

Kingdom of Israel

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Literature

I. The First Period

1. The Two Kingdoms

The circumstances leading up to the foundation of the Northern Kingdom of Israel, or the Kingdom of the Ten Tribes, have been detailed under the heading KINGDOM OF JUDAH. From a secular point of view it would be more natural to regard the latter as an offshoot from the former, rather than the converse. But not only is the kingdom of Judah of paramount importance in respect of both religion and literature, but its government also was in the hands of a single dynasty, whereas that of the Northern Kingdom changed hands no less than 8 times, during the two and a half centuries of its

existence. Moreover, the Southern Kingdom lasted about twice as long as the other.

2. The 1st Dynasty

No sooner had Jeroboam I been elected the first ruler of the newly founded state than he set about managing its affairs with the energy for which he was distinguished ([1Ki 11:28](#)). To complete the disruption he established a sanctuary in opposition to that of Jerusalem ([Hos 8:14](#)), with its own order of priests ([2Ch 11:14](#); [2Ch 13:9](#)), and founded two capital cities, Shechem on the West and Penuel on the east of the Jordan ([1Ki 12:25](#)). Peace seems to have been maintained between the rival governments during the 17 years' reign of Rehoboam, but on the accession of his son Abijah war broke out ([1Ki 15:6](#), [1Ki 15:7](#); [2Ch 13:3](#) if). Shortly afterward Jeroboam died and was succeeded by his son Nadab, who was a year later assassinated, and the 1st Dynasty came to an end, after an existence of 23 years, being limited, in fact, to a single reign.

3. The 2nd Dynasty

The turn of the tribe of Issachar came next. They had not yet given a ruler to Israel; they could claim none of the judges, but they had taken their part at the assembling of the tribes under Deborah and Barak of Naphtali. Baasha began his reign of 24 years by extirpating the house of his predecessor ([1Ki 15:29](#)), just as the 'Abbâsids annihilated the Umeiyads. The capital was now Tirzah ([1Ki 14:17](#); [Son 6:4](#)), a site not yet identified. His Judean contemporary was ASA (which see), who, like his father Abijah, called in the aid of the Syrians against the Northern Kingdom. Baasha was unequal to the double contest and was forced to evacuate the ground he had gained. His son Elah was assassinated after a reign of a year, as he himself had assassinated the son of the founder of the preceding dynasty, and his entire family and adherents were massacred ([1Ki 16:11](#)).

4. Civil War

The name of the assassin was Zimri, an officer of the charioteers, of unknown origin and tribe. But the kingship was always elective, and the army chose Omri, the commander-in-chief, who besieged and took Tirzah, Zimri setting the palace on fire by his own hand and perishing in the flames. A second pretender, Tibni, a name found in

Phoenician and Assyrian, of unknown origin, sprang up. He was quickly disposed of, and security of government was reestablished.

II. Period of the Syrian Wars

1. The 3rd Dynasty

The founder of the new dynasty was Omri. By this time the Northern Kingdom was so much a united whole that the distinctions of tribe were forgotten. We do not know to what tribe Omri and his successors belonged. With Omri the political sphere of action of Israel became wider than it had been before, and its internal affairs more settled. His civil code was in force long after his dynasty was extinct, and was adopted in the Southern Kingdom ([Mic 6:16](#)). The capital city, the site of which he chose, has remained a place of human habitation till the present day. Within the last few years, remains of his building have been recovered, showing a great advance in that art from those believed to go back to Rehoboam and Solomon. He was, however, unfortunate in his relations with Syria, having lost some towns and been forced to grant certain trading concessions to his northern neighbors ([1Ki 20:34](#)). But he was so great a king that long after his death the Kingdom of the Ten Tribes was known to the Assyrians as “the house of Omri.”

2. World-Politics

Contemporarily with this dynasty, there occurred a revival of the Phoenician power, which exerted a powerful influence upon the Israelite kings and people, and at the same time the Assyrians once more began to interfere with Syrian politics. The Northern Kingdom now began to play a part in the game of world-politics. There was peace with Judah, and alliance with Phoenicia was cemented by the marriage of Ahab, it seems after his father's death, with Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal ([1Ki 16:31](#)). This led to the erection of a temple in Samaria in which the Tyrian Baal was worshipped, while side by side with it the worship of Yahweh was carried on as before. It seems as if the people had fallen back from the pure monotheism of Moses and David into what is known as henotheism. Against this relapse Elijah protested with final success. Ahab was a wise and skillful soldier, without rashness, but also without decision. He defeated a Syrian coalition in two campaigns (1 Ki 20) and imposed on Ben-

hadad the same conditions which the latter had imposed on Omri. With the close of the reign of Asa in Judah, war ceased between the two Israelite kingdoms and the two kings for the first time became friends and fought side by side (1 Ki 22). In the reign of Ahab we note the beginning of decay in the state in regard to personal liberty and equal justice. The tragedy of Naboth's vineyard would not have happened but for the influence of Tyrian ideas, any more than in the case of the famous windmill which stands by the palace of Sans Souci at Potsdam. A further improvement in the art of building took place in this reign. The palace of Ahab, which has recently been recovered by the excavations carded on by the Harvard University Expedition under Dr. G.A. Reisner, shows a marked advance in fineness of workmanship upon that of Omri.

3. Battle of Karkar

The object of Ben-hadad's attack upon Ahab seems to have been to compel him to join a league founded to resist the encroachments of Assyria upon the countries bordering upon the Mediterranean. The confederates, who were led by Ben-hadad, and of whom Ahab was one, were defeated by Shalmaneser II in the battle of Karkar. The date is known from the inscriptions to have been the year 854-853. It is the first quite certain date in Hebrew history, and from it the earlier dates must be reckoned by working backward. Ahab seems to have seized the moment of Syria's weakness to exact by force the fulfillment of their agreement on the part of Ben-hadad (1 Ki 22).

4. Losses of Territory

On the other hand, the king of Moab, Mesha, appears to have turned the same disaster to account by throwing off his allegiance to Israel, which dated from the time of David, but had apparently lapsed until it was enforced anew by Omri (MS, ll. 4ff, but l. 8 makes Omri's reign plus half Ahabs = 40 years). Ahab's son and successor Jehoram (omitting Ahaziah, who is chiefly notable as a devotee of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron), with the aid of Jehoshaphat and his vassal, the king of Edom, attempted to recover his rights, but in vain (2 Ki 3). It may have been in consequence of the failure of this expedition that the Syrians again besieged Samaria and reduced it to great straits ([2Ki 6:24](#); 7), but the date is uncertain. Jehoram replied with a counter-attack upon the east of the Jordan.

5. Reform of Religion

It was no doubt owing to his connection with the king of Judah that Jehoram so far modified the worship and ritual as to remove the worst innovations which had come to prevail in the Northern Kingdom ([2Ki 3:1-3](#)). But these half-measures did not satisfy the demands of the time, and in the revolution which followed both he and his dynasty were swept away. The dynasty had lasted, according to the Biblical account, less than half a century.

6. Revolution

The religious reformation, or rather revolution, which swept away almost entirely both royal houses, bears a good deal of resemblance to the Wahhâbî rising in Arabia at the beginning of the 18th century. It took its origin from prophetism ([1Ki 19:16](#)), and was supported by the Rechabite Jonadab. The object of the movement headed by Jehu was nominally to revenge the prophets of Yahweh put to death by order of Jezebel, but in reality it was much wider and aimed at nothing less than rooting out the Baal-worship altogether, and enforcing a return to the primitive faith and worship. Just as the Wahhâbîs went back to Mohammed's doctrine, as contained in the Kor'ân and the Tradition, and as the Rechabites preserved the simplicity of the early desert life, so Jehu went back to the state of things as they were at the foundation of the Northern Kingdom under Jeroboam I.

7. 4th Dynasty

Jehu's reforms were carried out to the letter, and the whole dynasty of Omri, which was responsible for the innovations, was annihilated like its predecessors. The religious fervor, however, soon subsided, and Jehu's reign ended in disaster. Hazael, whose armies had been exterminated by the forces of Assyria, turned his attention to the eastern territory of Israel. In the turbulent land of Gilead, the home of Elijah, disappointed in its hopes of Jehu, he quickly established his supremacy ([2Ki 10:32](#)). Jehu also appreciated the significance of the victories of Assyria, and was wise enough to send tribute to Shalmaneser II. This was in the year 842. Under his son and successor Jehoahaz the fortunes of Israel continued to decline, until Hazael imposed upon it the most humiliating conditions ([Amo 1:3-5](#); [2Ki 13:1](#)).

8. Renewed Prosperity

Toward the end of the reign of Jehoahaz, however, the tide began to turn, under the leadership of a military genius whose name has not been recorded ([2Ki 13:5](#)); and the improvement continued, after the death of Hazael, under his son Jehoash (Joash), who even besieged and plundered Jerusalem ([2Ki 14:8](#)). But it was not until the long reign of Jeroboam II, son of Jehoash, that the frontiers of Israel, were, for the first time since the beginning of the kingdom, restored to their ideal limits. Even Damascus and Hamath were subdued ([2Ki 14:28](#)). But the prosperity was superficial. Jeroboam II stood at the head of a military oligarchy, who crushed the great mass of the people under them. The tribune of the plebs at this time was Amos of Tekoa. His Cassandra-like utterances soon fulfilled themselves. The dynasty, which had been founded in blood and had lasted some 90 years, on the accession of Jeroboam's son Zachariah gave place to 12 years of anarchy.

9. Anarchy

Zachariah was almost immediately assassinated by Shallum, who within a month was in turn assassinated by Menahem, a soldier of the tribe of Gad, stationed in Tirzah, to avenge the death of his master. The low social condition of Israel at this time is depicted in the pages of Hos. The atrocities perpetrated by the soldiers of Menahem are mentioned by Josephus (*Ant.*, IX, xi, 1).

III. Decline and Fall

1. Loss of Independence

Meantime Pul or Pulu had founded the second Assyrian empire under the name of Tiglath-pileser III. Before conquering Babylonia, he broke the Independent power of the Hittites in the West, and made himself master of the routes leading to the Phoenician seaports. As the eclipse of the Assyrian power had allowed the expansion of Israel under Jeroboam II, so its revival now crushed the independence of the nation forever. Menahem bought stability for his throne by the payment of an immense bribe of 1,000 talents of silver, or \$2,000,000, reckoning the silver talent at \$2,000. The money was raised by means of an assessment of 50 talents each upon all the men

of known wealth. The payment of this tribute is mentioned on the Assyrian monuments, the date being 738.

2. Decline

Menahem reigned 10 years. His son Pekahiah was, soon after his accession, assassinated by one of his own captains, Pekah, son of Remaliah, who established himself, with the help of some Gileadites, as king. He formed an alliance with Rezin of Damascus against Israel, defeating Ahaz in two pitched battles, taking numerous captives, and even reaching the walls of Jerusalem. The result was disastrous to both allies. Ahaz called in the aid of the Assyrians. Tiglath-pileser put an end to the kingdom of Damascus, and deported the inhabitants of Northern and Eastern Palestine. The kingdom of Israel was reduced to the dimensions of the later province of Samaria. Pekah himself was assassinated by Hoshea, who became king under the tutelage of the Assyrian overlord. The depopulated provinces were filled with colonists from the conquered countries of the East. The year is 734 bc.

3. Extinction

Hoshea was never an independent king, but the mere vassal of Assyria. He was foolish enough to withhold the annual tribute, and to turn to Egypt for succor. Meanwhile, Tiglath-pileser III had been succeeded by Shalmaneser IV. This king laid siege to Samaria, but died during the siege. The city was taken by his successor Sargon, who had seized the throne, toward the end of the year 722.

4. Summary

The Northern Kingdom had lasted 240 years, which fall into three periods of about 80 years each, the middle period being the period of the Syrian wars. As it was fully formed when it broke off from the Southern Kingdom, its history shows no development or evolution, but is made up of undulations of prosperity and of decline. It was at its best immediately after its foundation, and again under Jeroboam II. It was strong under Baasha, Omri and Ahab, but generally weak under the other kings. Every change of dynasty meant a period of anarchy, when the country was at the mercy of every invader. The fortunes of Israel depended entirely on those of Assyria. When Assyria was weak, Israel was strong. Given the advance of Assyria, the destruction of Israel was certain. This was necessary and was clearly foreseen by Hosea ([Hos 9:3](#), etc.). The wonder is that the little state,

surrounded by such powerful neighbors, lasted as long as it did. See, further, ISRAEL, HISTORY OF, V.

Literature

The most important works are Ewald, *Geschichte des Volkes Israel* (English Translation by Martineau and Glover); Wellhausen, *Geschichte Israels*; Derenbourg, *Essai sur l'histoire ... de la Palestine*; and there are many more. Ewald is best known to English readers through the medium of Dean Stanley's *Lectures on the History of the Jewish Church*. See further under CHRONOLOGY; ISRAEL, and articles on individual kings.