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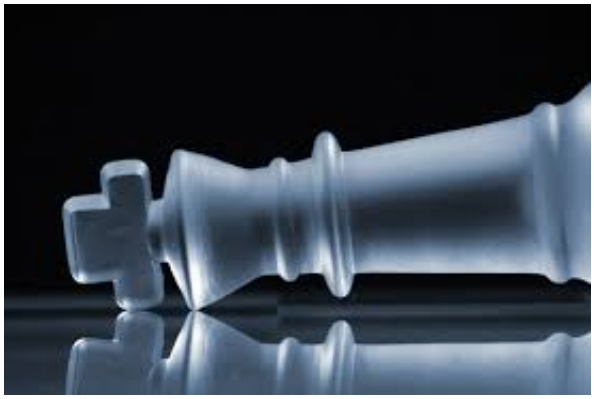
The Political Situation in First and Second Kings



Domestic and foreign politics play a significant role in the events recounted in **First** and **Second Kings**. Regional conflicts, superpower expansionism, and petty internal squabbles all affect how **Isra'el's** history unfolds. To read **First** and **Second Kings** intelligently, then, it is necessary to note some key nations and events that impact the book's telling of the story. Though these nations and events take place in a "secular" context, the author constantly reminds readers that **ADONAI** determines who rules at what point in history.[15]

The United Kingdom: Except for a description of **David's** last days, **Isra'el** only existed as a unified, twelve-tribe nation during **Solomon's** reign (970-930 BC) in **First** and **Second Kings**. Unity had been difficult for **David** to achieve after **King Sha'ul's** death **(Second Samuel 2-4)**, and tribal tensions never completely died. As a result, **Solomon's** ability to govern all twelve tribes for forty years was in itself a major achievement. Of course, the absence of wars and the emergence of economic prosperity probably helped people accept **his** leadership more readily.

Solomon's foreign policy was also effective. **He** made peace with **Egypt**, the main threat from the south, through a marriage alliance **(First Kings 3:1)**. Though that practice came to haunt **him**, marriage alliances were keys to peace with other neighboring countries as well **(First Kings 11:1)**. **Solomon** also continued **David's** vital relationship with **Tyre (First Kings 5:1-7)**. **Tyre** helped **Solomon**

with **his** building projects, and **he**, in turn, paid **them** in wages and with a few small cities **(First Kings 5:6** and **9:10-14)**. The Bible indicates few external problems in the first decades of Solomon's reign.

In **his** old age, however, **Solomon** encountered several difficulties, which the author attributes to **Solomon's** idolatry (**to see link click Bx – Solomon's Wives**). **ADONAI** decided to punish **Solomon** but left **David's** descendants a portion of **Isra'el** to govern **(First Kings 11:9-13)**. As a domestic punishment **God** allowed **Jeroboam** to emerge as a rebel leader (see **Bz – The Prophecy of Ahijah**). More will be heard from **him** later. As a further punishment **the LORD** raised up **Edomite** foes to the southeast and **Aramean** enemies in the north (see **By – The Fall of the House of David**). Worse than that, **Solomon's** allies in **Egypt** were overthrown by Pharaoh Shishak, who supported **Solomon's** domestic and foreign enemies **(First Kings 11:14-40)**. Clearly, **Solomon's** death found **Isra'el** in a weakened position both at home and abroad.

The Divided Kingdom: Immediately after **Solomon's** death the nation was split into two parts. **Jeroboam** managed to take ten northern tribes, while **Rehoboam**, **Solomon's** son, retained **Judah** and **Benjamin** – two southern tribes (see **Dc – A House Divided**). Tensions had always existed in the northern tribes, yet the author states that the division occurred as a direct result of **Solomon's** sin of spiritual adultery and according to **God's** word through the prophet **Ahijah (First Kings 11:29-39)**. Once again **YHVH** directed human events. After the split **"Isra'el"** became two different nations, with two names, with two capitals, in two separate locations (see **Cz – The Divided Kingdom: The Rise of Idolatry**).

The northern kingdom of **Isra'el** and the southern kingdom of **Judah** warred periodically until **Isra'el** was destroyed by Assyria in 722 BC. **Jeroboam** and **Rehoboam** fought one another **(First Kings 15:6)**, as did **Asa** and **Baasha (First Kings 15:16-17)** and **Jehoash** and **Amaziah (Second Kings 14:8-14)**. Yet, at times the two nations fought together against common foes (for example: **First Kings 22:1-40; Second Kings 3:1-27** and **8:28-29**). Obviously, then, **Isra'el** and **Judah** were both friends and enemies through the centuries. The greatest threat to the two countries, however, came from other powers.[16]

Egypt: Isra'el's history was impacted by **Egypt** most during the years after **Solomon's** reign and during the decades just before the great destruction of **Jerusalem**. Pharaoh Shishak invaded **Jerusalem** and stripped **the Temple** of its gold **(First Kings 14:25-27)**. Shishak's invasion left **Judah** too weak to attack

Isra'el, which helped keep the two nations apart. In 609 BC Pharaoh Neco marched north to aid **Assyria's** efforts against **Babylon (Second Kings 23:29)**. For reasons not stated in the Bible, **Josiah**, **Judah's** last righteous king, confronted Neco and was killed **(Second Kings 23:29-30)**. **Egypt** could not overcome Babylon at that time but was able to dominate **Judah's** political scene until 605 BC. Thus, just as Pharaoh Shishak's invasion partially contributed to the nation's division, so Neco's killing of **Josiah** effectively removed **Judah's** last godly king and paved the way for **her** final destruction.

Aram (Syria): **Syria** posed a great threat to the Northern Kingdom's security during the ninth century BC. Two powerful kings, Ben-Hadad I (around 880-840 BC) and Hazael (around 840-805), led Syria to become perhaps the chief power in northeast Judea. Ben-Hadad first enters the biblical story when he breaks an alliance with **Isra'el's King Baasha** to ally **himself** with **King Asa** (see **Dd – Asa King of Judah**). Ben-Hadad's friendship, however, was costly since **Asa** was forced to strip **his** palace and **the Temple** of **its** gold and silver to purchase **the Syrian's** "loyalty." With **Judah's** money in hand, Ben-Hadad gladly annexed several of **Isra'el's cities (First Kings 20:1-12)**. **Omri** (see **Ds – Omri King of Isra'el**) tooks steps to ward off the **Syrian** threat, including marrying **his son Ahab** to **Tyre's** princess **Jezebel**, thus linking **Isra'el** with another anti-**Syrian** country **(First Kings 16:31)**. Indeed, the Syrian problem remained so serious that **Isra'el** and **Judah** joined forces to fight **Syria** during the days of **Ahab** and **Jehoshaphat (First Kings 22:1-4),** and **Ahab** died fighting **his** longtime foe **(First Kings 22:29-40; Second Chronicles 18:28-34)**.

Syria continued its domination under Hazael. Though annoyed for a time by **Assyria**, **Syria** ravaged **Isra'el** during **Jehu's** reign **(Second Kings 10:32-33)**, captured Gath of Philistia **(Second Kings 12:17)**, and only spared **Jerusalem** because **Josiah** paid him a large sum of money **(Second Kings 12:18)**. **Syrian's** power was finally broken after Hazael's death, when **Assyria** laid siege to Damascus and forced the king to pay tribute money. **Assyria** did not threaten **Isra'el** or **Judah** at that time, however, so they enjoyed a half-century of peace and prosperity.

Assyria: **Assyria** was the fiercest, most cruel, and most oppressive foreign power ever to threaten **Isra'el** and **Judah**. That ambitious, seemingly relentless nation terrorized Palestine from the mid-eighth century BC to the late seventh century BC. **Assyrian's** power was especially devastating to **the northern kingdom of Isr'ael**, since **Assyria** conquered and destroyed the entire nation in 722 BC. **Judah**

also felt the sting of **Assyrian** oppression in 701 BC when **they** nearly captured **Jerusalem** under King **Hezekiah**. Only a miracle of **God** saved **the City** (see below).

Three **Assyrian** kings figured prominently in **Isra'el** and **Judah's** history during the period from 750 to 700 BC. First, Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BC) began a new foreign policy. His campaigns differed from those of his predecessors in that they were not tribute-gathering expeditions, but permanent conquests. That new policy made **the Assyrians** more dangerous than other invading armies. Syria, **Isra'el**, Philistia, and a few other smaller nations opposed Tiglath-Pileser, but **Judah's King Ahaz** adopted a pro-**Assyrian** foreign policy **(Second Kings 16:7-9)**. The Assyrian king invaded the area from 734 to 732 BC and punished the coalition by defeating **Gaza** and **Damascus (Second Kings 16:9)**, and by annexing parts of northern **Isra'el (Second Kings 15:29)**. **Judah's** pact with **Assyria** saved **her**, but the Northern Kingdom was then in serious trouble.

Shalmaneser V (727-722 BC) finished what Tiglath-Pileser began in Isra'el. After Tiglath's death **King Hosea** sought to free **the Northern Kingdom** from **Assyrian** domination. In a colossal miscalculation, he withheld tribute money from Shalmaneser **(Second Kings 17:3-4)**, who depended on **Egypt** for help **(Isaiah Chapters 30** and **31)**. **Egypt**, always a poor ally to **Isra'el**, failed to respond, and **Assyria** laid siege to **Samaria**. After three years **the city** surrendered **(Second Kings 17:5-6)**. Then, **it** was burned to the ground; and the state of **Isra'el** was abolished and absorbed into the **Assyrian** Empire. No less than 27,290 of its inhabitants were reportedly taken off to **Assyria** and Media. Tiny Judah was all that remained of the covenant nation.

Sennacherib (704-681 BC) nearly obliterated Judah in 701 BC. **Judah's King Hezekiah** decided to break with **Assyria** when **the old oppressor** had difficulties with **Babylon**. Nevertheless, Sennacherib invaded **Judah** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Gp – The Timeline of Sennacherib's Invasion of Judah**) and laid siege to **Jerusalem**. The prophet **Isaiah** counseled **Hezekiah** to resist, trusting only in **God's** power (see **Isaiah Gv – I Will Save This City for My Sake and for the Sake of David My Servant**). Because Hezekiah obeyed, **Ha'Shem** obliterated the **Assryian** army **in a single night** (see the commentary on **Isaish Gw – Then the Angel of the LORD Put To Death a Hundred and Eighty Five Thousand Men in the Assyrian Camp**), then removed Sennacherib from power **(Second Kings 19:35-37)**. After **Hezekiah's** death, however, **his son Manasseh** reverted to appeasing **Assyria** and not trusting in **the LORD (Second Kings 21:1-18)**.

Babylon: Like **Assyria**, **Babylon** exerted **her** power and influence intermittently over several centuries. It was from 605 to 539 BC, however, that this nation impacted **Judah** the most. In 612 BC, **Babylon** conquered **Nineveh**, **Assyria's** capital, thus becoming the dominant force in the ancient world. It took **the Babylonians** until 610 BC to eliminate **Assyrian** opposition and until 605 BC to place **Judah** under servitude, but once in control **they** didn't relinquish power for nearly seven decades.

When Nebuchadnezzar subdued **Egypt** at Carchemish in 605 BC (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Dh – A Message Concerning Egypt**), thus establishing **Babylon's** dominance in the region **(Second Kings 24:7)**, he found **Jehoiakim**, hand picked by **Egypt** (see **Jeremiah Ca – Jehoiakim Ruled For 11 Years from 609/608 to 598 BC**), on **Judah's** throne. At that time **Babylon** started the first of three deportations (see **Jeremiah Gt – In the Thirty-Seventh Year of the Exile Jehoiachin was Released from Prison**), taking **Dani'el** and **his friends (Dani'el 1:1-2)**. **Jehoiakim** served **Babylon** for three years, then rebelled **(Second Kings 24:1)**. Though according to **Second Kings 24:2-4 God** sent various raiders from neighboring lands to harass **Jehoiakim**, **Babylon itself** did not move to punish **his** rebellion until 598 BC, the year **Jehoiachin** succeeded **his father** (see **Jeremiah Du – Jehoiachin Ruled For 3 Months in 598 BC**). Nebuchadnezzar removed **Jehoiachin** from power after only **three months**, deported **Ezeki'el** and other **Isreaelites**, stripped the Temple of its wealth, and placed **Zedekiah** on the throne **(Second Kings 24:10-17; Jeremiah 24-29)**. Therefore, **Babylon** gave **Judah** one more chance to be a loyal vassal.

Zedekiah governed **Judah** during the last decade of **her** existence (see **Jeremiah Dz – Zedekiah Ruled For 11 Years from 598/597 to 586 BC**). The only notice **Second Kings** offers about why **Babylon** finally decided to destroy **Jerusalem** is the brief comment: **Now Zedekiah rebelled against the king of Babylon (Second Kings 24:20).** Perhaps nationalistic fervor had risen, but no clear reason for this **rebellion** can be determined. Regardless of the reasons for **Zedekiah's** actions, **his** decision caused Nebuchadnezzar to eliminate **his** troublesome vassal. **He** captured **the City** (see **Jeremiah Ga – The Fall of Jerusalem**), burned its walls and important buildings (**to see link to video click here ,** including the Temple (see **Jeremiah Gb – The Destruction of Solomon's Temple on Tisha B'Av in 586 BC**), and appointed his own **governor** (see **Jeremiah Gc – Gedaliah Ruled For 3 Months in 586 BC**). **Zedekiah** was blinded, but only after seeing each of **his sons killed (Second Kings 25:6-7)**. No part of **Isra'el** or **Judah** was

left free. All **twelve tribes** were then in exile or enslaved in **their** own **land**. However, hope for the future remained (see **Jeremiah Eo – I Will Make a New Covenant with the People of Isra'el**), but that was blunted by the present reality that **God** had **thrust them from His presence (Second Kings 24:20)**. [17]