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*The Hebrews*

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Out of the multitude of peoples and cultures that hailed from the teeming lands of the Middle East emerged a people, a group called the Hebrews. This study of those Hebrew people will focus on their cultural setting and on their history from the Patriarchs to the Assyrian and Babylonian captivities. Special emphasis within this historical survey will be given to the historicity of the Hebrew Bible's stories and to some of the modern archaeological finds that relate to the Hebrews' history.

Terminology is an important aspect of the issue at hand. Since the terminology used in describing the land being discussed has been a hotly debated issue connected to the political problems in the land for many years, one must know the origins of the terms used and be ready to employ the most reasonable one.

The Romans coined the name "Palestine" during the time of the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 CE and the second Jewish revolt in 135. It is derived from the name of the Philistines, a group of Aegean invaders who settled in the area currently referred to as the Gaza Strip. The Philistines did not have control over the entire region in question for any amount of time, and the Romans used this renaming as a propagandistic way to remove all vestiges of Jewish identity, thus dealing a strong blow to Jewish nationalism in the area at that time.<sup>1</sup> The term "Palestine" has been used in the realm of Biblical studies for many years, however, only recently has the name become a politically charged term, making its use as a geographic term worthless.

The land originally had many names. The Akkadians called it Amurru, their name for the occupants who are called the Amorites in the Bible, and the Hurrites referred to it as Arrapha. The Egyptians of different dynasties had different names for the land; in the Middle Kingdom it

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<sup>1</sup> Joan Peters, *From Time Immemorial: The Origins of the Arab-Jewish Conflict Over Palestine* (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 138-139.

was called Retennu, and in the Eighteenth Dynasty it was classified geographically as Kharu (land of the Hurrites) and politically, with the land of Syria included, as Canaan (after the Canaanites). Canaan was also the name by which the Hebrews referred to the land when they came to it from captivity in Egypt.<sup>2</sup> Due to the focus of this study, the land will be called Israel, even when speaking of times that the nation did not exist, as a means of retaining congruence.

In addition to this, Jewish tradition requires that the name of G-d, when referring to the G-d of the Hebrews, be spelled without the middle vowel “o”. This is a way of obeying the third commandment of the famous Ten Commandments given to the Hebrews, “You shall not take the name of the L-rd your G-d in vain.”<sup>3</sup> The name of G-d is hwby, which has no translation into English because no one really knows what vowels are to be used, making the name unpronounceable. In worship, the Jewish people use “Ad-nai” (also with the middle vowel “o” removed) or “HaShem” (literally “the Name”) when referring to G-d. This is also done in fulfillment of the Biblical command to not use His name in vain. These guidelines will be followed within this paper when referring to the G-d of the Hebrews.

The Bible has always been the basis for the study of the land of Israel. In the past, most Biblical scholars were maximalists—they held the consensus that the Bible is a reliable guide to the history of ancient Israel, that the stories written within the Bible are true to the greatest extent possible, and that the Biblical record takes precedence over archaeological data being produced if that data seems to stand in opposition. These scholars were experts in Near Eastern history and culture (not just in Biblical studies), and their works were the foundation of Biblical studies for many years.

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<sup>2</sup> Emmanuel Anati, *Palestine Before the Hebrews* (New York: Alfred A Knopf, 1962), 412.

<sup>3</sup> Exodus 20:7.

Within about the last thirty years there has been a distinct change in the approach of some scholars to the text of the Bible. Some minimalist scholars have rejected the historicity of the Biblical stories, even going so far as to claim that Israel did not exist as a nation in the eleventh and tenth centuries BCE. By contrast, these new scholars are not experts in Near Eastern studies, and, for the most part, have an underlying political urge to present a history devoid of Jewish understandings for the purpose of combating the ideas of modern Zionism, not for obtaining a historical picture of the land.<sup>4</sup> These scholars do not unilaterally apply this politically based construct to other cultures. As is the case with Keith Whitelam, it is used as a stepping-stone for spouting off political rhetoric against one group of people without applying the construct to the opposing group.<sup>5</sup> The concepts expressed by these authors are detrimental to the area of Biblical studies because they deny this primary historical text its viability as a resource for study, thus relegating it to the realm of refuse. “Through the teachings of other religious authorities, the Hebrew’s highly exaggerated stories became factual accounts of the larger masses of mankind.” This quote is not from one of the aforementioned minimalist scholars, but from a booklet by Khalid Kishtainy called *Palestine in Perspective*.<sup>6</sup> That this propaganda booklet, published by the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), portrays the same anti-Biblical ideas as the scholars mentioned above is proof that these tactics are not built on good scholarship, but are a politically biased construct that should be surrendered for a more balanced view.

The history of Israel (See Figure 1 on page 21), as with the histories other areas of the world, is quite intricate. Literate civilization, according to most sources, had its beginnings in

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<sup>4</sup> Gary A. Rendsburg, *Down with History, Up with Reading: The Current State of Biblical Studies* (lecture, accessed 11 April, 2001); available from <http://www.arts.mcgill.ca/programs/jewish/30yrs/rendersburg>; Internet.

<sup>5</sup> Keith W. Whitelam, *The Invention of Ancient Israel: The Silencing of Palestinian History* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 23.

<sup>6</sup> Khalid Kishtainy, *Palestine in Perspective: On the Image and reality of Palestine throughout the Ages* (Beirut, Lebanon: PLO Research Center, 1971), 10.

the area known as the Fertile Crescent. This strip of land, encompassing many modern day states in the Middle East, teemed with cultures, peoples and ethnic groups. The earliest of empires appeared in Sumeria, being led by men such as Sargon and Hammurabi. The Egyptian Empire (under the Old Kingdom) began as far back as 3500 BCE, and other cultures and empires grew at the same time, gaining dominance in their regions by conquering the peoples around them.<sup>7</sup> The Amurru were the dominant language-group in Sumeria and Israel in this time, and they continued to endure through the great upheavals that were common. Both the Akkadians (the first great empire in Sumeria, started by Sargon) and the Assyrians associated Canaan with the Amurru.<sup>8</sup> This group of people (who are referred to as the Amorites in the Bible) was one of many groups that settled down in Israel and the surrounding areas, gaining a cultural foothold that was not suppressed for many centuries.

The Hebrew account of the beginnings of mankind is written in the Hebrew Bible or Tanach (Christianity's "Old Testament") where G-d is given credit for the creation of the world and for the events that followed thereafter. All of the Mesopotamian cultures had various myths and legends about the gods and their dealings with mankind. The *Enumah Elish*, a Babylonian epic depicting the creation of the world, echoes the Biblical story of the creation to a large degree. However, there is a major difference between the two tales. The *Enumah Elish* tells the tale as a battle between the gods, a fight of good against evil, but the Biblical story relates the acts of one G-d, making him the originator of the universe *ex nihilo* (out of nothingness).<sup>9</sup>

The *Epic of Gilgamesh* (See Figure 2 on page 22) is a story about a great flood that has caused many scholars to question the Biblical account of Noah and its originality. In the story of Gilgamesh, the hero is searching for divine life. In his search, he comes upon a man named

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<sup>7</sup> Will Durant, *Our Oriental Heritage*, The Story of Civilization, vol. 1 (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1935), 113.

<sup>8</sup> Anati, 363-366.

Utnapishtim. Utnapishtim relates a story to Gilgamesh of the gods' desire to kill mankind, of a great flood that covered the earth, and of Utnapishtim's deliverance from that flood in a boat filled with animals.<sup>10</sup> The key events mentioned in the *Gilgamesh* account are also mentioned in the Biblical account—a great deluge that covered the earth, a boat filled with animals and people, the release of birds to see if it was safe to exit the boat, a rainbow as a sign from the gods, and a sacrifice given to a god in thanksgiving. As with the *Enumah Elish* and the creation account, there are some differences to make mention of in these two accounts. When one thinks pragmatically about the time necessary for the flood to cover the entire earth, the *Gilgamesh* account seems less logical than the Biblical account. In the *Gilgamesh* account, the boat is built in seven days, the rain lasts seven days, and the passengers disembark just seven days later. In the Biblical account, the flood and the receding of the waters takes an entire year—forty days of rain and over 300 days for the waters to recede completely.<sup>11</sup> In addition to this, the story of Noah and of his family is set within the genealogical data listed in the Bible and includes more specifics about the individuals than the *Gilgamesh* epic, giving it more historical authenticity. Many scholars have taken the Biblical account of the flood seriously, to the extent that some scholars and adventurers have traveled to Turkey to the mountain called Ararat, the final resting place of the ark in the Biblical account, in search of its remains. Due to military and political restrictions, no intense search or excavation has been allowed, however there are reports of sightings and some very interesting pictures of a shape thought to be the ark of Noah (see Images 3 and 4 on page 23).<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Grant, *The History of Ancient Israel* (New York: Charles Scribner's sons, 1984), 173.

<sup>10</sup> Alfred J. Andrea and James H. Overfield, ed., *The Human Record, Sources of Global History, vol. 1: to 1700* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2001), 10-11.

<sup>11</sup> Genesis 7-8.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew Kneisler, <http://www.arksearch.com>; Internet.

According to the Bible, after the great flood mankind all spoke the same language. All people moved into “the plain of Shinar” (Sumeria) and built a tower to heaven.<sup>13</sup> The tower described was most likely a ziggurat, a typical type of temple built in this time period. A ziggurat is described as “a tower of three, four or seven stories, surrounded with a winding external stairway, and set back at every stage.”<sup>14</sup> (See Figure 5 on page 24) The account continues that G-d confused the languages of the people, making it impossible for them to continue their work and creating the divisions that caused mankind to disperse from that area to other parts of the world.<sup>15</sup>

The history of the Hebrews themselves begins with Abraham. The details of Abraham’s life are spelled out in the book of Genesis, and these details form the story of a great personality, a man who is seen in all of his humanity. In the account, Abraham deals with issues of childlessness, jealousy, land disputes, and even G-d’s demand for the sacrifice of his son (which G-d recanted on at the last moment).<sup>16</sup> Abraham’s actions and reactions to the events taking place in his life are comparable to the actions and reactions of other men in similar situations, making Abraham come alive in full color.<sup>17</sup> Certain scholars have maintained that Abraham was not an individual, but that he was merely a typological figure in the history of the Hebrews.<sup>18</sup> This issue of Abraham’s historicity is important because Abraham is considered by the Hebrews to be the first Hebrew, and the rejection of him as an individual from their history is a rejection of their history as a people. Abraham is called a Hebrew in Genesis 14:13, and the same reference is applied to his grandson Joseph in Genesis 39:14, 17 and 41:12. This word *yrb*(

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<sup>13</sup> Genesis 11:1-9.

<sup>14</sup> Durant, 133.

<sup>15</sup> Genesis 11:1-9.

<sup>16</sup> Genesis 12:1-25:11.

<sup>17</sup> P. Kyle McCarter, Jr., “The Patriarchal Age: Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,” in *Ancient Israel: A Short History from Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1988), 21.

means “the other side.” “Literally it means that he came from the other side of the Euphrates... Alternatively, the name means that he was a descendant of Eber [the ancestor of Abraham by six generations – c.f. Genesis 11:10-27]. Only Abraham’s descendants are called “Ivrim” for they alone spoke Hebrew, Eber’s language.”<sup>19</sup>

Abraham had two sons, Isaac and Ishmael, and the Bible says that Isaac was chosen to replace Abraham as the head of the family. Ishmael later became the father of the Ishmaelites, who are mentioned throughout the Scriptures. Isaac married Rebecca, and she had two sons, Jacob and Esau. Genesis 25-27 tells how Jacob bought from Esau the birthright that Esau was entitled to as the oldest son and how Jacob later tricked Esau out of the blessing of his dying father. Jacob fled from his enraged brother and settled in Haran, marrying Rachel and Leah. Jacob later had an encounter with G-d, and in that encounter, G-d renamed Jacob “Israel”, which means “he struggles with G-d.”<sup>20</sup> Jacob had twelve sons, and these sons were later the leaders of the twelve tribes of Israel. Jacob’s favorite son was Joseph, but the other brothers hated Joseph. They finally sold Joseph into slavery in Egypt and told Jacob that a lion had killed him. While living in Egypt during the seventeenth century BCE, Joseph gained power in the house of the pharaoh by interpreting a dream that the pharaoh had. Joseph was made the Vizier of Egypt, the position second only to the pharaoh.<sup>21</sup> Eventually, his father and his brothers moved to Egypt and settled there, living in the land of Goshen and prospering under the shadow of Joseph’s authority.

The idea that a Semite could gain the rank of Vizier in Egypt is indicative of the times in which Joseph lived. The Hyksos, a group of nomads from Asia, invaded Egypt in the eighteenth

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<sup>18</sup> Dr. Sally Vaughn, *Hebrews: The God Who Did Wrong?* (lecture, 1 February, 2001).

<sup>19</sup> *Tanach, The Stone Edition*, ed. Rabbi Nosson Scherman (Brooklyn, New York: Mesorah Publications, 1996), note pg. 28.

<sup>20</sup> Genesis 32:28.



century BCE. Though scholars do not know exactly where the Hyksos originated, the cultural remains they left behind give indications as to some possibilities. The war chariot was a distinctive of the Hyksos culture, as was the spiral or sun design used on pottery and in other forms of art, and the tracing of these distinctive traits lead most scholars to the conclusion that the Hyksos originated somewhere in the Eurasian or Asian plains. The first flow of the Hyksos, or a related people, into Israel was gradual, with a slow assimilation into the other groups of settlers and an infusion of the land with their culture; however, the second group of Hyksos invaders who came in the eighteenth century BCE were definitely a single body, a unified whole, coming to conquer and control the land they desired.<sup>22</sup> Their conquest moved into Egypt, where they assumed the throne and assimilated into the Egyptian culture to become rulers of the empire. This was the time period in which Joseph found himself thrust into the position of Vizier. The Hyksos ruled Egypt and Canaan for almost two hundred years, finally being chased out by the Egyptians in an empire-wide uprising. It was at this time that the Hebrews were enslaved in Egypt, having been placed under the rule of a new pharaoh, “who did not know about Joseph.”<sup>23</sup>

According to Exodus 12:40, the Hebrews’ slavery in Egypt lasted 430 years. It ended with the Exodus, an event described in the book by the same name in the Hebrew Bible. According to Numbers 14:33-34, the Hebrews (also known by this time as the Israelites, or the children of Israel) went to Mount Sinai and received the Torah, or Law, from G-d. The Torah is a covenant between G-d and Israel that closely relates to the Hittite suzerainty treaties of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries BCE.<sup>24</sup> With this understanding of the structure of the Torah,

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<sup>21</sup> Durant, 162.

<sup>22</sup> Anati, 392-401.

<sup>23</sup> Exodus 1:8.

<sup>24</sup> Ariel and D’vorah Berkowitz, *Take Hold* (Littleton, Colorado: Firstfruits of Zion, 1998), 26.

it is no surprise that it also bears a unique resemblance to the law Code of Hammurabi (See Figure 6 on page 24) from the eighteenth century BCE.<sup>25</sup> After receiving the Torah from the Lord, the Israelites wandered in the deserts of the Sinai Peninsula and the Negev for forty years, after which they entered into the Land of Israel to conquer it.

Much is debated about the origins of the Hebrews, and a large amount of ink and blood have been spilled in the search for those origins. Some scholars place the origins of the Hebrews as a people during this time period and not at the time of Abraham. A group of people known as the *habiru* or *hapiru* is mentioned in a set of historical letters from the fourteenth century BCE in Egypt known as the Amarna letters (See Figure 7 on page 25). Within these letters the *habiru* are portrayed as a group of marauders who continually vex the city-states in Israel,<sup>26</sup> and some scholars say that these *habiru* are the Hebrews or a group closely related to them. The scholarship of the maximalists in the last generation based the historical record of the Hebrews on the outline made within the Hebrew Scriptures. This maximalist position of the Bible as worthy of historical merit, contrasted with the newer positions of the Bible as a mismatched group of propagandistic analogies, have led historians to differing conclusions on both the origins of the Hebrews and on their conquest of Israel. Two of the views of the Hebrew origins are N. P. Lemche's "evolutionary Israel" theory, and Keith Whitelam and R. B. Coote's "shift in land-use" theory.

Lemche's "evolutionary Israel" theory claims that beginning in the middle of the fourteenth century BCE the *habiru* lived in the hill country between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea. Lemche argues that these people were "a para-social element...[consisting

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<sup>25</sup> Anati, 364.

<sup>26</sup> Nahum M. Sarna, "Israel in Egypt: The Egyptian Sojourn and the Exodus," in *Ancient Israel: A Short History from Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1988), 38-39.

of] runaway former non-free peasants or copyholders from the small city-states in the plains and valleys of Palestine.”<sup>27</sup> Based on the archaeological remains of many Early Iron Age settlements in the hill country that were not around in the Late Bronze Age,<sup>28</sup> Lemche’s hypothesis states that these *habiru* were a Canaanite people that settled down in the hill country and “sedentarized”, creating the group later known as the Hebrews.

Whitelam and Coote’s theory assumes basically the same structure, with one exception. They claim that it was not a specific group of “para-social” people who inhabited the hill country during this time period, but that it was merely a shift in the use of land and in settlement patterns of the inhabitants of the various city-states in the area. These and other theories have been explained and critiqued, revisited and revised by the historical community for almost fifteen years; however, in the light of some archaeological discoveries, such as the Merneptah stela, they begin to break apart.

The Merneptah stela (See Figure 8 on page 25) is a record of the conquests of the pharaoh Merneptah in Israel, and within the closing hymn of its narrative lays the earliest mention of “Israel” as a collective entity.<sup>29</sup>

The princes are prostrate, saying “Peace!”  
 Not one raises his head among the Nine Bows.  
 Lying broken is Tehenu;  
 Hatti is pacified;  
 Plundered is Canaan with every evil.  
 Carried off is Ashkelon;  
 Seized upon is Gezer;  
 Yanoam is made as that which does not exist.  
*Israel* is laid waste,  
 His seed is not;  
 Hurru is become a widow because of Egypt!

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<sup>27</sup> Quoted in John J. Brimson, “Merneptah’s Israel and Recent Theories of Israelite Origins,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 49 (1991): 15.

<sup>28</sup> Brimson, 4.

<sup>29</sup> Michael G. Hasel, “Israel in the Merneptah Stela,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 296 (1994): 46.

All lands together are pacified;  
 Everyone who was restless has been bound.<sup>30</sup>

The most interesting aspect of this stela is that fact that it was written during the first few years of Merneptah's reign, sometime around the year 1210 BCE, placing it almost two hundred years before the unification of the Israelites into the Kingdom of Israel under Saul, David, and Solomon.<sup>31</sup> Most scholars agree that the *Israel* mentioned in the stela refers to the Israel in the Hebrew Bible in some way, though some scholars, such as Whitelam, deny this claim and attempt, with little real argument, to disprove it. The hieroglyphics of the text have been translated and retranslated in an attempt to place the reference to *Israel* in its original context, and the discussion continues as to what type of people-group the term *Israel* really refers.

One of the best hypotheses arrived at to-date was published in 1994 by Michael Hasel. Hasel makes a strong case for *Israel* referring to a "socioethnic entity within the region of Canaan the same way in which the three city-states [mentioned before *Israel* in the hymn] are sociopolitical entities in the same geographical region."<sup>32</sup> A point of interest to make here is that though both are written in Egyptian hieroglyphics, the word used in the Merneptah stela is actually *Israel*, not *habiru*, the word used in the Amarna letters. This bespeaks a difference between the *habiru* and the inhabitants of the hill country being called *Israel*.

Hasel speaks at length on the determinative used before the words for the city-states and before the word *Israel*. Determinatives are hieroglyphic symbols that give a word the meaning that the scribe wants it to have, a symbol that produces the desired connection between the word and its context. The determinative used before the names of the city-states is that of a city-state, land, or region, thus putting those names in context with the sociopolitical entities that they

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<sup>30</sup> Brimson, 21.

<sup>31</sup> Brimson, 13.

<sup>32</sup> Hasel, 51.

were—cities that controlled the lands around them. The determinative used before *Israel* is the one used to describe a socioethnic entity.<sup>33</sup> Gosta Ahlstrom, Diana Edelman,<sup>34</sup> and Whitelam<sup>35</sup> dismiss this determinative as insignificant and inconclusive, saying that it is most likely a scribal error; however, Hasel makes a great point in defense of his theory. “The overall consistency in the use of determinatives [within the rest of the stela] with this one exception argues for the original intention of meaning for the respective determinatives.”<sup>36</sup>

The Merneptah stela provides much evidence to refute the origination theories of Lemche, Whitelam, and Coote, placing the socioethnic entity called *Israel*, in connection with the city-states mentioned, as a valid and powerful force in the area, powerful enough to be mentioned on a stela of a pharaoh in the great empire of Egypt. This significant force could not have been a result of either of the origination theories’ inhabitants of the hill country because the appearance of the new settlements, upon which these theories are based, is dated later than the Merneptah stela. This means that the *Israel* in the Merneptah stela cannot be the result of the resedentarization of groups of Canaanites, as the theories claim, but that *Israel* already existed before those new settlements were founded.<sup>37</sup>

The Merneptah stela corroborates the events of the conquest of Canaan as laid out by the Book of Judges which “preserves a tradition that the land of Canaan was possessed over a long period of time in operations that involved individual tribes or groups of related tribes acting independently.”<sup>38</sup> As was mentioned above, great wars and migrations occurred in the Fertile Crescent during the changeover of power between empires. Every time the Egyptian Empire

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<sup>33</sup> Hasel, 51.

<sup>34</sup> Gosta Ahlstrom and Diana Edelman, “Merneptah’s Israel” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 44 (1985): 61.

<sup>35</sup> Whitelam, 228.

<sup>36</sup> Hasel, 52.

<sup>37</sup> Brimson, 19.

changed dynasties or had an interregnum period, their hegemony over the land of Canaan dwindled. This permitted the growth of independent city-states and the group *Israel* before the reign of Merneptah, and it also allowed the growth of the Kingdom of Israel under David and Solomon.

The period of time related in the Book of Judges, a time when “every man did what was right in his own eyes,”<sup>39</sup> led into the time of one of Israel’s greatest prophets, Samuel. Samuel led the Israelites for many years, but the Israelites wanted a king. The Philistines had been attacking and prodding into the land that the Israelites had captured, and the people were afraid. The real reason that they wanted a king was to win great victories against the Philistines and to bring unity to the twelve tribes of Israel. Saul was the first king of the Israelites. He ruled Israel in a time of expansion and war, and was killed in a battle with the Philistines at Mount Gilboa.<sup>40</sup> After Saul’s death, David became the king of Israel, and his reign of forty years is known as the “golden age” of Israel.<sup>41</sup>

David was a shepherd in the hills of Bethlehem, but due to his valiant fighting in a battle with the Philistines under Goliath, he became Saul’s son-in-law. David brought real peace and stability to the kingdom by subduing the Philistines, Amorites, Moabites, and Edomites, extending the domination of Israel in the region from the Red Sea to the Euphrates River (See Figure 9 on page 26). One of the most important developments during the time of David was the capture of Jerusalem. Up until this time, the Jebusites controlled the city of Jerusalem, and it had been declared an impenetrable fortress. After a three-year siege, the city fell to David’s army,

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<sup>38</sup> Joseph Callaway, “The Settlement in Canaan: The Period of the Judges,” in *Ancient Israel: A Short History from Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1988), 54.

<sup>39</sup> Judges 21:25.

<sup>40</sup> 1 Samuel 31.

<sup>41</sup> Andre Lemaire, “The United Monarchy: Saul, David and Solomon,” in *Ancient Israel: A Short History from Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology

and David made it the capitol of his kingdom.<sup>42</sup> David is described as “a man after G-d’s own heart,”<sup>43</sup> and his religious reforms were extensive. Within Jerusalem, David had plans to build a Temple to the L-rd, so he bought the threshing floor of a Jebusite resident of the city and built an altar there to HaShem.<sup>44</sup> That site is where the Temple was built by Solomon and where the Al-Aqsa mosque stands today.

Toward the end of his reign David fought rivalries within his own family, at times running from his eldest son Absalom to avoid being killed. After Absalom died in battle, the king faced other problems, but his kingdom stayed secure. Before his death, David appointed Solomon, his youngest son, king over Israel. Solomon’s kingdom was geographically the same as his father’s, but he made alliances with many other nations and increased the administration and the trade of the kingdom. The Solomon’s strength at the beginning of his kingdom was seen when the pharaoh of Egypt at that time was fearful enough that he did not take advantage of the change in power to fight Israel. Solomon consolidated his kingdom by putting to death the other people who could threaten him, including his older brother Adonijah, David’s chief general Joab, and a priest who had been a supporter of Adonijah in his quest to take the throne from Solomon.<sup>45</sup> During Solomon’s reign, great building projects were engaged, including a total renovation of the city of Jerusalem. Solomon built the Temple that his father had envisioned (See Figure 10 on page 27), thus making a permanent place of worship for the Israelites. However, Solomon also built temples to the gods of his wives, allowing syncretism and idolatry to have a foothold in the kingdom. Solomon’s reign was one of peace and great economic gain, but after his death the kingdom broke apart.

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Society, 1988), 92.

<sup>42</sup> 2 Samuel 5:6-10.

<sup>43</sup> Acts 13:22.

<sup>44</sup> 2 Samuel 24:18-25.

The kingdom of Israel divided into two parts around 931 BCE (See Figure 11 on page 28). Though he was crowned the king over the two Southern tribes of Judah, Solomon's son Rehoboam was not crowned king over the ten Northern tribes of Israel because he did not attend the tribal convocation where he was to be crowned for fear of assassination. That opened the door for Jeroboam, a rebel who had fled from Solomon, to take control of the Northern tribes and set up his own kingdom. The two kingdoms were never to become one again. Shalmaneser V, a leader of the fast-growing Assyrian empire, captured Israel and sacked its capitol in Samaria in 722 BCE. Reportedly, he deported 27, 290 Israelite captives to other lands,<sup>46</sup> putting an end to the Northern kingdom of Israel. The Southern kingdom of Judah was attacked by the Assyrians under Sennacherib at the end of the eighth and beginning of the seventh centuries BCE; however, the army was reportedly decimated by a great disaster that the Israelites reported as a miracle, and the Assyrians retreated to their homeland.<sup>47</sup> Judah lasted until 586 BCE, when, after a two-and-a-half year siege, the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar finally destroyed Jerusalem, burning it to the ground.<sup>48</sup>

Some archaeological discoveries have shed light on the divided kingdom of Israel. The Mesha stela is an account by Mesha, a king of Moab in the ninth century BCE, of his deliverance of Moab from the rule of Judah under the king Omri. The Prism of Sennacherib (See Figure 12 on page 29) is an account of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah and his defeat of the fortified cities of Hezekiah, the King of Judah. No mention is made of Sennacherib's attempt to defeat

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<sup>45</sup> Lemaire, 98.

<sup>46</sup> Siegfried H. Horn, "The Divided Monarchy: The Kingdoms of Judah and Israel," in *Ancient Israel: A Short History from Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Washington, D.C.: Biblical Archaeology Society, 1988), 130-131.

<sup>47</sup> Horn, 136.

<sup>48</sup> Horn, 147-148.



Jerusalem, as it was customary for the Assyrians to leave their defeats out of the official records.<sup>49</sup>

One of the most important discoveries of recent years is the Tel Dan stela, (See Figure 13 on page 30) uncovered in the city of Dan in the area of the Northern kingdom in 1993. “Until the stela’s discovery, the formation of the state of Israel could not be dated later than the mid-ninth century BCE, because Assyrian epigraphs of the 850s and 840s BCE and the roughly contemporary Mesha stela mentioned kings of Israel, some (Ahab, Omri, Jehu, and, later, Joash) by name.” It is too early to really know the full extent of the effect that the Tel Dan stela will have on the historical studies of ancient Israel, but some preliminary conclusions have been reached. The best dating of the stela places its origins close to the end of the ninth century BCE. Ben-Hadad II, who was the king of Damascus at that time, most likely had it written in his honor. Ben-Hadad II conquered Dan during this time period; however, he lost it again as his kingdom was taken over by Assyria and he was forced to fortify his northern border in defense. The stela was incorporated into a wall in Dan by an Israelite king thirty to forty years after it was made. One of the most important questions that the stela answers is the reality of David as an historical figure. There are no other epigraphic remains that mention David or his dynasty, but the Tel Dan stela specifically mentions “the house of David” within its text.<sup>50</sup> These discoveries have led scholars great lengths in reconstructing the histories of the divided kingdoms and in corroborating the writings of the Bible as true history.

The Hebrews (now known as the Jews) have survived for almost four thousand years. They are one of the oldest people-groups in the world, and their language is the only “living”

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<sup>49</sup> Horn, 135-136.

<sup>50</sup> Baruch Halpern, “The Stela from Dan: Epigraphic and Historical Considerations,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 296 (1994): 63-74.

Canaanite language.<sup>51</sup> When compared against the empires of the world, whether ancient, classical, or modern, the Hebrews never had a great empire. The golden age of David and Solomon was the high point, and even that “empire” was only strong due to the powerlessness of the empires around it.<sup>52</sup> It has been mentioned by some writers that the Hebrews did not leave much of their own material culture in the land, but that they relied on the buildings and arts of those around them to give their kingdom substance.<sup>53</sup> While it is true that the Hebrews did not leave behind the great pyramids of Egypt, the glory of Greece, the grandeur of Rome, or the great invasions of Europe and Asia of the Barbarian hordes,<sup>54</sup> through their moral and religious teachings, they have had an even greater impact on the world than these civilizations. The Hebrews impacted the world forever with their novel ideas of justice, love, and grace, with their concept of right and wrong, and with their staunch belief in one all-powerful G-d who created the world and its inhabitants and who watches lovingly over the human race.

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<sup>51</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Internet ed., available from <http://www.britannica.com>.

<sup>52</sup> Durant, 113.

<sup>53</sup> Kishtainy, 30-31.

<sup>54</sup> Vaughn (lectures, Spring, 2001).

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