of the old?

3. What is the image of God projected by the old covenant? How is God viewed differently by the new covenant?

4. How did the belief in covenant transform the understanding of the fall of Jerusalem?

Resources

Anderson, Bernhard W. "The Rediscovery of the Mosaic Torah," *Understanding the Old Testament*. Chapter 11, pages 332-66.



PART VI

Old Traditions Emerge in New Visions

CHAPTER 16

Exile and Rebirth in a Second Exodus

Gist

During the years of their exile in Babylon, the Jews gradually rose from defeat and laid the foundations for a revived family under God. Sabbath and circumcision took on new meaning as the sign of their covenant with Yahweh, replacing the symbol of the temple now lost to them. They renewed their covenant by collecting and reviewing their history and studying the words of the prophets who had warned of

Jerusalem and Samaria, the capitals of sister states, enjoyed the honor and loyalty of their respective citizens. When Samaria fell in 722 B.C. and thousands of its leading people were taken into captivity, the history of Israel as a nation came to an end.

But when Jerusalem was destroyed in 587 B.C., and its leading families were deported into Babylon, a new and different thing happened. The broken nation put itself together, piece by painful piece. A new body emerged—not really a nation, but a resurrected form better than a nation could ever be.

History, Babylon, and God

It did not happen overnight and it did not happen quietly and eloquently like the unfolding of a flower. Rather, it was a trial by fire and with fury, like the boiling of a cauldron, like flailing through a churning reef of rocks toward a dim and distant shore shrouded in mist.

Transported to Babylon, the priests and prophets of Israel, along with merchants and military commanders, artisans and teachers, came face to face with the power and culture of a world empire. How poor and puny the province of Judah seemed by comparison.

The shock was more than cultural; it was also profoundly religious. The temples of the Babylonian gods mocked them. Where is the mighty Yahweh now? Are not these gods of Babylon whose imposing temples tower over you greater than the God of Israel?

In their despair, many must have said yes. But their prophets spoke to the symptoms of Babylon shock (Isa. 40—48). Yahweh is a creating God, the creator of all the world. God has measured the waters of the seas in the hollow of God's hand. Before our God, the nations are like a "drop from a bucket" (40:10-17). An idol simply cannot compare with God. It is but the creation of an artisan's hand, but God has created the maker of the idol (40:18-20; cf. 46:5-7; 41:21-24; Ezek. 20:32).

The dialogue on creation and idols continues through these chapters from Isaiah. In the middle of the discourse is a satire against idols (44:9-20) that teems with the sights and sounds absorbed by a homeless Judean refugee walking through the bazaars of Babylon.

But the exiles had to cope with more than those new sights external to their minds. The assault on their history and their creed was

internal. They had used the covenant as their interpreter of history. God's covenant with David had once propped up their faith: the promise that a member of David's family would always sit on the throne in Jerusalem. Now there was no throne, no dynasty, no Jerusalem. Did that mean no covenant?

The Mosaic covenant offered another way to understand history. God had rescued the people from oppression and given them the land. In response to God's great grace, the people had made a covenant to do God's will and God would continue to bless them. What went wrong? Did they not do God's will? Had they misunderstood?

The nation's life had been intertwined with the acts of God. They had to work with patience to extract from the ruins of the nation their belief in God. They also had to ask the historical question: What really happened back in Jerusalem? When we worshiped the queen of heaven all went well and we prospered. When we stopped, we were eaten up by sword and famine. It would have been better for us if we had remained faithful to the queen of heaven (Jer. 44:15-19; cf. Ezek. 20:32).

They also asked: Is God just? (Ezek. 18:2, 25; Lam. 5:7). And they were ready to affirm: we are lost; we have no future (Ezek. 33:10; 37:11; Lam. 2:9; Ps. 74:9, 10).

Life in exile becomes normal

At first, life in Babylon was not good. But eventually it became more livable. Three deportations (597 and 587, and a third, following a thwarted rebellion, in 582) brought to Babylon about 4,600 adult males plus their families (Jer. 52:28-30, though other sources differ; cf. 2 Kings 24:16).

They were not scattered among the general population but were settled in colonies near Babylon (Ezek. 3:15; Ezra 2:59; 8:17). They were not in a prison or even in a prison camp. They were free to pursue their special interests, to build houses, to cultivate the land, and to earn a living in their crafts and professions (Jer. 29:5, 6). They were able to create what seems to have been a fairly normal community life (Ezek. 8:1; 14:1; 33:30, 31).

Some families that had settled in Babylon would never return to Judah for they would find life in the empire appealing. This was the beginning of the Diaspora (the Dispersion), the community of Jews living outside Palestine. Already, Jews were living in Egypt, having fled to that country during the growing uneasiness in Judah in the days before the fall of Jerusalem.

But it was in Babylon where the fate of the people of God would be worked out. Bit by bit, the lessons of the nation's death were being studied and applied. Believing that the prophets were right in explaining the disaster as punishment for ignoring or misapplying the covenant law, they turned to applying the law and the traditions with more vigor.

Signs to replace the lost temple

Sabbath and circumcision emerged as the visible bearers of tradition and the law. No longer could the temple and the throne of David serve as the landmarks of faith, symbols to rally loyalty and identify the people of God. More and more, sabbath and circumcision became the marks of the loyal follower of Yahweh.

Circumcision had long been practiced by most Semites. But it

the very judgment they experienced. These were creative years during which God's people came to new understandings. Their faith was renewed by the hope of a second exodus in which God would once more lead them out of their captivity.

Journal

Read the following passages and in three or four sentences describe the faith of the writer and the reason for writing:

Ezekiel 37
Isaiah 40
Isaiah 44:9-20
Isaiah 52:13—53:12

Aramaic in Babylon

The spoken language of Babylon was Aramaic, a dialect related to Hebrew. Aramaic was the original language in the texts of Ezra 4:8—6:18; 7:12-16; Daniel 2:4b—7:28; Jeremiah 10:11. Portions of Daniel and Ecclesiastes may have been translated from Aramaic into Hebrew. Ezekiel, the late psalms, Esther, Song of Songs, Ezra, Nehemiah, Chronicles, and the framework story of Job have been influenced by Aramaic.

Years in Exile

[Prophets in CAPS]
B.C.

- **597 First deportation**
  EZEKIEL
- **587 Jerusalem falls. Second deportation.**
- **582 Third deportation.**
- **568 Babylon invades Egypt.**
  [end Ezekiel]
- **562 Nebuchadnezzar dies.**

SECOND ISAIAH

- **538 Edict of Cyrus.**

was not part of the culture of such non-Semites as the Babylonians and the Philistines (1 Sam. 18:25-27). In Babylon, circumcision became the sign of the covenant as well as the mark of a Jew (Gen. 17:9-14).

The Sabbath became a practical and a crucial test of obedience to the covenant. The writings of the period carry increased mention of the Sabbath (Jer. 17:19-27; Isa. 56:1-6; 58:13, 14; Ezek. 46:1-3).

Thus, the people of Yahweh were able to preserve and defend their ethnic and religious identity. It was also during this time that the rituals on cleanness and uncleanness were refined (Ezek. 4:12-15; 44:23); for the people were living in an "unclean" land and needed to protect themselves from ceremonial defilement.

An urge to write the story down

The people's separation from the land of their forebears produced a strong drive to write down the memories and the oral traditions, and to collect and supplement the various writings that they had carried with them.

The Deuteronomistic history (Joshua to Kings) had taken form before the Exile, but scattered notes were added to bring the record up to date and make it relevant for the time of the Exile (e.g., 2 Kings 25:27-30).

Collections of the sayings of the prophets received special attention. So much of what the prophets had said had proven true; their oracles of doom had been right on target. The sayings already written were supplemented by words from the oral tradition which were inserted along with marginal notes calling attention to things that happened later or to sayings current in the Exile community.

Most of the laws about the rituals and the ceremonies of the temple had been passed on orally from generation to generation among the priestly families. Now was the time to put the record in writing so that the proper usage would be applied when the temple would be restored.

The priestly writers also used this time to supplement the documents of the Yahwist and the Elohist that had been composed in the early days of the monarchy. Thus, the Pentateuch took its final form during these days.

It was a time of creativity in religious thought unequaled since the days of Moses. Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Lamentations, Job, and Second Isaiah were put on paper during the Exile.

The fall of Jerusalem was a time when a great many things were lost. But the Exile was a time of finding and preserving. Without the urgent need created by the crisis of the last days of Jerusalem, much of the material now in the Bible might never have been collected. The great need of the people of the Exile to hold onto their traditions meant that their past was carried forward into our present to enrich us many times over.

With their writing and their speaking in Babylon came a new language for the people of Israel. The Aramaic tongue of Babylon, a language akin to Hebrew, became the language of everyday speech for the Jews in Babylon, later for those in Palestine and then for those in New Testament times as well.

Hopes for a second exodus

Above all else, the Exile community nurtured a hope for the time

Seed

By the waters of Babylon,/ there we sat down and wept,/ when we remembered Zion./ On the willows there/ we hung up our lyres./ For there our captors/ required of us song,/ and our tormentors, mirth, saying,/ "Sing us one of the songs of Zion!" (Ps. 137:1-3).

And I will vindicate the holiness of my great name, which has been profaned among the nations, and which you have profaned among them; and the nations will know that I am

that they would be restored to their homeland once more. They suffered much from homesickness and were discontented in the place of their Exile. Regardless of the attractiveness and benefits of the culture, Babylon was not their home. They nurtured a bitterness toward their enemies and refused to think of their settlement as anything more than temporary (Ps. 137).

They must have pursued every possible remedy that might have gained their release. They confessed their sins (1 Kings 8:46-53). They prayed for the restoration of Jerusalem (Isa. 63:17-19; 64:8-12). And they remembered the promises given by the prophets that the land would be restored. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel regarded the Exile as something that would come to an end (Ezek. 11:16-21). Jeremiah thought it would end in seventy years, but, actually, it did not last that long (Jer. 29:10-14; cf. 30:3, 6-9).

Most vividly of all, they remembered Jeremiah's demonstration of faith in the return of his people. Even as the fall of Jerusalem was at hand with Nebuchadnezzar and his armies approaching the gates of Jerusalem, Jeremiah had gone out and bought a plot of land near his ancestral home in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, recorded the deed, and put it in a place of safekeeping (Jer. 32:6-15). "For thus says Yahweh of hosts, the God of Israel: Houses and fields and vineyards shall again be bought in this land" (v. 15). Jeremiah admitted that this was faith put to its severest test (32:16, 17, 24, 25).

Once the people had been in Egyptian captivity looking for escape and they were delivered by the arm of Yahweh in the Exodus. Now in Babylonian captivity, supported by the prophetic words, the people looked forward to a second exodus.

Those Jews in Babylon who were politically alert must have seen some realism in the prayers and promises and in the hopes for a return to Israel. Babylon was not a world empire with promise for a long life. Twenty-five years after the fall of Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar, the kingdom's strongest ruler, died. That was the beginning of the end. Persian power was already looming in the east and pressing down on the Babylonians.

Yahweh, says the Lord Yahweh, when through you I vindicate my holiness before their eyes. For I will take you from the nations, and gather you from all the countries, and bring you into your own land (Ezek. 36:23, 24).

"Remember not the former things,/ nor consider the things of old./ Behold, I am doing a new thing;/ now it springs forth, do you not perceive it?/ I will make a way in the wilderness/ and rivers in the desert" (Isa. 43:18, 19).

"For you shall go out in joy,/ and be led forth in peace;/ the mountains and the hills before you/ shall break forth into singing,/ and all the trees of the field shall/ clap their hands" (Isa. 55:12).

"It is too light a thing that you should be my servant/ to raise up the tribes of Jacob/ and to resotre the preserved of Israel;/ I will give you as a light to the nations,/ that my salvation may reach to the end of the earth" (Isa. 49:6).

Life in the valley of the dry bones

Two prophets lived with the exiles in Babylon—Ezekiel and the prophet known as Isaiah of Babylon (or Second Isaiah) whose words are recorded in Isaiah 40-55. Both were outstanding spokesmen for God. They spoke strength and power to their people, giving them hope and comfort.

Ezekiel's visions have added many symbols to the language of faith. He continued the figure of the second exodus that would be a time of discipline for the people and a time of cleansing before they would be led home (20:33-38). Ezekiel also foresaw the time when Israel and Judah would be reunited in their land once more (11:17-20; 34:23, 24; 37:15-28); the covenant with Yahweh would be renewed (16:59-63), a covenant of peace (34:25-31); the temple would be rebuilt and the worship of former days restored there (20:41-44; 37:26-28).

Few of Ezekiel's visions are more sharply etched on the consciousness of so many people as his vision of the valley of dry bones. Israel was not just sick, brought low by a deathly plague, but with a hope for a miracle of healing. The nation was dead beyond all hope for life. The

The Isaiah Scroll

Gathered together in the Isaiah scroll is the work of two or more prophets or schools of prophets written at different times. Most of chapters 1 to 39 are the work of Isaiah of Jerusalem who lived during the second half of the eighth century when Assyria was repeatedly invading Palestine.

Chapters 40 to 66 were written anonymously during the Exile when the power of Cyrus, the Persian, was growing. The writer of chapters 40 to 55 is often called *Second Isaiah* or *Isaiah of Babylon*.

Chapters 56 to 66 may come from writers in the time of Restoration, so it seems that within this part of Isaiah there is the voice of another school of prophets, a Third Isaiah.

bones were even dry (Ezek. 37). But God would return the community to life through a resurrection from a death it had deserved to die.

Ezekiel still clung to the old national hope for a return to the Davidic kingdom. Such must have been the expectation of many (Ezek. 37:24). Though Ezekiel does not use the word *Zion*, that tradition looms large in his oracles as he specified almost every necessary detail for the new temple (chaps. 40—48). Reflecting the separateness of the Babylonian Jewish community, he emphasized the need for the temple to be free from all contact with the unclean and the profane. In this regard, Ezekiel's temple plan would be superior to the temple built by Solomon, for it would not be contaminated by being joined to the palace or to the graves of the dead kings (43:7-9).

Flowers in the desert on the road back

Second Isaiah brought his visions to the people in Babylon later in the period of the Exile. These were the days of Babylon's decline. The appearance of the Persian power on the horizon threatened defeat for Babylon and promised release for the captives.

As this Isaiah picked up the theme of the second exodus, he could add more details. The exodus would be under Yahweh's control, but the human agent of the exodus would be Cyrus, the Persian king. He would be Yahweh's anointed one who would open doors so that the people might escape (Isa. 44:24-28; 45:1-7; 41:1-7, 25-29; in 41:2, "one from the east," and in 41:25, "one . . . from the rising of the sun," also apply to Cyrus).

The theme of a "new thing" appears throughout these oracles (42:9; 43:19; 48:6-8; 42:14, 15). The new thing of which Second Isaiah spoke is the coming exodus that he anticipated almost breathlessly (48:20, 21; 52:11). The highway and the blooming desert suffused with flowing water were tokens of this great deliverance (40:3-5; 41:18-21; 42:16; 49:9-11; 55:12, 13; 35:6-9; chaps. 34 and 35 belong with the oracles in 40-55).

Isaiah painted on a large canvas with the brightest of colors and the broadest of brushes when he portrayed the new exodus. His grandest scheme linked the exodus with creation (51:9-11). For, if the exodus is indeed a new (and not "renewed") thing, it is a special act of creation. (The reference to "Rahab" and "dragon" in 51:9 is the use of the imagery of an ancient creation legend—and a symbol understood in Babylon—to recall the arm of Yahweh active in creation.) Such is the grace of God for whom Isaiah spoke—a God who would go to any length to rescue the exiled people (43:3, 4), who because of great love would bring them home again (49:14-18).

So great was the scope of Yahweh's grasp that it included all nations and all creation (43:9). Having been to Babylon, an empire of world scope, the prophet's own world view had been broadened. Yet he knew that the nations were in the palm of Yahweh, the creator of the universe. History is God's arena to which the patriarchs came (41:8-10; 51:1-3) to serve the divine purpose and prove that Yahweh is God (43:8-13; 44:6-8).

Servant from the crucible of suffering

Dominant as is the theme of exodus and creation in these few short oracles from Isaiah of Babylon, yet another vision from these

Babylon in Hebrew Life

In Babylon, the Jews adopted the square Aramaic script for the writing of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet.

Babylonian names were used by Jewish leaders: Shesh-bazzar, Zerubbabel, Belshazzar.

They also took on the Babylonian names for the months of the year: Tishri, Heshvan, etc.

passages has become more widely known—the Servant of Yahweh. Out of the crucible of suffering experienced in the Exile, came this sublime and towering resolution for the suffering of the righteous.

The human soul had long rebelled at suffering and counted it as evil. Yet the suffering of the servant played a key role on the stage of history which was always under the control of God. While the servant may be variously identified, the given meaning in the historical context must be Israel (49:3). The servant holds a prophetic office, being the one who is faithful in keeping covenant, the one who brings the word of salvation to Israel, and the one who gives the word of God's justice to the nations. The servant works for justice in the community and in the world.

To call the servant to such work was to call the servant to suffer in the cause of redeeming others, to submit to vicarious suffering to the point of death. The testimony about the true sufferer came from the mouth of the kings of the nations who scoffed at the servant and saw no worth in such a one so marred and disfigured by punishment (52:14, 15). But then these scoffing kings confirmed the purpose for the misery endured: the servant was "wounded for our transgressions . . . bruised for our iniquities . . . with his stripes we are healed" (53:5). (In later years, the early church found the figure of the Servant had fully foreshadowed the role that Jesus lived out in his ministry and in the crucifixion. Innocent suffering had become redemptive.)

Could the exiles fully grasp the universal and cosmic meaning of their calling? Likely not. But they had gone to Babylon and there they saw the world, the wider world that became a part of their consciousness in a deep and profound sense. It made an indelible mark on their souls that could never be erased. The world was now a part of the missionary endeavor of Israel. They might go home to Jerusalem, but Babylon and the world had a lien on their souls.

The Servant Songs of Isaiah

[Verses in brackets may also be part of the Songs.]
42:1-4 [5-9]
49:1-6 [7]
50:4-9 [10-11]
52:13—53:12
[61:1-3]

Meanwhile, back in Judah

Center stage, during the days of the Exile, rightfully belonged to the Babylonian Jewish community. It was the focus of all that was creative in those desperate decades. Yet, back in the land of Judah, not all was bare and barren. Life went on, though for far fewer people and in circumstances more grim than those endured by their cousins by the rivers of Mesopotamia.

During the prosperous days of King Uzziah in the eighth century B.C., 250,000 people lived in the land. But Judah had steadily lost population until only half that many lived there after the first deportation to Babylon. So depopulated was the land that even after the first exiles returned, the total number of people in Judah may have come to only 20,000.

The invasion of Judah by the Babylonian army had been a brutal operation. All the fortified towns in the hill country about Jerusalem had been leveled and they were not rebuilt for many years (Lam. 2:2, 5). What happened to the people? Besides those carried away to Babylon, many must have fled for their lives. Thousands must have died in battle or of starvation and disease (Lam. 2:11, 12, 19-21; 4:9, 10). And the Babylonian army must have executed many more of their captives than is reported (2 Kings 25:18-27).

Such are the ruins left by war. Yet life returned. The poor remained in the land and were able to cultivate the fields that had once belonged to

Inventory

1. What were the trials and problems that the exiles faced in Babylon?

2. Name three of the many books of the Bible or parts of books of the Bible that were written during the time of the Exile.

3. What were some of the symbols of hope for restoration that gave courage to the people in exile?

4. Identify these names:
Aramaic
Cyrus
Diaspora
Ezekiel
Isaiah of Babylon
Isaiah of Jerusalem
Nebuchadnezzar

the landowners and princes taken to Babylon (Jer. 39:10). Some of the Jews who had fled to nearby lands eventually drifted back to Judah (40:11, 12). They eked out a miserable existence (Lam. 5:1-18).

Even the temple was not completely deserted. Some form of ritual continued even amid the ruins. Pilgrims came to worship at a reconstructed altar, some even from the territory of the old northern kingdom (Jer. 41:5). These may have been Israelites whose forebears had been won to Yahwism in the days of Josiah's reform. Some of the faithful turned to writing. From these people left behind have come Lamentations, Isaiah 21, Obadiah, and a number of psalms.

Yet the faith of the people left in Judah had been brutally undermined. Leaderless, they groped in their spiritual darkness and many of them lost their way (Ezek. 33:24-29). According to the deportees in Babylon, the lamp of faith was burning low in Judah.

Discovery

1. In Babylon, the exiles found answers to their despair. They resolved their doubts about the justice of God. They found new handles on history. They came to a new understanding of the role of suffering. Test their solutions. Do you feel they made gains?

2. The Exile was a period of creativity. Review the various new developments that came out of this period. What were the sources of this new power? Why did it appear at this time and this place?

Resources

Anderson, Bernhard W. "By the Waters of Babylon" and "The Dawn of a New Age," *Understanding the Old Testament*. Chapters 13-14, pages 399-470.

Ezra. Nehemiah. Isaiah 56—66. Ezekiel 40—48. Joel. Jonah. Haggai. Zechariah. Malachi. Chronicles.

CHAPTER 17

Restoration and Conflict

The end of the Babylonian empire came quickly. The city gave up without a fight in October 539 B.C. When Cyrus, the Persian, entered Babylon, he received a triumphant welcome, the people hailing him as their liberator. Within a year, Cyrus had brought all of western Asia, including Palestine and Syria, under Persian control.

Persia's policy regarding captive peoples proved different from those of either Babylon or Assyria. Instead of moving conquered peoples from one place to another, Cyrus allowed the people of captured nations to stay in their homes, sometimes with their own princes ruling over them.

He applied the same principle to the captives that the Babylonians had relocated, one group being the Jews. In 538, Cyrus issued an edict giving the Jews in Babylon freedom to return home. He even got the resettlement off to a good start by granting funds to rebuild the temple. And Cyrus returned for the temple the vessels that Nebuchadnezzar had taken.

Rival plans for a restored Zion

The resettlement of Judah was put into the hands of Sheshbazzar, a prince of Judah and member of the royal family (Ezra 1:2-4, 7-11; 6:3-5). Soon after arriving in Jerusalem, he laid the foundation for the temple (Ezra 5:16; but compare 3:6-11 and Zech. 4:9 which credit the foundation to Zerubbabel, a later governor, who may also have been involved).

But the actual building of the temple was delayed for eighteen years. The work was soon abandoned. While to many the rebuilding of the temple was most urgent, others were just as sure that this was not the time for it.

Restoration meant different things to the small groups of returnees who had the pluck and dedication to leave the comforts of Babylon. And those who had remained in Judah during the Exile had

Gist

When Persia overtook Babylon, Cyrus, the Persian king, released the exiles to return to Jerusalem and restore their city. Some of them went, but once in Judah they came face to face with differing views of what their future should be. To build or not to build the temple was the debate. The temple was restored over the objections of the visionaries who wanted an open city and not a shrine that would limit the presence of God. Though the temple party won the day and turned toward separatism in ritual and in marriage, the festivals and the study of the Law became new centers of faith in the life of the people. The covenant community formed under the leadership of Ezra reshaped the ancient faith. In defeat, the visionaries, as the bearers of the prophetic tradition, retreated from a dialogue with life in the here and now into exalted visions of God's return in power into human life in an indefinite future.

their own ideas. Naturally, the priests wanted the temple rebuilt and they were prominent among the former exiles. They came with detailed plans that had been drawn up by Ezekiel, the prophet-priest who had been active in Babylon during the years of captivity (Ezek. 40—48).

Ezekiel's plan included more than a temple. Walls were to be built around the city. A special family of priests would be installed to serve the temple and the laws of holiness would be taught and practiced.

The priestly party also adhered to the royal theology that had always been nurtured in Jerusalem. They relied on the Davidic covenant and they expected the line of David to continue on the throne in Jerusalem forever.

Opposing the priestly party were the disciples of the other prophet who had been active in Babylon, the anonymous preacher who has come to be known as Second Isaiah (the prophet of Isaiah 40—55). His was a vision of a grand new exodus from Babylon to Judah which would establish a new community. The followers of Second Isaiah had a much broader vision of the restored community than did the priestly party. For one thing, its priesthood would be more open and less restrictive. The community would be less exclusive and would draw in people from all nations.

The core of the program of these visionary disciples appears in Isaiah 60—62. Quite clearly, this is a counterplan to match the priestly proposals in Ezekiel 40—48. The visionary plan touched on the rebuilding of walls whose gates would all be open (Isa. 60:10, 11) in contrast to Ezekiel's plan (Ezek. 44:1-30). Instead of a restrictive priesthood, the ranks of religious service would be open to all people as would be admission to worship which would include aliens and foreigners (Isa. 61:5, 6). Holiness would be a gift of God rather than the object of a holiness code (Isa. 62:12).

Both plans end by giving new names to the restored community. Ezekiel said the new Zion would be called "Yahweh is there" (48:35). The visionaries, responding to the priestly blueprint, named the community they wanted to build "Sought Out" and "City Not Forsaken" (Isa. 62:12).

Journal

Read the following passages and write a sentence or two describing the condition in the community in each:

Nehemiah 1:1—2:20
Nehemiah 8:1-18
Isaiah 58
Isaiah 61
Ezekiel 40
Haggai 1
Malachi 1
Zechariah 14

Rebuff for the native Judeans

A third party in the debate over the shape of the restored community were the native Judeans who remained behind in the homeland during the Exile. During those dark years, they had kept watch over the ruined temple and had prayed in its shadows. Now, they were being pushed aside by newcomers who treated them as inferiors and as people who were unorthodox and unclean. Instead of gratitude for their faithfulness, they were abused (Ezra 4:4, 5; Zech. 8:10).

A lament of these Palestinians appears in Isaiah 63:7—64:12. Vivid in their memory was the beautiful temple now blackened by fire, a place that still recalled warm memories of better days (64:11). They felt the holy place belonged to them and they resented the intrusion of the outsiders from Babylon who acted so self-righteously: "Thy holy people possessed thy sanctuary a little while;/ our adversaries have trodden it down" (63:18).

Driven from the temple by the priestly party, these Judeans probably joined forces with the visionary disciples of Second Isaiah who were also resisting the priestly plans for rebuilding Jerusalem.

For a whole generation, the controversy raged. The priestly party

insisted that its way was right and that leadership was theirs because they were of the family of Zadok who served in the temple from the days of David (Ezek. 40:46; 43:18, 19; 48:11). Of more practical importance, they carried the commission of the Persian government to rebuild the temple. With such authority, they were able to excommunicate those who opposed them from the life of the worshiping community.

Each party accused the other of uncleanness, idolatry, and immorality (Isa. 57:1-13; 66:3, 4). While the priestly party was concerned about ritual purity (Hag. 2:10-14), the visionary party in the tradition of Jeremiah and Elijah had concern to avoid compromise with foreign nations. They were scandalized that the priestly party operated with the support of Persia, an act seen by them as consorting with evil (Isa. 57:8, 9). They also protested that the broader issues of justice and righteousness were being ignored. The poor were being neglected. Too much emphasis was being put on the rites of worship and fasting, for example, while the hungry went unfed (Isa. 58:1-9; 59:9-15).

Those early years of resettlement were not easy years for the returnees. Making a living in Judah proved hard enough even with a temple to build. Drought and blight brought near total crop failures (Hag. 1:9-11; 2:15-17). Food and clothing were in scarce supply (1:5, 6).

Three men turned the tide

Would the temple ever rise above the foundations that had been so bravely laid in the early years of the return? Hope was fading. Then, three men appeared to fuel the temple-building program. Two were Jews: Haggai and Zechariah; the other, a Persian: Darius.

Haggai and Zechariah came as prophets, but they were not supporters of the visionary prophets who followed Second Isaiah. The visionaries, who must have looked on Haggai and Zechariah as false prophets, avoided applying the word *prophet* to themselves though they were more truly in the line of classical prophecy than their contemporaries who used that title (Zech. 13:2-6).

Haggai scolded the people for being discouraged and hanging back. If they were poor, Haggai said, it was because they had shirked their duty to restore the temple (1:9-11). Zechariah was just as vigorous in pressing for a new temple. The scandal of the ruined sanctuary had been endured far too long (Zech. 1:12).

These prophets linked material prosperity with the building of the temple. They assured the people, that once finished, the temple would be the key to open the treasury of heaven. Wealth would pour down on the nation. The richness of the temple would be greater than the wealth of Solomon (Hag. 2:5-9). The priestly party needed this kind of prophetic support if it was to win support from the larger group of people. In Haggai and Zechariah, it found just such help. They turned the tide (Ezra 5:1, 2; 6:14).

From the international front, at about this time, came signs that also spurred the people on. In the years following the death of Cyrus, the Persian empire was bogged down in a mighty power struggle. Darius Hystaspes finally gained the throne in 521 B.C. But then the states and provinces in all parts of the empire began to revolt and the new emperor was kept busy putting down far-flung mutinies.

Thus, Darius gave unwitting support to the temple effort, for Persia seemed to be falling apart. This gave new hope to the dispirited

Seed

"Thus says Cyrus king of Persia: Yahweh, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth, and he has charged me to build him a house at Jerusalem, which is in Judah" (Ezra 1:2).

They set the altar in its place, for fear was upon them because of the peoples of the lands" (Ezra 3:3).

Thus says Yahweh:/ "Heaven is my throne/ and the earth is my footstool;/ what is the house which you would build for me,/ and what is the place of my rest? (Isa. 66:1).

This is the law of the temple: the whole territory round about upon the top of the mountain shall be most holy (Ezek. 43:12).

And the elders of the Jews built and prospered, through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. They finished their building by command of the God of Israel and by decree of Cyrus and Darius and Artaxerxes king of Persia" (Ezra 6:14).

And Ezra the priest brought the law before the assembly, both men and women and all who could hear with understanding. . . . And he read from it facing the square before the Water Gate from early morning until midday . . . and the ears of all the people were attentive to the book of the law (Neh. 8:2, 3).

Jews. They believed that the time might be at hand when Judah might become an independent nation once more.

Zechariah came with the oracles of a messianic age, of an era of peace for Jerusalem, "the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in its streets" (8:5). He addressed a call to the Jews still in Babylon, bidding them come to Zion and receive the tribute that the nations of the world would soon be bringing to their capital city (2:6-12). Yahweh would rule from Jerusalem and the city would overflow with people so that many would have to live outside its gates, giving Zion the appearance of an unwalled village (1:16, 17; 2:1-5). The messiah would be Zerubbabel, the prince of the house of David, who was then the governor (4:6-10a).

Haggai was even bolder. He addressed Zerubbabel as if he were already crowned king of Judah, telling him to be prepared to receive the surrender of the kingdoms of the world (8:20-23). He called him the "signet ring" of Yahweh, contradicting a prophecy of Jeremiah who had used the same title to proclaim the end of the line of Davidic kings (Jer. 22:24).

Not everyone cheered the temple

Jeremiah proved more right than Haggai. Darius was able to reassert Persian power over the empire and Judah remained as much a vassal as it had been before. But the revival of interest in the temple was enough to make things happen. In 520 B.C. work on the temple was once more begun. The priestly party with the endorsement of Haggai and Zechariah was now more firmly in control. They could also rely on the support of Darius (Ezra 6:14).

The disciples of Second Isaiah still resisted the temple project. Their words from Yahweh were: "Heaven is my throne and the earth is my footstool;/ what is the house which you would build for me,/ and what is the place of my rest?" (Isa. 66:1).

As the building advanced, the visionaries became ever more bitter. They likened the temple rituals to the Canaanite fertility cults with their impurities and excesses which the early prophets so soundly condemned (Isa. 66:3, 4; 57:5). The comparison is overstated and not to be taken literally, for the priestly party was most strict in observing the ancient laws of holiness and purity.

Yet the visionaries saw the building of the temple as failure to trust in Yahweh. Therefore, the temple seemed an idolatry even more repulsive than the Canaanite paganism that had for centuries been the plague of Israel. They even compared the temple to a prostitute's bed (Isa. 57:7, 8).

But these bitter words could not impede the building of the temple. Once begun by Zerubbabel, the governor, and Joshua, the high priest, the project moved forward steadily. The temple was dedicated in March 515 B.C. The ritual was full and the sacrifices were lavish (Ezra 6:13-18). The priestly party had triumphed and was fully in control. The visionary disciples of Second Isaiah had been suppressed.

Prophecy dissolves into visions in the sky

The restoration of the temple brought an end to prophecy in Israelite life. The visionaries as bearers of the old prophetic tradition saw no hope that their new community would take shape within history.

The prophets had always been linked with history, calling on the people and on kings to take specific action in obedience to the will of Yahweh. History was their canvas and the faithful acts of God's people were the pigments that brought the divine design to life. Their preaching had always been rooted in the current events of the day.

But their defeat by the temple party drove them from earthly history into the otherworldly arena of the sky where strange visions became their medium of expression. History no longer held meaning for them because they saw no way that their hope for a new community could be realized in the present order unless Yahweh would descend from heaven and take direct action.

Prophecy had always dealt in visions, but those were visions that were applied to the human realm. After Isaiah's glimpse into the heavenly court, he received his instructions: "Go, and say to this people" (Isa. 6:9). But now in the days after the Exile, prophecy disappeared into the world of the apocalyptic—the realm of secrets and symbols from another world. All activity in this region belonged to God. People had only to wait until God would break into the world of human events.

Restoration Years

B.C.
- 538 Edict of Cyrus
- 520 Temple begun
- 515 Temple built
- 445 Nehemiah
- 428 Ezra

CHRONICLES

- 400

Secret codes for former prophets

When the apocalyptic was fully developed, it had no relation to history: "But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, until the time of the end" (Dan. 12:4; cf. 8:26). This trend began to appear in the writings of the disciples of Second Isaiah (Isa. 56—66, sometimes called Third Isaiah) as well as in the oracles of an anonymous visionary attached to the Zechariah scroll (Zech. 9—14, sometimes called Second Zechariah). Here, the new visionaries are abandoning prophecy and absorbing themselves in the apocalyptic style that would be the refuge of oppressed minorities for many centuries to come.

We can see the change taking place in the oracles of Joel. The essence of the prophetic message about judgment, repentance, and restoration are still there. He has a concern about formalism in worship (2:12-14) and holds that deeds of righteousness are superior to fasting and weeping: "rend your hearts and not your garments" (v. 13). But history seems to be beyond the control of God's people. They will need to look for Yahweh to break through into the realm of history at some future time. He admits that prophecy has ceased and looks forward to an indefinite future when it will be revived (2:28, 29).

Joel has a kinship with the visions of Zechariah 9—14 which foresee another siege of Jerusalem with a dramatic appearance of Yahweh (14:1-5). The actor in these visions is the Divine Warrior who comes in power with his holy ones in his train (14:5b). With fire and chariots of storm, the Warrior executes judgment (Isa. 59:15b-20; 66:14-16). Without any hope of changing the order of human affairs, the visionaries wait for Yahweh to step in and destroy the old evil system and establish the new community.

Yet these early users of the apocalyptic medium were still close enough to events in their own time to remember their oppressors. They marked not only pagan nations but the unfaithful ones in Israel for defeat. Among these are the leaders of the temple party who had set themselves up as shepherds over the flock of Judah (Zech. 10:3).

Anonymous Prophets

A mark of apocalyptic literature is that its writers do not identify themselves. It's all a part of the code of secrecy that is the character of this form of writing. Thus, the name of the writer (or writers) of the material added to the Zechariah scroll (chaps. 9—14) is not given nor of the material added to the scroll of Isaiah (40—55 and 56—66).

Taste of Eden turns sour

According to the priestly leaders of the restoration effort, the building of the temple would mean the fulfillment of all the dreams of Israel, the full blossoming of the covenants given to Abraham and David. Yet the new Eden did not work out that way.

The early days of the second temple were days when religious life fell to a low level. Priests were indifferent to their duties, according to Malachi. They offered sick animals on the altar. Temple officials failed to teach the people and disgraced their office (1:6-14; 2:1-9).

With priests and leaders setting a poor example, the people were not bound to do any better. They transgressed the Sabbath (Neh. 13:15-22) and withheld their tithes (Mal. 3:7-10). As a result, the Levites who served in the temple had to leave their service and take on other work to earn their living (Neh. 13:10, 11).

Of most concern to both Malachi and to Nehemiah was the growing intermarriage with non-Israelites (Neh. 13:23-27; Mal. 2:11, 12). They feared that the community of Yahweh might be overcome by outside influences and go the way of the Samaritans who had intermarried with Assyrian colonists. Family life began to break apart. Divorce was much too common (Mal. 2:13-16) and the poor were oppressed (3:5). The peasants who had mortgaged their farms to pay their taxes and then defaulted on the repayment of their debts were sold into slavery along with their children (Neh. 5:1-5).

Political conditions were also uncertain. During these days, the Jews seemed to have been without their own governor, so that Judah's affairs were being handled by an administrator based in Samaria. The Judeans felt their rights were being ignored and that their future was uncertain. When they tried to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, the Samaritans carried charges of treason against the Jews back to the king of Persia (Ezra 4:6-23).

From the Persian government's point of view, the unrest in Judah needed settling. It was in their interest that there should be peace in the provinces so near to Egypt. And the Jews in Babylon with their emotional ties to Jerusalem had a concern also.

Nehemiah repairs more than a broken wall

Two persons appeared after the middle of the fifth century B.C. and pulled the people of Judah together in a way that the building of the temple did not. They were Ezra and Nehemiah, as the Bible orders the books named after them; but more likely Nehemiah, who resolved the political problems, came before Ezra, who dealt with the growing religious crisis.

Nehemiah was a Jew from Babylon who had risen high in the ranks of the Persian government, holding the rank of cupbearer to Artaxerxes, the king who followed Darius Hystaspes. Whatever his duties, Nehemiah had frequent personal contact with the king. Hearing about the distress among the Jews in Judah, Nehemiah petitioned the king for a commission to go to Jerusalem and rebuild the walls of the city (Neh. 2:1-8). His petition granted, he arrived in the city sometime around 445 B.C.

An aggressive and hard-driving administrator, Nehemiah made things happen in Jerusalem. Judah soon became a province separate from Samaria, and Nehemiah was appointed its governor (Neh. 5:14;

10:1). He recruited laborers from every part of Judah, assigning parts of the wall to each group. The work moved rapidly and within fifty-two days, the wall was finished (6:15).

More difficult, he found, would be the social problems that were plaguing the community. He found the poor being oppressed by money-lenders. Enraged by such abuse, he called the offenders to appear before him to hear a lecture on their duties as Jews. He took over the loans and pressed the erring businessmen to return the property and goods that they had seized (5:6-13). He stood at the city gate on the eve of the Sabbath so that business might cease and the holy day not be profaned (13:19-22).

When he found that a member of the high priest's family had married a foreign wife, he drove the offender from the country (13:28, 29). This problem of intermarriage he found most difficult to stem. He saw orthodox Judaism being diluted by the foreign customs of the non-Jewish people in the land. That was a religious problem with which he could not cope.

Reform 3 in Jerusalem grows out of Ezra's book

Sometime late in Nehemiah's term as governor, Ezra appeared on the scene. A priest and a scholar of the law from Babylon, Ezra, like Nehemiah, came with a commission from the Persian king. Ezra's assignment related particularly to the area of religion (Ezra 7:6, 11-26). Persia was firming up its defenses against Egypt and a disorganized state would not provide a dependable outpost of its power.

Shortly after his arrival, Ezra read the book of the Law of Moses (probably the Pentateuch which had by then been completed) at the Feast of Tabernacles. It was a public reading, a dramatic and moving event (Neh. 8:1-12). Thus began public instruction in the meaning of Judah's historic faith.

In a forceful and direct way, Ezra attacked the intermarriage problem. In a great public assembly at which all families were to be represented under penalty of law, Ezra lectured the people. Standing in a heavy rain in the temple square, he rebuked them for their error of intermarriage, and the people confessed their sin. A tribunal was appointed to deal with each case. In three months' time, the work was finished. All the mixed marriages had been dissolved (Ezra 10:9-17, 44).

Then followed the highlight of Ezra's ministry, a covenant ceremony (Neh. 9—10). It included a solemn confession of sin, an oath not to enter into any marriages with foreigners (10:30-39), and an agreement to observe the Sabbath and the sabbatical year. And the people committed themselves to support the temple.

In a few short years, Nehemiah and Ezra produced a new expression of Judaism, a form of community that had not existed before. Israel was more than a nation; it was now a covenant community organized around the Law of Moses and the message of the prophets of Israel.

Ezra and Nehemiah had built on the reforms begun by Hezekiah and Josiah two and three centuries earlier. The temple still had an important place in the life of the people, but the festivals and the Sabbath began to shape their lives as well. The Law had also gained in importance. It was now the constitution of the new community.

Order of Ezra and Nehemiah Books

Nehemiah material appears in Ezra and Ezra material in Nehemiah. Somewhere in copying the records, sections were misplaced. The proper order seems to be:

Ezra 1:1—2:70 (duplicated in Neh. 7:6—73a)
Ezra 3:1—4:6
Ezra 4:24—6:22. Ezra 4:7-23
Nehemiah 1:1—7:5. Nehemiah 11—13
Nehemiah 9:38—10:39. Ezra 7—10. Nehemiah 8:1—9:37

Resistance from a reluctant prophet

But different points of view still circulated in the community which served to correct certain trends. One came from the Book of Jonah, a tract that may have been written during the days of the Exile. Rather than being supportive of the exclusivism and separatism promoted by Nehemiah and Ezra, Jonah spoke of Yahweh's concern to win the obedience of non-Israelites, in this case, the people of Nineveh—the Assyrians, the bitter enemies of Israel.

Here is a parable with a lesson about God's mercy for all people. Its hero is modeled on Jonah, the son of Amittai, a prophet who served Jeroboam II, performing a special service for the Israelite king in a war with Syria (2 Kings 14:25). In those ancient days, that Jonah was a prophet of salvation. In the parable about the witness to Nineveh, Jonah was still a prophet of salvation, albeit, a reluctant one.

Jonah preached the grace of God, though with an unsure voice, when he cited Exodus 34:6, 7, an affirmation repeated eighteen times in the Old Testament: "I knew that thou art a gracious God and merciful, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, and repentest of evil" (Jon. 4:2). God loved all the people of Nineveh, and even their cattle (4:11).

Memoirs of Ezra and Nehemiah

Ezra 7:12—9:15 represent the memoirs of Ezra which once existed as a separate book and was later combined with other material by the Chronicler to make a single book.

The memoirs of Nehemiah (Neh 1:1—7:73a) were also in origin a separate book.

Much of this combined material appears in the Apocrypha as the book of 1 Esdras which includes 2 Chronicles 35:1 through Ezra 10 and also Nehemiah 7:73—8:12.

History to tidy up the traces of the tough years

During the days of the restoration of Judah, the books of 1 and 2 Chronicles along with Ezra and Nehemiah were written. They must have taken shape shortly after Nehemiah and Ezra had completed their reforms. The compiler of these four books has come to be known as *the Chronicler*, though the task may have involved more than one person.

Chronicles, even though it reports on the same period covered by 1 and 2 Kings, is more than a supplement. It was written to promote the restored community. Chronicles links the new Judaism with the kingdoms of David and Solomon in the days when the temple began to take a central place in Israelite life. Caught up in the temple as described by the Chronicler was the new community's understanding of the plan of God.

Chronicles is largely a history of the kingdom of Judah with the northern kingdom of Israel receiving little mention except as its history crossed paths with that of Judah. The northern kingdom's story, after all, was only a recital of disobedience that justified the separation of the Jews of the restoration community from the Samaritans. The Chronicler summarized Samaritan fate with this judgment: "So Israel [i.e., Samaria] has remained in rebellion against the house of David until today" (2 Chron. 10:19).

Because of the Chronicler's bias toward David and Solomon, all material from Kings that might reflect negatively on these heroes was dropped. With only Chronicles before us, we would not be able to understand why the northern tribes broke with the house of David. Chronicles tells nothing about David's policy of centralization and Solomon's system of taxation.

In the records of the Chronicler, the returnees from Babylon saw themselves as the true Israel, descended from the Davidic kingdom of Judah and from the captives from Jerusalem who had been taken to Babylon.

Abijah, the king of Judah after Rehoboam, the son of Solomon,

delivered a monologue from Mount Zemaraim in the hill country before doing battle with the forces of Jeroboam I of Israel (2 Chron. 13:4-12). His statement sums up the point of view of the Chronicler: the kingship of Israel had been given to the house of David forever (v. 5); the rebellious Israelite kingdom was the work of "certain worthless scoundrels" (v. 7); and the temple at Jerusalem was the only proper place for the worship of Yahweh (vv. 8-12).

The best of times in the restoration

The Chronicler saw the Exile as only an interlude in the history of Judah and Jerusalem. The restored community had come to claim all the promises of the former kingdom even though it no longer had a king.

The bitter struggle between the visionaries and the temple party was now over. The prophecies of Haggai and Zechariah had been fulfilled—the building of the temple had introduced the blessed community. It was the high point of Israelite history, and the symbol of this achievement was in the Festival of Tabernacles that Ezra had reinstated. The Chronicler compared this festival with the Passovers under earlier great reformers. Hezekiah's celebration had been great—nothing like it had happened in Jerusalem "since the time of Solomon" (2 Chron. 30:26). Later came Josiah with a more far-reaching reform marked by a Passover feast that surpassed all other events "since the days of Samuel" (2 Chron. 35:18). Ezra's feast topped them all for "from the days of Jeshua [Joshua] the son of Nun to that day the people of Israel had not done so" (Neh. 8:17).

The Hebrew Old Testament ended with the work of the Chronicler. In this historian's opinion, prophecy had been fulfilled when Judah had been restored to Jerusalem.

Discovery

1. List the new ideas gleaned from this chapter. What are the questions still unanswered?

2. What was the historical ancestry of the temple (priestly) party? What elements from Israelite history most influenced them and shaped their view of the world?

3. Who were the spiritual ancestors of the visionaries (the disciples of Second Isaiah)? What elements of Israel's history did they most cherish?

4. Why did the visionaries fail to lead in shaping the restored community? How would Israelite history have been different had they not failed?

Resources

Anderson, Bernhard W. "A Kingdom of Priests," *Understanding the Old Testament*. Chapter 15, pages 471-501.

Inventory

1. What was the Edict of Cyrus? Why was it issued?

2. What was the attitude of the following toward the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem: Ezekiel? Disciples of Second Isaiah (visionaries)? Haggai? Zechariah? Judeans who protected the temple during the Exile?

3. What was the nature of the apocalyptic view of events in Judah? How did it differ from the prophetic view?

4. What were the main contributions of: Nehemiah? Ezra?

5. Who was the Chronicler? What was the view of the Chronicler about Samaria? About Judah and the restored temple?

6. What was the view of Jonah about the mission of Judah?

7. Identify these names:

Cyrus
Darius
Ezekiel
Ezra
Haggai
Jonah
Malachi
Nehemiah

Shesh-bazaar
Zadok
Zechariah
Zerubbabel

Suggested Resources

Books

Alexander, David and Pat. *Eerdmans' Handbook to the Bible*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973.

Anderson, Bernhard W. *Understanding the Old Testament. Third Edition. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975.*

Baly, Denis. *The Geography of the Bible*. New York: Harper and Row, 1974.

Cornfield, Gaalyah. *Archaeology of the Bible: Book by Book*. New York: Harper and Row, 1976.

Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962.

Kramer, Samuel N. *Cradle of Civilization*. New York: Time, Inc., 1967.

Magnuson, Magnus. *Archaeology of the Bible*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1977.

May, Herbert G. *Oxford Bible Atlas*. Second Edition (paper). London: Oxford University Press, 1974.

Miller, Madeleine S. and J. Lane. *Harper's Bible Dictionary*. Eighth Edition. New York: Harper and Row, 1973.

Schroeder, David. *Learning to Know the Bible*. Newton: Faith and Life Press; Scottdale: Herald Press, 1966.

Audio visuals

Abingdon Bible Map Transparencies for overhead projector

Set 1. Palestine — Old Testament
- 1A Physical Map of Palestine
- 1B The Exodus
- 1C The Kingdom of Saul
- 1D The Empire of David and Solomon
- 1E The Kingdom of Israel and Judah

$13.95 from Abingdon Press, 201 Eighth Avenue, Nashville, TN 37202, (615) 749-6301.

Our Bible: How It Came to Us

3-part black and white motion picture from ABS
- Part 1 - Formation of the Bible - 25 minutes
- Part 2 - The Bible Crosses Europe - 24 minutes
- Part 3 - Making of the English Bible - 35 minutes

How Our Bible Came to Us

5-part filmstrip (46 minutes total) from ABS, AVL
- Part 1 - The Bible Is Put into Writing - 7½ minutes
- Part 2 - The Bible Crosses Europe - 9 minutes
- Part 3 - The Bible Comes to England - 11 minutes
- Part 4 - The Bible Comes to America - 10 minutes
- Part 5 - The Bible in the World Today - 8½ minutes

The Dead Sea Scrolls and Our Scriptures

82-frame color filmstrip, script, 1958. AVL

How the Old Testament Came to Be

76-frame color filmstrip, script, 1958. AVL

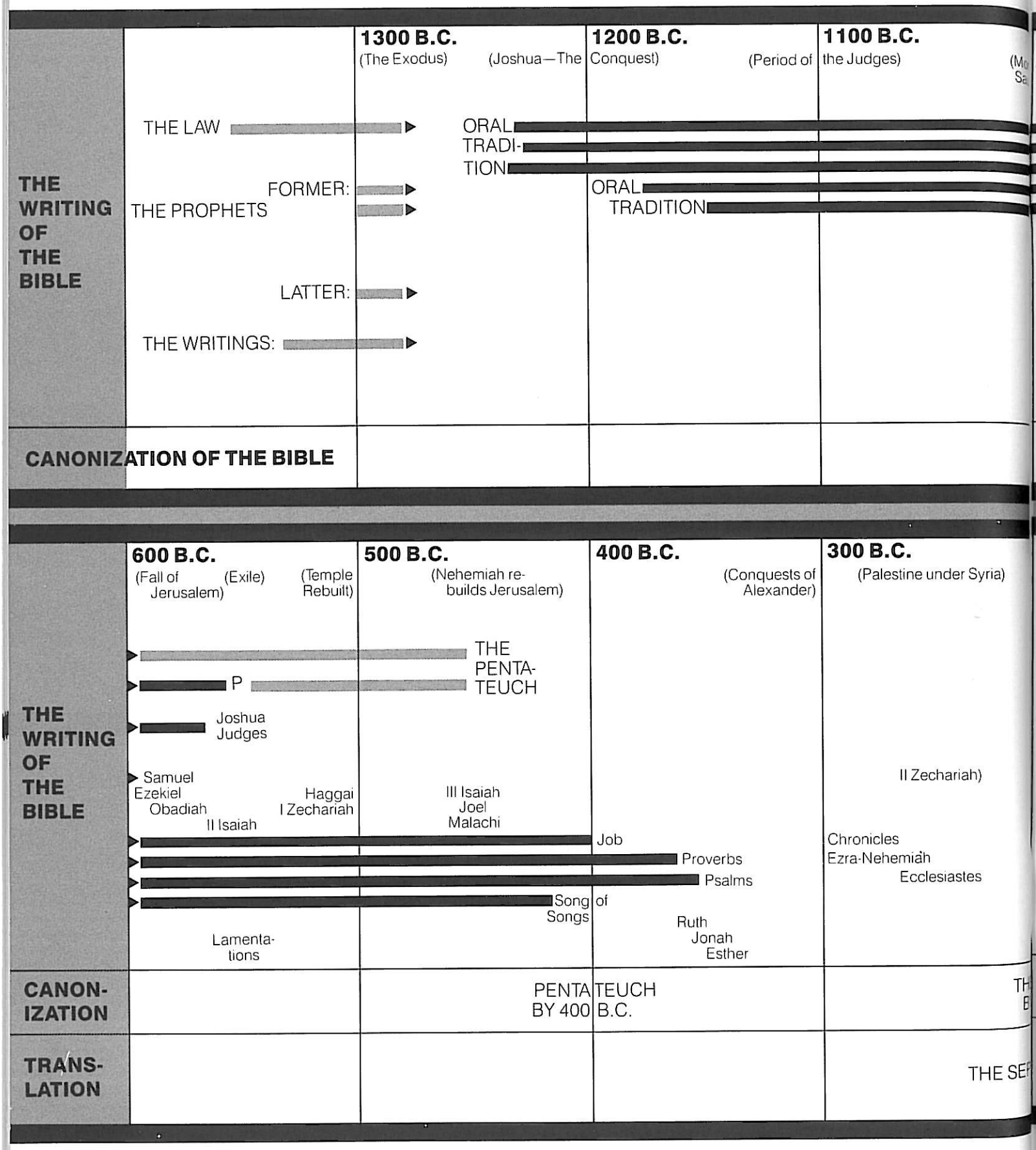
A Survey of the Bible

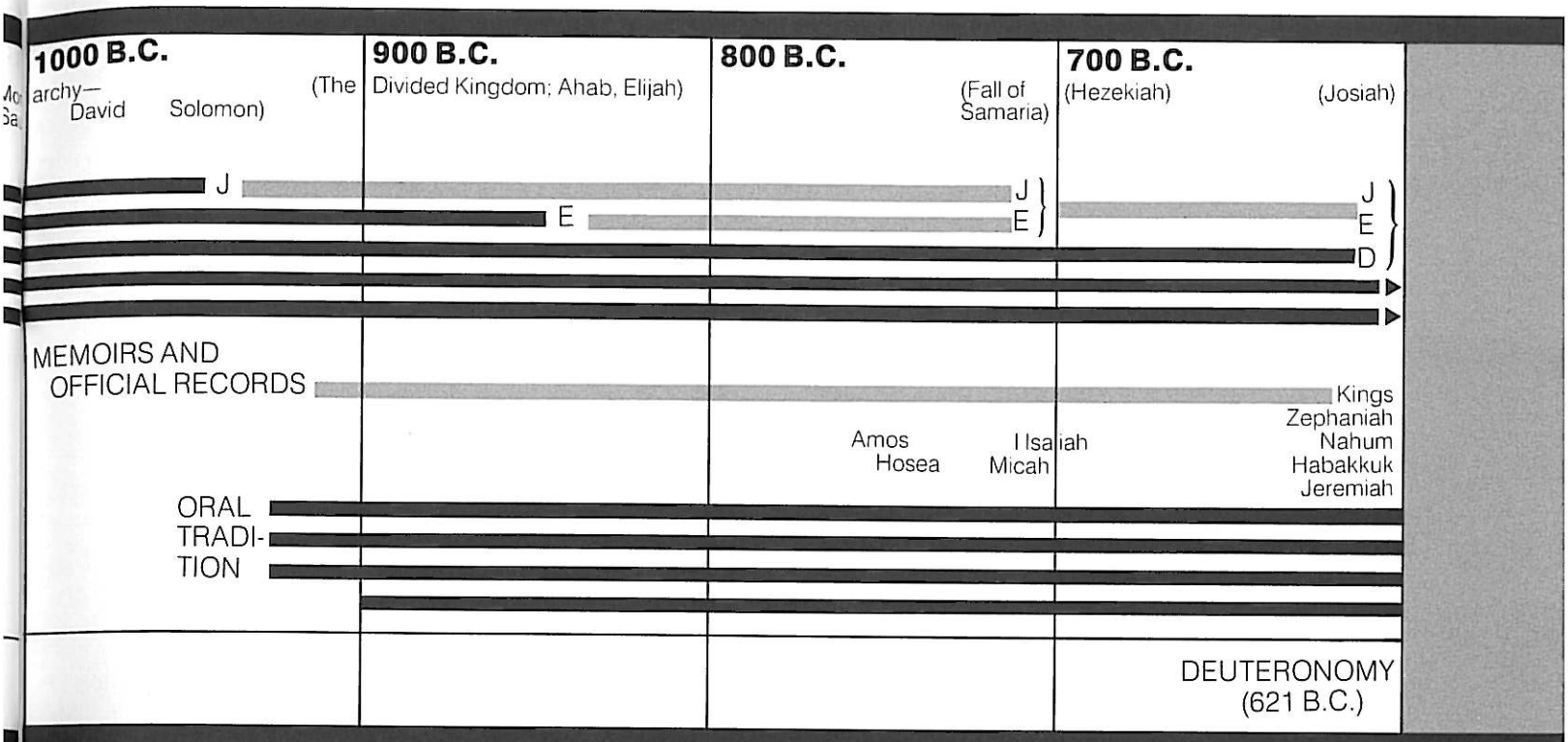
40-frame color filmstrip, record, script. AVL

American Bible Society (ABS): Write to Film Rentals, Audio Visuals, 1111 Lancaster Avenue, Rosemont, PA 19010

Audio Visual Library (AVL): Box 347, Newton, KS 67114

Time Line of the Bible

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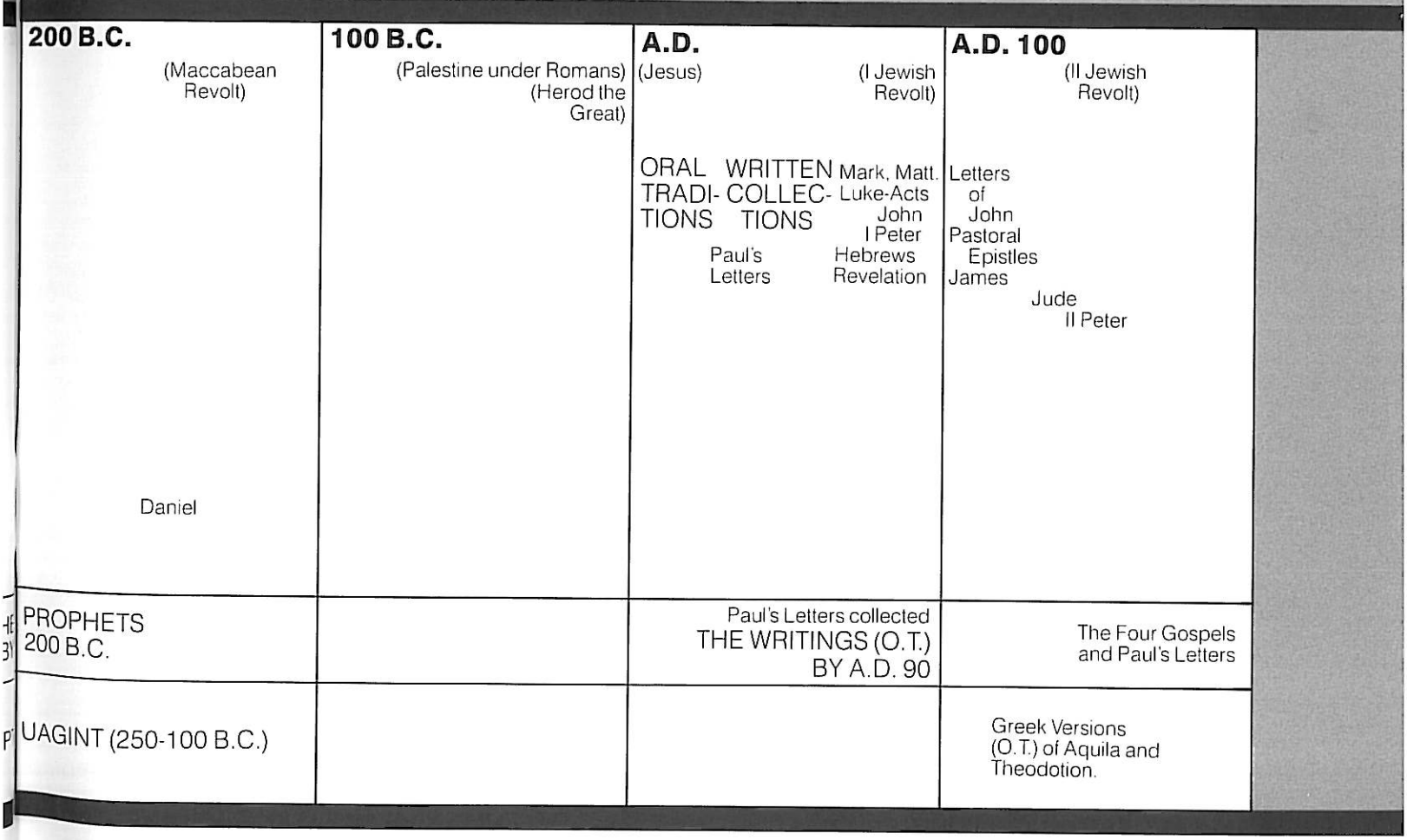
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(Palestine under Romans)
(Herod the
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A.D.
(Jesus)
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II Peter
Daniel
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Paul's Letters collected
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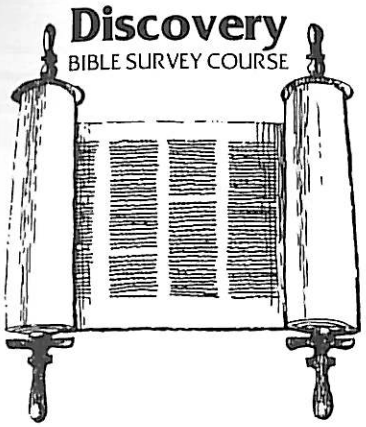
Theodotion.



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