

# Chapter 6

## Northern History

(9<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> centuries)

My servant Moses is entrusted with all my house.  
With him I speak face to face – clearly and not in riddles.  
Numbers 12.

### The new kingdoms of the Levant

The bible uses the terms ‘Israel’, or sometimes ‘Ephraim’, to describe the northern of the two tribal kingdoms whose southern counterpart was ‘Judah’. Although the histories of the two kingdoms are tightly intertwined in the biblical accounts, the development of Israel into a kingdom occurred earlier than for Judah and Israel’s leaders shaped events in the region to a far greater extent than their southern counterparts. Israel existed as an monarchic country from around 900 until 722 BCE.

In the 11<sup>th</sup> century the hill country south of the Jezreel Valley and north of the Benjamite Plateau contained a cluster of about 180 settlements - the core of the future Israel. These villages would be continuously occupied until the 8<sup>th</sup> century. Judging by the artefacts they left behind, their inhabitants came from the neighbouring areas of the coastal Levant, probably driven into the hill country as part of the disturbances that brought the sea peoples into the region. They established a successful agricultural economy, terracing the hillsides and trading with the coastal cities and the towns of the Jezreel valley such as Megiddo and Taanach.

If this area was visited by the Pharaoh Merenptah, as he claims, then he appears to have trodden with a light footstep. No destruction layers associated with his time, around 1200 BCE, have been found. It is possible that all he came across were a few nomadic groups. His claim that ‘the seed of Israel is no more’ seems ironic in the light of the archaeological evidence, for he may have passed that way just at the time that the ‘seed of Israel’ was being planted!

The early settlers in the hill country do not seem to have been especially religious; very few cultic artefacts have been found in the layers associated with the first settlements. Such domestic religion as existed probably involved the worship of Asherah, the wife of El in the Canaanite pantheon. Small statuettes of this goddess are amongst the earliest religious symbols uncovered.

The important shrine of Shiloh, in the south-east of main northern settled area was amongst the earliest of the shrines to Yahweh. The bible associates this site with events that conventional biblical chronology place in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. It was destroyed around 1025 BCE according to the Radio Carbon dating of the debris<sup>2</sup>. The destroyers were probably those known to archaeology as the ‘sea peoples’ and in the bible as the ‘Philistines’. Some scholars hold that the Shiloh priests who survived the destruction of their shrine were the ancestors of the rural priests of the Israel. It is this priesthood which may be credited with the authorship of the E text – the Northern Epic.<sup>3</sup>

<u>Kings of Israel<sup>1</sup></u>	
933	Jeroboam
910	Nadab succeeds
908	Ba'asha assassinates Nadab
884	Elah succeeds
882	Zimri usurps throne
882	Tibni usurps throne
882	Omri's coup
870	Ahab succeeds
852	Ahaziah succeeds
851	Jehoram succeeds
842	Jehu's coup
814	Jehoahaz succeeds
800	Jehoash succeeds
788	Jeroboam II succeeds
747	Zechariah succeeds
747	Shallum's coup
746	Menahem's counter-coup
737	Pekahiah succeeds
735	Pekah usurps throne
732	Hoshea's coup
722	<i>Fall of Israel to Assyrians</i>

<sup>1</sup> Scholars disagree on the dates of these rulers; the table can be taken as being indicative only.

<sup>2</sup> Care should be taken in comparing dates derived from Radio Carbon analysis with the accepted conventional chronologies. Discrepancies of around a century are not uncommon due to the limitations inherent in the carbon dating techniques and the potential errors in the conventional dates. The biblical data on which the conventional dates largely depend includes conflicting information within Kings, between the Kings and Chronicles, between the M.T. and the Septuagint and between these records and non-biblical accounts.

<sup>3</sup> Friedman (1987)

The stability of the northern settlements enabled their economy to flourish. Even Pharaoh Sheshonk's military activity in the late 10<sup>th</sup> century appears to have passed them by. After raiding in Gilead, Sheshonk's troops probably passed up the Jezreel valley and certainly laid siege to Megiddo, but he apparently did little damage to the city. Only a palace and another building appear to have been destroyed when the town eventually fell. He erected his stele there and may have planned to use the town as a base for controlling the area and for trade. Sheshonk returned to Egypt via the coastal route.

Sheshonk's successors did not have the energy of the founder of their dynasty, but they did maintain an interest in the coastal Levant, even if it was only mercantile. Votive statues to Pharaohs Orsokon I and II have been found in Byblos and the latter gave an alabaster present to Sidon. Alabaster inscriptions incorporating the names of the rulers of the 22<sup>nd</sup> dynasty have been found in neighbouring Tyre.

North and East of the Jezreel valley lay the Aramean states of which Damascus was the most significant. Beyond them was Assyria. Whilst the Arameans had reached the Tigris by around 925 BCE, their successes against Assyria came to an end following the accession of Adad-nirari II in 911. From then on Assyria was pressing west and south.<sup>4</sup> The main difficulty faced by the Assyrians was that the northern arc of the Fertile Crescent lacked natural boundaries. Military expeditions had to be mounted yearly; south-east against the Babylonians, northward against the new Caucasian kingdom of Van, westward against the Phrygians of Anatolia (modern day Turkey) or south-westward against Phoenicia and Aramean states of Syria. Repeated victory was the price of continued dominance.<sup>5</sup>

New tribal groupings emerged in the Israel's neighbouring lands. Ammon formed in the hills between the Jordan valley and the Arabian desert; Moab in the farmland to the east of the Dead Sea; and Edom, a 'Shasu' (Bedouin) tribal group, in the region between Moab and Gulf of Aquaba. Whilst Moab may have been an organised kingdom by the mid-9<sup>th</sup> century, Edom was only sparsely occupied by nomadic people until a major wave of settlement occurred in the late 8<sup>th</sup> century.

### **The Omride Dynasty (882-842)**

Whilst the people of Judah were still practising semi-nomadic subsistence pastoralism, the settlements in the northern hill country were able to develop the economic surpluses that are a necessary pre-condition for the establishment of a state. These surpluses would have been attractive to men with the will, ruthlessness and ability to weld the tribes together into a kingdom – a process that may have been encouraged by the presence of the Aramean threat. The bible describes a plausible picture of the struggle for power in the nascent Israel<sup>6</sup>. In the space of thirty years around the start of the 9<sup>th</sup> century there was a series of assassinations, coups and countercoups the final outcome of which was the establishment by Omri of a dynasty that went on to dominate the region. Omri apparently used military force to seize power, a force that he was able to turn into a formidable national army.

An inscription created on the orders of Mesha, a ruler of Moab in the late 9<sup>th</sup> century stated:

*As for Omri, king of Israel, he humbled Moab many days.  
...and Israel dwelt there in his time and half the time of his son, 40 years.*

This is solid - nearly contemporary - evidence that Omri conquered Moab and that he and his son Ahab held it for a considerable period.

Either Omri or Ahab pushed north into the territory of Aramean Damascus, for a later king of that state wrote in another inscription that "*the king of Israel entered previously in my father's land*". This inscription was uncovered in Dan, and was probably erected sometime after 842 by Hazael of Damascus. It indicates that in his father's time (880 – 842 BCE) the king of Israel occupied Dan, and controlled territory that Hazael regarded as rightly falling within the orbit of Damascus. Under Omri therefore the territory of Israel extended as far north of the Jezreel valley as it did to the south of it – and

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<sup>4</sup> Redford (1992) p 334 ff.

<sup>5</sup> McEvedy (1967); Penguin Atlas of Ancient History p 42.

<sup>6</sup> Whilst the general background of the biblical account of the formation of the State of Israel is plausible, the details cannot be so regarded. They premise the reality of the mythical Solomon when no-one with the wealth, influence and power attributed to him can have existed in 10<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> century Judah. Furthermore, there are major discrepancies between the events attributed to Omri and Ahab by the author of Kings and non-biblical accounts contemporary with their reigns. Nevertheless, the idea that the first king of Israel was an Egyptian protégé gains some support from Finkelstein's re-dating of Sheshonk's raid and the revelation that Sheshonk retained Megiddo more or less intact. If Sheshonk wished to use Megiddo as an income generating Egyptian outpost, he would have wanted his own man in control.

<sup>7</sup> The Dan stele (see below for more)

on both sides of the Jordan from Dan to the Dead Sea.

Omri established a successful formula for wealth creation by securing a trade route from Phoenicia to Edom, thus connecting the Mediterranean with the Red Sea. Good access to markets enabled Israel to adopt agricultural specialisms in the form of its vineyards and olive groves which led to oil processing and wine-making industries<sup>8</sup>. With this wealth, Omri created a new, permanent and spectacular capital, Samaria. Previously Israel had had no established capital although, according to the biblical record, towns such as Tirzah, Ramah, Shechem and Penuel are associated with earlier leaders. In time, the new capital became the name of the region, whether it was an independent state or ruled over by Assyrians, Babylonians, Persians, Greeks or Romans.

The building in Samaria was on a gigantic scale. The hilltop was levelled and surrounded by a casement wall up to 6 metres thick. The space thus enclosed was filled, creating a level platform of approximately 5 acres (2 hectares) on which a palace was built. The palace was constructed using pre-cut 'ashlar' masonry walls<sup>9</sup>. Columns with Proto-Aeolian capitals probably marked the entrance to the royal compound.<sup>10</sup>

Where he did not conquer, Omri formed diplomatic relations. He married his son Ahab to the king of Tyre's daughter, named in the bible as Jezebel.

Omri is said to have reigned for only 12 years, less than half of those from Samaria, but his son carried on his father's work to such an extent that Israel was known in diplomatic documents as the 'The Kingdom of the House of Omri' for years afterwards<sup>11</sup>.

Ahab (ca 870- 852) inherited an influential kingdom – economically, militarily and diplomatically. He continued the economic policies of his father, the success of which permitted him a more assertive role in international politics. Foreign embassies frequented his court. Gifts from Egypt's Orsokon II have been recovered in Samaria and one of Egypt's ambassadors seems to have had his name put on a seal in Hebrew script.<sup>12</sup>

In Ahab's time, Assyrian expansionism became the major threat to the region. Having stopped the eastward movement of the Aramean states, the efficient Assyrian military machine began to push them back. The Assyrian sphere of influence moved steadily further and further to the west and then turned south. Israel under Ahab recognised the danger as clearly as did the Aramean states. They organised a substantial coalition to oppose

King and kingdom	Chariots	Horse/ Camel	Soldiers
Adad-idri (Hadadezer of Damascus)	1200	1200	20,000
Irhuleni of Hamath	700	700	10,000
Ahab the Israelite	2000		10,000
Que (Byblos?)			500
Musri (Border country?)			1000
Irqanata	10		10,000
Matinu-baal of Avad			200
Usanata			200
Adunu-baal of Shian	30		10,000
Gindibu of the Arabs		1000	
Ba'sa of Ammon			?,000

the Assyrian Shalmaneser III, putting aside any border disputes that they may have had amongst themselves. The alliance determined to stop the Assyrians at Qarqar.

The Assyrian account of the battle survives; it includes the breakdown of the opposing forces shown in adjacent table<sup>13</sup>. From this it can be seen that the principle partners in the defensive alliance were Hadad-Idri (the biblical Hadadezer of Damascus) and Ahab of Israel who between them supplied the majority of the heavy arms – the chariots – as can be seen from the table.

The coalition involved the Aramean states, together with Israel, Phoenician Byblos, and the Arabs who supplied a force of a thousand camels. Egypt may not have been involved unless the token 1000 men from Musri came from its northern border territory. Judah was not involved at all, reflecting the fact that it was still undeveloped and under-populated. A total of around 70,000 troops were

<sup>8</sup> Finkelstein and Silberman (2002); *The Bible Unearthed*. p 159.

<sup>9</sup> Ashlar refers to a masonry technique in which stones were cut squarely to precise measurements at the quarry and then simply assembled on site with no need for further working in order to make them fit.

<sup>10</sup> Finkelstein and Silberman (2002); *The Bible Unearthed* pp 181-2

<sup>11</sup> Mainly Assyrian documents. Even Jehu, who overthrew the Omride dynasty in 842 BCE is described as a 'son of Omri' in the tribute lists of Shalmaneser III – although the usurper was far from that! ANET p 281 (d) II

<sup>12</sup> Redford (1992) pp 339-340

<sup>13</sup> Based on the Assyrian records preserved in ANET pp 278-9

amassed.<sup>14</sup> The battle took place in 853 towards the end of Ahab's reign when he was possibly at the height of his powers. Both sides claimed to have won: the coalition halted the Assyrian advance, but Assyria was not fatally wounded and its forces were able to return later to try to crack the united front of the coalition.

Politically, Ahab followed his father's practice of supplementing military power with strategic alliances secured through marriage. He secured influence over Judah through the marriage of Athaliah (who was either his sister or his daughter<sup>15</sup>) to prince Jehoram of Judah<sup>16</sup>. Athaliah was more than a token wife; she was sufficiently powerful to become the ruler of Judah herself on the death of her son Ahaziah. Not only was she the only woman to rule Judah, she was the only ruler who did not claim to be a descendant of David.

After Ahab, two more Omride kings continued the dynasty, which lasted in total for roughly 40 years. Under the Omrides, Israel accomplished a number of spectacular building projects. In addition to the palace at Samaria, another was built at Megiddo, also in ashlar blocks. The mason's marks on some of these blocks are the same as those on the blocks at Samaria, indicating that the same firm did the skilled work. At Megiddo the Omride engineers established elaborate underground water tunnels hewn through the rock to carry water from springs located outside the city into cisterns within the walls. The external access to the springs was then blocked off, enabling the inhabitants to survive prolonged sieges without running out of water. The structure incorporated a 600-meter-long tunnel, high and wide enough for two people to walk along side by side. In the far North, at Dan, a substantial ashlar sanctuary, roughly 20 meters by 10, has been dated to the Omrides. At Jezreel, the Omrides built a large enclosure similar to that at Samaria using the casement wall technique. Here a substantial moat was dug into the bedrock, 8 meters wide and nearly 5 meters deep. The Jezreel palaces would have been used mainly in the summer months since the pleasant cooling winds of the area made it an ideal retreat at that time of year. Since Jezreel was occupied for only a few years, and only during the Omride dynasty, the ceramics found there have been used to date other constructions. On that basis, the major construction effort at Gezer, which involved casement walls, ashlar construction at key points and a six-chambered entrance gate can also be assigned to the Omrides<sup>17</sup>. It is conceivable that the construction of the Milo, and the rebuilding of the temple in Jerusalem using ashlar blocks took place when Israelite money and technology was made available to Judah following Athaliah's marriage<sup>18</sup>.

In addition to the construction of the palaces and cities of Samaria, Jezreel, Gezer and Megiddo and the sanctuary at Dan, it is possible that Ahab also built a temple to Baal. This allegation was made by an author of Kings<sup>19</sup> a couple of centuries later, but there is no reason to dispute it. Ahab's wife would certainly have wanted such a temple.

The author of Kings implies that one of his sources was 'The record of the acts of the days of the kings of Israel'. If such an official chronicle had existed, it would undoubtedly have mentioned Omri's triumph over Moab and Ahab's part in holding back the great Assyrian army. And yet these things are not mentioned in the book of Kings. In the case of Ahab, he is depicted as being at war with Damascus, whereas in reality Ahab formed an alliance with Damascus, whose king in Ahab's time was Hadadezer. Either the author of Kings had access to these records, but misled his readership as to their contents, or he did not have access to these records but instead relied on a Judean tradition concerning these events which had, over time, re-arranged matters to Judah's advantage. What appears to have happened is that Omride successes over Moab and Aram Damascus were transferred to king David of Judah, where they became the basis of what is now 2 Samuel chapter 8. The king whom David allegedly defeated in that chapter is named as Hadadezer, who reigned from 880 until 842, who lost territory to Omri, but also formed an alliance with Ahab to hold back the Assyrians.

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<sup>14</sup> Of course, Shalmaneser may have been exaggerating. Some consider that Ahab's 2000 chariots may have been a scribal error for 200. (See Cogan in AB I Kings p 506) But there is no reason to believe that any exaggerations would have been applied disproportionately to The Israelites. Note that Ahab did not provide any horsemen. Does this suggest that Israel had not yet developed either the techniques or the equipment needed to enable horsemen to both ride and fight, and was still relying for fast-moving attacks on well-tried chariotry? Israel's reputation as a trainer of chariotry became the basis of a successful trade in horses.

<sup>15</sup> She appears in some texts to be Ahab's daughter (and thus possibly Jezebel's child) and in others to be Omri's daughter (and thus Ahab's sister and Jezebel's sister in law).

<sup>16</sup> Circa 867 BCE

<sup>17</sup> Finkelstein and Silberman (2002): *The Bible Unearthed*: pp180-191. Also Oxford pp 289-290.

<sup>18</sup> Seeds found in the interstices of the blocks of the Milo, interstices that were covered by the subsequent building, have been radio carbon dated to around Athaliah's time.

<sup>19</sup> I Kings 16

The author of Kings had two main objectives in preparing his text. One was to show that Israel's fate related to how strictly their kings worshipped Yahweh. The other was to show that there was a historical right for the kings of Judah to rule over the northern as well as the southern tribes<sup>20</sup>. Had this author discovered that the greatest empire ever built by Israel or Judah was in fact the work of a largely Baalist regime, he would have been tempted to suppress the information. Hence the suspicion remains that this is what occurred. However, the muddled nature of the account of the struggle between Damascus and Israel tends to show that his principal fraud was to imply a better source that he really had. To his rhetorical question "As for the other events of Omri's reign, what he did and the things he achieved, are they not written in the annals of the kings of Israel?", the answer would seem to be that the reader has no means of knowing – and neither, apparently, did the author. We can only hope that he did have a reasonably reliable King list, for the accepted chronology of Israel relies on this<sup>21</sup>.

Building on the scale undertaken by the Omrides required a substantial labour force and considerable organisation. Something like the forced labour scheme, attributed in the bible to Solomon, but significantly involving only the ten northern tribes, may have been used by the Omride kings to get the work done. The Solomon stories gave their hero not just the credit for building the cities built by the Omrides, but also the criticism for the way they were built.

The 'house of Omri' thrived, made alliances and managed dependant territories. It received ambassadors from Egypt. It managed extensive building projects. It maintained a substantial army. There was wealth and significant foreign trade. A modest empire was created – an empire more-over that was recognised by writings and inscriptions elsewhere in the Middle East. The state itself would surely have required tax-managers, merchants, record keepers and administrators. The necessary conditions for a scribal class must have existed, but there is a paucity of evidence that one actually arose. The ostraca from ancient Samaria, tax receipts once thought to date from Ahab's time, are now thought to be 8<sup>th</sup> century. Such writing as was done seems therefore to have used materials that have not survived, or to have been modest in extent and confined the needs of the state. There is no evidence of non-professional literacy such as has been found associated with next century.

Popular religion was fairly eclectic. Cultic artefacts dug up dating from this period include over 2000 mass-produced female figurines. Some replace the lower body with a pillar, possibly representative of the tree of life, symbolically connected with the goddess Asherah. These artefacts are found in houses, in cult sites, and in work places throughout the kingdom. Also found in many contexts are domestic-scale four horned altars and offering stands, presumably used for burning incense or making domestic offerings to the gods. At Dan, one of the two main national temple sites under the Omrides<sup>22</sup>, there have been found dice and male and female figurines as well as four horned altars, sceptres and other priestly artefacts. At Tirzah, an early temporary capital, the temple site contained numerous female figurines and a model temple of the form typically occupied by two gods, one of whom was usually Asherah. Excavations at Ta'anach, near Megiddo, have shown that the temple owned a mould for the mass production of female figurines, some knuckle bones for use in divination and two large offering stands, one of which had images associated with several gods. There was an image of a quadruped carrying a

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<sup>20</sup> See the chapter on the Deuteronomists for a further discussion on the person and point of view of the principal author of Kings, the Deuteronomic Historian.

<sup>21</sup> The generally accepted dates cannot be asserted to be completely accurate. (See Mordecai Cogan; Chronology; ABD.) The biblical record in the Masoretic Text is not always consistent with itself, nor with the Septuagint, nor with such Assyrian records as are helpful. The sum of all the biblical durations of the reigns of these Kings exceeds the total duration conventionally accepted by about 40 years. This result may be partly due to co-regencies, but problems remain. The dates quoted here start in 933, although 928 is more commonly accepted. There is no reason to follow the Judean author's requirement that Jeroboam broke away from Judah's Rehoboam. This eases the chronological problem somewhat, bringing it almost to the point where plausible co-regencies and counting conventions can account for the discrepancies. It is possible that the author of Kings used the memorials and inscriptions around the Jerusalem temple complex as his main source. The dates of the Judean leaders may have been given in relation to the reigns of the kings of Israel - the more powerful state to the north - although the Judean author naturally presented the references the other way around. Nevertheless, he may have used the Judean information to derive the reign lengths of the Israelite Kings. The details given in the bible about the kings of Israel are sparse when compared to the details given concerning the leaders of Judah – a fact that is consistent with the hypothesis that he did not have access to Israelite records.

<sup>22</sup> Dan was conquered by Omri around 875 and then lost to Damascus following Jehu's coup in 842. It was re-conquered by Jeroboam II (around 775), only to be lost again to the Assyrians in 732. Dan was part of Israel for only 70 to 80 years. It was not part of Israel under Jeroboam I, who therefore cannot be held responsible for erecting the 'golden calves' there as the author of Kings alleges.

sun disc on its back, an empty temple doorway (perhaps suggesting that the god within is invisible – thus perhaps Yahweh), a pair of cherubim (winged lions in this case), and another pair of lions, this time held by a nude female figure, presumably the ‘lion lady’ – Asherah<sup>23</sup>.

There is no sure means of knowing the official religion of Israel’s early rulers. There are no references to Yahweh or Baal in their names prior to Ahaziah (Ahazi-yah). It is generally accepted that the population of Israel came from the Canaanite coastlands, who were predominantly Baalist, so it would not be surprising if the rulers, as well as the general population, were at least sympathetic to Baalist ideas. As has already been noted, several of the early psalms (18, 19, 29, 68, 82, 89, 93 and 144) seem to have been converted from an earlier usage in the worship of Baal.

At both Dan and Bethel, an author of Kings asserted, statues were set up which he described as ‘golden calves’. One of the symbols of Canaanite El was the bull, and it is possibly that this is what they really were - the word ‘calf’ being used as a term of contempt by the Yahwist writer. The commissioner of these statues is further alleged to have declared that “These are your gods, O Israel, who led you out of the land of Egypt<sup>24</sup>”. If it is true, as has been argued<sup>25</sup>, that the Baalist ruling class that retreated from Avaris, pursued by the Egyptian army, formed one strand of the Exodus story, then this statement, attributed to an early ruler of Israel, may reflect their view of these events. Ahab’s marriage with Jezebel may have brought a fanatical Baalist into the kingdom, but given the broad range of religious practice as evidenced by the religious artefacts of the time, her views would not have been unacceptable to the bulk of the population.

### **Elijah**

The Baalists in Israel, with royal patronage, may well have made life hard for those who wanted to adhere to a version of Yahwism that incorporated a covenant stating “I am Yahweh your god; you shall have no other gods besides me.” The prophet Elijah was such a man. The tradition that surrounds his name asserts that the Israelites had forsaken Yahweh’s covenant, thrown down his altars, and killed his prophets with the sword, leaving Elijah isolated.

Biblical evidence suggests that, from at least the time of Samuel, prophet bands had been a social phenomenon in Israel. They existed outside mainstream religion but were popularly believed to reveal the authentic word of God. They used music and other means to bring themselves into ecstatic trances. The author of I Samuel 19 described an occasion when Saul met a group in a prophetic frenzy; Saul himself fell into a frenzy, stripping off his clothes and remaining ecstatic for a day and a night. Because the spirit of God was often believed to be upon the prophets, both kings and people respected their words. The more impressive of them, such as Elijah, may even have had an international following.

The prophets preached primarily about social justice, about the purity of the faith and about obedience to God’s will. They often formed the semi-official opposition. From about 760 BCE onwards some of their oracles were written down. But Elijah, who was contesting with the priests of Baal around 850 BCE, did not leave a written record. The Elijah and Elisha traditions are full of the motifs of folklore – miracles and magical events. There is the never-emptying jar, the revival of a dead child, damp wood bursting spontaneously into flame, the purification of water, the parting of water with a cloak and much else. The stories give every indication of having had a long oral tradition behind them before they were committed to writing but it is possible that oral stories about these two prophets would later be collected and used as the core of a work that might have been called something like ‘Tales of the Prophets’. Donald Redford hypothesizes the existence of such a work in his *History of Egypt, Canaan and Israel in Ancient Times*<sup>26</sup>.

The final form of the Elijah tales seems to have been influenced by the stories about Moses, for there are striking similarities amongst the traditions that evolved around the two prophets. Elijah, like Moses, began his journey with a flight eastward to escape a king’s wrath; like Moses, he lodged with a family. Like Moses, he returned to his country to face and challenge the king, and to awaken faith among the Israelites. Like Moses, he left the country again on a journey to Sinai/Horeb, where both prophets saw God from a cleft in the rock – possibly the same place. Elijah was fed by Yahweh with cakes in the desert, Moses with manna. Elijah, like Moses, departs for Israel via Trans-Jordan. And at their deaths, the bodies of both prophets were lost to their followers. The final version would have been written down many years after the death of the prophet.

But before the tales of his miracles were fully developed, his disciples may well have retained

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<sup>23</sup> All these are archaeological finds which are documented, amongst other places, in W. G. Dever (2001); “What did the biblical authors know and when did they know it?”

<sup>24</sup> 2 Kings 12:28

<sup>25</sup> See chapter 2

<sup>26</sup> Redford (1992) p 320. see also footnote 35 for further references to M Noth, A Rofe & J Van Seters

an oral tradition of his words, including perhaps his description of an experience of the divine presence whilst hiding from his enemies in a cleft in the holy mountain in Sinai.

*Now there was a great wind, so strong that it was splitting mountains and breaking rocks into pieces before Yahweh, but Yahweh was not in the wind;  
And after the wind an earthquake, but Yahweh was not in the earthquake;  
And after the earthquake a fire, but Yahweh was not in the fire;  
And after the fire, a sound of sheer silence.  
When I heard it, I wrapped my face in my cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then there came a voice to me that said, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"  
I answered, "I have been very zealous for Yahweh, the God of armies; for the Israelites have forsaken your covenant, thrown down your altars, and killed your prophets with the sword. I alone am left, and they are seeking my life, to take it away."<sup>27</sup>*

### **The loss of Moab (circa 852)**

The effort to resist Assyria must have cost Israel much in manpower and material and may have created the opportunity for Moab to break-away. Mesha of Moab wrote: -

*As for Omri, king of Israel, he humbled Moab many days, for Chemosh was angry with his land. Now Omri had occupied the land of Medeba and Israel had dwelt there in his time and half the time of his son (Ahab), 40 years; but Chemosh dwelt there in my time...  
Now the men of Gad had always dwelt in the land of Ataroth, and the king of Israel had built Ataroth for them, but I fought against the town and took it and slew all the people of the town as a satiation for Chemosh and Moab. And I brought back from there 'ar'el dwd'...  
And Chemosh said to me, "Go take Nebo from Israel!" So I went by night and fought against it from the break of dawn till noon, taking it and slaying all, seven thousand men, boys, women, girls and slave-girls, for I had devoted them to destruction for the god Astar-Chemosh. And I took from there the ... of Yahweh, dragging them before Chemosh....  
It was I who built Qarhoh, the wall of the forests and the citadel...And I cut beams for Qarhoh with Israelite captives. I built Aroer. I made the highway in the Arnon valley.  
And I reigned in peace over the hundred towns which I had added to the land....<sup>28</sup>*

The text has a couple of themes that find parallels in the bible when it too deals with conquest. First there is the explanation of the success of a foreign force; this is attributed here to Chemosh's anger with 'his' land. In a similar way, the Philistine success at Ebenezer would be attributed to Yahweh's anger with his priesthood and the disloyalty of his people. Secondly Mesha states that he sacrificed the enemy to his god, devoting them all to destruction for Astar-Chemosh. Similarly, the biblical author will imagine that Joshua intended to sacrifice everything in Jericho to Yahweh.

Ataroth was a town to the east of the Dead Sea, roughly opposite Hebron. The strange phrase 'ar'el dwd could be understood as the 'altar (ariel) of David'<sup>29</sup>; if so it is a second non-biblical reference to David. But it may also simply be the name of the local chieftain of Ataroth. Nebo is a trans-Jordanian town opposite Jericho; There were clearly worshippers of Yahweh there at the time who may have survived and continued the worship of Yahweh in Moab, and who were still loyal to Yahweh three hundred years later when the Judean exiles returned from Babylon.

The extensive building projects included creating water reservoirs inside the towns, mirroring practices known to have been undertaken by Israel under the Omrides. As Israelite captives are referred to in connection with the building works, it may be that Israelite engineering skills were put to use by Mesha.

It is hard to be precise about the date of the Moabite rebellion. The Moabite stone suggests that it was in the middle of the reign of Omri's son, which would place it around 860, whereas the bible suggests that it was after the end of Ahab's reign which would be about a decade later. But neither of these dates would mean that Moab was under Israelite domination for as long as forty years. Perhaps forty years should be interpreted just as 'a long time' and perhaps Omri's conquest of Moab should be dated to a time when he was commander of the army, but not yet King. A likely date for the rebellion is around 852, just after the battle of Qarqar and Ahab's death. The massive effort in turning back the

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<sup>27</sup> 1 Kings 19:11b-18

<sup>28</sup> ANET p 320

<sup>29</sup> Isaiah uses the word 'ariel' in a number of ways, including this, in his poem in Isaiah 29.

Assyrian advance, together with the potential weakness that often accompanies the first years of a new king, could have created the opportunity that Meesha exploited.

The events described in the Moabite Stone seem to be covered by the author of II Kings 3, although there the story has quite a different emphasis. In the biblical account, the Moabite rebellion was countered by Israel, who went out to meet the rebels accompanied by forces from Judah and Edom. The prophet Elisha stated that Yahweh would put Moab in their hands. The kings made excellent progress subduing Moab, until the Moabite king publicly sacrificed his child to his god – and the Israelites then withdrew.

Ahab was succeeded by his sons, but the record suggests that Israel lost its power and influence. Whilst the Aramean alliance continued to resist the Assyrians, Israel was no longer mentioned in the Assyrian records as being part of that resistance<sup>30</sup>. In Judah, Athaliah further extended the power and influence of Israel over Judah when her son Jehoram came to the throne. Kings with Omride blood now reigned in both Israel and Judah. A temple to Baal was erected in Jerusalem.

It is thought by some that it is around this time, whilst Elijah was a prophet, that the Elohist wrote his Epic. As motive and official scribal capability may both have existed then, it must be considered as a possible, if unlikely, date. The official scribes would probably have adhered to the Baalist religion. As far as the oppressed minority of Yahwists, the evidence shows that oral transmission, not the written word, was the way their tradition was passed on - as the Elijah stories demonstrate.

The general level of literacy was probably not high enough to enable written material to be a viable way of communicating the message to the ordinary people. Such written material as might have survived from this time would have been that necessary for the operation of the state, such as a law code, and writings that were found entertaining by the court - a set of proverbs perhaps.

### **The Covenant Code**

The northern tradition included a set of laws which owe something to ideas that had been prevalent in Mesopotamia for centuries before Israel became a political reality. The Omride dynasty would have encountered these laws amongst the people they conquered and may have adopted them for their own use. It is also possible that they were the common laws in use by the Canaanite communities that initially settled in Israel, or they were imposed on Israel during the period of Aramean supremacy that followed the Omrides. What seems to be clear is that these laws were the laws that the Northern Country used to regulate its civilisation. The administration of justice and the protection of widows, orphans and the destitute was an accepted part of the duties of kings throughout the Ancient Near East. Such law collections as have been retained are largely case law; they are not a comprehensive listing of the laws that were administered. It is possible that a significant part of the body of the law was maintained orally. Where laws were written down, this was sometimes done as a writing exercise as part of a scribe's education, or because the decision of the king exhibited some unusual feature or interesting complication. The laws are presented as generalisations from a particular decision. They often take the form "If a person does such and such, then the punishment is ...". Later, as further cases are heard, riders may be added of the form "...but if such and such is the case, then something else shall be done." All the laws of Hammurabi are of this form, and so are most of the laws in the Covenant Code found today in the book of Exodus<sup>31</sup>. The similarity in form, areas of concern and, in some cases, specific content between the covenant code and other ancient law codes of the region has led scholars to believe that this is probably the earliest of all the biblical law codes. It may date from the 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE, although clearly reliant on earlier material.<sup>32</sup>

In comparing these two set of laws, it is important to recognise that they are around 800 years apart. In view of this, the similarity of the material is striking. Hammurabi was, of course, an Amorite king. Some Amorites migrated to Canaan in the early years of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium, and in the opinion of some scholars had, by 1500 BCE, become indistinguishable from indigenous Canaanites. The similarity of the Covenant Code with Hammurabi's code is thus evidence that Israel evolved from an Amorite/Canaanite heritage, confirming Ezekiel's judgement concerning Jerusalem, "Your origin and your birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite, ..." <sup>33</sup>

<sup>30</sup> ANET p 279-280. The usual description of the alliance is that it comprised Damascus, Hamath and 12 Kings from the coastal cities.

<sup>31</sup> Exodus 21:2 - 23:19. The last laws, 23:12-19, have much in common with J's Ritual Decalogue (Exodus 34:21-26)

<sup>32</sup> Alt, Albrecht (1934); 'The origin of Israeli Law'; D.H. von Mueller (1903), 'The Law of Hammurabi and its relationship to the Mosaic laws and the 12 Commandments' (both in German) and Westbrook (1988), 'Studies in biblical and cuneiform law'

<sup>33</sup> Ezekiel 16:3

<b>Exodus ref</b>	<b>Covenant code (circa 9<sup>th</sup> century BCE)</b>	<b>Law ref</b>	<b>Code of Hammurabi<sup>34</sup> (circa 1700 BCE)</b>
21:15	<i>If a person strikes father or mother, they shall be put to death.</i>	195	If a son has struck his father, they shall cut off his hand
21:16	<i>If a man kidnaps another, whether he sells him or keeps him, he shall be put to death.</i>	14	If a lord has stolen the young son of another lord, he shall be put to death.
21:22	<i>If people who are fighting injure a pregnant woman so that there is a miscarriage...the one responsible shall be fined ...as much as the judges determine...</i>	209a	If a lord has struck a lord's daughter, and caused her to miscarry, he shall pay 10 shekels of silver...
21:23 - 21:25	<i>...but if there shall be any injury, then you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe.</i>	209b & 197	...but if the pregnant daughter died, then they shall put the striker's daughter to death. If a lord has destroyed the eye of another lord, they shall destroy his eye; if he has broken a lord's bone, they shall break his bone.
21:28 – 21:29	<i>If an ox gores a man or a woman to death, the ox shall be stoned...but the owner of the ox shall not be liable. If the ox was a gorer, and its owner has been warned but has not restrained it, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned, and its owner shall also be put to death.</i>	250	If an ox, when walking along the street, gored a lord to death, the case is not subject to claim. If the lord's ox was a gorer and his city council had told him it was a gorer, and he had not had the horns trimmed, nor tied up the ox, he shall give one half mina of silver.
22:2	<i>If a thief is found breaking in, and is beaten to death, no bloodguilt is incurred; ...</i>	22	If a lord committed robbery and has been caught, that lord shall be put to death
22:7 – 22:8	<i>When someone delivers to a neighbour's money or goods for safekeeping, and they are stolen from the neighbour's house, then the thief, if caught, shall pay double. If the thief is not caught, the owner of the house shall be brought before god, to determine whether or not the owner had laid hands on the neighbour's goods.</i>	124 & 125	If a lord gave ...anything for safekeeping to another lord in the presence of witnesses and he has denied the fact... he shall pay double what he denied. If the property has disappeared along with the property of the house owner, ..., who was careless, then he shall make restitution to the owner of the goods, whilst making a thorough search for the lost property and recovering it from the thief
22:10 – 22:13	<i>When someone delivers to another an ... animal for safekeeping, and it dies or is injured or carried off ... an oath before the Lord shall decide between the two of them. .... If it was mangled by beasts, let it be brought as evidence; restitution shall not be made for the mangled remains.</i>	266	If an 'act of god' has occurred in a sheepfold or a lion has made a kill, the shepherd shall prove himself innocent in the presence of god, but the owner shall receive from him the stricken animal.
22:18	<i>You shall not permit sorcerers to live.<sup>35</sup></i>	2	If a lord has brought an unproven charge of sorcery against another..., then the lord charged shall throw himself into the river and if the river overpowers him then his accuser shall take over his estate; ...
23:1- 23:3	<i>You shall not spread a false report. You shall not join hands with the wicked to act as a malicious witness. You shall not follow a majority in wrongdoing; when you bear witness in a lawsuit, you shall not side with the majority so as to pervert justice; nor shall you be partial to the poor in a lawsuit.</i>	3&4	If a lord brings false testimony in a case, and has not proved the word he spoke; if that case involved life, he shall be put to death. If he came forward with false testimony concerning grain or money, he shall bear the penalty of that case.

<sup>34</sup> Based on ANET p 163 ff.

<sup>35</sup> Following the Septuagint, rather than the feminine 'witches' of the Masoretic text.

There are differences between the two law codes. The laws on slavery, with which the Covenant Code begins, are the more enlightened ones: -

*When you buy a male 'ibri' slave, he shall serve six years, but in the seventh he shall be released as a free person,*<sup>36</sup>

The word 'ibri' is often translated as 'Hebrew', although its root meaning suggests 'outsider' and the word is used in contexts where 'refugee', 'mercenary' or 'outlaw' make equal sense. The word may refer to the *habiru* who were so prevalent throughout the Ancient Near East. The term is rarely used by the Israelites of themselves; instead it often occurs in the bible in the words attributed to Israel's opponents. It may well be a contemptuous term. An 'ibri' slave is thus not necessarily an 'Israelite' slave, although he could be. The law for female slaves was different:

*When a man sells his daughter as a slave, she shall not be released in the way the male slaves are. If she does not please her master, who took her for himself, then he shall let her be redeemed; he shall have no right to sell her to a foreign people...  
If he takes her for his son, he shall deal with her as with a daughter.  
If he takes another wife to himself, he shall not diminish her food, clothing, or shelter, and if he does not do these three things for her, she shall be freed without debt or payment*<sup>37</sup>.

An owner is allowed to beat a slave, but not to kill or mutilate him or her, or at least not to do so immediately: -

*When a slave-owner strikes a male or female slave with a rod and the slave dies immediately, the owner shall be punished. But if the slave survives a day or two, there is no punishment; for the slave is the owner's property...  
...but if the owner knocks out a tooth of a male or female slave, the slave shall be freed...*<sup>38</sup>

The slave's body is not entirely owned by the master; damaging the slave's eye or even his or her tooth results in the owner letting the slave go. This may not have been justice for the slave, since the slave now had to earn his or her own food and shelter, and a blind or damaged ex-slave may have found that difficult.

Foreigners had rights, for they were not to be oppressed; and so did widows and orphans for they were not to be abused. The enforcer was no longer the civil authority, but god. But the punishment remained;

*You shall not abuse any widow or orphan. If you do abuse them, when they cry out to me, I will surely heed their cry; my wrath will burn, and I will kill you with the sword, and your wives shall become widows and your children orphans.*<sup>39</sup>

### **Proverbs: early collections**

Scholars recognise that the Book of Proverbs comprised six compilations

1. Chapters 1-9; Introduction – the last part to be put together
2. Chapters 10-22:16; The main body
3. Chapters 22:17 - 24:22; "The Words of the Wise"
4. Chapters 24:23 – 34; "These too are of the wise"
5. Chapters 25-29; The collection of Hezekiah
6. Chapters 30-31; Miscellaneous, possibly foreign, material and some numerical proverbs.

The introductory section appears to be the last section to be established since it lays out the purpose of the book as a whole and incorporates the motto, "The beginning (or first principle) of wisdom is the fear of Yahweh". The language of some of the material in this section suggests that the final assembly of collections into a single book took place in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century. But the social setting of some of

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<sup>36</sup> Exodus 21:2

<sup>37</sup> Exodus 21:7 - 11

<sup>38</sup> Exodus 21:20 - 27

<sup>39</sup> Exodus 22:21-22

the other sections appears to be the royal court, so the monarchic period (9<sup>th</sup> - 7<sup>th</sup> centuries) is suggested for these, implying that the content of the collections as a whole were compiled over five or six centuries. An early cultural exchange took place between Egypt and the Omride court. The Omrides entertained Egyptian ambassadors, received gifts from the Egyptian Pharaohs and probably bought luxury items from Egyptian merchants. As noted earlier, one ambassador from Egypt was sufficiently impressed by the Israelite culture to have his seal written in Hebrew. It is known that both Egyptians and Israelites enjoyed a fascination with proverbs: it is therefore not surprising that a set of Egyptian proverbs found its way into the biblical book. The Instruction of Amenemope was written during the Tanite dynasty<sup>40</sup>, possibly a hundred years before the Omrides established their sophisticated court in Samaria,<sup>41</sup> The proverbs in this collection could have been brought to Israel through the social connections established with the court.

### Proverbs: “The words of the wise” Amenemope<sup>42</sup>

22:17–18

*Incline your ear and hear my words, and apply your mind to my teaching; for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you*

22:21

*Have I not written for you thirty sayings of admonition and knowledge, to show you what is right and true, so that you may give a true answer to those who sent you?*

25:21-

*If your enemies are hungry, give them bread to eat; and if they are thirsty, give them water to drink;*

*for you will heap coals of fire on their heads, and Yahweh will reward you.*

22:22

*Do not rob the poor because they are poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate;*

22:23

*Make no friends with those given to anger, and do not associate with hotheads*

3:9–11,

Give your ears; hear what is said: give your heart to understand them. To put them in your heart is worthwhile

10:1

See these thirty chapters; they entertain; they instruct; they are the foremost of books. They make the ignorant to know

2:20-

So steer that we may bring the wicked man across; for we shall not act like him –

Lift him up, give him your hand; leave him in the arms of the god;

Fill his belly with your bread, so that he may be sated and ashamed

2:1

Guard yourself against robbing the poor, and against overbearing the disabled

9 1

do not associate yourself with a heated man; nor visit him with conversation

Amenemope’s collection comprised thirty sayings – the same number as are preserved in the third section of proverbs. It seems that the compiler of this group included Hebrew versions of those Egyptian sayings that he could remember and added a few more from elsewhere to make up the number. The Egyptians delighted in these forms of collections of sayings; one very ancient source (ca 2450 BCE attributed to the vizier Ptah-Hotep) includes this advice:

“If you wish to make friendship last in a home to which you have access as master, as brother or as a friend... beware of approaching the women. It does not go well in the place where that is done. ... One is made a fool by limbs of the finest porcelain, as she stands there, her skin aglow, the colour of pale carnations. A mere trifle, the likeness of a dream; yet one obtains death through knowing her”<sup>43</sup>

This may have an echo in the first section proverbs,

<sup>40</sup> Waltke and Diewert (1999); ‘Wisdom Literature’ in ‘The face of Old Testament Studies’; p303

<sup>41</sup> It should be noted, however, that there are difficulties in comparing the standard Egyptian chronology with other dates in the region – the evidence of the Santorini eruption would suggest that discrepancies of the order of 100 years are possible.

<sup>42</sup> ANET pp 421-424

<sup>43</sup> ANET pp 412-414 following line 276

*“Do not desire her beauty in your heart, and do not let her capture you with her eyelashes; for a prostitute’s fee is only a loaf of bread, but the wife of another stalks a man’s very life.”<sup>44</sup>*

Some proverbs occur in more than one collection, demonstrating that the whole biblical book is a loosely edited compilation of anthologies. For example, the short collection entitled “More words of the wise” (24:23-34), whilst linked by title to the early Egyptian material also included material which is found in the much later introductory collection.

*A little sleep, a little slumber,  
a little folding of the hands to rest  
And poverty will come upon you like a vagrant  
and scarcity like a beggar<sup>45</sup>.*

It may have been the elegant courts of Samaria that started the collection of two-line traditional sayings now to be found in the main body of Proverbs (10:1 – 22:16). Some hold these two-liners to be amongst the earliest material in the book of Proverbs, the kernel around which other, sometimes foreign, material was gathered. Others argue for a later date, at least for the majority of the material.<sup>46</sup> These familiar two-liners take the form of balanced doublets with the hope that the reader will recognise the truth of the saying. No argument or explanation is offered. For example,

*“A slack hand causes poverty,  
whereas a diligent hand brings wealth.”<sup>47</sup>*

The subject matter is human behaviour. Its range includes the unpredictability of wealth; the power of the wealthy; the value of integrity; the effectiveness of a bribe; the importance of self-discipline and hard work; the power of speech; the attractiveness of gossip; the danger of too much wine; the upbringing of children; the folly of quarrelling and much else. Editorially associated with the ‘Solomon’ brand, most of these proverbs are the product of a sophisticated wealthy society: for the most part, they are not the sayings that one would expect to find exchanged amongst the tents of the semi-nomadic tribes living in 10<sup>th</sup> century Judah. It is likely that the development of this collection, although started in Samaria, was supplemented by later material from 7<sup>th</sup> century Judah. All the fifty references to god refer to Yahweh: none to Elohim.

### **The Age of the Arameans (842 - 780)**

In 842, the Omri dynasty came to an end in events that seem to have had three elements - external invasion, internal rebellion and religious reform.

Whilst it seems that the Omrides had good relations with Aram Damascus under Hadadezer, that king died (or was murdered) around 842 BCE and Hazael, a usurper, secured the Damascene throne. In 1993 CE, some broken stones were uncovered in Dan that appear to be a fairly contemporary record of an external invasion of Israel by Hazael. The stones contain an inscription that purports to be by the ruler of Damascus, whose god was Hadad. Although its interpretation has been somewhat controversial, the best reading, with guessed interpolations in square brackets, would seem to be: -

*[.....] and cut [.....]  
... my father went up [against him when ] he fought at [.....]  
and my father died. He went to [his ancestors]. Then the king of Is-  
rael entered Quedem in my father’s land. Hadad made me king.  
Hadad went before me and I departed from [the] seven [.....]  
...of my kingdom. And I killed seve[nty] kin[gs], who harnessed thou[sands of cha-]  
riots and thousands of horses. [I killed Jeho]ram, son of [Ahab]  
king of Israel and I killed [Ahaz]iah son of [Jehoram, kin-]  
g of Bethdavid. And I put [their towns into ruins and turned]*

<sup>44</sup> Proverbs 6:23-26. Its position in the first section of proverbs would suggest a late date; it is included here by virtue of the possible relation with similar Egyptian material.

<sup>45</sup> Proverbs 6:10-11 and 24:33-34. Some translations prefer *bandit* and *warrior* in place of *vagrant* and *beggar*

<sup>46</sup> James Crenshaw his ABD article on Proverbs argues for an early date. Scott (1965) argues for the late 7<sup>th</sup> century.

<sup>47</sup> Proverbs 10:4

*their country into [desolation.....]*  
*other [.....Jehu ru-]*  
*led over Is[rael.....and I laid]*  
*siege upon [.....]*<sup>48</sup>

Hadad was the storm god of the Canaanites and Arameans; the god who is known as Baal throughout the Bible (although Baal simply means ‘Lord’ and was thus a common form of address for any god). Since Hadad was the main god of the Damascus Arameans, their kings always took names that included the words Ben-Hadad (Son of Hadad). The stele is thus a claim by Hazael of Damascus to have killed the king of Israel and the king of a place called Bethdavid, possibly the ‘city of David’ – Jerusalem.

This story differs slightly from the biblical account in Kings. In that version there was indeed a battle against Hazael involving Jehoram, supported by his cousin’s son Ahaziah, the ruler of Judah. It took place in Ramoth-Gilead but it seems to have been indecisive. Ramoth-Gilead was retained by Israel in the biblical account, but Jehoram was wounded and retired to Jezreel to recover, accompanied by Ahaziah. Meanwhile, one of Elisha’s disciples had anointed Jehu, the Israelite army commander, as King of Israel. Jehu rode towards Jezreel but was met on the way by Jehoram and Ahaziah. Jehoram suspected the treachery and directly challenged Jehu with the words “Is it peace, Jehu?”

<b>Rulers of Aram-Damascus (Syria)</b>	
	Dates
Hadadezer, Ben-Hadad I	880 - 842
Hazael, Ben-Hadad II	842 - 805 (or 796)
?, Ben-Hadad III	805 (or 796) – 792 (or 775)
...	...
Rezin	750? - 732

“How can there be peace”, Jehu responded, “so long as the great whoring and witchery of your mother Jezebel continues?” And he shot Jehoram in the back, killing him. Ahaziah fled but was also hit and died of his wounds in Megiddo<sup>49</sup>. The two accounts differ in the way one would expect - given their differing sources - with Damascus emphasising the straightforward and justified external conquest, and Israel emphasising the treachery and internal rebellion.

The religious component came from the support given by the prophets to Jehu’s insurrection. The Omrides may have been Baalists, but Jehu was a fanatical Yahwist. According to the author of Kings, Elijah had had a vision back in Ahab’s time, in which he had been commanded to go from Horeb to anoint Hazael as king of Damascus, Jehu as king over Israel, and Elisha as prophet instead of himself, so that “whoever escapes from the sword of Hazael, Jehu shall kill; and whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu, Elisha shall kill.”<sup>50</sup> But Elijah apparently did not do as he was commanded, for it was left to Elisha, some-time later, to send a disciple to anoint Jehu - and thus, perhaps, to provoke the rebellion.

The royal residence at Jezreel has been identified by archaeologists. It comprises an enclosure of around 10 acres, surrounded by walls and corner towers. The walls are built of the alternating layers of dressed Ashlar masonry that were typical of royal residences. It was used only for a short time in the 9<sup>th</sup> century, thus presumably built by Omri or Ahab, used by Ahab’s sons, and destroyed in Jehu’s coup. Perhaps Hosea is referring to Jehu’s destruction of Jezreel with the accompanying brutality when, a century later, he prophesied that Yahweh will ‘punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezreel’<sup>51</sup> The bible has a gory description of Jezebel’s end. She was thrown from a window in the Jezreel palace and her body left for the dogs to eat. It also states that Jehu contrived to have the rest of Ahab’s royal household killed - seventy ‘sons’ in total - perhaps the seventy ‘kings’ that Hazael mentions.

Even if Hazael did not initiate the events that brought Jehu to power, he certainly exploited the advantages that the situation offered him. He sliced off parts of Israel for himself and erected the stele in Dan to proclaim his achievements. The author of Kings conceded that Israel lost a great deal of territory: “from the Jordan eastward; all the land of Gilead, the Gadites, the Reubenites; and the Manessites from Aroar, by the Wadi Arnon, Gilead and Bashan”. Archaeology confirms that this was a time of rapid Aramean expansion. Megiddo and Jezreel fell to Hazael

Recent carbon dating of the relevant destruction level in Megiddo, one that contains ceramics that match those of Jezreel, shows that the destruction occurred between 870 and 835<sup>52</sup>. The samples on

<sup>48</sup> Texts can be found in Cogan (2000) ‘I Kings’; p507, and in Lemche (1998) pp39-40. See discussion in Lemche as to whether *Bethdavid* is a place name or a dynastic name.

<sup>49</sup> 2 Kings 9

<sup>50</sup> I Kings 19:15

<sup>51</sup> Hoshea 1:4.

<sup>52</sup> Piasetsky and Finkelstein (2005). ‘The Bible and Radio Carbon Dating; 14C results from Megiddo,

which this conclusion is based were uncovered beneath a meter of destruction debris indicating that the city had suffered a massive attack. Other cities in the fertile north – Tel Rehov, Beth-Shean and Ta'anach also went up in flames. Megiddo remained deserted for about 50 years. Other places - Jezreel and Ta'anach – never recovered. Hazor was destroyed but a new Aramean city was built on top of the debris, possibly including an elaborate water supply system modelled on the one built by the Omrides at Megiddo. After the conquest of Dan, new and more elaborate city gates with Syrian features were installed there and the Ashlar sacrificial platform rebuilt. On the northern shore of Lake Galilee, near the site of the future Bethsaida, Hazael built another city similar to that at Hazor incorporating a Syrian style gate like that found at Dan. Here archaeologists have also found a depiction of a horned deity characteristic of the Aramean cult. In these sites, ostraca have been found written in Aramaic.<sup>53</sup>

Israel was reduced to its core territory – the hill country between the Jezreel valley and the Benjamite Plateau. With his kingdom decimated, Jehu may well have been tempted to appeal to Assyria for help. The black obelisk of Shalmaneser III (859-824), now in the British Museum depicts Jehu grovelling before the Assyrian king, and kissing his feet<sup>54</sup>. Shalmaneser's records includes a tribute list of gifts from Jehu, including silver, gold, a golden saplu bowl, a golden vase with a pointed bottom, golden tumblers, golden buckets, a staff for a king and wooden *puruhu*, whatever they were<sup>55</sup>. Such however was the reputation of the Omrides that even Jehu, no doubt to his chagrin, was described as 'the son of Omri'<sup>56</sup> Jehu's tribute to the Assyrians is not recorded by the writer of Kings, possibly because by the time the Books of Kings were compiled, this aspect of the history had been lost and forgotten, or possibly because it was not relevant to the author's purposes. Instead the author of Kings concentrated on Jehu's murder of the leading Baalists.

Jehu was expected to bring in a Yahwist reformation. The bible depicts Jehu as 'wiping out Baal from Israel' by trickery and murder. If Ahab and Jezebel had almost wiped out the worshipers of Yahweh, then Jehu attempts an even more thorough elimination of the Baalists. But they were to survive. Within a couple of generations of the end of his reign, the leading families were split roughly three to two in favour of the worship of Yahweh, if it is possible to judge such a thing by the names they gave their children. Even though there was an enforced Yahwist revival under Jehu, it seems unlikely that he sponsored the writing of the Northern Epic, the great Elohist text. He is not described as a cultured man and there is little evidence of writing from his time.

There is, however, evidence of economic recession. Jehu's revolution cut the profitable trade route between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea, cut Israel off from the Phoenician markets, and decimated her agricultural acreage. Jehu's revolution may have brought a Yahwist to the throne of Samaria, but it very nearly caused the complete loss the country. As it was the country became a rump state under the Aramean thumb.

In Judah, Athaliah, probably Ahab's sister, and mother to the killed Ahaziah, seized power for herself and thereby prolonged Omride rule in the south. The murder of her family in Israel and Jehu's revolution would probably have eliminated much of the economic co-operation between the two countries just as the previous good relationships between Tyre and Israel almost certainly ended with Jezebel's murder. Athaliah herself fell in yet a further revolution five or six years later.

Aram under Hazael continued to expand to the south. By 825 Hazael controlled Philistia and dominated both Israel, on both sides of the Jordan, and Judah. There is no evidence that the Arameans deported citizens in the way that Assyria would do in the next century; the Arameans were simply concerned with power and territory. They could, however, be quite destructive. Recent excavations at the site of ancient Gath, modern Tell-el-Safi, show that the city was surrounded by a substantial siege system, captured and burnt to the ground. Prior to its destruction, it was the largest of the Philistine cities, covering about 100 acres<sup>57</sup>. The simple statement (II Kings 12:17) that refers to this event places it in the time of Joash of Judah (836 – 798). This was linked to the payment of a substantial tribute by Joash in order to buy Hazael off and keep Jerusalem intact.

For thirty or forty years from 825, Israel was a vassal of Aramean Damascus. Her leader was permitted only a token army of 50 horsemen, ten chariots and ten platoons. When Hazael of Damascus died around 800 BCE, he passed on a state that controlled most of the region from the approaches to

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Tel Dor, Tel Rehov, and Tel Hadar'. Previously this destruction level had been dated about 70 years earlier. See also Appendix D of Finkelstein and Silberman (2002); 'The Bible unearthed.'

<sup>53</sup> Finkelstein and Silberman (2002); 'The Bible Unearthed'; pp 201-205.

<sup>54</sup> Oxford p 302 & Dever (2001) p 166

<sup>55</sup> ANET p 281

<sup>56</sup> ANET p 280

<sup>57</sup> Finkelstein and Silberman (2006); 'David and Solomon'; p 115

Hamath in the north to Gaza in the south.<sup>58</sup>

The biblical account of the struggle between Israel and Aramean Damascus is generally accepted as being confused<sup>59</sup>. The events of I Kings 20 (a siege of Samaria by Ben-Hadad that is repulsed by Ahab) may be a muddled recollection of Ahab's successful resistance of the Assyrian, not the Aramean, advance. II Kings 6 and 7 (Elisha's trapping of the blinded Arameans inside Samaria and the siege of Samaria by Hazael's predecessor) may relate to Hazael's attack on the city after Jehu's accession. The muddled nature of these accounts suggests that the author of Kings was not altering history from that recorded in the state annals of Israel, for such a fraud would have been free from muddle, but rather setting down the confused and inconsistent folk memories that were current in his time.

But the Assyrians had not gone away; they were always applying aggressive pressure. In the late 9<sup>th</sup> century, the Phoenicians, trading with Spain out of Tyre, established ports at Carthage and Sicily. As Assyrian and other pressures became dangerous to Tyre, the Phoenician fleet was increasingly based at these western Mediterranean harbours; a movement of long term significance for Europe for this formed the basis of the Carthaginian power that challenged Rome.

### **Israel's Recovery (circa 780)**

Israelite Samaria was able to work loose from the grip of Damascus in the early part of the eighth century, probably because the Arameans were focused on repulsing Assyrian attacks. These attacks intensified over time; Assyria laid siege to Damascus four times in the twenty years between 775 and 755. Such was the renewed Assyrian vigour that the Libyan dynasty ruling Northern Egypt decided it was worthwhile to send permanent ambassadors to the Assyrian capital Ashur.

The subjection of Israel by Aramean Damascus followed by the eventual escape of Israel may be mirrored in the Bible by the story of Jacob's subjection to Laban followed by his eventual escape. In this story Jacob metaphorically represents Israel and Laban represents Aramean Damascus (today's Lebanon). If this is so, and the metaphor is fairly blatant, then the creation of this story must have taken place sometime after the events it symbolises. A date before the 8<sup>th</sup> century would therefore be impossible, but sometime during it would be plausible.

With Judah and Israel no longer subject to Aramean control, both may have sought to expand their territories. This appears to have resulted in a dispute which was resolved when Israel briefly invested Jerusalem, taking away some booty and hostages<sup>60</sup>. The cause may have been a border dispute precipitated by an overconfident Judah, or the ambition of Israel to control the trading route between the Mediterranean and the Red Sea. Excavations at Kuntillet 'Ajrud, in the Negev about 30 miles south of Kadesh Barnea show the presence of Israelite troops occupying an outpost on the route to the Red Sea and being supplied with provisions carried in jars made from Judean clay - and therefore perhaps at Judean expense.<sup>61</sup>

In a storehouse there, passing travellers have left a number of graffiti: one is an image captioned "*Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah*".<sup>62</sup> The impression that popular religion had provided Yahweh with a partner is confirmed by a tomb inscription from Hebron which reads "*May Uriyahu be blessed by Yahweh, for from his enemies he has saved him by his Asherah*".<sup>63</sup> It is interesting that Yahweh's partner in the popular mind was El's wife in the Baalist religion - yet another pointer towards the idea that Yahweh was regarded by many as another revelation of El. In the outpost in the Negev, there is an inscription which talks of Baal in partnership with El; both are to be blest on the day of battle.<sup>64</sup> At roughly the same time (ca 800 BCE), writings that were probably Israelite were made on the wall of a room at Deir Alla (biblical Sucoth in Gilead) which also witnessed to a pantheon of gods. There is recorded a story of El in which the council of the gods prepare their plans to silence Shaggar- Istar<sup>65</sup>. These writings revolved around the activities of the prophet Balaam, who is also quoted in biblical texts.

### **The Oracles of Balaam**

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<sup>58</sup> Redford (1992) p 340

<sup>59</sup> Oxford p 296

<sup>60</sup> 2 Kings 14:1-14

<sup>61</sup> Meshel, Zeev; 'Kuntillet Ajrud'; ABD

<sup>62</sup> Oxford p 309. Asherah was the 'mother of all' in the Canaanite pantheon

<sup>63</sup> Dever, W G (1996); p 186. Tomb inscription found by Dever in 1968 in Khirbet el-Qom.

<sup>64</sup> Meshel, Zeev; 'Kuntillet Ajrud'; ABD and Baruch A. Levine; 'Numbers 21-36 (2000)', p 227

<sup>65</sup> AB: Numbers 21-36; Baruch A Levine (2000); pp 245-246. The writing at Deir Alla is linguistically very close to biblical Hebrew; probably just a local variant that would be understood without difficulty in Jerusalem.

In his fourth oracle, Balaam claims to be one who *hears the sayings of El, who knows the knowledge of Elyon, and who sees the vision of Shaddai*<sup>66</sup>. In his third oracle, he again claims inspiration from El and Shaddai, but also links in Yahweh when he says that the tents of Israel are ‘*like Aloes that Yahweh has planted*’: and in his second oracle he says, “*El did not see trouble in Israel, for Yahweh their god was with them*”. The author of these verses related to a pantheon of individual gods – El, Shaggar, Elyon, Shaddai and others - which included Yahweh as the national god of Israel. The four biblical Balaam oracles are quoted in contexts connected with the Israelites passage out of Egypt through Moab on their way to crossing the Jordan. It is probable, however that they were composed to celebrate a victory much closer in date to the Balaam inscriptions at Deir Alla. Levine suggests tentatively that this success was the conquest of Moab by Omri<sup>67</sup>.

The prophet saw himself entirely in the power of the gods: -

*How can I curse those whom El has not cursed?  
How denounce those whom Yahweh has not denounced?*

...and tells of the power of Israel protected by the gods

*See what El has done!  
The people rise like a lioness,  
Rouse themselves like a lion  
that does not rest till he devours his prey  
and drinks the blood of his victims.*

...and thus Israel will dominate Moab.

*A star will come out of Jacob -  
a sceptre out of Israel.  
He will crush the foreheads of Moab*<sup>68</sup>

One of the poems on the walls at Deir Alla is a mythical tale in which Balaam is able to prevent a disastrous darkness from overcoming the people of the area. Levine suggests that this expresses the author's grateful response to surviving the war that liberated Moab from Israel. If this is the case, then the biblical Balaam poems and the Balaam poems of Deir Alla relate to the beginning and the end of Israel's domination of Moab

### **Peace and Cooperation (780 – 745)**

Shortly after the invasion by Israel, Judah lost her leader through assassination. A period of co-operation ensued – probably under the leadership of Israel. Even if Judah had to be compelled to cooperate in the early years, it is clear that both countries benefited economically. It was also a time of political stability as both Hebrew Kingdoms acquired kings that remained in power for around 40 years. Israel's king was Jeroboam II (786-747) and Judah's was Azariah (783-742), also known as Uzziah, who ruled on his own for a while and then as co-regent to both his son and grandson. Further benefits ensued when Jeroboam's Israel restored working commercial relationships with Damascus and Hamath.

According to the author of Kings, Jeroboam II expanded the scope of Israelite power until it was once more as extensive as it had been under Omri – from the approaches of Hamath in the North to the Dead Sea in the South. Amos confirms that there were some territorial gains, but suggested they were not that significant: -

*You rejoice at Lo Devar (hebrew for ‘nothing’)  
You say, “Have we not taken Karnaim for ourselves, by our own strength?”  
But I will raise up a nation against you, Israel,  
That will afflict you from the approaches of Hamath to the Valley of the Arabah*<sup>69</sup>

<sup>66</sup> Numbers 24:16

<sup>67</sup> Levine, Baruch A (1990); ‘Numbers 21-36’, AB; pp 231-234

<sup>68</sup> The three extracts are from Numbers 23:8 (1<sup>st</sup> Oracle), Numbers 23:24(2<sup>nd</sup> Oracle) and Numbers 24:17(4<sup>th</sup> Oracle).

<sup>69</sup> Amos 6: 13-14

Increased territory, a period of co-operation with Judah, political stability and the restoration of trade routes to the Red Sea led to a period of economic success. In an annex to the Sumerian palace, receipts have been found relating to goods taken in taxation, mostly oil and wine.<sup>70</sup> These records refer to the same names again and again, indicating that wealth was concentrated within a small number of powerful families. The eighth century layers of excavations in Samaria have revealed exquisite ivories used as furniture inlays and as individual carvings. The artistry used Syrian, Egyptian and Phoenician motifs – imported elegance that showed almost no regard for the precepts of Yahwism. Sometimes the ivories included inset lapis lazuli from Egypt. The extreme wealth of the upper classes is confirmed by the attacks made on them by the prophets Amos, Hosea and Micah. Some of the wealthy had compound names incorporating the name of a god. Amongst these 40% are Baalist and 60% Yahwist. One shard refers to two gods in a single name, Gaddiyaw, which, somewhat confusingly, means ‘Yahweh is my Gad’.<sup>71</sup> The archaeology confirms that the country – both rich and poor - remained uncommitted to Yahwism, as the prophets repeatedly claimed.

Megiddo was rebuilt. The new city included, for the first time, the famous stables. Initially wrongly associated with the time of the mythical Solomon, then re-dated by Yadin to Ahab’s kingdom, it is now clear that the stables were built after the destruction of the city by Hazael, an event fixed fairly accurately. Some scholars query whether these columned buildings were indeed stables, since similar buildings, but without the ‘feeding troughs’, have been found elsewhere. But horse experts seem to find the details of the buildings, even including teeth marks on the troughs, to be consistent with the stable theory<sup>72</sup>. Critics of the stable theory point to the lack of horse accoutrements found in the area, although this can be accounted for by the later systematic dismantling of the site by the Assyrians. As previously noted the Assyrians admired Israelite chariotry so much so that they incorporated an Israelite chariot group within their army.

Israel remained the dominant partner in the new relationship with Judah. Israelite troops were stationed as far south as Sinai, in what was clearly Judean territory.

The power and influence of Israel was possible in part because of the absence, for the time being, of any major regional imperial power. In Egypt, the 25<sup>th</sup> Kushite dynasty was gaining strength and pushing north from its base in modern Sudan but still had some way to come, whilst the ageing Libyan 22<sup>nd</sup> dynasty was weakening in the Delta. Assyria continued to batter the Arameans but, by the middle of the century, it had not broken through.

### **The expansion of Literacy (circa 760)**

From around 760 BCE, there emerged new strong prophets whose words were committed to writing. The sayings of these men were written down by themselves or their followers and then edited and supplemented to form the books that bear their names. These books comprised stories from their lives and records of their major oracles. Why did these prophets come to make such use the written word at this time?

The lives and utterances of Elisha and Elijah have come down to us with a heavy overlay of folklore – moulded by the oral transmission that these stories received prior to being written down. But for Amos, Hosea, and Isaiah of Jerusalem we have virtually contemporary written accounts of their work. This suggests that a significant expansion in general literacy occurred in the middle years of the 8<sup>th</sup> Century. Such an expansion of literacy is confirmed from the archaeological record. The Sinai graffiti look like the work of ordinary people – not the work of a professional scribe. Jamieson-Drake’s survey of archaeological finds in Judah shows a massive five-fold increase in written material in the 8<sup>th</sup> century. The increase comes mainly in the form of great finds of seals, being the only parts of written documents made from materials that could survive. The economic wealth over which Jeroboam II and Azariah presided enabled increased resources to be assigned to education.

The increased literacy levels would have made the distribution of the message by written means both desirable and effective. Copies of the oracles could be read to villagers by the prophet’s disciples lending more authority to the disciple’s work. Copies could be left with village headmen. The motivation of the prophet was to be heard by the people. And they were heard. Amos’ voice was so clear and so unwelcome that he was forcibly invited to leave Israel.

Was the writing of the Northern Epic - itself essentially a recounting of the life and teaching of the prophet Moses - part of this 8<sup>th</sup> century blossoming of prophetic writing? Probably. It cannot have been much later than that since the Northern Kingdom was crushed in 722 BCE.

But the Epic and the words of the writing prophets were not the only scripture that could have

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<sup>70</sup> Dever, W G (2001); ‘What did the Biblical Authors know?’; p 210

<sup>71</sup> Davies, P R (1998); ‘Scribes and Schools’; p 49

<sup>72</sup> Deborah Cantrell (2000); Horse Troughs at Megiddo; Megiddo Newsletter No 5; November 2000.

had its written origin during the two hundred years of Israel's existence as a state. All through this period, the law would have been developing to meet the circumstances of the time. No advance in popular literacy is required for these to be written down, merely that state officials should want to possess reasonable records to ensure consistency and justice. Equally the hymns required only the memory of the singers for their accurate preservation. Some of these developments may have preceded the writing of the Northern Epic.

### Northern Songs

The use of 'El' or 'Elohim' in Israelite texts is well attested and contrasts with Judah's use of Yahweh in comparable contexts. The psalms that mainly use El or Elohim as the divine name were at some stage collected together to form the basis of the 2<sup>nd</sup> book of psalms (psalms 42 to 72)<sup>73</sup>. The first eight of these are attributed to the Korah family. The contrast with the first book, which predominately used Yahweh as the divine name becomes particularly clear in psalms 53 and 70 which are in other respects the same as psalm 14 and psalm 40:13-17. The first eleven psalms of book III, which are attributed to the Asaph family, continue this elohistic preference and thus the group of psalms from 42 to 83 are sometime known as the Elohist Psalter.<sup>74</sup> Within this psalter, as finally edited, are some ancient psalms as well as some that are clearly exilic or later, but the other 30 or so psalms may have been composed in the ninth and eighth centuries BCE, and may have had a Northern origin

Whereas the psalms in the first anthology often took the form of an individual appealing to Yahweh, only about a third of this second anthology take this form. In the Elohist psalter there are more psalms designed for use in a congregational setting. The dangers are national enemies or poor harvests. This psalter contains nine royal psalms – psalms clearly associated with a monarchy. It also includes a terse sarcastic poem (psalm 52), "*Why do you boast of wickedness, you champion devotee of El*" and wisdom psalms such as 49, "*Hear this, all you peoples*" and 73, "*How good is Elohim to those who are pure in heart*".

Whether or not associated with the Israel, these thirty psalms used a language which was neither post-exilic nor archaic; nor do they contain any references to the destruction of Israel in 722 BCE. The range and quality of these psalms is reflected in the examples that follow. The texts are influenced by Dahood's translations and the accompanying discussions<sup>75</sup>.

Psalm 83 is an ancient psalm, part of the Asaph collection psalms (73-83) that opened Book III. It may have originated as a Canaanite psalm claiming the ascendancy of Elohim over the Canaanite pantheon.

*Elohim presides in El's council  
In the midst of gods, he demands  
"How long will you defend the unjust  
And show partiality to the wicked?"*

The psalmist pointed out that it was the duty of all gods to rescue the afflicted and the poor, and that those who do not '*will die as men do, and fall like any prince.*' It concluded with the plea

*Rise up, Elohim, govern the earth  
Rule over the nations yourself<sup>76</sup>.*

Psalm 45 was a royal wedding song, composed by a courtier, who was clearly trying to impress the king:

*"You are the most handsome of the children of men,  
graciousness flows from your lips  
Elohim has blessed you from eternity.  
Buckle your sword on your thigh,  
great in splendour and majesty;*

...

By contrast the girl was advised:

<sup>73</sup> 85% of the references to the divine name use Yahweh in Book I, whilst a similar proportion use Elohim in Book II

<sup>74</sup> Buss, J M (1963); The psalms of Asaph and Korah; Journal of Biblical Literature 82:382-91

<sup>75</sup> Dahood's work on the Psalms; Anchor Bible volumes 16-17a.

<sup>76</sup> Psalm 82: 1b-2 & 'demands' in verse 2 seems to render the intended sense hear better than NRSV's 'holds judgement', for it is god speaking in the next line.

*“Forget your people and your father’s house;  
For the king desires your beauty  
He is your lord; bow down to him  
...”*

And the psalmist concluded

*Let the girl be led to the king,  
Let her companions be brought after her  
Come let her be led with joy and gladness,  
Let her be brought into the palace of the king.*

*In place of your fathers shall be your sons,  
You shall make them princes over all the earth.<sup>77</sup>*

Psalm 55 is a lament, a common form in this book. It was the lament of an individual and contained, as a quotation, the lines later used by Mendelsohn in his work “The Wings of a Dove”. They are similar in sentiment to Jeremiah 9, where he said “O that I had in the desert a traveller’s lodging place”. It is possible that both texts were inspired by an earlier Canaanite masterpiece.<sup>78</sup>

*Oh, for the wings of a dove  
to fly away and be at rest.  
Far away would be my flight,  
In the wilderness, I would settle,  
to my shelter I would rush,  
out of the raging wind and storm.<sup>79</sup>*

Another lament is found in psalm 71, the first lines of which were used again in psalm 31, where it opened, naturally, with a call to Yahweh. But Psalm 71 may originally have begun with a call to Elohim, for it refers to Elohim consistently from verse 7 onwards. This was the prayer of an old, rich and musically talented individual. He was seeking deliverance from his enemies.

*In you, Elohim, have I trusted.  
Do not let me be humiliated, Eternal One<sup>80</sup>  
In your faithfulness deliver me and rescue me.  
Incline your ear to me and save me.*

...  
*My Elohim, be not far from me  
My Elohim, make haste to help me*

...  
*You will restore me to life -  
from the depths of the earth raise me once more  
You will increase my honour  
and comfort me once more.*

*I will praise you with the harp,  
for your faithfulness, my Elohim*

...  
*O that those that seek my ruin would be humiliated!  
O that they would be put to confusion.<sup>81</sup>*

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<sup>77</sup> Psalm 45:3-4, 11-12 & 15-18. This psalm refers to Ivory Palaces. Ivory furnishings have been found in Samaria and are referred to by Amos. The use of the plural ‘palaces’ suggests the winter and summer palaces built by the Omrides. The reference to Tyrian guests in some translations or a Tyrian dress in others suggests the bride came from Tyre. She is a princess, and other ‘daughters of kings’ are amongst the honoured women present. All this supports the speculation that the song was first composed for the marriage of Jezebel, princess of Tyre, to Ahab, builder of exquisite palaces.

<sup>78</sup> Dahood M (1968): Psalms II (AB). p 30.

<sup>79</sup> Psalm 55; 7 -9

<sup>80</sup> Reading *l’olam* with Dahood as a call to ‘Olam’ – the eternal one

<sup>81</sup> Psalm 77; 2-3,12,20b,22a,24b. Dahood translates the ‘depths of the earth’ as the ‘underworld’.

The pattern in which the psalmist offers to praise god in the congregation in return for god's acting on his plea is common to many laments. In some cases, the psalm is that praise.

Northern psalms occur outside the Elohist Psalter. Psalm 122 shows evidence of a northern dialect and is interesting because it is the song of a pilgrim returning from Jerusalem. It is one of the 'Songs of Ascent', poems which may have been used at a particular point in the liturgy or, as in this case, poems in which words or ideas are carried from one verse to the next, developing as they go to create an ascending structure. Here the linkages are 'Jerusalem', 'the tribes', 'Yahweh', 'thrones', and 'peace and prosperity', with the 'house of Yahweh' bracketing the whole. Although the poem uses Yahweh as the divine name, as befits a visitor to the Jerusalem temple, the poem's northern origin is suggested by the surprising number of northern dialectical forms it contains.<sup>82</sup> This is the song of northern pilgrims. It is easy to imagine it being sung as the pilgrim 'ascended' from the gates of Jerusalem to the temple itself.

*I was glad when they said to me,  
"Let us go to the **house of Yahweh!**"*  
*My feet were standing  
within your gates, **Jerusalem.***  
***Jerusalem**—built as his city  
bound firmly together by him.*  
*There **the tribes** go up,  
**the tribes of Yahweh,***  
*as was decreed for Israel,  
to give thanks to the name of **Yahweh.***  
*For there were set up **the thrones** of judgement,  
**the thrones** of the house of David.*  
*Pray for the **peace** of Jerusalem:  
"May those who love you **prosper.***  
***Peace** be within your walls,  
and **prosperity** within your towers."*  
*For the sake of my brothers and friends  
I say, "**Peace** be within you."*  
*For the sake of the **house of Yahweh** our god,  
I will seek your good.<sup>83</sup>*

### **Riches and the law**

The tax receipts and fine artefacts of the time testify to concentrated wealth and an advanced economy. The development of the economy would have required laws concerning the lending of money and the operation of justice. When Amos (ca. 760) accused the rich mafia of his day of being in breach of the law, perhaps he had in mind laws such as these: -

*If you lend money to one of my people who is needy, you shall treat them like a creditor; do not charge them interest.  
If you take your neighbour's cloak in pawn, restore it before the sun goes down...for what else can they sleep in?*

As the economy developed, it needed a reliable legal framework. The covenant code may have been expanded to provide justice for the poor;

*Do not pervert the justice due to your poor in their lawsuits. Keep away from a false charge; and do not kill the innocent and those in the right, for I will not acquit the guilty.  
You shall take no bribe, for a bribe blinds the officials, and subverts the cause of those who are in the right.<sup>84</sup>*

This was the background in which the writing prophets sought to influence both king and people, and the first of these was probably Amos.

<sup>82</sup> Dahood, M (1970); Psalms 100-150; Anchor Bible Vol 17a: p204.

<sup>83</sup> Psalm 122:1-9

<sup>84</sup> These laws may be found in Exodus 22 and 23. They were incorporated into the E text.

### Amos (circa 760 - 750)

Amos preached around 760 BCE. The date can be given with reasonable confidence since: -

- Amos preached ‘two years before the earthquake’ – a date which can be archeologically confirmed to be in the middle of the eighth century. Josephus, albeit not always a reliable historian, links Uzziah’s leprosy, around 750 BCE, with the earthquake.
- Amos included an account of a tough interview he had with Amaziah, high priest of Bethel, who ordered him to leave the country. Amaziah served under Jeroboam II, who reigned from 786 to 746 BCE.
- Amos likened the ‘day of Yahweh’ to a solar eclipse<sup>85</sup> and one occurred in 763<sup>86</sup>.

Modern scholarship views Amos as a substantial landowner from Tekoa with flocks of sheep and herds of cattle. He also seems to have owned a stand of a type of fig tree (*ficus sycomorus*) whose fruit was mainly used as cattle feed. If this is the case then, in the affluent times of the middle eighth century, he could probably have financed his preaching activities from the profits of his farm. Indeed, when challenged by Amaziah the priest of Israel, he said:

*I am not a professional prophet, nor a member of a prophet’s guild; but a livestock breeder and a cultivator of sycamore figs.<sup>87</sup>*

Willoughby, in his Anchor Bible Dictionary article on Amos, contends that there were a number of people who earned their living by being prophets - paid by the king or the temple. They were used to promulgate the official line to the people. Amos was stating that he was not one of these. He supported himself and responded only to Yahweh’s bidding.

Like most of the books of the prophets, the book of Amos combined his oracles with some biographical material about his life. The book was probably edited into almost its present form soon after the end of the prophet’s career, although some further editorial material may have been added over time - such as the book’s superscription, which reads rather like a librarian’s catalogue entry: -

“The words of Amos, one of the ‘shepherds’ of Tekoa; what he observed concerning Israel in the days of King Uzziah of Judah and in the days of King Jeroboam son of Joash of Israel, two years before the earthquake.”

Priests, prophets and kings can be described as ‘shepherds’ of their people. This appears to be the sense intended here since the other *noqed* in the bible was king Mesha of Moab.

The book began with a series of seven political predictions concerning the countries around Israel

*Thus says Yahweh:  
For three transgressions of Damascus, and for four,  
I will not revoke the punishment;  
because they have threshed Gilead with threshing sledges of iron.  
So I will send a fire on the house of Hazael,  
and it shall devour the strongholds of Ben-hadad.  
I will break the gate bars of Damascus,  
and cut off the inhabitants from the Valley of Aven,*

He was clearly an educated man. The formula “for n and for n+1” was a classical literary device of the

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<sup>85</sup> Amos 8:9

<sup>86</sup> Another solar eclipse that Amos may have seen occurred in 784 BCE; but this is a poor fit with the other data.

<sup>87</sup> Amos 7:14. A difficult passage to translate. The suggestion here stems from the view that the phrase literally translated as ‘son of a prophet’ relates to the institution of prophetic bands whose members would have regarded themselves as ‘sons’ of the prophet whose band it was. There is a good scholarly consensus behind this view (see B. Willoughby’s article on Amos in ABD). The author describes Amos’ livelihood using very rare words so there is room for some doubt as to what he actually did for a living.

era, familiar from Canaanite poetry. Three and four make seven – a number of special significance in Canaanite works.

The prophet attacked Gaza, Tyre, Edom, Moab, Ammon and Judah: Philistine Gaza because they sold prisoners as slaves to Edom; Tyre likewise; Edom because of their intermittent attacks on Israel and Judah; Moab because they desecrated the bones of the king of Edom; Ammon because of brutal attacks on Gilead which included ripping open pregnant women; and Judah because they did not keep Yahweh's commandments. And then he broke the pattern and added an eighth oracle: -

*Thus says Yahweh:  
For three transgressions of Israel, and for four,  
I will not revoke the punishment;  
because they sell the righteous for silver,  
and the needy for a pair of sandals —  
they trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth,  
and push the afflicted out of the way.  
Father and son go into the same girl,  
so that my holy name is profaned;  
They lay themselves down beside every altar on garments taken in pledge;  
In the house of their God they drink wine bought with the fines they impose.<sup>88</sup>*

These crimes are contraventions of the covenant code, which bans debt slavery, the perversion of justice, sexual abuse, and the abuse of authority. Amos continued with the word of Yahweh

*Yet...  
I brought you out of the land of Egypt  
and led you forty years in the wilderness to possess the land of the Amorite.  
And I brought up some of your children to be prophets  
and some of your youths to be Nazarites.  
Is it not so, people of Israel?*

*Yet you made the Nazarites drink wine,  
and commanded the prophets saying, "You shall not prophesy!"<sup>89</sup>*

Amos was one of the prophets who was commanded not to prophesy. The people of Israel may have felt that the political crimes of the nations justified the punishments proposed. But with regard to Israel herself, Amos was making clear that her social crimes demanded similar punishment.

*So I will press you down in your place  
- as a cart presses down when loaded.  
Flight shall perish from the swift,  
the strong will lose their power -  
the mighty their lives*

Amos differed from a modern day political pundit in that he saw all these events as springing from the will of Yahweh. If Israel was to be destroyed it was because it was Yahweh's will. They had broken his covenant - they whom Yahweh had selected out of all the peoples to be his people. As he wrote in Yahweh's voice at the start the next section of the book (chapters 3 to 6): -

*You only have I known of all the families of the earth;  
Therefore I will punish you for your iniquities.*

Amos expanded on the punishment of Israel. He made specific references to the winter and summer houses and the ivory palaces, all of which have been confirmed by archaeology. He describes a dinner amongst the wealthy in which the perfumed participants lie on beds of ivory or lounge on their couches,

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<sup>88</sup> Amos 2:6-8

<sup>89</sup> Amos 2:10-12 Amos seems to believe that the Amorites were the people dispossessed by the Israelites coming from Egypt. Other biblical authors considered the Israelites of the Exodus to be the descendants of Abraham, who was himself an Amorite, and therefore so were they! The terms Canaanite and Amorite are used interchangeably when referring to times after the end of the Amorite migration.

eating the best lamb and veal, and singing idle songs to improvised music whilst drinking wines from luxurious bowls.<sup>90</sup> He attacked the women of the capital:

*Hear this, you Bashan cows on mount Samaria,  
you who oppress the poor and crush the needy -  
who call to your husbands, "Bring something to drink"*

...

*The time is surely coming when they shall take you away with hooks...  
through breaches in the wall.*

These attacks were rejected by the moneyed class. They argued that wealth was not a sin: on the contrary, it was proof of Yahweh's approval. Did they not regularly perform the sacrifices expected and more than those required? But Amos declared that ritual sacrifice is less than worthless if the ritual was performed by someone who is leading an unjust life: -

*Come to Bethel and transgress  
and to Gilgal and multiply transgressions.  
Bring your sacrifices every morning,  
your tithes every three days;  
Bring a thank offering of leavened bread,  
and tell about your freewill offerings. Proclaim them!  
For this you love to do, people of Israel.*

Amos saw the history of Israel as a series of events in which Yahweh regularly chastised his disobedient children, yet they never learnt the intended lesson;

*I sent a plague upon you – like Egypt,  
I killed your young men with the sword,  
I carried away your horses  
and made the stench of your camp go up your nostrils  
Yet you did not return to me.*

*I have overthrown some of you, as Elohim overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah,  
and you were snatched from the fire like a firebrand.  
Yet you did not return to me<sup>91</sup>*

Amos said to the people of Israel that there would be no more of these minor chastisements; instead "Prepare to meet your god!". The meeting would be terrible; a day of darkness and judgement. Amos composed a lamentation, now found in Chapter 5 of his book:

*Virgin Israel is fallen to rise no more,  
forsaken on her land; with none to raise her up*  
...  
*Because you trample on the poor and take from them levies of grain,  
you have built houses of hewn stone, but you shall not live in them;  
you have planted pleasant vineyards, but you shall not drink their wine.  
For I know how many are your transgressions, and how great are your sins -  
you who afflict the righteous,  
who take a bribe, and push aside the needy in the gate.  
Therefore the prudent will keep silent in such a time; for it is an evil time.*  
  
*Seek good and not evil, that you may live;  
and so Yahweh, the God of armies, will be with you,  
just as you have said.*

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<sup>90</sup> Amos 6:4-6

<sup>91</sup> Amos 4:11. Although Amos is preaching in the Northern Kingdom, he was a southerner and uses Yahweh as the divine name, the name usually preferred in Judah, rather than Elohim, the name usually preferred in the North. Indeed, in the reference to Sodom and Gomorrah, Amos seems to distinguish between Elohim and the Yahweh.

*Hate evil and love good,  
Establish justice in the gate;  
It may be that Yahweh, the God of armies,  
will be gracious to the remnant of Joseph.*

He developed the idea that the day of Yahweh will be a day of terror: -

*Alas for you who desire the day of Yahweh!  
Why do you want the day of Yahweh?  
It is darkness, not light;  
as if someone flees from a lion and meets a bear,  
or goes into a house and rests a hand upon the wall  
- and is bitten by a snake*

And Amos rejected the belief of the rich and powerful in the efficacy of sacrifice as a basis for salvation. He told them of Yahweh's word:

*"I hate, I despise your festivals;  
the smell of your assemblies disgusts me.  
Though you offer me burnt and grain offerings, I will not accept them  
Nor will I look at the peace offerings of your obese animals.  
Take away the noise of your songs:  
For I will not hear the melody of your harps*

*But let justice run down like water,  
and righteousness as a mighty stream."*<sup>92</sup>

In the final section of the book (chapters 7 to 9), Amos described a series of visions he had – complete with their interpretation. The visions were poetically arranged in two pairs - each with the same meaning - and then a single climactic vision. The first pair of visions was of locusts eating up the grass and of a fire eating up the land. After this and each further vision Amos cried out to Yahweh to forgive; "*How can Jacob stand; he is so small?*" And Yahweh relented saying "*It shall not be.*" The second pair of visions is of a plumb line and a basket of summer fruit: and the meaning of each is that the end has come for the people of Israel; Yahweh will never again walk with them. And Yahweh will listen to no intercessions; for he says

*"The songs of the temple will be howls on that day.  
The dead bodies will be many, cast out in every place.  
Be silent!"*<sup>93</sup>

And then there is the final vision: -

*I saw Yahweh standing beside the altar, and he said:  
Strike the capitals until the thresholds shake,  
and shatter them on the heads of all the people;  
Those who are left I will kill with the sword;  
none of them shall flee away,  
not one of them shall escape."*<sup>94</sup>

No matter where they are, whether in exile, in captivity or even in Sheol or in heaven, Yahweh will gather them and fix his eye upon them, "*for harm and not for good*".

In our bible this series of visions is interrupted by a biographical detail; the interview between

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<sup>92</sup> Amos 5:21-24. Most modern translations have something like 'I do not delight in your solemn assemblies'(NRSV), but the authorised version has 'I will not smell in your solemn assemblies' which links with the next line concerning the rejection of the burnt offerings. The present paraphrase attempts to retain something of the poet's idea.

<sup>93</sup> Amos 8:3

<sup>94</sup> Amos 9:1

Amos and the priest Amaziah in which the priest ordered Amos to cease prophesying in Bethel, “for it is a king’s sanctuary and it is a temple of the kingdom.”<sup>95</sup> Amos refused to cease prophesying against Israel; instead he predicted that the king would be carried away to exile, his wife sold into prostitution, and his children put to death by the sword.

But king Jeroboam probably died of old age after a reign over a prosperous Israel for forty years. He was succeeded by his son Zechariah, who would be assassinated. But what happened to Amos? Did he return to Judah? Nothing is known, but there is one legend that he was tortured by Amaziah the priest and then killed by his son, and another that he was executed by Uzziah, king of Judah.<sup>96</sup>

The last few verses of the book, which contain a prophecy of restoration finishing with a promise that the Israelites shall never again be removed from the land, are generally felt to be late exilic additions, perhaps stimulated by the Persian promise to return the Judean exiles in Babylon to their land. Meanwhile, the original text ended with the words

*I will shake the house of Israel from among all the nations as one shakes a sieve,  
but not one pebble shall fall to the ground.  
All the sinners of my people shall die by the sword -  
all who say, “Evil shall not overtake or meet us.”*<sup>97</sup>

### **Proverbs: The Numericals**

Amos made use of numerical sayings in his prophecy, a form that also finds expression in a small group of proverbs now to be found in the appendix of miscellaneous material attached to the end of today’s Book of Proverbs. Can the wise learn from their study? Here are four sayings that leave no trace:

*Three things are too wonderful for me;  
four I do not understand.  
The way of an eagle in the sky,  
the way of a snake on a rock,  
the way of a ship on the high seas,  
and the way of a man with a girl.*<sup>98</sup>

Other examples are four things that are never satisfied (Sheol, the barren womb, the parched land and fire), four changed circumstances (a servant who becomes king, a fool who is full of food, an unloved woman who marries and a maid who succeeds her mistress) and four strutting movers (a lion, a cock, a goat and a king). These sayings are difficult to date; all that can be said is that they used a form that was fashionable in 8<sup>th</sup> century Israel, but numerical sayings were also used in Job and, much later, in Ecclesiastes and Psalm 62.

### **The Return of the Empires (745 – 732)**

In 745, a civil war in Assyria unseated the old dynasty and brought Tiglath-Pileser III, nicknamed ‘Pul’ to the throne. Pul proved to be an organisational and military genius. With his accession the long years of constant struggles against the Arameans and others came to an end. A new era was launched – an era that Assyria would dominate. At the start of his reign, his country was nearly encircled by his northern neighbour, the kingdom of Ararat, which then occupied the area broadly taken up today by the Kurdish people. In two years he defeated this northern foe, extracted tribute from the Aramean states on his south-western borders, and began to work further south. Pul had a three-stage approach to achieving dominance. If a country voluntarily submitted, then the ruler could remain in power provided an adequate tribute was paid; if the ruler resisted then a military conquest would ensure compliance; if however there was a rebellion, then Assyria would take over governmental control, deport a significant part of the population and replace them with exiles from elsewhere in its empire.

In Egypt, too, a new power was on the move. From 800 onwards the kingdom of Kush (modern Sudan) had been extending its influence northwards. These people had recently been converted to the worship of Amun. The major centre for this religion had for centuries been the ancient metropolis of Thebes – today’s Luxor, well South of the Delta. Thebes held therefore a great attraction to the leaders

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<sup>95</sup> Amos 7:10-17 deals with this episode.

<sup>96</sup> Willoughby: Book of Amos: ABD

<sup>97</sup> Amos 9: 9-10

<sup>98</sup> Proverbs 30:18-19

of Kush. By 747, the Kushite leader, Pianky, had secured the Sudan and Upper Egypt; by 735 Thebes was in his power and he was looking north to the Delta.

The Emperors were back. For about four centuries the absence of strong powers in Mesopotamia and Egypt had created conditions in which the small countries of the Levant could come into being and flourish. These times were now over. But it was by no means clear whether Egypt or Mesopotamia would prove the more dominant. The clash between the Assyrians and the Egyptian 25<sup>th</sup> dynasty was still some way in the future, but by 745 the shape of the future struggle was becoming apparent.

In Israel, the reign of the old and successful Jeroboam II had come to an end in 747 after nearly forty years. He was succeeded briefly by his son Zechariah, but his assassination six months later brought Jehu's dynasty to an end. It had lasted for a century. The assassination was part of a putsch that brought Shallum to the throne. Shallum was from Jabesh, probably the town of that name in Gilead, so this may have been a revolt of the Trans-Jordanian tribes against western dominance. Hosea the prophet named his first son in reference to this putsch, for he believed that Yahweh told him to name the child 'Jezre'el' "*for in a little while I will punish the house of Jehu for the blood of Jezre'el*".

The long successful reign of Jeroboam had brought great wealth to the land, but it was concentrated in the hands of a few. These exploited their control of the justice system to further enhance their wealth and power; they practised debt slavery – buying and selling the needy; and they built altars to foreign gods. So said the prophets, and archaeology confirms the picture they painted. Hosea, like Amos, described how Yahweh would punish 'a trader, in whose hands are false balances, who loves to oppress' and who is so arrogant in his ability to manipulate the justice system that he says, "*I am rich, I have gained wealth for myself. In all of my business, no offence has been found in me that would be a sin.*"<sup>99</sup> Perhaps Shallum's revolution also fed on a sense of social injustice.

Shallum was himself assassinated in a counter-revolution organised by Menahem – probably an army commander under Jeroboam<sup>100</sup>. It is possible that Menahem bought in some help from the Assyrians in support of his bid for power, for the later biblical record stated that Menahem paid the Assyrians a heavy fee to 'help him confirm his hold of royal power'<sup>101</sup>. Allegedly, some 60,000 residents of Menahem's kingdom were taxed: they each handed over 50 shekels of silver (just over half a kilogram) in order to meet the bill. Assyrian annals confirm receipt of a substantial payment<sup>102</sup>. If Shallum's revolution sprung in part from the oppression of the poor, the rich seem to have been prepared to pay to reverse it.

However he came to the throne, Menahem remained in power for ten years (ca. 746 – 737 BCE). Were the taxpayers content with the payments needed to put down Shallum's revolt and sustain Menahem's rule? Were the people content with Menahem's dependency on Assyria? Was Shallum's origin in Gilead evidence of discontent in the region east of the Jordan? Was it evidence of a revolt against the narrow group that controlled the country and its wealth, and who may have provided the money to put the revolt down?

In 738, Hamath (240 kms north of Damascus) lost its coastal territory and the northern part of the Orontes to the Assyrians. As it became clear that Pul's objective was the conquest of all the states between Assyria and Egypt, Damascus and Israel became concerned. Some Israelites sought safety by moving south. Menahem of Israel and Rezin of Damascus chose to buy off the threat with tribute.

In 737, Menahem was succeeded by his son Pekahiah, but he was assassinated just two years later by men from Gilead. The new king, Pekah, was a close associate of the fallen king and may even have taken his name. Was the assassination provoked by Pekahiah's pro-Assyrian policies and the taxation needed to support the tribute? Was the fact that both Shallum and Pekah came from Gilead a coincidence? Or was it a symptom of a fault-line in the kingdom of Israel? Some believe that the territory of Ephraim had separated from Israel and had been ruled as a separate entity by Pekah since 752<sup>103</sup>. Evidence for this comes from 2 Kings 15:27 which gives Pekah's reign as lasting 20 years, a fact which is impossible to reconcile with other regnal data if all twenty years of his reign were spent on Israel's throne. Hoshea the prophet gives some support for the separation of the old tribal area of Ephraim from the rest of Israel when he refers to Ephraim and Israel as separate entities during these troubled times:-

*I know Ephraim; Israel is not hidden from me:  
for now, Ephraim, you have turned to prostitution, and Israel is defiled.  
Their deeds do not permit them to return to their god,*

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<sup>99</sup> Hosea 12:7-8

<sup>100</sup> Josephus. Antiquities; book 9; chapter 11.

<sup>101</sup> 2 Kings 15:19

<sup>102</sup> ANET p 283

<sup>103</sup> D N Freedman, Francis Andersen, Theile and others. See AB commentary on Hosea.

*for the spirit of prostitution is within them; they have not known Yahweh.  
The arrogance of Israel testifies to its face:  
Both Israel and Ephraim stumble in in their iniquity:  
And Judah stumbles along with them.*<sup>104</sup>

If this is a valid understanding, then the instability of the state of Israel is clear and Pekah's exploitation of the situation understandable. Three of Israel's kings had died by assassination within the space of a little over ten years.

Damascus under Rezin and a re-united Israel under Pekah, those '*smouldering stumps of firebrands*' as Isaiah called them, attempted to create a new anti-Assyrian alliance similar to the one those countries had led in the previous century. Gaza, Ashkelon and Tyre joined in, but Judah refused. Israel and Damascus invaded Judah in an attempt to change Judean policy by replacing Ahaz with a puppet king of their choice. Ahaz appealed to Assyria for help.

Pul was probably already on the move. He swiftly ravaged Phoenicia enforcing a partial deportation of Tyre's population and extracting tribute. This may have been sufficient to take the pressure off Judah, for Israel and Damascus now had more direct concerns. Pul dealt with the alliance members in accordance with his own requirements. When he took Naphali from Israel, the route to Philistia opened and Gaza and Ashkelon collapsed. When Damascus fell after a two-year siege, it was fairly clear that Israel would be next. Hosea predicted that Yahweh would make them live in tents again, as they had done as slaves in Egypt.

### **Hosea (approx. 750-720)**

Hosea the prophet was the only writing prophet to be a northerner born and bred. The superscription provided by a later Judean editor said he was active during the reign of king Jeroboam II of Israel and continued until the reign of king Hezekiah of Judah. His career probably overlapped that of both Amos and Isaiah and lasted from around 750 till about 720 BCE.

Hosea's marriage, whether by chance or by his deliberate choice, became a lived parable for the relationship between Israel and Yahweh. As Hosea saw Israel as faithless and wanton, so he felt Yahweh was calling him to:

*'Go, love a woman who has a lover and is an adulteress, just as Yahweh loves the people of Israel, though they turn to other gods and love raisin cakes'*<sup>105</sup>

The story of Hosea's life and marriage can be deduced from his writings, although there are those who hold that the story was not real but rather a piece of street theatre that Hosea used to dramatize his message. There is no way to know.

But if it was not theatre, it seems he had an adulterous wife, Gomer the daughter of Diblain. He may have discovered her adultery by the time of the birth of her third child, whom he called *lo-ammi*, 'not-my-people'. Perhaps she left him, or perhaps he divorced her. Later, after he had received his calling from Yahweh, he found her again, now a slave, and bought her '*for 15 shekels of silver, a homer of barley and a measure of wine*'<sup>106</sup> and brought her home. She had three children, the first of whom Hosea named *Jezre-el*, as a symbol that God would punish the house of Jehu for the blood they shed in the valley of Jezre'el.<sup>107</sup> The second child he named, '*Not-Pitied*' – although he sometimes shortened that and '*Not-my-people*'s name by omitting the '*Not!*' The phrase '*My People*' is how Yahweh is often held to have described the people of Israel. Hosea explained why Yahweh wanted him to use these particular names. Of '*lo-ammi*', he says:

*Call his name 'not-my-people': for you are not my people, and 'I am' is not yours'*.<sup>108</sup>

'God' is often added to this sentence in translation thus making it 'I am not your god', but the word is not in the Hebrew text. If that is not a scribal error, then the original could have been a reference

<sup>104</sup> Hosea 5:3-5. The Hebrew requires the 'both ...and...' formulation; often ignored in the translations.

<sup>105</sup> Hosea 3:1 'Raisin cakes' may be a reference to an aphrodisiac used as part of fertility ceremonies.

<sup>106</sup> Hosea 3:2

<sup>107</sup> Jehu's bloody coup of 842 initiated a dynasty which ended when Shallum assassinated Zechariah in 747. 'Shallum' means 'retribution', so this may have been a name by which he came to be known rather than his real name.

<sup>108</sup> Hosea 1:9

to the enigmatic statement attributed to Elohim in the northern Epic – “I am who I am”.<sup>109</sup>

Hosea’s message is one of redemption derived from the steadfast love of God, which he expressed with great power using the family parable. There is a poem that seems to be addressed to his children but may have been truly intended for the children of Israel – note the plurals in the first line.<sup>110</sup>

*Speak to your brothers, ‘Pitied’,  
and to your sisters, ‘My-People’.  
Plead with your mother -  
for she is not my wife, and I am not her husband -  
plead that she put away her whoring from her face,  
and her adultery from between her breasts,  
or I will strip her naked  
and expose her as in the day she was born.  
I will make her like a wilderness,  
and turn her into a parched land,  
and kill her with thirst.*

*Upon her children also I will have ‘no pity’,  
because they are the children of adultery.  
For their mother has played the whore;  
she who conceived them has acted shamefully.  
For she said, “I will go after my lovers; they give me my bread and my water,  
my wool and my flax, my oil and my drink.”*

Hosea was attacking the fertility practices of some cults that believed that it was the love making of the gods that produced fertility on earth (wool, flax, oil and wine) – a common idea in Egyptian religion. The cults may have used the techniques of sympathetic magic, in which temple prostitutes, both men and women, acted out the love making of the gods, in order to promote that fertility. (It is even possible that Gomer was such a temple prostitute.)<sup>111</sup> But Hosea proclaims that it was truly Yahweh who gave Israel its wealth.

*She did not know that it was I who gave her the grain, the wine, and the oil,  
who lavished upon her the silver and gold that they used for Baal.  
So I will take back my grain in its time, and my wine in its season;  
and I will take away my wool and my flax, ...  
I will put an end to all her laughter,  
her festivals, her new moons, her Sabbaths, and all her appointed feasts.  
I will lay waste her vines and her fig trees,  
of which she said, “These are my pay, which my lovers have given me.”  
I will make them a forest, and the wild animals shall devour them.*

*I will punish her for the festival days of the Baals, when she offered incense to them  
and decked herself with her rings and jewellery and went after her lovers,  
And forgot me, says Yahweh.*

But Yahweh forgives

*Therefore, I will woo her now;  
I will bring her into the wilderness and speak to her heart.  
From there I will give her vineyards,  
and make the valley of trouble into a door of hope.*

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<sup>109</sup> The passage in Exodus 3:14 which includes the line ‘I am who I am’ is held to be part of the northern Elohist Epic. The nature of this reference, if that is what it is, thus suggests that the story, at least in oral form, preceded Hosea’s reference to it.

<sup>110</sup> Translators often correct these to the singular, but there is no reason to suppose that the Hebrew text is in error. ‘Not-pitied’ was the sister of Jezre’el and ‘Not-my-people’ – her brothers.

<sup>111</sup> It is also possible that the strong words of condemnation of homosexuality expressed by the Yahwist temple priesthood in Leviticus were provoked in part by the contemporary practise of homosexual prostitution in some places of worship.

*There she shall respond as in the days of her youth,  
as at the time when she came out of the land of Egypt.  
On that day, says Yahweh, you will call me, "my husband,"  
and no longer will you call me, "my master."<sup>112</sup>*

In the last line, Hosea is making a complex pun on the word 'Baal', which, as well as being the normal way of referring to the Canaanite storm-god, also means both 'husband' and 'master'. The phrase 'bring her into the wilderness' refers to a tradition of courtship, in which the newly married groom took his bride away from the tribal tents and the couple spent time together in the wilderness. The tribe would put out food for them to find – honey, milk and bread. It is still the custom among some Bedouin to this day.

Hosea attacked the proliferation of altars. Too many were built for the wrong reason - with 'a false heart' to false gods. The pillars in what follows are probably references to Asherah poles.

*Israel is a luxuriant vine that yields its fruit.  
The more his fruit increased, the more altars he built;  
as his country improved, he improved his pillars.  
Their heart is false;  
now they must bear their guilt.  
Yahweh will break down their altars,  
and destroy their pillars<sup>113</sup>*

Hosea disapproved of ritualistic sacrifice unaccompanied by a proper obedience to the will of God. Jesus of Nazareth, 8 centuries later, was fond of Hosea's emphasis on the inner intent of the heart; Mathew records Jesus sending his listeners to study Hosea on two occasions (9:13 & 12:7). The verse he wanted them to think about was this:

*I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice,  
The knowledge of God, rather than burnt offerings.<sup>114</sup>*

Like Amos, Hosea accused the people of "swearing, lying, murder, stealing and adultery". He accused the priests of a lack of the knowledge of God and of his laws; he accused them of "feeding on the sin of the people - of being greedy for their iniquity"<sup>115</sup> But it was idolatrous worship and ritual prostitution that especially offended:

*Wine and new wine take away the understanding.  
My people consult a piece of wood, and their divining rod gives them oracles.  
...  
They sacrifice on the tops of the mountains, and make offerings upon the hills,  
under oak, poplar, and terebinth, because their shade is good.  
...  
I will not punish your daughters when they play the whore,  
nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery;  
for the men themselves go aside with whores,  
and sacrifice with temple prostitutes;  
thus a people without understanding comes to ruin.  
...  
When their drinking is ended, they indulge in sexual orgies;  
they love lewdness ...  
but they shall be ashamed because of their sacrifices.<sup>116</sup>*

Hosea often depicts Yahweh as hurt by Israel's disobedience. He imagined Yahweh's anguished

<sup>112</sup> Hosea chapter 2. The usual English renderings of this passage leave the word for 'master' as the untranslated 'Baal'. Hosea no doubt intended the double meaning of 'husband' and 'master'. In this passage, the children's names have been translated, since Hosea intended the meaning of these names to be understood.

<sup>113</sup> Hosea 10: 1-2

<sup>114</sup> Hosea 6:6

<sup>115</sup> Hosea 2-9

<sup>116</sup> Hosea 4:11-19

love as a father's love for a wayward child. The event that Hosea foresaw is probably the punishment that Assyria would meet out to Israel when king Pekah decided to withhold the tribute money and instead to organise an anti-Assyrian league. But for the prophet Hosea, Israel was not to be punished by Assyria for a political error, but rather by Yahweh for their failure to return to him.

*When Israel was a child, I loved him,  
and out of Egypt I called my son.  
The more I called them,  
the more they went from me;  
they kept sacrificing to the Baals,  
and offering incense to idols.*

*Yet it was I who taught Ephraim to walk.  
I took them up in my arms;  
but they did not know that I healed them.  
I led them with cords of human kindness,  
with bands of love.  
I was to them like those who lift infants to their cheeks.  
I bent down to them and fed them.*

*They shall return to the land of Egypt,  
and Assyria shall be their king,  
because they have refused to return to me.*

...  
*How can I give you up, Ephraim?  
How can I hand you over, O Israel?*

...  
*My heart recoils within me;  
my compassion grows warm and tender<sup>117</sup>.*

### **The Fate of Israel (732-722)**

732, the year that Damascus fell, saw an uprising in Israel against Pekah, the king whose adventurism might have been thought by some of his subjects to have brought the Assyrians down on them. But there may also have been pro-Assyrian Israelites, for the Assyrian record of Pekah's demise states that the people of Israel "*overthrew their king Pekah and I placed Hoshea as king over them.*" Hoshea (not the prophet) may have organised the assassination of Pekah, but it seems he had Assyrian support. Under king Hoshea, Israel once more became a tribute-paying vassal. But it was a much-reduced state. Pul annexed Galilee and Trans-Jordan reducing the state to its capital and the surrounding area. Nevertheless, he gave some assistance to Hosea when he was faced with a challenge from Gilead.

Three times in a decade, Assyria had been invited to involve herself in the affairs of Israel: once by Menahem to put down the revolt of the Gileadean Shallum; once by Judah's Ahaz to protect Judah against Israelite pressure, and finally by Hoshea to put down another pretender from Gilead. No wonder the prophet Hosea calls Gilead a '*city of evil doers, foot-tracked with blood*'<sup>118</sup>

Having destroyed the anti-Assyrian alliance, and having secured his route to Egypt, Pul concentrated his efforts temporarily elsewhere. In 729 he annexed Babylonia.

Meanwhile in Egypt, Pianky was continuing to extend his power northwards. In 735 he had his sister appointed as a co-regent of Thebes. In the Delta, a leader called Tefnakht (727-720) subjugated the whole of the area and tactically acknowledged Pianky as the dominant ruler. Tefnakht may have been strong enough to retain power without Pianky's sponsorship; if so, the relationship must have suited both men – for the time being. The dominance of these two men meant that Egypt was no longer a series of weak disunited states. Leaders had now come to power who looked as if they were able to re-establish the old Upper and Lower Egyptian Kingdoms

The Assyrians may have been mistaken if they thought that king Hoshea was their man and Samaria a secure vassal under his kingship. When in 727, Pul died, Hoshea decided to exploit the new situation and suspended tribute payments, preferring instead to look for protection to 'king So of Egypt' - possibly the king of Sais, Tefnakht. Hosea the prophet commented that Israel was like '*a silly dove*

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<sup>117</sup> Hosea 11: 1-8

<sup>118</sup> Hosea 6:8

*without heart; they call to Egypt; they go to Assyria*<sup>119</sup>. The irony of Israel considering returning to Egypt was not lost on the prophet, who saw the indecision as disastrous and the involvement of Egypt as futile. “*They shall not remain in Yahweh’s land; Ephraim shall return to Egypt, and they shall eat unclean in Assyria*”, he wrote, “*Egypt shall gather them up, Memphis shall bury them; nettles shall possess their treasures; thorns their tents*”<sup>120</sup>

The new Assyrian leader, Shalmaneser V was not as pre-occupied by other matters as Hoshea might have hoped. Having secured his power base at home, Shalmaneser launched a punitive expedition against Israel in 725 BCE. “*They shall not return to Egypt; the Assyrian shall be their king*”<sup>121</sup>, commented the prophet. Damascus fell in 732. Babylonia was captured in 729. In 725 the Assyrians marched to punish erring Israel. The anxieties of the times may have been expressed in Northern prayers such as psalm 80:

*Shepherd of Israel, give ear, lead Joseph like a flock  
You who dwell between the cherubim, shine forth  
Before Ephraim, Benjamin and Manasseh  
Stir up your strength and come and save us*

*Restore us, O God;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved.*

*Yahweh, God of Armies,  
how long will you be angry with your people’s prayers?  
You have fed them with the bread of tears,  
and given them tears to drink in full measure.  
You make us the scorn of our neighbours;  
our enemies laugh among themselves.*

*Restore us, O God of Armies;  
let your face shine, that we may be saved*<sup>122</sup>.

But Israel would not be saved.

It was, however, Shalmaneser’s successor, Sargon II who had to finish the job of punishing Israel for their rebellion. After a prolonged siege, the city of Samaria fell in 722 BCE. According to the rather precise Assyrian records, between 27,280 and 27,290 people were exiled. The archaeological evidence shows devastation in Shechem, Tirzah and Samaria.

Some Israelites remained where they were and accepted Assyrian administration. The Assyrians brought in people from Babylonia, Elam and the ex-Aramean territories in order to further strengthen their control. (The policy of exchanging the populations of conquered territories was a standard Assyrian technique. When Sargon had to deal with the subjugation of the Medes (whose capital was located where Hamadan now is, in the Zagros Mountains of northern Iran) he imported people from the Land of Hatti (Syria, Phoenicia and Israel) to replace the deportees<sup>123</sup>. There is a small Jewish community in Hamadan to this day.)

Israel was finished; from now on it would be a province of a foreign power, usually called after its major town, Samaria. But it would be wrong to consider it as an empty land from which the worship of Yahweh had been excluded. And Assyrian rule was not going to last forever.

Many people fled the defeated land and became refugees in Egypt and Judah; the population of Jerusalem doubled or trebled to around 25,000<sup>124</sup> and there were dozens of new settlements in the hills. The refugees may have brought with them their own traditions including their own account of their origins and their religious heritage. Maybe it was already written; maybe they wrote it shortly after their arrival; maybe it was partly written before the destruction of Israel, but completed in the light of their

<sup>119</sup> Hosea 7:11

<sup>120</sup> Hosea 9:3-6

<sup>121</sup> Hosea 11:5

<sup>122</sup> Psalm 80:3-7. Other possible psalms from this time are psalm 44 and psalm 77 vv 1-16.

<sup>123</sup> Yamuchi, E M (1990); ‘Persia and the Bible’; p 48. Hamadan was known by its ancient name of Ecbatana at the time. The deportees came from the land of ‘the Hatti’ which is now recognised to mean the Levant – Syria, Phoenicia, Israel, Judah and the adjacent area.

<sup>124</sup> Rosenbaum, Jonathan. ‘Hezekiah’; ABD (1992, 1997)

experiences as refugees. The possible dates of the composition of this Epic, together with its style and content are the topics for the next chapter.