

ISRAEL FROM
MONARCHY TO EXILE

THIS IS A PLACEHOLDER. IF YOU WANT TO HAVE AN ACTUAL STATEMENT HERE, YOU HAVE
TO MAKE SOME CHOICES USING BOOK'S METADATA MODAL.

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ISRAEL FROM MONARCHY TO
EXILE

Historical Perspective

By

Janet Iko Salubuyiii

First published in 2022 © Janet Iko Salubuyi ISBN: 978-978-991-115-8

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Supported by:

Tertiary Education Trust Fund

6, Zambezi Crescent, Off Aguiyi Ironsi Street

Maitama, Abuja, Nigeria.

Published by:

Academic Publishing Centre,

Federal University of Technology, Minna,

Nigeria.

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DEDICATION

To Almighty God who taught me the value of scholarship and the imperative
of a rich, self-actualizing, cultural and educational experience.

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FOREWORD

Every tribe or race has its history. Palestine is not an exception, it is a home to many nations, out of which is Israel. Thanks to Christianity, a religion which makes the Protestant Bible available in nearly every human race and tongue. The Protestant Bible is into two parts: Old and New Testaments. The terms Old and New Testaments originated from the early Christians, precisely first century Christians, who referred to the Hebrew Bible as the Old Covenant and their own Christian writings as the New Covenant. Dr. Janet Salubuyi in this eight chapters book has presented perhaps, the history of Israel as the most popular history in the world in a lucid original apt and simple language. This book is special, and a must read for every Christian religious teacher and students across levels and curricular, every mother with her little congregation in her home, the missionaries, general readers and of course every Christian.

Having heard and read Dr. Janet Salubuyi's book, I can hear her voice as it comes off the pages, re-echo that when the biblical characters encountered God and wrote down their responses to the divine encounters, such written document is considered to be inspired. Inspiration in this context does not mean that God dictates the actual words to the writers. Rather, it means that God was the initiator but man was the writer. This book sets the art of documentation of the history of Israel, its people, and the canonization of Hebrew Bible as a historical process in a wonderful perspective. Welcome to the story of Israel from monarchy to exile as presented in the Nebiim or the Prophets, and as re-told by this renowned author, Janet Salubuyi (PhD), from an African historical scholarly perspective.

It is a joy to recommend a book that is such a delight to read.

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PREFACE

The history of Israelites began with the call of Abraham and Abrahamic covenant in which Isaac and Jacob were inclusive, and which informs the biblical reference to God as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Jacob's name became Israel and from Israel came the twelve sons which later became the twelve tribes of Israel. Under the leadership of Moses, God rescued the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and brought them into the wilderness, from where (after 40 years) they were given the land of Canaan as an everlasting possession.

Having gained Canaan land, and living in peace, the Israelites began to sin against God. As punishment for their sins, they were usually subjugated by the remnants of Canaanites who made their existence unbearable for some time. Upon realisation of her sins, Israel would repent and call on God for deliverance. Out of pity, God, would raise up Judges to deliver them. After deliverance and restoration of peace, they would begin to sin against God even more than ever before. This was Israelites' pattern of existence until the time of Samuel, under whom they demanded for a king who would rule them. This demand paved the way for the institution of monarchy in Israel. The story of Israel from the period when she gained a king to the time when she went into exiles is what the author intends to narrate in the eight chapters of this book. In the first chapter of the book, the author, explains the terms monarchy and prophet, as well as the characteristics of the prophets of Israel. The religion of the Canaanites (Baalism), and its influences on the religion of Israel (Yahwism) were also examined. In chapter two of the book, the author presents the Judges of Israel, namely: Eli and his sons (Hophni and Phinehas); and Samuel and his sons, (Joel and Abiah). The set of circumstances that finally served to unite the Israelite tribes were expounded.

The institution of monarchy was the subject matter of chapter three. Here, the author identifies Samuel as the king maker. Moreover, the advantages and disadvantages of theocracy and monarchy were elucidated. The kings of the United Kingdom of Israel, namely Saul, David and Solomon, were properly identified in chapter four. Their individual strengths and weaknesses as well

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as their contributions to the development of the United Kingdom of Israel were revealed in this chapter.

Historians often refer to the Northern kingdom (Ten Tribes) of Israel as kingdom of Israel or simply as Israel, or as the 'kingdom of Samaria', whereas the Southern kingdom of Israel (with Two Tribes) is called kingdom of Judah or simply Judah. Israel went into Assyrian exile before the Babylonian captivity of Judah; hence, the stories of the nineteen kings of Israel is taken up first but divided into two chapters, that is, chapters five

and six.

In chapter five, the achievements and failures of kings Jeroboam, Nadah, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, Joram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, and Joash were explained together with the prophetic roles of Elijah, and Elisha in the history and religion of Israel. In chapter six, the stories of the remaining kings of Israel, specifically Jeroboam II, Zachariah, Shallum, Menhahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hosea, and their achievements and failures were presented together with the roles of prophets such as Amos and Hosea in Israel. The factors that led to the fall and Assyrian captivity of Israel were clarified.

Similarly, the stories of the twenty kings of the southern kingdom called Judah were told in two chapters, specifically chapters seven and eight. In chapter seven, the achievements and failures of kings Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, Ahaziah, Queen Athaliah, Joash, Amaziah, Uzziah, Jotham, and Ahaz were expounded. In Chapter eight, the successes and failures of kings Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakin, Jehoichin and Zedekiah were revealed together with roles of Isaiah and Jeremiah in Judah. The factors that eventually led to the Babylonian captivity of Judah were demonstrated in this chapter, which closes with the contributions of Ezekiel among the Jews in Babylon. In narrating these stories, the author, for the sake of convenience, adopts pedagogical approach in which the objective of each chapter is first specified, followed by pre-test, content of the chapter, summary, post-test and citations of references. Whatever the academic rigor invested in a book such as this, it may not be free from some errors either of omission or commission. In view of this, any error found in this book is therefore, the sole responsibility of the author. With prayer and best wishes, the book is sent forth to the readers, especially students of religious studies in general and Christian religious education in particular.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Objective

At the end of this introductory chapter, readers are expected to be able to explain the terms monarchy and prophet, as well as the characteristics of the prophets of Israel. They should understand and be able to discuss the religion of the Canaanites (Baalism), and its influences on the religion of Israel (Yahwism).

Pre-test

1. What is monarchy?
2. Describe the religion of the Canaanites.
3. Who is a prophet?
4. What were the characteristics that all great prophets of Israel share?

Content

Monarchy

Monarchy is a political system based on a single person's full sovereignty or control. The phrase refers to states in which the supreme authority is vested in a monarch, or an individual ruler who serves as the head of state and is elected by hereditary succession. This definition shows that a monarch is a ruler, who2Israel: Monarchy to

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is a king, queen or emperor. Therefore, a monarch is a ruler, just as we have them in our contemporary society today. The Queen of Britain is a monarch; the Emir of Kano, the Emir of Bida, the Oni of Ife and the Alafin of Oyo are all monarchs or rulers (Ajayi, 2012).

Monarchy is a system of government by a king or a queen. A country that is ruled by a king or queen is said to be practicing monarchical system of government. Today, there are several constitutional monarchies in Africa and Europe. In the days of yore, monarchy held sway in different societies. The king or monarch ruled through his agents such as the security forces, who took order from him. The idea of monarchy was initially anathematic to true Israelites, particularly right from the settlement in Canaan (Judges 8:22-28). Through his charismatic representatives, Yahweh ruled and saved people (Lisdon, 2014).

Israel was heading towards embarrassing monarchy as against theocracy, being practiced for centuries. Many of them wanted to be ruled by human kings, but still be faithful to Yahweh. This was in a dissonance with their professed faith, their ruler,

their saviour who delivered them right from their Exodus from Egypt.

Israelites' demand for a king in I Sam. 8-12 was out of the fact the Philistines constituted a potential threat to the region. Still fresh in the memory of the Israelites were the seizure of the Ark of Covenant by the Philistines in the war and the death of the two sons of Eli. Israel therefore, demanded for a king on the ground that Samuel had grown old and was more of a spiritual leader and less of a sound and great military leader to effectively lead the people in a battle.³ Historical Perspective Israel: Monarchy to Exile Moreover, the fact that Samuel's sons had deviated from their father's ways (codes of conducts) exacerbated the drive to demand for a new king (Barne, 2020). Israel was in dire need of a kind. It was when God was the leading light in the rulership of the country. In fact, Israel was desperately in need of a king the people could confide in, had a physical touch with, see him and talk to him. They never wanted an invisible king like God. They recalled when they had monarchs ruling over them. They therefore, detested theocracy which the period when they were ruled by human agent through under the control of God. The human agents were Moses, Judges, Joshua, Abraham and Isaac. Abraham represented, as it were, the father of faith; he came and was no more. Joshua who was a great solicitor, distributed the land to Jews who came to Canaan land, but the later went into oblivion. Moses also came to the scene; he played the onerous roles assigned to him and later eclipsed. The Judges also "vanished" after they had been appointed leaders. This shows that Israel had no monarchical system that would have served as the basis for their rulership like the other nations. That was why they demanded for a king.

The Religion of the Canaanites

The Canaanites were the original owners of the land Israel was to occupy. They were great farmers and had well developed culture before the Israelites came to occupy the land. During this period, the Jews were wanderers; they had left Egypt and had been in wilderness, settled in Canaan and bound to God under the Sinaitic law/covenant to serve only one God. The Canaanites had their own religions centred on a deity called Baal. The worship of the Baal includes the belief that Baal was a male deity with a female counterpart (goddess); and that the⁴ Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective

fertility of the soil was the result of sexual relation between the Baal and the goddess. This belief also informed the practice of prostitution among male and female worshippers in the temple of Baal. In other words, the immoral activities of prostitutions were supposed to be a copy of what took place between Baal and his goddess (Dickson, 1981).

The Hebrew Bible stands as a best source of informational detail pertaining to the religious practices of early Israel.

In pre-monarchical Israel, there was a variety of forms of Baalism. Different understanding of Yahweh also produced different forms of Yahwism such that Yahweh became a “god” instead of God of Israel. In fact, there was no central authority for orthodoxy, no committee of priests or theologians to decide which theology was correct or heretical. There was no agency or institution for religious matters. What obtained then was the proliferation of religious practices which varied from locations to locations. Moreover, religious practices took a family dimension. There was no external authority that moderated religious practices (Coote, 2017).

Introduced to Israel by a group that joined Israel was a warrior god who fought for his people; and due to its assumed credibility and functionality, Yahweh worship gained wider recognition and spread in Israel. Yahweh was worshipped alongside with El, a high god of the Canaanites. This confirmed therefore; that the people of early Israel practiced monotheism and henotheism. With their religious belief known as polytheistic, families focused greatly on the worship of ancestral gods and goddesses. They, in the main, worship other deities such as Asharte, EL, Ashera, Anat, Baal in temples and high places of worship. While the supreme god of Canaanites was EL, other functional god of the land was Baal. In certain religious festival,⁵ Historical

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the king played significant roles, and was therefore, revered.

The culture of Canaan affected many lives, particularly of the Jews. For example, the son of Saul was named Ishbaal, implying the “man of Baal”. These people never remembered what was contained in the book of Exodus 23:34 “you shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them nor do according to their works, but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillar” (Flanagan, 2009). The land of Canaan’s broken geography tends to breed dozens of different

variants of Baalism, each with its own set of practices, content, and understanding that varies from family to family, village to village, and region to area. There was no one version of Baalism (Corollen, 2014).

The worship of Yahweh as a warrior god who fought for the humbler classes of society and for his people was introduced to Israel by one or several of the groups that joined Israel.

The popularity of Yahweh worship spread in Israel due to its functionality. Yahweh did not take the place of El, the Canaanite high god, but was worshipped alongside him. Thus, early Israel did practice monotheism, alongside with henotheism.

The religious beliefs of the Canaanites were polytheistic, with households worshiping ancestral household gods and goddesses while honoring prominent deities like as El, Ashera, Baal, Anat, and Asharte at numerous public temples and high sites. The main functional god of the land was Baal, but the supreme god was El. Canaanites kings also played an important role especially in certain religious festivals and ceremonies, and may have been revered as gods. Canaanites' religion was well developed along the agricultural lines.

This kind of religion eventually affected the lives of the Jews6Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective

who copied, intermarried and embraced the culture of Canaan. For instance, Saul named one of his sons, Ishbaal, meaning 'man of Baal'. They forgot the instruction given to them in the book of Exodus 23:24, which states that "you shall not bow down to their gods, nor serve them, nor do according to their works, but you shall utterly overthrow them and completely break down their sacred pillar".

This strange Canaanites religion, with its immorality and human sacrifices, had significant negative effect on the worship of Yahweh, the God of Israel. As Israel learnt to cultivate the soil in the land of Canaan, they tended to believe that unless they recognised the authority of the Baal who was supposed to have the charge of land, their seed would not grow and they would have no food. As late as the time of Hosea the prophet, that is in the 800 B.C., some of the Israelites not only worshipped Yahweh in the way the Canaanites worshipped Baal in order to have the blessings of fertility but they also called Yahweh Baal (Hosea 2:16). Although their religious leaders cum prophets and the priests warned them against this kind worship yet they

continued to worship according to the pattern of Canaanites. The result was that they were always under oppression and wars from their neighbouring nations (Redford, 2013).

Prophets in Israel

The Old Testament prophet is a person who is called, sanctified, and divinely inspired by Yahweh to disclose Yahweh's will to the people, effectively acting as a conduit between God and His people. In light of this era, the prophet foresees approaching calamity and warns his contemporaries; as a result, the prophet is essentially a preacher who invites people to repentance and teaches them good life. Israelite prophets served in a number of

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of capacities in ancient Israel, particularly throughout the monarchy's reign. According to Vangemeren (1990), the two fundamental functions of the Israelite prophets are covenant preservation and tradition preservation.

The Bible mentions the places where some of the prophets were born and prophesied. Samuel, who was both a prophet and a judge, utilized his hometown of Ramah as a base from which he travelled around the country every year. Elijah and Elisha, two additional early monarchy prophets, had houses in the northern kingdom (Israel). Only Hosea and Jonah were from the north among the prophets who wrote (Israel). Hosea's house and ministry location were unknown at the time. Jonah was originally from Gath-Hapher, but his ministry took him to Nineveh's foreign cities. While some prophets lived in the south (Judah), they prophesied in the north (Israel). Amos was from Tekoa, yet he preached against the northern kingdom's religious center at Bethel (Israel). The Elkoshite designation is the only indication of Nahum's residence (Boadt, 2010).

Micah's messages were targeted to both Israel and Judah.

Several prophets focused their ministry on Judah and Jerusalem, the capital city. Isaiah's, Jeremiah's, Zephaniah's, Ezekiel's, Haggai's, Zechariah's, and Malachi's teachings span a long period of time, yet they all deal with Jerusalem's impending destruction, fall, or rebuilding. Geographical information is missing for several prophets, such as Joel, Obadiah, and Habakkuk. Seters (2014) asserts that an Israelite king never waged war without having a prophet beside him. This assertion on how prophets function during the monarchical period will be demonstrated fully in subsequent chapters.

All great prophets of Israel, according to Tullock (1992), share 8 Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective

the following characteristics. They were God-moved men whose message was, “thus says the LORD”. They were fearless men, unafraid to communicate their message even if it meant putting their lives in jeopardy. They were sincere men who were always looking for the truth. They were moral men who preached a message that required their listeners to live up to the greatest moral standards. They were ardent folks who could hear the cries of the oppressed. They were sensitive men who were aware of what was going on in the world around them and believed that God was in charge. They were concerned with their own time and what was about to happen to their people.

Summary

Monarchy is a government under a king/Queen on the basis of hereditary power. Polytheism is the best description of the meaning and nature of the Canaanites’ religion of Baal whereas its adoption by Israel was explained as a form of henotheism, which is the worship of several gods and goddesses with a firm belief in Yahweh as the Supreme Being. The general characteristic of the prophet is that of an intermediary between God and his people as well as moral adviser.

Post test

1. What do you understand by the term monarchy? Give examples of monarchs in Nigeria.
2. Describes Baalism. In what way was Israel influenced and corrupted by the religion of the Canaanites?
3. Who is a prophet? Mention two primary functions of Israelis prophet.
4. What were the characteristics that all great prophets of Israel share?

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CHAPTER TWO

ISRAELITE JUDGES BEFORE

MONARCHY

Objective

This chapter presents the story of Israel when they gained the land of Canaan, the Promised Land. At the end of the chapter, you should be able to identify some of the last Judges cum prophets in Israel like Eli and his sons namely Hophni and Phinehas; and Samuel, and his sons, namely Joel and Abiah. You should be able to describe the set of circumstances that finally served to unite the Israelite tribes Pre-test

1. What does it mean when we say the Judges were “charismatic leaders”?
2. What set of circumstances that finally served to unite the Israelite tribes?
3. Identify the following people: Joel and Abiah; Hophni and Phinehas.
4. Identify the following places: Shiloh, Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpah.

In the tabernacle of Shiloh, Eli was a high priest responsible for worship and sacrifice. In deed for the ministry of Samuel, Eli's story served as a mere background to it in the tabernacle at 10Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective

Shiloh. Israelites looked up to Eli to provide sound leadership and direction during matters of national importance. In the days of Eli, the practice of Israelites religion was weak. This was because he (Eli) failed to direct his two children on the path of God. The two children were Hophri and Phinehas. They were never taught, never abide by the tenets of Christianity or knew God (1 Sam 2:12). They (sons of Eli) took advantage of the people, assumed priestly duties while sacrificing and worshipping. Before they made sacrifice, they rob God, particularly in their demand for priestly portion. People lacked confidence in them and couldn't do their sacrifices at the Shiloh. They were engaged in debauchery and profanity, the hall mark of the Canaanite religion and people. 1 Sam 2:12 states that “Eli sons were scoundrels; they had no regard for the Lord. Corrupt practices varied religious dimension took over the whole Israel”.

Samuel was born during this turbulent period. From his childhood days, he was entrusted to Eli, and dedicated to God. However, he had a God-fearing mother who took care

of him. Consequently, he was nourished and brought up in the tabernacle which was not trained by Eli's sons misdemeanour. God called Samuel when he was 12 years old, sleeping in the temple. He was told by God to tell Eli of the catastrophe awaiting him for his detestable misconducts

Content

The Story of Eli's Ministry

The narrative of Eli provides as a backdrop to Samuel's mission. Eli was in charge of worship and sacrifice at the Shiloh tabernacle as a high priest. In religious and civil matters, 11Historical PerspectivesIsrael: Monarchy to Exile

the Israelites looked to him for direction and leadership. In the days of Eli, Israel's religion was at an all-time low. He failed to instil reverence in his own sons, Hophni and Phinehas; in fact, "they knew not the Lord" (1 Sam. 2:12). They acquired priestly functions under his jurisdiction, taking advantage of the people who came to sacrifice and worship. They deprive God of the priestly portion by demanding it before the sacrifice is made. People were also hesitant to bring their sacrifices to Shiloh because of how they carried themselves. They also desecrated the sanctuary with the baseness and immorality that are typical of Canaanite worship. As one might imagine, they ignored their father's vehement condemnation of their actions. "Eli sons were scoundrels; they showed no regard for the Lord," 1 Sam 2:12 says. As a result, it's hardly unexpected that Israel's religious practices have become increasingly corrupt.

It was in this abhorrent atmosphere Samuel was born and brought to as well as entrusted to Eli's care from his childhood days. Dedicated to God and encouraged by godly mother, Samuel grew up in the environment of the tabernacle not affected by the godless influence of Eli's sons. It was not until Samuel was about twelve (12) years of age that God called him while he was sleeping in the temple. God gave him a message to Eli of the impending family calamities.

An unnamed prophet rebuked Eli because he honoured his sons more than God (1 Sam. 2:27). His laxity had provoked God's judgement; therefore, his sons would lose their lives and a faithful priest would minister in their stead. This was revealed to Samuel when God spoke to him during the night (1 Sam.3:1-18). Swiftly and suddenly these prophetic words received fulfilment. When the Philistines captured the Ark of

the Covenant, Eli's sons (Hophni and Phinehas) died on the 12th day of the month, the same day, and Eli himself died shortly after hearing the news of the captured ark.

Due to the terrible news, Eli's daughter-in-law gave birth to a son on the same day, and she appropriately named him "Ichabod" since she thought God's blessing had been removed from Israel. The meaning of the child's name is "Israel's splendour has passed away." As a result, Eli's family withdrew in shame, paving the way for Samuel's ministry (Torn, 2011). Samuel's place in the history of Israel is unique. Being the last of the Judges, he exercised civil jurisdiction throughout the land of Israel. He also gained recognition as the greatest prophet in Israel since Mosaic times. He also officiated as the leading priest though he was not of the lineage of Aaron to whom the responsibilities of high priesthood belonged. To execute his judicial responsibilities, Samuel annually went to Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpah (1 Sam. 7: 15-17). One may infer that in earlier years, before he delegated responsibilities to his sons, Joel and Abiah (1 Sam. 8: 1-5); he included such distant points as Beersheba in his circuit through the nation. Eventually, the tribal leaders felt that they should strengthen their resistance to Philistines' aggression and consequently sought for a king. As an excuse for the establishment of a monarchy, they pointed out that Samuel was now an old man and his sons were morally unfit to take his place. Samuel rejected their proposal imploring them not to impose upon themselves a Canaanite institution alien to their own way of life. In spite of this, they persisted in their demand. Samuel obliged only after divine interventions (1 Sam. 8) but with a solemn warning, showing them the ways of the king who shall rule them (Nelson, 2008).

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Israelite	Judges	from	Joshua	to	Samuel	

Joshua, the son of Nun, Moses's lieutenant and general of Israel's army was the first in the line of Judges in Israel. He led the people of Israel into a covenant-renewal ceremony at Shechem (Joshua 23, 24) where he called the people back to God with a renewed commitment. Other Judges whose roles in Israel shall not be dwelt upon here include Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, Samson, among others. Judges in Israel (from Joshua to Samuel) were charismatic leaders because they possessed

magnetic personalities. In other words, they were persons who had qualities that inspired others to follow wherever they led. However, the common theme during the times of the Judges is that, "in those days there was no king in Israel: every man did that which was right in his own eyes" (Judges 21:25). During the period of the Judges, whenever Israel seemed to face a common challenge, problem, or enemy, they usually unite to fight it out. But when there was relative peace, they tried to fight one another. It may be argued that the set of circumstances that first served to unite the Israelite tribes were the raping of Levite's wife by some Benjamites and the ensuing war. This incidence precipitated a war of the other eleven (11) tribes against Benjamin. This war (won by the other 11 tribes) served to unite the Israelite tribes. Apart from this, there are three series of events that caused Israel to unite and eventually ask for a king:

(i) the threats of the Philistines on Israel's land. Israel faced the possibility of being destroyed by the Philistines unless they unite; (ii) the corruption of Eli's priesthood by his sons: Hophni and Phineas; (iii) the corruption of priesthood by Samuel's sons: Joel and Abiah (Cliffs, 2008).¹⁴ Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective Samuel was essential in the hard, but necessary shift from a loose confederation of Hebrew tribes to a centralised

monarchy, as he stood at the end of one age and the beginning of another. He was a key figure in the events that led to his people's complete liberation from the Philistines' oppression and the threat of total annihilation. Eli, Israel's high priest and judge, was succeeded by Samuel. Samuel returned to Ramah after the Philistines destroyed Shiloh, Israel's sacred center, and made it the center of his work. Samuel traveled to the cities of Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, judging the people, exhorting them to quit worshipping idols, and using his power to keep the tribes united. He appeared to be able to see into the future, and the people regarded him as a prophet. Israel was besieged by the Philistines, constantly threatened by the Ammonites, and divided among its own tribes at this period. Samuel's corrupt sons, Joel and Abijah, whom he chose to judge Israel in his place, were despised by the people. The elders advised Samuel to find a strong national leader to succeed him as king. Samuel agreed and chose Saul, the son of Kish of the Benjamin tribe,

and he was present at Saul's inauguration and coronation (Houtman, 2013).

Samuel: the child of Vow

McKenzie (2020) said that Samuel (in Hebrew Shmu'el) lived in 11th BC. In the history of Israel, Samuel is a religious hero.

He served in every leadership position available to a Jewish man of his time, including seer, priest, judge, prophet, and military commander. His most notable achievement was his role in the formation of Israel's monarchy. Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son, whom she named Samuel, which means

"I enquired of God." But McKenzie (2020) said that the phrase that fit the meaning of Samuel's name is "Eli has heard".

The sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, are depicted as corrupt, abusing their position as shrine servants to take offerings from the people for their own gratification, in contrast to Samuel, who grew in stature and favor with both the Lord and man. Eli's sons and family were to be stripped of their position of trust and influence. This condemnation and interruption of Eli's prophetic lineage is the Deuteronomic historian's explanation for why Abiathar, the priest of Eli's family, was barred from the priesthood at Jerusalem, which became the monarchy's central shrine, during the reign of David (Jagersma, 2009).

The Birth and Dedication of Samuel

The book of first Samuel opens up with the introduction of Samuel family. Elkanah the father of Samuel had two wives namely: Hannah and Peninnah. Hannah was barren whereas Peninnah had children. Elkanah usually go to Shiloh yearly to worship and sacrifice to the Lord of host. The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas were there. When the time came for sacrifice, Elkanah would make provision for his wives: Peninnah, and her sons and daughters received portion of sacrifice whereas Hannah usually received a double portion, for he loved her but she was barren. Samuel's birth was answer to Hannah's prayers of petition to God for a child. Hannah sealed her prayer for a child with a vow so that she would be holy and to remove the notion that she was barren because of her sin. To keep herself holy she vowed that the child would be a Nazarite. A Nazarite was one dedicated totally to the service of God all the days of his life (see, Numbers 6:127) (Rober, 1989).

Hannah was severely provoked by Peninnah year by year

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when she went up to Shiloh, the house of the Lord to worship. Therefore, she always wept and would not eat, but her husband constantly consoled her that he (Elkanah) is better than ten sons. So in one of the years, the family were all in Shiloh. After they have finished eating and drinking, she was in bitterness and prayed to the Lord and wept in anguish. She made a vow and said:

O Lord of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your maidservant and remember me, and not forget your maidservant but will give your servant a male child, then I will give him to the Lord all the days of his life and no razor shall come upon his head (1 Sam. 1:11).

Eli, the priest, thought she was drunk and rebuked her, but she said she was not drunk. Then priest Eli blessed her saying the God of Israel grant your petition which you have made. Thus, Samuel was born and brought to the temple at Shiloh as a young child to serve God in fulfilment of a vow made. Hannah took the boy to the shrine at Shiloh and sang an exhortation song (1 Sam. 2:1-10), which became the basis of the form and content of the magnificent song of Mary, the mother of Jesus, sang in Luke chapter 1:46-55. Samuel was turned over to Eli at such an early age because Samuel was a child of vow. An average Israelites does not joke with a vow. So, Hannah hastily performed her vow to God by giving Samuel to the Lord as soon as he could eat solid food.

Eli, the priest at Shiloh (who had heard Hannah's vow) trained the boy to serve Yahweh at the shrine, which Samuel's mother and father visited annually. On one of such occasions, Eli the Priest blessed and prayed for Hannah and Elkanah that the Lord would give the couple more children. In answer to this prayer, the Lord caused Hannah to bear three sons and two daughters. So she had a total of six children. It should be added that the stories of the birth of Samuel (1 Sam. 1: 1-2, 11) and Isaac (Genesis 19, 21) has some similarities. Samuel and Isaac were both wanted children. They were children from barren womb. They were both received through prayer and God's mercy. Both were children of promise, although Isaac appears as more of a child of promise than Samuel (Brill, 1995).

Summary

Judges are charismatic leaders in Israel. They ruled when there

was no king in Israel and when every man did what was right in their eyes. In other words, every Israelite was law to his/herself before the institution of monarchy. The importance of making and fulfilling vow was demonstrated by Hannah. The mentorship of Samuel under Eli was incorruptible, though in the face corruption of the sons of Eli. Later, Samuel's sons also became corrupt. Eli's and Samuel's ministries could have been more successful if not for the waywardness of their children. The threats of the Philistines and the failures of Eli's and Samuel's children informed Israel's unity in demanding for a king.

Post test

1. What does it mean when we say the Judges were "charismatic leaders"?
 2. What are the series of events that caused Israel to unite and eventually ask for a king?
 3. Identify the following people: Joel and Abiah; Hophni and Phinehas.
 4. Identify the following places: Shiloh, Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpah.
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5. What similarities are there in the birth stories of Samuel and Isaac?
 6. Why was Samuel turned over to Eli at such an early age?

7

CHAPTER THREE

THE INSTITUTION OF MONARCHY

Objective

You should, at the end of this chapter, be able to give an account of how monarchy was brought into Israel. You should be able to identify Samuel and Saul, and account for how and why Saul became God's providential choice of king for Israel. Moreover, you should be able to mention the advantages and disadvantages of theocracy and monarchy; as well as state Saul's strengths and weaknesses as king of Israel.

Pre-test

1. Why was the system of the Judges rejected by the Israelites?
2. How and why was Saul chosen as king over Israel?
3. What were Saul's strengths and weaknesses as king?
4. What did Saul do to gain Samuel's disfavour?
5. How is Israel monarchy different from pagan monarchy?
6. Mention the advantages and disadvantages of: (i) theocracy, and (ii) monarchy.

Content

The institution of kingship was established at the request of the elders of Israel, and Samuel views this request as a form of rebellion against Yahweh. According to McKenzie (2020), 201Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective the king was chosen by lot rather than divine election at this time, meaning that no unique characteristics were required. In truth, the shy candidate must be roused from his or her hiding place. The Israelites abandoned the Judges' system not because of its failure, but because of their worldliness, according to the text. Samuel is the only Judge/prophet who is both a permanent magistrate and a military leader who defeated the Philistines decisively.

I Sam. 7:3-8: 22; 12:1 and 10:17-22 gave an account of how monarchy was brought into Israel. The people had demanded that Samuel give them a king. Samuel was vehemently opposed to this request. This, however, did not affirm that Samuel was opposed to the institution of monarchy in Israel. In fact, he was instrumental in the planting of monarchy in Israel. Consequently, Saul was made the first king of Israel. Samuel's advancement in age and dwindling physical capacity to do great works compelled him to make his sons Judges over Israel. But his sons were grossly involved in unethical conducts

such as collecting bribe from people instead of focusing on sound administration. They were morally debased and lack good human relations that could endear them to the people. The immoral conducts of two sons of Samuel (Joel and Abiah) compelled Israelites to demand for a king from Samuel. They said to Samuel: “appoint for us a king to govern over us like other nations” (that is, the heathen nations around them). They demanded for a king that would lead them in battle and riot. At this stage, the people’s belief is that kingship was good for Israel. They saw monarchy as the means of salvation for Israel. This demand did not go well with Samuel. In Samuel’s view, theocracy is far better than monarchy. Samuel believed that monarchy was not good for Israel because he knew that the kings would later become oriental despots which will lead to the ruin of Israel. Sequel to his prayer for divine’s intervention on the matter, God said, “hearken to the voice of the people in all that they say to you’ they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them” (1 Sam.8:7). This, therefore, amounted to rejecting God. Apparently, God was not pleased with such a demand because Israel has been a nation ruled by God through His representatives specifically the Judges and priests. Israelites had, for centuries, been disobedient to God; the demand for a king was, therefore, not surprising (Van Seters, 2012).

Like a good democrat, God not only instructed Samuel to oblige them but also to show them the ways of the king who shall reign over them. The description was that the king would have certain constitutional rights to compel them to work for him; some would have to plough and reap his farm while others would run before his chariot in accordance with ancient custom of oriental despots. The description of the king’s authority by Samuel should not be construed as an attempt to dampen the spirits of the Israelites. Rather, it was to enlighten them as well as possibly negotiate the monarchical constitution with them. The Israelites were hesitant despite the gloomy picture painted by Samuel; they were not ready to change their minds; they just wanted a king. Samuel called a national assembly where Saul was chosen as king. This was reciprocated with a loud ovation: “longlive-the-king”. Monarchy was therefore, established in Israel (Mullen, 2011).

Saul's enthronement as king over Israel

Account of the event that led to Saul's enthronement as king over Israel held that a man known as Kish had a son called Saul who was assigned to search for his father's lost asses.

He was accompanied by a servant to search for the asses until they got to the land of Zuph. When Saul was eager to get back home, his servant told him of a man in a nearby village who could tell them the outcome of the search. Saul tried to wave the suggestion away on the ground that he had no money to pay

for the consultation. The futurist was Samuel, also described 22Israel: Monarchy to

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as a	Seer.	Samuel told them that the asses had been found; and he later invited Saul to a feast of sacrifice. Saul was anointed king the following morning by Samuel. He gave him three signs that indicated that he was chosen by God. The first two signs were that he would meet some people that would confirm to him that the asses had been found and that some pilgrims who were heading towards Bethel would share their bread (that is, the bread they were taking to Bethel for sacrificial meal) with him. Also, it was revealed that he would meet some prophets descending from the place with harps, flutes, lyres and tambourines prophesying together with Saul. Thus, this account proves that Saul was God's providential choice for Israel
	(Whitelam,	2007).

Meanwhile, the threat of the Ammonites had spread to Saul's hometown, Gibeah of Saul. The spirit of God came upon Saul while working on his farm. He slaughtered an ox and distributed the pieces to all tribes of Israel, signalling his call on them to come out and support him in a war against the Ammonites. He was crowned at Gilgal having won the war. Monarchy was fully established. Under the monarchy, the covenant relationship that existed between God and his people was not taken away (Whitelam, 2007).

According to Tullock (1992), Saul's career as a king was a pathetic story. Explaining further, Tullock (1992) says Saul had some strength as a king. He was impressively tall, dark and handsome. He was non-assertive of his authority. He was charismatic, that is, he had certain personality traits that command followership of people. He was a simple man. On the other hand, Saul had some weaknesses. He was a very shy man, and non-assertive. He was a men-pleaser. He had insecurity-

complex. He lacked self-confidence.

Saul's kingship gained Samuel's disfavour when he (Saul) began to mess up Samuel's authority by performing some priestly function which was the exclusive preserve of Samuel. For

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instance, Saul took over the function of priesthood (I Sam. 13: 3-15) by not waiting for Samuel. He was to wait for Samuel to perform the proper religious ceremony before he (Saul) could launch an attack on the Philistines. Saul actually waited for 7 days. By this time, his army was very impatient and were beginning to scatter from him. So, he decided to perform the religious ceremony himself. Samuel then came and discovered Saul had not waited enough for him to come and perform the sacrifice. In anger, Samuel rebuked Saul and passed judgement on his kingdom. The final disfavour with Samuel came

when Saul failed to keep all the holy war provisions with the Amalekites. He was impatient, and was said to have violated the harem which was a sacred law regarding the conduct of the war. He was disobedient by sparing the Amalekite king and flogging of cows and rams alive under the pretext of carrying out sacrifice (Shanks, 1992).

Some sources in the scripture (I Sam. 8:5, 20) reject the rulership as an institution of the heathens' nations. So it was, in the sense that it was a foreign institution to Israel, while common elsewhere and therefore suggested to Israel by his environment. But Israel monarchy was nevertheless unique. It was certainly not designed on the feudal city state system whether of the kingdom of Edom, Moab and Ammon. Being a fusion of theocracy and monarchy, it remained a phenomenon characteristically Israelites. The evolution of the monarchy in Israel can be traced to several factors. In order to understand these factors, it is imperative to examine the religio-political background of Israel. The period of Samuel marked the end of the old order in the religio-political affairs of Israel as a nation. Israel in the old order was a confederate state being ruled by charismatic leaders after the land settlement in Canaan. These charismatic leaders were chosen by God. It was therefore a confederacy where each tribe was independent of one another. That is to say, whenever there was war between one tribe and the surrounding heathen nations, there was no compulsion on Israel: Monarchy to ExileHistorical Perspective

the part of the remaining eleven tribes to assist them. Since there was no standing army, the people of Israel only seemed to come together to rally round the charismatic leaders that rose from time to time in the various tribes to meet up with any emergency. The only unifying factor among the twelve tribes was the belief in Yahweh as the only God to be worshipped. This is the God who saved them from the house of bondage in Egypt and chose Israel to be his people in a covenant signed on Mount Sinai (Kyle, 2013).

These charismatic leaders were not only leaders in the battle front, but were also Judges. The book of Judges Chapter 3-16 gives a list of twelve Judges who were charismatic leaders at this period; Samuel was the last Judge during the period of the tribal confederacy. The change from theocracy (the rule of a God) to monarchy (the rule of a king) was received with mixed feelings; majority in favour of it, others opposed it, but the majority had their way. Daudu and Kwala (2004) also say that there are two accounts of how the monarchy was instituted. We are told in I Sam. 8, 10:17-27 that the people of Israel themselves requested Samuel to give them a king. To this, Samuel was opposed.

Then, in chapter 9:11-16 and 11 (all this is one account), it is made clear that the prophet was not opposed to the institution of monarchy. Hence, Dickson (1981) says that it is quite clear that the accounts come from different sources, though both affirm that Samuel took an active role in the institution of monarchy and that Saul was the first king of Israel.

By the time Saul became a king, Samuel has undisputed authority over Israel. Indeed, by that time, he was fairly advanced in age and could no longer carry out his activities without help. He accordingly made his sons Judges over Israel. This shows that the administration of the laws of the country was in Samuel's hands. Unfortunately, his sons were more interested in bribes than in good administration. It was partly because of this that the people sent elders to Samuel with the request, 'appoint for us a king to govern us like all the nations'.

Canaanites among whom they lived had many kings, each with his own territory, similar to what is obtainable in Africa, where each king has his own jurisdiction. The Israelites did not just want to copy this for imitation sake, but for its functionality in meeting their own needs. They wanted a king cum leader who would lead them in battle because of the threats of the Philistines (Jame, 2013).

In the same vein, Bright (1982) sees the divine election of Saul in two parallel narratives: one tacitly favourable to monarchy, the other bitterly hostile to it. I Sam. 9:1-10:16, in favour of monarchy, show how Saul was secretly anointed by Samuel at Ramah, it was continued in chapter 13:3-15. Woven with this narrative was Saul's victory over Ammon and his subsequent acclamation by the people at Gilgal. I Sam. 8, 10:17, 12, in disfavour of monarchy, present the demand as a permissive will; as if Samuel, in anger, yielded to popular demand, thus presiding over Saul's election at Mizpah.

Saul's election was by prophetic direction and majority of a loud applause (I Sam. 10:11, 11:14). The fact that he was from the tribe of Benjamin, a small tribe not centrally located and immediately threatened (thus keeping jealousy to a minimum), may have influenced the choice. However, Saul was accepted primarily because of his victory over Ammon. He exhibited charismatic gifts like the Judges before him. Saul's whole reign was spent at war I Sam.14:37-52. But his impatience as well as disobedience during the war with the Amalekites earned him Samuel's disfavour. Moreover, he took harsh measures against the remnants of Gibeonite confederacy, thus defying the covenant between Israel and the Gibeonites. Apparently, many of them were killed and others forced to flee. Saul incidentally became the first king to be appointed in Israel and he marked the beginning of the new order of monarchical government. Saul's reign, 1050-1010 BC, marked the beginning of the new order while the old order was Samuel's reign over Israel (1075-26Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective 1033 BC). Theocracy therefore, ended in Israel's history, and monarchy emerged. The challenge that was to face the people of Israel was on the issue of loyalty. They would have divided loyalty: loyalty to Yahweh the God of Israel and loyalty to the king. The challenge of divided loyalty was one of the issues at stake in the tension between theocracy and monarchy. This challenge played out itself from monarchy to the time of exile (Norman, 1985).

Every form of government has its strengths and weaknesses. At this juncture, we shall see the advantage and disadvantage of theocracy and monarchy as observed by Daudu and Kwala (2004). Theocracy has merits in that, under it, Israel believed in Yahweh not only as their God but also as their king and ruler.

In addition, protection and prosperity were guaranteed under theocracy if God's commandments were kept. Theocracy is weak in that, under it, everyone did what was right in his own eyes as there was no king in Israel (Judges 21:25); there was no united Israel but merely a confederacy and with such a loose unity, they could not defend the realm; the charismatic leaders were not acknowledged as national heroes; and there was no standing army to meet any emergency.

Similarly, monarchy, according to Daudu and Kwala (2004), has its merits and demerits. In terms of merits, monarchy ensured that Israel was united not only in the monotheistic belief in Yahweh, but also in the monarch as an earthly leader; the king was acknowledged as a national hero who could galvanize the people into the united states of Israel (I Sam. 11:3-7, 11:12); and the monarch provided a standing army to meet the challenges of Philistine's threats. The demerits of monarchy include the problem of a divided loyalty, that is, loyalty to God and loyalty to man; the possibility for a king to disobey divine commandment, which could lead to punishment or disaster (I Sam. 15); the king could become an oriental despot over his subjects (I Sam. 18: 11-18).

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Summary

The Judges ran Israel as a confederate nation-state. There was no unity government until the establishment of monarchy. Samuel's role in the establishment of monarchy and enthronement of Saul as the first king of Israel illustrates the providence of God. Saul became king based on divine providence. He was more of a men-pleaser than God-fearer. No system of government is perfect. Israel's monarchy is unique in that it was a mixture of divine-human government. However, monarchy constitutes the challenge of whether or not God's authority should be regarded as higher than the King's authority. Israel's choice of monarchy over theocracy was informed by the need for a united front in matters of warfare and defence.

Post test

1. Why was the system of the Judges rejected by the Israelites?
2. How and why was Saul chosen as king over Israel?
3. What were Saul's strengths and weaknesses as king?
4. What did Saul do to gain Samuel's disfavour?
5. How is Israel monarchy different from pagan monarchy?

6. What kind of challenge did the transition from theocracy to monarchy present to Israel?
7. Enumerate the strengths and weaknesses of theocracy.
8. List the strengths and weaknesses of monarchy.

8

CHAPTER FOUR

KINGS OF THE UNITED KINGDOM

OF ISRAEL

Objective

In the preceding chapter, students learnt about the Judges in Israel. You would recall that the era of Judges ended with Samuel while the enthronement of Saul was the beginning of monarchy in Israel. Thus, Saul was the first king who reigned over the united kingdom of Israel. The main objective of this chapter is to present the kings that reign over the United Kingdom of Israel starting with Saul and ending with Solomon. Students should, at the end of this chapter, be able to identify the kings of the United Kingdom of Israel; their individual strengths and weaknesses as well as their contributions to the development of the United Kingdom of Israel.

Pre-test

1. Why could Samuel be described as a “king maker” and as a “king breaker”?
2. Who was Saul and what were his achievements and failures?
3. What was the religious significance of the ceremony of anointing?
4. Mention the three stages of Saul’s choice as king of Israel.
5. Who was David and what were his achievements and failures?

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6. What role did Samuel play in Israel in the times of Saul and David as kings?
7. Who was Solomon and what were his achievements and failures?
8. What are the immediate and remote causes that led the division of the United Kingdom of Israel?

Content

Israel had three kings who reigned over the United Kingdom of Israel. They are Saul, David and Solomon. These three kings ruled before the division of the kingdoms in the later years. Among these three kings, Saul was the pioneer kings of Israel, that is, he was the first king with executive powers. Throughout the lifetimes of Saul and David, Samuel’s role in Israel includes the roles of priest (he was chief religious officer); the chief Judge of Israel; the prophet (he was a moral spokesman and a clairvoyant or fortune teller who could help to find lost object);

the wise counsellor; the maker of kings and the breaker of kings (Lemche, 1995).

As an influential and powerful leader in Israel, Samuel put Saul on the throne of Israel. But when he withdrew his support for Saul's kingship, the rulership of Israel under Saul started eroding away. It was Samuel who chose and certificated Saul as the Lord's choice and it was the same Samuel who said Saul's kingdom would not continue. Hence, Samuel could aptly be described as a "king maker" and as a "king breaker"?

Saul: Israel's First King

As earlier indicated, Saul was son of Kish (who used to have so many asses) from the tribe of Benjamin. Saul, at this time, was a young man when his father's asses got lost. It was while Saul was searching for his father lost asses that Saul met with Samuel, the king maker. It does appear that Saul and his family knew Samuel by report but had never met Samuel before. So, 30Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective when Saul met Samuel, he told him that the asses had been found and intimated him that he was to be a king. He had to spend his night in the house of Samuel; and when Saul wanted to leave, Samuel had to anoint him as king of Israel. The religious significance of this anointing was to mark Saul as God's man. Hence, Samuel charged Saul not to disclose this anointing yet. Seven days later, Samuel met Saul at Mizpah where he (Samuel) had gathered all the people. Lot was cast and it fell on Saul. This was open declaration of Saul as the people's king. In summary, the choice of Saul was in three stages: Saul was privately made king in Ramah; he was publicly picked by lot at Mizpah but not fully accepted; and was finally accepted by all the people at Gilgal. All these places were known as the ancient sanctuaries of worship (Karel Vander, 2004).

Saul's Achievements and Failures

Saul was very unfortunate in that he was the pioneer king. He laid the foundation for monarchy. But he was regarded by the people as a king who started well and ended badly. Despite this strong condemnation, Saul tried so much for his people. For instance, he fought and tried to subdue the Philistines who were the greatest enemy of Israel; he tried so much to unite the nation of Israel; he showed great fear of God; he loved Israel so dearly. Nevertheless, according to I Sam. 13: 8-15, 15: 4- 9, Saul's failures as king are the following: he was charged with the

sin of disobedience by offering sacrifices at Gilgal which was Samuel's duty to carry out; he failed to destroy the Amalakites as he was ordered (the command was to kill all and destroy all, but he failed to do that. The order was from the Lord and he ought to obey); God therefore, rejected him. When Saul was rejected by God, evil spirit began to torture him. He eventually became mentally affected and needed help. Moreover, Saul was proud in that he was not of broken spirit whenever he erred, in fact, it was not very easy for him to accept his fault or confess his sins to God. It seems Saul was not as lucky as David who (despite his terrible sins) really enjoyed divine mercy and favour at all times. Saul was indeed a sorry case. His kingship did not enjoy much of divine mercy as that of David. Because of Samuel's dominating influence and power, Saul did not enjoy or wield full authority. Moreover, he lacked self-confidence and patience. He was a men pleaser. His chief failure was his lack of success in dealing with the Philistines. Nevertheless, he was God's anointed.

David: Second King of Israel

Lee (1981) says that the name David means chieftain and that is a title. He was the son of Jesse and the second king of Israel. He spent most of his youthful life in Bethlehem of Judah. He was the youngest of his eight brothers. In the registry of the tribe of Judah, only seven of the brothers of the sons of Jesse are named. Perhaps one of them died. David had a tender mother (Ps. 86:16). His lineage is inspiring, praise worthy and at times tainted by sin. David was in charge of his father's animals where he started displaying faith and courage. He had musical gifts, which made him to be recommended to Saul who needed music to soothe his tortured spirit. David had to be in the court of Saul (after his rejection) to make melody for him. Meanwhile, no proclamation of David's being made to succeed Saul because of the evil intentions of Saul. The act was only performed in the presence of the elders (II Kings 16:14-5, 13). David came into the presence of Saul after his rejection to play music for him at least to reduce the level of his insanity and melancholy. He learnt war and government and had association with noble men. He also had a working experience of what kingship was all about; the bright and sad aspects of it too. As soon as the king Saul's condition improved, David went back to Bethlehem, to continue with his father's sheep as a shepherd boy (I king 17:15) (Stern, 2015).

At this period, the Philistines, long time enemy of Israel, 32Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective was on the attack, led by the war-lord Goliath. The brothers of David have spent some time on the battleground without coming home, so Jesse sent David to find out what was wrong. Goliath's challenges provoked David. David quickly accepted the challenge against his brother's wish because of the defilement of the God of Israel by the uncircumcised Philistine. Encouraged by the cause of righteousness and confidence in God, David approached Goliath unhampered in movement by any armour with a sling (catapult), which he knew very well with five stones that could be hauled from a distance. Struck by a stone from David's sling, Goliath fell. That's how David (the ruddy boy) came into providence in Israel. Because of jealousy, David was not received so much by Saul. When Saul discovered through Abner who David was, trouble loomed. David's ancestors were not known for great and heroic deeds. The victory became a crisis point for David; it earned him the love and friendship of Jonathan, Saul's son. On account of David's popularity, David eventually became a suspect to Saul. Saul endeavoured to kill David. He reduced his military rank, gave Michal his daughter (earlier betrothed to David) to another man. He tried using Michal to entrap David in order to kill him. David became a fugitive (i.e. wanderer) and came to Nob. At Gath, even when Saul continued to pursue him, David fought against the Philistines and defeated them. David had opportunities to kill Saul but spared his life simply because he feared God and respected God's act of anointing of Saul as Israel's king. But when he learnt of the death of Saul and his three sons, including Jonathan, he mourned. David's act of mourning the death of Saul was genuine in that David was related to Saul in several ways. First, David was one of Saul's subjects, as a citizen of Israel. Second, David became Saul's musician. Third, David became one of his soldiers and, in fact, a commander of an army squadron. Fourth, David became one of Saul's household and a lieutenant. Fifth, David became Saul's son-in-law. Sixth, David was the best friend of Jonathan, 33Historical PerspectivesIsrael: Monarchy to Exile Saul's son (Rabbin, 2013).

After the death of Saul, David was first made king over the house of Judah. To stop him from becoming king over the whole land

of Israel, Abner enthroned Ish-bosheth (son of Saul). There was war between Israel and Judah. Judah won the battle and David was enthroned king over all Israel. David became king over all Israel by popular consent of all the leaders of Israel. He transferred the capital city from Hebron to Jerusalem. He fought and defeated the Philistines and brought back the Ark of God to Jerusalem (which belongs to no tribe before David captured it). Being a neutral site, the choice of Jerusalem as the capital city solves the problem of tribal rivalry among the people of Israel. He was to build the temple but God denied him that opportunity. David's sins include his adulterous act with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah. This resulted in series of problems and rebellions in the palace (Mich, 2014).

In terms of achievement, David was probably the most colourful character in Hebrew history (Lee, 1981). He occupied a place of greatness to Moses in the Old Testament. His 40 years of reign brought in a military organisation and administrative governance of Israel. In fact, Israel became more united and more organised. He made Jerusalem the most important city in the world. He was an empire-builder, though by conquest. He occasioned a new covenant for Israel. He gave the world great and wonderful poetic literature called the Psalms, which are his deepest emotional addresses to God. He had many excellent qualities. Apart from being a shepherd and musician, he was also a team leader and warrior with a good character and excellent spirit. Religiously, he was exceptional: he maintained Yahwism and prepared for the building of the temple of Jerusalem. He fought all the enemies of Israel and made them to pay homage to him. It was under his kingship and leadership that Israel became common wealth of nations. As his Psalms show, he was highly devoted to God; he did justice to all Israel and not 34Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective for Judah (his tribe) alone. David reign for forty (40) years and lived a fruitful life. In conclusion, his readiness to accept his fault even from anybody and his readiness to confess his sins to God (and never allowed sins to linger in his mind) made God to call him "a man after His heart".

David's failures are both moral and parental in nature. Despite all the good records of success story in his reign, he was evidently a very weak family man. He had no control over his family. Perhaps this was because he gave all his attention to

the affairs of the state with the result that he had no time for his family. If God had not loved David so much, he could have been rated as one of the most corrupt leaders in Israel. David really enjoyed the divine favour in all sides of his life. There were a number of unexpected happenings or abominable acts in the royal house namely: the case of incest between Ammon and Tamar; the snatching of Uriah's wife by David; the outright murder of Uriah by David; Absalom rebellion against his father David; the sexual defilement of David's wives by Absalom; and the temporary dethronement and exile of David. It is surprising to note that David still enjoyed divine favour in spite of all these moral and spiritual flaws (Niels, 1987).

Solomon: Third King of Israel

Solomon was the son of David and Bathsheba. The period of his reign was characterized with peace and prosperity. David had established the kingdom and now Solomon was to reap the benefits of his father's labours. The period of his reign has been looked on as the most magnificent in Israelites' history. Because King David had dealt with all the enemies, King Solomon had no wars to fight. Thus, he inherited a prosperous and healthy nation. Olotana (1978) says that the accession of Solomon to the throne was without events. There was no civil strife.

He outlines three main reasons why it was so. It was so because

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Solomon's choice as king was a promise of David to Bathsheba; the political supporters of Solomon were very strong; and the influential persons or threats such as Adonijah and Joab and Abiathar the priest were either sacked from their offices/positions or banished into exile. For instance, Joab (David's cousin as well as army general commander) was removed as army general while Abiathar the priest was banished to Anathoth.

Solomon's Wisdom

Solomon assumed the leadership of Israel at an early age.

Certainly, he was less than thirty (30) years, perhaps, about twenty years of age. Sensing his need for divine wisdom, he assembled the Israelites at Gibeon where the tabernacle and the bronze altar were located and made a great sacrifice.

Through a dream, he received divine assurance that his request for wisdom had been granted and that God has also endowed him with riches, honour and long life, but conditioned by his

obedience. Solomon's sagacity became a source of wonderment. The decision rendered by the king when two women were contending for one living child (I king 3:16-28) undoubtedly represents but a sample of the cases demonstrating his wisdom. As this and other reports circulated throughout the nation, the Israelites recognised that the king's prayer for wisdom had been answered. On this account, Queen Sheba heard of his fame and visited him with precious gifts (New King James Version). Solomon's wise sayings are recorded in the book of Proverbs. His commercial enterprises were linked with his building programme. During his reign, trade increased and he encouraged it. He was deeply involved in trade and controlled the North to South. Through his friendly ties with Hiram and Tyre, he raised a heavy merchant ship which sailed to Arabia, East Africa and possibly India in search of precious stones, ivory, pearls, bronze, apes and peacocks. Coppers were mined

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in the valley of Arabia (between the Dead Sea and Red Sea). Some of the aforementioned items such as bronze went into the building of the temple and other buildings whereas some were sold in foreign market. The international trade brought about a closer links among Israel, Egypt and Tyre. Solomon used seven (7) years to build the temple after which he dedicated it to Yahweh. He also built a magnificent palace for himself; this took a period of thirteen (13) years. He also builds great assembly hall. These building projects were through direct and hard labour and heavy taxation of the common man in Israel. This economic policy caused hardship among the people of Israel and partially paved the way for a later possible revolt and rebellion. Solomon took many wives from foreign nations; and as he grew older, he began to accept their gods and built altars for them. For this reason, God was angry with him and passed a sentence on him. The sentence was that, after Solomon's death, the united kingdom of Israel would be taken from David's royal house but not entirely, for David's sake. In other words, the kingdom would be divided after Solomon's death; God would give the kingdom, except two tribes, to Solomon's servant (Jeroboam). The two tribes to be given to Solomon's son are for David's sake. This prophecy was the beginning of the events that eventually led to the division of the United Kingdom of Israel (David, 2012).

In conclusion, Solomon's strengths include his self-confidence; elimination of oppositions and threats; wisdom in governance and administration; and international reputation, partnership and relation. Solomon was a great project builder. His weaknesses include the following. He was more ruthless and tasking; he levied heavy taxation of the people; and he lived an elaborate/ostentatious life. Solomon loved sexual pleasure and strange women; he was a dictator because he denied the people of some of their human rights/freedom. Solomon was less spiritual or religious as he was tolerant of foreign gods.

Finally, he became an apostate because he started worshipping 37Historical
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 and building houses for foreign gods in defiance of the Lord's commands. The aforementioned failures set the stage for the fulfilment of the prophecy of division of the United Kingdom of Israel. Under Rehoboam, Solomon's son and successor, the prophecy was fulfilled as Israel became two kingdoms. The Divided Kingdom of Israel from Rehoboam and Jeroboam
 The United Kingdom of Israel ruled by Saul, David and Solomon terminated with the accession of Rehoboam to the throne after Solomon's death. Immediately after the exit of King Solomon, his son Rehoboam took over the governance of United Kingdom of Israel. Though Rehoboam inherited a United Kingdom of Israel yet there were lingering murmurings here and there among the majority of Israelites, perhaps, because of hard policies of King Solomon. Dissatisfied with Solomon's hard rule, the ten tribes (except Judah and Benjamin) decided to negotiate the conditions of their allegiance to the house of David with Rehoboam. These tribes sent a delegate of elders to Rehoboam to ask him to soften down some of his father's policies on taxation, the use of forced labour and all other forms of inhuman administration. As Rehoboam was preparing for his answer, the tribal elders had already sent messages to Jeroboam, son of Nebat, who was on exile in Egypt to come back home and take over the mantle of leadership in case Rehoboam would refuse to grant their demand. The return of Jeroboam was greeted with great joy by the people who wanted "change" or better governance (Herez, 2014).
 Rehoboam, therefore, gave these elders three days for the

answer. Rehoboam, being a youth, went to the young men (that had been brought up with him) and consulted them for advice.

These young men (his childhood friends) said: “thus shall thou

38Israel: Monarchy to ExileHistorical Perspective spoke to these people: my father put a heavy yoke on you but I will add to your yoke, my father beat you with whips, but I will beat you with scorpions” (I kgs. 12: 10-11). He also consulted with the elders who were his father’s counsellors. They advised him to listen to the people and make their hardship less. When the elders and officers of Israel returned on the third day for the answer, Rehoboam spoke to them as the young men had advised.

John Lee (1981) says when the people saw that they had no hope in their young king, they decided to rebel. Ten of the tribes threw off Rehoboam’s authority, and opted for Jeroboam (son of Nebat) as their king. Only two tribes namely the tribe of Judah and Benjamin clung to the house of David, thus remained faithful to Rehoboam. From that day, henceforth, the United Kingdom of Israel became divided into two separate kingdoms namely the southern kingdom of Israel simply called Judah (comprising the tribes of Judah and Benjamin) and the northern kingdom of Israel simply called Israel (comprising ten tribes). Rehoboam ruled over the southern kingdom (Judah) while Jeroboam ruled over the northern kingdom (Israel).

Certaincommentatorshaveopinedthattheterm“united

monarchy” is more appropriate than the term “United Kingdom of Israel”. Their argument is twofold. First, they reminded us that David made separate covenants with the two kingdoms (Judah and Israel) to rule over them. There is no mention of David making a common covenant with the south and the north. The two kingdoms remained separate and were united only in the person of the king. There was thus a united monarchy and not a United Kingdom in Israel. Secondly, I Kings. 12:1 says “Rehoboam went to Shechem, for all Israel had come to Shechem to make him king”. This, according to them, explains thetwoseparatecoronationsofRehoboam,Solomon’s

successor. Having been readily accepted by Judah at Jerusalem, Rehoboam travelled to the ancient northern capital of Shechem39Historical PerspectiveIsrael: Monarchy to Exile

to be crowned king by the northerners. If there were a United Kingdom, there would have been no need for Rehoboam to

travel all the way to Shechem for a separate coronation. The importance of this verse, therefore, lies in the light it throws on the united monarchy in Israel. It is also worthy of note that the united monarchy made for a fragile union which needed tact and diplomacy on the part of the king to keep it intact. When Rehoboam's stupidity shook the foundations of this fragile union, the kingdom disrupted. Thus, the united monarchy with its inherent elastic union contributed to the dissolution of the kingdom (Lee, 1981).

Immediate and Remote Causes of the Division

One of the remote causes of the division could be traced back to the time when Saul, the first king of Israel died. It is evident that his son was made king over the Northern part of Israel while David was reigning in Hebron (south). It is, therefore, interesting to suggest that there had been anti-North and South feeling even before the period of King Solomon. Another factor is the sins of David and the fulfilment of the consequent prophesy that the kingdom (comprising twelve tribes) would be shared into two: southern kingdom (Judah, comprising two tribes) and northern kingdom (Israel, comprising ten tribes). Another factor is the over taxation of King Solomon and his use of force labour which were not cherished policies among the people. Even though the nation was rich, there was a great margin of difference between the rich and the poor. The Israelites were praying for a change of leadership and perhaps wished a discontinuity to the house of David. The immature response of Rehoboam should be reconsidered as one of the last factors for the division. With the separation of the North from the South, the southern kingdoms with its two tribes retained Jerusalem as their capital and religious centre. The Northern kingdom (Israel) chose Samaria as its capital. The effects of 40 Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective

the separation went further as Jeroboam king of Israel thought within himself that if the people continued to go to Jerusalem to offer sacrifice to the Lord in the temple, their hearts would sooner or later return to the house of David. So, Jeroboam made Samaria to be the capital and Damascus was developed into a big city. He thus set up idolatrous sanctuaries at Dan and Bethel to rival the temple in Jerusalem (Hans, 2013).

Jerobom's sin

Shortly after crowned king of Israel, Jeroboam set up two calves of gold (idols or gods) for Israel at Bethel and Dan in order to prevent northern Israelites from patronising Jerusalem temple. I Kings 12: 29-30 says "And he set one in Bethel and the other he put in Dan. And this thing became a sin: for the people went to worship before the one, even unto Dan". The erection of the golden bulls at Bethel and Dan was strategic in that these cities were strategically located. Bethel and Dan were also ancestral sanctuaries and ancient centres of pilgrimage in the north. The main motive was to attract pilgrims and keep the northerners away from the Jerusalem temple. This became necessary because many of the northerners considered the Solomonic temple as the only place of worship and thus were tempted to go there too. If Jeroboam allowed the northerners to continue this practice, it would weaken their loyalty to him and this would in turn militate against his efforts at consolidating his newly-won kingdom (Hans, 2013).

Obaze (2015) asserted that Jeroboam's intension of setting up the golden calves was to promote the worship of Yahweh in the north. He meant the golden calves to be symbolic representation of Yahweh in accordance with ancient Israelite tradition of portraying Yahweh as status invisibly on the back of a young Oxen. The Oxen was thus the throne of Yahweh, serving the same purpose as the Cherubim in the Jerusalem Temple. However, the Canaanites, among whom the Israelites lived, associated their gods with images of bulls. Practically, on

the other hand, the golden calves became another gods rather than a symbol of Yahweh. The danger was that, in practice, many of the northerners looked upon the golden bulls as images to be worshipped.

Summary

Samuel could be described as a "king maker" and as a "king breaker" because he set up King Saul by prophecy and dethrone him by prophecy. As the first king of United Kingdom of Israel, Saul, son of Kish, united the tribes and led them into victories in many battles but his disobedience to God's command led to his ruin. Israel experienced time of glory under David and Solomon. David, son of Jesse, succeeded Saul. He won all battles, expanded the land of Israel and promoted Yahwism. His inability to control his children; his adulterous act with

Bathsheba and his murder of Uriah eventually dimmed his glory and the future of his lineage.

Solomon, son of David, was a builder and seasoned administrator. However, his harsh economic policies, large harem and idolatrous leaning constituted his ruin. Due to the aforementioned, the United Kingdom of Israel was divided into two: Judah and Israel during the reign of Rehoboam, son of Solomon. Jeroboam, son of Nebat, was allotted ten tribes while Rehoboam ruled over only two tribes (tribes of Judah and Benjamin). Shortly after his accession as king of Israel, Jeroboam led Israel into national sin of idolatry.

Post test

1. Mention six ways David was related to Saul.
2. Examine the factors that led to the secession of the Northern Kingdom of Israel under Rehoboam.
3. Discuss the causes that resulted in the disruption of the Kingdom of David.

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4. How far was Solomon responsible for the eventual break-up of the Kingdom?
5. Examine the reign of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. How justifiable were the Biblical writers in condemning him?

9

CHAPTER FIVE

KINGS OF ISRAEL (Part I)

Introduction

Historians often refer to the Northern kingdom (Ten Tribes) of Israel as kingdom of Israel or simply as Israel, or as the 'kingdom of Samaria' whereas the Southern kingdom of Israel (with Two Tribes) is called kingdom of Judah or simply Judah. The story of Israel is taken up first (before the story of Judah) because Israel went to Assyrian captivity before Judah went into Babylonian captivity. For convenience, the story of the nineteen (19) kings of Israel, in their chronological order, is divided into two chapters. In the present chapter, the stories of twelve (12) of these kings namely Jeroboam, Nadah, Baasha, Elah, Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, Joram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, and Joash, is considered. The stories of the remaining seven (7) kings of Israel are considered in the next chapter.⁴⁴

Genealogy of the kings of Ancient Israel

and Judah

Objective

The achievements and failures of kings Jeroboam, Nadah, Elah, Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, Zimri, Joram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, Baasha, and Joash are highlighted in this chapter. At the end of this chapter, students should be able to identify these kings in terms of their failures and successes. They should also be able to identify Elijah and Elisha and their roles in the history and religion of Israel.

Pre-test

1. Identify: (i) Jeroboam I, (ii) Omri, (iii) Ahab, and (iv) Jehu⁴⁵
2. How would you prove that the double anointing of Elijah was upon Elisha?
3. What was the role of: (i) Elijah; and (ii) Elisha in the history and religion of Israel?
4. Jehu was said to have overdone the spiritual purge of Israel. How is this stance tenable?
5. Who were the Rechabites?
6. Why was Israel referred to as 'the land of the house of Omri', or the 'land of Omri'?

Content

The kingdom of Israel existed roughly from 930 BC until 720BC, when it was conquered by the Neo-Assyria Empire. The major cities of the kingdom were Shechem, Tirzah, Samaria (Shomron), Jaffa, Bethel and Dan. All the nineteen

(19) kings of Israel, that is, the northern kingdom (or, the Ten Tribes) were:

Jereoboam I, Nadah, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, Joram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, Joash, Jeroboam II, Zachariah, Shallum, Menhahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hosea. These kings were not loyal to God; they were unrighteous, morally weak and wicked just like their founding predecessor (Jeroboam I). Most of these kings' periods of ruling were short-lived because of treason, coup, or assassination.

So, this nation ended up being taken captive by the king of Assyria in 721 B.C. The stories of the kings of Israel, from Jeroboam I to Joash, are presented as follows: Jeroboam I Turah (2016) called him Jeroboam I for being the founding king of the Ten Tribes of Israel. Jeroboam distinguished himself as an administrator under Solomon while supervising the construction of the wall of Jerusalem known as Millo (1 king 11:26-9). When the prophet Ahijah dramatically imparted a divine message by ripping his mantle into twelve pieces,⁴⁶ Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective

he gave ten to Jeroboam signifying that he was to rule over ten tribes of Israel. Jeroboam showed signs of rebellion and incurred the disfavour of Solomon. Consequently, he fled to Egypt, where he found refuge until after Solomon's death. The United Kingdom of Israel, as demonstrated in the preceding chapter, was torn apart during the reign of Rehoboam, son of Solomon. Two tribes (Judah and Benjamin) remained loyal to Rehoboam while the remaining ten tribes switched their loyalty to Jeroboam who became their first king.

Civil war prevailed during the 22 years' reign of Jeroboam, although scripture does not indicate the extent of this war. After Rehoboam's death, Jeroboam attacked Judah, but Abijam, the new king of Judah, countered the attack and took over Bethel and other Israelite cities. Jeroboam resided in the beautiful city of Tirzah. Jeroboam took the initiative in religious matters. Naturally, he did not want his people to attend the sacred festivities at Jerusalem, lest they turned their allegiance to Rehoboam. He then fashioned out an alternative by erecting golden calves at Dan and Bethel, thus instituting idolatry in Israel (II Chron. 11:13-15). He appointed priests freely ignoring Mosaic restrictions and allowing Israelites to offer sacrifices at various high places throughout the land.

Jeroboam's aggressiveness in religion was tampered with when he was warned by an unnamed prophet from Judah. This 'man of God' (an unnamed prophet) warned the King as he stood and burned incense at the altar in Bethel. He immediately ordered prophet's arrest. The prophet's message, however, received divine confirmation in the rending of the altar and the inability of the king to withdraw the hand he pointed toward the faithful man of God. Suddenly, the king asked the prophet to intercede for him. After the prophet's prayer, the king's hand was restored (Culled for Doorly, 1997).

Another warning came to Jeroboam through the prophet Ahijah when his son Abijah became seriously ill. Jeroboam sent his47Historical
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wife to the prophet at Shiloh. The wife disguised herself but the old blind prophet recognised her. She was sent back to Tirzah with sobering message that the child would not recover.

Furthermore, the prophet warned her that failure to keep God's commandment would draw divine judgement, specifically extermination of Jeroboam's dynasty and captivity for the Israelites. Before she reached home, the child died. In spite of all prophetic warnings, Jeroboam continued in idolatry. Civil strife undoubtedly weakened Israel such that Jeroboam even lost the city of Bethel to Judah in the days of Abijah, the son of Rehoboam. Within few short years, the continued warning of the prophet came to fulfilment (Doorly, 1997).

Biblical writers were justified in condemning Jeroboam for having made Israel to sin. The appointment of non-Levitical priests was against Israelite priestly tradition, although Biblical records do contain instances of non-Levites acting as priests.

For instance, Samuel who acted as priest in Israel was an Ephraimite. Eleazer, a non-Levite, was appointed as priest in charge of the Ark. David is also reported as having made some of his sons priests (II Sam. 8:18). Taking these things into consideration, it is difficult to see why the Biblical writers were unusually critical of the religious policies of Jeroboam. The truth of the matter appears to be that Jeroboam's critics were most anxious that there should be no rival sanctuary to the Jerusalem temple. To the writers, Jerusalem was the sole sanctuary in which all holiness was centred (Rapids, 2013).

Nadab

He was the son of Jeroboam, who ascended to the throne of

Israel after his father's death and reigned for two years during the reign of King Asa of Judah. In the eyes of the Lord, he did wrong and followed in the footsteps of his father, who had led Israel astray. Baasha, the son of Abijah of the Issachar family, plotted against him.

While King Nadab and all of Israel were

besieged in Gibbethon, Baasha assassinated him and took his position as king.

Baasha

When Asa had been king of Judah for three years, Baasha became king of Israel. When he became king, he slaughtered the entire house of Jeroboam, not leaving anybody alive until he had completely decimated them.

This was in response to the Lord's word, uttered through His servant Ahijah the Shilonite, concerning Jeroboam's misdeeds in causing Israel to sin and his provocation against the Lord. Baasha ruled Tirzah for twenty-four years. He walked in Jeroboam's footsteps and did evil in the eyes of the Lord. Then, via Prophet Jehu, son of Hannani, the Lord's message came with judgment on Baasha's iniquity (1 Kgs. 16:1-7). Baasha died and his son Elah ruled in his place (Eerdmans, 1979).

Elah

Elah, son and successor of king Baasha, was the fourth of the kings of Israel. He ruled from the city of Tirzah. The reign of Elah lasted for two years from 886 BC to 885 BC and he began to rule when King Asa of Judah had reigned for twenty years. King Elah was neither different from his father nor from the other kings who preceded his father in that he also practiced idolatrous religion of King Jeroboam I, which was the worship of the golden calves. During his reign, Elah hated Asa, king of Judah, just like his father, Baasha. His reign was short and so was the account of his achievement. There was no great deed recorded to his credit. It stands to reason that during his reign of two years he did not do anything worth mentioning such as waging a war or building a monumental structure.

During his reign, the northern army encamped for war against 49Historical PerspectiveIsrael: Monarchy to Exile

the Philistine city of Gibbethon. However, the army were far from Elah and the capital city of Tirzah; and this provided the opportunity for a coup by Zimri, the army commander, who struck and assassinated Elah and usurped the throne. Zimri did not assassinate Elah alone; he proceeded to kill all the relatives

of Elah, or the entire family of Baasha. Even before Elah was made a king, his destruction had been foretold in that God had spoken by the mouth of Jehu, the Prophet, that He was going to destroy the household of Baasha for misleading the kingdom into idolatrous religion, that is, the worshipping of golden calves built by Jeroboam I.

King Elah's death was fast and sudden. He left his palace and went into the house of Azra, the palace administrator. There, Elah was entertained, such as was befitting a king and he drank alcohol till he was drunk. Then in such an opportune time, Zimri one of the army captains, pounced on him and killed him. Though many other kings of Israel were assassinated during their reign, it appears that Elah, in particular, made himself an easier target by getting drunk. Elah belongs to categories of kings that inherited the throne peacefully. He is also counted among the kings who did evil before the Lord (Sheffield, 1985).

Zimri

He was the servant and one of the commanders of half of the chariots of king Elah. In Tirzah, he plotted against the monarch and assassinated him. And as soon as he took power, he massacred King Baasha's entire household, leaving no male children, relatives, or friends alive. This was in accordance with the Lord's word, which He spoke through the prophet Jehu. He barely reigned in Tirzah for seven days, and when the people learned that he had plotted against Elah and slain him, they all crowned Omri (the army general commander) as king of Israel. When Zimri learned that Omri had conquered the city, he went inside the king's palace and set fire to it with himself. So Omri 50Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective reign in his place (Oyibah, 2015).

Omri

He was the sixth king of Israel. A commander of the army in Israel, Omri emerged as the most important king in Israel after the death of Jeroboam I, the son of Nebat. He seized the throne from Zimri and established himself after getting rid of another claimant, Tibni. The account of Omri's reign in the book of Kings is limited to six verses (1 Kings 16:23-28). He is reported to have reigned for twelve years, six years at Tirzah and six years at Samaria, his new capital. The Biblical writers also regarded him as one who led Israel into sin. They were usually severe with him, insisting that "he did more evil than

all who were before him". From other sources, however, we have a fuller account of Omri's reign. Through conquest, and diplomacy, he was able to consolidate and save Israel from further disintegration (Asarri, 1998).

By the time of his accession to the throne, Israel had been plagued by several years of political instability through rapid dynastic changes. Soon after he began to reign, Nadab, Jeroboam's successor, was assassinated by Baasha. Then, Baasha eliminated the house of Jeroboam and reigned for about fourteen years. He was succeeded by his son, Elah, who was in turn murdered by Zimri. The latter wiped out the entire family of Baasha. Those dynastic changes left Israel hopeless to defend herself from hostile neighbours. Eastern Palestine and the northern of Yarmuk to Aram (Syria) Israel lost it. The northern region of the Arnon was occupied by the resurgent Moabites. Omri, therefore, inherited a reduced and threatened Israel. From the Mesha Stone, we learnt that Omri reconquered Moab and resettled Israelites in the territory north of the Arnon (Olotona, 1978). Of all the Trans-Jordan states, only Ammon was not reconquered. Omri came to terms with Syria in the interest of peace. He gave some Israelite territory in Trans-Jordan to Syria and granted her commercial concessions in Samaria (I Kings 20:34).

Following the precedents of David and Solomon, Omri made an alliance with Phoenicia. Omri's favorable relationship with the Phoenicians was cemented when his crown prince, Ahab, married Jezebel (daughter of Itobaal, the Sydonian King of Tyre). The main cause for this union was undeniably the common threat to both, which was Benhadad, King of Aram's continuous development of power. The subsequent expansion of economic links between Israel and Phoenicia most likely provided significant affluence to both Omri and Ahab. Omri initiated a period of collaboration with Judah reflected in the friendly relation between Jehoshaphat and Ahab. In the early reign of king Ahab, the uniting was further consolidated formally by the marriage of Ahab's daughter Athaliah to Jehoram, son of Jehoshaphat, King of Judah. The alliance was both military and commercial, for subsequently, there was an effort to resuscitate the overseas business out of Ezion-geber. With Omri's occupation of the throne of Israel, the state of

political chaos that had threatened Israel ever since the death of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, was brought to an end. His status and features of control were such that he was able to hand the throne over to his descendants. Thus, Omri was the first king in the Northern Kingdom of Israel to establish a dynasty with three of his descendants, (Ahab, Ahaziah and Jehoram), reigning after him. His dynasty was of such prestige that the Assyrian Kings continued to refer to the Northern Kingdom as 'the land of the house of Omri' for many years after his death and long after his dynasty had been overthrown (Leiden, 1991). In spite of the silence of the book of Kings on Omri's reign, we have reason to believe that under his statesmanship Israel achieved great stability and prosperity. During his twelve years' rule, Israel's political power expanded towards the Mediterranean into Trans-Jordan. Something like an economic boom must have followed in the wake of his vigorous political exploits. Omri's purchase of the hill of Samaria and transforming it into the capital of Israel was a wise political decision. The steep slopes of the hill made it difficult for enemies to easily invade Samaria.

Ahab

He succeeded Omri, his father, as king of Israel and reigned for 22 years (I kgs. 16:28-34). He did evil in the sight of the Lord above his predecessors. He not only carried on the sin of Jeroboam but also married a strange woman called Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Zidonians. Like Jezebel, Ahab served Baal and worshiped him. He built the house of Baal in Samaria and made a grove. Out of greed, he passively agreed to the killing of Naboth in order to take unlawful possession of his vineyard. He imprisoned prophet Micaiah for being different in his message from his 400 lying prophets on the outcome of the war with the Syrians. He was said to have provoked the Lord far above his predecessors. Here, Elijah's prophetic role during the life and reign of Ahab is worth mentioning as follows.

Elijah the prophet

Elijah's prophetic ministry was carried out in Israel. Elijah was basically concerned with the extinction of the worship of foreign deities from Israel and raising the religion of Yahweh to a higher ethical level. Before assessing the importance of Elijah in Israel's history and religion, it is important to look at the significance of the contest on Mount Carmel which

Elijah organized to arrest wholesale apostasy in Israel. What occasioned the contest on Mount Carmel was the imminent threat to Yahwism in Israel. As noted above, a religious crisis had been brought about by the marriage of Ahab and Jezebel. True to her early training and environment, Jezebel not only persuaded her husband to build a temple for Baal-Melkart in53Historical
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Samaria, but also became a zealous propagandist for her cult and persecuted the prophets of Yahweh who opposed her. The very existence of Yahwism was thus threatened. Such was the situation when Elijah dramatically appeared before Ahab as the champion of Yahwism. After pronouncing drought which lasted for three years, the prophet returned to confront the king Ahab. At Elijah's suggestion, the prophets of Baal and the prophets of Asherah were summoned to Mount Carmel to a trial of power, to see which deity, Baal or Yaweh, would respond to an appeal by his followers to send down fire to consume an un-kindled sacrifice of a bull. The prophets of Baal raved, danced and cut themselves from morning till late afternoon in an effort to persuade their deity to ignite their sacrifice but nothing happened. Then Elijah ordered Yahweh's altar to be drenched with water before his invocation. At the prayer of Prophet Elijah, fire fell down from heaven devouring the altar together with the sacrificial victim. The people were convinced and confessed: "the Lord, he is God, the Lord, he is God" (I kings. 18:39). At the order of Elijah, the people seized the prophets of the foreign deities and slew them by the River Kishon (Hans, 2013).

Elijah won the contest and thereby resolved the issues of which of the two deities the Israelites should follow. The main issue can thus be stated: Yahweh or Baal? In the words of Elijah: "if the Lord is God, follow him; but if Baal, then follow him" (I kings. 18:21). But this was not simply a question of two deities vying for the allegiance of the people; it was the one true and only God as against so-called gods who were incapable of doing anything. The true and only God was supposed to act, to intervene and to secure victory. Yahweh's victory testified to his divine power, his reality and his claim to be the true and only God. Baal's failure made the people to agree that Baal was no living god. The contest proved that it was not Baal who brings rain or fire. It demonstrated Baal's lack of divine power,

his non-existence and his falsehood (Johanne, 2015).⁵⁴ Israel: Monarchy to Exile
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What appears outwardly as a purely religious confrontation has a wider significance both politically and socially. The contest was also a protest against the claims of Baalism in the organization of the total lives of the people. Baalism placed no limitation on the exercise of royal power. That is to say, the king has unlimited rights over his subjects and their property. In the field of social relationships, Baalism tended to support the status quo, with the aristocracy on top. Such despotic tendency inherent in Baalism has no room for social justice. All these are deviation from normative Yahwism. The covenant relationship imposes certain obligation and limitations on the exercise of royal power. The king was God's steward and not an absolute monarch. Moreover, Israelite's society was a covenant community in which everybody stood equal before the law whether rich or poor, or private citizen. The whole community was responsible to the sovereign will of Yahweh as expressed in the absolute laws. Thus, the issue of whether Israel should be organized as a nation with covenant relations with Yahweh was also at stake in the contest on Mount Carmel (Moshe, 1992). On another level, the significance of the contest can be assessed in terms of its effect. In his battle against Baal, Elijah used inevitably some violent methods specifically 'the assassination techniques' of his enemies. Such drastic measure partially succeeded in arresting temporarily the trend towards Baalism, thereby giving Yahwism the much needed breathing space. But it ignored the hearts and minds of the people, the very areas which had been polluted by Baalism; and soon afterwards, the worship of the foreign deity surfaced again in Israel. The threat to the very existence of Yahwism in Israel posed by Baalism precipitated the contest on Mount Carmel. Elijah won the contest and this settled the issue of divided loyalty. But the religious significance of the contest goes beyond mere allegiance to a deity; the conception of Yahweh is significant. Yahweh was the true and only God (Princeton, 2014). A few other Elijah's prophetic interventions in Israel's history and religion deserve mentioning. Elijah was a lone voice championing Yahwism at a time when the worship of Yahweh was in danger of being completely relegated to the background by Baalism. Jezebel, the 'fanatical missionary of Baal-Melkart,

had made her cult the official religion in Israel with the support of the state. Loyal Yahwists were persecuted. Elijah successfully opposed the national apostasy with all his might. He pronounced famine as punishment for the apostasy. After three years, he confronted the king who blamed him for the severe famine. Elijah courageously told him that he was to be blamed because he had forsaken the commandments of God and followed Baalism. He challenged the king and all Israel to a contest on Mount Carmel, a trial of power, to see which god, Yahweh or Baal would respond to an appeal by his devotees to consume an un-kindled sacrifice. Elijah faced the four hundred and fifty (450) prophets of Baal and the four hundred (400) prophets of Asherah and vindicated Yahweh as God deserving the allegiance of the people (Lee, 1981).

Elijah was also a solitary figure at a time when Israel seemed to be set up as a proper oriental despotic state. In a characteristic despotic fashion, Jezebel had imposed her religion on all Israel and stifled all oppositions. She persuaded the king to behave like a tyrant. "Do you now govern Israel?" she asked Ahab, when the latter was denied the vineyard of Naboth. She promised to secure Naboth's vineyard for him in her own way. Despotism placed no limitation on the exercise of royalty and consequently she got rid of Naboth and handed over the vineyard to Ahab. Elijah once again confronted Ahab when the king took possession of the vineyard. The prophet denounced this despotic act and invoked divine judgment upon the household of Ahab. Elijah's zeal for Yahweh which led to the slaughtering of the prophets of Baal and Asherah on Mount Carmel was no narrow religious devotion. His rebuke of Ahab over Naboth's vineyard shows that the prophet was concerned with the societal

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implications of Yahwism. The covenant relation between God and Israel imposed certain obligations on the people and the exercise of royal power. Every man stood equal before the law, whether rich or poor, king or private citizen, the whole society was responsible to the sovereign will of Yahweh. Elijah upheld these high ethical standards. To him, justice to the poor was paramount (Aaron, 2006).

In the history of prophecy in Israel, Elijah holds a prominent position. Prophetism has two important duties to perform: to extirpate the worship of foreign deities from Israel and to raise

the religion of Yahweh to a higher ethical level. Elijah addressed himself to these two cardinal duties with zeal. However, there are indications that Elijah was very much a child of his age. In his attempt to eliminate Baalism, he used the ‘assassination technique’ of his enemies. His murder of the Baal prophets was an attempt to establish Yahwism by negative force. This method was bound to fail since such drastic and violent methods weakened the country without fulfilling their purpose. Indeed, subsequent events showed that the reforms of Elijah failed. Soon after Elijah had departed from the scene, Baalism once again reigned supreme in Israel. It was left to Elisha and Jehu to continue the struggle against Baalism. Nevertheless, Elijah saved the day in a bleak hour when normative Yahwism stood in peril of being transformed into Baalism and thus gave Yahwism the much needed breathing space.

The name Elijah means “Jehovah in God”. His prophetic ministry was very dynamic. For instance, he was fed by ravens (I Kgs 17:2-7); he was fed, during famine, by the widow; he performed the miracle of oil supply (I Kgs 17:8-16); he raised a widow’s son to life (I Kgs 17:17-24); he singly contested with the prophets of Baal in the contest between Baal and God at Mt. Carmel (18: 1-46); he fled from Jezebel when his life was threatened (I Kgs 19:1); he performed the miracle of dividing river Jordan shortly before he was caught in a chariot of fire (II57Historical

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kings 2) (Robert, 2014).

Henotheism in Israel

The concept of henotheism is amply illustrated during this period. The concept of henotheism is the idea of the localization of a deity. It is one of the important religious ideas that emerge in the reign of Ahab. According to this belief, the powers of a particular national god were limited to its own territory. Outside its boundaries, its powers were not effective. After Ahab had succeeded in defeating the Syrians in their first encounter, the Syrians saw their defeat on the fact that the war was fought on Israelite territory, which was under the control of Israel’s national God. Expressing this concept, the Syrians said: “Their Gods are gods of the hills: and so they were stronger than we: but let us fight them on the plain, and we shall be stronger than they (I Kings 20: 23). Yahweh was associated with the hills of Samaria and the Syrians who lived in the plains thought their

own god was powerful in the plains (King, 2010).

Jehoram's battle against the Moabites further illustrates the concept of henotheism. When the Moabite king was defeated, he sacrificed his eldest son to the Moabite god, Chemosh, to placate him and to seek his help against the Israelites. It is then recorded that there was a great wrath against Israel, and the Israelites departed from him and returned to their country (2 Kings 3: 26, 27). In addition, the story is told of how a Syrian general, Naaman came to Elisha to be healed of leprosy (II Kings 5:1-19). The prophet advised Naaman to wash in the river Jordan seven times. Upon the advice of his servants, he washed himself seven times in the Jordan and was healed. But then on Elisha's refusal of the gift offered to him, Naaman asked for two mules to be loaded with Israelite soil upon which he intended to worship the God of Israel when he got back to Syria. This is in accordance with the ideas of the time that a god⁵⁸ Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective

of a country is limited to its own territory and as such the god cannot be worshipped properly except upon his own soil which was believed to be sacred.

Similarly, in 2 Kings 17, we are told of how after the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 721 B.C., Assyrian colonists were settled in Samaria. Later, the new comers were attacked by lions in the vicinity and this was attributed to the law of the god of the land (II Kings 17:26). The powers as well as the laws of a national god were confined to its own territory. Hence its laws were known only to the inhabitants of the land. Consequently, an Israelite priest was sent down to Samaria to teach the strangers the laws of Yahweh (Joi, 1979).

Ahaziah

He was the eight king of Israel, the son of Ahab and Jezebel, and uncle of Ahaziah king of Judah. Williams (2020) says that he was criticised by the writers of the book of kings for following the ways of his father Ahab and mother Jezebel and led Israel into sin in the ways of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. Barnes (2020) notes the phrase 'in the way of his mother' does not occur anywhere else in the Hebrew Bible; and this demonstrates the strong feelings of the writer of the books of Kings as to the influence of Jezebel. During his reign, the Moabites revolted against his authority. King Ahaziah formed a business partnership with king Jehoshaphat of Judah in order

to construct a trading fleet ship. The ship was wrecked and never sails because of the sin of Ahab and Jezebel, Ahaziah's parents. Ahaziah fell from the roof-gallery of his palace and thus became sick.

He sent his messenger to go and consult Beelzebub the god of prophecy in Ekron regarding his recovery from the effect of his fall from the roof-gallery of his palace. Prophet Elijah met his messenger and passed the judgement of God that he will never

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rise from his bed', because he seeks the god that was not God.

According to the second book of Kings, he did not recover from his injuries and died.

Jehoram

The ninth king of Israel, he was the son of Ahaziah. He began to reign in Israel in the 18th year of Jehoshaphat of Judah. He ruled for 12 years. Unlike his predecessors, Jehoram did not worship Baal and he removed the pillar of Baal probably a special pillar which Ahab had erected near his palace at Jezreel for royal worship. However, the book of Kings said that he still followed in the ways of king Jeroboam (I) who led Israel into sin. With the help of Jehoshaphat of Judah, Jehoram attacked Mesha king of the Moabites. Prophet Elisha was a friend of king Jehoram, revealing to him the plans of the enemy.

But when Ben-hadad besieged Samaria and was reducing the city almost to starvation and cannibalism, Jehoram sought to behead Prophet Elisha. The prophet later foretold plenty of food in the city in the next day. When Hazael, king of the Arameans, violently revolted in Damascus as Elisha had predicated (II kings. 8:12), Jehoram made an alliance with king Ahaziah of Judah his nephew. Together, they waged war against the Arameans but were defeated. Jehoram was wounded in the fight; and thus went back to Jezreel to recover. While Jehoram was recuperating at Jezreel, Jehu (general commander of his army) incited a revolt and executed Jehoram by shooting him in the back with an arrow and had his body thrown into the field of Naboth the Jezreel as a punishment for his parents' sin, precisely the illegal stealing of Naboth's land and murder of Naboth. Jehu also wiped out the royal family. With the death of Jehoram and his family members, Omri/Ahab Dynasty came to a tragic end. Jehu claimed the throne of Israel as his own and

proclaimed himself as king (Narration of Genovi, 2012).⁶⁰ Israel: Monarchy to Exile
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Jehu

Elisha, the successor of Elijah, commissioned one member of the prophetic band to seek out Jehu, the Israelite army commander, and to anoint him king over Israel. On his anointing, Jehu was prophetically charged to exterminate the entire household of Ahab in order to avenge Jezebel's persecution of the prophets of Yahweh. In the part of the evolve blood removal, not only were all the royal members of Omri dynasty and their supporters dissolve; there was a great killing of all the priests, prophets and the residents of Baal.

Outwardly, the revolution of Jehu was a religious upheaval aimed at exterminate the cult of Baal-Melkart from Jews land. Jezebel's zeal for Baalism had threatened the very existence of Yahwism in Israel. Elijah, the champion of Yahwism, had attempted to stamp out Baalism by slaughtering the prophets of Baal after winning the contest on Mount Carmel. However, the royal house of Omri, which supported Baalism remained. Elijah, therefore, charged his successor (Elisha) to anoint Jehu as king to liquidate the Omri dynasty. This is also an obvious attempt to wholly eliminate Baalism from Israel (Sevi, 2010). Apart from the prophetic call for revolution in opposition to the religious policy of Omri, there were conservative elements in Israel who were ready for a rebellion. Such were the Rechabites, whose leader, Jehonadab took active part in the revolution. These were worshippers of Yahweh who zealously maintained a semi-nomadic life in opposition to the settled life of the farmer. They were living in tents, refusing to engage in agriculture and abstaining from wine. The Rechabites, who stood for purity of Yahwism, believed that the Mosaic tradition had been defiled by the agrarian culture of Canaan. They would like to see a return to the purity of the desert period of Israel and were thus ready to support Jehu's bloody purge. Jehu invited

Jehonadab to join him in his war of extermination. "Come with⁶¹ Historical
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me and see my zeal for the Lord" (2 Kings. 10: 16), Jehu said to Jehonadab. Jehu displayed his zeal for Yahwism by slaughtering the remnants of Ahab's house according to the prophetic word of Elijah. Moreover, Jehonadab, a representative of the conservative nomadic tradition of Israel endorsed Jehu's purge

by riding with him in his chariot. Jehonadab also watched Jehu's zeal for Yahweh by joining in the extermination of the Baal worshippers. The liquidation of all captured priests, prophets and devotees of Baal was an application of the ban on/ against Baalism which threatened to deform Yahwism. Elijah himself had demanded the ruthless extermination of Baal after the contest on Mount Carmel (Mahdi, 2011).

Jehu's revolution has a much wider significance. Closely linked with the religious upheaval were a socio-economic revolution in which the poor and the landless revolted against the increasing contrast between the wealth of the new nobility and the equally new merchant class on the one hand, and the poverty of the masses on the other. The episode of Naboth, a particularly bad perversion of justice, may represent what was typical of those in authority. It undermined the covenant relation between Yahweh and his people which imposed certain obligations and limitations on the exercise of power by those in authority. Every individual Israelite was equal before the law, whether rich or poor, king or private citizen. Jehu's revolution was an attempt to uphold the societal implications of Yahwism. According to Donald (2016), political issues were also involved in Jehu's revolution. The death of Jezebel at the hands of Jehu has more than religious significance. It is a violent protest against oriental despotism set up by Jezebel and which gave the ruler an unlimited rights over his subjects and their property. This was diametrically opposed to Israelite concept of kingship where the king was God's steward.

Military factors also played their part in the revolution.

The revolution was headed by the General of the Army and62Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective

supported by the officers and the ordinary soldiers as there was some discontent in the army. The military officers that were led by Jehu, were not satisfied with the politics of the king then. The revolution of Jehu was thorough going and brutal that it is possible to read personal motives into the rebellion. He had all the seventy (70) sons of Ahab and the more prominent supporters of the Omri's dynasty decapitated probably to eliminate all possible claimants to the throne. He murdered Ahaziah of Judah who had come to visit his sick uncle, and later massacred Ahaziah's brothers who had come for a similar visit. The extermination of the royal household of Judah seems

uncalled for, but was perhaps excused on account of the close relationship with the family of Ahab. However, it is possible that Jehu proposed to put an end to the independence of Judah and to incorporate it fully in his kingdom. According to Leisus (2014), the significance of the revolution can also be assessed in terms of its effects. According to the Biblical narrative, Jehu succeeded in wiping out Baal from Israel (2 Kings 10: 28).

However, this claim is only admissible if we were to limit our assessment of Jehu's revolution to the slaughter of the priests, prophets and devotees of Baal as well as the destruction of the shrines and images of Baal. This might have given Yahwism the much needed breathing space, but certainly they were no lasting effects. The coup was only temporarily successful in a superficial sense. Like the liquidation of the Baal prophets on Mount Carmel, Jehu's revolution was an attempt to establish Yahwism by negative force. The Yahwism involved was of a narrow fanatical kind pursuing an impossible ideal. Israel was deviating from the covenant basis of society and becoming like any other oriental despotic kingdom.

The wrong had to be stopped and a return to the Israelite desert ideal instituted. The revolt, therefore, aimed at removing those responsible for the bad conditions, and a return to the ancient path as advocated by the Rechabites. But this was shallow judgment since all the negatives could not be erased with the sword. By seeking to create conditions which could only be

realized in the desert, the coup was in effect attempting the impossible. The effect was bound to be ephemeral since such drastic measures weakened the country without accomplishing much. Baalism survived Jehu's revolution. Both Amos and Hosea preached against Baalism and it was never eliminated from Israelite soil even at the collapse of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. Hosea in fact, repudiated Jehu's bloody act of slaughter (Hosea 1:4). Moreover, the revolution did not go so far enough to rid Israel of syncretism. The golden calves set up by Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, were not destroyed (Kings. 10: 29, 31) and (Obajemu, 1996).

Politically, the consequences of the revolution were equally disastrous. It led to drastic changes in Judah, as Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah seized the throne by slaughtering the remaining members of the Davidic dynasty, with the exception of the infant son, Joash. Athaliah herself, a devotee of Baal-

Melkart, encouraged Baalism in Judah. The bloody purge also irreparable hostile Israel's foregoing allies like Judah and Phoenicia. The deaths of the Judean King and his brothers terminated the military co-operation that had existed between Israel and Judah. The demise among the Phoenicians from Jezebel down were exceedingly countless, and the abuse to Baal-Melkart, Lord of Tyre, was irrevocable in character. Consequently, Israel lost her profitable trade with Phoenicia and her north-western boundary was left unprotected. Depravedness of help from former allies, Jew's defence situation became speedily porous. Hazael of Aram overran and apparently taken over the whole of the Israelite Trans-Jordan border. From Assyrian inscriptions, we learn that Jehu docilely paid tribute to Shalmaneser in the year 841/42 B.C., probably to secure the great king's protection against Aram. The Arameans suffered gravely but did not capitulate. However, Assyria did not help them. Under Jehu's son, Joahaz, Israel was devastated by the Arameans and reduced to a dependency of Aram (Klim, 1974).⁶⁴

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By way of summary, Jehu's revolution was triggered off by the prophetic opposition to the religious policy of Omri's dynasty. Conservative elements like the Rechabites supported it, and political factors were also involved. The religious impact of the revolution was negligible since it attempted the impossible. It led to serious political and economic repercussions in Israel, especially with the loss of Israel's two former close allies, Judah and Phoenicia.

Elisha the prophet

Vahilon (2016) asserts that, Elisha, another prophet of Israel, and successor of Elijah, is most remembered by the stories connected with him. These stories are filled with wonder tales (see, 2 Kings. 2-9; 14-21). According to the stories, Elisha sweetens a spring of brackish water at Jericho; he renders a poisonous mess of pottage harmless for the members of the prophetic order; he multiplies the oil for the poor widow; he multiplies a few loaves of bread to feed a great company; he rolls back the Jordan by Elijah's mantle; he deceives the Moabites with a mirage of blood-red water; he restores the Shunammite woman's child from the dead. These stories are mostly miraculous deeds of mercy and they throw light on Elisha as a prophet who had a deep concern for the people. However,

the importance of these stories lies in the light they shed on institutionalised prophecy in Israel; its organization and its function in Israelite society. These prophets appear to have been drawn from the impoverished section of the society and have lived in communities with their families in a loose organization under the charge of a master like Elisha at such ancient cultic centres as Bethel, Jericho and Gilgal. Their predilection for the abnormal and the irrational is evident from the fact that Elisha is depicted as miracle-worker and clairvoyant who used music to stimulate prophetic trance. Moreover, these prophets were regarded as madmen and despised. Although they were despised, they were also feared and held in awe.⁶⁵ Historical Perspective Israel:

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The prophetic guilds acted as intermediaries between God and the people. As representatives of the people in relation to God, they played a leading role in the worship of the sanctuaries and were specialists in prayer. As representatives of God in relation to the people, their principal function was to foretell future events. They obtained oracle by the stimulation of trance. Because they were believed to be in direct contact with God, they were consulted by both individuals on private matters and by kings on public issues. But for the stories surrounding Elisha, our knowledge of the prophetic guilds in Israel and their function in the society, would have been scanty indeed. Since the stories were told against the background of the political events in which Elisha was involved during the closing years of Omri's dynasty, especially in the reign of Jehoram, king of Israel, they shed light on the political activities of Elisha. At a time when Israel was at war with Syria, Elisha heals the Syrian army commander, Naaman, a leper. The healing was not only an expression of Israelite faith but it also shows how men could believe under trying conditions of war that the enemy was included within the sovereignty of Yahweh. Thus, Elisha contributed to the conception of Yahweh as a universal God (Yalez, 2010).

Like Elijah, Elisha played important role in Israel's history and religion. Elijah and Elisha had cooperated in establishing schools for prophets. Elisha is reported to have involved himself in violent dynastic changes in Syria and Israel. He journeyed to Damascus and while there, Benhadad, the Syrian king, suffering from sickness, sent one of his officers, Hazael

to ask the prophet whether he would recover. In a prophetic trance, Elisha predicted that Hazael would be the next king of Syria and that he would bring great military calamity to Israel. Hazael returned to Damascus and murdered Benhadad and became king of Syria.

Elisha's interference in the political affairs of Syria is also66Israel: Monarchy to Exile
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indicative of his belief in the universal sovereignty of Yahweh. The prediction that Hazael would cause havoc in Israel might reflect the belief that Yahweh, the sovereign Lord of history, used other nations as his instrument in punishing Israel for her sins (Clarendon, 2018).

The second revolution was brought about by Elisha when he summoned one of the members of the prophetic guild to anoint Jehu as king over Israel; and to charge him to exterminate Omri's dynasty in an attempt to eliminate Baalism and restore Yahwism in Israel. With Jehu's rise to power, Omri's dynasty was brought to an end in a terrible blood-bath, and a new chapter in Israel's history began. Thus, Elisha's importance in Israel's religion is gleaned from the stories connected with him in 2 Kings. While these stories depict the wonder works of mercy of the great man of God, they also contain reliable religious traditions on the prophetic guilds in Israel at this time with respect to their organization and function in Israel. The stories also embody traditions about military and political matters in which the prophet was involved (Jerome, 1990).

By way of summary, the outstanding stories of Elisha include Elisha's call by Elijah while ploughing in the field (I kgs 19:19-21); and his witness of the ascension of Elijah to heaven on horses of fire, and the impartation of double portion of Elijah's spiritual power (proved by dividing the Jordan) with the mantle that fell from Elijah. Elisha had double anointing because his predecessor performed 18 miracles while Elisha performed 36 miracles. Some of Elisha's miracles include the healing of the bitter water (II kings. 2:19); the recovery of an axe that was lost in the water; the attack of forty children by two bears when they mocked Elisha; the miraculous settlement of the debt of a certain widow who was a prophet's wife. Other spectacular miracles include the healing of Naaman; and the impartation of leprosy as consequence of Gehazi's sin; the opening of Elisha's

servant's eyes to see the host of chariot surrounding Elisha, and⁶⁷Historical PerspectiveIsrael: Monarchy to Exile

the blindness of the eyes of the enemies; and Elisha's prophesy that the prices of food stuff would normalise the next days. In view of these miracles, the double anointing on Elisha is more than justified.

Jehoahaz

Jehoahaz (in Hebrew Yahoahaz, meaning Yahweh has heard) was the eleventh king of Israel (that is, the Ten Tribes, or Northern kingdom) and the son of Jehu. He reigned for seventeen years. He did evil in the sight of the Lord and followed the sin of Jeroboam (I), the son of Nebat, who had made Israel to sin. He did not depart from them. Then, the anger of the Lord was aroused against Israel and he delivered them into the hand of Hazeal, king of Syria and Benhadad, the son of Hazeal. Throughout this reign, he was kept in Damascus. Jehoahaz maintained the idolatry of Jeroboam, but in the extreme of his humiliation, he besought Jehovah and Jehovah gave Israel's deliverance and they escaped from Syrian oppression (Lo, 2017).

Jehoash or Joash

Jehoash, the son of Jehoahaz, became king (II kgs. 13:10-13).

He was the 11th king who ruled over Israel in Samaria and reigned for sixteen (16) years. He did evil in the sight of Lord. He did not depart from all the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, but walked in them. He fought against the king of Judah (Amaziah), and defeated him. Jehoash went to Jerusalem and broke down the walls of Jerusalem. He also took all the gold, silver and all the articles that were found in the house of the Lord and the treasures that were in the king house, and the hostages; and returned them to Samaria (II kgs. 14:11-14). Jehoash died and was buried in Samaria (Lo, 2017).⁶⁸Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective

Summary

The regimes of Jereoboam (I), Elah, Zimri, Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, Joram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, and Joash Nadah, Baasha, as kings of Israel have been examined. The evil precedence set by Jeroboam (I) apparently became an incurable disease that plaque the spiritual lives of subsequent kings of Israel. To cure the plaque of Jeroboam's sin of Baalism, God raised up Elijah and Elisha as prophets in Israel. As dynamic as the prophetic

ministries of Elijah and Elisha were, they had little or no effect in the eradication of the sin of Jeroboam (I) and its generational effects in Israel. But God was not done yet with his people. Divine mercy was still available. However, the other kings of Israel misused divine mercy and eventually plunged Israel into captivity. How this happened is demonstrated in the next chapter.

Post test

1. Evaluate the importance of Omri's reign.
2. Consider the view that Omri did more evil than all those who were before him.
3. Account for the prophetic opposition to the house of Omri.
4. How was the life and thought of Israel affected under King Ahab?
5. What issues were at stake in the contest on Mount Carmel between Elijah and the prophets of Baal?
6. Estimate the importance of Elijah in Israel's history and religion.
7. What is the significance of Elijah in the Prophetic movement in Israel?
8. The concept of Henotheism is amply illustrated during this period. Discuss.
9. Account for the prophetic revolution under Elijah and Elisha.⁶⁹ Historical Perspectives Israel: Monarchy to Exile
10. Critically examine the political revolution under Jehu.
11. How far did personal motives influence the revolution of Jehu?
12. The revolution of Jehu was an attempt to realize an impossible ideal. Discuss.
13. Explain Elisha's importance in the history and religion of Israel.

10

CHAPTER SIX

KINGS OF ISRAEL (Part II)

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, we started the stories of the kings who reigned over the ten tribes of Israel, called the northern kingdom of Israel, or simply as Israel. The kings of Israel examined in the previous chapter are: Jereboam I, Nadah, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, Joram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, and Joash. In this chapter, we take up the stories of the remaining kings of Israel namely Jeroboam II, Zachariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hosea. The prophetic roles of Amos and Hosea in the history and religion of Israel during the reigns of some of these kings are also examined.

Objective

At the end of this chapter, students should be able to identify Jeroboam II, Zachariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hosea, their achievements and failures as kings of Israel. They should be able to identify the factors that led to the fall and Assyrian captivity of Israel; and the roles of prophets such as Amos, and Hosea in the lives and times of the kings of Israel.

Pre-test

1. Identify: (i) Jeroboam II, (ii) Zachariah, (iii) Shallum, and (iv) Menahem, in terms of their achievements and failures

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as kings of Israel.

2. Identify: (i) Pekahiah, (ii) Pekah, and (iii) Hosea, in terms of their achievements and failures as kings of Israel.
3. Why was Israel doomed and punished with exile?
4. What are the major themes of Amos's and Hosea's prophetic ministries in Israel?
5. Why do Amos and Hosea criticize sacrificial cult as they do in their books?
6. How did Hosea's attitude toward Israel differ from the attitude of Amos?

Content

Jeroboam II

Jeroboam II, son of Jehoash or Joash, was the thirteenth king of Israel. He reigned over Israel for forty one years (II kgs. 14:16; 23-29). The kingdom of Israel had reached the height of its power during the reign of Jeroboam II (983 BC) who succeeded in achieving independence from Syrian dominance and bring

the nation to high degree of economic prosperity. However, this affluence gave rise to moral and spiritual corruption to which the prophets, Amos and Hosea, formed a nucleus of opposition (Elija, 1984).

A period of instability followed when Jeroboam II and Zachariah was assassinated by Shallum, who in turn was put to death by the military commander, Menahem, son of Pekah. The rising Assyrians empire, meanwhile, now posed a major threat. Menahem ward off Assyrian invasion by paying tribute to king Tiglath-pileser (also called Tiglath-pileser III) of Assyria as did king Ahaz of Judah. Menahem, however, formed an alliance with Rezin of Ramascus and attempted to influence Judah to join the revolt against Assyria. Judah did not respond and when Israel and Syria attacked Judah, Tiglath-pileser (king of Assyria) came to Judah's aid. Menahem's son, Pekariah ruled Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective

only briefly and was assassinated by the usurper, Pekah, around 735 BC. During this time, the Assyrians succeeded in annexing the Israelite territory of the Galilee, leaving Israel with only a small area of land surrounding its capital of Samaria. Pekah's reign was put to an end when he was assassinated by Hoshea, possibly in an attempt to put a stop to the policy of resistance towards Assyria. Like all the northern kings, Hoshea is said by the Bible to have done evil in the eyes of the Lord but it specifies that Hoshea's evil was not like that of the kings of Israel who preceded him. Based on the Biblical description of the other kings of Israel, this probably means that he was personally a devotee of the Hebrew deity, Yahweh, and did not encourage Baal worship, but that he did support the Israelite shrines at Bethel and Dan of which the pro-Jerusalem Biblical writers strongly disapproved. What happened to Hoshea following the end of the kingdom of Israel and when or where he died is unknown (Kolade, 2012).

The reign of Jeroboam II was a mixed blessing to the Northern Kingdom of Israel. There was political peace and stability coupled with material prosperity on the one hand, and social, moral and religious decay on the other hand. In the preceding century, internally weakened by Jehu's purge of the house of Omri, Israel had suffered severely at the hands of the Aramean Kingdom of Damascus, losing all her territory east of the Jordan and probably more besides, and becoming ultimately a

dependence of the Aramean King. At the end of the 9th century, however, Assyrian invasion crippled Damascus while leaving Israel relatively untouched. Then the Assyrians withdrew; and for some fifty years busied with internal problems and with campaigns elsewhere, did not march into Syria and Palestine at all. This gave Israel her chance. Under Jehoash (801-786 BC) and then under Jeroboam II, she recovered all her lost territories and enlarged her borders considerably at the expense of her neighbours. Jeroboam II recaptured the border cities that had been seized previously by Syria. He made expeditions of73Historical

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conquest into Trans-Jordan where he made some territorial gains. He was able to place his northern frontier at the entrance of Hammath. By this victory, the Moabites and Ammonites were ejected from Israelite territory and held in check. Thus, under Jeroboam II, Israel became stronger. The political peace and stability was parallel by intense economic activity and thus Israel became more prosperous. The control gained over Trans-Jordan left Jeroboam II in a position to control the trade routes between Asia and Africa and so levy tolls on considerable commercial traffic. This, with the free interchange of goods poured into the country, trade flourished and there was much wealth in the land. The economic prosperity which this expansion implies is suggested also by excavations at Samaria and Megiddo (Noth, 2013).

As the country became more and more wealthy, a rich and affluent merchant class emerged. The consequence was the creation of two classes of people in Israel, the rich few and the poor who were in the majority. The rich took advantage of the poor at every opportunity, amassing wealth by dishonest means and without regard for the rights of the poor. Their women-folk were equally guilty with them. Since the judges were venal, the poor had no recourse. Thus, the tribal structure of Israel's society completely disintegrated, leaving a wide gap between the rich and poor. Covenant law in which all social obligations had once been based ceased to have any real meaning. The shrines were busy and well supported but immorality and foreign cultic practices were rampant. Religion had divorced itself from morality. The clergy, being servants of the existing order, could neither utter criticism nor combat societal corruption. Baalism was the religion of a large proportion of the population at this

time. It is these ugly situations that the prophetic ministries of Amos and Hosea attempted to address (Alahun, 2019).⁷⁴ Israel: Monarchy to Exile
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Amos and Hosea

It is against this historical background of mixed blessing that Eze (2009) asserts that Amos and later, Hosea prophesied.

Whereas Amos' message was proclaimed in a tone of righteous indignation, Hosea proclaimed his message with tearful pleading.

Much of our information on the social, moral and religious conditions of the period is gained from the denunciations of

Amos and Hosea. Amos exposed the maltreatment of the poor by the rich. He denounced the practice whereby the poor were

bought for silver and the needy for a pair of sandals. Amos

declared: "They sell the righteous for silver and the needy for a pair of shoes; they trample the head of the poor into the dust of the earth, and turn aside the way of the afflicted" (Amos 2:6-7).

Amos attacked the wicked farmers and merchants who exploited the poor through cheating, especially in the markets.

They used false weights and measures to extract more money

from the poor. "They make the ephah small and the shekel great, and deal deceitfully with false balances" (Amos 8: 5).

The prophet condemned the domineering women of Samaria

whom he compared to the cows of Baashan for their selfish luxury which forced them to make incessant demands on their

husbands, who in order to satisfy their wives, oppressed the

poor. "You cows of Baashan, who are in the mountains of

Samaria, who oppress the poor, who crush the needy, who say to their husbands, 'Bring that we may drink' (Amos 4:1). The

prophet criticized the wealthy greedy land grabbers who took advantage of the plight of the poor to enlarge their holdings.

They built houses of hewn stone and planted vineyards (Amos 5:11). Amos condemned the wealth and luxury of the rich.

They built winter and summer houses and also houses of ivory (Amos 3: 15).

They sleep on ivory beds, they stretch themselves upon

their couches, and eat lambs from the flock and calves⁷⁵ Israel: Monarchy to Exile

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from the midst of the stall, they sing songs of the sound of

the harp; they drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oil (Amos 6: 4-6).

Amos attacked corruption of the courts. He condemned the

venality of the judges. The judges turned justice into wormwood. Those who advocated for justice were silenced. "They hate him who reproves in the gate and they abhor him who speaks truth" (Amos 5: 10). The judges perverted justice by taking bribes from the rich in order to give judgment in their favour (Amos 5: 12) (Peters, 2014).

Amos condemned the practice whereby religious leaders like the Nazarites were made to break their vows and the prophets were silenced from performing their duties. "And I raised up some of your sons for prophets, and some of your young men for Nazarites... But you made the Nazarites drink wine, and commanded the prophets saying, 'you shall not prophesy'" (Amos 2: 11-12). To force the Nazarites to break their vows and to stop the prophets from performing their sacred duties (as Amaziah, the corrupt priest at Bethel sacked Amos from the Northern Kingdom) meant that moral and religious perversions had reached alarming proportions in Israel. The people were so engrossed in their wickedness, likewise their own religious leaders (Peters, 2014).

Amos attacked the shallow religiosity of the people. The shrines were well, and outward religious duties like the payment of tithes and the offering of sacrifices were with regularity and great zeal but there was no moral transformation in the lives of the people. The prophet reproved the sham worship and sacrifices thus:

I hate, I despise your feasts; and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies. Even though you offer me burnt offerings and cereal offerings, I will not accept them, and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts I will not look⁷⁶Israel: Monarchy to Exile

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upon. Take away from me the noise of your songs; to the melody of your harp I will not listen. But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever flowing stream. (Amos 5: 21-24).

With biting sarcasm, Amos indicted the people for carrying on with their festivals and then come to the sanctuaries of Bethel and Gilgal only to rebel against Yahweh.

Come to Bethel and transgress; to Gilgal and multiply transgressions; bring your sacrifices every morning, your tithes every three days; offer a sacrifice of thanksgiving of that which is leavened, and proclaim

freewill offerings, publish them; for so you love to do O Israel (Amos 4:4-5).

What the worshippers did at these sanctuaries was to intensify their apostasy and rebellion against Yahweh. The regularity of their sacrifices without any corresponding inner moral change was the substance of their apostasy and rebellion. Hosea also condemned the social vices of the period but laid emphasis on the syncretism which had gripped the nation. "A spirit of harlotry has led them astray, and they have left their God to play the harlot" (Hosea 4: 12). In the midst of this social injustice and moral and religious perversions, Amos stressed the righteousness of Yahweh; and Hosea, the steadfast love of God (Babalola, 2012).

Amos' Concept of the Righteousness of Yahweh

In the teaching of Amos, righteousness is a narrow religious or legalistic concept. It is that aspect of Yahweh's being by which men are led into fuller perception of his whole nature. First, it is an expression of the essential nature of Yahweh himself, and second, it represents the character of God in his dealings with man. It is a total description of the moral demand of Yahweh.⁷⁷ Historical Perspective Israel: Monarchy to Exile

Thus, righteousness is an expression not only of the essential nature of Yahweh himself, but also of the unique characteristics of the moral or ethical imperatives which Yahweh lays upon all those who are his creatures. Amos declared that Yahweh had made the whole world and all human history as the outcome of his will. Hence, he was concerned with all nations and he appeared as the vindicator of universal moral laws. The moral obligations of which all men are aware is identified with the personal will of Yahweh who exercises universal sovereignty and holds people accountable for their conduct. Thus, his righteousness demands that he punishes neighbouring states for crimes which violated natural laws of common humanity. Damascus, Edom, Ammon and Moab are to be punished for their inhuman atrocities. The Philistines and the Phoenicians are to be punished for their participation in inhuman slave trade. Yahweh's righteousness, therefore, manifests itself in his judgment of other nations for their acts of inhumanity (Yohanan, 2010).

If Yahweh, in his righteousness, punishes other nations, then

Israel as Yahweh's elect comes under severe punishment because the total description of what Yahweh requires from his people is explicitly stated in the covenant with a basic stipulation that the people obey the covenant law in all dealings with each other. Righteousness involves the establishment of equal rights for all. Israel had perverted the notion of the covenant through corruption, exploitation and oppression of the poor and social injustice. Yahweh's righteousness would not tolerate corruption in the courts; corruption in the markets; and corruption in high places with all the cruel suffering they cause. Israel had become unrighteous, therefore, Yahweh, in his righteousness, will punish Israel. Yahweh's passion for righteousness led him to punish Israel in the past with famine, drought, blight, epidemic, disease, earthquake, etc., but Israel had persisted in her unrighteousness. Therefore, Yahweh's judgment will fall heavily upon the nation. Israel is doomed⁷⁸ Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective

and she will be punished with exile (Esiri, 2014).

The visions of Amos highlight the punishment in store for Israel in consequence of her apostasy, moral and social evils. In the first two visions, Yahweh was ready to punish his wayward people but the prophet intervenes and he relents. First, a swarm of locusts ready to devour the land, but Amos interceded and Yahweh relented (Amos 7:1-3,); secondly, a vision of a consuming fire devastating the land. The prophet interceded again and for the second time, Yahweh changed his mind (Amos 7: 4-6). In the third vision, the prophet saw a man standing beside a wall with a plumb line in his hand ready to demolish the wall. This means that Yahweh is tired of relenting and will execute judgment (Amos 7:7-9). In the fourth vision, the prophet saw a basket of summer fruit which symbolized the end of summer. The end has come for Israel; the judgment is certain (Amos 8:1-3). In the final vision, Yahweh avenged and there was no escape whatsoever. The destruction would be complete (Amos 9: 1-8). It is reasonable to conclude from Amos' condemnation of Israel that the righteous demands of Yahweh do not exempt Israel from divine punishment. In this, Amos made a significant break away from popular understanding of the righteousness of God. The contemporary idea was that Yahweh had chosen Israel and was bound to protect his people under all circumstances. Yahweh, in his righteousness, will come and punish every other

nation, except Israel. Thus, to Israel, the judgment associated with the “Day of the Lord”, will mean vindication of Israel, the elect of God, and her triumph over all her enemies. Thus, it would be a time of rejoicing and exultation. This optimistic attitude reflects in the oracle found in Amos 5: 18-20, where it is said that the people were “desiring the Day of the Lord” confident that it would be a day of ‘Light’, that is, a time of victory and blessing (Juol, 2013).

Amos reverses this popular concept of the “Day of the Lord” of his time, saying that it would be a day of punishment, gloom and destruction for Israel for failing to keep the moral demands

of Yahweh. He said Yahweh had known only Israel of all the families of the earth; therefore, Israel would be punished for her iniquities. Israel’s special calling, said Amos, does not entitle her to special privilege, but only to greater responsibility. His special relationship to his own people meant not privilege to do wrong, but responsibility to do right. In fact, Amos censured Israel far more heavily than any of the surrounding nations, precisely because Israel alone had been called into relationship with God and had received through her experience, the teaching concerning God’s will. Having seen the light, however, Israel preferred the darkness rather than light.

Consequently, Amos asked: “Is not the day of the Lord darkness, and not light, and gloom with no brightness in it?” (Grandt, 1979).

“The Day of the Lord” would prove to be a day of destruction (Amos 5: 18-20; 8: 9-10). Since Yahweh knows the movement of all nations, he would raise one of them to be the instrument of divine judgment (Amos 6:14). Amos was so critical of the doctrine or conventional belief in Israel’s election; in fact, he seems to denounce the doctrine altogether (see, Amos 9:7).

Amos retained the idea of Yahweh’s coming to assert his sovereignty in the world, but he made a radical break with all popular expectations when he declared that it was Israel (and not the Gentiles) who was Yahweh’s enemy and therefore, that it was his own people who would be brought to judgment. Amos’ radical interpretation of the day of Yahweh’s visitation is to be seen in the context of the covenant tradition, which included blessings for obedience as well as threat in the form of curses upon disobedience. The covenant did not give an unconditional guarantee for the future; but popular religion reversed this

covenant tradition and clanged to the view that Yahweh would favour Israel in spite of her wickedness and rather judge the Gentiles (Esiri, 2014).⁸⁰Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective
Hosea's Concept of the Steadfast Love of God
(Hesed)

According to Michael (2016), since the key to the interpretation of Hosea's message of God's unyielding love for his apostate people, Israel, is his marriage with Gomer, we shall take a look at the marriage and then see the analogy in God's relation to Israel. Whereas Amos' message was proclaimed in a tone of righteous indignation, Hosea proclaimed his message with tearful pleading. Hosea married Gomer, she gave birth to three children. He gave symbolic names to his children in order that they might be 'walking signs' of Yahweh's word to Israel. The first son was named Jezreel, in recollection of the place where Jehu carried his bloody purge - a sign that in a little while, Yahweh would punish the house of Jehu for their monstrous atrocities. The second child, a daughter was named 'Not Pitied', a symbol that Yahweh's patience with Israel had been exhausted. The third child, a son, was named 'Not my People', a sign that Yahweh had dissolved the covenant and rejected his people.

Initially, there was love between Hosea (husband) and Gomer (wife). Later, Gomer proved unfaithful to the marriage bond by going after other men.

Gomer's infidelity indicated a clear rejection of the relationship between her and Hosea (her husband). As a result, Hosea divorced her. However, despite her disloyalty, Hosea was prepared to go beyond the law and forgive her. Thus, Hosea ransomed her and, after a period of discipline, restored her as his wife. When Hosea married Gomer, she was not yet a prostitute, although looking at the matter in retrospect she was clearly destined to be one. Hosea insisted that his loving and reconciling action towards Gomer was initiated at Yahweh's command. He was divinely ordered to take "a wife of harlotry and have children of harlotry". And once he had reflected on⁸¹Historical
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Israel's relation to Yahweh, the meaning of his own marriage became clear. Just as Gomer forsook Hosea, "the land commits great harlotry by forsaking Yahweh" (Harrah, 2008).

Hosea applied the sacred marriage concept to Yahweh's relation

to Israel. He interpreted the covenant by comparing it with marriage. He spoke of a historical marriage in the wilderness between God and his people. The meaning of this marriage was disclosed to him by a deep understanding of his own relationship with Gomer. The initial relationship of openness and spontaneity which characterized the beginning of Hosea's marriage is comparable to Yahweh's relationship with Israel "in the days of her youth, when she came out of the land of Egypt". Just as Gomer played the harlot, so the 'wife' whom Yahweh had chosen and betrothed to himself had become a whore. In the land of

Canaan, she began to pursue her 'lovers'. The people's ungrateful forsaking of Yahweh for Baal and his licentious worship at the sanctuaries is denounced as nothing than harlotry and whoredom. Thus, Israel had abandoned Yahwism in favour of the Canaanite way. Oyelade (2017) affirmed that the faithless attempt to find security in foreign alliances in the chaotic years after the death of Jeroboam II in 746 B.C. promoted Canaanite idolatrous and sinful practices. The covenant is broken because Israel, the 'wife' was estranged from her 'husband' by her unfaithfulness.

Israel's fidelity was likening to that of a fickle woman such as Gomer. It lacked steadfastness of a true covenant love. In short, it lacked 'Hesed'. This is a covenant word that refers to the faithfulness or loyal love that binds two parties together in a covenant. When a person shows 'Hesed', he is not motivated merely by legal obligations, but by an inner loyalty which arises out of the situation itself. Such covenant love has the quality of constancy, firmness, steadfastness and reliability. In Hosea's marital experience with an unfaithful wife, Israel's 'Hesed' was

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like a transient morning cloud. Hosea divorced his wife for her infidelity resulting from her fickleness and frailty. In the same way, Yahweh would divorce

Israel (harlotrous mother of harlotrous children) for "she is not my wife and I am not her husband". Yahweh would forget his people, he would abandon them when they seek him and he would love them. A faithless people, no better than Gomer, were to be cast off. The name of Hosea's youngest child, "Not My People", stood for Yahweh's abandonment of his people. In short, the covenant is cancelled.

Bazeth (1994) affirmed that Hosea continued to love his wife even though she proved unfaithful. In this experience, Hosea found analogy between Yahweh and Israel, for Yahweh too steadfastly loved his people even though they turn to other gods. It is a divine love that will not let his people go, despite their fickleness and harlotry. Hosea ransomed Gomer and restored her to himself after subjecting her to a prolonged period of discipline, during which she was denied all sexual intercourse, whether legitimate or illegitimate. So, Israel is to be disciplined for her infidelity; she had to go without king or prince, without sacrifice or pillar, without ephod or teraphim. The deprivation will be primarily political and religious, the very areas that had been eroded by the culture of Canaan. Israel is to be punished by Egypt or Assyria, the very nations to whom Israel was turning for political salvation.

But God's wrath or judgment as implied in the disciplinary measures to be taken is not destructive; it is rather redemptive. His wrath is not capricious and vindictive. Therefore, in catastrophe, Yahweh neither abandons his people nor does his love for them cease. It is not his will that Israel should be destroyed as Admah and Zeboim were destroyed during the destruction of Sodom and Gomorah. The purpose behind Yahweh's judgment is thus love, like that of a parent who lovingly disciplines his wayward child. It is a struggle within the heart of God... a struggle that undoubtedly reflects the agony of Hosea's experience with Gomer. But the victory is on the side of love that will not let go, "for I am God and not man, the Holy One in your midst, and I will not come to destroy you" (Hooker, 2008).

Junahdi (1995) stated that after many days of cleansing and chastisement, there would be a beginning; a new relationship, for Israel would return and seek Yahweh her God. The wilderness was to be the scene of the renewal of the covenant and there the long history of broken covenant would be ended. In the wilderness, Israel would answer Yahweh's overture of love as she had responded in trust and gratitude at the time of the Exodus. And Yahweh would restore Israel to the relationship of a wife, betrothing her 'to himself in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love (Hesed) and in mercy'. For Israel's persistent infidelity would be conquered by a love stronger and deeper than hers and she would know

Yahweh in the relationship of a new covenant. Thus, Israel's faithlessness and the lack of it in its own marital experience led Hosea to his mission. In this marriage tragedy, Hosea found deep religious insight into God's deep and intimate personal relationship with Israel. Yahweh's love for Israel is 'Hesed'... a steadfast love, covenant faithfulness with added qualities of constancy and stability, reliability and dependability.

The Prophets' Criticism of Sacrifices

The criticism of sacrifices which played an essential part in the religion of Israel was a central element in the denunciation of the 8th century prophets, especially Amos and Hosea. The attitude of Amos to sacrifices is evident from several utterances in his book. He condemns the cultic feasts as a whole with all their varied ritual acts. To Yahweh, they were offensive.

Yahweh hates, despises their feasts; he takes no delight in the⁸⁴Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective

solemn assemblies; he will not accept their burnt sacrifices and cereal offerings; he will not look upon the peace offerings of their fatted beasts; he will not listen to their songs. Amos is merciless in his attack on the shrines, especially the royal shrine of Jeroboam II at Bethel. Hosea says that Yahweh will punish Israel for the Baal feasts, Israel will be deprived of every possibility of performing cultic rites. The sacrifices are simply described as sin. The cult, on the sacred hills with its sacrifices and sexual rites, brings about the ruin of the people. The entire sacrificial cult is condemned; Yahweh does not require burnt offering; he is not pleased with their sacrifices. With scorn, he speaks of the cessation of the cultic feasts and performances on the day when Israel will be deported to foreign countries, and the total devastation of the temple at Bethel. The syncretic cult is to Hosea a worship of Baal, or apostasy (Falalumi, 1994).

The prophetic denunciation of sacrifices is usually coupled with a statement of the moral demand of Yahweh, though the prophets never give this as the basis of their denunciation. Therefore, the question is: why do Amos and Hosea criticize sacrificial cult as they do in their books? Here, two possibilities are opened to us: either they were denouncing corrupt practices merely but not the cult itself, or they were doing something more fundamental, which is, sweeping aside the cult as a means of recalling the people to the true basis and demands of Yahwism. There is evidence that the prophets denounced

corrupt practices but not the cult itself. It appears that they were opposed to the forms in which men acted out their worship. Amos condemns the cult because it was mingled with direct immoral elements such as sacred prostitution. Garments and the wine of fine persons used in the sanctuaries are condemned because it was alien to Yahweh and apostasy to him. Israel's religious practice is condemned both for its corrupt practice and its side show. The shrines were busy and well supported by immorality together with the notion that religious obligations could be discharged by external observances like sacrifices.⁸⁵ Historical

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With bitter sarcasm, Amos indicted the people for observing their festivals and come to the sanctuaries at Bethel and Gilgal to rebel against Yahweh.

Niels (1987) stated that Hosea attacks the cult because of its syncretism, which was to him an apostasy for Yahweh, being as he says, the worship of the Canaanite Baal. In popular religion, Yahweh and Baal had become identified. The people no longer saw the difference between the worship of the god of fertility and the God of history. Israel did not realize that the very gifts she sought from Baal had been mercifully provided by the God who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. The cult was stained with grosser forms of wickedness.

Fornication was practiced in connection with the worship of Yahweh himself. The people have corrupted the notion of the covenant and imagined that the bond between Yahweh and Israel was one based on the notion of sacrifice and ritual.

Apart from the hostile attack on the corrupt practices of the cult, it appears that the prophets were doing something more fundamental and more radical... they swept aside the cult as a means of recalling the people to the true basis and demands of Yahweh. Amos rejected not only the immoral rites but the entire cult as it was celebrated in his time. That this is the case is confirmed by the question in Amos 5: 25: "Did you bring me sacrifices and offerings for the forty years in the wilderness, O house of Israel?" From the non-existence of sacrifices during Israel's sojourn in the wilderness, Amos concludes that the entire cult as it was celebrated in the sanctuaries was alien to the moral demand of Yahwism. He repudiated the cult because it was false homage to Yahweh who, above all, required of his worshippers justice and righteousness (Kingston, 2017).

Instead of cultic achievements, Amos demanded a total change of the moral life. In Amos 5: 23ff, he says: "Take away from me the noise of your songs... and let justice roll on like water and86Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective

righteousness like an ever flowing stream". God is to be found not in the cults but in everyday experience and human relations. In short, Yahweh is not to be found in the sanctuaries, but rather in right human relations. This moral alternative to the cult had been made clear. Amos asserts it from the very beginning of Israel's Mosaic faith. Hosea also shared this fundamental view point of Amos. He ultimately condemned the entire syncretic cult and declared that what Yahweh required was not such a cult but wholehearted devotion in faith and obedience, which he calls the knowledge of God. "I desire steadfast love and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God rather than burnt offering" (Hosea 6:6). The chief demand of Yahweh is faithfulness or loyalty, including obedience to Yahweh's command. The kings of Israel were motivated by political expediency to leave the real source of power and seek aid from Egypt or Assyria. This was because international relations demand that a weak nation align itself to powers that be. But to the prophet, this meant trusting in something that saves.

Israel's salvation lies not in these alliances, but trusting in Yahweh (Fajenyo, 2009).

Zachariah

Zachariah, son of Jeroboam II, was the 14th king of Israel. He was the king over Israel in Samaria for only six months. He did evil in the sight of God as his father has done. He did not depart from the sin of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. Albright and Thiele (2020) dated his reign as 746 BC-745 BC, while Albright (2020) offers the dates 753-752 BC. Shallum conspired against Zachariah, struck him down before the people and reigned in his place. This was in fulfilment of the word of the Lord spoken to his forefather, Jehu, that because of his faithfulness to God, his son would sit on the throne of Israel to the fourth generation.⁸⁷Historical PerspectiveIsrael: Monarchy to Exile

Shallum

Shallum was the 15th king and the son of Jabesh. Shallum reigned for only one month in Samaria. Menahem came from Tirzah, murdered Shallum and usurped his throne. The book of Jeremiah chapter 22 focuses upon the three kings who occupied

the throne in Jerusalem between the death of Josiah in 609 BC and the accession of the last king of Judah, Zedekiah in 597 BC. It was a period of increasing political and social instability. Two of them reigned but a brief few months; the third long enough to show only too clearly his true colours.

Menahem

He was the 16th king of Israel. He was the son of Gadi. He reigned ten (10) years in Samaria. He did evil in the sight of the Lord. The city of Tirzah did not open to him. Menahem captured it and its borders, slaughtered all the people and ripped open the pregnant women. Despite the knowledge of the law of God, he still did evil without restraints. Throughout his days, he did not turn away from the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, by which he caused Israel to sin. Pul, king of Assyria, came against the land and Manahem gave him quite an amount of money exacted from Israel, from all the great men of wealth. This made the King of Assyria to depart from the land. He died and was buried in Israel. Pekaliah succeeded him (Oluyemi, 2015).

Pekahiah

He was the 17th and antepenultimate king of Israel. He was the son of Menahem, and the second and last king of Israel from the house of Gadi. He ruled from the capital of Samaria. He became King in the 15th year of the reign of Uzziah, King of Judah. He was the 6th to be assassinated. Pekahiah reigned for two (2) years. His reign ended when he was assassinated88Israel: Monarchy to

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by Pekah, a general in the army. Pekahiah is described as an evil king who continued to worship false idols that were started by Jeroboam I. Pekah conspired with 50 men from Gilead to assassinate Pekahiah at the palace of Samaria. Pekah then became king.

Pekah

He was 18th and penultimate king of Israel. He was the captain in the army of king Pekahiah of Israel whom he killed to become king. Pekah was the son of Remaliah. He reigned for twenty (20) years, i.e. 735-732 BC. He was described as an evil king as he continued the worship of false idols that was started by Jeroboam I. It is believed by scholars that he killed Pekahiah because the Jews were angry of the Assyrians' domination. Pekah aligned himself with king Rezin of Damascus. He also

encouraged the Edomites and Philistines to attack Jerusalem. King Ahaz of Judah turned to king Tiglath-pileser of Assyria for help.

The Assyrians then invaded Israel and took many people there as captives to Assyria (Alomi, 1988).

Hoshea

Hosea (meaning, salvation in Hebrew), the son of Elah, was the 19th and the last king of Israel (732-724 BC). He was the king under whose reign Israel (the Ten Tribes, or Northern kingdom) fell into the captivity of the Assyrians and was exiled from her land. He became a king through conspiracy in which his predecessor, Pekah was killed. The Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser (also, called Tiglath-pileser III) claimed that he made Hoshea king and Hosea paid an annual tribute to him. After the death of Assyrian king, Hoshea revolted against the new Assyrian king Shalmaneser, who then invaded Israel, took

Hoshea to prison and besieged Samaria until the city fell three89Historical
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years later. Many Israel citizens (27,000) were deported beyond the Euphrates River; and Shalmaneser emigrated various foreign people to colonize Israel under Assyrian administration. Assyrian captivity, according to biblical narratives, occurred because the children of Israel sinned against the Lord, and not because of the political miscalculation on

Hoshea's part. The deportees were scattered throughout the East and are popularly known as the lost tribes of Israel. Those who stayed in Israel and intermarried with the colonists formed the mixed blood people later known as Samaritans. Gradual decline of Israel has been from Jeroboam I, who nationalised idolatry for Israel, and in whose steps subsequent kings of Israel had followed despite prophetic warnings and divine interventions. Ignoring all acts of divine mercies, Israel cannot but lose their land and became slave-fugitives in Assyria. The relation between Israel and Judah before the Assyrian captivity of the former deserves some consideration as follows:

Relations between Israel and Judah

According to Lalabi (2010), before turning attention to the reasons behind the early decline of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, the relationship between the independent kingdoms of Israel and Judah from 922-721 B.C. deserves our examination here. The relationship between these two independent kingdoms

falls roughly into four successive periods namely the periods of hostility, alliance, toleration, and separation. He stated that the period of hostility spanned about half-century (922-876 BC) following the division of the united kingdom of Israel in which two tribes went to Rehoboam and ten tribes went to Jeroboam I. During this period, there was continual border fighting over the disputed territory of the tribe of Benjamin, the 'no-man's land' between the two states. There was continual war between Rehoboam and Jeroboam, the son of Nebat (1 Kings 14: 30), and also between Asa and Baasha, king of Israel (1 Kings 90 Israel: Monarchy to Exile

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15:16). The feud was dropped when Judah, having bribed Damascus to march against Israel, succeeded in pushing its border far enough to safeguard Jerusalem (1 Kings. 15: 16-22). The period of alliance lasted throughout the dynasty of Omri (876-841 BC), when Israel deliberately fostered friendly relations with Judah and the two royal families even united in marriage. Omri's grand-daughter, Athaliah was married to Jehoram, king of Judah (2 Kings 8: 18, 26, 27). In these years, we find Judah being called upon three times to help Israel against her neighbours. Ahab sought the help of Jehoshaphat against Damascus (1 Kings. 22: 1-40); Jehoshaphat again went with Ahab's successor, Jehoram against Moab (II Kings. 3: 4-27). Jehoram co-opted Ahaziah of Judah to wrestle Ramoth-gilead from Damascus (II Kings. 8:23-29). The period of toleration began with Jehu's revolt in the Northern Kingdom and lasted for sixty years (842-783 BC), when, for the most part, both were too enfeebled for anything else. Jehu's bloody purge was extended to the royal house of Judah... killing Ahaziah and his forty-two brothers (II Kings. 9: 27b, 10: 12-14); and put an end to Omri's policy of friendship. For forty years, Israel, weak internally and by Damascus, crawled along in a state of exhaustion. This explains why Judah suddenly threw down a foolhardy challenge to Israel, sometimes after 801 B.C. It was answered in an expedition without parallel, when Israel under Joash, marched south, ravaged Jerusalem, and plundered the temple (II Kings. 14:8-14). Judah was reduced to a vassal of Israel.

The period of separation covered the last sixty years of the coterminous life of the two kingdoms (783-721 BC). At first,

both of them exploited independently, with Jeroboam II in Israel and Uzziah in Judah. These glorious years, however, came to an abrupt end with the resurgence of Assyrian power after 745 BC. In this new and threatening situation, Judah opted to

become vassal to Assyria rather than join Israel in a defensive alliance of minor states (Bright, 1982).

The Early Decline of Israel, the Northern Kingdom

The Northern Kingdom of Israel collapsed with the fall of Samaria in 721 B.C. Judah, on the other hand, was able to survive over a hundred years following the destruction of Samaria. A number of complicated factors led to the early decline of the Northern Kingdom. Throughout their history, the two Hebrew Kingdoms were trapped in a complex international situation. They were drawn into the international politics of the ancient Near East. Their own political fortunes were almost entirely determined by the great powers. When the nations (roundabout) were pre-occupied with their own problems, the Hebrew Kingdoms were free to develop and expand their territories. However, the great powers embarked on territorial and commercial expansion, and the two kingdoms were threatened. In this situation, Israel suffered more than Judah, for whereas the latter was comparatively isolated in the country, off the main roads of the ancient world, Israel stood squarely on the path of history. Her position (astride the cross roads of commerce between Egypt and Mesopotamia) exposed her to foreign powers more than Judah. Israel therefore, the most vulnerable, was always the first to feel the threat from outside. With Israel's political existence was the fact of her economic wealth. Being the wealthier of the two kingdoms, she became the envious target of commercial and territorial expansion of her more powerful neighbours (Clarendon, 2018).

The two great nations which threatened the Hebrew Kingdoms at this time were Syria and Assyria. The Syrians dominated the affairs of the Northern Kingdom to a greater degree than Judah.

The Syrian threat started when Asa of Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective

Judah (913-873) bribed the Aramean king Benhadad (I) to come to his rescue against Baasha of Israel, who was challenging Judah's northern border. The Arameans, who had an interest in the great caravan route from Damascus which ran along the

eastern side of the Jordan to Edom and Arabia, readily invaded Israel from the north. This invasion in 878 B.C. devastated northern Galilee and probably, directly or indirectly, to the loss of all Israelite territories east of the Jordan, and north of Yarmuk. It seemed likely that Benhadad (I) retained his dominant position throughout the reign of Omri (876-869), who is reported to have ceded to him cities and trading rights in Samaria (1 Kings 20:34). His son Benhadad (II) relentlessly kept up the pressure on Israel in the time of Ahab (869-850 BC), probably with the aim of reducing Israel to an Aramean satellite before the rising power of Assyria began its conquest to the west. Ahab had to fight several wars against Aram, mainly defensive. In the end, Ahab died fighting the Arameans over Ramoth-gilead on the north-western frontier. The next Syrian king, Hazael, engaged Joram of Israel. In the reign of Jehu (842-815 BC), Israel lost to Hazael all her territories east of the Jordan as far south as the Amon Valley (2 Kgs 10: 32, 33); and in the reign of his son, Jehoahaz (815-801 BC), Israel was reduced to a state of complete subjection. Jerusalem was spared a similar fate only at the cost of an immense tribute. With the death of Hazael about 796 BC, the power of Damascus was completely down (Turah, 2016).

The Assyrians intent on expanding to the Mediterranean were beginning to pose a threat to the petty kingdoms of Syria and Palestine. Israel, the nearest and therefore, the most vulnerable was the first to taste the threat of Assyrian expansion to the west. The threat of Assyrian expansion became real after the northern Syrian campaign of Ashur-nasirpal in about 870 B.C.

The next Assyrian attack was in 853 B.C. under Shalmanesser III. A coalition of small states, Hamath, Aram and Israel and others met Assyria at Qarqar in Hamath. The battle was

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indecisive and Assyria withdrew. The next Assyrian attack was in 848 B.C. on Syrian confederates. Assyria demolished Syria in 802 B.C. and for more than forty years, the Assyrian Empire was torn by internal revolts. This period of impotence exactly coincided with the reigns of Jeroboam II and Uzziah in Israel and Judah respectively. With the rise of Tiglath-pileser III (745-727 BC) in Assyria, an aggressive policy of conquest and dominion was vigorously pursued.

Assyria's new foreign policy affected the Hebrew Kingdoms

immediately. In his first great campaign to the west (743-738 BC), Tiglath-pileser exacted tribute from Menahem of Israel and from Uzziah of Judah. In the second campaign of 734-732 B.C., Assyria answered the impertinent coalition led by Damascus and Israel by capturing a number of Philistine cities and exacting tribute from Ahaz of Judah, Ammon Edom and Moab. Israel, however, fared worst and lost not only most of its territories but also the bulk of its population.

Lisdon (2006) posited that the Northern Kingdom suffered a devastating first deportation a decade before its final collapse in 732 B.C. Damascus became part of the Assyrian Empire and the remnant of Israel was given to king Hoshea, an Assyrian puppet. Ten years later, it fell on Sargon II to claim the fall of Samaria and make the second deportation from the Northern Kingdom. Judah survived the Assyrian onslaught because she submitted to Assyria. Apart from the complex international situation which affected Israel more than Judah, there was also the contrast between the stability of the throne of David and the chronic instability of the throne of Israel. Compared with the stability of Judah which had a single dynasty from the time of David to its very end, the Northern Kingdom of Israel had a chequered political career. There was rapid turn-over of kings in Israel, owing to assassinations, suicides and intrigues. Baasha gained the throne by murdering Nadab in his army camp. Baasha's son, Elah, assassinated within two years⁹⁴ Israel: Monarchy to

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by Zimri, his chariot commander, who then reigned for a week within which he exterminated the family of his predecessor before finally committing suicide.

Omri, the commander-in-chief of the Israelite forces, became king having first disposed Tibni of the throne in a military coup d'état. The dynasty which he founded, more on the basis of military than hereditary principle, was overthrown thirty-five years later, by Jehu, another officer, who was anointed by a prophet in the middle of a session of the army council. The dynasty which Jehu established lasted (largely because of the untroubled reign of Jeroboam II) for nearly a century. Zechariah, the last of Jehu's line, was murdered by Shallum, after a reign of only six weeks. In the chaos of Israel's national existence from 746-721 B.C., there were six kings and five of them lost the throne by violence. Statistically speaking, Israel

in two hundred years ran through no less than nineteen (19) kings. Out of these, nine were murdered and one committed suicide. Of the ten kings who inherited the throne legitimately, seven are accounted for by the two dynasties of Omri and Jehu alone (Luther, 2016).

Philip (2013) posited that the political stability in the south was abetted by the then logical conviction that Yahweh had made a special covenant with David, promising to uphold his throne and establish his sons after him. Thus, Judah remained faithful to the Davidic dynasty which ensured a succession of David as king on the throne of Jerusalem. In the north, there was no religious sanction to assure permanence of the dynasty there. The loss of the religious sanctions of the old tribal rule and the rejection of Judah's newly adopted dynastic system exposed the Northern Kingdom to the lawless opportunism of military usurpers and hurried Israel to its extinction. Socio-economic factors also played their role in the early decline of Israel. Unlike Israel where swift economic changes led to the erection of an unstable social pyramid, Judah moved fairly smoothly from

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the simplicities of the old tribal order to the more advanced economy of town life. And in the process, she preserved an astonishing degree of social stability. Though, Judah shared in the flagrant social injustice of the north, nevertheless, the social order was relatively stable.

What contributed to Judah's social stability was the reform in the south carried out by Hezekiah and Josiah. Though the reforms were not a complete success yet they undoubtedly served as a constant reminder of faithfulness to Yahweh upon whom the longevity of the nation depends. By contrast, there was no lasting reform in the north to act as a constant reminder. The revolutions of Elijah and especially that of Jehu were both an attempt to establish Yahwism by negative means and virtually did nothing to the national consciousness (Kingston, 2017).

The fall of Northern Kingdom

Hershel (2016) recapitulate here the decline and fall of Israel from Jeroboam II to Hoshea. The death of Jeroboam II in about 746 B.C. was followed by a period of political instability in Israel. King after king was murdered in rapid succession. Zachariah son of Jeroboam II was restored for only six months.

He was later assassinated in a revolt, which restored Shallum on the throne for one month, after which Menahem seized the throne, following a civil war. During the first year of Menahem's reign, the Assyrians, under their new king Tiglath-pileser III, resumed their drive towards the west. Having defeated the Babylonians to the south and the kingdom of Utartu to the north, the Assyrian king captured lands as far as Caspian Sea. In 743 B.C., he turned to the west against Syria. An anti-Assyria coalition failed to ward off the advance and by 738 BC, if not before, Tiglath-pileser had taken tribute from most of the states of Syria and northern Palestine, including Hamath, Tyre, Byblos, Damascus and Israel.

It was Menahem who paid tribute to

Tiglath-pileser when the latter advanced to the west. The tribute which was quite heavy was raised by means of a head tax levied on every landholder in Israel. Though Menahem probably had little choice in the matter, it appears that he surrendered his country's independence willingly, hoping that Assyrian aid would secure him on his throne. This was resented by patriotic Israelites. When, therefore, Menahem was succeeded by his son Pekahiah, he was suddenly killed by one of his officers, Pekah, who then took the throne in 735 BC.

Pekah reigned for two years. The growing power of Assyria under Tiglathpileser led to the formation of a coalition between Rezin, king of Aram and Pekah of Israel. Their intention was to pull together their military might in order to halt the Assyrians as Ahab and Benhadad had done a hundred years or so earlier. The two kings then attacked Ahaz of Judah in a bid to force her into the confederation. The Edomites regained their independence from Judah and joined the confederates in attacking Judah. The Philistines invaded the Negeb and the Shephelah, taking and occupying certain border towns. Thus, Judah was raided from three sides (Parpola, 2014).

His throne endangered the helpless to defend himself, Ahaz begged Assyria for assistance, which was quickly forthcoming. Before then, the king was confronted by prophet Isaiah and warning him of the serious results of what he was about to do. The prophet begged him to take no such step but to trust in the promises of Yahweh to David (Isaiah 7: 1). Ahaz, however, incapable of the faith that the prophet asked of him, refused the advice, sent an enormous gift to Tiglathpileser, and implored his assistance. Damascus was stormed by Assyria in 732 B.C.

after a bloody war, and Syria was converted into four Assyrian provinces. Rezin was executed and a large portion of the population deported to Kir. Even before the fall of Damascus, the Assyrian armies swept over Israel, devastating Galilee, and

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annexing all Israel except Ephraim and western Manasseh (735 B.C.). The occupied territory was then divided into three Assyrian provinces, Gilead, Megiddo (including Galilee), and Dan on the coastal plain (Sunai, 1998).

Tiglath-pileser would have destroyed Israel completely had not Pekah been murdered by one Hoshea, who straightaway surrendered and gave tribute. For some nine years, Hoshea remained a faithful subject of Tiglath-pileser in order to save as much of the land of Israel as possible from destruction.

When, however, the Assyrian king died in 727 B.C., he saw his chance to revolt. He did not take immediate steps till 724 BC, when he made overtures to Egypt. But Egyptian help was not forthcoming and in 724 BC the new Assyrian king, Shalmaneser V, attacked Israel. Hoshea was immediately taken prisoner, and the Assyrians then occupied the land, except the city of Samaria, which resisted for over two years. Shalmaneser died before he could complete the conquest and his successor Sargon II captured Samaria in 722/721 B.C. Sargon deported many of the Israelite population to other parts of the Assyrian Empire. With the deportation of the Israelites, the Assyrian brought into Israel various captives from other parts of the Empire. Tullock (1992) calls this Assyrian policy the policy of switching population

The Assyrian colonists intermarried with the Israelites and their products became known as the Samaritans, a name derived from the northern capital of Samaria (Ezra, 1990).

Factors leading to the fall of Israel, the Northern Kingdom
The following are factors that ultimately led to the fall and captivity of Israel. There was a gross apostasy in the land, from their first leader (Jeroboam I) who set up a sanctuary at Dan and Bethel to rival the temple in Jerusalem. Most of the kings forsook God and led Israel astray. Baal Worship flourished and there was gross social injustice. There was great and constant political unrest. But the leaders and all the

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Israelites refused to heed God's warning through the numerous prophets. God's Judgement finally caught up with Israel in 722

BC when Shalmaneser brought large army from Assyria and besiege it. Over 27,000 of them were carried as captives to Assyria; colonists were sent to Israel to replace the captives. Intermarriages took place between Assyrian colonist and the Israelites, resulting in half-cast Israelites who are called the Samaritans (Zee, 2014).

Summary

In Chapters 5 and 6, the reigns of the 19 kings of Israel have been examined. They are Jereboam I, Nadah, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, Ahab, Ahaziah, Joram, Jehu, Jehoahaz, and Joash, Jeroboam II, Zachariah, Shallum, Menahem, Pekahiah, Pekah, and Hosea. Their achievements and failures as kings of Israel have been identified together with the roles of such as Elijah, Elisha, Amos, and Hosea in the lives and times of these kings. Compared with the stability of Judah which had a single dynasty from the time of David to its very end, the Northern Kingdom of Israel had a chequered political career. There was rapid turn-over of kings in Israel, owing to assassinations, suicides and intrigues. The death of Jeroboam II in about 746 B.C. was followed by a period of political instability in Israel. King after king was murdered in rapid succession. Jeroboam II was replaced for six months by his son, Zechariah. The latter was killed in a revolt, which placed Shallum on the throne for one month, after which Menahem seized the throne, following a civil war. The Northern Kingdom of Israel eventually collapsed with the fall of Samaria in 721 B.C. Judah, on the other hand, was able to survive over a hundred years following the destruction of Samaria.⁹⁹Historical PerspectiveIsrael: Monarchy to Exile

Post test

1. Discuss the view that the reign of Jeroboam II was a mixed blessing to Israel.
2. Examine the conditions in Israel during the reign of Jeroboam II.
3. Show how the oracles of Amos and Hosea reflect the social and religious conditions of their time.
4. Examine Amos' conception of righteousness.
5. How far is it accurate to describe Amos as a prophet of doom?
6. Consider carefully the view that for Amos, religion cannot be separated from morality.
7. Examine the concept of the 'Day of the Lord' in the time

of Amos.

8. Discuss the concept of 'Hesed' in the teaching of Hosea.

9. How far did Israel benefit from the marriage tragedy of Hosea?

10. Evaluate the attitude of the eighth century prophets towards sacrifices in Israel.

11. What factors contributed to the fall of the Northern Kingdom of Israel?

12. Why did Judah survive long after the collapse of the Northern Kingdom of Israel?

13. The decline of the Northern Kingdom of Israel was inevitable. Discuss.

14. The relationship between Israel and Judah underwent four successive periods. Name and discuss these periods.

11

CHAPTER SEVEN

THE KINGS OF JUDAH (Part I)

Introduction

As indicated in the last chapter, Israel went into Assyrian exile in 721 BC, much earlier than Judah's Babylonian captivity in 587/586 BC. In other words, the kingdom of Judah lasted longer than the kingdom of Israel. The last two chapters have dealt with the stories of the kings of Israel, or the northern kingdom. In this chapter, we take up the stories of the kings of the southern kingdom called Judah. Chronologically, the twenty (20) kings of Judah whose stories you are about to read are: Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, Ahaziah, Queen Athaliah, Joash, Amaziah, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoichin and Zedekiah.

In this chapter, you will also learn about the prophets of Judah specifically Isaiah and Jeremiah and their contributions to good governance in Judah during the times of some of these kings.

As we did for the kings of Israel, the stories of the kings of Judah are also divided into two chapters. In what follows, you will read about the reign of each of the kings who ruled over Judah beginning with Rehoboam to Ahaz. In the next chapter, the narratives continue from Hezekiah to Zedekiah.

Objective

At the end of this chapter, you should be able to identify any of these kings, especially in terms of their successes and failures.¹⁰¹ Historical Perspectives: Israel: Monarchy to Exile

You should also be able to discuss the contributions of prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah in the affairs of Judah.

You should also be able to identify the factors that eventually led to the Babylonian captivity of Judah.

Pre-test

1. Identify the following: (i) Rehoboam, (ii) Abijah, (iii) Asa, and (iv) Jehoshaphat.
2. Identify the following: (i) Jehoram, (ii) Ahaziah, (iii) Athaliah, and (iv) Joash.
3. Identify the following: (i) Amaziah, (ii) Uzziah, (iii) Jotham, and (iv) Ahaz.

Content

The King of Judah (Southern Kingdom)

The kings of Judah were the monarchs who ruled over the ancient kingdom of southern kingdom which capital city was Jerusalem. According to the Biblical account, this kingdom

was founded after the death of Saul. Seven years after the death of Saul, David became king of a reunited kingdom of Israel. However, in about 930 BC, the United Kingdom split with ten of the twelve tribes of Israel rejecting Solomon's son, Rehoboam, as their king. The tribe of Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to Rehoboam and reformed the kingdom of Judah, while the other entity continued to be called the kingdom of Israel or just Israel.

Hooker (2008) recalled that the capital of the kingdom of Judah was Jerusalem. All of the kings of Judah lived and died in Judah except for Ahaziah (who died at Megiddo in Israel), Jehoahaz (who died a prisoner in Egypt) and Jeconiah and Zedekiah (who died in exile or, Babylonian captivity). The Davidic dynasty began when the tribe of Judah made David its king, following Israel: Monarchy to

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the death of Saul. The Davidic line continued when David became king of the reunited kingdom. The tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to the Davidic line before, during and even after the Babylonian captivity of Judah. The David line was still respected by the exile in Babylon, who regarded the ex-monarchs of Judah as kings in exile.

According to Partain (2020), most of the kings of Judah, like the kings of Israel, were wicked. The 20th Davidic monarch who ruled after Solomon ranged from extremely righteous individual such as Hezekiah and Jotham to such grossly wicked personalities as Manasseh and Jehoakim. Although spiritual standards were higher in Judah than in Israel, of course, due to the presence of the temple (Bais Hamikdash), idolatry still pervaded the society and was the major factor in the destruction of the temple. The kingdom of Judah lasted for 454 years (792338), which is still 133 years longer than the kingdom of Israel. Judah was taken into captivity by the Babylonians beginning in 606 B.C.

The prominent Judean kings and queens in their chronological order includes: Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, Ahaziah, Queen Athaliah, King Joash, Amaziah, Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakin, Jehoichin, and Zedekiah. A brief discussion on twelve (12) of these twenty (20) rulers with their contemporary prophets is attempted in this chapter, in terms of their positive and negative inputs in their society.

Rehoboam

As earlier said, Rehoboam was the son of King Solomon, the king during whose tenure the united kingdom of Israel was divided into two; and the first king to rule over the kingdom of Judah. He was forty-one (41) years old when he became a king. He reigned for seventeen years (17) in Jerusalem, the city¹⁰³Historical

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which the Lord had chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, to put His name there. His mother's name was Naamah, an Amorites. During his reign, Judah did evil in the sight of the Lord and provoked God to jealousy with their sin which they committed more than all that their fathers had committed. They did according to all the abominations of the nations which the Lord had cast out before them. In the fifth year of his reign, Shishak, king of Egypt, came up and attacked Judah and took away everything from the treasury of the house of the Lord. He also took away gold shields which Solomon had made. Rehoboam replaced it with another bronze shields and committed them to the hands of the captains of the guard.

Rehoboam died and was buried in the city of David. He was succeeded by his son, Abijam.

Abijam

Abijam was the second king of Judah after the death of his father Rehoboam. He ruled three (3) years in Jerusalem; his mother's name was Maachad. King Abijam grew mighty and married 14 wives, begot twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters. He walked in all the sins of his father which he had done before him. His heart was not loyal to the Lord his God as was the heart of David his father. However, God showed him mercy by given him victory over king Jeroboam. He died and his son, Asa, succeeded him (Jerum, 2013).

Asa

In the twentieth year of Jeroboam (I), the king of Israel, Asa became king over Judah. Asa reigned for forty-one (41) years in Jerusalem. Asa did what was right in the eyes of the Lord. He banished the perverted persons from the land and removed all the idols that his father made. He removed his grandmother,

Maachad, from being queen mother because she had raised an ¹⁰⁵Historical

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the law to all the cities of Judah. So, the fear of Lord fell on all their neighbouring cities, so that they could not make war

against Jehoshaphat. Some of the Philistines and Arabian cities brought present to him and he became increasingly powerful. He built fortress and storage cities, had much properties, men of war, or, mighty men of valour in Jerusalem (Parpola, 2014). Jehoshaphat made a peace agreement with Ahab, king of Israel. Ahab, king of Israel, solicited for his help in a war against the Aramites. Jehoshaphat agreed to help Ahab but suggested that the Lord's counsel be sought on the issue. Out of 400 prophets, only Micaiah gave true message from the Lord whereas the other 399 prophets were under the influence of lying spirits (1 kgs. 22). Unlike Micaiah who foretold defeat of Israel and death of Ahab, the other 399 false prophets promised victory for Ahab and thus encouraged him to wage the war. Discarding Micaiah's prophecy and warning, Ahab and Jehoshaphat decided to go to war. Ahab asked Jehoshaphat to dress as king while he would dress as a common soldier on the battleground, thus Ahab planned to get Jehoshaphat killed in warfront. Ahiz (2007) stated that when the Aramite soldiers saw Jehoshaphat dressed as king, they thought it was Ahab and thus decided to kill him. However, by divine providence, Jehoshaphat's cry for help made them to realise that he was not Ahab, king of Israel, so that left him unhurt. By some stroke of fate, a stray arrow from one of the Aramite soldiers hit Ahab. It turned out to be a fatal hit as Ahab died from the wound. Years later, three of Judah's neighbouring nation (precisely, Ammon, Moab and Mount Seir) organized a battle against Jehoshaphat. But he defeated them by praise. The instruction from God was that they don't need to fight; they should first position themselves in the warfronts and praise God. Jehoshaphat died and was buried in Jerusalem. His son, Jehoram, took over as king.¹⁰⁶ Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective

Jehoram (also called Joram) Jehoram was the firstborn of Jehoshaphat. He was thirty-two (32) years old when he became a king and reigned eight (8) years in Jerusalem. When he was established over the kingdom of his father, he strengthened himself and killed all his brothers with a sword and other princes of Israel. He did evil in the sight of the Lord just as king Ahab of Israel, for he had Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab, as a wife. In his days, Edom and Libnah revolted and appointed kings for themselves (2kg 8: 16-24). For

Jehoram's sins, Elijah delivered divine judgment (II Chronicle 21: 12-20). Consequently, the Philistines and Arabians rose up against him, came to Judah and carried away all the possessions that were in the king's house including his sons and his wives, so that there were not a son left to him, except Jehoahaz (also called Ahaziah), the youngest of his sons (II Chronicle 21). After all these, the Lord struck him in his intestines with an incurable disease. After two years, his intestine came out, so he died from severe pain; and was buried in the city of David and not in the tomb of kings.

Ahaziah, also called Jehoahaz Ahaziah was the youngest son of Jehoram after the older were killed by Arabians troops. He was forty-two years old when he became a king and reigned one year in Jerusalem (II kgs. 8:24-26; II Chronicle 22:1-9). His mother's name was Athaliah, the daughter of Omri of king of Israel. Therefore, he did evil in the sight of God, walking in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother advised him to do so to his destruction. He went with King Jehoram, the son of Ahab to war against Hazael, king of Syria where the Syrians wounded king Joram who returned to Jezreel to be healed. Ahaziah went to visit him at Jezreel where he (Ahaziah) was killed by Jehu of Israel (Kovert, 1994).¹⁰⁷Historical PerspectiveIsrael:

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Queen		Athaliah

When queen Athaliah, the mother of Ahaziah found out her son was dead at Jezreel, she rose up and killed all the royal heirs of the house of Judah (II Chronicle 22:10; 23:1-15). But Jehoshabeath, the daughter of king Ahaziah took Joash (son of Ahaziah) and hid him with his nurse in the house of God for six years, while Athaliah reigned over Judah. Jehoshabeath was also wife of Jehoiada the priest. Eisen (2020) says she ruled for six years and was fanatically idolatrous. She was slayed in a coup engineered by the Jehoiada, the priest, who anointed Joash and placed him on the throne. Athaliah was killed with the sword when Joash was ordained as the next king. The people rejoiced and the city was quiet.

Joash

When Joash was seven years old, he was ordained as a king of Judah. His mother's name was Zibiah of Beersheba (II Chronicle 24). He did what was right in the sight of God all the

days of Jehoiada, the priest. The priest married two wives for him and he had sons and daughters. He set his heart to repair the house of the Lord because the Athaliah and her goons had broken into the house of God and have presented all the things of the house of Lord to the Baals. When Jehoiada, the priest, had grown old and was full of age, he died and was buried in the city of David among the kings, because he had done well in Israel both toward God and his house. After his death, they forsook the God of their fathers and served wooden images and idols. The wrath of God came upon Judah and Jerusalem. Eisen (2020) sees king Joash as a fragile figure that oversaw the repair of the temple, but later forsakes it, and became apostate. He disregarded prophetic warnings and killed Zechariah, son of Jehoiada the priest. For his punishment, the Lord gave Judah into the hands of Syrian army who killed all Israel: Monarchy to Exile

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the princes of Judah but spared the Joash who was sick at the time. Joash was murdered on his sick bed by his own servants. Then, his son Amaziah, reigned in his stead. Amaziah

He was twenty years old when he became King of Judah and he reigned twenty-nine (29) years in Jerusalem (II Chronicle 25). He did what was right in the sight of the Lord but not with all his heart but did what his father, Joash, had done. People still sacrificed and burned incensed on the high places. When he was fully established, he killed his servants who had murdered his father but did not murder their children. He killed ten thousand Edomites by war. Allowing this success to his head, he also initiated a war with Jehoash, king of Israel, and was decisively defeated and Jerusalem temple was looted. After 15 years, the Judeans conspired against him and killed him; and his son, Uzziah reigned in his place (Marahaz, 1999). Uzziah

Uzziah, the son of King Amaziah, was made king by Judah after the death of his father (II kgs. 14:21; II Chronicle 26). He was sixteen years old when he became king and ruled for fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jecholiah of Jerusalem. He did what was right in the sight of God according to all that his father Amaziah had done. Uzziah sought the Lord in the days of Zachariah, who had understanding in the visions

of God and as long as he sought the Lord, God made him prosper and helped him against the Philistine/Arabians; and the Ammorites brought tributes to him. He was very intelligent. He invented missiles that helped him to defeat the Philistines. He was exceedingly rich. Then, pride entered him that led to his destruction (Rowles, 2015).

He transgressed against the Lord his God by entering the temple of the Lord to perform the priestly duty of burning incense on the altar. Priest Azariah with eighty other priests went and withstood Uzziah and rebuked him. Instead of repenting, Uzziah became furious; and when he was angry, the Lord struck him with leprosy, a skin condition that renders one ritually impure. So, the priests thrust him out of the temple. In accordance with Torah (the Law), he was no longer qualified to sit on the throne and ought to be banished out of Jerusalem but he was placed in isolated house till his death. He died and was buried with his fathers in the field of burial which belonged to the kings; for they said he is a leper. Eisen (2020) describes him as the righteous king who made a tragic mistake in thinking that the king could officiate in the priestly office, or temple (Bais Hamikdash). As soon as Uzziah became leprous, Jotham, his son, ruled and judged the people of the land (Rowles, 2015).

Jotham

In the second year of Pekah, the son of Remaliah, king of Israel, Jotham the son of Uzziah, the king of Judah, began to reign. He was twenty-five years old when he became a king and he reigned sixteen (16) years in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Jerushah, the daughter of Zadek. He did what was right in the sight of God. He is considered by the Talmud to be one of the greatest people of all time; he was an example of a son who honours his father. Upon assuming the throne, during Uzziah's lifetime, Jotham demonstrated respect for his father by issuing all proclamations in Uzziah name as long as the man lived. However, the high places were not removed, people still sacrificed to idol. So, God began to send Rezin, king of Syria; and Pekah, king of Israel against Judah. Jotham died and was buried in the city of David. His son, Ahaz, reigns in his place.110

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Ahaz

Ahaz, the son of Jotham, began to rule in Judah when he was twenty years old and he reigned for sixteen years in Jerusalem (II Kgs. 16; II Chro. 28). He did what was not right in the sight of the Lord. He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel. He made his son to pass through the fire according to the abominations of the nations, whom the Lord cast out from them. He sacrificed and burned incense in the high places on the hill and every green tree. Then, Rezin king of Syria and Pekah king of Israel came up against Judah and besieged Ahaz but could not overcome him. However, Rezin captured the city of Elath for Syria and drove the men of Judah away (Semetia, 1978). To ward off this attack, Ahaz sought the help of Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria. Ahaz sent gifts of silver and gold that were in the treasuries of the house of the king and the house of the Lord to Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria to curry his favour. In response, Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria fought against Rezin, defeated and killed him and captured Damascus. Ahaz went to Damascus to meet Tiglath-pileser, king of Assyria, where he saw an altar. Interested in the design, he sent for Urijah, the priest, to make the exact replica of the Damascus altar in Jerusalem. Upon arrival at Jerusalem, the replica of the Damascus altar had been carved and made ready for ritual sacrifices. Ahaz started offering his burnt offering and grain offering and poured his drinking offering and sprinkled the blood offering on the Damascus-like altar at Jerusalem. He also brought the bronze altar from the house of the Lord and put it on the north side of the new altar. Ahaz commanded Urijah, the priest, to perform sacrifices to the altar, morning and evening. He removed many things from the house of Lord that were once dedicated to the worship of the Lord (Wahdi, 2010). In appealing to Tiglath-pileser for aid, Judah became a vassal state of the Assyrian Empire. The consequences of this submission were disastrous, especially in the religious sphere. In the ancient Orient, political subservience normally involved the recognition of the overlord's gods alongside the native religions. Thus, in recognition of Assyrian overlordship, Ahaz introduced innovations in the Temple in Jerusalem (II Kings 16: 10-18). When the king appeared before Tiglath-pileser in the new provincial capital of Damascus, it was to

give allegiance to him, and presumably to pay homage to the Assyrian gods at a bronze altar that stood there. Ahaz had a copy of this altar made and erected in the Jerusalem temple for his own use. Thus, under Ahaz foreign religious practices flourished, together with all sorts of alien fashions, cults and superstitions. Yahwism was thus seriously undermined in the reign of Ahaz. Economically, Judah suffered severely. Apart from the loss of revenue resulting from the loss of territories like Edom and the port of Ezion-geber in the Syrian-Israelite war, Assyria demanded crippling tribute from Ahaz. The king was forced to empty his treasury and strip the temple in order to raise it (Giglock, 1991). According to Lath (2010), the paganizing tendencies of Ahaz in the recognition of Assyrian overlordship involved a breaking up of Jehoahaz's agreement with His people, and this inevitably led to a disregard of the covenant law. The next result was that Judah's society was threatened to its very foundations. The wealthy class was no better than its counterpart in Israel. The property magnates callously dispossessed the poor, often by dishonest means (Isaiah 3: 13-15; 5: 1-7, 8). The judges being corrupt, the poor had no recourse (Isaiah 1: 21-23; 5:23; 10: -1-4). The rich lived in selfish luxury, without integrity or concern for the plight of the teeming masses (Isaiah 3: 5: 11 ff; 22-23). The official religion seems to have offered no antidote against all these social vices. The cults were well supported and this gave the false notion that Yahweh's demands could be met by ritual and sacrifice (Isaiah 11:2 Israel: Monarchy to Exile

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1: 10-17). Ahaz died and was buried in the city of David. His son, Hezekiah, reigned in his place.

Summary

Twelve (12) out of twenty (20) rulers of Judah had been identified and discussed in this chapter. In chronological order, they are Rehoboam, Abijah, Asa, Jehoshaphat, Jehoram, Ahaziah, Queen Athaliah, King Joash, Amaziah, Uzziah, Jotham, and Ahaz. Their contributions to the development and ruin of Judah have been highlighted. The eight (8) remaining Judean kings namely Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiahkim, Jehoiahchin, and Zedekiah are taken up in the next chapter.

Post test

1. Identify the positive and negative contribution of the following Judean rulers: (i) Rehoboam, (ii) Abijah, (iii) Asa, and (iv) Jehoshaphat.
2. Mention the achievements and failures of the following Judean rulers: (i) Jehoram, (ii) Ahaziah, (iii) Queen Athaliah, and (iv) King Joash.
3. Enumerate the strengths and weaknesses of the following Judean rulers: (i) Amaziah, (ii) Uzziah, (iii) Jotham, and (iv) Ahaz.¹¹³

12

CHAPTER EIGHT

KINGS OF JUDAH (Part II)

Objective

In the last chapter, twelve (12) kings of Judah were identified in terms of their roles in Judah. In this chapter, you will read about the reign of the remaining kings of Judah namely Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah. At the end of this chapter, you should be able to identify any of these kings, especially in terms of their successes and failures. Moreover, the roles of Major Prophets like Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel in the regimes of some of these kings are examined in this chapter.

Pre-test

1. Identify the following: (i) Hezekiah, (ii) Manasseh, (iii) Amon, and (iv) Josiah
2. Identify the following: (i) Jehoahaz, (ii) Jehoiakim, (iii) Jehoiachin and (iv) Zedekiah
3. What are the major themes of: (i) Isaiah's message, and (ii) Jeremiah's message?

Content

Hezekiah or Ezekias

According to the Biblical narrative, King Hezekiah (the 13th king of Judah) assumed the throne of Judah at the age of 25¹⁴ Israel: Monarchy to

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and reigned for 29 years (II Kings 18:2; II Chron. 29:1). Some writers have proposed that Hezekiah served as coregent with his father, Ahaz, for about 14 years. According to the Hebrew Bible, King Hezekiah is the son of Ahaz, the 13th King of Judah. He is considered a very righteous king (II kgs. 18-20; II Chro. 29-30). For instance he removed the high places, broke the images, cut down the groves, and broke in pieces the brazen serpent (Nehushtan) that Moses made, but which the people had turned into idol. He served the Lord wholeheartedly. He is one of the prominent kings of Judah mentioned in the Bible and in the genealogy of Jesus in the gospel of Mathew.

No king of Judah among either his predecessors or his successors could be compared to him (see, II kgs. 18:5).

The reign of Hezekiah saw a notable increase in the power of the Judean state. He defeated the Philistine and thus increased Judah's land. At this time, Judah was the strongest nation on the Assyrian-Egyptian frontier. There were increases in literacy and in the production of literacy works. The massive water

construction project in which a pool and a conduit conveyed water to Jerusalem was made during his reign; the city was enlarged to accommodate a large influx of people such that population increased in Jerusalem up to 25000, five times the population under King Solomon (Tinkelstein and Amihai, 2020). Archaeologists Tinkelstein and Amihai (2020) say that the sudden growth of population in Jerusalem and Judah in general during King Hezekiah's time must be as a result of Israelites' fleeing from Assyrian destruction of the Northern kingdom of Israel (the Ten Tribes).

During Hezekiah's reign, the Ten Tribes of Israel went into Assyrian captivity. In 721 BC, Shalmaneser (Sargon II), king of Assyria invaded Samaria, defeated Hoshea king of Israel and carried away all Israel (that is, the Ten Tribes) to Assyria. Still during the reign of Hezekiah, Sennacherib, who succeeded Shalmaneser as king of Assyria, succeeded as his father displaced Israel. He demanded Judah's submission to his authority as the only condition for their safety. Not willing to become Sennacherib's subject, Hezekiah accepted to pay off Sennacherib rather than becoming his subject. Not satisfied with this, Sennacherib sent his personal assistants to threaten Judah and destabilise them emotionally. He boasted of his achievements and those of his father in the conquest of other nations and thus advised Judah to take a cue rather than trusting in the Lord for deliverance. Overwhelmed with Sennacherib's threats, Hezekiah went to the temple to solicit for divine help. He also sent for Isaiah's prophetic intervention. He was assured of victory over Sennacherib. God sent His angel to Assyrian camp to destroy 185,000 Assyrian army. Thus, Sennacherib became powerless to carry out his threats against Judah. In shame, he returned to his own land at Nineveh where he was assassinated by two of his own children as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch, his god (Ashnod, 2008). After this, Hezekiah developed a fatal sickness with a boil on his skin. According to II Kgs 20:1, the sickness came naturally whereas rabbinic literature opines that Hezekiah's dangerous illness has some divine causation. Isaiah came with a death-sentence-prophecy. To reverse this prophecy of doom, Hezekiah prayed to God, stating his righteousness and loyalty to God as a condition for divine healing, and preservation of life. Some scholars observe that Hezekiah's prayer was rather arrogant,

that he was praising himself rather than petitioning the Lord. Levi (2020) says that Hezekiah's word: "and have done what is good in thy eyes" (I Kgs. 20:3), is a form of self-righteousness, or selfjustification. Before Isaiah could leave the king's court, God heard Hezekiah's prayer instantly and sent Isaiah back with a message of divine healing and 15 additional years of existence for the king.

When the Hezekiah had fully recovered from his sickness, he received visitors from Babylon. The visitors were delegates of 16 Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective

Berodach-baladan, King of Babylon. They came with gifts to congratulate him on his recovery. Out of joy, Hezekiah not only received them warmly but also showed them all his treasures. After Hezekiah had displayed the kingdom's treasures to the Babylonians ambassadors, Isaiah paid him a visit and prophesied that the Babylonians would, in the nearest future, cart away all the treasures they had been shown. They would not just take the treasures but they would also take away future kings of Judah and made them eunuchs in the palace of the king of Babylon. Notwithstanding this flaw, Hezekiah was one of the righteous of Judah. He died and was succeeded by Manasseh, his son.

Turah (2016) stated that, it is apt to re-assert that Hezekiah resented Judah's submissiveness to Assyria and he took steps to reverse his father's policies at every point. Proceeding first cautiously, then boldly, he sought to get free of Assyria. In this movement for independence, Hezekiah had the support of patriotic people in Judah, loyal Yahwists, who found the paganizing tendencies of Ahaz intolerable. The bid for independence through reforms was strengthened by the prophetic reminder that the disaster which overtook Israel was Yahweh judgment on the Jews that have forsaken Him and those that have broken the covenant. This meant that Judah would have to reform if she wished to escape the fate of the Northern Kingdom. Yet as long as Judah was subject to Assyria, no satisfactory reform was possible. Any attempt at reform would, in itself, have been an act of rebellion. He recalled that about seven years after Hezekiah became king (i.e. in 711 BC.), a revolt broke out against Assyria led by the Philistine king of Ashdod, and encouraged by the Egyptians. Judah, Edom and Moab were invited to join. Opinion was divided in Judah on

whether to join the revolt or not. People angrily opposed Isaiah to the conspiracy, calling on Hezekiah to give the Ethiopian envoys a negative answer, and symbolically illustrating the117Historical PerspectiveIsrael: Monarchy to Exile

foolishness of trust in Egypt by walking about Jerusalem, barefooted, and clad only in a loincloth. It appeared that Judah did not join the rebellion, for when the revolt was crushed by Sargon II (king of Assyria), Judah was not punished. Soon after the death of Sargon II, Hezekiah instigated a sweeping cultic reform. Not content with setting aside foreign practices newly introduced by Ahaz, Hezekiah went ahead to take away many cults that were long popularly related with Jews religion. He destroyed a bronze image of a snake reputed to have been made by Moses himself. He demolished the local shrines' 'high places', probably because of the paganizing practices associated with them. Hezekiah did not confine his efforts to Judah. He carried the reforms into the defunct Northern Kingdom, possibly to reunite the north and the south under the Davidic throne (2 Chron. 30:1-12). It is probable that Hezekiah's reforms had social aspects as well. A return to normative Yahwism would of necessity have involved an attempt to remove the economic abuses that had existed. Excavations of vessels approximating to the time of Hezekiah and bearing the King's stamp, probably indicates some sort of fiscal or administrative reform, perhaps an attempt on the part of the state to regularize the collection of taxes, and to curb dishonesty by the introduction of standard measure (Gong, 2014).

Soon after Sargon's successor, Sennacherib, came to the throne of Assyria, a general rebellion broke out in the whole of the Assyrian empire, headed by an able Babylonian patriot, Berodach-baladan. He sent emissaries to Hezekiah, ostensibly to congratulate him on his recovery from an illness, but more probably to enlist his support. The help of Egypt was sought. Hezekiah was under pressure both from the confederates and from certain of his patriotic nobles. In spite of the earnest warnings of Isaiah, who branded the whole thing as folly and rebellion against Yahweh, Hezekiah joined in and sent envoys to Egypt to negotiate a treaty. He played a leading role in the118Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective

revolt. He imprisoned the King of Ekron in Jerusalem. He went ahead with energetic measures of defence by strengthening the

walls of Jerusalem and increasing its stock of arms (Drewah, 2012).

This flagrant step brought the Assyrians down, and in the gushing of 701 B.C., Sennacherib completely subjugated all the rebels. Most of Judah's territory was given to Philistine Kings and Hezekiah and the rest of his troops were in Jerusalem. While Sennacherib was still besieging Lachish, one of the strong fortresses of Judah, Hezekiah sent to the Assyrian King and sued for peace. Hezekiah had to strip the temple and the royal treasury in order to raise it. After receiving the tribute, the Assyrian King sent three top Assyrian officials to Jerusalem with a large army to demand Hezekiah's surrender. It is probable that Hezekiah, at this time, had approached Egypt for help. The Assyrian officials came and demanded Hezekiah's unconditional surrender. Hezekiah fully aware that surrender would mean the end of Judah and the deportation of its population, preferred to die fighting. In this, he had the support of the aged Isaiah who, now convinced that Assyria had over tried the patience of God, assured him that Jerusalem would never be taken. In the end, Jerusalem survived (Popila, 2012).

The Assyrian king (Sennacherib) return to his own land after the angel of the Lord had wiped out 185, 000 Assyrian soldiers. Two explanations have been put forward to explain this massacre, both of which are plausible: that Sennacherib's army was crippled by an epidemic; and that he withdrew his soldiers when news came that his presence was required at home. Hezekiah died the following year (687/76 BC).¹¹⁹Historical PerspectiveIsrael: Monarchy to Exile
Isaiah's Contribution to the Political Affairs
of Judah

Passing references were made to the prophet Isaiah during the reigns of both Ahaz and Hezekiah. In fact, the prophetic activity of this prophet covered the entire reigns of these two Judean Kings. The circumstances of Isaiah's call and ministry are examined as follows. The story of Isaiah's call is found in chapter six of his book. It came to him in a vision which he experienced in the Jerusalem temple in the year that king Uzziah died. Looking up, he saw the Lord upon a lofty throne beneath the ministering Seraphims who cried one to another; "Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of

his glory". As Isaiah listened amid the shaking of the foundations of the thresholds and the thickening clouds of smoke, his first thought was of the unfitness of himself and his whole people to meet such awful presence. In response, he cried out: "Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts!" When his lips were cleansed by a coal from off the altar by one of the Seraphims, he heard Yahweh speak: "Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?" Isaiah replied, "Here I am! Send me". Thus, the prophet was commissioned to speak to a people whom his words would only harden, until desolation and exile should fall again and again. Yet after the tree was felled, there would remain life to sprout from the stump (Isaiah 6: 11ff) (Clarendon, 2018).

There are elements of special significance in Isaiah's inaugural vision; the purification of the prophet's lips, the commission and the content of the message. On being confronted with the holiness of God, Isaiah became aware that he and the whole nation had unclean lips. This showed that he was conscious of his own sinfulness and his participation in the iniquity of his people. As a bearer of the divine word, as one who brought a message from God, Isaiah must have his lips cleansed and so

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Northern Kingdom.	Seen in this light, Isaiah may be looked upon as a prophet-statesman (Erik, 2017).	
Nevertheless, such an interpretation of the prophet's teaching overlooks the wider and deeper perspective in which Isaiah viewed the crisis. For, beyond the political schemes of men was the sovereign activity of Yahweh, whose purpose shaped the course of events. The rulers of Israel and Damascus are men and not God. Their plan will fail unless it has the backing of Yahweh. So, Isaiah affirmed that the greatest resource in time of trouble is faith, absolute trust and dependence upon God. Abandon human alliance, and place your reliance in Yahweh whose sovereign will control human affairs. It was the prophet's conviction that Yahweh would overthrow the Syro-Ephramite coalition by bringing Assyria against these nations. Thus, Isaiah advised Ahaz not to make a futile attempt to change the situation by following the view of his political counsellors, but rather accept Yahweh's direction of historical events by placing his reliance on Yahweh (Erik, 2017).		
Isaiah's prophetic role in Hezekiah's regime		

Ahaz recalled that about seven years after Hezekiah succeeded Ahaz, a further attempt was made to involve Judah in a rebellion against Assyria. The whole plot was hatched by the Philistine city of Ashdod and backed by Egypt. Ambassadors from Egypt and probably of the Philistines also waited on Hezekiah to enlist his cooperation. Isaiah was vigorously opposed to this move. While the plot was being hatched, Isaiah went about Jerusalem barefooted and clad only in a loincloth like a war prisoner, symbolically protesting the disastrous results of the reliance upon Egypt. Possibly, the prophet was heeded; Judah escaped harm when the rebellion was crushed; she apparently did not commit herself.

After the death of Sargon in 705 B.C. there was a general¹²⁵Historical PerspectiveIsrael:

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 uprising throughout the Assyrian dominions, headed by Babylon. The Babylonian king sent emissaries to Hezekiah, ostensibly to congratulate him on his recovery from an illness, but more probably to enlist his support. Hezekiah joined the revolt, having negotiated with Egypt for assistance. Isaiah condemned the negotiations Hezekiah made with Egypt and predicted nothing but disaster for it. He counselled the king, as he had counselled Ahaz, to stay out of the revolution. To seek help from Egypt was futile. Sargon's successor, Sennacherib crushed Babylon and the eastern rebels in 703B.C. and then turning to the west, captured Sidon and Ashkelon. He destroyed many cities in Judah including Lachish. As he closed in upon the capital, Hezekiah and the remnant of his soldiers were left like "a bird in a cage". During the siege of Lachish, Sennacherib sent a delegation led by his chief deputy to Jerusalem to demand Hezekiah's unconditional surrender. At this stage, Isaiah counselled resistance. He advised the king to stand firm against Assyria and declared that Assyria could never take the city. Assyria, he concluded, would be punished, and this would mean the safety of Jerusalem (Rakit, 2013). Adanab (2015) stated that in his dealings with Hezekiah, Isaiah appeared to have pursued contradictory policies: counselling submission to Assyria and later advocating for resistance against Assyria. To resolve this apparently contradictory stand, we have to look at Isaiah's theology. His opposition of rebellion against Assyria like his advice to Ahaz was not based on shrewd

political calculation that Assyria would eventually win in the end. Uppermost on his mind was the conviction that Yahweh was running history and that Assyria was called to serve his purpose. Assyria is hailed as the rod of Yahweh's anger. Behind the Assyrian advance is the over-ruling sovereignty of God. The terrible havoc wrought by the Assyrian invader is the sign of Yahweh's rule in human affairs, and particularly his judgment upon a godless nation, the people of his own choice. Hence the man of faith should willingly submit, not to the Assyrian¹²⁶ Israel: Monarchy to Exile

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yoke, but to the yoke of Yahweh's sovereignty. It is out of this conviction that Yahweh is using Assyria as his instrument to serve his purpose that Isaiah advised Ahaz to shun the revolution against

Assyria.

Lalabi (2010) said that Isaiah's later advice to Hezekiah to stand firm against Assyria was based on the conviction that Assyria, too, was subject to Yahweh's sovereign rule and would be punished for her arrogant pride. Assyria wrongly believed that her victory was due to her military might; but it is Yahweh who is in full control of history. When Yahweh had carried out his judgment against his own people, he will overthrow the Assyrian tyranny. Since Assyria's power was given to her by God, that power could be revoked or checked when God chose to do so. The prophet's declaration that Jerusalem could not fall and as such Hezekiah should resist Assyrian bluff is also based on his belief in Zion as the dwelling place of Yahweh and His faithfulness to His covenant established with David. Isaiah was of the firm conviction that Yahweh's purpose in history was tied up with the city of Jerusalem (the place of the Temple, in which the Ark rested). Jerusalem was the city that Yahweh had founded. Mount Zion was the place of the name of Yahweh of hosts'. Jerusalem was also the city of David, and the Davidic dynasty, which had survived through the troubled centuries of history. Jerusalem was the sign of a social stability. Isaiah and Yahweh's Holiness

Mention has been made of Isaiah's view on Yahweh's holiness in connection with his inaugural vision. Let us now examine this concept in some detail. Holiness was almost regarded as a physical quality attached to things. It did not have any moral connotations. Basically, it means set apart, devoted to Yahweh.

Thus, holiness implied anything that tended to appropriate people or things to God. The holy object was one set apart from all that was secular, cut off from men and from profane usage.¹²⁷ Historical Perspective Israel: Monarchy to Exile

Isaiah stressed on the holiness of God, including in this quality, not only Yahweh's holiness, but also his moral purity. Thus, with Isaiah, the ethical content of holiness was fundamental. As the Holy One of Israel, Yahweh is Righteousness (Isaiah 5: 16). In his presence, nothing unclean, nothing unrighteous, nothing idolatrous survives. In reaction to Yahweh's holiness, Isaiah exclaimed: "Woe is me. For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the Lord of hosts" (Isaiah 6:5). Consequently, nothing defiled or unclean could hold communion with that perfect God. Yahweh was the Holy One of Israel and she (Israel) in turn must be a holy people (Ryderland, 2017). Isaiah's visionary experience of the Holy One of Israel enthroned in universal glory signified the divine sovereignty of Yahweh. Thus in Isaiah's view, the term Holy One of Israel is more than a nationalistic concept. It is universal in scope. This holiness which implies Yahweh's universality demands that those who are close to him should keep certain moral standards. In this respect, Isaiah made a significant break away from the popular understanding of the holiness of Yahweh by emphasizing the moral or ethical demands of Yahweh and his universality. However, he stressed this not only as an expression of the essential being of Yahweh, but also as the unique characteristic of the ethical imperatives which he lays upon all those who are his creatures. Holiness was not merely a pure narrow religious concept to Isaiah. It is that aspect of Yahweh's being by which men are led into fuller perception of his whole nature. Thus the Holy One of Israel means that this God who has this character has chosen Israel for a relationship with himself. In the original sense, Israel is holy to Yahweh. Therefore, the consequences for Israel are disastrous of her apostasy and wickedness. The relationship is not automatic: it leads Yahweh to punish Israel using other nations as his instruments. On Israel's part, certain attitudes become axiomatic for the Holy One of Israel is the sovereign Lord of all the earth. Israel cannot run away from¹²⁸ Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective

Yahweh because she is in contact with the real source of power. Lack of knowledge drives her to seek alliance with other nations which is a denial of the true nature of Yahweh. Thus, the conduct of her national life and her international relations are profoundly affected. It means exclusive devotion to and trust in Yahweh (Aronid, 2012). It is instructive to note that there are several points of contact between Amos' concept of Yahweh's Righteousness and Isaiah's concept of the Holiness of God. Each, in its own way, made a significant break away from popular understanding. The popular notion of righteousness was that Yahweh had chosen Israel and he was to protect his people under all circumstances. To this, Amos said, no. The righteousness of Yahweh extends to all nations and this leads him to punish other nations for acts of inhumanity. Moreover, Yahweh would punish Israel because she did not keep to the ethical demands of Yahweh. Thus, Isaiah added a moral content to the holiness of Yahweh, the sovereign ruler, whose Holiness demands purity from his people. In fact, both Amos and Isaiah emphasized the moral demands of Yahweh as not only an expression of his essential being but also the unique characteristic of the ethical imperatives he lays upon all who are his creatures. Righteousness and Holiness were thus not two purely narrow religious concepts, but that aspect of Yahweh's being which led to fuller understanding of his whole nature (William, 2019). Some distinctive elements in Isaiah's prophetic teaching

1. The futility of sacrifice without righteousness is expressed in Isaiah 1:13 thus: Bring no more vain offerings; incense an abomination to me. New moon and the Sabbath and the calling of assemblies. I cannot endure iniquity and solemn assemblies. I cannot endure to assemblies. (Isaiah 1:13)

Isaiah repudiated the sacrificial worship of the sanctuaries and the observance of the festival days like new moon and Sabbath. He declared the lavish cults by which Judah had hoped to satisfy Yahweh's demands to be unacceptable and offensive to him. This was because the elaboration of the sacrificial cults both misrepresented Yahweh's character as expressed in

the covenant. Yahweh's demands could not be met by ritual and sacrifice alone. Righteousness in human relation is the alternative which Yahweh requires. Thus it appears that Isaiah was not merely denouncing corrupt practices associated with the sacrificial cults, but fundamentally rejecting the whole cults as means of recalling the people to the true demands of Yahwism (Toradin, 1984).

2. Obedience is better by far than disobedience. What was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? Where I look for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes? (Isaiah 5:4)

Isaiah likens the nation to a good-cared garden that supposed to have bred good grapes but did not. The contrast is between the righteousness which God expected of the people he had cherished and the rebellion he suffered from them. Instead of living according to the moral demands of Yahwism which had been made explicit to them, the people had taken to immorality, wickedness and apostasy and thought that Yahweh's demands could be met by ritual and sacrifice. The failure of the southern kingdom to respond to God's grace to righteousness, Isaiah declared that they are like wild grapes in the vineyard.

3. Benevolence is enjoined while Greed is condemned. Woe to those who join house to house, who add fields to field, until there is no more room, and you are made to dwell alone, in the midst of the land. (Isaiah 5:8) 130 Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective

In this verse, Isaiah condemns the activities of the property magnates of Judah who had taken the land of the poor and rendered them homeless. Isaiah's attack is based on the notion of the Promised Land. Yahweh, real owner of the land in faithfulness to his promise, had given the land of Canaan to the various tribes and clans. This means that the Promised Land is for all and as such land-grabbing were ruled out by the very nature of the covenant community. However, the commercial basis of the society has tended to nullify covenant notion of the land. The money economy which Judah now enjoyed had led to the amassing of wealth, and in the process, individual Israelites were dispossessed and turned into serfs. By condemning the property magnates, Isaiah was only reaffirming the ancient basis of land tenure. He denounced the amassing of wealth as

morally wrong (Toradin, 1984).

4. Divine call should be accepted and fulfilled
And I heard the voice of the Lord saying, 'Whom shall
I send who will go for us? 'Then I said 'Here I am! Send
me'.(Isaiah 6:8)

In his inaugural vision in the Temple, Isaiah is called to prophetic office after he had been cleansed of his un-holiness with a burning coal. The cleansing of the prophet means that the prophet himself needs purification. The call to become a prophet or a messenger of God must evoke a response from the individual. Either he responds positively by accepting the call or negatively by declining the call. Isaiah's positive response meant that he was willing to become a messenger of God.

5. Spiritual delusion and hardness of heart is part of the prophetic ministry as well as divine purpose. Making the heart of this people fat, and their ears heavy, and shut their eyes. (Isaiah 6:10)

The verse then represents the results of Isaiah's preaching. The131Historical
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significance of this passage lies in whether the 'hardening' of Israel expresses the purpose of Isaiah's ministry or a later reflection on the failure of his ministry. If this verse is taken as an expression of the purpose of Isaiah's ministry, then he was merely to speak God's word which will be heard but never understood. Indeed, the only effect of his preaching will be to stultify his hearers and render their obedience impossible. But the purpose of preaching is to awaken the people to true repentance and to lead them to establish right relations with each other and with God. Men who close their ears to the divine word ultimately become incapable of response. Since the people were deeply engrossed in their wickedness and immorality, his word would only make their situation worse.

6. Prophetic declaration about the Messiah
Behold a young woman shall conceive and bear a son, and shall call his name Emmanuel. (Isaiah 7:14)

Ahaz refused to place his reliance upon Yahweh to crush the Syro-Ephraimite alliance and further declined to seek a sign from God to confirm Yahweh's word. So, Isaiah said that Yahweh would give a sign that would confirm the prophetic word of doom upon the Syro-Ephraimite coalition. The sign

promised was the birth of a child whose name would be Emmanuel (God be with us). The language presupposes that the mother is already or soon will be pregnant; the child would be born in the near future. Even before he reaches the age of choosing between good and evil, the Syro-Ephraimite alliance will have been broken up and the king of Assyria would have wrought havoc on Judah. Thus, the prophetic sign was a way of affirming for the Judean king that within a short time his enemies would disappear.

The primary fulfilment of the prophecy probably took place in birth of Josiah, king of Judah, who was a righteous king. However, the secondary fulfilment of the prophecy, according to 132 Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective

to Christian theology, took place in the Virgin birth of Jesus Christ to whom was given the name Emmanuel (God is with us). It appears that the passage is to be understood in its primary fulfilment in the person of Josiah within the context of the political situation of the time. The 'sign' is the child himself, not the manner of his birth. Before Josiah reaches maturity, the danger Syro-Ephraimite alliance and Assyria had become a thing of the past.

7. God can use unrighteous people as instrument of His punishment

Ah Assyria, the rod of my anger, the staff of my jury. (Isaiah 10:5)

In this verse, Isaiah is expressing the conviction that Yahweh is the sovereign Lord of history and consequently, he uses human agents to punish offenders.

Assyria was an instrument in Yahweh's hand to punish his rebellious people. Behind the political schemes of men is the deep conviction of Yahweh's sovereignty. But when Yahweh had finished all his works on Mount Zion and in Jerusalem; he will punish the arrogant boasting of the king of Assyria and his haughty pride. Assyria thought that it was through her military might that she had won all her victories, not realizing that Yahweh had given her that power.

8. It is futile to trust in man
Woe to those who go down to Egypt for help and rely on horses, who trust in chariots because they are many and in horses because they are strong; but do not look to

the Holy One of Israel or consult the Lord. (Isaiah 10:5)

Isaiah condemned Hezekiah for turning to Egypt for help in his rebellion against Assyria. Isaiah was against such reliance upon foreign aid because it amounted to lack of faith and confidence in Yahweh who was the real source of power. If Egypt is

strong, then it was by the power given to her by Yahweh, the sovereign Lord. To leave the actual source of power and help and seek human aid is an apostasy, since it amounts to a denial of Yahweh's presence and power. The expression 'Holy One of Israel' in the conception of Isaiah is more than a nationalistic title. It also expresses the universality of Yahweh, whose character demands that those close to him should maintain certain moral standards (Mayes, 1983).

9. The unfathomable divine forgiveness of sin

Though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be whiter than snow. (Isaiah 1:18)

In the preceding verse, Isaiah recounts the sins of Judah apostasy, corruption at the courts, social injustice, immorality and irreligiosity. Now, Yahweh invites the people to argue out the case as before a judge. The people deserve to be punished, but Yahweh in his mercy will pardon their sins. This invitation, similar in tone to Hosea, is extended to the people. It is a free offer of justification; an unconditional forgiveness with Yahweh himself taking the initiative.

Manasseh (14th king of Judah)

Hezekiah's bid for independence failed and at the time of his death, Judah was under Assyrian control. His son and successor, Manasseh apparently became a vassal of Sennacherib and during his entire reign, he remained the subject of Nineveh. Sennacherib was murdered and succeeded by one of his sons, Esarhaddon in 661 B.C. The new Assyrian king led his country to the conquest of Egypt and seized Mephis in 671 B.C. after subjugating Babylon. His son

Ashurbanipal was able to hold his father's empire during

the first part of his reign. He advanced to Upper Egypt and 134 Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective

destroyed Thebes and, for a short while, Egypt was held within the orbit of Assyrian power. In fact, it was during the reign of Manasseh that Assyria reached the summit of her political glory. Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal succeeded in building the greatest empire in history. During the entire reign of Manasseh,

the Assyrian Empire was still intact; and to have resisted it, would have been both fatal and suicidal. Like Ahaz before him, Manasseh believed that the best policy for Judah was to play safe with Assyria, as a faithful vassal. Therefore, he declared himself a king vassal of Assyria and deserted the battle. Both Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal list 'Manasseh king of Judah' among their twenty-two subjects (Yohanan, 2010).

Since in the Ancient Orient political subservience normally involved the recognition of the overlord's gods alongside that of national religion, Manasseh reversed the religious policy of his father and reverted to Ahaz's recognition of Assyrian cults. He reintroduced the practises in the high places with its altars to the Baal, its Asherim and all the accompaniments of natural religion. Desiring to flatter his Assyrian master, Manasseh brought in also the worship of the heavenly bodies prevalent in Nineveh and Babylon, especially that of Ishatar, 'the queen of heaven'. The worship of the host of heaven was part of Assyrian astrological cults, which was based on the belief that the sun and stars controlled human destiny. The wicked ceremonial of child sacrifices he, likewise, sponsored, denote his own son. Along with these ritual practice came in the use of augury, necromancy and those other means of controlling human destiny. Those who protested against this wholesale apostasy were ruthlessly silenced. In fact, there was no record of prophetic activity in his reign.

Ohajawa (2009) observed that the effect of Manasseh's religious policies was that it threatened the very existence of Yahwism. Pagan rites were practised alongside the cult of Yahweh. Yahwism was in danger of slipping unawares into

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outright polytheism. Since Yahweh had always been thought of as surrounded by his heavenly host, and since the heavenly bodies had been popularly regarded as members of that host, the introduction of the cult of astral deities encouraged the people to think of these gads as members of Yahweh's court and to accord them worship as such. Had this not been checked, Yahweh might soon have become the head of a pantheon, and Israel's faith might have been adulterated altogether. In addition to this, the decay of the national religion brought with it contempt of Yahweh's law and new incidence of violence and injustice together with an uncertainty regards to God's ability

to act in the situations.

The writer of the book of Kings condemned Manasseh as the worst king ever to sit on David's throne. He is said to have seduced the people into doing more evil than the surrounding nations. However, it appears that Manasseh had no choice. His apostasy was a matter of political expediency. So long as Assyria's power remained intact, he had to play safe in order to safeguard Judah. King Hezekiah raised the spiritual level of the Jewish people to its highest degree since the days of David but his wicked son, Manasseh, undid all his works. His disastrous reign for 55 years introduced paganism on a national level and created a mass movement to imitate the surrounding nations' idolatrous way. Manasseh also ruthlessly suppressed any dissent and even executed the great prophet Isaiah, perhaps his harshest critic. Although, he repented later in life, but the damage he caused was irreversible. His son, Amon, outdid his father in wickedness. To demonstrate his love for cruelty, Amon burned Tarah scroll and placed an idol in the holiest part of the temple. Manasseh's son, Amon who succeeded his father for two years continued in the policies of his father (Drewah, 2012).¹³⁶ Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective
Amon

Amon was twenty-two years old when he became king and he reigned two years in Jerusalem. But he did evil in the sight of the Lord as his father, Manasseh, had done. Amon sacrificed to all the carved images which his father Manasseh had made and served them. He did not humble himself before the Lord, but he trespassed more and more. Amon succeeded Manasseh for two years before he was murdered in a court conspiracy. His servant conspired against him and killed him in his house. The conspiracy was probably machinated by anti-Assyrian features who took struck to avenge the national policy of continued subservience to Assyria with its worship of Assyrian deities. The people of land executed all those who had conspired against king Amon. It seems that there were some who felt that the time was not yet ripe for this and they, at once, executed the assassins and placed the eight-year-old Josiah on the throne. But the people of the land slew-all those who had conspired against King Amon, and the people of the land made Josiah his son king in his stead. (II kgs. 21:24)
The executors are referred to as 'the people of the land'. This

was more or less a term during the period of the monarchy for a social class in the community consisting of male citizens who owned land and had full rights and responsibilities in the kingdom. In the social hierarchy, they seemed to follow the priesthood and were mentioned as playing a significant part in the ascension to the throne not only of Josiah but also of Joash of Judah (II Kings 11: 12, 18-20) and Jehoahaz (II Kings 23:30).

Josiah

This highly righteous monarch represented the last hope to save both the kingdom and the temple from divine wrath. During his

31 years of reign, Josiah almost single handily forestalled the137Historical
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destruction of Judah. He initiated national revival movement and nearly eradicated idol worship in his kingdom. Josiah also made badly needed repairs in the temple of the Lord (Bais Hamikdash) and purified it from all vestiges of idolatry. Josiah also hid the Holy Ark and several others scared objects to prevent them from falling into the enemies' hands. Along with prophet Jeremiah, Josiah brought back remnants of the Ten Tribe (Israel) from their exile in the east (Zeifah, 1988).

Josiah was a religious reformer per excellence. Josiah's reforms were largely influenced by religious and political considerations. The discovery of the book of the Law in the course of repair to the Temple accelerated and gave direction to the reforms. When the Law-book was brought to the notice of the king, he consulted the oracle and summoned the elders of the people to the Temple. He read the Law to them and entered with them into a solemn covenant before Yahweh to obey it. This among other things implied ensuring the pure worship of Yahweh by ridding the country of alien forms of worship. The prophetic movement at this time also influenced the religious policy of Josiah. By asserting that the nation was under judgment and would know the wrath of Yahweh if she did not repent, the prophets helped to prepare the ground for reform. The prophets Zephaniah and young Jeremiah denounced Judah's sins and declared that the nation had no hope save in repentance. Preaching of this sort undoubtedly increased the sympathy for Josiah's policy. Aside from the religious factors, there were strong political undercurrents which made the reforms possible. Josiah's reign witnessed a singularly favourable international situation which

made possible a reversal of Manasseh's religious policies.

Josiah's coming of age coincided roughly with the weakened state of Assyria caused by rebellion during the last years of Ashurbanipal. First, Egypt and then Babylon rebelled against the imperial power and regained their Independence. Finally, the Medes exploited Assyria's weakness and in alliance with the Babylonians, sacked Nineveh, the Capital in 621 B.C. This¹³⁸ Israel: Monarchy to

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momentous shift in the balance of power gave Josiah the much needed breathing space to initiate thorough-going religious reforms (McKeneth, 2016).

Taking advantage of the imminent collapse of the Assyrian Empire, Tyda (2011) asserted that the king made a brave attempt to restore the religious and political independence of Judah. As already noted, the worship of Assyrian deities was a necessary concomitant of Judah's political subservience to Assyria. Whereas in Manasseh's reign, Assyrian power was at its zenith and therefore, any attempt at religious reforms would have been interpreted as a political move to secure Judah's independence and would have been ruthlessly crushed. The reign of Josiah saw the decline of Assyria. The religious reforms were therefore an assertion of political independence. They were an overt rejection of Assyrian sovereignty, and therefore, a kind of unilateral declaration of independence.

The extension of the religious reforms into the former northern Kingdom of Israel betrayed further the political ambitions of Josiah. John (2018) noted that it was an attempt to unite the two parts of Israel under his rule as in the times of David. In short, Josiah sought to restore the kingdom of David with its capital at Jerusalem. Josiah's interception of the Egyptian army led by Neco at Megiddo in 609 B.C., in which he lost his life, was a political move aimed at consolidating his religious and political gains. Egypt was going to help Assyria against the Babylonians who had virtually annihilated Assyria and were simply engaged in wiping out the last remnants of Assyrian resistance. If Egypt succeeded in reviving Assyrian's power, Judah would inevitably come under Assyrian yoke. This would of course mean the loss of not only Judah's independence but also a total negation of his religious reforms which, as already observed, were a rejection of Assyrian lordship. Thus, to forestall any negative trend that might reverse the clock of religious and political freedom,

Josiah confronted Neco at Megiddo. Unfortunately, the king¹³⁹ Historical Perspective Israel: Monarchy to Exile

lost his life in the ensuing battle and, for a brief period, Judah came under Egyptian rule.

Thus, Josiah was motivated by religious and political considerations to effect necessary reforms in Judah. Philip (2019) noted that it would be unfair to suggest that Josiah was motivated by purely political factors to carry out his reforms. Religion and politics were not rigidly separated in the ancient world and religion and security depended on political independence. Hence in asserting the independence of Judah, Josiah was at the same time paving the way for religious freedom.

Significance of Josiah's Reforms

Amon, Manasseh's successor, was assassinated after two years on the throne and his younger brother, Josiah (who was just eight years old) was made king of Judah. Josiah's reign is remembered for the sweeping reforms which he initiated in the eighteenth year of his rule, if not before. In the wake of the reforms the king abolished the Canaanite Baal worship, the Assyrian Cult, and the worship of other deities such as the Ammonite Milcom. He cleansed the Temple of all foreign objects: the male god Baal and the mother goddess Asherah, the horses dedicated to the sun, and the astral altars on the roof. The practice of sacred prostitution, child sacrifice in the valley of Hinnon, and the consultation of mediums and wizards were discontinued. The reforms did not stop with the cleansing of the Jerusalem Temple. The outlying sanctuaries of high places and their idolatrous priests were deposed. Josiah's reforms extended into the territory of the former Northern Kingdom which had become the Assyrian province of Megiddo and Samaria. The rival temple of Bethel with its golden calf erected by Jeroboam, the son of Nebat and its Asherah were destroyed along with other outlying high places. On his return to Judah, a covenant ceremony was performed and the celebration of the¹⁴⁰ Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective

Passover was reinstated (Ojiggin, 1998).

The immediate effect of the Josiah's reforms was the centralization of all worship of Yahweh in the Jerusalem Temple as the sole legitimate sanctuary. This centralization purged the worship of Yahweh of syncretic tendencies. In other

words, it checked the abuses which the prophets denounced. On the other hand, this centralization led to disgruntlement and dissatisfaction among the country-side priests of the abolished Yahwistic shrines. They were naturally not eager to surrender their ancient prerogative and meekly integrate themselves with the priesthood of Jerusalem, and many of them refused to do so. Nor was the Jerusalem clergy willing to receive them save on a status of inferiority. The reforms thus paved the way for the later development of a class of subordinate clergy. It also set in motion a priestly monopoly in Jerusalem which could hardly have been entirely healthy, since spiritual monopolies seldom are. Moreover, the abolishment of the local shrines and the attendant reduction of cultic activities in which the people could participate must inevitably have resulted in a certain secularization of life in the outlying areas, a separation of cultic and common life never known before (Lalabi, 2010).

The reforms undoubtedly gave Yahwism a breathing space and it is probable that public morality and the administration of justice underwent, at least for a time, a significant improvement. However, it does appear that the reforms were not thoroughly successful. Basically, the reforms set out to organize religious activity and herein lay its inherent weakness. What the reformers did not see is that true religion is not a thing that can be organized. It must spring spontaneously from the contact of the human spirit with the living God, and the attempt to manipulate can only result in hypocrisy (Lalabi, 2010).

The reform was superficial and bred nothing but hypocrisy and its resultant false sense of security. It failed to achieve a genuine spiritual revival and renewal of the covenant. It tended to have satisfied external measures which, while not profoundly affecting the spiritual life of the nation, endangered a false sense of peace that nothing could penetrate Judah. For instance, the centralization of worship in Jerusalem made the people think that God was on the side of his people and as such no evil could befall them. Jeremiah, who had earlier supported the reform became disillusioned and testified to its superficiality when he complained that the reform had produced nothing but increased cultic activity without a real return to the ancient paths (Jer. 6: 16-21) and that the sins of the society continued without protest from the clergy (Jer. 5: 20-31). Moreover, the reform did not lead to a restoration of faith in Yahweh. It did not have much

impact since it did not result in the circumcision of the heart.

The mere fact that Jeremiah later advocated for a new covenant meant that the reform did not achieve a real deepening of the spiritual nature of Israel's religion (Leisus, 2014).

The reform led to undue attention to the letter of the law that, in the end it, replaced prophetic activity. The official promulgation of a written law, in fact, marked the first step in that process which progressively elevated the law until it became, in post-exilic times, the organizing principle of religion and, at the same time, the first step in the concomitant process whereby the prophetic movement, and its message were rendered progressively superfluous, ultimately, came to an end. Thus, there began that later devotion to the law that marked Judaism.

In conclusion, therefore, it can be said that the reforms of Josiah, though well intentioned and zealously pursued, did not achieve the desired result, that is, the spiritual re-awakening and renewal of the nation. This is because it led to externalization of religion as evidenced in increased cultic activity and undue legalism and its failure to satisfy the ethical and moral demands of Yahwism.¹⁴² Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective
Jeremiah: Pre-Exilic Prophet

Okalawon (2013) posited that Jeremiah was the prophet who ministered during the reigns of the latter kings of Judah just before the fall and Babylonian captivity of Judah. He was thus a pre-exilic prophet. He started prophesying in the days of Josiah, the son of Amon, king of Judah (Jeremiah 1:1-3). Jeremiah was born into a priestly family. He was the son of Hilkiyah, of the priests in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin. He was familiar with the story of God's gracious dealings with Israel, the religious traditions of his people, and the teaching about obedience which God cherished. His bowl against the priests of the old was that they were not totally committed to the will of God. They failed to fulfil their calling to teach or instruct their people in the ways of the Lord. He lived in Anathoth, in a small village, a few miles north-east of Jerusalem, near enough for him to know exactly what prevailed in a city so large. He protested against political and religious policies which he regarded as powerless to change and possibly could result in the demise of his people. He was accused of being a traitor to his religion and to his country. His conduct, particularly his detestation of the truth in the midst of national tragedy led to

the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 587 B.C.

He was inclined to act as midwife at the birth of a faith which enabled his people to see in their own tragedy the working out of the purposes of their God. When other nation perished, their gods disappeared; when Judah perished, new faith raised from the ashes of Jerusalem. This certainly was the Lord's doing and His agent was Jeremiah.

God had known Jeremiah before he was formed in the womb.

The word 'know' reflects a personal relationship or experience like that similar to husband and wife (Gen. 4:1). This knowing has a purpose, for God has chosen him. This is a reflection of

God's own nature which makes him omniscient, omnipotent¹⁴³ Historical Perspective Israel: Monarchy to Exile

and omnipresent Lord. Jeremiah is no doubt different from us.

The service to which he was called is described as that of being a "prophet to the nation" a God's spokesman, not merely to his friends or country men but the nations. Jeremiah's era was when power politics was being played by people of the ancient near east.

His message had relevance beyond the narrow gates of his people. The description of Jeremiah as a "prophet to the nation" is not a sign of political realism in that the God in whose name Jeremiah speaks is not merely the God of Judah but the God of the entire universe, the God under whose sovereignty all decisions of power are taken. His ministry was therefore, geared towards challenging other gods that are hinged towards limiting or challenging the power of Yahweh, God of Israel (Ahujah, 1992).

Jeremiah's day witnessed the situation where some people were too eager to use God's name for their personal or national interests (see, Jeremiah 28). God, however, called him to serve Him. When he delivered his sermon in the temple (in which he said if the people refused to amend their ways and doings, then the temple and Jerusalem would be destroyed), he was arrested. Although Zedekiah knew and recognised Jeremiah as God's prophet yet he always ignored his message. In the service of Yahweh, Jeremiah faced some many oppositions; he experiences and endured intense persecutions to the point of contemplating suicide, and was eventually carried as exile into Egypt. Because his message was not what the people expected, he was described as the prophet of doom by his

hearers whereas he was the true mouthpiece of God. He was called a traitor by many people of Jerusalem simply because of his negative prophecy about Jerusalem and its inhabitants. He warned the kings and people of Judah to no avail until the prophetic invasion and captivity of Judah by the Babylonians was fulfilled (Anach, 2010).¹⁴⁴ Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective

When Judah fell in 587/586 BC, the temple was completely destroyed; Jerusalem burnt and the walls were broken down and the talented people among the population were taken to Babylon. Jeremiah was first captured by the Babylonians, after bringing him out of prison. Upon his recognition as the prophet of God, he was released and given the choice of remaining in the land in the custody of Gedeliah. After the exile, Jeremiah wrote to the exiles and advised them to live as normally as possible in Babylon (Jeremiah 29:4-6); be good citizens; and pay no attention to the super patriots and false prophets (29:8-9); and that when the time is right, the Lord will bring the exiles back home. When Gedeliah was assassinated, Jeremiah was deported to Egypt where he died.

Jehoahaz

He was the son of Josiah that became king of Judah after his father Josiah's death. He was twenty-three years old when he became a king and he reigned three months in Jerusalem. Neco, the king of Egypt deposed him at Jerusalem to Egypt and imposed on the land a tribute of one hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold. Then, the king of Egypt made Jehoahaz's brother Eliakim king over Judah and Jerusalem changed his name to Jehoiakim.

Jehoiakim

He was twenty-five years old when he became king of Judah and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem and did evil in the sights of the Lord. King Jehoiakim seems to have reciprocated Jeremiah's feelings since he treated him with studied contempt as a charlatan of a prophet. Jehoiakim was a self-indulgent depot whose reign was based on no justice and no righteousness. Keeping up with the royal beauty of his days was his number one priority. Jeremiah prophesied the king will die unlamented, his burial no better than the burial of an ass, his body dumped¹⁴⁵ Historical Perspective Israel: Monarchy to Exile

unceremoniously like that of an unclean animal outside the city wall (Jeremiah 36:18-19, 30). In fulfilment, King

Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon came up against Jehoiakim and bound him in bronze fetters to Babylon. King Nebuchadnezzar also carried some of the articles from the house of the Lord to Babylon and put them in his temple. His son, Jehoiachin, reigned in his place (Akinlade, 2016).

King Coniah or Jehoiachin

According to Davidson (1985), when Coniah succeeded to the throne, he took a royal title of Jehoiachin. He was quickly deposed by the Babylonians to whom he has surrounded the city and then sent into exile with his queen mother (Jeremiah 30:26) and other leading citizens. He was eight years old when he ruled in Judah and ruled only three months. Nevertheless, Jehoiachin presided over a major event in Jewish history.

Eleven years before Nebuchadnezzar destroyed the temple, he took Jehoiachin into Babylonian exile along with 1000 of the era's greatest Torah scholars, which were divine blessing in disguise. These scholars were well treated in Babylon. The scholars were able to set up a thriving Jewish community with the infrastructure necessary to lessen the traumatic adjustment of the late exile. Indeed, Babylon became a major Torah centre for the next 1,500 years. As such, it was used to build a special holy synagogue. Davidson (1985) adds that no son of his ever sat on the throne of David. So king Coniah had no future. In the poem of Jer.30: 28-30, he is compared to a despised broken pot, a vessel no one cares for, that is, a mere figure head and a lifeless shape or puppet fit to be thrown out.

Zedekiah (20th King of Judah)

He was twenty-one years old and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem. He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and did not humble himself before the prophet Jeremiah who spoke from Israel:

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the mouth of God. All the elders of the priests and the people transgressed more and more according to all the abominations of their neighbouring nations, by defiling the house of Lord which He had consecrated in Jerusalem. This tragic figure was the last king of Judah. Although, he was personally righteous, he did not try to challenge the powerful, wicked noble men and as a result the first temple (Bais Hamikdash) was destroyed during his reign. Judah fell in 587/586 BC during the reign of Zedekiah (Kolade, 2018).

The Fall of Judah in 586 BC

Since the beginning of divided Monarchy, Judah (southern kingdom) had to struggle in order to survive. Apart from foreign invasions, she was in constant conflict with the North. Judah had only two tribes namely Judah and Benjamin.

The capital city was Jerusalem. The topography of the area was not favourable and so made life unbearable for the inhabitants. The people of Judah were more loyal to Yahweh than the Israelites (the Northerners). They had political and spiritual advantages than the North. There was relative peace in Judah, religiously and politically. The peace was threatened first by Assyria and later by Babylon. When Assyrian power was declining, Babylon was rapidly rising to power and religion and social conditions was growing worse. Judah survived only 105 years after the fall of Israel (Northern Kingdom). The people of Judah were carried to the land of Babylon in the 586 BC. In their land of captivity, the Jews were generally well treated. Yet they suffered hardships and the devotees among them longed for Jerusalem. However, the prophets among them were source of encouragement (Moore, 2014).

Some factors that led to the fall of Judah include: her solitary and exposed position to foreign attacks after the fall of the Northern kingdom; the neglect of God's command to wipe out

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the original Canaanites, who therefore, became the heaven of the corruption among God's people; socio-political alliance with idolatrous neighbours; and loss of moral strength through apostasy and refusal to repent at the call of the prophets.

Ezekiel: Exilic Prophet

Ezekiel was the son of Buzi, a priest and a man of some influence in priestly circles. Ezekiel was born about 623 B.C in Jerusalem where his father worked in the great temple. When Judah obtained her independence, Ezekiel was relatively young. He grew up during the last years of independence of his home state Judah, which was militarily subjugated at that time. His native city of Jerusalem was defeated by the powerful armies of the Babylonian Emperor, Nebuchadnezzar. In 597 B.C., many of Jerusalem's key citizens and families were taken off as exiles to live in Babylon, a region that is now part of Iraq. Ezekiel was part of the people of a community which was established in Babylon at a place known as Tel-Abib, by the "River" Chebar, which was an irrigation canal, drawing waters from the river

Euphrates near the city of Babylon. God appeared to him there and commissioned him as a prophet, hence, he could aptly be described as exilic prophet (Alaba, 2013).

It is a fact that the exiles were known to have built houses for themselves with mud bricks, and settled there in a strange environment not far from the capital city of the Emperor Nebuchadnezzar. Ezekiel had a profound religious experience during his fifth year as an exile in Tel-Abib. At the age of 30, Ezekiel had been living in Jerusalem where he would have assumed the full responsibilities of priesthood. But in Babylon, he was made a prophet, the spokesman of God. In fact, he served as a prophet among the exiles for more than 20 years. In 571 B.C, he gave his last prophecy when he was in the middle-age.¹⁴⁸ Israel: Monarchy to Exile Historical Perspective He probably died in exile. According to Craigie (1983), “there still exists today a tomb in Iraq which is regarded as the tomb of Ezekiel. It is situated at Al-Kifli, not far from the ruins of ancient Babylon”.

Ezekiel communicated God’s word to the people of Israel. He employed speech but his words were rarely simple sermon. He also recounted visions, expounded allegories, and propounded parables. His actions were extraordinary in their symbolism. His words, particularly the prosaic and poetic, were penetrated with symbolism and hidden meanings that lay beneath the surface of the words. Ezekiel’s ministry was the richest of any of the Biblical prophets. He fulfilled his responsibilities through many means. In fact, all the varieties of prophetic experience were packages into the life of Ezekiel. He was diverse in his religious experience. Although, his character and experience were unique, there is considerable parallel between his experience and that of other prophets.

Summary

In this second part of the stories of Judean kings, the reigns of Hezekiah, Manasseh, Amon, Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoikim, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah have been examined. Their successes and failures have been highlighted. Among these kings, Manasseh is undoubtedly the worst while Josiah was the most righteous king of Judah. Some of the teachings of Major Prophets like Isaiah and Jeremiah in the regime of some of these kings have been highlighted. Their major task was to call erring/sinful people back to God, and the path of righteousness.

As it was for Israel, the people's gross failure to heed prophetic message was the main reason for the Babylonian captivity of Judah in 587/586 BC.

Post test

1. How would you explain Isaiah's advice to Ahaz during the149Historical
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Syro-Ephramite crisis?
2. Examine Isaiah's call and its significance.
3. What were the distinctive elements in Isaiah's Prophetic teaching?
4. Consider the view that Isaiah is to be regarded more as a statesman than a prophet.
5. How would you explain Isaiah's counsel to Ahaz and Hezekiah?
6. Examine critically Isaiah's concept of the Holiness of Yahweh.
7. Examine: (i) the background and (ii) the significance of Josiah's reforms.
8. What are the factors that Led to the fall of Judah?

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