

Judah and Tamar, Horace Vernet

our brother and conceal his blood? ... Let not our hand be upon him, for he is our brother, our flesh.")

Judah marries the daughter of Shua, a Canaanite. Genesis chapter 38 Judah and his wife have three children, Er, Onan, and Shelah. Er marries Tamar, but God kills him because he "was wicked in the sight of the Lord" (Gen. 38:7). Tamar becomes Onan's wife in accordance with custom, but he too is killed after he refuses to father children for his older brother's childless widow, and spills his seed instead.^[4] Although Tamar should have married Shelah, the remaining

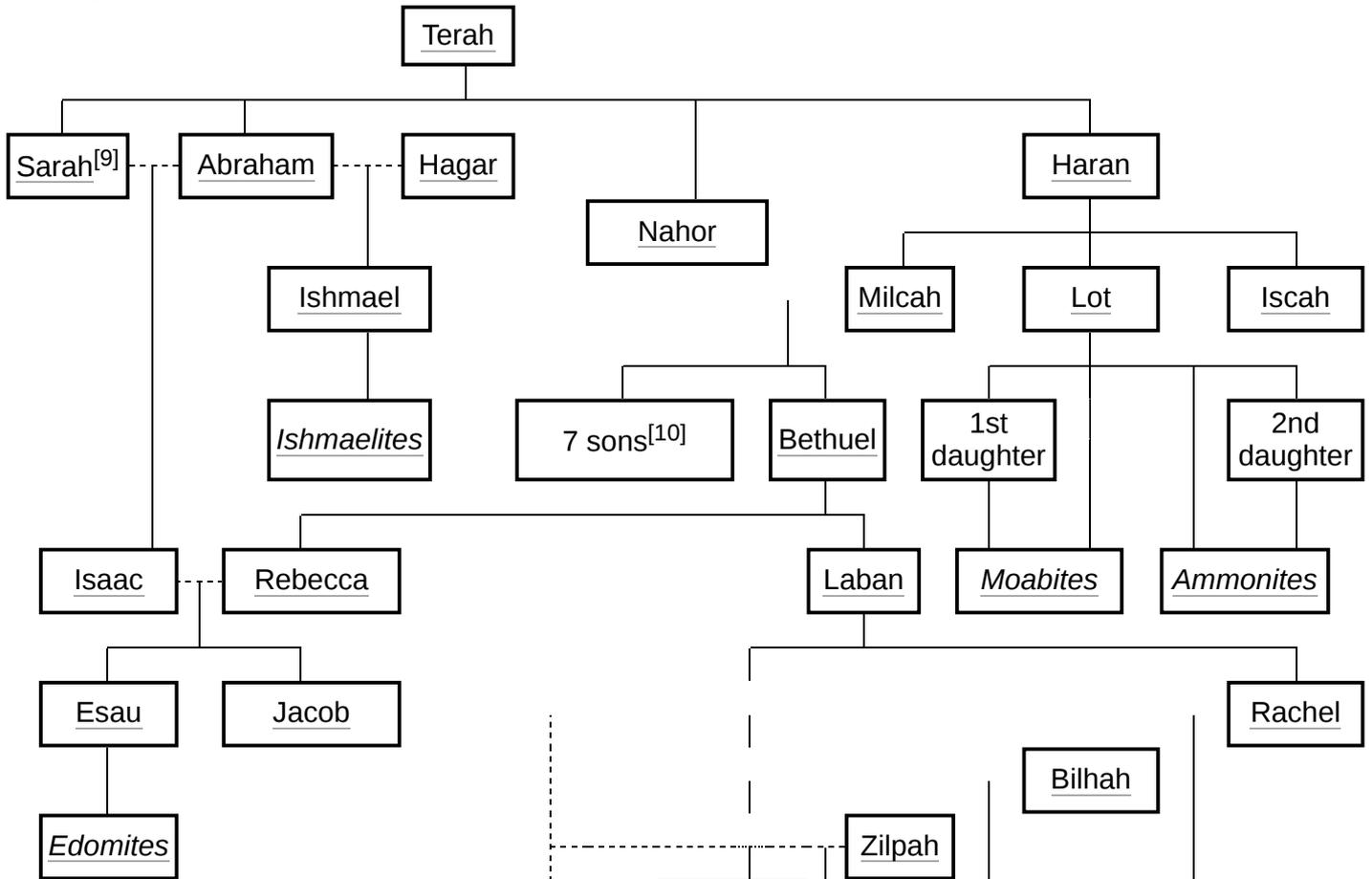
brother, Judah did not consent, and in response Tamar deceives Judah into having intercourse

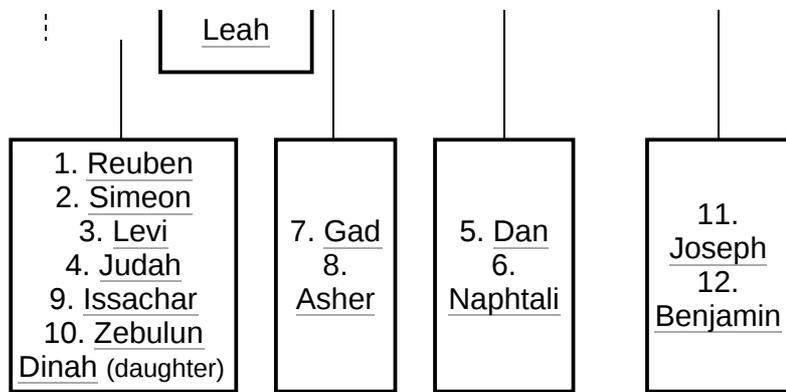
with her by pretending to be a prostitute. When Judah discovers that Tamar is pregnant he prepares to have her killed, but recants and confesses when he finds out that he is the father (Gen. 38:24-26).^[5] Tamar is the mother of twins, Perez (Peretz) and Zerah (Gen. 38:27-30). The former is the patrilinear ancestor of the messiah, according to the Book of Ruth (4:18-22).

Meanwhile, Joseph rises to a position of power in Egypt. Twenty years after being betrayed, he meets his brothers again without them recognizing him. The youngest brother, Benjamin, had remained in Canaan with Jacob, so Joseph takes Simeon hostage and insists that the brothers return with Benjamin.^[6] Judah offers himself to Jacob as surety for Benjamin's safety, and manages to persuade Jacob to let them take Benjamin to Egypt. When the brothers return, Joseph tests them by demanding the enslavement of Benjamin.^[7] Judah pleads for Benjamin's life, and Joseph reveals his true identity.^[8]

- Gad (half brother)
- Asher (half brother)
- Joseph (half brother)
- Benjamin (half brother)
- Dinah (sister)
- Rebecca (grandmother)
- Isaac (grandfather)
- Esau (uncle)
- Rachel (aunt/stepmother)
- Laban (grandfather)
- Abraham (great-grandfather)
- Sarah (great-grandmother)

Family tree





Textual criticism

Relationship between the Joseph and Judah narratives

Literary critics have focused on the relationship between the Judah story in chapter 38, and the Joseph story in chapters 37 and 39. Victor Hamilton notes some "intentional literary parallels" between the chapters, such as the exhortation to "identify" (38:25-26 and 37:32-33).^[11] J. A. Emerton, Regius Professor of Hebrew at the University of Cambridge, regards the connections as evidence for including chapter 38 in the J corpus, and suggests that the J writer dovetailed the Joseph and Judah traditions.^[12] Derek Kidner points out that the insertion of chapter 38 "creates suspense for the reader,"^[13] but Robert Alter goes further and suggests it is a result of the "brilliant splicing of sources by a literary artist." He notes that the same verb "identify" will play "a crucial thematic role in the dénouement of the Joseph story when he confronts his brothers in Egypt, he recognizing them, they failing to recognize him."^[14] Similarly, J. P. Fokkelman notes that the "extra attention" for Judah in chapter 38, "sets him up for his major role as the brothers' spokesman in Genesis 44."^[15]



Russian icon

Foreshadowing the hegemony of Judah

Other than Joseph (and perhaps Benjamin), Judah receives the most favorable treatment in Genesis among Jacob's sons, which according to biblical historians is a reflection on the historical primacy that the tribe of Judah possessed throughout much of Israel's history, including as the source of the Davidic line.^[16] Although Judah is only the fourth son of Leah, he is expressly depicted in Genesis as assuming a leadership role among the 10 eldest brothers, including speaking up against killing Joseph, negotiating with his father regarding Joseph's demand that Benjamin be brought down to Egypt, and pleading with Joseph after the latter secretes the silver cup into Benjamin's bag.^[17]

Judah's position is further enhanced through the downfall of his older brothers: Reuben, the eldest, cedes his birthright through sexual misconduct with Jacob's concubine Bilhah (Gen. 35:22), and the bloody revenge taken by Simeon and Levi following the rape of Dinah (Gen. chap. 34).^[16] disqualifies them as leaders.^[17] The eternal legacy of these events are foreshadowed in the deathbed blessing of Jacob (Gen. 49:1-33), which has been attributed according to the documentary hypothesis to the pro-Judah Yahwist source.^[18] In Jacob's blessing, Reuben has "not the excellency" to lead "because thou went up to thy father's bed, then defiled [it]"; meanwhile, Simeon and Levi are condemned as "cruel" and "weapons of violence [are] their kinship." (Gen. 49:3-7.) On the other hand, Judah is praised as "a lion's whelp" whose brothers "shall bow down before thee," and "the sceptre shall not depart from Judah" (Genesis 49:10), the latter a clear reference to the aspirations of the united monarchy.^[19]

Archaeologist and scholar Israel Finkelstein argues that these and other pro-Judah narrative strands likely originated after the demise of the Kingdom of Israel in the 8th Century BCE: "[I]t was only after the fall of Israel that Judah grew into a fully developed state with the necessary complement of professional priests and trained scribes able to undertake such a task. When Judah suddenly faced the non-Israelite world on its own, it needed a defining and motivating text. That text was the historical core of the Bible, composed in Jerusalem in the course of the

seventh century BCE. And because Judah was the birthplace of ancient Israel's central scripture, it is hardly surprising that the biblical text repeatedly stresses Judah's special status from the very beginnings of Israel's history... [In Genesis], it was Judah, among all of Jacob's sons, whose destiny was to rule over all the other tribes in Israel!^[20]

The story of Judah and Tamar in the historical context

Emerton notes that it is “widely agreed” that the story of Judah and Tamar “reflects a period after the settlement of the Israelites in Canaan.”^[21] He also suggests the possibility that it contains “aetiological motifs concerned with the eponymous ancestors of the clans of Judah.”^[22] Emerton notes that Dillman and Noth considered the account of the deaths of Er and Onan to “reflect the dying out of two clans of Judah bearing their names, or at least of their failure to maintain a separate existence.” However, this view was “trenchantly criticized” by Thomas L. Thompson^[22]

Jewish tradition

Rabbinic commentaries

The text of the Torah argues that the name of *Judah*, meaning to *thank* or *admit*, refers to Leah's intent to thank Hashem, on account of having achieved four children, and derived from *odeh*, meaning *I will give thanks*. In classical rabbinical literature, the name is interpreted as a combination of *Yahweh* and a dalet (the letter *d*); in Gematria, the dalet has the numerical value 4, which these rabbinical sources argue refers to Judah being Jacob's fourth son.^[23] Since Leah was matriarch, Jewish scholars think the text's authors believed the tribe was part of the original Israelite confederation; however, it is worthy of note^[24] that the tribe of Judah was not purely Israelite, but contained a large admixture of non-Israelites, with a number of Kenizzite groups, the Jerahmeelites, and the Kenites, merging into the tribe at various points.^[24]

Classical rabbinical sources refer to the passage "... a ruler came from Judah", from 1 Chronicles 5:2 to imply that Judah was the leader of his brothers, terming him *the king*.^{[25][26]} This passage also describes Judah as the *strongest of his brothers* in which rabbinical literature portray him as having had extraordinary physical strength, able to shout for over 400 parasangs, able to crush iron into dust by his mouth, and with hair that stiffened so much, when he became angry, that it pierced his clothes!^[27]

Classical rabbinical sources also allude to a war between the Canaanites and Judah's family (not mentioned in the Hebrew Bible), as a result of their destruction of Shechem in revenge for the rape of Dinah.^{[28][29][30][31][32]} Judah features heavily as a protagonist in accounts of this war. In these accounts Judah kills Jashub, king of Tappuah, in hand-to-hand combat, after first having deposed Jashub from his horse by throwing an extremely heavy stone (60 shekels in weight) at him from a large distance away (the Midrash Wayissau states 177 $\frac{1}{3}$ cubits, while other sources have only 30 cubits);^[24] the accounts say that Judah was able to achieve this even though he was himself under attack, from arrows which Jashub was shooting at him with both hands.^[24] The accounts go on to state that while Judah was trying to remove Jashub's armour from his corpse, nine assistants of Jashub fell upon him in combat, but after Judah killed one, he scared away the others;^[24] nevertheless, Judah killed several members of Jashub's army (42 men according to the midrashic Book of Jasher, but 1000 men according to the Testament of Judah).^[24]

According to some classical rabbinical sources, Jacob suspected that Judah had killed Joseph,^[33] especially, according to the Midrash Tanhuma, when Judah was the one who had brought the blood stained coat to Jacob.^[24]

Since rabbinical sources held Judah to have been the leader of his brothers, these sources also hold that the other nine brothers blamed him to be responsible for this deception, even if it was not Judah himself who brought the coat to Jacob.^[24] Even if Judah had been trying to save Joseph, the classical rabbinical sources still regard him negatively for it; these sources argue that, as the leader of the brothers, Judah should have made more effort, and carried Joseph home to Jacob on his (Judah's) own shoulders.^[34] These sources argue that Judah's brothers, after witnessing Jacob's grief at the loss of Joseph, deposed and excommunicated Judah, as the brothers held Judah entirely responsible, since they would have brought Joseph home if Judah had asked them to do so.^[35] Divine punishment, according to such classical sources, was also inflicted on Judah in punishment; the death of Er and Onan, and of his wife, are portrayed in by such classical rabbis as being acts of divine retribution.^[36]

When Benjamin was held in bondage following the accusation of stealing Joseph's cup, Judah offered himself among his brethren as a bondman in replace of him, but Joseph was strict that the punishment is only applied to the one who was guilty, not to the innocent ones.^[37]

According to classical rabbinical literature, because Judah had proposed that he should bear any blame *forever*, this ultimately led to his bones being rolled around his coffin without cease, while it was being carried during the Exodus, until Moses interceded with God, by arguing that Judah's confession (in regard to cohabiting with Tamar) had led to Reuben confessing his own incest.^[24] Apparently, Judah learned a lesson from his experience with Tamar that he must be responsible for those around him and this eventually prepares him for his future reconciliatory encounter with Joseph!^[38]

Genesis Rabbah, and particularly the midrashic book of Jasher, expand on this by describing Judah's plea as much more extensive than given in the Torah, and more vehement.^{[39][40]}

The classical rabbinical literature argues that Judah reacted violently to the threat against Benjamin, shouting so loudly that Hushim, who was then in Canaan, was able to hear Judah ask him to travel to Egypt, to help Judah destroy it;^[24] some sources have Judah angrily picking up an extremely heavy stone (400 shekels in weight), throwing it into the air, then grinding it to dust with his feet once it had landed.^[41] These rabbinical sources argue that Judah had Naphtali enumerate the districts of Egypt, and after finding out that there were 12 (historically, there were actually 20 in Lower Egypt and 22 in Upper Egypt), he decided to destroy three himself, and have his brothers destroy one of the remaining districts each,^[24] the threat of destroying Egypt was, according to these sources, what really motivated Joseph to reveal himself to his brothers.^[24]

Testament of Judah

Before his death, Judah told his children about his bravery and heroism in the wars against the kings of Canaan and the family of Esau, also confessed his shortcomings caused by wine that led him astray in his relationship with Bathshua and Tamar.^[42] Judah admonished his sons not to love gold, and not to look upon the beauty of women, for through these things, the sons of Judah will fall into misery. In his last words, he reminded them to observe the whole law of the Lord.^[42]

Dating the lifetime of Judah

According to Classical rabbinical literature, Judah was born on 15 Sivan (early June);^[24] classical sources differ on the date of death, with the Book of Jubilees advocating a death at age 119, 18 years before Levi,^[43] but the midrashic Book of Jasher advocating a death at the age of 129.^[44] The marriage of Judah and births of his children are described in a passage widely regarded as an abrupt change to the surrounding narrative.^[45] The passage is often regarded as presenting a significant chronological issue, as the surrounding context appears to constrain the events of the passage to happening within 22 years;^[46] and the context together with the passage itself requires the birth of the grandson of Judah and of his son's wife,^[47] and the birth of that son,^[48] to have happened within this time (to be consistent, this requires an average of less than 8 years gap per generation).

According to textual scholars, the reason for the abrupt interruption this passage causes to the surrounding narrative, and the chronological anomaly it seems to present, is that it derives from the Jahwist source, while the immediately surrounding narrative is from the Elohist.^{[24][49][50]}

See also

- Lion of Judah

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The children of Jacob sell their brother Joseph by Konstantin Flavitsky, 1855. Judah was the one who suggested that Joseph be sold, rather than killed.



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5. According to the Talmud, Judah's confession atoned for some of his prior faults, and itself resulted in him being divinely rewarded by a share in the future world (*Sotah* 7b) that he had used a prostitute. Tamar's sons by her father-in-law were the twins Pharez and Zerah, the fourth and fifth sons of Judah. Pharez in turn was an ancestor of David. (Genesis 38:1-30 (<http://bible.oremus.org/?passage=Genesis+38:1-30:1&version=nrsy>))
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8. Genesis 44:18-34 (<http://bible.oremus.org/?passage=Genesis+44:18-34:18&version=nrsy>)
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27. *Genesis Rabbah* 93:6-7
28. in great detail in the midrashic *Book of Jasher, Vayishlah*
29. *Pseudo-Jonathan* (on Genesis 48:22 (<http://bible.oremus.org/?passage=Genesis+48:22-48:22&version=nrsy>))
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Kingdom of Judah

The **Kingdom of Judah** (Hebrew: מַמְלַכֶּת יְהוּדָה, *Mamleket Yehudāh*) was an **Iron Age** kingdom of the **Southern Levant**. The **Hebrew Bible** depicts it as the successor to a **United Monarchy**, but historians are divided about the veracity of this account. In the 10th and early 9th centuries BCE, the territory of Judah appears to have been sparsely populated, limited to small rural settlements, most of them unfortified.^[9] **Jerusalem**, the kingdom's capital, likely did not emerge as a significant administrative center until the end of the 8th century; before this the archaeological evidence suggests its population was too small to sustain a viable kingdom.^[10] In the 7th century its population increased greatly, prospering under Assyrian vassalage (despite **Hezekiah's revolt** against the Assyrian king **Sennacherib**^[11]), but in 605 the **Assyrian Empire** was defeated, and the ensuing competition between the **Twenty-sixth Dynasty of Egypt** and the **Neo-Babylonian Empire** for control of the **Eastern Mediterranean** led to the destruction of the kingdom in a series of campaigns between 597 and 582, the **deportation of the elite of the community** and the incorporation of Judah into a **province of the Neo-Babylonian Empire**

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Archaeological record

Significant academic debate exists around the character of the Kingdom of Judah. Little archaeological evidence of an extensive, powerful Kingdom of Judah before the late 8th century BCE has been found; **Nimrud Tablet K.3751**, dated c. 733 BCE, is the earliest known record of the name Judah (written in **Assyrian cuneiform** as Yaudaya or KUR.ia-ú-da-a-a)^[13]

Archaeologists of the **minimalist school** doubt the extent of the Kingdom of Judah as depicted in the Bible. Around 1990–2010, an important group of archaeologists and biblical scholars formed the view that the actual Kingdom of Judah bore little resemblance to the biblical portrait of a powerful monarchy. These scholars say the kingdom was no more than a small tribal entity^{[14][15]}

Kingdom of Judah	
<div> <p>9th^{[1][2]} or 8th^[3] century BCE–586 BCE</p> </div>	
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Capital	Hebron <p>Jerusalem</p>
Languages	Hebrew
Religion	Monotheistic <p>Yahwism/Judaism</p> <p>Canaanite polytheism</p> <p>Mesopotamian polytheism</p> <p>Folk religion^{[4][5][6][7][8]}</p>
Government	Monarchy
Historical era	Levantine Iron Age
<div> <ul style="list-style-type: none">Jeroboam's Revolt Siege of Jerusalem (587 BCE) </div>	<div> <p>9th^{[1][2]} or 8th^[3] century BCE</p> <p>586 BCE</p> </div>
Preceded by	Succeeded by
 Kingdom of Israel	Yehud (Babylonian)



Mesha Stele c. 850 BCE – An inscribed stone set up c. 840 BCE by Mesha of Moab tells how Chemosh, the God of Moab, had been angry with his people and allowed them to be subjugated to Israel, but at length assisted Mesha to throw off the yoke of Israel and restore the lands of Moab.^[12]

However, Yosef Garfinkel has written in a preliminary report published by the Israeli Antiquities Authority that finds at the Khirbet Qeiyafa site support the notion that an urban society already existed in Judah in the late 11th century BCE.^[16] Other archaeologists say that the identification of Khirbet Qeiyafa as an Israelite settlement is uncertain.^{[17][18]}

	province)
Today part of	Israel Palestine

The status of Jerusalem in the 10th century BCE is a major subject of debate.^[9] The oldest part of Jerusalem and its original urban core is the City of David, which does not show evidence of significant Israelite residential activity until the 9th century.^[19] However, unique administrative structures such as the Stepped Stone Structure and the Large Stone Structure, which originally formed one structure, contain material culture dated to Iron I.^[9] On account of the apparent lack of settlement activity in the 10th century BCE, Israel Finkelstein argues that Jerusalem in the century was a small country village in the Judean hills, not a national capital, and Ussishkin argues that the city was entirely uninhabited. Amihai Mazar contends that if the Iron I/Iron IIa dating of administrative structures in the City of David are correct, (as he believes) "Jerusalem was a rather small town with a mighty citadel, which could have been a center of a substantial regional polity"^[9]

Biblical narrative

According to the Hebrew Bible, the kingdom of Judah resulted from the break-up of the United Kingdom of Israel (1020 to about 930 BCE) after the northern tribes refused to accept Rehoboam, the son of Solomon, as their king. At first, only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the house of David, but soon after the tribe of Benjamin joined Judah. The two kingdoms, Judah in the south and Israel in the north, coexisted uneasily after the split until the destruction of the Kingdom of Israel by Assyria in c. 722/721.

The major theme of the Hebrew Bible's narrative is the loyalty of Judah, and especially its kings, to Yahweh, which it states is the God of Israel. Accordingly, all the kings of Israel and almost all the kings of Judah were "bad", which in terms of Biblical narrative means that they failed to enforce monotheism. Of the "good" kings, Hezekiah (727–698 BCE) is noted for his efforts at stamping out idolatry (in this case, the worship of Baal and Asherah, among other traditional Near Eastern divinities),^[20] but his successors, Manasseh of Judah (698–642 BCE) and Amon (642–640 BCE), revived idolatry, drawing down on the kingdom the anger of Yahweh. King Josiah (640–609 BCE) returned to the worship of Yahweh alone, but his efforts were too late and Israel's unfaithfulness caused God to permit the kingdom's destruction by the Neo-Babylonian Empire in the Siege of Jerusalem (587 BCE)

However it is now fairly well established among academic scholars that the Biblical narrative is not an accurate reflection of religious views in either Judah or particularly Israel during this period.^[21]

Relations with the Northern Kingdom

For the first sixty years, the kings of Judah tried to re-establish their authority over the northern kingdom, and there was perpetual war between them. Israel and Judah were in a state of war throughout Rehoboam's seventeen-year reign. Rehoboam built elaborate defenses and strongholds, along with fortified cities. In the fifth year of Rehoboam's reign, Shishak, pharaoh of Egypt, brought a huge army and took many cities. In the sack of Jerusalem (10th century BCE), Rehoboam gave them all of the treasures out of the temple as a tribute and Judah became a vassal state of Egypt.

Rehoboam's son and successor Abijah of Judah continued his father's efforts to bring Israel under his control. He fought the Battle of Mount Zemaraim against Jeroboam of Israel and was victorious with a heavy loss of life on the Israel side. According to the books of Chronicles, Abijah and his people defeated them with a great slaughter, so that 500,000 chosen men of Israel fell slain^[22] after which

Jeroboam posed little threat to Judah for the rest of his reign and the border of the tribe of Benjamin was restored to the original tribal border.^[23]

Abijah's son and successor, Asa of Judah, maintained peace for the first 35 years of his reign,^[24] during which time he revamped and reinforced the fortresses originally built by his grandfather Rehoboam. 2 Chronicles states that at the Battle of Zephath, the Egyptian-backed chieftain Zerah the Ethiopian and his million men and 300 chariots was defeated by Asa's 580,000 men in the Valley of Zephath near Maresha.^[25] The Bible does not state whether Zerah was a pharaoh or a general of the army. The Ethiopians were pursued all the way to Gerar, in the coastal plain, where they stopped out of sheer exhaustion. The resulting peace kept Judah free from Egyptian incursions until the time of Josiah some centuries later

In his 36th year, Asa was confronted by Baasha of Israel,^[24] who built a fortress at Ramah on the border, less than ten miles from Jerusalem. The result was that the capital was under pressure and the military situation was precarious. Asa took gold and silver from the Temple and sent them to Ben-Hadad I, king of Aram-Damascus in exchange for the Damascene king canceling his peace treaty with Baasha. Ben-Hadad attacked Ijon, Dan, and many important cities of the tribe of Naphtali, and Baasha was forced to withdraw from Ramah.^[26] Asa tore down the unfinished fortress and used its raw materials to fortify Geba and Mizpah in Benjamin on his side of the border.^[27]

Asa's successor, Jehoshaphat, changed the policy towards Israel and instead pursued alliances and co-operation with the northern kingdom. The alliance with Ahab was based on marriage. This alliance led to disaster for the kingdom with the battle of Ramoth-Gilead.^[28] He then entered into an alliance with Ahaziah of Israel for the purpose of carrying on maritime commerce with Ophir. But the fleet that was then equipped at Ezion-Geber was immediately wrecked. A new fleet was fitted out without the cooperation of the king of Israel, and although it was successful, the trade was not prosecuted.^[29] He subsequently joined Jehoram of Israel in a war against the Moabites, who were under tribute to Israel. This war was successful, with the Moabites being subdued. However, on seeing Mesha's act of offering his own son in a human sacrifice on the walls of Kir-haresheth filled Jehoshaphat with horror and he withdrew and returned to his own land.^[30]

Jehoshaphat's successor, Jehoram of Judah formed an alliance with Israel by marrying Athaliah, the daughter of Ahab. Despite this alliance with the stronger northern kingdom, Jehoram's rule of Judah was shaky. Edom revolted, and he was forced to acknowledge their independence. A raid by Philistines, Arabs and Ethiopians looted the king's house and carried off all of his family except for his youngest son, Ahaziah of Judah

Clash of empires

After Hezekiah became sole ruler in c. 715 BCE, he formed alliances with Ashkelon and Egypt, and made a stand against Assyria by refusing to pay tribute.^[31] (Isaiah 30–31; 36:6–9) In response, Sennacherib of Assyria attacked the fortified cities of Judah. (2 Kings 18:13) Hezekiah paid three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold to Assyria – requiring him to empty the temple and royal treasury of silver and strip the gold from the doorposts of Solomon's Temple. (2 Kings 18:14–16)^[31] However, Sennacherib besieged Jerusalem^[32] (2 Kings 18:17) in 701 BCE, though the city was never taken.

During the long reign of Manasseh (c. 687/686 – 643/642 BCE),^[33] Judah was a vassal of Assyrian rulers – Sennacherib and his successors, Esarhaddon^[34] and Ashurbanipal after 669 BCE. Manasseh is listed as being required to provide materials for Esarhaddon's building projects, and as one of a number of vassals who assisted Ashurbanipal's campaign against Egypt.^[34]

When Josiah became king of Judah in c. 641/640 BCE,^[33] the international situation was in flux. To the east, the Neo-Assyrian Empire was beginning to disintegrate, the Neo-Babylonian Empire had not yet risen to replace it, and Egypt to the west was still recovering from Assyrian rule. In this power vacuum, Judah was able to govern



Stamped bulla of a servant of King Hezekiah used to seal a papyrus document

itself for the time being without foreign intervention. However, in the spring of 609 BCE, Pharaoh Necho II personally led a sizable army up to the Euphrates to aid the Assyrians.^[35] Taking the coast route Via Maris into Syria at the head of a large army, Necho passed the low tracts of Philistia and Sharon. However, the passage over the ridge of hills which shuts in on the south of the great Jezreel Valley was blocked by the Judean army led by Josiah, who may have considered that the Assyrians and Egyptians were weakened by the death of the pharaoh Psamtik I only a year earlier (610 BCE).^[35] Presumably in an attempt to help the Babylonians, Josiah attempted to block the advance at Megiddo, where a fierce battle was fought and where Josiah was killed.^[36] Necho then joined forces with the Assyrian Ashur-uballit II and together they crossed the Euphrates and lay siege to Harran. The combined forces failed to capture the city, and Necho retreated back to northern Syria. The event also marked the disintegration of the Assyrian Empire.

On his return march to Egypt in 608 BCE, Necho found that Jehoahaz had been selected to succeed his father, Josiah.^[37] Necho deposed Jehoahaz, who had been king for only three months, and replaced him with his older brother, Jehoiakim. Necho imposed on Judah a levy of a hundred talents of silver (about 3¾ tons or about 3.4 metric tons) and a talent of gold (about 34 kilograms (75 lb)). Necho then took Jehoahaz back to Egypt as his prisoner,^[38] never to return.

Jehoiakim ruled originally as a vassal of the Egyptians, paying a heavy tribute. However, when the Egyptians were defeated by the Babylonians at Carchemish in 605 BCE, Jehoiakim changed allegiances, paying tribute to Nebuchadnezzar II of Babylon. In 601 BCE, in the fourth year of his reign, Nebuchadnezzar unsuccessfully attempted to invade Egypt and was repulsed with heavy losses. This failure led to numerous rebellions among the states of the Levant which owed allegiance to Babylon. Jehoiakim also stopped paying tribute to Nebuchadnezzar^[39] and took a pro-Egyptian position. Nebuchadnezzar soon dealt with these rebellions. According to the Babylonian Chronicles, after invading "the land of Hatti (Syria/Palestine)"^{[40][41]} in 599 BCE, he lay siege to Jerusalem. Jehoiakim died in 598 BCE^[42] during the siege, and was succeeded by his son Jeconiah at an age of either eight or eighteen.^[43] The city fell about three months later,^{[44][45]} on 2 Adar (March 16) 597 BCE. Nebuchadnezzar pillaged both Jerusalem and the Temple, carting all his spoils to Babylon. Jeconiah and his court and other prominent citizens and craftsmen, along with a sizable portion of the Jewish population of Judah, numbering about 10,000^[46] were deported from the land and dispersed throughout the Babylonian Empire. (2 Kings 24:14) Among them was Ezekiel. Nebuchadnezzar appointed Zedekiah, Jehoiakim's brother, king of the reduced kingdom, who was made a tributary of Babylon.

Destruction and dispersion

Despite the strong remonstrances of Jeremiah and others, Zedekiah revolted against Nebuchadnezzar, ceasing to pay tribute to him and entered into an alliance with Pharaoh Hophra. In 589 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar II returned to Judah and again besieged Jerusalem. During this period, many Jews fled to surrounding Moab, Ammon, Edom and other countries to seek refuge.^[47] The city fell after a siege which lasted either eighteen or thirty months^[48] and Nebuchadnezzar again pillaged both Jerusalem and the Temple,^[49] after which he destroyed them both.^[50] After killing all of Zedekiah's sons, with the possible exception of one,^[51] Nebuchadnezzar took Zedekiah to Babylon,^[52] putting an end to the independent Kingdom of Judah. According to the Book of Jeremiah, in addition to those killed during the siege, some 4,600 people were deported after the fall of Judah.^[53] By 586 BCE much of Judah was devastated, and the former kingdom suffered a steep decline of both economy and population.^[54]

Jerusalem apparently remained uninhabited for much of the 6th century,^[54] and the centre of gravity shifted to Benjamin, the relatively unscathed northern section of the kingdom, where the town of Mizpah became the capital of the new Babylonian province of Yehud for the remnant of the Jewish population in a part of the former kingdom.^[55]

This was standard Babylonian practice: when the Philistine city of Ashkelon was conquered in 604 BCE, the political, religious and economic elite (but not the bulk of the population) was banished and the administrative centre shifted to a new location.^[56]



Depiction of Jewish king and soldiers in ancient Judah

Gedaliah was appointed governor of the Yehud Medinata, supported by a Babylonian guard. The administrative centre of the province was Mizpah in Benjamin,^[57] not Jerusalem. On hearing of the appointment, many of the Judeans that had taken refuge in surrounding countries were persuaded to return to Judah.^[58] However, before long Gedaliah was assassinated by a member of the royal house, and the Chaldean soldiers killed. The population that was left in the land and those that had returned fled to Egypt fearing a Babylonian reprisal, under the leadership of Yohanan ben Kareah, ignoring the urging of the prophet Jeremiah against the move. (2 Kings 25:26, Jeremiah 43:5–7) In Egypt, the refugees settled in Migdol, Tahpanhes, Noph, and Pathros, (Jeremiah 44:1) and Jeremiah went with them as a moral guardian.

The numbers that were deported to Babylon and those who made their way to Egypt and the remnant that remained in the land and in surrounding countries is subject to academic debate. The Book of Jeremiah reports that 4600 were exiled to Babylonia.^[53] The Books of Kings suggest that it was ten thousand, and later eight thousand.

Re-establishment under Persian rule

In 539 BCE the Achaemenid Empire conquered Babylonia and allowed the exiles to return to Yehud Medinata and rebuild the Temple, which was completed in the sixth year of Darius (515 BCE) (Ezra 6:15) under Zerubbabel, the grandson of the second to last king of Judah, Jeconiah. Yehud Medinata was a peaceful part of the Achaemenid Empire until the fall of the Empire in c. 333 BCE to Alexander the Great

See also

- Kings of Judah
- List of artifacts in biblical archaeology

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