
Old Testament History

INTRODUCTION

Any study of the Old Testament must include the study of history from the divine viewpoint. This type of study usually provides the Christian with a viewpoint that is quite different from that taken by many historians. The reason is that many of the histories that you will read take no account of God's sovereign purpose or His activity. They deal only with surface issues in the interpretations of history.

For example, economists might interpret history from the viewpoint of economics, trade, money, and balance of industrial and commercial power. They try to make all shifts in history fit an economic framework. A geographer might interpret history according to geographical circumstances, indicating that tribes and nations move about and settle where they do or fight for new territory because of the locations of rivers and valleys or because of climatic conditions. There are those who advocate a "strong ruler" interpretation, that history is directed by the powerful people in society. There is also the cataclysmic interpretation, that the human race moves in response to acts of nature. There are many theories, and some may involve a combination of several philosophies.

But historians almost always deal with these results of the sovereign activity of God as if the events or conditions were the causes of history rather than the effects of the execution of the Plan of God.

For instance, historians state that Germany waged war on the rest of the world for *Lebensraum*, living room; and interpreters have pretty well voted unanimously that Germany wanted seaports, more room for its people, more markets for its goods, etc. What has been often ignored, however, is that pre-World War Germans were almost totally devoid of spiritual understanding as a nation and that they did not indicate any submission to the will of God.

Because many historians ignore God in their investigations, they make suppositions which are fatal to their conclusions. They decide for example that there is no God, or if there is a God, He holds Himself aloof and doesn't interfere (except

that they blame Him for all catastrophes). Therefore, they conclude, there is no such thing as the supernatural, or miracles, and therefore we live in a closed system into which no outside influence comes - there is no God directing human affairs.

This paper acknowledges the personal involvement of almighty God in the story of mankind. It deals with the history of the Eastern Mediterranean region of the world leading up to the life and career of Daniel the prophet. The objective of this study is to supply a brief but thorough historical background for the study of the Old Testament book of Daniel and the minor prophets. The earnest student of Daniel and other Old Testament prophets, must become very familiar with the following:

- The Jews as a nation, as individuals, including their very longstanding culture, tradition, and religion.
- The Gentile nations surrounding the Jews, their character, culture, religion, and their relationship to the Jews as both friends and conquerors.
- The individuals, both Jews and Gentiles, who are central to the history of that period of time, their personalities, characters, and activities.
- The movement of the tribes and nations in the general motion of history under the sovereign direction of God.

Daniel's story, and those of his contemporaries, gives the true interpretation of history at an extremely critical historical juncture. Among the Gentile nations, during the period from about 1000 B.C. to 300 B.C. there arises a turning point. The Gentile nations were often at war among themselves; but in general they were separated from each other, and each nation developed according to its own desires. And during the time that Israel lived within its ancient borders under immediate divine guidance, the nations living around them came into many hostile conflicts with them. God used these conflicts as a rod of correction for His rebellious people, when needed from time to time.

From the most ancient historical times the great kingdoms on the Nile and on the Tigris-Euphrates

system had for centuries struggled to expand their influence and to enlarge themselves into world powers. The Phoenicians, for example, on the Mediterranean coast, gave themselves to commerce, seeking to get rich through marketing the treasures of the earth and economic empire building. They built the great Carthaginian empire which lasted for centuries until its fatal confrontation with Rome.

Small nations and large acquired strength and influence. God permitted each of them to follow its own way for a time, and He had, in fact, given them many good things along the way in order that they might be free to seek the Lord and find Him through the riches of His grace.

But their negative volition and the principles of the Sin Nature dwelling in these tribes and nations poisoned their natural development so that they went farther away from God and sank deeper into idolatry and immorality of every kind. God began to sift the world through the use of great judgments. The Chaldeans raised themselves to world power, overthrowing the Assyrians, conquering lesser tribes and nations and breaking the world domination of Egypt and the Phoenicians.

In succession, the Medo-Persian Empire, the Greeks, and the Romans subdued the Mediterranean world. The history of the ancient world came to a close, in a sense, at the appearance of Jesus Christ on the earth.

In this repeated rise and fall of nations and tribes, people were driven to the knowledge of their helplessness and the vanity of their idolatry. They learned the fleeting nature of earthly greatness, wealth, and glory. God placed strict limits on the egotistical establishment of nations in their special interests and the resulting deification of their separate identities of culture, art, science, language.

The Roman Empire paved the way for the spreading abroad of the culture and language of the dominant Romans and for the removal of the isolation of the tribes which had been scattered. Thus, the way was opened for the revelation of the Gospel at the same time that the faith of the heathen in their institutions and gods was being severely shaken. So we see God always working to reveal Himself and His plan to every human being.

DIVINE DISCIPLINE

It is important to understand the doctrine of Divine Discipline as it relates to the interpretation of history. Whom the Lord loves, He chastens, whether it is an individual, a city or community, or a nation. Because God loves the whole world, there has always been a lot of chastening going on. The history of the Jews as a nation is, in part, a story of the cycles of discipline and recovery they experienced throughout all their generations. There are many parallel lessons to be learned by individual believers regarding the way the Lord handles the individual and nation in Grace when either is disobedient.

Divine Discipline of the Christian Believer

Chastisement of individuals is for believers only (Heb. 12:5). God's discipline is based on love, and when a believer is out of fellowship, discipline is aimed at only one thing, to get the believer to acknowledge his sin to God, to confess in order to be restored to fellowship (Heb. 12:6).

Discipline never means a loss of salvation (Gal. 3:26; Heb. 12:6). Divine discipline is chastisement for sins of the believer in the immediate context of the sin that was committed. And discipline is removed by Biblical confession of sin (1 John 1:9; 1 Cor. 11:31), "...if we judge ourselves..." [Read Confessing Sin Biblically]

Suffering may well be part of the chastisement, and confession does not remove the suffering. However, when suffering continues after the believer has been restored to fellowship, the cursing is turned to blessing; that is, the suffering is for a positive purpose. [Read *Christian Suffering*, by R. B. Thieme] (Job 5:17,18).

If a believer continues in sin and refuses to repent and confess, the chastisement will become more and more severe. Certain sins bring compounded discipline, particularly those in which the believer is acting as a stumbling block to others (Matt. 7:1-12). In extreme cases, the believer could suffer the Sin Unto Death. However, all chastisement is confined to time; there will be no discipline for believers in eternity (Rev. 21:4)

The believer can avoid divine discipline through a consistent exercise of the principles of Christian

living outlined in the Word of God, as illustrated by the passage in Heb. 12:1-6.

Confession is equivalent to "laying aside the weight" of Heb. 12:1. The result is production and the fruit of the Spirit. The phrase "...let us run with patience" refers to the Faith-Rest life. This is Faith-Patience, also spoken of in James 1.

The next recovery principle is Occupation with Christ, the "looking unto Jesus..." of Heb. 12:2. Then, avoid sins of the mind; avoid becoming "wearied", a reference to mental depression resulting from sin in Heb. 12:3. If any of the following are harbored continually, mental illness can result: A guilt complex; bitterness or hatred toward others; jealousy or envy; fear about the present or future; anxiety or worry about little things; desire for revenge; arrogance; judging another or running him down to others.

Heb. 12:4 refers to having victory over the Sin Nature. Confess, keep moving, separate from the sin, grow up in Christ, stand on Grace principles, exercise Faith-Rest, rely on positional truth.

Live in the Word, Heb. 12:5.

Divine discipline is designed to restrain us from sin and to teach us lessons which will result in growth (Heb. 12:11).

Divine Discipline for a Nation

The Bible has many examples of divine discipline being brought against communities or nations. The most dramatic discipline of a city occurred at Sodom and Gomorrah when God destroyed the cities and their inhabitants at one stroke. There had not been even a remnant of faithful people there in order to preserve the cities from final judgment. Even Lot and his family protested against having to leave.

Another example is the destruction of heathen Jericho in which all inhabitants were killed except for Rahab and her family. Rahab obviously had positive volition toward the Gospel, and her family enjoyed blessing by association in their narrow escape.

As the individual goes, so goes the nation. In order for a nation to avoid divine discipline, there must be at least some of its citizens who live in fellowship with the Lord. A question arises as to how many positive believers constitute a remnant,

a "quorum". The answer is that at least some of the citizenry and some of the political leadership of a nation must be faithful believers and have enough influence to maintain the Divine Institutions in that nation. It's possible that the remnant could be very small if it is composed of the most influential and powerful citizens, such as kings, presidents, or other top political and business leaders. In a democracy, the remnant would probably have to be fairly large in order to have divine viewpoint influence in elections.

The key is this: in order for a nation to survive there must be freedom and morality. These are vital for the preservation of national integrity and for the maintaining of the Divine Institutions of volition, marriage, family, and nationalism.

There must be freedom so that the Word of God can be taught clearly and every citizen be given a chance to decide on issues of salvation and Christian living. People need freedom so that, under positive volition to the Word of God, they can keep their marriages and their families together. Families and nations are a part of God's plan for the human race. Satan's program is immorality, family breakup, and internationalism. The Divine Institutions were given to preserve the human race after the Fall and to protect the nations from the inroads of Satan's program.

There must be morality in order to protect people from criminality, disease, and the other consequences of unchecked sinfulness. In particular, the institutions of marriage and the family are very much dependent on a high level of morality in the community so that parents can maintain positive momentum for long periods of time while they are training and nurturing their children. It is the breakdown of morality which is the first and most obvious indication that both the individual and the nation are in trouble.

The Five Cycles of Discipline - Leviticus 26

The five "cycles" of discipline refer to the five levels, or increments, of chastisement which God brings on a nation which steadfastly refuses to repent of its immorality and live according to God's plan. When a nation at first very subtly begins to drift away from the Lord, indicated by a laxness in morality in many of its citizens and an indifference to the Word of God, the Lord begins the discipline with relatively gentle reminders in

the form of a loss of peace, a reduction in prosperity, and so forth. At the other end of the scale, God allows the complete destruction of a nation which has defiantly ignored all levels of discipline. This destruction is analogous to the Sin Unto Death suffered by an individual who is intractable in his defiance of God (Nadab and Abihu, Saul, Ananias and Sapphira).

At this point you should read Leviticus 26:14-29. That chapter provides a concise outline of God's warnings about the levels of punishment He will bring on the nation of Israel if they will not turn from their sinful rebellion. Discipline of the nation begins with relatively mild problems, including people's loss of inner peace and mental depression. There will be great fear and paranoia among the people, accompanied by lack of success in business and agriculture, poverty, sickness, and defeat in battle.

Verses 18 to 20 show the second stage of discipline which is characterized by a continued lack of fellowship with the Lord, loss of national prestige and honor, a cessation of God's grace provision for the nation, and a great barrenness in the land.

The third cycle, verses 21 and 22, includes great plagues, no control over natural enemies, a general inability to subdue the earth, the death of children, and the beginnings of great desolation among the people.

In verses 23-26 chastisement becomes severe, with increased attacks by enemies, invasions by foreign powers. There is extreme economic adversity and poor productivity, even in the production of necessities, resulting in famine. Some national sovereignty remains, but invaders have ever-widening influence in all areas of life. There are increases in plagues and disease.

The fifth cycle of discipline involves complete loss of personal and national sovereignty, the destruction of the family and the nation. Offerings to God are unacceptable. Nations which have undergone this destruction have experienced slavery, cannibalism, and the assimilation of its surviving citizens into other cultures.

The Seeds of National Destruction, Gen.11

The people of Babel, in defiance of God, thought they could construct a better society, a more secure, more compatible, more idealistic commu-

nity. Their volitional defiance of God began at the grass roots level, "They said to one another..."; then they united in an effort to organize their society under agreed-upon principles. They had a complete disregard for God; there was no communication between God and man. They refused divine viewpoint and the commandment to go throughout the world and multiply.

During the Age of the Jews there were many examples of national discipline. Hosea 4:1-7 gives an example of the nation rejecting Bible teaching and building for chastisement. They were engaged in false business practices (4:2); there was no application of grace, "no truth...nor mercy" (4:1); they were in a miserable state "languish" (4:3); there was false prosperity "they are increased" (4:7); they followed their religious leaders to destruction.

The whole book of Isaiah, notably chapter 28, was directed at the nation which had rejected the authority of God.

National destruction came on every nation that rejected the Word of God, not just the nation of Israel. Canaan was destroyed by the Jews under Joshua. There was divine discipline on Egypt for refusing to let the Jews leave. Assyria was destroyed (2 Kings 19:35; 2 Chron. 32:21). Babylon, in turn, faded quickly as a nation (Daniel 5).

And discipline is related to cities as well as to nations, as the following examples indicate:

Sodom and Gomorrah, Gen. 18:20

Jericho, Joshua 6

Jerusalem, Luke 21:24; Jer. 5:1

Damascus, Isaiah 17:1

Nineveh, Nahum 3:5-8

Babylon, Isaiah 13:19-21

Tyre, Ezekiel 26,27; Isaiah 23:1

Rome, Rev. 17:11; 18:1ff

Chorazin and Bethsaida, Matt. 11:21

Sidon, Ezekiel 28:20,22

The Centuries Preceding Daniel

In Bible study it is easy to compress centuries into days, so that one sometimes thinks of events with a great deal of foreshortening of vision. It is important to remember that in ancient history there are many hundreds of years involved. The events

from the time of Abraham to Daniel's lifetime covered about 1,400 years. While it is difficult to know the exact dates involved, we know that the events in the Bible concerning Abraham and his direct family involved about 700 years. During that time Isaac, Jacob and Esau, and Jacob's twelve sons were born, Joseph was sold into Egypt, Jacob's family moved into Egypt, and the Hebrews experienced about 250 years of captivity in Egypt before escaping through the Red Sea in about 1290 B.C.

In about 1250 B.C., the Jews moved into Canaan under Joshua's leadership; and the period from about 1200 B.C. to 1020 B.C. was known in Bible history as the Period of the Judges. During this period the Trojan War was fought (c. 1194 to 1184 B.C.), and Tiglath-Pileser I ruled Assyria. Egypt was fairly quiet during this period, but there was continuous invasion and counter-invasion among the Greek city-states. In 1020 B.C. Israel became a kingdom under Saul.

The years 1000 B.C. to 961 B.C. mark the reign of David. During this period, the Greeks colonized Asia Minor, the Assyrian Empire increased in size and strength and began to subdue the Hittites, the Phoenicians continued to consolidate their commercial strength. The Persians existed only in their tribes at this time and had not yet become a cohesive national entity.

From 961 to 925 B.C., Solomon built the Temple, and upon Solomon's death the kingdom was divided into the Northern (Israel) and Southern (Judah) kingdoms.

After 900 B.C. the Assyrians began to extend their borders through conquest. They won the battle of Kharkar, and the Hittite city of Aleppo fell to Assyria during the reigns of Jehoshaphat in Judah and Ahab and Jezebel in Israel.

In 814 B.C., Carthage was founded. In 805 B.C., the city of Damascus fell to Assyria. In 800 B.C., the Etruscans invaded Italy. In 776 B.C. the first Olympic games were held in Greece. Uzziah was king in Judah, Isaiah was the prophet, and Jeroboam reigned in Israel. In about 753 B.C. the city of Rome was founded. In quick succession, the last Hittite states, then Syria (Damascus), and Israel fell under Assyrian rule (721 B.C.). In 701 B.C. Sennacherib, King of Assyria, invaded Judah but was repelled under King Hezekiah.

FROM SOLOMON TO DANIEL

The Disobedience of Solomon (1 Kings 11)

The decline of Israel as a sovereign nation under God can be traced to Solomon's spiritual decline. He had married many foreign women, even though the Lord had warned against such practice. These wives and concubines turned his attention to such pagan gods as Ashtoreth, one of the best known of fertility goddesses, known to the Greeks as Astarte, and worshipped in Babylonia under the name of Ishtar. Solomon finally came to the place where he built a high place of worship for the pagan god Chemosh on the "hill that is before Jerusalem" (Isa. 11:7), which was probably the Mount of Olives.

Because of these sins, the Lord said that he would take the kingdom from Solomon; but because of David, his father, He would not do this until the time of Solomon's son. During the reign of Solomon, a young man named Jeroboam came to prominence who was later to be king of the northern kingdom after the division. This was predicted by the prophet Ahijah, who tore Jeroboam's garment into twelve pieces, symbolizing the breaking up of Solomon's kingdom. Jeroboam fled to Egypt on rumors of Solomon's displeasure, and Solomon finished his reign of forty years and slept with his fathers.

The Division of the Kingdom (1 Kings 12; 2 Chron. 10)

Solomon's son Rehoboam prepared to ascend the throne after Solomon's death. The people of the ten northern tribes had asked Rehoboam to make their lives easier, and the older advisers of the kingdom advised Rehoboam to do so. However, he followed the bad advice of his young associates who told him to increase the taxation and burden on the ten tribes. The northern tribes rallied around Jeroboam and made him their king. Rehoboam prepared to go to battle against them, but the Lord said "This thing is from me." (1 Kings 12:24). The two portions of Solomon's kingdom remained divided until the Northern Kingdom was occupied by the Assyrians (721 B.C.) and the Southern Kingdom was subjugated by the Babylonians (586 B.C.)

Jeroboam's Idolatry; Shishak's Invasion (1 Kings 12,14)

Shortly after Jeroboam became king of Israel, he established calf worship by setting up calf altars at Dan and Bethel. He wanted to prevent the people from going down to the temple at Jerusalem where they might be influenced to join Rehoboam. The sacred bull was an object of worship in Egypt, and a bull's tomb was found at Memphis in the 19th Century. The sacred cow was the symbol of the goddess Hathor. It is likely that Jeroboam became acquainted with this religion when he went to Egypt during Solomon's reign. Israel underwent a very rapid decline under divine discipline, a decline which was never reversed during the next two centuries because there was no king who would lead the nation in repentance.

In the meantime, Sheshonk I of Egypt (spelled "Shishak" in the Bible) came to Palestine and took the Temple treasures from Jerusalem. An inscription regarding this military feat is found on the wall of the great temple of Karnak in Egypt. The inscription shows Shishak grasping a group of cowering Semites by the hair and hitting them with a club. On the bodies of the people in the carving are the names of many Palestinian towns, such as Taanach, Gibeon, Ajalon, Bethshan, and many others.

Idolatry was rampant in the Northern Kingdom after Jeroboam, under Omri, Ahab, and Jezebel. Elijah and Elishah were raised up to combat the progress of idolatry and Baal worship. The idolatry slowed down a little during the reigns of Jehu and Jeroboam II, but flourished again under later kings. The Northern Kingdom finally ended with a series of murders in the palace.

Hostilities between Israel and Judah

1 Kings 16; 2 Kings 17

Conflict between Israel and Judah continued throughout the reigns of Rehoboam, Abijah, and Asa (of Judah) and the dynasties of Jeroboam and Baasha in Israel. Neither side prevailed for long; and the constant warfare sapped the strength of both sides. The squabbles were mostly over the border lands of the tribe of Benjamin, which Israel claimed. Abijah raised an army and annexed to Judah the city of Bethel and the hills surrounding it, along with Ephron and Jeshanah (2 Chr. 13:19).

In the days of Asa, however, Israel was stronger, and Baasha was able to recover the conquered territories. To safeguard the new border, Baasha fortified Ramah, on the main highway about five miles from Jerusalem.

The kingdom of Damascus became Israel's most serious threat. Their disputes concerned mostly the control of the Transjordan and the northern parts of Palestine. The kings of Damascus were called "Ben-Hadad", or "son of (the god) Hadad". Out of distress, Asa appealed to Ben-Hadad I for help in defeating Baasha. Baasha was forced to retreat from Judah. During Asa's long reign in Judah, order was restored to the kingdom, and the fruits of his victories were enjoyed by his son, Jehoshaphat.

The Rise of Omri -- 1 Kings 16:16f

For some time the town of Gibbethon, a city occupied by Levites and on the border with Philistia, was a sore spot. At the end of the reign of Elah the son of Baasha, news of the revolt of Zimri reached the Israelite troops encamped there. They elected Omri as their commander, went to Tirzah, the capital of Israel, and besieged and conquered it. After a period of civil war, Omri was able to secure the kingdom for himself.

Omri stabilized the kingdom and strengthened it against Aram. He built the city of Samaria at a strategic location and moved his capital there. He renewed a treaty with Tyre by marrying his son Ahab to the Phoenician princess Jezebel. Relations with Judah were improved for a time through the marriage of Athaliah to Jehoram.

The Wars of Ahab Against Aram (1 Kings 20; 2 Chron. 18)

Ahab continued the policies of Omri, and there was some political and economic stability during his reign. The area of the city of Hazor, near the border with Aram, was doubled and the city surrounded by a fortified wall. In this period, Ben-Hadad, the king of Aram (Damascus) gained control of Aram and formed a cohesive political entity stretching from Israel to Hamath. Then began the struggle between Aram and Israel, and in the Bible are accounts of Ahab's three wars.

First, the Arameans laid siege to Samaria itself (c. 855 B.C.), but Ahab was able to beat them off.

During this period Ahab's army was part of an allied force which fought the Battle of Karkar against the Assyrians (see below).

The second battle with Aram took place in the Jarmuk valley, again resulting in the defeat of Ben-Hadad. In the third war (c. 850 B.C.), when Aram broke the treaty which resulted from the second war, Ahab and Jehoshaphat set out to fight at Ramoth Gilead. Ahab fell in battle, although he fought courageously and avoided an utter rout. However, Ramoth-Gilead and the northern part of the Trans-Jordan remained in the hands of Aram.

The Battle of Karkar (1 Kings 22)

The Assyrians had been building up their power during the time that the kings of Palestine and Syria were engaged in their petty wars. Assurnasirpal II renewed Assyria's expansionist policies, his armies invading Syria and northern Phoenicia, including Arvad, Biblos, Tyre, and Sidon. His son Shalmaneser III continued these campaigns and reached the Amanus mountains. In about 853 B.C. Shalmaneser set out from Nineveh to the central region of Syria. He crossed the Euphrates in flood, near Pethor, going by way of Aleppo. He conquered several cities, including Karkar.

Leaving their quarrels for the time being, the kings of the west, including Ahab, formed a league to meet the Assyrian threat. This league included armies gathered from Syria, Palestine and Egypt. The biblical Ben-Hadad, the enemy of Ahab, Irhuleni king of Hamath, and Ahab's Israelite army itself, stood at the head of the league. Ahab had raised 2,000 chariots, comprising more than half of the mounted forces of the league, an indication of the military strength of Israel at this time.

According to Shalmaneser's history, Assyria was the winner. However, the kings of the league succeeded in undermining Assyria's influence in the area. Four years were to pass before Shalmaneser came back on another campaign. With the danger from Assyria past, the petty struggles between the members of the League were renewed.

Ahab and Jezebel; Baal Worship (1 Kings 16)

Ahab was the 7th king of Israel, married to Jezebel the daughter of the King of Sidon (Phoenicia).

Jezebel had brought in Baal worship from Phoenicia. When this new curse was about to engulf the kingdom, God raised up Elijah, and later Elisha, to cry out against the Baal worship. The Baal worship was much worse than the calf worship had ever been, so the prophets spent their energies on this very serious problem.

In various archaeological expeditions in Palestine a great deal of evidence, in the form of seals and inscriptions on pottery fragments, has turned up that the name "Baal" appears in the personal names of the people who lived in the Northern Kingdom. The fact that Jewish parents were naming their children after false gods shows what a great impact the Baal worship introduced by Jezebel had upon the land of Israel.

Ahaziah's Idolatry

Ahab's son, Ahaziah, ruled Israel from 853 to 852 B.C. He continued the wicked practices of his parents by worshipping Baal (1 Kings 22:51-53). When he became ill, he sent messengers into Philistine territory to get help from their god at Ekron and to ask whether he would recover from his disease. The messengers were met by Elijah, who asked why they were going to Ekron when there was a God in Israel. He told them that the king was not going to recover from his illness. Ahaziah died and was succeeded by his brother Jehoram (852-841 B.C.), another son of Ahab.

Relations between Judah and Israel

During this period, King Jehoshaphat (870 to 848 B.C.), the fourth king of Judah, had introduced a period of close relationships between Israel and Judah, by marriages between the royal families, by adopting the same names for their children, and by frequent visits with each other. They made joint ventures in foreign trade, establishing a merchant navy at Ezion-geber, where Solomon had established his seaport about a hundred years earlier. At various times Israel and Judah joined military forces, as at the battle at Ramoth-gilead (1 Kings 22) and in putting down the rebellion of the Moabites (2 Kings 3:6,7).

These alliances were an entanglement to Judah because the kings of Israel were so idolatrous. Judah's spiritual progress was undermined. Elisha preached specifically against the alliance of

Israel and Judah against the Moabites (2 Kings 3:13,14).

The Reign of Jehu (841 to 814 B.C.)

Elisha directed one of the prophets to anoint Jehu as king over Israel, while Ahaziah was still alive, and he told Jehu to destroy the house of Ahab. The army acknowledged Jehu as King. (2 Kings 9) Jehu set out for the town of Jezreel in north-central Palestine, where Jehoram had returned after being wounded in battle with the Syrians (2 Kings 8:28,29). Upon hearing about Jehu's approaching army, Jehoram of Israel and Ahaziah of Judah went out to meet him and were slain. At Jehu's order, Jezebel was thrown down from an upper window and killed. Jehu also had the sons of Ahab put to death and the prophets of Baal slain. He concluded his purge of Baalism by burning the images and breaking down the temple of Baal. 2 Kings 9,10

This reform brought a brief period during which idolatry in Israel was somewhat checked. But Jehu stopped short of a complete spiritual house-cleaning, because he allowed the worship of the golden calves to continue at Bethel and Dan. He went far enough to get himself seated on the throne but did not completely destroy idolatry. During the latter part of his reign, Hazael of Damascus attacked the borders of Israel on the north and east. Jehu reigned 28 years until his death.

The Campaigns of Mesha, King of Moab (2 Kings 3)

The wars against Aram gave Moab the opportunity to revolt and free itself from Israel. One of the most important archaeological finds in Palestine, the Stele of Mesha, discovered in 1868 in the ruins of Dibon, recounts the story.

Mesha had already revolted against Ahab. Ahab probably attempted a punitive expedition against Moab, at first recovering part of Mesha's territory. But Mesha eventually prevailed in the area and made permanent inroads into Israelite territory east of the Dead Sea.

The Israelite Campaign Against Moab (2 Kings 1:1,3,4-27)

Jehoram, the son of Ahab, set out on a campaign to Moab to reconquer and punish them, probably

in the first year of his reign. He was joined by Jehoshaphat, then an ally, who was co-regent of Judah with his son, also named Jehoram. They passed south through Edom to avoid strong northern forces set up by Mesha. The Edomites joined them in the attack. On the desert road, they were suffering from severe thirst when a flood occurred, allowing them to continue. They overpowered the Moabite army and laid siege to the city of Kir-hareseth. Not being able to force a surrender, they retreated.

The Attack of the Moabites and Allies by Way of En-Gedi (2 Chron. 20:2)

At the end of the reign of Jehoshaphat, an allied Moabite force invaded Judah by way of En-gedi. This was a daring move in which they had to cross the Dead Sea, probably at the ford opposite Masada. They made a short but difficult climb up cliffs into the Judean hills. The invasion was repulsed by the Israelites, but in consequence, fortresses were built at Masada and En-gedi.

The Rebellion of Jehu (1 Kings 9,10)

The wars between Israel and Syria (Aram) continued after the death of Ahab. In the days of Jehoram, the two kingdoms fought again at Ramoth-Gilead. The fierce revolt of Jehu, supported by the prophets, brought the Omri-Ahab-Jehoram dynasty to an end and caused the death of Ahaziah, king of Judah, who happened to be in Jezreel, the winter capital of the Israelite kings, at the time. With the murder of Jezebel, the close ties between Israel and Tyre (Phoenicia) also came to an end.

Israelite Kings Following Jehu (2 Kings 13,14)

In Israel, Jehu was followed by his son Jehoahaz, who made further concessions to idolatry, but had some consideration for the things of God (2 Kings 13:4). He was followed by his son Jehoash, who took the Temple treasures from Jerusalem. Jehoash was followed by his son, Jeroboam II, who was able to restore the eastern borders of Israel which had been invaded by Hazael of Damascus during the reign of Jehu.

Amos prophesied during the reign of Jeroboam II, even though he lived in Tekoa, about ten miles south of Jerusalem. He preached against both the

Southern and Northern Kingdoms, and singled out the Israelite capital of Samaria for particular rebuke (Amos 4:1). He also spoke against idolatry in Bethel where Jeroboam's calf had been erected. He admonished the decadent and luxury-loving people of Israel for their extortion from the poor, their crookedness and use of bribes, and their use of sacrifice and offering to cover up their sins - a form of hypocrisy which God especially hates. After laying out this sordid picture, Amos pointed forward to the time of the restoration of the Davidic Kingdom (9:11) and the time of prosperity which will be brought in with the millennial reign of Christ (9:13-15).

The prophet Hosea also prophesied during this time against the sins of the Northern Kingdom. He used his own family situation as a symbol of the situation in Israel. Hosea's wife had forsaken him for an adulterous life but was restored to him after a time (Hosea 3:1-3). Hosea used the fact of her adultery as a symbol of the spiritual adultery (apostasy) of Israel. Her restoration was used as an illustration of Israel's future restoration in the Davidic Kingdom.

Murder in the Palace (2 Kings 15)

The era of Jeroboam II was prosperous, but it was very sinful. His reign was followed by the worst of times in Israel as the wickedness of the nation caught up with it. He was succeeded by his son Zachariah, the fourteenth king of Israel. Zachariah ruled only six months and was slain by Shallum. This brought to an end the dynasty of Jehu. Shallum himself was slain by Menahem after only one month of rule.

Menahem ruled for ten years; and when Tiglath-Pileser III of Assyria came against Israel, Menahem paid him a thousand talents of silver and gold as a bribe to allow him to stay on his throne. Menahem was followed by his son, Pekahiah who reigned for two years before being murdered by one of his military officers, Pekah, who took over as king of Israel. Pekah, in turn, was slain by Hoshea in a conspiracy, and Hoshea became the nineteenth and last king of Israel. He was on the throne when the Northern Kingdom was brought to an end with the Assyrian siege of Samaria in about 722 B.C., during the reign in Assyria of Shalmaneser V.

The Rise of Assyria

Tiglath-Pileser III renewed Assyria's expansionist policies and is considered to be the founder of the extensive Assyrian Empire which eventually swallowed up the small kingdoms of Syria and Palestine. Unlike his predecessors, he was not satisfied with the surrender of kings and receiving tribute. Rather, he annexed conquered territories by reducing them to Assyrian provinces governed by Assyrian deputies. Opposition to Assyrian rule was overcome by exiling the noble classes and resettling the territories with Assyrian people.

The inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser show that in 738 B.C. he fought in northern Syria against a large league headed by Ahaziah of Judah. The league dissolved in the face of Assyrian might, and the list of kings he defeated became quite long.

The Siege of Samaria (2 Kings 17)

When Tiglath-Pileser III died, Hoshea apparently saw this as an opportunity to discontinue paying bribes to Assyria, and he looked to Egypt for help in resisting Assyria. The new king of Assyria, Shalmaneser V, swept into Canaan and besieged the city of Samaria. The city fell after three years assault and the principal inhabitants were carried into captivity by the Assyrians. Many of the inhabitants of Israel were sent to the distant reaches of the Assyrian Empire, to the region of the Habur River, to Nineveh, and to the cities of Media. The land was resettled with people from Babylonia and Hamath, and in 716 B.C. Arabians were brought into Israel to live.

The Reign of Uzziah, King of Judah (2 Kings 14: 2 Chron. 26)

Before these events, in the mid-8th Century B.C., Uzziah set out on a sweeping campaign against Philistia, reaching Ashdod and gaining access to the sea from Jabneh to the mouth of the Jarkon river, renewing the borders of the kingdom of David in this region. He completed the conquest of Edom and conquered the southern desert regions against various Arabian tribes. He developed the economy of Judah and outlying regions, and receives simple yet exalted praise in the Bible.

One reason for his success and the renewal of profitable trade was Uzziah's reconstruction of

Israelite fortresses along the roads of the Negev desert. At Ezion-Geber (Gulf of Aqaba), Arad, Kadesh-Barnea, and other sites, strong forts with casemate walls and towers have been uncovered by archaeologists.

Hezekiah's Reforms (2 Kings 18:3-7; 2 Chron. 29-31); His Rebellion Against Assyria

Hezekiah reacted sharply against the wickedness of his father, Ahaz, who had participated in the "abominations of the heathen". Hezekiah opened the doors of the house of the Lord and repaired the facilities. He then promoted the resumption of normal worship with the keeping of the Passover. The resulting spiritual awakening caused the people to break down the images and groves and to destroy the high places of pagan worship. Hezekiah "clave to the Lord, and departed not from following him, but kept his commandments, which the Lord commanded Moses." (2 Kings 18:6)

The death of Sargon II was a sign for new uprisings all over Palestine and Syria. Hezekiah stood at the head of the conspirators in Palestine, including Ashkelon, king of Philistia, and Merodach-baladan, king of Babylon. The revolt was, as usual, also supported by Egypt. Hezekiah began to prepare extensively for the coming conflict.

His most famous work was the hewing of the Si-loam water conduit in Jerusalem, which carried water from the spring of Gihon into the city (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chron. 32:30). He also strengthened the fortifications of the city (Isa. 22:8-11) and fortified and provisioned the central cities of Judah (2 Chron. 4:38-41). He expanded the borders of Judah at the expense of kingdoms which had refused to join the revolt, mainly in the direction of Gaza and Edom (2 Kings 18:8; 1 Chron 4:42-43).

Letters were sent to the Israelite populations of Samaria and Megiddo in order to bring them closer to Judah. Hezekiah was renewing the hopes of uniting the two kingdoms once more.

The Campaigns of Sennacherib in Palestine (2 Kings 18; Isa. 10; Micah 1; 2 Chron. 32)

Sennacherib attacked Palestine in 701 B.C., after putting down several rebellions in Mesopotamia and areas east of Assyria. He advanced along the Phoenician coast, dethroned the king of Tyre ("the

king of the Sidonians"), defeated the Egyptians in the battle of the Valley of Eltekeh, accepted the surrender of Philistia and Ekron, and turned to Judah. The conquest of Lachish is described in reliefs found at Nineveh which show the breaking down of the double walls and the attack of the main gate by siege rams. The inscriptions of Sennacherib describe the capture of 46 cities in Judah, some of which are referred to by Isaiah and Micah. Sennacherib demanded the complete surrender of Jerusalem, even though Hezekiah had been paying him heavy tribute.

In this fateful hour, Isaiah, who had opposed the rebellion from the beginning, now revived the spirit of the besieged by his preaching and foretold the salvation of the city. The miracle took place and the Assyrians retreated. Judah was able, in consequence, to endure for more than a century longer; and its miraculous salvation left an indelible impression upon the people.

The Days of Manasseh

There is little definite information about the reign of Manasseh, the son of Hezekiah, who reigned for 45 years while Judah was under the shadow of Assyria. This was a period of quiet prosperity and healing of wounds left by Sennacherib's campaigns. Judah was bordered by Philistia on the west and Ammon, Moab, and Edom on the south and east.

About 639 B.C., Ashurbanipal carried out a punitive expedition against Arabians who had revolted against Assyria. During this time a drastic decline in population began which is unaccounted for except in the prophecies of Isaiah and Jeremiah.

The Conquest of Esarhaddon

The expansion of Assyria reached its peak during the first half of the seventh century. In 669 B.C. Esarhaddon conquered Lower Egypt. On a second campaign to Egypt Esarhaddon died and his son, Ashurbanipal, put down the insurrection in Egypt and established control of Upper Egypt, putting an end to the 25th Dynasty in Egypt. The Assyrian sphere of control now reached its furthest extension, over the entire Fertile Crescent, from Upper Egypt to the Persian Gulf and Elam. All of the other vassal kingdoms paid tribute, among them Judah under King Manasseh.

The Destruction of Assyria

Assyria's decline and fall came with great rapidity. Egypt freed itself from Assyria, even under the reign of Ashurbanipal. Two emerging rivals, Babylon and the Medes, contributed to the process of internal disintegration within the extensive Assyrian Empire. In 626 B.C., Babylon revolted and defeated the Assyrians at the borders of Babylonia. Surprisingly, Egypt came to Assyria's aid against Babylon, probably so that they could renew their rule over Palestine and Syria. But this did not hold the tide for long.

In 614 B.C., the army of the Medes conquered the city of Asshur; and two years later Nineveh fell before a combined attack of Medes and Babylonians. In 610 Haran was also captured, and Assyria ceased to exist.

The Kingdom of Josiah - 628 to 609

Josiah's reign was the last period of greatness in the history of Judah. He began his reign as a boy of eight, and ruled for thirty-one years. He took advantage of Assyria's decline and worked to renew the kingdom of the House of David in all of Palestine. Political and national restoration were encouraged through extensive religious reformation. Josiah had the Law read to the people and made a covenant, ratified by the people, to keep the Lord's commandments and to walk in the way of the Lord. (2 Kings 23) He commanded the people to keep the Passover, which had not been kept formally during all the period of the judges or kings.

High places and altars in rural places were destroyed. Purified Israelite worship was concentrated entirely in the temple at Jerusalem. The purification was carried out not only in Jerusalem and Judah, but also in "...the cities of Manasseh and Ephraim and Simeon, even unto Naphthali...throughout the land of Israel." (2 Chron. 34:6,7) Josiah even expanded his kingdom at the expenses of the Philistines, according to a Hebrew letter found in a fortress built on the coast between the cities of Jabneh and Ashdod.

The Death of Josiah

The kingdom of Josiah fell apart upon his tragic death near Megiddo where he was slain by the Egyptian pharaoh Necho. (2 Kings 23:39) Necho

had led his forces to Carchemish to aid the Assyrians against the Babylonians in 610 B.C.

It is probable that Josiah met his death trying to halt Necho's attempt to reestablish control over Judea. Although the Assyrian-Egyptian alliance failed to subdue Babylon, Necho controlled Palestine and Syria for several years. Upon Necho's return from his campaigns, Josiah's son Jehoahaz hastened to greet him at Riblah in the land of Hamath; but his brother Jehoiakim was placed on the throne of Judah instead. Jehoahaz had reigned for only three months.

The Campaigns of Nebuchadnezzar

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim (606 B.C.), Nebuchadnezzar defeated an Egyptian army at Carchemish (Jer. 46:2) and again at Hamath. A year later he marched through the Holy Land, conquered Ashkelon, and reached the brook of Egypt (2 Kings 24:7). Judah became a small vassal kingdom of Babylon, soon to be ground down in the wars between Babylon and Egypt.

Babylon reached its zenith under Nebuchadnezzar. In the east and north, it bordered on the kingdom of the Medes; in the south was Egypt. Three years after his surrender to Nebuchadnezzar, Jehoiakim felt ready to revolt. The reaction was swift; first, the Babylonians directed the unrest of Judah's neighbors against her, mainly in the east. Then, the Chaldean army came up against Jerusalem in 598 B.C., besieging it. Jehoiakim died at the start of the siege; he may have been murdered (Jer. 22:18,19; 36:30). His son Jehoiachin surrendered and was exiled to Babylon along with many of his family and notables of the kingdom (2 Kings 24).

Nebuchadnezzar put Zedekiah, the son of Josiah, on the throne, a man who had a weak character and was unsuited for rule, especially in troubled times. In 589 B.C., with the feeble assistance of Egypt, Zedekiah was drawn into a new rebellion against Babylon, on the advice of other states in Palestine. When Nebuchadnezzar's punitive army approached Jerusalem, Zedekiah was abandoned by his "allies" to face the battle alone. The Edomites took advantage also by invading Judah at this time (Obad. 1:10-14; Ps. 137:7; Lam. 4:21,22).

This time the Babylonians had no pity. The cities of Judah were destroyed one after another. Finally, Jerusalem was besieged. The siege was lifted for a short time because the Egyptians were rumored to be approaching; but it was reimposed. In the summer of 587 B.C. the walls of the city were breached and Jerusalem was captured. A month later, the Babylonians burned the entire city, including the Temple, and took many of the survivors into exile. More people were exiled in 582 B.C. Most of the exiles were settled in various villages on the Chebar River near Nippur and Babylon. The number of exiles is given in Jer. 52:28-30, although this may include only the important families.

Judah Under Babylonian Rule

The Babylonians left the internal rule of Judah in the hands of Gedaliah, the son of Ahikam, who ruled from Mizpeh. He was murdered, however, by hotheads; and out of fear of Babylonian reprisals, many families fled to Egypt (2 Kings 25: Jer. 40-44). Here they founded Jewish military colonies which are known through Persian archives of the period.

In Judah, the lands and destroyed settlements were quickly occupied by the Jews who were left in the land (Jer. 40:10), causing much resentment among the captive exiles (Eze. 33:21-27). The central highlands of Judah, however, were not reoccupied, and the Babylonians did not bring settlers in. These areas were gradually seized by the Edomites, and the southern Judean hills to the region of Beth-zur now became known as "Idumea".

Most of the exiles in Babylon, who were settled in scattered agricultural communities, preserved their spiritual and religious heritage and cultivated the vision of the "return to the promised land." This found expression in the visions of Ezekiel who was exiled to Babylon along with Jehoiachin. In chapters 47 and 48 appear his view of the redistribution of the Holy Land among the twelve tribes (during the Millennial Kingdom).

The Fall of Babylon

The hopes of the exiles rose with the rapid disintegration of the kingdom of Babylon. After the death of Nebuchadnezzar in 562 B.C., three successors followed over the next seven years. The first was Evil-Merodach, who freed Jehoiachin from prison (2 Kings 25:27-30).

Nabonidus of Haran seized the throne of Babylon in 556 B.C. His goal was to weaken the power of the priests of Marduk, but he busied himself more with archaeological excavations than with affairs of state. When the threat from Cyrus the Persian became apparent, Nabonidus moved his capital to the relative safety of the Oasis of Tema on the Arabian border, leaving the administration of Babylon in the hands of his son, Belshazzar.

The end of the kingdom came quickly. In 550 B.C., Cyrus inherited the vast kingdom of the Medes through conquest. Four years later, he conquered Croesus, King of Lydia, and captured his capital of Sardis. In 539 B.C. he entered Babylon without a fight (Daniel 8).

Cyrus was the founder of the largest empire the Ancient East had ever seen. His son, Cambyses, conquered Egypt, and his successor, Darius I, reached India. The immense empire was divided into provinces (satrapies) ruled by "satraps and the governors and the princes of the provinces from India to Ethiopia, a hundred twenty and seven provinces" (Esther 8:9). The fifth satrapy was Abar Nahara ("beyond the river Euphrates"), and one of its lands was "Yehud" - Judah.

For an index of topics, or information about regular Bible studies, write to:

Warren Doud

Grace Notes

1705 Aggie Lane

Austin, Texas 78757

E-Mail: wdoud@bga.com

URL: <http://www.realtime.net/~wdoud/>

There is no charge for Grace Notes materials. The work is supported by Christians who pray for the ministry and share in the expenses.
