sword and fell upon it,” rather than fall into the hands of his enemies. His was a heroic and tragic role in a crucial period in Israel’s career. It was his hard lot to bear the brunt, not only of Philistine aggression, but also of the inevitable reaction of his own people to the decisive change represented by his anointment as king. His sick nature, furthermore, aggravated and dramatized the difficulties of his position. In spite of all, however, Saul laid the foundation for an effective opposition to the Philistine advance, for an attack on their valuable monopoly of iron, and, perhaps most important, for a measurable degree of unification among the individualistic tribes of Israel.
CHAPTER IV

The Israelite Empire
under David and Solomon

ANCIENT Israel's Golden Era came during the tenth century B.C., when David and Solomon ruled Israel and Israel dominated western Asia. It was this period that the prophets had in mind, later, when they urged the restoration of a united Israel and called for vengeance on the foes about them. And it was among the descendants of David that they assumed the leader would be found who could make possible this achievement. Thus Isaiah affirmed:

And there shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse [the father of David]. . . . And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him. . . . And it shall come to pass in that day that the root of Jesse, that stands for an ensign of the peoples, to him shall the nations seek, and his resting-place shall be glorious [11:1–10].

Recent discoveries have greatly enhanced the historical value of the Biblical account, and even enriched its three-thousand-year-old story with considerable new material. The Queen of Sheba, after she met Solomon, is reported to have exclaimed,
III. The united Israelite empire under David and Solomon (tenth century B.C.).
It was a true report that I heard in my country concerning your achievements and your wisdom. But I did not believe the reports until I came, and my own eyes saw. Indeed, the half of it was not told me. You have wisdom and prosperity exceeding the report that I heard [I Kings 10:6–7].

The same words might well express the mood of modern scholars rereading the Biblical history of the reigns of David and Solomon in the light of the recent revelations.

*David Acquires the Throne of Saul*

Left leaderless and vulnerable by their defeat at Mount Gilboa, the Israelites seemed poised on the verge of complete disintegration, like the Canaanites before them. From this fate they were saved by David and his followers.

Immediately on the death of Saul, a struggle broke out for the succession to his power. Some supported Ishbosheth (Esh-baal), a son of Saul, while others, particularly the tribe of Judah, demanded David as king (II Samuel 2–4). To seize and consolidate the royal power David had to resolve both domestic and foreign problems. On the one hand he had to acquire sole authority in Israel, and on the other hand he had to unite Israel and check the Philistine drive.

In the bloody battle which ensued, David and his followers left no room for doubt as to which group was to rule in Israel. To some supporters of Ishbosheth, death was meted out—not always, it appears, with David’s knowledge or consent; to others, such as Mephibosheth, the crippled son of Jonathan, mercy was shown (II Samuel 9). Not relying completely on his fellow-Israelites, David hired mercenaries from Crete and elsewhere, the traditional
“Cherethites and Pelethites” (II Samuel 8:18; 15:18), who served as his bodyguard.

Even more important and spectacular in this swift consolidation of power and prestige were David’s military triumphs. Jerusalem, also known as Jebus, the stronghold of the Jebusites, fell before his attack. Then, on several occasions, he checked the Philistines, and finally he cut them up so badly, particularly at Gath, that they never recovered their power to threaten Israel (II Samuel 21:15–22).¹ Having secured his western and southern flanks, David sent his forces east across the Jordan as far as Damascus and Zobah, and in a long series of battles he subdued some of the vigorous Aramean groups, as well as the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites. He even completed the destruction, which Saul had begun, of the elusive Amalekites in the south.

By the time David’s astonishing military force had spent itself, the Israelites were in control of territories running from Kadesh on the Orontes River in Syria to Ezion-geber at the head of the Gulf of Aqabah. (See Map III.) The Mediterranean coast, except for Phoenicia and small segments of Philistia, had been made tributary, and Transjordan, as far as the Arabian desert on the east, also acknowledged David as king. These military triumphs, moreover, greatly furthered tribal coalescence and the composition of ancient quarrels. Already Israel was becoming a kingdom in fact, as it had been only in title under Saul.

¹It is interesting to note that some of these battles seem to have been decided by a fight between one or more picked warriors of the two sides, as in the case of David and Goliath, or the twelve-man teams which represented the forces of David and Ishbosheth.
The Setting for International Expansion

The rise of the Israelite empire can be understood properly only in the context of the entire Near East. At the turn of the second millennium not a single state in Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, Syria, and Egypt—the aggressive forces normally active within the historic constellation of which Israel was a part—was powerful enough to interfere with David’s plans for expansion. Babylonia had been in decline since the downfall of the Hammurabi dynasty in the sixteenth century B.C. The Hurrian state, in northeast Iraq, had been destroyed by Assyria in the thirteenth century. The latter, in turn (except briefly about 1100 under Tiglath-pileser I), was too weak to seek empire and adventure outside its territory until after 900 B.C. The Hittites, who had taken over northern Syria and the Hurrian state early in the fourteenth century, and whose power in the entire Near East at the time was equaled only by that of Egypt, collapsed before the onslaughts of the Aegean peoples at about 1200 B.C.

Egypt’s power, too, had waned. The disintegration which had begun during the Twentieth Dynasty, especially after 1150, was not alleviated when the Amon priesthood and their wealthy associates assumed control of the land, shortly after 1100. Except for a brief period under Sheshonk I, the Biblical Shishak (about 925), Egypt was in no position to challenge anyone outside its borders until over four centuries later, when her power revived under Necho of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty. As for the Arameans (Syrians), their ascendency in upper Transjordan, where they eventually founded a number of city-states, had only just begun.
Kings David and Solomon

In the context of this political void which was western Asia about 1000 B.C., the Biblical account of the rise of David's empire bears eloquent testimony to the skillful manner in which the Israelites moved to fill the vacuum.

Israel and Phoenicia

Only against Phoenicia David did not go to battle; to do so was neither necessary nor desirable. The once-great Canaanite civilization had been reduced to a narrow coastal strip running from near modern Haifa to beyond Byblos. Here the Phoenician remnant flourished.

The Israelites under David and the Phoenicians under Hiram I entered into a mutually beneficial military and political understanding. The Phoenicians agreed to provide the Israelites with skilled engineers and craftsmen, and with cedar and cypress timber from Lebanon. As a matter of fact they built David a palace (II Samuel 5:11), for which he, in turn, probably paid more in protection and non-aggression than in silver and gold. After all, Phoenicia was militarily and economically at the mercy of Israel, and it could hope to retain its independence and increase its wealth only so long as it was useful to Israel's kings.

This situation made it possible, as well as geographically necessary, for the Phoenicians to concentrate on maritime expansion. Within a very brief period they had reached almost every part of the Mediterranean basin—Spain, Sardinia, Corsica, Sicily, and north-central Africa (later Carthage)—with their commercial undertakings, colonial activity, or cultural influence. In fact, Greece and Rome (and through them ultimately a great proportion of the entire world) acquired from the Phoenicians an alphabet in
which to record the *Odyssey* and the *Iliad* and the other epics which had come into being, orally perhaps, during the era corresponding to the Biblical Period of the Judges.

*The New Administration*

Thus within one generation the tribes of Israel came into the imperial splendor so often promised in the Pentateuch and created a national capital where none had previously existed. Shifting his headquarters from Hebron in Judah to newly conquered Jerusalem, David made this the private domain of his royal court. Existing outside all tribal jurisdiction, and belonging solely to the king, it came frequently to be called “The City of David.”

The centralization of political authority in the abode of the king called for a corresponding focus for religious jurisdiction, and David’s ministers began to plan the erection of a royal chapel, a magnificent edifice which would represent the earthly dwelling of Israel’s invisible God. To provide fitting service for the Temple, a priesthood was established and musical guilds were organized, the latter in all likelihood by David, who was a distinguished musician and composer in his own right. Abiathar, who had assisted David at Nob, and Zadok, both of whom boasted ancient and distinguished ancestry, were appointed priests to David. Later the Zadokites, descendants real or nominal of this same Zadok, were to become the principal caste of Temple priests.

The centralization of power in David’s hands was implemented further by the creation of new administrative and military systems. The boundaries of a number of tribes were altered on the excuse—plausible enough—of increasing fiscal and administrative efficiency, but more likely for
the larger purpose of weakening tribal independence. The new units were to be represented at the court in Jerusalem, not in the traditional manner by the heads of the tribes and families, but by royal officials. And thus the way was paved for the collection of the taxes which were the price of monarchy.

The army was transformed into a permanent professional body, and the command reorganized to centralize control in Jerusalem directly under the king's authority. Abner, the commander-in-chief under Saul and Ishboseth, was killed, and he was replaced by David's colorful nephew and devoted friend, Joab, one of the most underrated personalities in the Bible.

For the first time in Israelite history, the government introduced forced labor. Every able-bodied resident in Israel was made subject to labor service without compensation. This innovation, in turn, was probably the chief motivation behind the census which David caused to be taken throughout the land.

Imperial consolidation went on apace. Plans were projected for building the Temple and the government palaces in Jerusalem, and a pattern was determined for "the courses of the priests and the Levites and all the work of the service of the house of the Lord" (1 Chronicles 28:11–19). David recognized the need for fortified sites scattered throughout the land and for administrative centers such as Megiddo. All of this involved a great building program, which, taken together with the development of the new army, the expansion of administrative services, the reorganization of the royal household, and the like, required unprecedented quantities of money, men, and supervision.

The supervision was provided by the newly created
court bureaucracy composed of scribes, heralds, recorders, ministers, stewards, and clerks, assembled in such numbers that not all of them were Israelites. To find sufficient money and manpower it was necessary to resort to booty and tribute from conquered peoples and to taxation and corvée at home. This vast program set the stage for David to become the great builder and organizer, as well as the military hero of Israel.

Before he could put all these magnificent plans into action, however, David died, so that his actual building was limited to the fortification of a few key sites against the Philistines, such as Tell Beit Mirsim (perhaps Biblical Kiriat-sepher) in the southern Shefelah, Beth-shemesh in the northern Shefelah, and Tell Qasileh near the Mediterranean Sea, and to the erection of royal buildings in Jerusalem and perhaps also in Megiddo.

**King David, the Personality**

The Biblical tradition attributes to David many qualities, but none more endearing perhaps than his gift for poetry and music. In all probability he must have composed at least some parts of the psalms which the Bible attributes to him, in addition to the famous lament over Saul and Jonathan (II Samuel 1:17–27). David's reputation was so great, however, that many psalms composed either before or after his reign came to be associated with his name. Indeed, the official collection of the first 72 psalms—though not the entire book of 150 psalms, as popular belief has since assumed—was attached to his name.

David's loves and hates have gripped the emotions and imaginations of people from his day down through the ages. Most famous of all, perhaps, was his deep affection
for Jonathan, but the mere mention of David conjures up the names of Absalom, of Abigail, and the beautiful Bath-sheba. In each of these stories kingly grandeur is blended with human weakness in a way that has touched and captivated each succeeding generation of readers.

On one of the rare occasions when a significant portion of the population sided with an armed revolt against David's rule, there was among the leaders David's favorite son, the charming but vacillating Absalom. Outwitted and outfought by David's well-trained militia, the rebels were defeated, although not yet crushed, when the implacable Joab brought the whole revolt to its final denouement by killing Absalom with his own hands. It was altogether characteristic of David's oftentimes unpredictable mood that he did not want any harm to come to his rebellious son and that when he heard the tragic news, "He was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept; and as he went, thus he said, 'O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would that I died for you, O Absalom, my son, my son!'" (II Samuel 19:1).

On those other famous occasions when he was unable to repress his passion for Abigail, whose husband he did not attempt to save from death, or for Bath-sheba, whose husband he brutally caused to be killed, David nevertheless was genuinely repentant for having caused the death of his rivals in love and humbly accepted the bitter rebuke of Nathan the prophet. It would be difficult to find another such intense, compulsive, dramatic, practical, talented personality in the wide range of human history, or so simple and powerful a delineation of character in all our literature.

To the Israelites after him, David was the key figure in the Golden Era of their history, a figure beyond reproach
and beyond compare. After all, it was not he but his son and successor, Solomon, who carried out his projects to their ultimate, and frequently distasteful, conclusions. David fully deserved his place of honor in his people's history but, at the same time, it was largely a matter of good fortune that his good lived after him, whereas his evil was interred with Solomon's bones.

King Solomon

When David's end drew near, there was another contest for the royal succession, just as there had been at the death of Saul. In this characteristic, the history of Israel is no different from that of any other comparable kingdoms in Assyria, Babylonia, or Egypt. The penalty for coming out second best in such a power struggle, normally, was death. So it was with Adonijah, the oldest son of David, who had prior claim over his half-brother, Solomon. Adonijah, indeed, had already been proclaimed king by his followers, including the redoubtable Joab, when Solomon's backers began a counterattack. Bath-sheba, David's favorite wife and Solomon's mother, joined with the prophet Nathan to persuade the aged king to name Solomon his legal heir. Bath-sheba pointed out that if Adonijah had his way she and her son would be as good as dead.

David let himself be swayed and gave the decisive order: "Let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him . . . king over Israel; and blow the trumpet, and say, 'Long live King Solomon'" (I Kings 1:34). Adonijah's followers deserted him, and Solomon later found a pretext for killing Adonijah. Other supporters of Adonijah were likewise killed or banished, until "the kingship was established firmly in the hand of Solomon" (I Kings 2:46; I Chronicles 29).
Solomon's Building Program: The Temple

Solomon inherited the task of fulfilling the plans that time and circumstances had permitted his father David only to formulate and dream about; and to this program he added plans and dreams of his own. Continuing and extending the pact with Phoenicia, Solomon imported vast amounts of timber from Lebanon and recruited large numbers of engineers, overseers, and artisans for the building of the Temple.

Solomon is best remembered by his Temple. In becoming the national shrine, as David had intended that it should, the Temple completed the process of making Jerusalem the spiritual as well as the political capital of Israel; but its cost was tremendous. To finish the magnificent edifice, Solomon was obliged to levy taxes without mercy, to force tens of thousands of his subjects to serve in labor gangs, to chop cedar and cypress in Lebanon, to raft timber from Phoenicia to Joppa, and to bear it log by log to the heights of Jerusalem.

The complex of the Temple and its associated buildings formed a magnificent architectural unit. Built by Canaanite architects, it followed the style of their native temple tradition. The two free-standing columns called Jachin and Boaz (I Kings 7:21), and the three main divisions of vestibule, holy place, and holy of holies, all sprang from the Canaanite convention. Their respective Hebrew names, *ulam, bekhal, and debir*—likewise the term *bayit* (house) for the whole Temple, which was “The House of the Lord”—also appear to have been borrowed from the Canaanites.

Solomon’s regime was further distinguished by the erec-
tion of government buildings and the building or rebuilding of key fortifications. It is a frequent archaeological experience to uncover the material remains of the Solomonic (Early Iron) level of Israelite towns—for example, at Megiddo, Gezer, Tell Qasileh, Ezion-geber, Hazor, and Lachish. Like the Temple, these structures were generally Phoenician in concept and in such details as the pattern of masonry, the use of capitals (which the Greeks also borrowed from the Phoenicians a couple of centuries later), and the style of gateways.

Solomon the Merchant Prince: Ezion-geber

Of particular interest is the famous copper refinery and seaport at Ezion-geber, on the Gulf of Aqabah, rediscov-ered in the middle 1930’s, about a third of a mile north of the present coastline. Although the site of the port had long been sought by scholars and travelers, no one was prepared for the discovery of the extraordinary structure built specifically to smelt the copper ore which was dug from the mines of nearby Sinai and Edom. Its excavator called Ezion-geber “the Pittsburgh of Palestine, in addition to being its most important port,” and described Solomon “as a great copper king.” Ezion-geber, like the corresponding levels from the period of Solomon at Megiddo and Tell Qasileh, “was planned in advance, and built with considerable architectural and engineering skill at one time as an integral whole.”

Solomon’s great enterprise at Ezion-geber, with its seaport and fleet of merchant ships, would seem to clarify an intriguing Biblical problem of long standing. It has often

2 From N. Glueck, The Other Side of the Jordan (New Haven, 1940), chs. iii, iv.
been asked: Did the Queen of Sheba really visit Solomon, and if so, why should she, a woman, have made the arduous and even dangerous trip of some 1,300 miles from her country in southwest Arabia to Jerusalem, bringing with her gifts of fabulous worth? The Bible explains: “Now when the Queen of Sheba heard the fame of Solomon . . . she came to test him with hard questions . . .” (I Kings 10:1–13). This explanation is clearly diplomatic. The “hard questions” very likely revolved about matters of the pocketbook. Our authority on Ezion-geber points out:

Solomon’s shipping line evidently made such inroads in the lucrative caravan trade controlled by the Queen of Sheba, that she hastened to Jerusalem with all manner of presents in order to conclude an amicable trade agreement with him. . . . A satisfactory commercial treaty was evidently negotiated between the two sovereigns, because we are informed that “King Solomon gave to the Queen of Sheba all that it pleased her to ask, besides that which he gave her according to his royal bounty” [I Kings 10:13].

The commercial enterprises of Solomon, handled by “the king’s merchants,” extended in all directions. Thus he virtually monopolized the strategic as well as lucrative horse and chariot trade; his agents bought up the horses in Cilicia and the chariots in Egypt and sold them to the Hittites, Arameans, and other peoples of the Near East (I Kings 10:28–29).

Relations with Phoenicia

The details of the economic relations between Israel and Phoenicia (cf. I Kings 5) will probably never be wholly recovered. It may be doubted that Solomon, at least in the

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3 N. Glueck, in Biblical Archaeologist, I (Sept., 1938), 14.
early part of his reign, paid much into Phoenicia’s govern-
mental coffers for the men and materials that he received
from Hiram. After all, Phoenicia was at the mercy of Solo-
mon no less than of David; it was not Phoenicia but Israel
which bought horses in Cilicia. On the other hand, Solomon
would have had no port, refinery, fleet, or crews at Ezion-
geber were it not for Phoenicia, and the latter did not make
this possible out of sheer good will. The Phoenicians would
have preferred to direct these projects themselves, or at least
to share in the profits, but in dealing with them Solomon
could apparently do just about as he pleased.

This relationship between Israel and Phoenicia changed
radically after the death of Solomon. Israel’s united kingdom
split into two, and the military balance in the Near East
changed with the rise of Shishak in Egypt and with the
growth of the rival empires of Assyria and Aram. Phoenicia
continued to grow rich in her maritime and colonial ven-
tures and ceased to grant to Israel any more concessions or
favors.

The Administration of Solomon

Solomon perfected and extended the administrative or-
ganization initiated by his father, David (I Kings 4), and
so facilitated even more the collection of taxes and the
recruitment of forced labor. At the same time, he weakened
further the tribal loyalties.

For administrative purposes Israel was divided into twelve
districts, each with its own governor. But the areas of juris-
diction, it should be noted, did not necessarily coincide with
the old tribal territories. Excavations indicate that some of
the governors, perhaps all, lived in palaces, to which were
attached storehouses for the grain, olive oil, and cattle col-
lected as taxes in kind. Each governor was required to provide food for the royal household one month out of the year. But the district of Judah, because it provided the principal backers and lieutenants of the royal house—as well as because Jerusalem, the capital and chief city of the nation was located within its area—occupied a specially privileged position, directly under the king. At least two of the twelve governors were not only members of the tribe of Judah but sons-in-law of Solomon himself.

Culture and Religion

Writing, uncommon although far from unknown in the times of Moses and the judges, spread widely in Solomon's day. Royal secretaries recorded the affairs of state, and royal archives are referred to repeatedly in the books of Kings and Chronicles, with some variation of the formula: "And the rest of the acts of King So-and-So and all that he did, behold they are inscribed in the records of the royal chronicles of Israel and Judah." Unfortunately, however, these records have not yet been recovered by excavators.

The royal annals, in keeping with the classical Hebrew narrative style of such other books as Judges and Samuel, were written in a highly developed Hebrew prose. Israel's poets, moreover, stood on the same high level as her writers of prose, as can readily be seen from the few samples that have been preserved, for example: Moses' Song of Triumph at the Red Sea (Exodus 15, in part), the Blessing of Moses (Deuteronomy 33, in part), the Oracles of Balaam (Numbers 23–24), and the Song of Deborah (Judges 5).

The books of the Pentateuch began to take shape from material that for centuries had been orally transmitted from generation to generation. Solomon himself was a patron
of literature and the arts, and it is not accidental that his name became intimately associated with such classics as Proverbs, Canticles, and Ecclesiastes even though these books crystallized in their present written form after the Babylonian Exile.

It was, however, during Solomon’s reign that a tendency toward toleration and assimilation of alien religious ideas first increased to prominence. Canaanite elements were responsible for the main divergences from the worship of the Lord. Economic and political co-operation between Israel and Phoenicia led to the free exchange of cultural and religious practices as well. The worship of Baal and other prominent Phoenician deities, including some of their orgiastic elements, spread in Israel. Intermarriage with Phoenician and other non-Israelite peoples also became less rare. The king himself “loved many foreign women, besides the daughter of Pharaoh, women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites” (1 Kings 11:1 ff.). It is true that Solomon’s acquisition of many of the alleged total of “seven hundred princesses and three hundred concubines” was motivated, as royal marriages frequently are, by the dictates of diplomacy. But these casual marriages with foreigners brought in their wake additional concessions to alien gods. The Biblical writers did not overlook the fact that Solomon built idolatrous shrines for Ashtoreth, Milcom, Chemosh, Molech, Asherah, and other deities of the foreign princesses, just as he permitted Phoenician novelties to intrude among various aspects of the Temple cult and paraphernalia.

Tens of thousands of Israelites of the border regions of Dan, Asher, Zebulun, Naphtali, and Manasseh mingled busily with the Phoenicians. Also in commercial towns such as
Tell Qasileh and border towns such as Beth-shemesh, Israelites and non-Israelites freely mixed. Small wonder that the Biblical historians of the Book of Kings blamed Solomon for this apostasy from the Lord, which, in their opinion, accounted largely for the disruption of the kingdom and the other disasters which followed his death (I Kings 11:9-13).

The Last Days of the United Kingdom

The opulence and power of Solomon’s kingdom was doomed to deteriorate. Under the increasing pressure of this decline, tensions, both foreign and domestic, produced a split between politically favored Judah in the south and the northern districts which came to call themselves Israel—with “Israel” here representing a political and not a spiritual unit.

In Israel as well as Judah, Solomon’s rule brought great prosperity and prestige to the land, but it was only in a limited degree that the common people shared with the aristocracy in this new wealth and status. Forced labor, high taxes, and political corruption bred a host of enemies for the king’s regime.

These grievances further aggravated the ancient distrust and resentment of the northern tribes for the Judeans and their assumed superiority. Even before Solomon’s reign had drawn to its close, the situation had become critical. When Rehoboam, Solomon’s son and successor, sent his tax collector, Adoniram, to treat with the Israelites under Jeroboam, he was confronted with open revolt. Adoniram was stoned to death, and Rehoboam himself barely escaped with his life (I Kings 12; II Chronicles 10). This act of violence ushered in the Divided Kingdom.

The rebel leaders of northern Israel did not oppose a
monarchy, nor did they care about the kind of worship that went on in the Temple and the shrines. They were willing to support one of their own as king, in the hope and belief that this would lighten the heavy burden of taxation and increase their share in the common wealth. But the lower classes who made up the backbone of the rebellion in the North had yet to learn that what Jeroboam and the other northern leaders intended was nothing more than replacing the Judean monarchy of Solomon with another equally harsh monarchy of their own.

The Biblical historian makes it clear that if the ruling group behind Rehoboam had been willing to share the considerable wealth of the kingdom with the leading supporters of Jeroboam, the kingdom of Solomon would have endured (I Kings 12:1–19). Whether there simply was not enough wealth to satisfy both groups, or whether Rehoboam overestimated his strength, the fact remains that the North broke forever with the South.
CHAPTER V

The Divided Kingdom:
Israel and Judah

ISRAELITE civilization was not destined to make any important contributions to mankind's material progress. The physical and economic geography of the land constituted a formidable obstacle to any such achievement. The natural resources of the region lying between Dan and Beersheba were few, its population small, and economic surpluses, therefore, negligible. Unlike the Egyptians, Phoenicians, and such peoples of western Asia as the Sumerians, Babylonians, and Assyrians, the Israelites never won a major place among the great builders, merchants, or warriors of the ancient Near East.

Israel's defensive situation was not more fortunate. Having made their home in a buffer area amid stronger civilizations, the Israelites were under almost constant pressure or attack from neighbors striving, if not to conquer them outright, at least to use their land as a highway or base for invasion of some rival. Once David's reign was over, the momentary lull in the imperial struggles of western Asia came to an end. Without such a lull the Israelite empire could hardly have emerged at all; and when it was over,
IV. The Divided Kingdom: Israel and Judah (ninth and eighth centuries B.C.).
Judah and Israel had no rest. Actual invasions were not uncommon, and the threat of possible or impending attack was almost constant. These same conditions, on the other hand, provided the setting for the Israelite genius which came to express itself in the realm of culture and religion; and it was largely during the period of the Divided Kingdom that the Israelite civilization took on its definite shape and character.

The split between Judah and Israel, following the revolt of Jeroboam, leader of the northern rebels, against Rehoboam, successor to Solomon, resulted in a stalemate. Israel, the northern segment, being larger both in total arable land and population, was wealthier than its rival. But if Judah, from whose soil the state of David had sprung, was smaller and geographically more concentrated, it was for that reason more efficiently administered and far less torn by regional conflicts. Israel was united chiefly by its opposition to Judah.

Had the two kingdoms been left to themselves, either might have gained the ascendancy over its opponent. But the major factors in preserving an equilibrium were external. Egypt, for a short time, and then Aram and Assyria managed to preserve a balance of power between the two.

The International Setting: Egypt, Aram, Assyria

After lying dormant several centuries, Egypt began to show renewed signs of imperial vigor under Shishak, founder of the Twenty-second Dynasty. By harboring such enemies of Solomon as Jeroboam and Hadad the Edomite, Shishak had helped to prepare the split of united Israel and then, exploiting the break which followed Solomon's death, he moved at once to invade the southern kingdom of Judah.

Anticipating an Egyptian invasion, Rehoboam shelved
the idea of challenging the secessionist government of Israel and instead made a feverish attempt to strengthen his own defenses (II Chronicles 11:5-12). These efforts proved of no avail when Shishak’s army began to march (about 920 B.C.): the fortified cities of Judah fell one after another, and the treasures of the palace and Temple in Jerusalem fell into the enemy’s hands.

At first, northern Israel welcomed the breathing spell provided by Egypt’s invasion of Judah. But Shishak’s mixed hordes did not stop at the boundaries of Judah; they pushed on into the territory of Israel, as well as south into Edom and west into Philistia. Difficulties at home, however, prevented Shishak from exploiting this brilliant beginning; yet in one respect, at least, this isolated imperialist irruption was of great significance: it left Judah unable to re-establish its old predominance over Israel.

The split between Israel and Judah considerably facilitated the emergence of several Aramean states in the northern part of the area that lay between Israel and the Euphrates, i.e., Syria. The powerful state of David and Solomon had held this area in check; but divided, Israel and Judah were less successful. Now and then they joined forces against the Arameans, and at other times one or the other entered into a coalition with an Aramean state against her sister state.

Even Phoenicia failed to maintain its independence. Faced by the growing power first of the Arameans and later of the Assyrians, the Phoenicians continued to cultivate their neighborly relations with Israel. This policy led, among other things, to the marriage of Ahab, son of King Omri of Israel, to Jezebel, daughter of King Ittobaal of Phoenicia. But early in the ninth century, the Assyrian Ashurnasirpal
II (about 883–859) managed to reduce parts of Phoenicia to tributary status and at the same time to establish the reputation of the Assyrian armies for merciless brutality.

The Assyrian menace provoked a reaction in the form of a defensive coalition in the region headed by the Israelites and Arameans. The royal Assyrian chronicle recounts that King Ahab of Israel contributed 2,000 chariots and 10,000 foot soldiers to the coalition; but, in spite of this magnificence, its forces were defeated at the battle of Karkar, near Hamath (about 853). It does not appear that the Assyrians were able to exploit the victory at once; but within ten years they were collecting tribute from states as far west as Israel and Phoenicia. From then until the Medes and a resurgent Babylon brought her to heel some two and a half centuries later, Assyria held all of western Asia in her sway. The history of Judah and Israel must be read against this background.

The Northern Kingdom of Israel

From the breakup of Solomon’s kingdom no single major group ever managed to dominate Israel for more than a generation or two at a time. Chronic plotting for the succession repeatedly brought kings and would-be kings to bloody ends, until after years of civil war a military chieftain named Omri finally gained the upper hand (about 878) and established what the Assyrian royal chronicles called the “House of Omri” (1 Kings 15:9 ff.; 16:1–23).

The Omride Dynasty

It was under Omri that the northern kingdom acquired, for the first time, a permanent and impressive capital. Abandoning Tirzah, which had served as a kind of capital for
about forty years, Omri built a new political center, which he named Samaria. From the excavations at this site, a good picture is gained of the magnificent palace and fortifications which he and his son Ahab erected there. And recent excavation has assigned to their period the mammoth stables erected at Megiddo; they housed many of the horses harnessed to Ahab's 2,000 chariots employed at Karkar.

The house of Omri brought prosperity to the northern kingdom. Aram for the time being ceased to threaten, Moab in Transjordan was under control, and economic relations with Phoenicia developed rapidly. This prosperity, however, was restricted almost exclusively to Israel's upper class. Those who worked with their hands in the towns and on the land shared little enough in this new wealth. The petty farmer frequently lost his crops and his land to the big landowner. The apprentices and artisans found the economic and social gap widening between themselves and their masters. The merchant class became richer and more influential than before. Freemen were becoming slaves, and the poor were being compelled to sell their children into bondage. Where members of the lower classes were able to obtain loans from the rich, it was usually at exorbitant rates of interest. Nor was the economic and social structure helped by the periodic droughts which came upon the land, such as the drought and famine recorded in the days of Ahab.

_Ahab, Naboth, and Elijah_

During this period occurred that event recorded in I Kings 21 and celebrated in the annals of justice and literature. Naboth, a commoner, owned a vineyard next to Ahab's palace. The king, determined to acquire the land, made sev-
eral offers; but Naboth, a man of strong ancestral sentiment, would not sell the property he had inherited from his fathers. Thereupon Jezebel, Ahab’s Phoenician wife, bribed two men to accuse Naboth falsely of blasphemy and treason. Naboth and his heirs were stoned to death, and the vineyard fell to the king.

The injustice of the royal couple was bluntly denounced by the prophet Elijah. “Have you murdered, and you will take possession too?” And he went on to curse the king, saying, “So said the Lord, ‘In the place where the dogs licked the blood of Naboth, the dogs shall lick your own blood’” (I Kings 21:19).

In denouncing the attempt of the monarchy to nullify the property and other rights of the old order, Elijah was acting in the same tradition as the prophet Nathan in the previous century, who fearlessly condemned David for causing the death of Uriah, the husband of Bath-sheba (II Samuel 11–12).

The Dynasty of Jehu

A revolt against the son of Ahab (about 842) brought Jehu to the throne. The new monarch initiated a sweeping purge of the Omride household and its chief supporters. He killed Jezebel and all of Ahab’s heirs and “all who remained of the house of Ahab in Jezreel” (II Kings 10:11).

When King Hazael of Aram threatened Israel, Jehu paid tribute to Shalmaneser of Assyria to keep the Syrian ruler in check. This event has become famous because Shalmaneser’s Black Obelisk, discovered in his palace in 1846, records and illustrates the transaction. The bas-relief clearly pictures the Israelite delegation, headed by a prostrate figure
—either Jehu or his personal deputy—bringing the tribute to "the mighty monarch."

Later, when the Assyrians developed troubles of their own at home, their domination of Israel was replaced by that of the Arameans, under Hazael and his son Ben-hadad. But Aram, in its turn, was rent and weakened by civil war, thus giving the kingdom of Israel the opportunity to embark once again on an expanded period of expansion and prosperity.

The long reign of Jeroboam II witnessed the spectacular, if temporary, reconquest of a considerable part of the area originally controlled by David and Solomon. The territory across the Jordan which had been lost to Aram was recovered. The Bible records that Jeroboam "restored the boundary of Israel from the entrance of Hamath as far as the Sea of the Arabah" (II Kings 14:25). None of Assyria, Aram, or Judah was in a position to interfere with Israel's limited objectives, and the Phoenicians profited with Israel through their long-established policy of co-operation. Excavations of such cities as Samaria and Megiddo have uncovered striking evidence of Israel's increased wealth during this period. It seemed that northern Israel was again well on the way to prosperity and peace.

Amos and Hosea

Once more, however, royal arrogance and privilege provoked a ringing challenge. As Nathan had confronted David, as Elijah had rebuked Ahab and Jezebel, now Amos spoke out, even at the temple of Bethel in Israel. From his position as a herdsman of Tekoa in Judah, Amos saw in the life of his people a gloomy picture within the gilded frame of royal riches. As fast as the upper classes were acquiring
wealth, the poorer groups were sinking into a disastrous economic decline. He realized that in such social quicksand Israel could not endure.

In tirades which have never been equaled in their majestic force or terrible beauty, Amos denounced King Jeroboam II. Like Elijah and Elisha before him, like Deborah, Samuel, and Nathan before them, Amos saw in his God the complete sovereign not only of His own chosen land and people but of the peoples and lands which surrounded Israel as well. The king and his supporters, Amos warned, had broken the Covenant with God: “They sold the righteous for money, and the needy for the price of a pair of sandals.” In the name of God, Amos portrayed with thunderous phrase the mortal peril of a society in which the powerful “trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and turn aside the way of the humble . . . so that they have profaned My holy name” (Amos 2:6–7).

The same dire warning was hurled at Israel by the prophet Hosea, an Israelite contemporary of Amos. Knowing intimately all phases of her life, Hosea dwelt upon Israel’s faithless desertion of the Lord for the gods of the Phoenicians and the idols of the heathen. Her leaders and priests, even her prophets, he charged, shared in the common acts of sin and sacrilege. Thus to depend on fortified cities, on impotent idols, and on Assyrian might, he warned Israel, was to invite disaster and exile. Only if Israel turned back to God, could the catastrophe be averted:

Samaria shall bear her guilt,
Because she had rebelled against her God.
They shall fall by the sword,
Their infants shall be dashed in pieces,
And their pregnant women ripped open.
Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God, 
For you have stumbled in your iniquity 
[Hosea 14:1-2; 13:16 f. in English versions].

The warnings of Amos and Hosea were fulfilled. The dynasty of Jehu, like that of Omri, came to a catastrophic end about 750.

The Fall of Israel

By this time, in truth, it made very little difference who ruled Israel, for Assyria once again had begun its massive westward thrust in the greatest phase of its imperialist expansion. Tiglath-pileser III conquered all of western Asia and carried off to distant lands large segments of the conquered populations.

Menahem, the reigning King of Israel, prevented the total devastation of the country only by paying heavy tribute, which he raised with a crushing levy on the people.

The new Israelite administration, however, not being content to remain a mere vassal of Assyria, withheld tribute on several occasions and began negotiations for a coalition with Egypt. Thus flouted, the Assyrians decided to put a stop, once and for all, to the spirit of resistance and intrigue which still smoldered in Israel. The Assyrian army under Shalmaneser V marched into Israel and for three years besieged the capital Samaria. Not until Shalmaneser was succeeded by his commander-in-chief, Sargon II, did the Assyrians smash through the crumbling defenses and put the city to fire and sword. Thus the sovereignty of the northern kingdom of Israel came to a final end (about 722).

Sargon always took great pride in his capture of Samaria. He records in his Annals that he led away as booty 27,290 of its inhabitants. The resulting depletion of Israel by forced exile had its counterpart in the resettlement throughout the
land of Canaan of Babylonians, Elamites, Arameans, and others drawn from other conquered territories. This deportation has given rise to a double misconception: first, that there were ten tribes in northern Israel at the time of its destruction, and secondly, that these ten tribes were “lost,” only to reappear elsewhere in the world. Time and again, peoples the world over have claimed descent from these “Ten Lost Tribes.”

There were not, in fact, ten distinct tribes in Israel at the time of Sargon the Assyrian; and the exiles were lost only in the sense that they were absorbed wherever they were transplanted. Probably only a few of the descendants of the Israelite exiles remained true to the God and land of Israel and managed, nearly a century and a half later, to join with the exiles of Judah.

The foreigners who were thus introduced into Israel also tended to lose their cultural identity in a general amalgamation. It was this resettlement, with its inevitable effect on religious and social customs, which set the stage for the rise of the anti-Judean group among the Samaritans that resisted the restoration of Jerusalem and the Temple later on when the Persians had come to power.

The Southern Kingdom of Judah

The history of Judah generally paralleled that of Israel, with the one qualification that Judah tended to be weak when Israel was strong. The area from Dan to Beersheba, with its limited natural resources and economic advantages, did not seem able to support two prosperous kingdoms at once. Agriculture, commerce, the handicrafts, and the tribute of weaker nations formed the major sources of income of both countries. Further, the intervention of neighboring powers—whether Assyria, the Aramean states, Phoenicia,
Egypt, or the Transjordan countries—tended to keep the two divided and unequal. Only occasionally did circumstances combine to allow an effective and equal alliance between Israel and Judah.

In spite of its inherent weakness, however, Judah lasted longer. Consisting of only two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, both of which remained loyal to the line and tradition of David, it was more compact and capable of greater coherence and agility. Nor did it lie directly across the path of conquerors.

During most of the long reigns of Asa and his son Jehoshaphat (about 912–850), Judah and the dynasty of David continued to prosper. Asa’s administration stabilized the position of the land. Asa checked the Egyptian army under Zerah the Ethiopian at Mareshah (II Chronicles 14:8–14) and bribed Ben-hadad of Aram to attack Baasha of Israel, to force the king to raise his siege of northern Judah.

Asa also carried out a program of religious reform. Early in his career he abolished male prostitution and various forms of idolatry, alien elements which had no rightful place alongside the worship of the Lord. In all of this he had the vigorous encouragement of the prophet Azariah.

Faced by the growing menace of the Arameans and Assyrians, Jehoshaphat then concluded a pact with Israel, and his son Joram (or Jehoram) was married to Athaliah, daughter (or sister) of Ahab. But not all the Judeans favored the alliance of the government with that of Ahab. Indeed, on one occasion when Jehoshaphat returned from an ill-starred joint military venture with Israel against Ramothgilead in Transjordan, then in Aramean hands, Jehu, son of Hanani the seer denounced him: “Should you help the wicked, and love those who hate the Lord?” (I Kings 22; II Chronicles 18; 19:2).
The Judean government levied tribute on the Philistines and Arabs, garrisoned the fortified cities of the land, and defeated a coalition of Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites. For a time Judah held sway over the southern part of Transjordan all the way to Ezion-geber. Jehoshaphat rebuilt the harbor there and in a joint venture with Ahab’s older son Ahaziah launched a new merchant fleet. The prophet Eliezer protested vehemently against this act of co-operation with Israel (II Chronicles 20:25–27; I Kings 22:48–49). In any case, the ships were wrecked, and the project was not repeated. But in another joint venture with Israel, that of collecting tribute from the Moabites, Jehoshaphat was somewhat more successful.

**Judicial Reforms**

An important development in this period was the reorganization of the Judean judicial system. The authority of the “elders” and the “heads of the tribes” had been on the wane ever since the days of the United Kingdom. The Bible reports that David and Solomon themselves acted as judges (II Samuel 15:2–6; I Kings 3:9–12) and appointed judges who, like the district governors, were responsible directly to them. Even the priests and Levites who administered the religious law and formed a kind of civil service were personally responsible to the king.

Probably because the civil administration of justice had become corrupt (II Chronicles 19:6–7) Jehoshaphat cleaned out the old system and appointed Levites, priests, and prominent laymen to administer both the religious and civil law. The Bible says of this reform:

And, behold, Amariah the chief priest shall be over you in all [religious] matters of the Lord, and Zebadiah the son of Ishmael, the leader of the house of Judah, shall be over you in all
the king’s [civil] matters; and the officers of the Levites shall be before you. Deal courageously, and may the Lord be with the good! [II Chronicles 19:11].

In all likelihood, the religious and civil spheres of the law were frequently too closely intertwined to be administered separately by religious and lay officials. In any case, it would appear that the judicial reforms of Jehoshaphat made it easier for the high priest to replace the king as the chief judge of the land after the return from the Babylonian Exile.

Conflict and Respite

During the reign of Jehoshaphat’s son, Joram (or Jehoram), and the brief reigns of his successors, Judah’s position deteriorated steadily, allowing the Edomites to revolt and achieve a measure of independence. During this period Philistine and Arabian marauders even invaded the royal palace and made off with its treasures, the royal wives, and all the princes but one.

Ahaziah, the lone survivor, reigned but one year; and following his death, his mother Athaliah proceeded to murder all but one of her grandsons and usurp the throne. Thus a full-blooded Phoenician woman, Jezebel, was the power behind the throne of Ahab in Israel, and her half-Phoenician daughter was on the throne in Judah. Six years later, Athaliah was killed and Joash (or Jehoash), the single grandson who had escaped her murderous net, assumed the kingship about 836. Under Joash and his son Amaziah, Judah’s troubles continued.

Finally, during the long reign of his grandson Uzziah (II Kings 14; II Chronicles 25) and the latter’s son and coregent Jotham (about 775–735), Judah reached the peak
of its power and prosperity. Free of any threat of interference by Israel, Uzziah was able to effect impressive improvements in his people's position both at home and abroad. The army was enlarged, reorganized, and supplied with the latest weapons and engines of siege. Key sites were fortified. Recalcitrant Philistine cities were reduced to subjection. The peoples of Transjordan were conquered and laid under tribute. In the Negeb, all the way to Ezion-geber and even beyond into Arabia, agriculture, commerce, and building flourished as never before (II Chronicles 26).

With the accession of Tiglath-pileser III to the throne of Assyria, Judah felt the need of a defensive coalition with Israel, Aram, and other nations against the revived Mesopotamian menace. Yet it was with the greatest difficulty that the little kingdom, now ruled by Jotham's son Ahaz, retained some semblance of her former independence. On one occasion Ahaz purchased Tiglath-pileser's assistance in driving off the allied armies of Aram and Israel (about 735); and just over a decade later Ahaz had to repeat this act of submission, during Israel's fatal revolt against Assyria.

Judah's tribute to Assyria must have been considerable, yet on the surface her prosperity appeared to continue. This impression may have been due, in part at least, to the fact that her surrounding rivals had likewise been weakened by Assyria.

Under Hezekiah and Manasseb: Micah

After Israel's fall, Merodach-baladan, king of Babylon, tried to form a coalition with Judah and organize western Asia to defy Assyria. Isaiah came forth and warned Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, that Judah would be trapped in the middle of a bitter struggle. The prophet thundered:
Hear the word of the Lord. Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house, and that which your fathers treasured up until this day, will be carried off to Babylon. . . . And some of your sons who are born to you shall be taken captive, and they shall be eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon [II Kings 20:16–18; Isaiah 39:6–7].

Isaiah was joined by another prophet, Micah, native of Moresheth, near Philistine Gath in the Shefelah. In the spirit of Hosea before him, who had described Israel as “mixing herself among the nations . . . like a silly dove, without understanding” (Hosea 7:8–11), Micah had already excoriated Israel for her reliance on the power of foreign allies instead of on the strength of the Lord. Now in His name he warned the people again:

I will make of Samaria heaps in the field,
A place for planting vineyards,
And I will pour down her stones into the valley,
And her foundations I will uncover [Micah 1:6].

Moreover, he continued, Israel’s doom would extend to Judah, for Judah was guilty of the same sins:

The godly man has perished from the land,
And the upright among men is no more.
They all lie in wait for blood,
And each stalks his brother with a net [Micah 7:2]

Judah’s leaders, her prophets, her judges, her priests, and her rich men were all misleading her. Trusting only in burnt offerings and empty sacrifices, they ignored Micah’s classic injunction:

Only to do justice
and to love loyally
and to walk humbly with your God [6:8].
The ominous warnings of Isaiah and Micah went unheeded. Shortly after 715, Assyria invaded the rebellious states and crushed them. Another major invasion took place about 701. The Assyrian forces under Sennacherib subjugated most of western Asia, and the enemy threatened Jerusalem itself. Interestingly, the Biblical account of this event (II Kings 18–19; Isaiah 36–38) is supplemented by the Assyrian chronicle. Together they paint a vivid picture of the campaign. Sennacherib, in his chronicle, boasts:

As for Hezekiah the Judean, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts, and to the countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered them. . . . I drove out of them 200,150 people. . . . [Hezekiah] himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage.1

The Assyrian army, however, did not take Jerusalem. A plague, achieving what the Judeans could not, laid the invaders low and spared the city. As the story is told by the Biblical chronicler:

That night the angel of the Lord went forth and struck 185,000 in the camp of Assyria. And when men arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses. And Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh [II Kings 19:35–36].

During the reign of Hezekiah, several religious reforms were effected (II Chronicles 29–30). The Temple and its paraphernalia were purified, the priestly and Levitic orders were reorganized, idolatrous objects and sites throughout the land were destroyed, and the celebration of the passover, long neglected by many, was once more generally.

revived. But the long reign of Hezekiah’s son, Manasseh, traditionally fifty-five years and the longest in the history of Judah or Israel, was remembered by the Biblical writer for “the evil that he did in the eyes of the Lord” (II Kings 21:2). He reintroduced the idolatrous objects and shrines which his father had removed, and “shed . . . much innocent blood, until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another.” But it must be borne in mind that during this period Judah was a vassal of the Assyrians (about 680–635).

Josiah and the Reformation: Jeremiah

King Josiah, Manasseh’s grandson, possibly with the full knowledge of Assyria, began to act with a remarkable show of independence; he seems even to have entertained hopes of taking over Israel, now an Assyrian colony. The Judean government was able to reorganize and enlarge the army, as well as to nurture other bold designs, because Assyria was being challenged by powerful peoples round about her in Mesopotamia.

About 621, while catastrophe was brewing for Assyria and, unbeknown to anyone, for Judah as well, Josiah effected the sweeping religious reforms subsequently known as the Reformation of Josiah. Unlike so many of his predecessors, Josiah was not content merely to cleanse the Temple of idolatrous objects and rites and to reorganize its services and priesthood. Rounding up the priests who had abetted alien practices, Josiah had them slain, and at the same time he abolished all shrines except the Temple in Jerusalem. He incorporated the dislodged priests in the purged guild at Jerusalem (II Kings 22–23).

The religious occasion for this reform was the accidental discovery, during a rebuilding of the Temple, of the Book
of the Law (or Covenant). This document, found by the high priest Hilkiah, had evidently been pigeonholed and forgotten during some earlier “wicked” regime. Hilkiah’s scroll is now generally supposed to have contained a basic part of the book of Deuteronomy.

It was in fact at about this time that the Book of Deuteronomy seems to have taken on the form we know today. The method employed by the editor apparently was to take the older traditions, the bare bones of the Mosaic experience, the themes of national covenant and chosen people, and amplify them in terms of the prophetic tradition. The purpose was to drive home the idea that all Israel was a community bound and locked to a God who would reward those who obeyed Him and punish those who did not.

Jeremiah the prophet had supported and encouraged Josiah’s reformation. But the reforms do not appear to have affected the Judean population deeply nor to have lasted long. Jeremiah found it necessary to dissociate himself from the project and to lament its deterioration.

In the last years of Josiah’s reign, the Assyrian empire began to crumble; by 612 the Babylonians, Medes, and Scythians had destroyed it forever and leveled its capital, the fabled Nineveh, in the dust. This shattering event was taken by the prophet Nahum as his theme to demonstrate the retributive justice of the God of Israel. Beginning with the traditional avowal:

The Lord is a jealous and avenging God,
The Lord avenges and is full of wrath;
The Lord takes vengeance on His adversaries,
And He reserves wrath for His enemies... 

he ends his Oracle concerning Nineveh with a somber, almost elegiac, triumph:
Near Eastern Ferment and the Fall of Judah

Assyria’s fall only paved the way for new and greater disasters. The Egyptians, reviving under Necho, rushed into the vacuum left by the Assyrians and made an effort to gain control of western Asia. Fearful of this threat, Josiah moved north into the valley of Jezreel to intercept the Egyptian advance. He took his stand at strategic Megiddo (609), but his Judean forces were overwhelmed and Josiah himself was killed (II Kings 23:29).

His son Jehoahaz II (Shallum) succeeded to the throne; but three months later Necho dragged him off in chains to the Nile and replaced him with Jehoiakim (Eliakim), another of Josiah’s sons. In the meantime, however, Babylonia, the most rapidly growing power in Mesopotamia, inflicted a crushing defeat on Necho’s forces at Carchemish (605) and succeeded the Assyrians as overlords of western Asia.

For a time, Jehoiakim vacillated, now looking hopefully to Babylonia, now to his Egyptian sponsors. Judah did not yet realize that Egypt would never recover from the catastrophe at Carchemish and would itself become but a dependency of other powers. Forgotten was the ancient warning: “Behold, you are putting your trust on the staff of this bruised reed, on Egypt, upon which if anyone lean, it will go into the hand and pierce it. So is Pharaoh, king of Egypt, to all who put their trust in him” (II Kings 18:21; Isaiah 36:6).

This indecision was rudely resolved when Babylonia,
under the energetic leadership of the ascendant Chaldean minority headed by Nebuchadnezzar, dispatched an army that swiftly subdued all of Judah. Even then, however, Nebuchadnezzar had no sooner turned his back than Jehoiakim revolted in a desperate gamble on aid from Egypt. But even as Jeremiah had warned, this aid never came. The Chaldean conqueror replied by sending a punitive force back into Judah, and the enemy captured Jerusalem, though only after strenuous resistance.

About three months before this Babylonian expedition actually breached the city, Jehoiakim was slain, apparently the victim of a palace plot. It was his young son Jehoiachin (Jeconiah), successor on the throne, who caught the full weight of the Babylonian vengeance. He and all the royal household, together with a portion of the upper class and a great levy of craftsmen, were marched off as captives to Babylon. As puppet ruler, the conqueror left on the throne Mattaniah, a son of Josiah, and changed his name to Zedekiah (II Kings 24:17; I Chronicles 3:15).

After some ten years of Babylonian rule, Judah revolted a second time, again refusing to heed Jeremiah’s dismal warnings to rely on the Lord and not on the force of arms. This time Babylonia struck back with even greater fury, not merely to bring the rebellious province to the dust, but to dispel any dreams of like resurgence on the part of Egypt.

The Babylonians systematically took and razed all the fortified cities of Judah. Archaeological excavation has confirmed the thoroughness of this destruction. Jerusalem, the capital, held out for almost two years, but fierce hunger and the Babylonian siege engines finally broke through the defenses and forced capitulation (586). The conquerors leveled the Temple to the ground. “They captured
the king, and brought him up to the king of Babylonia to Riblah [near Kadesh], and judgment was passed on him. They slew the sons of Zedekiah before his eyes, and put out the eyes of Zedekiah, and bound him in fetters, and took him to Babylon” (II Kings 25:6–7). There followed renewed deportations of the people from their land. The sovereign state of Judah was no more.

Now the Babylonians reduced Judah to the status of an outright colony, similar to that endured by Israel since the days of the Assyrian rule. A native Judean, Gedaliah by name, was appointed governor of the despoiled and depopulated land and established headquarters at Mizpah. Gedaliah’s administration seems to have been mild, for many Judeans who had fled into the hills, or into Egypt or Transjordan, returned from their places of refuge. But a certain Ishmael, a member of the Judean royal house, was desirous of restoring the monarchy and, abetted by the Ammonites, conspired to throw off Babylon’s yoke. His well-meaning but utterly irresponsible accomplices murdered Gedaliah, together with the Judeans and Babylonians who made up his retinue, and embarked upon a reign of terror in the land. Once again the revenge of Babylon was swift and terrible. In 582 her troops instituted the third and final phase of Judah’s depopulation and destruction (II Kings 25; Jeremiah 41–42).

Finally peace was achieved. Judah lay quiet, all the swirl and clash of centuries apparently come to naught. The period of the Great Babylonian Exile descended upon the people of Judah, God’s people. But the Law remained, and all that it stood for and implied.