Kenneth A. Kitchen, *The Bible in its World: The Bible and Archaeology Today*. Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1977. Pbk. pp.168.

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7

Wars and Rumours of Wars

Twin Kingdoms

1. ***End of an Empire***

In the last decade or so of his reign, Solomon's regime was beset with problems at home and abroad. On the south, prince Hadad of Edom returned from Egyptian exile to reclaim the independence of Edom (1 Kings 11:14-22). This must have endangered Solomon's hold on the Arabah rift valley (south from the Dead Sea) with its access to copper-deposits, and to Ezion-Geber and the Red Sea. His sources of wealth from the south, therefore, were probably curtailed. In the north, a certain Rezon gained control of Damascus and the former kingdom of Aram-Zobah (1 Kings 11:23-25). With this revolt, Solomon's northern foreign holdings fell away completely. An independent Aram cut him off both from Hamath (now also left independent) and from the routes to the Euphrates; northern trade would suffer.

Nearer home, one Jeroboam son of Nebat was heralded by a prophet as future ruler of the northern tribes of Israel as distinct from Judah and Benjamin. Solomon's attempts to eliminate him were frustrated by Jeroboam's flight into Egypt, he finding safe haven at the court of the new pharaoh Shishak (1 Kings 11:26-40), i.e. Shoshenq I, founder of the new, Libyan, Twenty-second Dynasty. Stripped of supporting revenues from both north and south, taxation now bore heavily upon the Hebrew people

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themselves—and perhaps more upon Israel than on Judah (possibly favoured by the royal house). Thus, at Solomon's death, his shrivelled domains were ripe for disruption, even at home, when Jeroboam returned from Egypt. When the new king Rehoboam refused to lighten the people's burdens, Israel broke away with Jeroboam as its king. So, even the heartland of Solomon's former 'empire' was now rent in twain, into two rival, petty states.

2. ***The First Oppressors: Shishak of Egypt***

'United we stand, divided we fall!': a suitable epitaph for the Hebrew monarchy. In the 5th year of Rehoboam, *c*. 925 BC, Shoshenq I of Egypt launched his armies upon the two puny kingdoms.[1] His official reason was a border incident near the Bitter Lakes (on the line of the modern Suez Canal). 'My Majesty found that ... [they] were killing [my soldiers—and] my army-leaders. His Majesty was troubled about them .... Then His Majesty said to his courtiers, ... "[See,] these atrocities they have committed!" ... [Then His Majesty went forth ...], his chariotry accompanying him, without their (= the enemy's) realizing it ... His Majesty wreaked great slaughter among them ...' Thus far Shoshenq's damaged war-stela from Karnak. The Egyptian war-machine rolled into Philistia. Several detachments forked off to the right, south-eastwards, to strike at Judah's southern forts (Beer-Sheba, Arad, etc.), and subdue

[1] For full details of Shoshenq's campaign, see Kitchen, *Third Intermediate Period in Egypt*, 1972, pp. 293-302, and 432-447.

the Negeb and desert fringes. Shoshenq and the main army continued north-east, up the valley of Ajalon to Gibeon, where he encamped. Cooped up in Jerusalem itself nearby, Rehoboam was invited to submit and pay a massive tribute, or be crushed. Stripping Temple and palace alike of Solomon's wealth in gold (1 Kings 14:25-26), he paid up promptly, confronted by Shoshenq's huge force—1,200 chariots, 60,000 main troops ('horsemen') and a horde of auxiliaries: Libyans, Sukkiim and Nubians (2 Chron. 12:2-9). The Sukkiim are mentioned only in the Chronicles account, and were the Tjuku or Tjukten scouts of Egyptian texts—an example of the original and independent value that can attach to items of information preserved only by Chronicles.

From Gibeon, Shoshenq struck northwards through the heart of Judah, up to Shechem, capital of his former protégé Jeroboam. But this wily character had already fled east across the Jordan and holed up in Penuel. Nothing daunted, Shoshenq dispatched a flying column to Penuel, to bring Jeroboam to heel, while he himself progressed grandly on through Israel north-westwards to Megiddo. There Shoshenq set up his field H.Q., sending raiding-parties into Galilee, and awaiting the return of his Penuel contingent. Meantime, the royal craftsmen set up a huge victory-stela in the king's

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name at Megiddo itself—a 'jumbo' visiting-card![2] Then the pharaoh returned south to Gaza (to be rejoined by the Negeb contingents), and thence in triumph to his Delta capital at Tanis (Zoan), laden with booty and doubtless leaving behind him two very chastened Hebrew kings.

3. *The Dynasty of Ahab and Jezebel*

For the next two hundred years, *c.* 925-722 BC, the twin kingdoms were caught up in a long series of petty rivalries with each other and with such local neighbours as the Aramean rulers of Damascus, the Transjordanian kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom, or with the Philistines, while the Assyrian colossus slowly and inexorably loomed up on the horizon by 850 BC. It is a long tale often told, and therefore a bird's eye view of a few interesting details must suffice here.

In Judah, the dynasty of David continued on the Jerusalemite throne in regular succession. But in Israel, a series of unstable regimes followed one another swiftly in coup after coup. Jeroboam's son was ousted by Baasha. Baasha's son fell to Zimri. Zimri lasted a week, until the army strong man, Omri, besieged him successfully in Tirzah, and then had to overcome a rival, Tibni. Omri bought the hill of Shemer, and built there a royal citadel—Samaria. This new capital was completed and adorned by his son Ahab. Excavations at Samaria long ago revealed something of the former splendour of the royal citadel, well laid out, and the main buildings executed in fine masonry. One particular detail that has often caught attention is the reference to the 'ivory house' of Ahab (1 Kings 22:39). This appears to have been a pleasure-pavilion, in which the walls and furnishings had been adorned with coloured ivory-work, set with inlays, giving a brilliant decorative effect.[3] Numerous fragments of the ivories were found during the excavations. They are similar in many respects to the Phoenician and other ivories so avidly collected (as loot and tribute) by Assyrian kings and hoarded in their great palaces in Calah and Nineveh (cf. Amos 3:12b). This was then the mode, 'the way of the

[2] The surviving fragment (with Shoshenq's names) is illustrated (e.g.) in Y. Yadin, *Hazor, Rediscovery of a Great Citadel...*, 1975, p. 216.
[3] Published by J. W. & G. M. Crowfoot, *Samaria-Sebaste II, Early Ivories from Samaria*, 1938.

world', to which Ahab eagerly conformed. Such fashions were doubtless encouraged by such notable characters as Jezebel, Ahab's Tyrian queen, patroness of the cult of Tyrian Baal.

However, Ahab had more serious building to do. Excavations at Hazor and Megiddo have vividly illustrated the drastic refortification of these centres with the solid walls now deemed necessary as defence against shifty neighbours (such as Damascus) or growing major threats (Assyria). Water-supplies were assured by execution of massive tunnelling-works down to springs, within the city-

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perimeters—again, as at both Hazor and Megiddo.[4] At Megiddo in particular, Ahab's works were very extensive, including the large series of stables formerly assigned to Solomon's time.[5] Israel and Judah had learned to live with one another, the former subduing—Moab (cf. 2 Kings 1:1; 3:4 f.) and the latter, Edom (1 Kings 22:47). But the approach of Assyria inspired wider alliances. Osorkon II of Egypt had renewed his dynasty's alliance with Byblos, and he and the dynasty of Ahab also found it mutually convenient to become allies. The excavations at Samaria produced fragments of a royal alabaster presentation-vase marked with the titles of Osorkon II of Egypt and the note '81 *hin*' as mark of capacity for the precious oil or unguent that it had once contained. The approach of Shalmaneser III of Assyria stimulated a coalition of practically all the Levantine states, encouraged also by Egypt's sending 1000 men,[6] to oppose him at the Battle of Qarqar in 853 BC At some cost, the coalition halted Assyria's advance for the time being, despite her claims of 'victory'.[7] The statistics are of interest: Hadadezer of Damascus fielded 1,200 chariots, 1,200 horsemen, 20,000 infantry; Ahab of Israel, 2,000 chariots and 10,000 infantry, etc. In fact, the allies mustered at least, 3,940 chariots, 2,900 horsemen and cameleers, and over 62,000 infantry. But hardly was the immediate threat repulsed, than the coalition broke up; Ahab died in conflict with the Arameans of Damascus.

4. *From Jehu to the Fall of Israel*

The short reigns of Ahab's sons saw the successful breakaway of Moab from vassalage under its king Mesha,[8] and finally a coup d'état by Jehu, founder of yet another new dynasty, in 841 BC. That very year, Jehu had promptly to pay tribute to Shalmaneser III of Assyria who was again pressing hard on the petty kings of the Levant. But it was the new king of Aram-Damascus, Hazael, who now wrought the greater havoc upon a weakened Israel (2 Kings 10:32-33; 13:22). Besides his appearances in the inscriptions of Shalmaneser III,[9] and as 'Mari' in those of Adad-nirari III,[10] two ivory fragments looted from Damascus bear the label-text *...l-mrn Hz'1*, '... belonging to our lord Hazael',[11] using the same Aramaic title,

[4] See generally Yadin, *Hazor, Rediscovery* ..., 1975, e.g. chapters 10, 11, 14.
[5] Provided with mangers in such a way that these buildings cannot well be just stores, as are the pillared buildings at Arad for example.
[6] Cf. H. Tadmor, *Israel Exploration Journal* 11 (1961), pp. 145-7.
[7] Cf. Oppenheim in Pritchard, *Anc. Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 278/9 (where one should now read 'Egypt' for 'Musri').
[8] Famous for his stela, the 'Moabite Stone' (cf. translation, Albright in Pritchard, *op. cit*., pp. 320-1), which supplements 2 Kings 3.
[9] Oppenheim in Pritchard, *op. cit*., pp. 280-1.
[10] *Idem*., pp. 281-2.
[11] Cf. Kitchen in J. D. Douglas *et al*. (eds.), *New Bible Dictionary*, 1962, pp. 506-7 with references, plus D. J. Wiseman, *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*, IV, 2/3, 1973, p. 238 f.

mari, 'lord' by which he had become known to Adad-nirari's scribes. In 796 BC, Adad-nirari III extracted massive tribute from Hazael, including 2,000 talents—nearly 60 tons!—of silver. He likewise mulcted the kings of Tyre and Sidon, and 'Ia'asu (king) of Samaria', i.e. the newly-enthroned Joash of Israel, grandson of Jehu.[12] The Assyrian pressure weakened Aram so much that Hazael's successor Benhadad III was no match for his rivals Joash of Israel (2 Kings 13:24-25) and Zakur of Hamath.

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For a brief span, *c*. 780-740 BC, both Israel (under Jeroboam II) and Judah (under Uzziah or Azariah) enjoyed a fragile outward prosperity. But not without social tensions and exploitation, as prophets like Amos make clear—condemning those that 'lie upon beds of ivory, but are not grieved for the affliction of Joseph' (i.e. the Israelite people), in the words of Amos 6:4-6. From Samaria at this general time we have the 'Samaria ostraca', a series of dockets apparently recording deliveries to the palace of oil and wine, possibly as revenue levied from crown estates.[13] Uzziah of Judah greatly restored his kingdom's power southwards (at Edom's expense), building a series of forts and re-establishing control of Elath (old Ezion-Geber) on the Red Sea Gulf of Aqaba (2 Kings 14:22; 2 Chron. 26:10). A series of forts of this period has been identified in the Negeb region,[14] and a sealstone optimistically attributed to the king's son and eventual virtual coregent, Jotham, was found at Tell el-Kheleifeh (Ezion-Geber),[15] perhaps confirming the presence of their rule in these southern reaches.

The ostraca and innumerable seals inscribed in ancient Hebrew script—intelligible only to those who could read—illustrate the wide use of alphabetic writing and of at least rudimentary literacy in Israel and Judah during the period of the kingdoms.[16] The production in this overall region of long inscriptions not only in Hebrew but in other West-Semitic dialects such as Moabite and Aramaic is shown by king Mesha's stela, as well as by the Aramaic inscriptions on plaster from Tell Deir Alla in the Jordan valley, mentioning the prophet or seer Balaam (cf. chapter 5). Kings and officials of the kingdom of Ammon are also becoming increasingly known from both seals and longer inscriptions.[17] Returning to Amos, his prophecies of judgement spanned the whole Levant, right across via Damascus (Amos 1:3-5) to the Euphrates, to 'him that holds the sceptre from Beth-Eden' (1:5). Coming in the mid-eighth century BC, this was a direct reference to Shamshi-ilu, the proudly-independent governor of Bit-Adini on the middle Euphrates, who for thirty years (*c*. 780-745 BC) was the virtually absolute ruler of his domain, not even troubling to mention his official masters, the Assyrian kings, in his inscriptions. His fall did come, from *c*. 745 BC, with the advent of a powerful new king, Tiglath-pileser III.[18]

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[12] Text edited by S. Page, *Iraq* 30 (1968), p. 143; cf. further, Kitchen, *Old Testament to its Context*, 1973, p. 29 and nn. 21, 22.
[13] Cf. Y. Aharoni, *Land of the Bible*, 1967, pp. 315-327.
[14] Aharoni, *op. cit.*, pp. 313-4, and in *Israel Exploration Journal* 17 (1967), pp. 1-17.
[15] Cf. latterly, N. Avigad, *Bulletin, American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 163 (1961), pp. 18-22.
[16] Cf. A. R. Millard, *Biblical Archaeologist* 35 (1972), pp. 97-111.
[17] Among other studies, cf. (e.g.) S. H. Horn & F. M. Cross, *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 193 (1969), pp. 2-19, and by H. O. Thompson & F. Zayadine, and F. M. Cross, *Bulletin, American School of Oriental Research*, No. 212 (1973), pp. 5-15; G. Garbini, *Journal of Semitic Studies* 19 (1974), pp. 159-168.
[18] A. Malamat, *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, No. 129 (1953), pp. 25-26.

But Shamshi-ilu was not alone in feeling the impact of renewed Assyrian might. During 743-732 BC, this descended like the proverbial wolf on the fold, subduing Uzziah of Judah and Menahem of Israel, and ending the kingdom of Damascus. Tiglath-pileser III devastated northern Israel, including Hazor (2 Kings 15:29) where have been found eloquent traces of the ferocity of

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that destruction in a layer of ashes a metre thick over the ruined buildings.[19] The Assyrian great king replaced Pekah on Israel's throne with a new king, Hoshea. When Tiglath-pileser died in 727 BC, Hoshea foolishly opted to rebel against Assyria. In 726/5 BC, he refused tribute to Shalmaneser V, and instead sent for aid from 'So, king of Egypt' (2 Kings 17:4). Not a whisper of help materialised from that quarter, and thus Shalmaneser V began the siege of Samaria without external interference (*c*. 725-722 BC). At its fall, the city's population was deported to Assyria by the new King, Sargon II. But who was the mysterious and unhelpful king So? By about 725 BC, Egypt had two lines of senior pharaohs reigning in the Delta—at that time, Osorkon IV in Tanis (Zoan) and Iuput II in Leontopolis further south. Neither king actually ruled effectively over anything more than his own local province. 'So' is most likely to have been an abbreviation for Osorkon IV of Tanis (Zoan), the recognised objective of Hebrew envoys to Egypt in the eighth and seventh centuries BC (cf. Isaiah 19:11, 13; 30:2, 4).[20]

The deportation of the Israelites to Assyria (2 Kings 18:9-12) spelt their kingdom's final eclipse, and was duly celebrated in the inscriptions of Sargon 11: '27,290 of its inhabitants, I carried away as booty'.[21] In Assyria itself, one slight trace of some of the captive Hebrews appears to have been found. An ostracon from Calah (now Nimrud) of about 720/700 BC contains a list of names, often of a good 'biblical' stamp—'Elinur son of Menahem; Nedabel son of Hanun; Elinur son of Michael', and so on.[22] But in the course of time, the exiled Hebrews were progressively assimilated into the Assyrian-Aramean amalgam of peoples inhabiting northern Mesopotamia.

Judah Alone

1. *Hezekiah, Assyria and Egypt*

Escaping the rapacity of Sargon II, Hezekiah of Judah provoked his successor Sennacherib who campaigned in Syria-Palestine in 701 BC and unsuccessfully besieged Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:13 ff.; 19:1-36; Isaiah 36, 37). These episodes also feature in the inscriptions of Sennacherib himself, who greatly emphasises his capture of Lachish (shown in reliefs now in the British Museum), as he could not claim the outright capture of Jerusalem.[23] One factor that has often puzzled historical enquirers is the role of 'Tirhakah king of Kush' (2 Kings 19:9; Isaiah 37:9)—especially as Tirhakah was not king of Egypt and Kush (Nubia) until 690 BC and onwards. Ultimately the solution to this problem is a simple one. In 701 BC,

[19] Cf. Yadin, *Hazor, Rediscovery of a Great Citadel...*, 1975, pp. 147-8, 175-183.
[20] See Kitchen, *Third Intermediate Period in Egypt*, 1972, pp. 182, 372-5, for So.
[21] Oppenheim, in Pritchard, *Anc. Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 284-5.
[22] Published by M. H. Segal, *Iraq* 19 (1957), pp. 139-145; cf. Albright, *Bulletin, American Schools of Oriental Research,* No. 149 (1958), pp. 33-36.
[23] Oppenheim, in Pritchard, *Anc. Near Eastern Texts*, pp. 287-8.

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Tirhakah was but a prince at the side of his militant brother, the new pharaoh Shebitku, who dispatched Tirhakah with an army to assist Hezekiah in fending-off the Assyrian advance. But the narrative in Kings and Isaiah does not end in 701 BC—it carries right through to the death of Sennacherib in 681 BC (2 Kings 19:37; Isaiah 37:38), which is nine years after Tirhakah had become king of Egypt and Kush. In other words, the biblical narrative (from the standpoint of 681 BC) mentions Tirhakah by the title he bore at that time (not as he was in 701)—as is universal practice then and now. Unaware of the importance of these facts, and badly misled by a wrong interpretation of some of Tirhakah's inscriptions, Old Testament scholars have often tumbled over each other in their eagerness to diagnose hopeless historical errors in Kings and Isaiah, with multiple campaigns of Sennacherib and what not—all needlessly.[24]

2. *The Final Century*

Assyria dominated the political scene down to the decade 630/620 BC, after which her foes steadily rose to engulf her. Only under Hezekiah's third successor, Josiah, did Judah see hope of escaping the Assyrian yoke. He was able briefly to reclaim a large measure of independence and to extend the area under his control. His religious reforms (2 Kings 22-23; 2 Chron. 34-35) removed the last vestige of subservience to Assyria, itself now hard-pressed to survive the attacks of Babylon under Nabopolassar and his allies the Medes. In 612 BC, Nineveh fell, and so the last Assyrian king made his base at Harran, well west of Assyria proper. In 609, Josiah lost his life trying to hinder the attempt by Necho II of Egypt to aid the Assyrians (cf. 2 Kings 23:28-29; 2 Chron. 35:20-24). But he did not die in vain; in 609/8 BC, the Assyrian state ceased to exist, and passed into history. Alongside the Old Testament, our principal source of information on these stirring times is the Babylonian chronicles, a compressed but relatively objective chronological summary of the principal events.[25]

Josiah's successors, however, may well have come to feel that the end of Assyria meant a case of 'out of the frying-pan into the fire'. In 609 BC, Necho II had appointed Jehoiakim as vassal-king in Judah. The new king wasted his threatened country's assets in short-sightedly building a lavish new palace with forced labour (cf. Jeremiah 22:13-19), probably the citadel excavated at Ramat Rahel, just south of Jerusalem.[26] In 605 BC, Nabopolassar's son the crown prince of Babylon, Nebuchdrezzar, heavily defeated Necho II of Egypt at the Battle of Carchemish, and so claimed control of all Syria and Palestine, including Judah whence he took

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hostages. That same year, Nebuchadrezzar II became king of Babylon. Three years Jehoiakim remained his vassal, then rebelled (2 Kings 24:1). The Babylonian chronicle gives us the background to this sudden change. In 601 BC, the Egyptian and Babylonian armies had

[24] See the full treatment in Kitchen, *Third Intermediate Period in Egypt*, 1972, pp. 154-172, and 383-386 (disposing of Macadam's imaginary co-regency between Tirhakah and his predecessor), refuting the false claims of Bright, *History of Israel*, 2nd ed., 1972, p. 298 and n. 9.

[25] Of this period, ed. D. J. Wiseman, *Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings*, 1956; this period and others, now in A. K. Grayson, *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*, 1975, (Texts from Cuneiform Sources, V).

[26] On which, see Aharoni, in D. W. Thomas (ed.), *Archaeology and Old Testament Study*, 1967, pp. 178-183.

clashed with mutually heavy losses, after which the Babylonian army at least needed a considerable refit. But Jehoiakim's fancied independence was not destined to last. Duly refitted, Nebuchadrezzar in 598/7 BC marched west, while Jehoiakim died, leaving the throne—and the crisis—to his son Jehoiachin. In March 597 BC Jerusalem and its new young king capitulated to the Babylonian emperor (2 Kings 24:8-17) who, as the chronicle states, having 'captured the king, he appointed there a king of his own choice, received it (Jerusalem's) heavy tribute, and sent them (dethroned king and tribute) to Babylon', along with many Judean notables. The new king was Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah.

The end came swiftly. Zedekiah could not restrain the unruly faction in Judean politics, and got embroiled in anti-Babylonian intrigue, despite the prophet Jeremiah's warnings. In 589, Judah thus openly revolted, encouraged by the incautious new Egyptian king, Hophra (Apries of the Greek historians). Promptly, the Babylonians invaded Judah, taking cities such as Azekah and Lachish, and doggedly besieging Jerusalem until its final fall in 587/6 BC This time, the fall was final—the Babylonians destroyed everything, leaving Jerusalem a desolation. Archaeological finds illustrate those dark, dramatic days. From the ruins of Lachish, a series of letters in Hebrew on ostraca (sherds) vividly reflect the oncoming Babylonian menace and the tensions in Judah.[27] Mention of people going down to Egypt in Ostracon III reminds one of the luckless prophet Uriah (Jeremiah 26:20 ff.). In Ostracon VI, the princes are accused of 'weakening our hands' (i.e. disheartening the writers), the very phraseology that the Judean princes used against Jeremiah (Jer. 38:4). The use of fire-beacons for signalling is found in both Ostracon IV and Jeremiah (6:1), both employing the same term. At Jerusalem, the Kenyon excavations revealed tumbled masses of destroyed and fallen walls and terracing, the bleak harvest of the Babylonian destruction. More recent work has found in the ruins arrowheads said to have been fired by the Babylonian attackers.

Thus Spoke The Prophets

One of the most remarkable features of Hebrew history, particularly for the five centuries or more from Samuel through to the Babylonian and Persian supremacies, was the role of those men

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and women commonly called 'prophets' (Hebrew *nabi*). Their most remarkable representatives were individuals who spoke out in the name of the God of Israel and Judah to recall their people to the basic norms and values of life as God's people under his covenant. Samuel proclaimed that 'to obey (God) is better than (formal) sacrifices' (1 Sa. 15:22), a theme pursued long afterwards by Hosea: 'I desire mercy and not (mere) sacrifice, the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings' (Hosea 6:6). So also, Micah:'What does the LORD require of you? But to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God' (Micah 6:8). Compassion for the oppressed, wrath against the exploiter, rooted in the character of their God and his covenant which, ever since Sinai, had bound Israel to the vision of a model community under their divine Sovereign—an obligation not relaxed in any way by the interposition of earthly kings as temporal leaders under that greater Sovereign.

[27] Some translations, cf. Albright in Pritchard, *Anc. N. E. Texts*, pp. 321-2, and D. W. Thomas in Thomas (ed.), *Documents from Old Testament Times*, 1958, pp. 212-217; both with further references.

The covenant (cf. chapter 5, above) was attended by promise of blessings for obedience and sanctions of curses (punishments) for disobedience. In this factor is rooted the judgements and blessings pronounced upon Israel and Judah by the prophets. In recalling the people to their supreme sovereign, the prophets in effect invoked sanctions on the people's unfaithfulness as the covenant laid down—and also the vision and promise of blessing on the contrite and returning prodigal. The old nineteenth-century theory claimed that the prophets were originally mere peddlers of unrelieved doom, to which meddling 'editors' added promises of blessing to soften the effect: this distortion takes no account of the basis from which the prophets took their cue, sometimes explicitly using the theme of the LORD's 'dispute' or 'controversy' with his people over their faithlessness (cf. Hosea 4:1-2; 12:2; Isaiah 34:8; Micah 6:1-3). Thus, the prophets spoke out on the basis of a covenant given in the past, in relating to it the condition and behaviour of their people in the present, appealing to a concern for the consequences dependent on a response marked by either obedience or disobedience in the future. All three time-zones belong to the prophets, not just any one of them.

1. ***Ancient Near Eastern Background***

The origins of the biblical prophetic movement have been sought in many directions—but nowhere in the ancient biblical world do we find the equal of a Nathan or an Isaiah or a Jeremiah who, as single individuals (no legions at their command), stood up and boldly reproved kings and princes. All peoples have sought twoway communication between themselves and deity. Speaking to

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deity was, and is, expressed in prayer. To obtain responses from deity, the pagan nations of antiquity developed a series of techniques—principally divination, soothsaying or oracles, and magic (cf. Deut. 18:9-14). In Mesopotamia, for example, whole manuals and text-series are devoted to various classes of omens and their interpretation. In stark contrast, ancient Israel had her 'spokesmen' (probable meaning of *nabi*, the word so often translated 'prophet') who, under an inner conviction and inspiration, spoke out messages from Deity: for the true prophet, neither more nor less than God willed (Deut. 18:15 ff.). It is instructive to note the mutually-exclusive nature of the two forms of activity. Divination, oracles, etc., were the usual rule in Mesopotamia and the Near East, with very little 'prophecy' from spokesmen.[28] But spokesmen (prophets) held the central role in Israel, with divination, etc., dismissed to the sidelines as mere aberrations, false to normative Hebrew faith; magic had no role to play in Old Testament prophecy.

Thus, the amount and relevance of ancient Near-Eastern data on 'prophecy' is necessarily limited. But texts excavated at Ebla, Mari, in Egypt, Mesopotamia and Anatolia do provide some background, illuminating within its modest limits. From Ebla come mentions of two classes of 'prophets', the *mahhu*[29] and the *nabi'utum* related linguistically to Hebrew *nabi*, 'prophet, spokesman' (cf. chapter 3 above). Knowledge of the actual functions of the *nabi'utum* must await publication of the Ebla texts.

[28] A point also observed by Hallo in W. W. Hallo & W. K. Simpson, *The Ancient Near East, A History*, 1971, p. 158 (cf. pp. 158 ff., for Mesopotamian divination).

[29] Sometimes translated 'ecstatic', although the known contexts do not so far bear out the correctness of such a rendering.

From Mari, some twenty-three documents attest 'prophetic' activity (eighteenth century BC), by *mahhu*, 'ecstatics', *apilu* 'respondents', and also prophetesses.[30] Usually they delivered a relatively short message about matters of concern to the king—his offerings to the gods, or funerary oblations to deceased predecessors, or about political events (friends and foes). The messages were sometimes received in dreams or during trances. Sometimes, they carried threat or promise, should the king respectively disregard or heed the messages. Thus, one may already see here—so early in history—the background to the concepts of the requirements of deity coming through spokesmen, enjoining obedience, and with appeal to blessing or sanctions (dependent on future response). But we have here no Nathan or Amos—no Mari prophet dares reprove the king for his personal sins, or to upbraid him because of social abuses and injustice, or to preach judgement on a nation, or blessings on the contrite. The contrast in essential content, therefore, is clearly marked. At best, Mari offers us part of the 'prehistory' of the concept of 'prophecy'.

From Egypt, a further dimension of that prehistory may be ad-

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ded. During the twenty-second to thirteenth centuries BC, at least, the Egyptians considered that sayings about the future should be expected to be fulfilled. One finds occasional references to 'what the ancestors foretold', now fulfilled, while the 'prophecy' of Neferty is actually a pseudo-prophecy, modelled on the preexisting concept of prediction.[31] Also, several Egyptian literary works of the early second millennium BC make their point not by staccato oracles (as at Mari) but by long, even impassioned speeches, including pleas for civil and royal justice—such works include The Eloquent Peasant and the Admonitions of Ipuwer, for example.[32] They are precursors of 'preaching'. Hence, one should not imagine the Hebrew prophets of a millennium later as being limited to a few stumbled ejaculations, but as men well able to speak out at similar length centuries later.

The Hittites (fourteenth/thirteenth centuries BC) used a phrase—literally, 'a man of God '—for someone who might, by omen or dream, give an answer from deity, rather as at Mari earlier on.[33] In Syria-Palestine, legal texts from Ugarit mention 'seers' only in passing.[34] But the Egyptian report of Wenamun mentions a youth at the court of the king of Byblos, who fell into an ecstatic trance and proclaimed that Wenamun was indeed the envoy of the Egyptian god Amun (*c*. 1075 BC).[35] In north Syria (*c*. 780 BC), king Zakur of Hamath had his court seers who gave him messages of deliverance from his god Baal-shamain,[36] rather like the Mari 'prophets' or the paid court 'prophets' of Ahab (1 Kings 22:6 ff.). From first-millennium Mesopotamia, our evidence is limited. Some texts that were once thought to be 'apocalyptic prophecies' are, in fact, ancient attempts to base forecasts of the future upon the pattern of past history.[37] However, brief announcements as from the gods—again, as at Mari long

[30] Translations and notes, cf. (e.g.) H. B. Huffmon, *Biblical Archaeologist* 31 (1968), pp. 101-124; W. L. Moran, *Biblica* 50 (1969), pp. 15-56, and in Pritchard, *Anc. N. E. Texts*, pp. 623-5, 629-32, or *Supplement*, pp. 187-9, 193-6.
[31] Cf. mentions, Kitchen, *Tyndale (House) Bulletin*, Nos. 5/6 (1960), pp. 6-7.
[32] Translations, Wilson, in Pritchard, *Anc. N. E. Texts*, pp. 407-10, 441-6.
[33] Cf. Kitchen, *Old Testament In its Context*, 1973, p. 32, *c*, references.
[34] Cf. Rainey, *Biblical Archaeologist* 28 (1965), p. 123.
[35] Translation, Wilson, in Pritchard, *Anc. N. E. Texts*, p. 26b.
[36] Rosenthal in Pritchard, *op. cit.*, 2nd & 3rd eds., p. 501/655, or *Supplement*, p. 219.
[37] Cf. R. Drews, *Iraq* 37 (1975), pp. 39-55, esp. pp. 48-50.

before—were still addressed to kings and others; so in the time of Esarhaddon king of Assyria, for example.[38]

2. *The Strands of Biblical Prophecy*

Thus, in overall context, the ancient biblical world in third, second, and first millennia BC alike illustrates various features associated with 'prophecy'. These include messages from deity (often in dream or trance), sometimes carrying future sanction or blessing depending on response. Attempts at prediction, and fulfilled predictions occur and (in Egypt) 'preaching' on social ills. However, one finds practically nothing in terms of real personal reproof for sin, no judgement on a nation; here, the Old Testament prophets appear to stand out distinctively, transforming the whole concept of 'prophecy'.

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The strands of prophecy in the Old Testament are parallel and multiple. Besides the central role of spokesmen from God (Deuteronomy 18:15-20) from Moses's time, there is the feature of giving praise to God, often with, or by, music—compare Miriam 'the prophetess' (Exodus 15:20 f.), the elders with Moses (Numbers 11:16-17, 24-29), and Deborah who was both spokeswoman (Judges 4:6 ff.) and praise-leader (Judges 5:1 ff.). Alongside the famed spokesman Samuel, we see groups of prophets singing and music-making in 'prophesying' as Miriam had done (i.e., in praise), in 1 Samuel 10:5-6, 10-11. Obviously, one may speak in such cases of people being in an ecstasy of praise—but very far from being reduced to a mere dervish-like frenzy.[39] Besides those of spokesmen and leaders of praise, a further role of the Hebrew prophets was that of writers. Such was Samuel (1 Sa. 10:25), along with Gad, Nathan and others (cf. 1 Chron. 29:29; 2 Chron. 9:29). Their lineage as firm and fearless spokesmen continued during the rest of the Hebrew monarchy. In contrast stood the 'tied prophets', attached to the royal court as in Ahab's Israel, subservient to the king (1 Kings 22)—these could too easily be 'false prophets', rather than true. From the eighth century BC onwards, the prophets (or their assistants)[40] also wrote what they spoke, and so left a permanent record of their utterances—initially, perhaps, as witnesses for posterity, that their words might be seen to be justified in the outcome. So, we possess the works of that noble company from Amos, Hosea, Isaiah, via Jeremiah and Ezekiel, down to Haggai, Zechariah and Malachi, for example.

Finally, prophets and temple cult deserve passing mention. Once upon a time, it was fashionable in Old Testament studies to assume that prophets and priests were ever deadly rivals, always at loggerheads. Such views were based on mistaken interpretations of prophetic denunciations of *false* cult (e.g., hypocritical substitution of mere formal ceremonial for right living) as if they were condemnations of all cult. But as the ancient Near-Eastern data make clear, there was frequently—from Ebla and Mari to Assyrian imperial times—a close relation to temple-cult with prophets as well as priests. In ancient Israel, some prophets were themselves associated with the temple in Jerusalem, such as Jeremiah (1:1) or Ezekiel (1:3), while others—like Amos (l: l; 7:14-15)—were entirely laymen who had received a call to speak out.

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[38] R. D. Biggs and Moran in Pritchard, *op. cit*., 3rd ed. pp. 605 f., 625 f., or *Supplement*, pp. 169 f., 189 f.
[39] Contrast Saul (I Samuel 18:10; 19:23-24) who probably did go into a frenzy.
[40] Cf. Baruch as scribe for Jeremiah, Jer. 36:4, 18, 27-28, 32.

Kenneth A. Kitchen, *The Bible in its World: The Bible and Archaeology Today*. Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1977. Pbk. pp.168.
