Contents

Illustrations 9
Preface to the Second Edition 11
Preface to the First Edition 13
Abbreviations 15

1. Recalling Israel’s Past: Issues and Strategies 19
   Preliminary Considerations 19
   The History of Israel and Historiography 20
   The Old Testament as Historiography 33

2. Origins 37
   Israel at Moab 37
   The Purpose of Torah 38
   The Story of the Patriarchs 41

3. The Exodus: Birth of a Nation 73
   The Meaning of the Exodus 73
   The Historical Setting of the Exodus 74
   The Date of the Exodus 83
   The Dates and Length of the Egyptian Sojourn 92
   Patriarchal Chronology 96
   The Wilderness Wandering 96

4. The Conquest and Occupation of Canaan 110
   The Land as Promise Fulfillment 110
   The Ancient Near Eastern World 111
Contents

The ‘Apiru and the Conquest  119
The Strategy of Joshua  125
The Date of Joshua’s Conquest  136
The Campaign against the Anakim  138
Alternative Models of the Conquest and Occupation  138
The Tribal Allotments  147
The Second Covenant Renewal at Shechem  157

5. The Era of the Judges: Covenant Violation, Anarchy, and Human Authority  160
   The Literary-Critical Problem in Judges  161
   The Chronology of Judges  166
   The Ancient Near Eastern World  171
   The Judges of Israel  177
   The Bethlehem Trilogy  197

6. Saul: Covenant Misunderstanding  207
   The Demand for Kingship  207
   The Chronology of the Eleventh Century  210
   The Selection of Saul  212
   The First Challenge to Saul  217
   The Decline of Saul  219
   Theological Considerations  226
   The Rise of David  228

7. David: Covenant Kingship  239
   The Lack of Nationhood before David  239
   David at Hebron  244
   Chronicles and Theological History  249
   Jerusalem the Capital  250
   The Establishment of David’s Power  253
   An Introduction to a Davidic Chronology  259

8. David: The Years of Struggle  266
   Egypt and Israelite Independence  267
   The Ammonite Wars  268
   The Beginning of David’s Domestic Troubles  277
   Jerusalem as Cult Center  279
   The Rebellion of Absalom  284
   David’s Efforts at Reconciliation  288
   Additional Troubles  289
   David’s Plan for a Temple  291
   The Solomonic Succession  296
   The Davidic Bureaucracy  298

Contents

9. Solomon: From Pinnacle to Peril  302
   Problems of Transition  303
   The Failure of the Opposition to Solomon  306
   The Conclave at Gibeon  307
   International Relations  308
   The Building Projects of Solomon  311
   Cracks in the Solomonic Empire  315
   Solomonic Statecraft  317
   Spiritual and Moral Apostasy  327
   Solomon and the Nature of Wisdom  329

10. The Divided Monarchy  331
    The Roots of National Division  331
    The Immediate Occasion of National Division  335
    The Reign of Rehoboam  339
    The Reign of Jeroboam  341
    The Pressure of Surrounding Nations  346
    Abijah of Judah  347
    Asa of Judah  348
    The Reemergence of Assyria  351
    Nadab of Israel  353
    The Dynasty of Baasha of Israel  354
    Omri of Israel  355
    Jehoshaphat of Judah  357
    Ahab of Israel  361
    The Threat of Assyria  364
    Ahab's Successors  365
    The Anointing of Hazael of Damascus  368
    Jehoram of Judah  369
    The Anointing of Jehu  370

11. The Dynasty of Jehu and Contemporary Judah  372
    The Reign of Jehu of Israel  373
    Athaliah of Judah  374
    The Role of Other Nations  375
    Joash of Judah  378
    Jehoahaz of Israel  381
    The International Scene  382
    Jehoash of Israel  384
    Amaziah of Judah  385
    Jeroboam II of Israel  387
    Uzziah of Judah  390
    The Ministry of the Prophets  392
Contents

12. The Rod of Yahweh: Assyria and Divine Wrath 404
   Factors Leading to Israel’s Fall 405
   The End of the Dynasty of Jehu 405
   Assyria and Tiglath-pileser III 406
   Menahem of Israel 408
   The Last Days of Israel 409
   The Impact of Samaria’s Fall 412
   Judah and the Fall of Samaria 415
   Hezekiah of Judah 422
   The Viewpoint of the Prophets 433

13. Fading Hope: The Disintegration of Judah 444
   The Legacy of Hezekiah 444
   Manasseh of Judah 446
   Anon of Judah 449
   The International Scene: Assyria and Egypt 449
   Josiah of Judah 454
   The Fall of Jerusalem 459
   The Prophetic Witness 466

14. The Exile and the First Return 481
   An Introductory Overview 481
   The World Situation during the Exile 487
   The Jewish People during the Exile 493
   The World Situation during the Period of Restoration 499
   The First Return 503
   Problems following the Return 505
   Encouragement from the Prophets 507

15. Restoration and New Hope 509
   The Persian Influence 510
   Subsequent Returns: Ezra and Nehemiah 514
   Malachi the Prophet 526

Bibliography 529
Scripture Index 535
Subject Index 547
Illustrations

Chronological Tables

1. The Sequence of the Bronze Age     46
2. The Patriarchs        47–48
3. Twelfth Dynasty of Egypt    67
4. Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties of Egypt    75
5. The Life of David       261
6. The Kings of the Divided Monarchy  337
7. The Neo-Assyrian Kings        352
8. The Neo-Babylonian Kings      461
9. The Persian Kings           490

Maps

1. The Middle East in Pentateuchal Times     44
2. Canaan in Patriarchal Times      50
3. The Exodus                        77
4. Arrival in Transjordan            103
5. The Middle East in the Times of Joshua and the Judges  113
6. The Conquest of Canaan            120
7. The Tribal Allotments             150–51
8. Israel during the Age of the Judges  163
9. The Kingdom of Saul                209
10. The Middle East during the United Monarchy    215
11. The Kingdom of David              240
12. Jerusalem in the Days of David and Solomon  251
14. The Twelve Districts of Solomon's Kingdom  323
15. The Divided Monarchy              333
16. The Assyrian Empire               377
17. The Babylonian Empire            447
18. The Persian Empire                485
Preface to the Second Edition

The twenty years since the initial publication of this work have witnessed a veritable explosion of new information and new methodologies in the study of the history of Old Testament Israel. New documents from the ancient Near Eastern and biblical worlds have emerged or have been newly edited and published, and new ways of assessing these texts and their meaning have come to the fore. The secondary literature has also kept pace, with new studies now available to the world of scholarship and to the general laity. The major rationale for a new edition of this work, indeed, has been the increasingly obvious recognition that what was adequate a generation ago has become insufficient for the dawn of a new millennium. Besides my own conviction that a major overhaul of the work was needed, I have been encouraged by others to take on the task of bringing the narrative up to date so that the message of the Old Testament as not only a theological but also a historical work can resonate more clearly and relevantly with a new generation of readers.

Baker Academic has responded to this sense of urgency and has graciously undertaken the immense effort and cost of revising a work such as this with all its technicalities. The author is particularly grateful to Jim Kinney because early on he saw the value and wisdom of bringing a sorely needed revision to pass. At the same time, he would be first to admit, with me, that without the competent staff at Baker this work would never have come to fruition.

The human and technical resources of Dallas Theological Seminary have also contributed immeasurably to the success of the project. The administration and staff have offered great encouragement and more—they
have assisted in practical ways that have eased the process and made it possible to complete the work in the short time that has been devoted to it. As always, my wife, Janet, has been a tower of strength in moving me forward in the times when it seemed there was so little energy to get it done. It is to my beloved faculty colleagues at Dallas Theological Seminary, however, that I want to pay greatest tribute this time around, and I gratefully dedicate this effort to them. Many of them have used the first edition in their classrooms, and they have unfailingly reminded me of its usefulness to them. I trust that they will find even greater satisfaction in this second attempt. One might think it strange that a work on history—even the history of Israel—could be such a spiritually edifying and stimulating exercise for its author, but such it has been. To recognize all over again and ever more profoundly that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ is the God of our history as well is both a sobering and exhilarating thought. To God be all glory and praise from this day in history until the eschatological day of his kingdom on earth.

Eugene H. Merrill
October 2006
10 The Divided Monarchy

The Roots of National Division
The Immediate Occasion of National Division
  The Succession of Rehoboam
  The Rebellion of Israel
  The Accession of Jeroboam
The Reign of Rehoboam
The Reign of Jeroboam
The Pressure of Surrounding Nations
Abijah of Judah
Asa of Judah
  Chronological Considerations
  The Wars of Asa
The Reemergence of Assyria
Nadab of Israel
The Dynasty of Baasha of Israel
  The Reign of Baasha
  The Reign of Elah
Omri of Israel
Jehoshaphat of Judah
  Coregency with Asa
  The Accomplishments of Jehoshaphat
Ahab of Israel
  The Evil of Ahab
  The Ministry of Elijah
  The Invasions of Ben-Hadad
  The Death of Ahab
The Threat of Assyria
Ahab’s Successors
  Ahaziah of Israel
  Joram of Israel
The Anointing of Hazael of Damascus
Jehoram of Judah
The Anointing of Jehu

The Roots of National Division

The death of Solomon paved the way for one of the most decisive and traumatic events in Israel’s long history: the formal and permanent...
division of the kingdom between the ten tribes of the north, henceforth known as Israel or Ephraim, and the tribe of Judah in the south. Though shattering to the national psyche, this cleavage should have come as no surprise to thoughtful people, for the political and theological roots of the schism reached deep into Israel’s past.

We have already taken note of events and attitudes symptomatic of the sickness in the body of the covenant people. These were exacerbated by other factors, some of which were beyond human control. For example, the allotment of tribal territories under Joshua contained the seeds of alienation—natural boundaries that, of necessity, separated the people. There was the Jordan, which sealed off the eastern tribes from the west; the result was mutual suspicion and even military skirmishes between the two sides from time to time. Similarly, the so-called Galilean tribes were isolated from Manasseh and Ephraim by the Valley of Jezreel. In this case, the wedge between the two was not so much geographical as it was practical. The Canaanites, who could not be driven out of the Jezreel and other broad valleys and plains, occupied the space between northern and central Israel from the time of the conquest to the reign of David. Evidences of Galilee’s isolation found expression as late as New Testament times.\(^1\)

Of most significance, however, was the early and continually intensifying sense of bifurcation between Judah and the other tribes. Again geography seems to have played a role, at least in providing the kind of setting in which tribal independence could be nurtured. Apart from the relatively narrow Benjamin Plateau, Judah was, for the most part, psychologically and physically cut off from central Israel by various transverse valleys and wadi-beds. To the west was a foreign people, the Philistines; to the south the hostile Negev deserts with their equally hostile nomadic populations; and to the east the barrier of the Dead Sea. Thus Judah, of all the tribes, was the most isolated and therefore most subject to a sense of not belonging.\(^2\)

This is most ironic, for it was Judah that in the early patriarchal covenants was promised a place of political and theological centrality. When Jacob gave his final blessing to his sons, he affirmed that “the scepter will not depart from Judah” (Gen. 49:10), an incontestable indication that the locus of historical and messianic kingship would be found in this tribe. The genealogy of David in the book of Ruth and in 1 Chronicles 2:3–17 unambiguously establishes the connection between patriarchal promise and historical fulfillment and demonstrates

Judah’s theological primacy among the tribes despite its geographical handicap.³

During the long period of the judges, however, there emerged a perceptible tension between the principle of Judah’s royal destiny, on the one hand, and the tribe’s alienation from the north, on the other. One of the purposes of the so-called Bethlehem trilogy of narratives (see pp. 197–206), especially the story of Ruth, was to establish Bethlehem (and hence Judah) as the birthplace of the true dynasty. Another purpose was to reveal, in almost parable form, the roots of the rivalry between the Saulide kingship, centered in Gibeah of Benjamin, and that of David, with its origination in Bethlehem. This is particularly evident in the story of the Levite who brought his Bethlehemite concubine to Gibeah, where she was savagely raped and murdered by the Benjamites (Judg. 19–21). Far from showing remorse and bringing appropriate punishment to bear on the offenders, the tribe went to war with Judah and the other tribes until Benjamin was virtually annihilated. Indeed, the tribe would have died out and there would consequently have been no Saul or Saulide kingship had not women from Jabesh Gilead and Shiloh been forced to marry the Benjamite survivors. Clearly, one intent of the story is to show the injustice done to Judah and the evil propensities of Benjamin.⁴

By the close of the era of the judges, the Judah-Israel polarization was a fait accompli. The author of Samuel speaks of Saul’s army as consisting of men of Israel and men of Judah (1 Sam. 11:8; 15:4; 17:52); he also makes much of the Philistine perception of Judah (i.e., David’s forces) as an entity to be distinguished from Israel. Part of this perception no doubt reflected the Philistine desire to drive a wedge between the two segments of Israel, but part of it must have come from a generally prevailing recognition that such a division did, in fact, already exist.

Any lingering doubt would have been put to rest when David acceded to the wishes of his countrymen and became king at Hebron over what was, in effect, the independent kingdom of Judah (2 Sam. 5:1–5). Only by the most creative and winsome kind of diplomacy was David able to extend his rule over the north; even so, it took more than seven years. But the apparent unity that he thereby achieved was nothing more than a facade, for Absalom instigated his rebellion by fanning the flames of the smoldering Judah-Israel antagonism (15:7–12). Moreover, when David did return from exile, he had to palliate the bitter hatreds and jealousies of the respective national elements before he could claim their loyalty

---

⁴ Cf. George Foot Moore, Judges, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1923), 408.
once again. He even had to nip in the bud another revolution, led by a member of the Saulide faction (20:1–3).

Although nothing specific is said to the effect that the Judah-Israel conflict continued under Solomon, a loud and clear statement is made by the apparent exemption of Judah from Solomon’s burdensome corvée and taxation (1 Kings 4:7–19). How and why the wise Solomon committed such an egregious blunder must remain a mystery, but he could hardly have thought of a more disastrous and divisive maneuver. The open rebellion of the northern kingdom did not occur until after Solomon’s death only because the sheer force of Solomon’s personality and diplomatic skill kept the seething cauldron of Israel’s discontent from boiling over in his lifetime.

There was also a theological aspect to the rupture of the kingdom. Indeed, one could argue that the intertribal rivalries and Solomon’s intemperate policies were only an expression of this underlying factor. Solomon had violated the letter and spirit of the covenant between Yahweh and David, a covenant under which he, as dynastic heir, had obligations. His disobedience was manifested in his ill-advised marriages and in his toleration of pagan gods, but these defections may not have been the most serious of his sins. The narrator points out that Yahweh “became angry with Solomon because his heart had turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice” (1 Kings 11:9). Solomon had gone after other gods—the quintessence of covenant infidelity. For this reason more than any other, the kingdom, except for Judah and Jerusalem, would be taken from Solomon and his descendants and delivered over to Jeroboam (11:11–13).

The Immediate Occasion of National Division

The Succession of Rehoboam

The prophet Ahijah had already told Jeroboam ben Nebat, the supervisor of civilian labor in the district of Ephraim, that he would become ruler

5. For textual difficulties in 1 Kings 4:7–19 that may or may not permit the inclusion of Judah, see Donald J. Wiseman, 1 and 2 Kings, TOTC 9 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1993), 93.

6. This is the major point of the so-called Deuteronomistic view of the books of Kings, which holds that the primary concern of these histories is to assess the reign of each king on the basis of its conformity (or lack thereof) to the covenant of Yahweh. See E. W. Nicholson, Deuteronomy and Tradition (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1967), 113–15; John Van Seters, In Search of History (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 311–14, 359–61; Brian Peckham, The Composition of the Deuteronomistic History, HSM 35 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1985), 67–68.
of ten tribes of Israel (1 Kings 11:31). One tribe, Judah, would remain in the hands of the Davidic dynasty because of Yahweh’s unconditional commitment to David. God had chosen Jerusalem as his dwelling place on earth, and David and his descendants would forever serve there as a lamp shining forth to the world the radiance of God’s presence and his saving purposes. Nothing could ever extinguish this lamp. The seed of David might be disciplined for its disloyalty to Yahweh, but not forever. In his inscrutable plan, Yahweh would accomplish his eternal purposes through his chosen servant David (11:34–39).

Solomon was succeeded by his son Rehoboam, who reigned for seventeen years, from 931 to 913. He was apparently Solomon’s first son, the product of a marriage of diplomacy with Naamah of Ammon (1 Kings 14:21). Since Rehoboam was forty-one when he became king and Solomon had reigned for forty years, it is likely that Solomon had taken Naamah as his wife during the brief period of his coregency with David. The marriage could well have been undertaken to lend credence to Solomon’s designation as heir apparent.

Like his father, Rehoboam was polygamous. He married a granddaughter of David (thus his own cousin), Mahalath (2 Chron. 11:18), and Maacah, daughter of Absalom. Altogether he accumulated eighteen wives and sixty concubines, some of whom he may have inherited from Solomon. The general characterization of Rehoboam is that “he did evil because he had not set his heart on seeking the Lord” (12:14).

What is remarkable about the succession of Rehoboam to the throne of Solomon is that it occurred not at Jerusalem but at Shechem (1 Kings 12:16). As it turned out, Benjamin affiliated with Judah, and the two together were counted as one tribe known as Judah (see 1 Kings 12:21; 2 Chron. 11:1, 10; 15:2, 9; Ezra 4:1). It is significant that Benjamin joined Judah in welcoming David back from Transjordanian exile (2 Sam. 19:16–17). Thus the defection of Benjamin to the Davidic family may have occurred even in pre-Solomonic times. For the problem of ten tribes left to the north and only one to the south, see Carl F. Keil, The Books of the Kings (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 179–81; Zecharia Kallai, “Judah and Israel—a Study in Israelite Historiography,” IEJ 28 (1978): 256–57.

7. As it turned out, Benjamin affiliated with Judah, and the two together were counted as one tribe known as Judah (see 1 Kings 12:21; 2 Chron. 11:1, 10; 15:2, 9; Ezra 4:1). It is significant that Benjamin joined Judah in welcoming David back from Transjordanian exile (2 Sam. 19:16–17). Thus the defection of Benjamin to the Davidic family may have occurred even in pre-Solomonic times. For the problem of ten tribes left to the north and only one to the south, see Carl F. Keil, The Books of the Kings (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 179–81; Zecharia Kallai, “Judah and Israel—a Study in Israelite Historiography,” IEJ 28 (1978): 256–57.


9. Several indicators suggest that this Absalom is not the son of David: (a) the daughter of David’s son Absalom was named Tamar (2 Sam. 14:27); (b) 1 Kings 15:2, 10 has Abishalom rather than Absalom; (c) Maacah’s father is elsewhere called “Uriel of Gibeah” (2 Chron. 13:2). See Eugene H. Merrill, “2 Chronicles,” BKC 1:629.
Regardless of whether this is to be understood as a coronation by the northern tribes separate from an earlier coronation at Jerusalem by Judah, the fact remains that the nation was so divided that Rehoboam felt it necessary to go to the old center of covenant renewal in order to win over the northern tribes. Shechem was the place where Joshua had called the nation together to reaffirm its commitment to Yahweh (Josh. 24:1). Perhaps Rehoboam felt that it was appropriate

and necessary to gather there again in order to mend the fabric of an unraveling monarchy.

**The Rebellion of Israel**

The tenuousness of the situation is apparent in the fact that the coronation became a negotiating session in which the spokesmen of Israel, led by Jeroboam, set forth conditions Rehoboam had to meet if he expected their support (1 Kings 12:3–4). Solomon, they said, had dealt with him harshly and unfairly. Rehoboam must redress the situation and promise to do better. Rehoboam then sought the counsel of the old advisers\(^\text{11}\) of his father, and they urged him to meet Israel's demands. His young peers, however, suggested that he pay no heed and that he whip the rebels into line by continuing and even intensifying his father's oppressive policies. Unfortunately, Rehoboam disregarded the sagacity of the elders and threatened the people with an even heavier yoke. Thus the stage was set for Yahweh to bring about the judgment he had promised if David's house proved disloyal to the covenant.

With one voice the Israelite delegation articulated what had long been developing but had hitherto gone unexpressed, a declaration of independence:

> What share do we have in David,  
> what part in Jesse's son?  
> To your tents, O Israel!  
> Look after your own house, O David! (1 Kings 12:16)

This marked a final, irreversible break. In a last desperate move at reconciliation, Rehoboam sent his chief public-works administrator, Adoram, to plead with Israel's leaders, but to no avail: they stoned him to death, and Rehoboam had to make an ignominious retreat to Jerusalem.

**The Accession of Jeroboam**

Meanwhile the people of Israel by acclamation placed Jeroboam as king over their newly formed monarchy.\(^\text{12}\) He at once displayed his

---

11. Abraham Malamat has proposed that the elders (זֶגֶנִים) and young men (יֵלָדִים) do not represent different age groups so much as a bicameral political system composed of delegates of the people and the princes ("Kingship and Council in Israel and Sumer: A Parallel," *JNES* 22 [1963]: 247–53). The contrasting advice favors the view, however, that it is merely a matter of age difference.

12. After the announcement of his selection as king over the northern kingdom, Jeroboam had fled from Solomon and found refuge with Shishak (or Shoshenq), founder of
considerable administrative abilities by establishing his capital at the central and hallowed city of Shechem and by taking advantage of the close relationship he had developed, while in exile, with Egypt's powerful King Shoshenq.\textsuperscript{13}

The final break between Israel and Judah had come as the judgment of God, a point repeatedly made by the historians. It was therefore useless for Rehoboam or anyone else to try to repair it. But try Rehoboam did. Returning to Judah, he raised a vast army with the intention of retaking Israel by force, but Shemaiah, a prophet of Yahweh, dissuaded him with the word that what had taken place was of God and so must be accepted perforce (1 Kings 12:21–24; 2 Chron. 11:1–4).

**The Reign of Rehoboam**

For the first three years of his reign, Rehoboam accommodated himself as best he could to the undeniable and unalterable fact that he presided now over a kingdom that was only a shadow of its former self. Judah was still the people of God, and he was heir to the glorious Davidic dynasty with all its covenant claims and privileges; but from a practical standpoint, Judah's position in the community of nations bore no resemblance to the glory of Israel in the heyday of Solomon. Rehoboam therefore had to take steps to reconcile the theocratic ideal of Judah as the chosen people and the day-to-day realities of political and military life.

One of the first measures Rehoboam undertook was the fortification of his tiny kingdom against outside interference, especially from Israel. This entailed the incorporation of Benjamin into his territory, an important achievement whose means are not disclosed,\textsuperscript{14} and the building of citadels in a perimeter surrounding the kingdom (2 Chron. 11:5–12).\textsuperscript{15}

\textsuperscript{13} J. P. J. Olivier, on the grounds that Jeroboam was ruler over a national rather than a territorial state, argues that there was no capital in the north until Omri built Samaria (“In Search of a Capital for the Northern Kingdom,” \textit{JNSL} 11 [1983]: 117–32). This argument is based on social-anthropology theories that appear to have little support from the biblical texts. For the reliability of the text as it stands, see Gösta Ahlström, \textit{The History of Ancient Palestine} (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1993). He suggests that Jeroboam chose to locate at Shechem but, for reasons not clear, had to abandon his plans and relocate to Peniel (548–49).

\textsuperscript{14} See note 7.

He then appointed his son Abijah (Abijam) as vice-regent and placed his other sons throughout the land as commanders of the fortified cities (11:22–23).

The most significant event of these early years, however, was not planned or executed by Rehoboam: the priests and Levites of the northern tribes deserted their homes after Jeroboam established his illegitimate cult there. Their taking up residence in Judah encouraged others from the north either to follow them to Judah or at least to be sympathetic to the Davidic royal family (11:13–17). In response Jeroboam developed his own rival shrines at Dan and Bethel.

Before long Rehoboam forsook Yahweh and the covenant, and in his fifth year Judah suffered the consequences—an invasion by Shoshenq of Egypt. This celebrated founder of Egypt’s Twenty-Second Dynasty was the first pharaoh in many years to recapture the greatness of ancient Egypt. In the course of his twenty-one-year reign (945–924), he reestablished foreign-trade alliances with Byblos and other Phoenician and Aramaean states, and waited patiently for events in Israel to work to his advantage. He had already provided sanctuary to Jeroboam, Solomon’s enemy and Israel’s king-to-be—an act prompted not so much by mercy as by political ambition.

When Solomon died in 931 BC, Shoshenq did not delay long before he made his move. Using as an excuse a border incident with some Semitic tribesmen, Shoshenq moved north to Judah. Having taken the fortified cities and come to the very walls of Jerusalem itself by the spring of 926/925, Shoshenq with his Egyptian and mercenary hordes moved north into Israel. This must have surprised Jeroboam to the extreme, for the king of Israel had every reason to feel safe from Egypt. But in a move characteristic of the traditional fickleness of the Egyptians, Shoshenq made a grab for Israel once he saw how easily Judah had yielded.

16. There is no evidence of coregency here, however, as S. Yeivin has shown (“The Divided Kingdom: Rehoboam-Ahaz/Jeroboam-Pekah,” in World History of the Jewish People, vol. 4, part 1, The Age of the Monarchies: Political History, ed. Malamat, 130).


20. Yeivin, indeed, interprets Shoshenq’s record of this expedition (an inscription found on the wall of the great temple at Karnak) as indicating that Israel, not Judah, was his original objective. Yeivin suggests that Shoshenq was attempting to open up trade routes to Byblos and Mesopotamia and to discipline Jeroboam for not having paid an expected tribute (“Divided Kingdom,” 133–34).
Why Shoshenq made no attempt to follow up on this campaign is unclear. He apparently was satisfied for the time being with the plunder he had taken from Judah and Israel, particularly the rich treasures of gold from the temple. In any case, his death soon afterward precluded any further measures by him. His son Osorkon I (924–889) also refrained from further conquest at least for a time, since he was more interested in lavishing wealth on the temple of Atum. The enormous amount of gold and silver he employed may well have come primarily from the Jerusalem temple.\textsuperscript{21}

The sin that had occasioned this devastation of the land and spoliation of the temple was serious indeed. The author of 1 Kings indicates that Rehoboam and his compatriots reached a new low in idolatrous behavior. They set up high places, sacred stones (\textit{maṣṣēbôt}), and Asherah poles and even engaged in ritual prostitution featuring sodomites.\textsuperscript{22}

Given the syncretism introduced by Solomon because of his pagan wives, including Naamah, the mother of Rehoboam, one is not surprised at this turn of events.

The last twelve years of Rehoboam’s reign seem to be viewed more favorably by the narrators. “Because Rehoboam humbled himself, the Lord’s anger turned from him, and he was not totally destroyed” (2 Chron. 12:12). But they were also years of conflict with Jeroboam. The record indicates that Judah and Israel fought continually (1 Kings 14:30). Unfortunately, there is no hint to whether either one had the advantage. In one sense, everyone lost, for the spectacle of brother fighting brother brought disrepute not only on the sons of Jacob but on their God as well.

**The Reign of Jeroboam**

If the religious situation was bad in Judah, it was even worse in Jeroboam’s Israel.\textsuperscript{23} The newly installed king, who had been given the promise of an unending dynasty if he proved true to the Lord (1 Kings

\textsuperscript{21.} According to James H. Breasted, no less than 560,000 pounds (\textit{A History of Egypt} [New York: Bantam, 1967], 444).

\textsuperscript{22.} For these pseudoreligious appurtenances and practices, see Helmer Ringgren, \textit{Religions of the Ancient Near East} (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), 158–69.

\textsuperscript{23.} Robert L. Cohn has provided an excellent literary analysis of the chiastic structure of the Jeroboam narrative (1 Kings 11:26–14:20). This study illustrates once again the point that the historical sections of the Bible, though true to fact, could be and often were couched in literary forms that run counter to modern style and even deviate from such modern conventions as chronological order, although there is no evidence of the latter in this particular case ("Literary Technique in the Jeroboam Narrative," \textit{ZAW} 97 [1985]: 23–35).
wasted no time in establishing his reign as the paradigm of evil against which all subsequent kings of Israel were measured (13:34; 15:30; cf., e.g., 16:2–3, 19). His dynasty, if it can be called that, lasted for only two generations, twenty-four years. And this was to set the pattern in Israel. Judah, in spite of its times of apostasy, remained always under Davidic kingship. Israel, however, suffered the turbulence of one royal family ever giving way to another; the nation was to know five different dynasties in its short lifetime of 210 years.

Jeroboam, as we have seen already, rebuilt Shechem and made it his capital. Peniel (Tulul edh-Dhahab), east of the Jordan on the Jabbok River, was also rebuilt, possibly as a Transjordanian provincial center (12:25). Without doubt, the association of Shechem and Peniel with Jacob influenced Jeroboam in his selection of those sites.

Whatever sacred traditions may have motivated Jeroboam in his choice of Shechem and Peniel were, however, of little consequence in his next step, that of the establishment of Bethel and Dan as cult centers. It was clear to Jeroboam that no amount of political partitioning of the nation could forestall the tendency of the Israelites to attend the great religious festivals at Jerusalem, where they would imbibe the spirit of national as well as religious unity. What was needed, therefore, were places in his own northern kingdom where the Israelites might gather for sacrifice and worship.

Such a move was squarely in contradiction to the Mosaic requirement that community worship be centralized (Deut. 12:1–14), but practical exigencies outweighed theological requirements in the mind of Jeroboam. He had to prevent at any cost a reunification of Israel with Judah, for reunification would mean the immediate cessation of his regal privileges. Besides, he might have reasoned, since Israel was independent of Judah, Jerusalem was no longer the cultic center for Israel, the presence of the ark and temple there notwithstanding.

Why Jeroboam located his shrines at Bethel and Dan rather than at Shechem is somewhat problematic. In Judah political and religious life were combined at Jerusalem. Why should it not be combined in Israel as well? Shechem would not have been an inappropriate choice as a

24. This promise is analogous to the promise given to Saul (see 1 Sam. 13:13). Since in both cases the king failed to meet Yahweh's conditions and consequently there was no unending dynasty, it is fruitless to speculate about these promises vis-à-vis the Davidic covenant. Wiseman (1 and 2 Kings, 139), quoting Talmon, goes so far as to suggest that there could have been “two God-fearing kingdoms if Jeroboam had kept his word,” a dubious notion at least in eschatological terms. See also Cohn, “Literary Technique,” 27.


342
spiritual center; for no site in all Israel enjoyed such a venerable tradi-
tion. Abraham, Jacob, and Joseph were all closely associated with the
place, and Joshua had called the people to covenant recommitment with
Yahweh at Shechem. But one must suppose that Jeroboam, always the
pragmatist, sought for a place that enjoyed both the benefits of strong
tradition and a suitable location. Bethel was eminently qualified.27 Jacob
had met Yahweh there on at least two occasions, and one could thus
make a compelling argument that Bethel was the birthplace of Israel's
faith. Besides—and this was of crucial importance to Jeroboam—Bethel
lay just north of the border and on the principal highway between north
and south. The people of Israel could easily gather there from all over the
southern and central part of the nation. In addition, they would have to
pass through Bethel if they insisted on making their way to Jerusalem,
which would be seriously discouraged.

The selection of Dan, on the other hand, is more difficult to explain. It
was on the northern border of Israel just as Bethel was on the southern
border. And it was reasonably accessible to the people of the Jezreel region
and all points north. It was identified in everyone's mind, however, with
open idolatry of a type that exceeded even Jeroboam's tolerance. It will
be recalled that when the Danites slaughtered the people of Laish and
occupied their territory, they brought with them Jonathan, grandson of
Moses, as their priest and set up the silver images they had stolen from
Micah (Judg. 18:30–31). They had then made at Dan, their city, a center
of worship that could hardly be defined as Yahwistic; it would be more
accurate to call it unmixed paganism. How could Jeroboam expect
the people of Israel to undertake pilgrimage to a place of such heathen
associations?

The answer lies perhaps in the nature of the cult Jeroboam introduced.
He set up golden calves at the two shrines, describing them as the gods
who had brought Israel up out of Egypt. He then appointed non-Levitical
priests and, in Bethel at least, designated the fifteenth day of the eighth
month as a day of special festivity. Scholarship is divided as to the full
significance of Jeroboam's cultic innovations, but one thing is clear: he
was identifying Bethel and Dan with the exodus.28 The two calves, whether
idols themselves or merely pedestals upon which the invisible Yahweh
was presumed to stand,29 are reminiscent of the golden calf Aaron made

27. Ibid., 32.
28. Ibid., 39–40.
29. William F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday,
1969), 197–98. John N. Oswalt argues rather persuasively that the calves were indeed idols;
as pedestals for the invisible Yahweh, they would not have evoked such intense prophetic
abhorrence of what both Aaron and Jeroboam did ("The Golden Calves and the Egyptian
while Moses was absent on Mount Sinai. The words of presentation are exactly the same in both instances: “These are your gods, O Israel, who brought you up out of Egypt” (Exod. 32:4; cf. 1 Kings 12:8). Both stories also point out that the creation and recognition of the new gods were followed by a time of festival. Further, Aaron had functioned as priest and, in Moses’s absence, as covenant mediator; now Jeroboam, in addition to his royal office, installed himself as head of the cult, as can be seen clearly in his appearance at the Bethel altar to offer sacrifices. That is, he evidently viewed himself as a second Aaron who had the right to establish and oversee a religious system apart from that at Jerusalem. He arrogated to himself the prerogative of the Davidic monarchy, namely, the right of the king as the elect and adopted son of God to act not only as the political leader of the people but also as the priestly mediator. Jeroboam perceived himself to be Israel’s equivalent of the messianic dynasty of Judah, a kingly priest after the order of Melchizedek.

This interpretation of Jeroboam’s perception of his role explains his boldness in assuming the priesthood and making priestly appointments outside the Aaronic line. It also explains his boldness in locating worship centers at Bethel and Dan, for just as David, as Melchizedekian priest, had moved tabernacle and ark to Jerusalem, a place up until then of no significance in Israelite tradition, why could Jeroboam not arbitrarily create his own cult at Bethel and Dan, especially since the former enjoyed the benefit of a long and holy tradition?

How Jeroboam could feature golden calves in his cult, especially in light of the fate of the calf Aaron had made, is rather baffling. (That idol had been ground to powder, mixed with water, and drunk by the Israelite apostates who had worshiped it.) The motivation behind Jeroboam’s action may have been an intense animosity against the Levites. It was the Levites who had taken sword in hand to slay the worshipers of Aaron’s golden calf. Jeroboam now bypassed the Levites by appointing his own priests and, in a supreme irony, manufactured his own golden calves as a symbol of his disdain for the Levitical priesthood. Had not Moses’s grandson Jonathan anticipated Jeroboam by serving as the first priest of the competing shrine at Dan (Judg. 18:30–31)? Besides according a measure of legitimacy to Dan, this story revealed that even within Moses’s family there was room for diversity in religious practice.

31. Frank M. Cross argues, with many other scholars, that Jeroboam’s attack on the Aaronic priesthood is only an interpretation by the Deuteronomist (the redactor of Kings) and that Jeroboam in fact appointed an Aaronic priesthood at Bethel (Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic [Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1973], 198–200). This can be supported only by totally disregarding the biblical narrative in favor of a speculative redactional history.
How could Jeroboam be faulted for his golden calves when Moses's own grandson had officiated over a cult at Dan that worshiped idols having no connection at all with the exodus?

Admittedly, much of the preceding line of argument is quite speculative. In the final analysis, one cannot know what motives or considerations prompted Jeroboam. He viewed himself as royal priest of a new and legitimate religious system. How he connected this to the past, especially to the incident of the golden calf after the exodus, is debatable. But Yahweh clearly viewed Jeroboam’s action as sinful and as the very epitome of apostasy.

Yahweh’s displeasure is obvious in that he sent a prophet from Judah to inveigh against Jeroboam and his newly formed religious system (1 Kings 13). When he arrived at Bethel, this unnamed man of God cried out against the altar there, for it symbolized the very heart of the apostasy. The time would come, he said, when a scion of David, Josiah by name, would destroy the altar, having offered on it the corpses of its wicked priests. Then the prophet turned to Jeroboam; when this pseudo-priest reached out his hand to apprehend the man of God, it withered and became useless. Even though Yahweh graciously restored the king’s hand, it was evident that he and his deviant religion were under irrevocable divine judgment.

In due course Abijah, the heir apparent, became fatally ill; despite his mother’s frantic appeals to the prophet Ahijah, the young prince died (1 Kings 14:17). The reason, Ahijah pointed out, was clear: Jeroboam, though blessed with most of David’s kingdom, had not measured up to the standards of David. He had blatantly violated the covenant of Yahweh by making other gods and rejecting the God of Israel. Yahweh therefore would quickly terminate Jeroboam’s dynasty and eventually remove Israel beyond the river Euphrates because of its sin in following Jeroboam (14:6–16).

Details are extremely sketchy concerning the last years of Jeroboam’s reign. He had evidently relocated the capital to Tirzah (Tell el-Fār’aḥ), about eight miles northeast of Shechem, for it was to Tirzah that his wife returned after her interview with the prophet Ahijah. Why the move was made cannot be known for sure, but the invasion of Shoshenq against Judah and Israel in 926/925 may have resulted in the destruction of Shechem or at least precipitated Jeroboam’s move from Shechem to safer quarters.32 What is known otherwise is that Jeroboam found himself at war continually with Rehoboam and, after Rehoboam’s death, with his son Abijah, who ruled for but three years. Unfortunately, we have no

concrete information concerning the reason for this unremitting conflict. The most plausible theory is that the Davidic kings yearned to restore Israel to Judah and thus recover the full Davidic kingdom.

The Pressure of Surrounding Nations

From extrabiblical sources one can glean a certain amount of information that sheds an indirect light on life in Israel and Judah from 931 to 910 BC. In Egypt, as we saw, Osorkon I succeeded his illustrious father Shoshenq and reigned from 924 to 889, well beyond the time of either Rehoboam or Jeroboam.33 Although there is no record of his direct involvement in Palestinian affairs until 897, he did take measures to reaffirm Egyptian relations with Byblos.34 Besides having obvious commercial value for both parties, such a step guaranteed Egypt a foothold to the north of Israel and a friendly ally between itself and the increasingly powerful and expansionist Aramaeans.

As noted earlier, Hezion (Rezon) established an Aramaean dynasty at Damascus during the reign of David, perhaps as early as 990 BC. Although the chronology is uncertain, it seems that Hezion lived at least until the death of Solomon and was then followed by his son Tabrimmon and grandson Ben-Hadad (ca. 900–841).35 This succession is documented by the biblical historian (1 Kings 15:18) and apparently confirmed by the so-called Ben-Hadad Stela, which reads in part, “Bir-hadad, son of Ṭab-Rammân, son of Ḥadyân, king of Aram.”36

34. H. Jacob Katzenstein, The History of Tyre (Jerusalem: Schocken Institute for Jewish Research, 1973), 121.
35. These dates are rough approximations deduced from the data cited by Merrill F. Unger, Israel and the Aramaeans of Damascus (repr., Grand Rapids: Baker, 1980), 56–61. The early date for Ben-Hadad (which necessitates an extremely long reign of almost sixty years) is based on the fact that King Baasha of Israel in about his thirteenth year (896 BC) suffered defeat at the hands of Ben-Hadad (1 Kings 15:20). To avoid the problem of such a long reign, some scholars argue for a Ben-Hadad I and a Ben-Hadad II prior to Hazael. See William H. Shea, “The Kings of the Melqart Stela,” Maarav 1/2 (1978–1979): 159–60. As Shea himself points out, however, to posit successive Ben-Hadads goes contrary to the ordinary dynastic pattern in Syria-Palestine (171). Frank M. Cross complicates matters still further with three successive Ben-Hadads between 885 and 841 (“The Stele Dedicated to Melcarth by Ben-Hadad of Damascus,” BASOR 205 [1972]: 42).
36. Unger, Israel and the Aramaeans, 56. This reading of the Ben-Hadad (Aramaic Bir-Hadad) Stela (otherwise known as the Melqart Stela) is by no means universally accepted. For helpful discussions of alternatives, see J. Andrew Dearman and J. Maxwell Miller, “The Melqart Stele and the Ben Hadads of Damascus: Two Studies,” PEQ 115 (1983): 95–101; Wayne T. Pitard, COS 2:152–53. Dearman contends that there was no ruler named Ben-Hadad between 865 and 806 (thus he denies the historicity of 1 Kings 20 and 22:1–38),
Of Hezion’s exploits nothing is known except that he had broken from Hadadezer, king of Zobah, and had relocated in Damascus (1 Kings 11:23–24). From this strategic center he harassed Solomon and presumably Jeroboam and Rehoboam as well. He could do so with relative impunity because of the incessant struggle between Israel and Judah. Other factors in the rise of Damascus were the relative weakness of the other Aramaean states and the continued impotence of Assyria, at least until the reign of Adad-nirari II (911–891); moreover, the Sealands people of lower Mesopotamia were no threat this early.

Abijah of Judah

The situation in Judah following the death of Rehoboam steadily deteriorated, for his son and successor Abijah (913–911) did not walk in the ways of David. Yet, the narrator says, “God gave him a lamp in Jerusalem by raising up a son to succeed him” (1 Kings 15:4), a favor done for David’s sake. Thus once more the unconditional covenant blessing of Yahweh, based on his promise to David, guaranteed the stability of David’s kingdom despite its ruler.

Evidence of Yahweh’s ongoing grace is seen in Abijah’s success against every effort of Jeroboam to defeat him. The Chronicler particularly emphasizes this fact. After his accession Abijah found himself facing seemingly insuperable odds as Jeroboam confronted him on Mount Zemaraim (Ras et-Tahuneh), only a mile or two from Bethel. Abijah had marched north with the purpose of winning Israel back to the Davidic kingdom (2 Chron. 13:4–12). Reminding the Israelites that Yahweh had made the covenant of kingship with David only, he claimed that their nation under Jeroboam was illegitimate. Jeroboam, Abijah said, had taken advantage and Miller identifies the Ben-Hadad of the stela as the son of Hazael (after 806), thus also loosing the Ahab stories from their historical moorings. Pitard reads the line as “The stela which Bir-Hadad the son of Attarhamek, king of Aram, set up for his lord Melqart.” See also Shea, “The Kings of the Melqart Stela,” 170; B. Oded, “Neighbors on the East,” in World History of the Jewish People, vol. 4, part 1, The Age of the Monarchies: Political History, ed. Malamat, 267.

37. For various reasons—the lack of a parallel in 1 Kings, the enormous numbers of soldiers, evidence of theologizing by the Chronicler—many scholars dismiss the record of the battle of Zemaraim as unhistorical. See the arguments of Ralph W. Klein, “Abijah’s Campaign against the North (2 Chron. 13)—What Were the Chronicler’s Sources?” ZAW 95 (1983): 210–17. To deny historicity to an event simply or primarily because it is not recounted in both synoptic accounts, however, is to beg the question and to overlook the Chronicler’s access to other sources. John Bright concludes that “the incident is certainly historical” (A History of Israel, 3rd ed. [Philadelphia: Westminster, 1981], 234).

38. For a reconstruction of the strategy, see Aharoni and Avi-Yonah, Macmillan Bible Atlas, map 121.
of the naive Rehoboam to carve out his own rival dominion. Although one may quarrel with Abijah’s objectivity on this point, this continuing argument, that Jeroboam’s idolatrous cult was antithetical to the will of God in every respect, can hardly be gainsaid. Since the true faith was only in Judah and in Judah’s observance of the requirements of Yahweh, Israel ought to return, Abijah said, to David without further ado.

Jeroboam ignored this appeal and surrounded Abijah’s army front and rear. To validate Abijah’s theological stand, Yahweh himself took up arms as the divine Warrior and delivered his people from calamity. Abijah followed through and captured the Israelite cities of Bethel, Jeshanah (el-Burj?), and Ephron (ēt-Ṭaiyibeh), thus undermining Jeroboam both religiously and politically. Jeroboam never recovered from this blow. Abijah, on the other hand, grew in power, as the size of his harem attests (2 Chron. 13:21).

Asa of Judah

Chronological Considerations

Jeroboam survived Abijah by a year or two and thus was briefly contemporaneous with Asa, the next ruler in the line of David. The author of Kings identifies Asa as the son of Maacah (1 Kings 15:10), but since he is clearly the son of Abijah, the real intent is to assert that Maacah was his grandmother. The reason for pointing out this relationship is that Maacah had authorized the erection of an Asherah pole in Jerusalem and Asa, among his other reforms, cut it down and destroyed it. It may be assumed that Asa was very young when he came to power because his father had reigned only three years and therefore was probably quite young himself when he died. In addition, Asa reigned for forty-one years (911–870), a not unparalleled but unusually long period of time. Even so, his death may have been somewhat premature, for the historian takes pains to point out that Asa was diseased in his feet in the last years of his life (1 Kings 15:23). Whether he died of this malady cannot be determined, but it apparently incapacitated him enough that he appointed his son Jehoshaphat as his coregent for the last three years of his reign.39

The chronological structure of the reign of Asa is complicated and so justifies rather detailed discussion. The Chronicler begins by stating that with the succession of Asa came ten years of peace (911–901). It