

## OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

### *Lesson 32 - Part 2*

#### The Divided Monarchy – The Civil War Concluded Hebrew alphabet *Aleph - Ayin*

I finished my Biblical Languages degree at Lipscomb University in 1981. The degree was integrated in the Bible Department, which trained ministers and preachers in the churches of Christ. The required course load, therefore, included those classes deemed necessary to qualify one to preach as a vocation.

The training was wonderful, and many professors were both outstanding scholars and fine Christians. We held men like Dr. Harvey Floyd in awe. His gentle demeanor spoke of God's love, and his brain worked through the Greek New Testament more fluently than ours did the English! Dr. Batsell Barrett Baxter was an icon of dignity, faith and caring. Every interaction with him is engraved in my memory.

One blessing of the school was the opportunity for “preachers in training” to give a chapel address (The school had mandatory chapel five days a week). One morning, as I was about to give the chapel sermon, I went into the men's room to check my look! While there, I bumped into one of the “most holy” professors using the facilities. The aura of this man was so special, that we students were hesitant to even speak to him in any normal fashion.

I was stunned. It had somehow escaped my reasoning that men so seemingly holy and special did such mundane things as use the restroom! It reminded me of my shock in High School when I saw one of my teachers in the grocery store – “Teachers bought groceries?”

Now, we must not pass this off simply as the naiveté of youth. For I am convinced that a similar misperception affects the way we read and understand the Bible. We have a tendency to read and understand many events as “holy stories” removed from the real-life experiences of every day. Biblical stories are indeed “holy stories,” but they are holy stories that were real life experiences in an everyday world.

We live the same real life, and holy stories are no less a part of our biographies. We understand this better as we examine the biblical stories in their everyday context. Because Israel and Judah were political entities, as well as a collection of individuals, part of the everyday context includes the political factors. This is an important starting point for understanding the life of Iron Age Biblical stories.

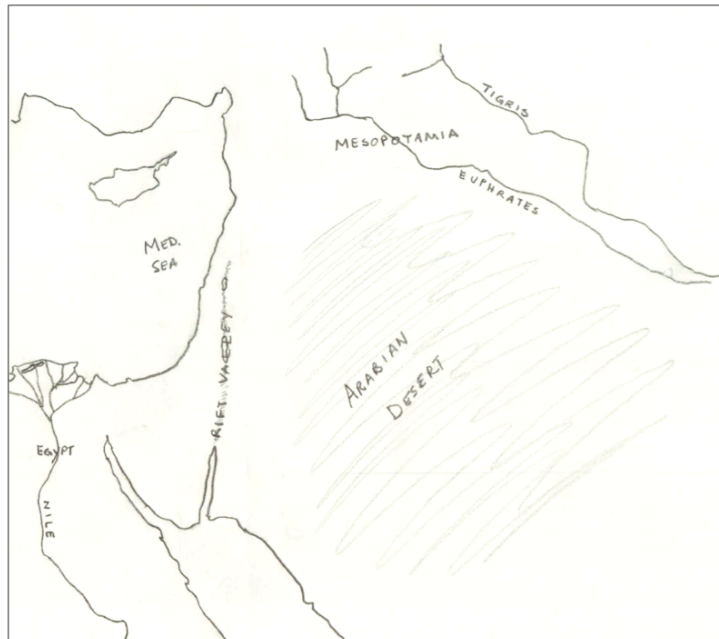
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## REVIEW

Last lesson, we began our study of the civil war between Israel (the northern tribes) and Judah (the title given to the southern tribes of Judah, Simeon, and at least part of Benjamin). Using maps produced by James Monson, *et al.*,<sup>1</sup> we discussed the political issues surrounding the Israelite monarchies, especially in light of the geographic placement of Israel. We briefly review the material adding more detail as the foundation for this lesson.

As we consider the Mediterranean world in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> centuries B.C., there were several major population centers worth noting. The two most ancient areas of settlement, where recorded history first shows civilization, were in the area of the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers (called “Mesopotamia” from “meso” meaning “between” and “potamos” meaning “river”), and the area around the northern Nile (“Egypt”). These population centers not only had a disproportionate large population, but they also had the crops, water, and terrain to sustain those populations. Egypt produced linen cloth, had nearby mines for copper and turquoise in the region of Sinai, and had waterways for transportation (including Mediterranean ports). Mesopotamia had abundant farmland, access to nearby mines for copper and iron, and was the meeting point between the Middle East and the world of Turkey and Greece.

The land of Israel was the zone between these two population groups. As such, Canaan/Israel was important in trade and transporting goods back and forth. To the east of Canaan/Israel were the Arabian deserts, and to the west was the Mediterranean Sea. Slicing through the heart of Canaan/Israel is a deep depression running south to north called the Rift Valley. Along the Valley floor flows the Jordan River. Lancaster and Monson call Canaan/Israel the “Land Between” or the “Bridge” between these population



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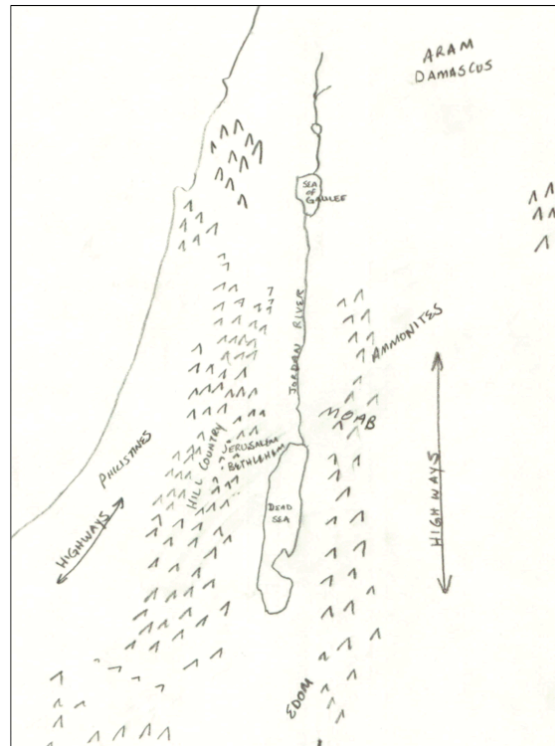
<sup>1</sup> Monson, James, *Regions on the Run*, (Biblical Backgrounds 2009). These maps are available

centers.<sup>2</sup> The shipment of goods and the traversing of armies depended on reliable access through this region.

Many regional peoples and tribes populated this land between the major centers of Egypt and Mesopotamia. It is both a savage and an abundant region. There are great sources of clean, fresh water as well as some of the most parched desert regions known. There are mountains that soar over 9,000 feet above sea level and valleys that reach the lowest point on earth. There is fertile land that easily grows most any crop and there is a seemingly dead soil punctuated by a sea dead in content and name! These geological and geographic features set up pockets of land easily inhabited and stretches of land inhospitable to more than a few brave souls.

The people groups living in this region readily fought each other over the rights to mountain passes, and to the access needed for transporting and receiving goods. As Israel settled Canaan, different tribes were placed in different regions with different resources and handicaps. There was a measure of independence among the different tribes, as well as a measure of competition. David was the first king to really consolidate the power of Israel in the land. David was crowned king in Hebron, a southern hill town of David's tribe Judah. David moved his capital to Jerusalem, the previously unconquered hill town in the region of Benjamin, a central location that united the northern part of Israel to the southern part.

After consolidating control over the tribes of Israel, David fought the Philistines to the west, securing his western border as well as the routes to the Mediterranean. David then turned his focus east across the Jordan conquering the tribes controlling the eastern paths between Egypt and Mesopotamia. These tribes were Edomites in the south, Moabites and Ammonites in the center, and the peoples of Aram-Damascus in the North. David had peace with the Phoenicians along the northern coast of the Mediterranean, and left a strong

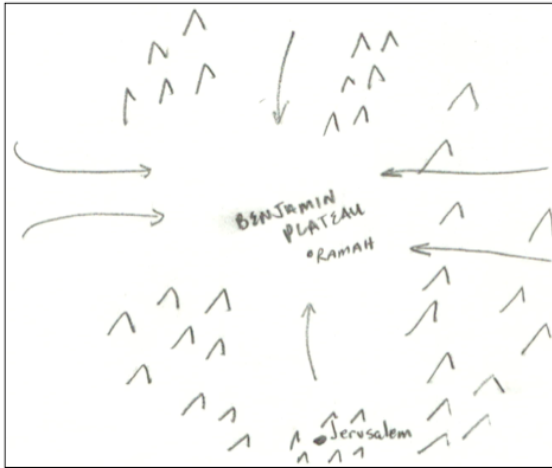


<sup>2</sup> Lancaster, Steven and Monson, James, *Regional Study Guide: Introductory Map Studies in the Land of the Bible*, (Biblical Backgrounds 2010) at 12.

kingdom for Solomon.

Solomon capitalized on the strength of David's empire, managing the great trade and international relationships that came with controlling the bridge between Egypt and Mesopotamia. After Solomon's death, things began to fall apart. The northern Israelite tribes joined forces behind Jeroboam as king while Judah stayed with David's lineage acknowledging Solomon's son Rehoboam as king. Soon, the

north and south were at war. The key in the battle was control of the Benjamin Plateau. This was the major thoroughfare that allowed traffic to flow west through the hill country to the Mediterranean and east to the Jordan and beyond. This plateau was also the main route out of Jerusalem to the north.



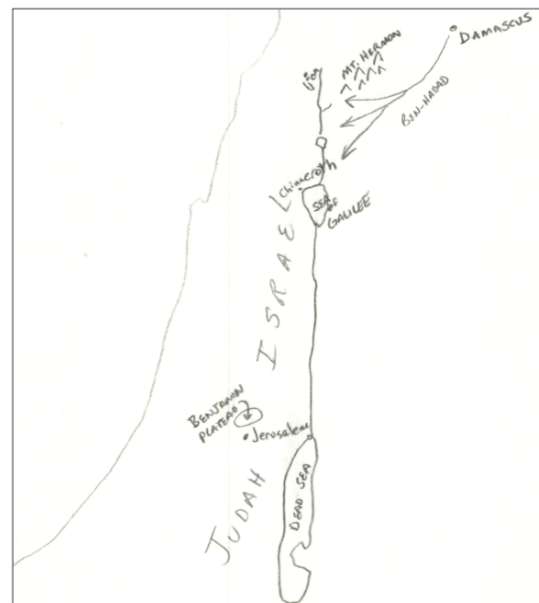
The northern king Baasha conquered the Benjamin plateau and began building a fortress at Ramah, a 90-minute walk north of Jerusalem to lock down all traffic into and out of

the capital of Judah. This caused Asa, king of Judah, to purchase a favor from Ben-Hadad, king of Aram Damascus to the northeast of Israel. As part of the deal, Ben-Hadad marched against Israel in the north, causing Israel to pull back from the Benjamin Plateau (in Israel's south) to avoid a two-front war.

Asa's decision made good political sense and was a smart military maneuver. Unfortunately, even though the move made sense (and was successful), Asa chose to do it without seeking the word of the Lord. Hanani, a prophet, confronted Asa for his unilateral moves and reprimanded him. King Asa was unrepentant and locked Hanani up. Soon thereafter, Asa's feet, that had quit walking in the way of King David, got some horrendous disease, and Asa died.

### THE CIVIL WAR FINISHES

As a result of Asa's deal with Ben-Hadad, Baasha, the king of Israel, lost a number of northern cities to Ben-Hadad. Ben-Hadad marched down the Rift Valley



taking Ijon (northernmost Israel) down to Chinnerth (on the Sea of Galilee).

Baasha reigned in Israel for 24 years. His epitaph given in 1 Kings 15:34 is,

He did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and walked in the way of Jeroboam and in his sin, which he made Israel to sin.

This is a common comment on the evil kings in Israel. Contrary to those upright kings who “walked in the way of David,” the wicked ones are labeled as ones who “walked in the way of Jeroboam.” The phrasing is lamentable as the memory of one who had promise but chose disobedience. Jehu, the son of the prophet Hanani (who brought God’s reprimand to Baasha’s opponent Asa), brought God’s judgment against Baasha:

Since I exalted you out of the dust and made you leader over my people Israel, and you have walked in the way of Jeroboam and have made my people Israel to sin, provoking me to anger with their sins, behold, I will utterly sweep away Baasha and his house, and I will make your house like the house of Jeroboam the son of Nebat. Anyone belonging to Baasha who dies in the city the dogs shall eat, and anyone of his who dies in the field the birds of the heavens shall eat (1 Kings 16:2-4).

In other words, “If you walk like Jeroboam, you will go the way of Jeroboam!” After Baasha’s death, his son Elah took the throne, but not for long. Just two years into his regency, while Elah was too drunk to stop it, his chariot commander Zimri assassinated him, claiming the throne for himself. Zimri then murdered all the offspring of Baasha, as foretold in Jehu’s prophecy.

As short as Elah’s two-year reign seems, it was a lifetime compared to the usurper Zimri. As soon as word got out about Zimri’s coup d’état, the Israelite army, which was encamped against the Philistines in the west, anointed their general Omri king. Omri and his army left the Philistines and marched against the self-made king Zimri at the palace in Tirzah. The town quickly fell against the army’s might and Zimri committed suicide, burning the palace while still inside.

At this point, half the people acknowledged Omri as king, but another half acknowledged a different fellow (Tibni). Omri and his army engaged Tibni and his followers. Before long, Tibni died and all Israel then recognized Omri as king.

Omri was king in Israel for at least 12 years (1 Kings 16:23), yet notably very little is said of him in Scripture. Scripture says that “he bought the hill of Samaria...and he fortified the hill and called the name of the city that he built Samaria” (1 Kings 16:24). Beyond that, all that is noted is that he did evil and “walked in the way of Jeroboam” (1 Kings 16:26), and that he fathered another king who would prove to be even more wicked--Ahab.

This silence of Scripture is noteworthy because history tells us much about Omri.



The Moabite Stone

This king who was not worth of many biblical verses was a powerful king in the eyes of the world. The neighboring country of Moab has given some understanding of Omri's importance in his day. In 1868, archaeologists found a stone almost 4 feet tall with inscriptions about the Moabite king Mesha's reign. Mesha was a contemporary of Omri and his son Ahab. Scholars date the stone from sometime between 840 to 820 BC.<sup>3</sup> This stone is found today in the Louvre and is called, appropriately, the "Moabite Stone" or "Mesha Stele." The stone is written in an ancient Phoenician alphabet that bears great similarity to the Hebrew of that time.<sup>4</sup>

Interestingly, the stone records the successes of Mesha, king of Moab, with an exception in the case of "Omri, king of Israel." Giving credit to "Chemosh," the patron god of king Mesha for causing Mesha to "triumph over all my adversaries," Mesha had to carve out Omri:

As for Omri, king of Israel, he humbled Moab many years, for Chemosh was angry at his land. And his son followed him [Ahab] and he also said, "I will humble Moab."<sup>5</sup>

The biblical text does not go into great detail over any of these victories; although, the success of Omri is certainly implied in the powerful kingdom he left to his son Ahab. This is also seen in the ability of Omri to construct a new capital (implying both funds and internal stability). A third way we know Omri's worldly success is the marriage between his son Ahab and Jezebel, the daughter of the Sidonian king Ethbaal who ruled over the important coastal cities of Tyre and Sidon (1 Kings 16:31).

The worldly significance of Omri's reign is also seen in succeeding generations. Omri founded a dynasty that became known outside the Bible as the "house of Omri." One of the Mesopotamian countries that ruled from the North during the 9<sup>th</sup> century BC was Assyria. Shalmaneser III was the king of Assyria from about

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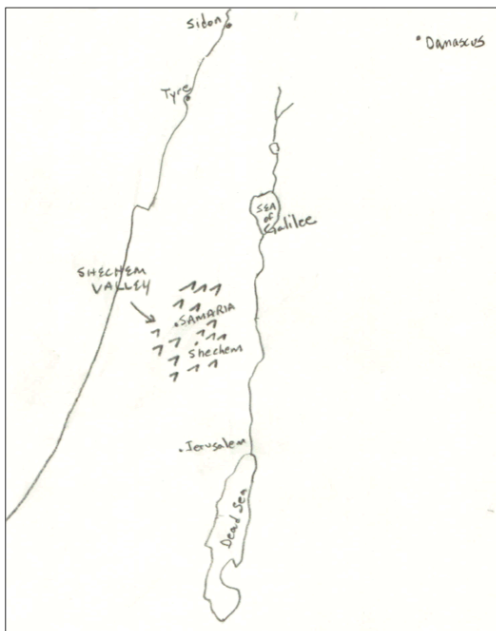
<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, at 320.

<sup>4</sup> See, Albright, W. F., "Is the Mesha Inscription a Forgery?", *The Jewish Quarterly Review*, Vol. 35, No. 3 (Jan. 1945), at 247-250.

<sup>5</sup> Pritchard, at 320.

859-824 BC. In 1846, British archaeologist Sir Henry Layard discovered a black limestone obelisk about 6 ½ feet tall. The obelisk was built at the end of Shalmaneser’s reign noting his accomplishments. It is now in the British Museum.

Among the kings noted that are bringing tribute and bowing prostrate before Shalmaneser is “Jehu of the House of Omri” (Found in the second line from the top). Jehu is found in 2 Kings 9-10. He is the 4<sup>th</sup> king to follow Omri, and is not even of Omri’s direct lineage. Yet, his international title is still from the “House of Omri.” Repeatedly in the records of Shalmaneser, we read the political designation “Jehu son of Omri.”<sup>6</sup> This designation of Israel as the “land of the house of Omri” continued in Assyrian records until at least 720 BC, over one hundred years later.<sup>7</sup>



Perhaps one of Omri’s most note-worthy achievements lies in ending the civil war between Judah and Israel. While scripture does not directly attribute the end of the war to the reign of Omri, we do read of the war before his reign, and it is clear that by the reign of Omri’s son Ahab, Judah’s king Jehoshaphat is an ally, not an enemy. This leads some scholars to conclude the civil war resolved in the reign of Omri.<sup>8</sup>

The capital constructed by Omri lived on as the capital for Israel up until the exile.

<sup>6</sup> For a translation of the obelisk see Pritchard, James, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, (Princeton 1974) at 280, 281.

<sup>7</sup> See the listing in Kelle, Brad, “What’s in a Name? Neo-Assyrian Designations for the Northern Kingdom and Their Implications for Israelite History and Biblical Interpretation,” *Journal of Biblical Literature*, Vol. 121, No. 4 (Winter, 2002), at 640.

<sup>8</sup> Harrison, R. K., “Omri,” *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (Eerdmans 1997), Vol. 3, at 603.

Known as “Samaria,” the capital sat up on an isolated hill surrounded by the fertile Shechem Valley. It had easy access to the Sea (and the in-laws for Omri’s son Ahab in Tyre and Sidon!), yet was easily defensible.

Omri bought the land for the city and the claim of the city was not simply as a political capital, but as the family land of the Omride dynasty. Samaria soon became the name for the surrounding countryside as well. The city itself has revealed many features through the multiple excavations conducted there. Over the last 90 years, these excavations have uncovered remains of Omri’s palace, defensive walls, a gate and watchtower.

Omri’s son, Ahab, kept Samaria as his capital, and added on extensive buildings. Excavated pottery has revealed worship of Baal as well as Yahweh as late as the mid-700’s BC. This city rose to such prominence that the Assyrians would sometimes refer to Israel as “the land of Samaria.”<sup>9</sup> The Assyrians sacked the city around 722 BC (2 Kings 17:1-6) and carried the town’s inhabitants into exile.

Here, we have the king Omri, famous in his own age and for ages to come. Omri played the political system well. He had the economy of Israel humming. He took authority over its borders. He made astute decisions militarily both outside and inside his country. He set up a dynasty that reigned for nearly a century, yet in 1 Kings we have only six verses spent on him with the judgment that he “walked in the way of Jeroboam” (1 Kings 16:26). All the success in the world does not overcome the spiritual judgment of holiness and devotion to God. What is important to the world, does not merit equal importance in the kingdom of God.

## CONCLUSION

Biblical stories can seem almost artificial in our reading because they are contained in the revelation of God to humanity. These were stories, though, of real people, in real life situations, making choices as they faced daily difficulties. These kings were caught in a land that held great promise, yet was fraught with danger. There were powerful forces to the north and south. Often, alliances with visible powers seemed to make more sense than reliance on an invisible God. This drove people to make choices that discounted the role and authority of God and his commands., It was not divine revelation, but circumstances that dictated ethics. Then, history unfolded the fruits of the disobedience, with the record of that history folded into Scripture for our edification and encouragement.

We do well to study materials that help us see the real world of Scripture, because then we more closely recognize the challenges and temptations of our age. Simply

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<sup>9</sup> See, Kelle, at 640.



because Scripture's canon is closed, it does not mean that we live in an age less interactive with the Divine and his directions.

### POINTS FOR HOME

1. "...walked in the ways of Jeroboam" (1 Kings over and over!).

What a tragic way to be known for history. A king with the promise of a wonderful dynasty as rich and lasting as David's, traded in for the poor idolatrous choices that sought power and security over the ways of God. The phrase "walk in the way of Jeroboam" reminds one of the admonition and teaching of Psalm 1:

Blessed is the man  
Who walks not in the counsel of the wicked,  
Nor stands in the way of sinners,  
Nor sits in the seat of scoffers;  
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,  
And on his law he meditates day and night.

He is like a tree  
Planted by streams of water  
That yields its fruit in its season,  
And its leaf does not wither.  
In all that he does, he prospers.  
The wicked are not so,  
But are like chaff that the wind drives away.

Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,  
Nor sinners in the congregation of the righteous;  
For the Lord knows the way of the righteous,  
But the way of the wicked will perish.

If we believe this counsel of Scripture, then how does it change the choices we make in everyday life?

2. "*Omri*" (1 Kings 21-28).

Omri was great in the eyes of the world. He had a successful career as a general in the army. He was made king and outplayed the rival king for sole reigning over Israel. He built a fantastic city, conquered adversaries, garnered an international reputation for success, and fathered a well-placed son with his own international ties.

The judgment of Scripture, however, stands in stark contrast to the success of the world. Jesus asked the question, “what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul?” (Mat. 16:26). It should bring into question for each us: how are we spending our lives? What are we working for?

3. “*Elah was at Tirzah, drinking himself drunk*” (1 Kings 16:9).

These biblical stories really are everyday life through the lens of God’s revelation, captured and explained for our edification. But, we are living our own everyday lives subject to the same God’s vision. Psalm 11 is clear that our righteous God, from his heavenly throne, sees all that is happening in everyday life. Are you seeing your own holy story in your everyday life? Let us in humility set ourselves before God seeking his wisdom and direction for our every step.

### **MORE HEBREW LETTERS!**

Ready for some more Hebrew letters? So far we have alef through mem. Now, we add three more:

נ “nun”

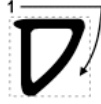
This letter is not pronounced like a Catholic nun. The “u” has an “ooh” sound so the word actually sounds more like “noon.” The letter sounds like an English “n” when used in a word. The block letter is written as follows:



This letter also has a final form when it is the last letter in the word. The final form extends the base into a long tail that extends below the writing line: ן

ס “samech”

This next letter is the Hebrew equivalent to an English “s.” It is written in block text as follows:



The letter was likely originally a shield.

ע “ayin”

This next Hebrew letter is called “*ayin*.” There is really no English equivalent. Like the *aleph*, there is no real distinct sound for the *ayin* discernable to the modern English ear. The sound the letter takes is generally that of the vowel that is assigned to it. The letter can be written in block form as:



### WANT MORE?

Time to practice your letters! Use your bookmark or earlier lessons and try to write the 16 letters learned this far.

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