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THE DIVIDED MONARCHY

By

FATHER FELIX, O.F.M.Cap., L.S.S.



Κοινητὸν τῆς ἱερῆς Κατοικίας ἡ ἀληθινὴ
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INTRODUCTION.

(3 Kings, 12; 2 Paralipomenon, 10).

After the death of Solomon the Hebrew nation was divided into two rival kingdoms—the Northern Kingdom, or Israel; and the Southern Kingdom, or Juda. (1) This schism was the divine chastisement for Solomon's sins; but natural causes led up to it. These were firstly, an old rivalry between the strong and powerful tribe of Ephraim and the ruling tribe of Juda; and secondly, the discontent created by the tyranny of Solomon.

THE SCHISM.

Roboam, the son of Solomon, succeeded his father and was crowned in Jerusalem. He went to Sichem in the tribe of Ephraim to be proclaimed king by the northern tribes. Jeroboam came to Sichem for the occasion at the head of a deputation to ask for a lessening of the heavy taxation. Roboam told the delegates that he would give them an answer after three days. Meantime he consulted first the counsellors of his father—old and prudent men, well acquainted with the problems of government; and then the dissolute young men who were his own companions. The old men advised him to give a suave reply to the delegation and thus win the people to his side by diplomacy. The young men gave the contrary advice. Roboam, to his undoing, accepted the advice of the young men; and when after the three days the delegates returned Roboam answered them roughly: "*My father laid upon you a heavy yoke, which I will make heavier: my father beat you with scourges, but I will beat you with scorpions*" (2 Paralipomenon 10, 14).

This infuriated the people of the northern tribes, and they rejected the rule of Roboam: "*What portion have we*

(1) Hitherto *Israel* (the *Israelites*) was used of the whole Hebrew nation. From now onward *Israel* means the Northern Kingdom of ten tribes; as distinct from *Juda*, the Southern Kingdom—comprising the tribes of Juda, Benjamin and Levi.

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in David? or what inheritance in the son of Isai? Go home to thy dwellings, O Israel, now David look to thy own house" (3 Kings 12, 16). Later when the king's minister went to Israel to collect the tribute they broke out in open revolt and stoned him to death; and Roboam had to take refuge in Jerusalem to escape violence. There he prepared to make war on the rebellious tribes; but a prophet was sent to forbid him—the schism was the will of God.

Jeroboam was now crowned king of the northern kingdom. The schism was an accomplished fact. The result was disastrous; the Hebrew people were "a house divided against itself," and both religion and their national independence suffered.

For this period (932-586 B.C.) the sources are 3 Kings 12-22; 4 Kings; 2 Paralipomenon 10-36; Judith. For the social, religious and political conditions we have much information in the books of the prophets: Isaias; Jeremias; Osee; Joel; Amos; Abdias; Jonas; Micheas; Nahum; Habacuc; Sophonias.

CHAPTER I.

THE KINGDOM OF ISRAEL: 932-721 B.C.

(3 Kings 13-22; 4 Kings 1-17; 2 Paralipomenon 11-32; Amos; Osee; Jonas).

In the history of the Northern Kingdom (Israel) we have nine dynasties and nineteen kings for two centuries. The Books of Kings and Paralipomenon treat this period very briefly; from the end of Solomon's reign they are merely a digest of ancient official chronicles long since lost—*The Book of the Words of the Days of the Kings of Israel*, and *The Book of the Words of the Days of the Kings of Juda*.

(1) JEROBOAM I, 932-911 B.C., made Sichem his capital. Continual strife between him and the kings of Juda weakened both kingdoms.

(2) NADAB, son of Jeroboam, 911-910 B.C., continued his father's evil policy, until he was slain by Baasa.

(3) BAASA, of the tribe of Issachar, 910-887 B.C., slew every member of the former dynasty in order to secure to himself the kingship. He removed the capital of the kingdom from Sichem to Thersa; continued the war against Juda; and recaptured the cities which Jeroboam had lost.

(4) ELA, son of Baasa, 887-886 B.C., was slain by Zambri, a captain of his army.

(5) ZAMBRI, 886 B.C., reigned for only seven days; but in that week he put to death every member of Baasa's family—the usual action of usurpers in those times. The people chose for king the commander of the army—Amri (or Omri). Zambri besieged in Thersa and seeing his cause lost, took his own life.

(6) AMRI (or Omri) of the tribe of Issachar, 883-872 B.C., had a rival for the kingship in Thebni; and for four years until the death of Thebni there was a civil war for the succession. Amri was a great ruler; he is called 'the second founder of Israel;' and in the Assyrian monuments Israel

is known as 'the land of Omri.' He made an alliance with Phoenicia; recaptured Moab; developed the resources of the country; and encouraged commerce. He built the city of Samaria (so called from Semer, the original owner of the site); and made it the capital of the kingdom.

(7) ACHAB, son of Amri, 872-854 B.C., was married to a Phoenician princess, Jezabel—a vicious and domineering woman. Through her influence the horrible cult of Baal-Melqart (the Phoenician god) was introduced into Israel; the worship of the True God was banned, and His prophets slain.

THE PROPHET ELIAS.

In this reign the true religion would have disappeared entirely from Israel were it not for the intervention of the prophets; and this history of strife, bloodshed and irreligion is agreeably interrupted here by the story of Elias, and of Eliseus, his disciple and successor. These chapters (3 Kings 17-22; 4 Kings 1-8) are among the most beautiful in the Old Testament.

Elias is introduced abruptly in 3 Kings 17, 1, reproaching Achab for his crimes and threatening the divine vengeance. Then, as the prophet had announced, a drought came on the country, and famine as a consequence. Elias was commanded by God to go to the torrent Carith (east of the Jordan) where ravens brought him food. When this stream went dry he was commanded to go to Sarepta in Phoenicia.

Meanwhile Achab had searched in vain for Elias in order to put him to death. At the end of the drought (three years and six months) Elias presented himself before the king. Again he denounced the idolatry which was widespread in Israel, and he challenged the prophets of Baal: let two bullocks be made ready for sacrifice—one by the prophets of Baal, the other by Elias; and the god who would send fire to consume his victim would prove himself to be the true God. The people were assembled on Mount Carmel to see this contest. The prophets of Baal prepared their victim and called on their god without effect. Elias then made ready his victim and called on Jahwe; and at

once fire from heaven consumed the victim on the altar. The people prostrated themselves and confessed: "*The Lord* (i.e. Jahwe) *he is God*" (3 Kings 18, 39). Elias slew all the prophets of Baal.

Elias had to flee the country from the anger of Jezabel. At Bersabee he rested under a juniper tree, and there exhausted from fear and fatigue he prayed to God that he might die. He then fell asleep to be awakened by an angel in human form who provided him with bread and water; and this miraculous food sustained him for forty days while he journeyed to Mount Horeb. Here he lived in a cave until the divine command sent him back to Israel. He was commanded to anoint Hazael, general of the Syrian army, king of Syria instead of Benadad II.; Jehu, king of Israel instead of Achab; and Eliseus of Abelmeula (near Bethsan) to succeed himself as prophet.

Elias went to the Jordan valley where he found Eliseus ploughing with a team of oxen. When he was informed of the divine mission committed to him Eliseus left his home and became the devoted servant and inseparable disciple of Elias.

For three years there was peace between Israel and Syria. (1) Then for the first time since the schism the two Hebrew kingdoms (under Josaphat of Juda and Achab of Israel) united to take for Israel the city of Ramoth Galaad from the Syrians. The Hebrew armies were defeated, and Achab was slain.

(8) OCHOZIAS, son of Achab, 855-854 B.C., continued the evil policy of his father.

(9) JORAM, his brother, succeeded Ochozias who died without issue, 853-843 B.C. Early in this reign Elias was taken from the earth in a fiery chariot leaving to Eliseus his "*double spirit*" (4 Kings 2, 9), i.e. the eldest son's double share of his power (Deuteronomy 21, 17).

(1) From Assyrian documents we know that the kings of Syria, Israel and ten neighbouring countries were allied against Salmanasar II of Assyria—their common foe.

ELISEUS.

Eliseus worked many miracles. He struck the Jordan with the mantle of Elias and a dry passage was made in the river. He multiplied oil for a widow who was in debt. He raised from the dead the son of a woman of Sunam. During a famine he multiplied bread to feed the people. He made the head of an axe to float in the Jordan. Several times he saved the army of Israel from destruction, and Samaria from capture. After his death a corpse buried in the prophet's tomb was restored to life. But the best known of his miracles is the cure of the leper Naaman, commander of the Syrian army. (1)

Mesa, king of Moab, revolted from Israel and refused to pay the tribute imposed by Amri. He also attacked Juda. Joram made an alliance with Juda and Edom, and their united armies went against Moab. They travelled southward by way of the Dead Sea to avoid the Syrians in the north. In the first encounter Mesa was defeated and the allies besieged him in Kir-Charosheth (modern Kerak), his capital. The biblical narrative is very brief at this point; for some reason not stated the allies retired without reducing Moab. The Moabite Stone (2) sheds light on the matter, however; 'Amri king of Israel oppressed Moab for long. His son Achab succeeded him and he also said: I will oppress Moab. And Amri had taken the land of Medaba . . . and I recaptured it. (3) The campaign, therefore, ended in a reverse for Israel.

Joram re-captured the city of Ramoth Galaad, but when Hazael became king of Syria he renewed the war. Joram was wounded in an encounter near Ramoth Galaad, and he returned to Jezrahel leaving Jehu in command of the

(1) Our Lord refers to this in St. Luke 4, 7.

(2) Also called the Stele of Mesa; discovered in 1868 at Dibon, east of the Dead Sea. It is a block of basalt inscribed with thirty-four lines of writing in a language closely akin to Hebrew, giving the chief events in Mesa's reign.

(3) LA BIBLE ET LES DÉCOUVERTES MODERNES. Vol. IV., pages 52-54.

army. Eliseus sent one of his disciples to the camp to anoint Jehu king of Israel.

(10) JEHU, 843-816 B.C., was acknowledged as king by his fellow officers; and immediately he set out for Jezrahel in his chariot (a distance of forty-five miles), where he slew Joram; Jezabel (the queen mother); the family and supporters of Joram; Ochozias, the king of Juda, and all his brothers. He was a daring man and an astute ruler, but cruel in the extreme. He might have been a successful king, but the tide of political events was against him. Hazael II of Syria took all the country beyond the Jordan; while Salmanasar II of Assyria boasts in his Annals that in the eighteenth year of his reign he received tribute from 'Jaua habal Humri,' i.e. Jehu, the son (successor) of Amri.

(11) JOACHAZ, son of Jehu, 816-800 B.C., inherited a wretched kingdom. The Assyrians were occupied in Media—Samsi-Adad IV, son of Salmanasar II, records no campaign against Syria—and Hazael had a free hand. He overran Israel, and made it subject to Syria.

(12) JOAS, son of Joachaz, 802-787 B.C., succeeded. So low had the power of Israel fallen that when Eliseus died (about 790 B.C.) bands of Moabite raiders could raid the country with impunity. Joas, however, reorganised the army. Benadad III had succeeded his father Hazael in Damascus. He was a weak ruler and Joas won three victories over Syria, and recovered the cities in Palestine which his predecessors had lost. He also won a victory over the king of Juda at Bethsames; took Jerusalem and broke down portion of the wall; and carried off large booty including the Temple treasure.

(13) JEROBOAM II, son of Joas, 787-748 B.C., continued the war against Syria, and recovered the trans-Jordanic territory of Israel including Moab and Ammon, thus restoring the kingdom to its original extent. Syria became a province of Assyria, and there began a period of prosperity for Israel. This in turn led to luxury and injustice among the people, who soon were divided into the very rich and the very poor. The prophet AMOS preached

against these social vices; but he was first despised and then expelled (Amos 8, 10). At the end of the reign the prophet OSEE preached against the neglect of religion and the lax morals of the people (Osee 4, 1-2); and he boldly condemned the foolish foreign policy of the king who formed alliances with the heathen empires of Assyria and Egypt (Osee 7, 11). Both prophets foretold the destruction of the kingdom, and the exile. During this reign also the prophet JONAS was sent to preach in "the great city," i.e. Ninive, the capital of Assyria.

(14) ZACHARIAS, son of Jeroboam II, reigned only six months in 748 B.C. He was slain by Sellum, a native of Galaad.

(15) SELUM became king in 747 B.C.; but after one month he in turn was slain by Manahem.

(16) MANAHEM ruled 747-738 B.C. During his reign the king of Assyria (1) invaded Israel; and Manahem had to levy a thousand talents of silver to be paid to Assyria.

(17) PHACEIA, son of Manahem, 737-736 B.C., was slain by his minister, Phacee.

(18) PHACEE, 735-730 B.C., joined with the kings of Philistia, Syria, Sidon, Tyre and Arabia in a league against Theglathphalasar III of Assyria. Two rival political factions arose in Israel—one in favour of Egypt, the other in favour of Assyria. Theglathphalasar defeated the league in 734 B.C.; captured Syria and put the king, Rasin, to death; fortified the southern cities of Moab, Ammon, Edom and Juda against Egyptian aggression; captured the northern and trans-Jordan territory of Israel, and deported the inhabitants to Assyria. Osee, the leader of the pro-Assyrian faction, slew Phacee; and for his reward he was made king of Israel—the last king of the northern kingdom, a vassal of Assyria.

(19) OSEE, 730-722 B.C., paid the tribute imposed by Assyria until the death of Theglathphalasar III. Then he revolted and allied himself with Sua (Shabaka), king of

(1) This King's name, Phul, gave trouble for long. It is now established, however, that Phul (Pulu of the monuments) is simply a title of Theglathphalasar III (745-727 B.C.)

Egypt. But the new king of Assyria, Salmanasar IV, promptly sent his general, Sargon, with an army against Israel before help could come from Egypt. Osee was captured and Sargon laid siege to Samaria. After a siege of two years Samaria was taken at the end of 722 or the beginning of 721 B.C.; Israel was made a province of the Assyrian empire; the people were exiled. During the siege Salmanasar IV died, and Sargon became king of Assyria.

CHAPTER II.

THE KINGDOM OF JUDA: (A) ROBOAM TO AHAZ.

(3 Kings 14-22; 4 Kings 1-16; 2 Paralipomenon 11-28; Abdias; Joel; Isaias 1-19; Micheas).

The Southern Kingdom (Juda) was of small extent. Also its territory comprised the mountainous and desert portion of Palestine. But it had advantages over Israel. Its capital was Jerusalem—the Holy City, the seat of the Temple. Its kings were the lineal descendants of David; (1) and one dynasty ruled it to the end, which circumstance saved it from the frequent and violent changes of government which brought such turmoil to Israel. Lastly, its natural isolation left it less exposed to pagan influences than was Israel in the north.

From 932 B.C. until its destruction in 586 B.C. Juda was ruled by nineteen kings and one queen.

(1) ROBOAM, son of Solomon, 932-916 B.C., was a vicious man and a weak ruler. Sesac(2) invaded Juda; and captured and plundered Jerusalem in 928 B.C.

(1) These kings of Juda, with some omissions, are mentioned in the genealogy of Our Lord: St. Matthew 1, 7-11.

(2) Sesac I (in Egyptian—Sheshonk I), founder of the twenty-second dynasty, is the first Pharaoh whose name is given in the Bible. In 1828 Champollion, the French Egyptologist, discovered at Karnak a stone image of Sesac I representing him with a hundred and fifty prisoners of war. A legend on the shield of each captive gives his name; and on the twenty-ninth of these shields is inscribed YUTAHA MELEK—King of Juda. (LECTURES ON SCIENCE AND REVEALED RELIGION. By Nicholas Cardinal Wiseman. Dublin, 1866. Lecture the Ninth, page 357).

(2) ABIA, son of Roboam, 915-913 B.C., was a better ruler than his father. He opposed Jeroboam of Israel and defeated him in battle.

(3) ASA, son of Abia, 912-872 B.C., was a good king. He put down idolatry and promoted the true religion. He fortified the country and strengthened the army so that when "*Zara the Ethiopian*" (2 Paralipomenon 14, 9) invaded Juda with an immense army he was defeated by Asa and forced to retreat.

(4) JOSAPHAT, son of Asa, 871-847 B.C., was a good king, zealous for religion. He reduced the Philistines and Arabians to tribute; and when the Moabites and the Ammonites invaded Juda they were defeated at Engaddi.

(5) JORAM, son of Josaphat, 847-843 B.C., had as queen Athalia, daughter of Achab; and her influence over him was for evil. The Edomites revolted and set up an independent kingdom; the Philistines and Arabians invaded Juda, plundered Jerusalem, and killed all the king's family except Ochozias, his youngest son. Many scholars think that these events are the historical setting of the short BOOK OF ABDIAS. (1)

(6) OCHOZIAS (also called Joachaz), son of Joram, 843 B.C., a bad king, was slain by Jehu, king of Israel, before he had been a year on the throne.

ATHALIA, the queen mother, now usurped the rule of Juda: 843-837 B.C.; and after the manner of the time proceeded to slay all the family of the late king. Josabeth, sister of Ochozias and wife of Joiada, the high priest, succeeded in rescuing Joas, the infant son of Ochozias, from the general slaughter. After six years of Athalia's misrule Joiada organised a movement in the army and among the levites in favour of Joas. The conspiracy succeeded; Joas, now a boy of seven years, was crowned King in the Temple; and Athalia was slain. Joiada put an end to the idolatrous cult of Baal which Athalia had introduced.

(1) Hebrew tradition identifies this prophet with the Abdias of 3 Kings 18, 3. But many modern writers (notably Van Hoonacker) put the Book of Abdias later than 586 B.C.

(7) JOAS, son of Ochozias, 837-798 B.C., began well. During the reign of Athalia the worship of the True God had been proscribed, and the Temple was in a sad state of disrepair. The young king encouraged Joiada to restore it and to establish again the sacrifices and ritual prescribed by the Law. But when Joiada died the king came under the evil influence of the princes who were idolators. God sent prophets to bring the king and his counsellors back to the true religion. Their preaching, however, bore no fruit; and when finally Zacharias, the son of Joiada, was sent they actually put him to death in the very Temple.

This twofold crime of murder and sacrilege could not go unpunished. In the next year Hazael, king of Syria, attacked Juda; defeated Joas in battle; killed the princes; and plundered the country and the Holy City. Later Joas was slain by his own servants who denied him the honour of burial "*in the sepulchres of the kings*" (2 Paralipomenon 24, 25).

The traditional opinion places the BOOK OF JOEL in this reign—about 800 B.C.

(8) AMASIAS, son of Joas, 798-773 B.C., reorganised the broken kingdom which his father had left; and led a victorious campaign against Edom. But he then set up the heathen idols of the conquered Edomites and adored them. Requital for this soon followed: he provoked a war with Israel; and at Bethsames in his own kingdom he was defeated in battle and taken prisoner to Jerusalem. King Joas of Israel plundered the Temple and the Holy City; levelled the protecting wall of Jerusalem for a distance of six hundred feet; and returned in triumph to Samaria bringing many hostages. Amasias survived this disaster for fifteen years. Then a conspiracy was raised against him; he fled to Lachis for his life; but he was pursued and slain.

(9) OZIAS (or Azarias), son of Amasias, 773-734 B.C., was a good king, thanks to the influence over him of a holy man named Zacharias. He warred with success against the Philistines, and took their cities of Geth, Jamnia and Azotus; and he reduced to tribute the Arabians and the Ammonites. He built several fortified towers on the wall

of Jerusalem; and he strengthened the eastern frontiers of the kingdom against invasion. He promoted agriculture: "*for he was a man that loved husbandry*" (2 Paralipomenon 26, 10); he reorganised the army; he recaptured the city and port of Elath—thus opening the Red Sea to commerce for Juda. Then, elated by success, he grew proud. Zacharias was dead; and there was no one to restrain him. One day he went into the Temple and prepared to offer incense. This function was reserved to the priests. The high priest, Azarias, tried to dissuade him; but the king persisted. Immediately he was afflicted with leprosy; and for the remaining fourteen years of his reign he was compelled to live in solitude—his son and heir, Joatham, acting as regent for him.

The official chronicler of the reign of Ozias was ISAIAS (2 Paralipomenon 26, 22), whose prophetic ministry fell in this and the three succeeding reigns. He is called "*the great prophet*" in Ecclesiasticus 48, 25.

(10) JOATHAM, son of Ozias, 734-733 B.C., was a good king. He repaired the Temple and the wall of Jerusalem; and fortified the cities of the kingdom. He made war on the Ammonites and reduced them to tribute. In his reign the ministry of the minor prophet MICHEAS began; it continued also in the two succeeding reigns.

(11) ACHAZ, son of Joatham, 732-717 B.C., was a bad king at an unfortunate time. He refused to join the Syro-Israelite league against Assyria; and the allies then made war on Juda. They captured and restored to Edom the city and port of Elath, and thus purchased the adherence of Edom to the league. The Philistines (who were also in the league) took six cities in the west of Juda. Phacee of Israel then attacked and defeated Achaz in battle. The king of Juda was now cooped up in the Holy City and the allies were planning to depose him and to place one Tabeel (probably a Syrian officer) on the throne of Juda (Isaias 7, 6).

In this extremity God sent Isaias to encourage Achaz, and to foretell the defeat of Syria and Israel by the Assyrians. The prophet told the king to ask for any miracle he wished in confirmation of his prophecy. Achaz had no faith; he

refused to believe; and he refused to ask for a miracle. Then Isaias gave him "*a sign*" i.e. a miracle—the sign of the Virgin Birth: "*Behold a virgin shall conceive, and shall bear a son, and his name shall be called Emmanuel. . .*" (Isaias 7, 14. . .). The Messiah in His human nature is to be of the line of David; consequently the house of David will be preserved, however powerful be its enemies. But the prophet adds a threat of the desolation which the evil policy of Achaz and his wicked successors will bring on the land. "*He shall eat butter and honey, that he may know* (in Hebrew—'when he shall know') *to refuse the evil and to choose the good*" (Isaias 7, 15). The coming of the Redeemer will find the royal house of David reduced to poverty; and He will dwell in a land where curdled milk and wild honey abound—that is to say, in a land where war and exile have left few inhabitants.

King Achaz remained obdurate, and the oracle of Isaias had no effect. He built sanctuaries to Baal and Astarte—the idols of Phoenicia. In the valley of Bennenom (or Gehenna) at the south of Jerusalem under the very walls of the Temple he established the monstrous worship of Moloch. And here he sacrificed his own son—"a sacrifice to despair"—burning him alive in honour of that deity. But when Achaz abandoned God, God abandoned him; and he paid heavily for his apostacy. He was defeated twice in battle—first by Rasin of Syria and then by Phacee of Israel. In the second of these defeats, Maasias, the king's son, and Elcana, his prime minister, were slain. Surrounded by enemies on all frontiers and helpless against them Achaz in desperation sent delegates to Theglathphalasar III with all the treasures of the Temple and the royal house to beg the protection of the Assyrian empire against Israel and Syria. This gave the Assyrian king an excellent pretext for invading Syria and Israel. Meantime before the Assyrians could arrive Edom attacked Juda from the south-east; defeated Achaz again; and pillaged the country. When the Assyrians did arrive they reduced Syria and then on their way to Philistia through Juda they plundered and massacred ruthlessly as they went. Hanno, king of Gaza, fled before the Assyrian invaders;

Gaza was taken; and soon afterwards Ascalon. The Ammonites, Edomites and Moabites submitted. When after a siege Damascus was taken Achaz went thither to submit to Theglathphalasar and pay his tribute. For the remainder of his reign Achaz was a vassal king of the Assyrian empire.

CHAPTER III.

THE KINGDOM OF JUDA: (B) EZECHIAS TO SEDECIAS.

(4 Kings 18-25; 2 Paralipomenon 29-36; Isaias 20-66; Judith; Sophonias; Nahum; Habacuc; Jeremias; Lamentations).

When King Achaz died the kingdom of Juda was in a sorry plight. The two rival empires of Assyria and Egypt divided between them the rule of the civilised world; and both bordered Juda. The position of Juda at this time has been aptly described as "between the hammer and the anvil."

(12) EZECHIAS, son of Achaz, 715-687 B.C., became king of Juda after an interregnum of two years. He is in pleasing contrast to his wicked father. His first care was to reopen and repair the Temple, and restore divine worship. He sent messengers throughout Juda and to the remnants of the ten tribes in Israel inviting them to come to Jerusalem for the celebration of the Pasch.

Ezechias then prepared to strengthen his kingdom. He trained an army and was able to make war with success against the Philistines.

The death of Sargon II of Assyria in 705 B.C. was the signal for a general revolt of his vassal kingdoms. Merodach-Baladan regained the throne of Babylon and joined with Elam. Syria and Phoenicia renounced their allegiance; and Ezechias (against the advice of the good statesman Isaias) joined in a league with them and cast off the Assyrian yoke. Egypt of course encouraged the anti-Assyrian movement, and promised military aid.

Meantime Sennacherib (704-681 B.C.) had succeeded his father on the throne of Assyria. He soon attacked and deposed Merodach-Baladan, and destroyed Babylon (703 B.C.); in a second expedition he defeated the king of Elam (702 B.C.); then he marched against Syria. Syria and Phoenicia were conquered. Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia submitted; and the Egyptian army was checked at Elthece (near Accaron). It was now the turn of Juda and "The Assyrian came down like a wolf on the fold. . . ." Ezechias had made careful plans—he brought the water-supply by an underground tunnel to Jerusalem thus preventing the enemy from either using it or cutting it off from the city; he fortified the walls and armed the defenders. But he was alone against the might of Assyria. Sennacherib captured forty-six cities of Juda; and the cause of Jerusalem seemed hopeless. Ezechias asked for terms of peace from the Assyrian king who was besieging Lachis. A very severe tribute was demanded—three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold—to pay which Ezechias had to empty the royal treasury and even to strip the ornaments from the Temple. The Ethiopian army under Theraca (1) was now reported to be coming against Sennacherib so he moved his head-quarters from Lachis to Lobna and sent an army to besiege Jerusalem. Ezechias and Isaias turned to God for help, and the prophet received a divine assurance that Jerusalem would not be taken. Soon after a pestilence killed in one night 185,000 of the Assyrian army. Sennacherib returned to Ninive; Jerusalem was saved. This part of the biblical narrative is confirmed by the Assyrian records. The official annals of Sennacherib's reign tell that he had enclosed Ezechias in his capital 'like a bird in a cage;' but there is no mention of the capture of Jerusalem. (2)

Ezechias also encouraged learning—certain proverbs of

(1) The text here (4 Kings 19, 9) rightly has *Ethiopian*; this Theraca (in Assyriac—'Tarquu;' in Egyptian—'Teharka') later became king of Egypt, and ruled the two kingdoms from 689 to 663 B.C.

(2) LA BIBLE ET LES DECOUVERTES MODERNES; Vol. IV., pages 196-225.

Solomon were copied out and saved for posterity by "*the wise men of Ezechias*" (Proverbs 25, 1).

(13) MANASSES; son of Ezechias, 687-638 B.C., re-introduced idolatry—the cult of Baal, of Moloch, and the Babylonian worship of "*the host of heaven*" (4 Kings 21, 3), that is, of the sun, moon and stars. These heathen cults were practised in the Temple itself; and along with them went divination, observation of omens, magic and every form of superstition. Divine warnings were not wanting; but they went unheeded: "*And the Lord spoke to him, and to his people, and they would not hearken*" (2 Paralipomenon 33, 10).

Then the divine vengeance fell: "*Therefore he (God) brought upon them the captains of the army of the king of the Assyrians; and they took Manasses, and carried him bound with chains and fetters to Babylon. . . .*" (2 Paralipomenon 33, 11-13). No passage of the Old Testament was the object of so many attacks by the 'critics' as this. How (it was triumphantly asked) could it be Babylon, and not Ninive? And how could he have been restored as king? The discovery in Ninive of the records of the reign of Assurbanipal (668-626 B.C.), son of Asarhaddon, have vindicated the accuracy of the Bible here: Salmugina, the youngest brother of Assurbanipal, was appointed by him viceroy of Babylon. Salmugina determined to become king of Assyria; and to this end he intrigued with the vassal kings of Lydia (in Asia Minor), Phoenicia, Hauran (in Syria), Arabia, Philistia, Egypt—and doubtless Manasses also was involved. Assurbanipal tells that he suppressed the revolt (his brother committed suicide); appointed lieutenants over the vassal kings; and took Nechao, the king of Memphis (in Egypt), a prisoner in chains. Assurbanipal himself (the Sardanapalos of the Greek historians) went to Babylon to re-assert his authority. Hence Manasses would naturally be taken to Babylon, not to Ninive. Nechao was re-instated when he had given assurance of loyalty in future; so why not Manasses also?

JUDITH.

To the time during which Manasses was in Babylon belong

the stirring events narrated in the BOOK OF JUDITH. (1) In 655 B.C. the Elamites in the east revolted from Assyria and continued their fight for independence until 638 B.C., when they were finally conquered. While Assyria was thus occupied the western nations took the opportunity to revolt, and Assurbanipal sent Holofernes with a great army to conquer them. Holofernes marched to the heart of Asia Minor; conquered it; then Syria and Arabia. At this point Assurbanipal discovered to his amazement that his brother, the viceroy of Babylon, was the root cause of the whole trouble. Holofernes was recalled to attack Babylon; he must have brought Manasses with him.

When Babylon was taken Holofernes returned to finish his conquest of the west. He quickly crushed the nomad Arabs, the Edomites, Ammonites, Moabites. The Phoenicians and Philistines sent to sue for peace; but it was too late. The Assyrian general destroyed their cities and sanctuaries, and commanded them to worship as god only Assurbanipal.

The people of Juda prepared to resist the Assyrian. They fortified all the passes leading to Jerusalem; laid up stores; and prayed earnestly for divine aid. The city of Bethulia near Dothain on the route from Esdrelon to Jerusalem was the first objective in Juda. It was in the mountains, and easily defended; but Holofernes stopped the water supply to the city and after twenty days the besieged were in sore straits.

Judith, a pious widow and a very beautiful woman, went to the Assyrian camp, feigning herself to be a fugitive from the beleaguered city. Holofernes was captivated by her good looks, and from unworthy motives received and treated her well. At a feast a few days later Holofernes became helplessly drunk. Judith was alone with him in his tent. She slew him with his own sword while he slept; and brought his head back to Bethulia. The death of their leader threw the Assyrians into a panic; and the Hebrews won a great victory.

(1) The author and the date of composition of the Book of Judith are both unknown.

In his prison in Babylon Manasses repented and turned to God. His prayer for deliverance was heard, and when he was restored to his kingdom he did much to repair the past. He took away the idols; re-opened the Temple; and commanded the people to worship the True God. Towards the end of this reign NAHUM prophesied to the remnant of the northern kingdom (Israel), and foretold the destruction of Ninive, the Assyrian capital.

(14) AMON, son of Manasses, 638-637 B.C., revived idolatry. But before his infamous career could run its full course a faction among his courtiers conspired and slew him. The people turned on the faction; slew them; and made Josias, son of Amon, king.

(15) JOSIAS, 637-607 B.C., was only a boy of eight years when he became king. He was a just and humane man, zealous for religion. In the eighth year of his reign he began a great religious reform which he carried even to the remnant of the northern kingdom; and at the end of four years idolatry was completely suppressed. In the eighteenth year of his reign Helcias, the high priest, found the text of the Law of Moses in the treasury of the Temple. Josias had it read publicly for himself and the people. Then he renewed the covenant; celebrated the Pasch; re-organised the priests and levites; and restored regular worship in the Temple. JEREMIAS the prophet began his ministry in the thirteenth year of this reign.

Meantime Assurbanipal died (626 B.C.); and with him died the glory of the Assyrian empire. He united in himself the courage, cruelty and energy of all his predecessors. Under his son, Assurdilili (the last king of Assyria) a horde of barbarians (probably the Scythians of Herodotus) overran the empire. Simultaneously Egypt attacked in the west; Babylon in the south declared its independence; while the Medes rose to power in the east. Nabopolassar conquered Babylon for Assyria and was made king of Babylon in reward. But after fifteen years he allied himself with Nechao II of Egypt and Cyaxares of Media and set about destroying Assyria.

Josias' foreign policy was pro-Assyrian, and he went against Nechao II who in 608 B.C. marched from Memphis through Palestine on his way to the east. The battle was fought at Mageddo in the Plain of Esdrelon. Josias was defeated, and slain in battle. The victorious Egyptian king pushed on to Carchemish on the Euphrates which he captured, thus gaining control of all the country west of the Euphrates.

In this reign SOPHONIAS and HABUCUC prophesied.

(16) JOACHAZ, son of Josias, 607 B.C., was appointed king by the people of Jerusalem. Nechao II showed his authority by summoning him to his head-quarters at Rebla on the Orontes, and deposing him after a reign of only three months. He appointed a brother of Joachaz named Eliachim king in his stead; and he changed the new king's name to Joachim.

(17) JOACHIM, son of Josias, 607-597 B.C., a vassal of Egypt, was a cruel tyrant; proud and bloodthirsty.

In 606 B.C. Ninive fell after a siege of two years by the Medes and Babylonians. Its strong walls resisted all attacks until a flood of the river Tigris undermined and swept away portion of the ramparts—a literal fulfilment of the prophecy of Nahum (1, 8). Babylon now became the world empire until 538 B.C. Nabopolassar was too old to lead his army; so his son, Nabuchodonosor, took his place in the war against Egypt. He marched on Carchemish; defeated the Pharaoh's forces; captured Syria and Palestine. Joachim submitted and became a vassal of Babylon. Before Nabuchodonosor could finish his conquests came the news of the death of his father. He hurriedly made a treaty with Nechao, and returned to secure the throne, bringing with him as hostages many of the nobles of Jerusalem—among them DANIEL the prophet. Nabuchodonosor (604-562 B.C.) was one of the greatest kings in all history—a great general, patron of art, a builder; he made his capital, Babylon, one of the wonders of the world.

Joachim plotted with Egypt against Babylon; and in 602 B.C. Nabuchodonosor sent a band of marauders to

punish him. In 597 B.C. Nabuchodonosor came himself to Juda to put down the pro-Egyptian movement. Joachim was now dead; and his son was king. Nabuchodonosor laid siege to Jerusalem.

(18) JOACHIN, son of Joachim, 597 B.C., was only eighteen years old; and after a reign of three months and ten days he surrendered unconditionally to the king of Babylon. He was brought prisoner to Babylon with many of the people of Jerusalem—among them EZECHIEL the prophet. The city was plundered; the Temple was rifled; and Sedecias, uncle of Joachin, was made king.

(19) SEDECIAS, son of Josias, 596-586 B.C., the last king of Juda, was a weakling. Jeremias foresaw the destruction of Jerusalem and he did all in his power to avert it—preaching against the vices which were calling for divine vengeance, and urging the king to submit to Babylon. But the prophet was despised first, and then imprisoned; and the pro-Egyptian party persuaded the king to revolt. Nabuchodonosor quickly marched to Rebla, and fixed his headquarters there. He sent his general, Nabuzardan, against Juda. The country was soon conquered; then Jerusalem was besieged. Overcome by pestilence and famine the city finally surrendered in 586 B.C. The Babylonian army destroyed the Holy City; burned the Temple, the royal palaces and the principal houses; levelled the walls; slaughtered great numbers, and took the remainder prisoners. Sedecias was captured outside the city while trying to escape towards Jericho. He was brought to Rebla to Nabuchodonosor. There his sons were slain in his presence; then his eyes were gouged out; and bound with chains he was brought to Babylon a prisoner.

The kingdom of Juda was made a colony of the Babylonian empire; and Godolias, a Hebrew, was appointed to govern it for the conqueror. The treasures of the Temple, its pillars and sacred vessels, were carried away to Babylon.

The Ark of the Covenant, the altar of incense and the relics of the Tabernacle in the Wilderness were well con-

cealed because later Jeremias was able to recover them and place them in a cave of Mount Nebo (2 Machabees 2, 1-8).

CONCLUSION.

1. The chronology of this period has always been a difficulty. Many numbers are provided in the Books of Kings and Paralipomenon—the length of every reign is faithfully recorded; cross-references to the contemporary ruler of Israel or Juda are frequent. But this only makes the problem more complex. It is fairly certainly established that the period runs from about 932 to 621 B.C. for Israel; from about 932 to 586 B.C. for Juda. Now the number of years given for the several reigns will make too large a total in both cases; and besides references to contemporaries will not always tally.

Various attempts to solve the problem have been made, and various are the resulting solutions. (1) The theory of which the conclusions are accepted in this booklet (2) is based on four principles which are generally recognised:

(a) Part of a year is reckoned as a full year by the Hebrews. Thus the last year of a king's reign is counted twice.

(b) The years of the kings of Juda are reckoned according to the *sacred* year—beginning in mid-March; those of the kings of Israel are reckoned according to the *civil* year—beginning in mid-September.

(c) There are *interregna*, i.e. intervals between the death of a king and the election of his successor; for instance between Achaz, who died in 717 B.C. and Ezechias, who began to reign in 715 B.C.

(d) There are *co-reigns*, for instance Joatham ruled for fourteen years before the death of his father Ozias in 734 B.C.; and the years of such a co-reign are counted twice.

(1) Rudolf Cornely, S.J., gives a list of twenty-two different sets of dates for the kings of Juda and Israel. (COMPENDIUM INTRODUCTIONIS. Pages 718-721).

(2) The author of the theory is Albert M. Kleber, O.S.B., St. Meinrad Seminary, Ind., U.S.A. It is fully elaborated in BIBLICA. Volume 2 (1921); pages 3-29 and 170-205.

But this theory claims in addition to have discovered the system used by the official chroniclers from whose records the inspired writers obtained their numbers. In this scheme the numbers tally perfectly as between the two kingdoms; and the dates thus secured correspond with what we have from the Assyrian and Babylonian records of the same period.

As a hypothesis it is very attractive. But it is not free from all objection; (1) so it is accepted here and proposed with reserve.

2. Another age-old difficulty occurs in the Book of Judith. Judith deceived the Assyrian generals: she went in the guise of a fugitive; she promised information which would lead to the capture of Bethulia; she used her natural attractiveness to delude Holofernes until she had the opportunity of slaying him.

In general this problem is solved on the same lines as those which occur in the history of the Judges. (2) It is further objected that Judith is praised and proposed as a model of virtue. But careful reading will show that *Judith* is a historical Book; it only states the facts. It describes the heroine as possessing many virtues—faith and confidence in God; charity; piety; temperance. It does not praise Judith for the means which she used to bring about the defeat of the national enemy. Neither does it censure her; and from this silence and from the general description of her character it is easy to conclude that she acted in good faith; that in conscience she considered such means to be lawful. In this she was merely thinking in terms of the international law of Old Testament times.

(1) CHRONOLOGIA VETERIS ET NOVI TESTAMENTI. Auctore Sac. E. Ruffini. Rome, 1924. Pages 31-32.

(2) See No. 6 of this series; pages 27-28.

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