

# Chapter 1, Abraham and Sarah, From One to the Many

- Abraham needs to learn that God’s promise in blessing two vulnerable old people with the founding of a great nation [Genesis 12:1-3], depends not just on him, but also on **Sarah; her contribution to the project is indispensable. The book of Isaiah points to this couple to illustrate how the one could become many: ‘Look to Abraham your father, and to Sarah who bore you. For he was but one when I called him, yet I blessed him and made him many [Isaiah 51:2].** Somehow, despite kingdom collapse and exile, dispersal and persecution, **through the process of “restoring their ruins, they [their descendants] would collect broken shards from their past,—ancestral lore, royal legends, legal codes, prophecies, poetry, and proverbs—and create what continues to be, now after more than 2,500 years, the most extraordinary and consequential body of literature in human history.”** [20-21,27]
- The two kingdoms that composed the population of Israelites described in Samuel, Kings and Chronicles—Israel, the Northern Kingdom, and Judah, the Southern Kingdom—  
—”were relatively short-lived, being subjected to superpowers from Mesopotamia. Israel was conquered first, after existing for just two centuries. **Judah managed to escape its neighbor’s fate and endured for another 135 years. During these years, it rose to prominence and exerted its influence throughout the region, and as it did, it laid claim to Israel’s culture and identity.** [23-24]
- While the biblical narrative explains how the one became many,...we face a problem of historical reconstruction: **how the many became one.** What did the host of clans that inhabited North and South have in common?” [One might think of the USA, how, post civil war, we insist on our coinage, E pluribus unum—”From the many, one.] **The Bible is our earliest example of these creative endeavors of political imagination, and also directly inspired many of these projects of peoplehood.** [27-28]

# Chapter 1 (continued)

- Wright [p. 25]: “If location is everything, Israel and Judah were not predestined for greatness. Although they would later expand, their core territories were just a small part of the Levant. ***On the periphery of the periphery they lived in land-locked enclaves, up in the hill country, far removed from the major urban centers in Egypt and Mesopotamia.*** These two inland kingdoms never managed to build naval fleets and the main trade routes of the region skirted their borders. Even if they lay off the beaten path, ***Israel’s and Judah’s location on the Levantine land-bridge shaped their destinies. Imperial forces confronted each other on their borders, and when these two kingdoms entered the fray, they did not escape unscathed.*** [As imperial powers consolidated in Mesopotamia, they inevitably set their sights on Egypt. Advancing across the Levantine land-bridge toward this ancient civilization, they destroyed the kingdoms that stood in their way.] Slowly but surely, the superpowers crushed them in military contests and forced them to forfeit their sovereignty. ***The scribes who shaped the biblical writings portrayed this imperial subjugation as divine judgment and made it the lens through which they scrutinized their past...[Attention to their defeat] goes a long way toward explaining why we have a Bible today.*** [23,25]

- Map source: Institute for Curriculum Services, [icsresources.org](http://icsresources.org)



# The importance of the Two Meanings of the term “Israel”

- “As we proceed, it is important that we bear in mind the **two, very different, meanings of the name “Israel.” One refers to the Northern kingdom, and the other to the nation (the “Israelites”) that descended from Abraham and Sarah.** The distinction is crucial to understanding the Bible’s origins—and to appreciating its vision for a new kind of political community.
- The biblical narrative, which begins with the creation of the world and ends with the destruction of Jerusalem in the book of Kings, evolved over the ages...**Generations of anonymous scribes collected independent pieces [of oral narrative and writing] embroidered them with new details, and wove them into an elaborate literary tapestry.** This work portrays the histories of the two kingdoms, Israel and Judah, portraying their tragic ends.
- As it does, **it blends their separate stories, setting them in relation to an earlier “United Monarchy” from the time of David and Solomon, and beyond that, to a nation that evolved from a single, extended family, beginning with Abraham and Sarah.**
- **Much of what became the biblical narrative originated in the Northern kingdom of Israel. After its downfall, scribes constructed a past of peoplehood that long preceded the palace. These are moving tales of a family becoming a nation, and of liberated slaves making their way as refugees to a new land.** Although Northern scribes drafted early versions of these tales, **much of their poignancy and power is due to the work of Southern scribes who created a larger “National Narrative” by connecting the competing histories Israel and Judah.** The Bible as we know it is therefore a work from Northern writers that has been filtered through and decisively shaped by the experience of Southern writers.” [26-27]

# Chapter 2, Miriam, Empire and Exodus

- ***When we consider the Exodus narrative, Wright points out that “the biblical authors consciously wrote a revisionist account of their people’s past. To understand what motivated their revisionism, we need to learn about the dramatic historical events on the eve of Israel’s emergence in Canaan.***
- ***One of the Execration Texts refers to a “Rushalim”, which some scholars identify with Jerusalem. If so it is the first reference to important biblical places, albeit “celebrating their doom and destruction” [texts date to Egyptian 12<sup>th</sup> Dynasty, c. 19<sup>th</sup> c. BCE, pre-Israelite period].***
- ***In 1887 locals were digging among the ruins at a site that we know today as the ancient Egyptian capital of Amarna of Pharaoh Akhenaten, often considered a predecessor to Israelite monotheism. The tablets are written in Akkadian, the diplomatic language of the time. Wright points out that “these documents mention many of the places of the Bible, such as Shechem, Jerusalem, Hebron, Lachish, Gezer, and Megiddo, [but]...have nothing to say about the people of the Bible—Israel, Judah, or any member of the biblical cast of characters...The Amarna archive confirms what archeologists and historians in the nineteenth century were already starting to realize for other reasons: the biblical account is not a reliable source for Israel’s history during these early centuries.”***
- ***“The biblical narratives are oblivious to any of the figures or conflicts documented in the Amarna Letters. In fact, they do not even know that Egypt controlled the region at the time. In the biblical memory of this period, Egypt is a place from which Israel escapes, and when the refugees make it to Canaan, they face independent city-states (such as Jericho), which form coalitions without any Egyptian oversight.***
- ***As long as Egypt was defending its imperial interests in the region, it was able to hold all the chiefdoms from the hill country in check. But when the empire collapsed, new populations would move into the space that Egypt vacated. They include Israel and Judah, as well as neighboring peoples with names such as the Philistines and the Ammonites, Moab and Edom.***
- ***Some scholars date the biblical exodus to the reign of Ramses the Great, Merneptah’s father (1279-1213 BCE). Since Merneptah’s inscriptions present Israel living in Canaan, their migration from Egypt, according to this late dating, would have had to occur shortly before Merneptah’s military assault on them [Mentioned in his stele, which we’ll see in the next slide. The Bible is silent about Merneptah and his invasion.]***
- ***Conversely, the Egyptians know nothing about Israel’s tenure in Egypt or its exodus, even on a small scale. [30-39]***

# The first mention of Israel, the people

- ***“In 1896 the...British archeologist Flinders Petrie [1853-1942] made the most sensational discovery of his...career. Excavating at Thebes he discovered a temple that the pharaoh Merneptah (1213-1203 BCE) had built. Among the ruins they found...an inscribed black granite monument standing over ten feet high...[When he found the term Israel he declared] ‘This stele will be better known to he world than anything else I have found.’”***
- Picture source: Wikipedia. The Merneptah stele from c. 1208 BCE, not long after the presumed date of the Exodus. The bottom with its reference to Israel has a protective cover. ***In the twenty-seventh line Merneptah claims that Israel has been completely wiped out. “Canaan is captive with all woe./ Ashkelon is conquered./ Gezer seized./ Yanoam made nonexistent./ Israel is wasted, its seed is no more.’ Israel...takes the stage of world history as a defeated, extinct people. However, reality proved to be the very opposite of Merneptah’s claim: far from being rendered extinct, Israel’s seed would soon thereafter blossom and flourish, giving its name to a people who not only went on to build a powerful kingdom, but also have managed to survive, against all odds, to the present day.”***  
[37]



# Moses, Miriam and the Exodus

- “In our Bibles...*the Family Story [Abraham to Joseph] sequences to the Exodus-Conquest Account [Moses through Joshua]*...[they] form a continuous story; *however the two works render very different images of the nation’s past and likely had separate origins.*
- What is important for our purposes is how scribes created these works by combining earlier traditions. As we shall see, *the authors of Family Story took independent figures (such as Isaac and Jacob) and grafted them into a single family-tree. Many of these figures represent independent regions, tribes and clans. By blending their stories into a larger narrative, scribes affirmed that originally separate and rival groups belonged in the same national fold. Similarly, the Exodus-Conquest Account was formed by linking Moses on the one end to Joshua on the other.* It grew to its present proportions as nameless scribes, working over many centuries, amplified it with a host of additional characters.
- **Consider Miriam: ‘And Miriam cried to them:/ “Sing to Yhwh,/for he has triumphed gloriously./ Horse and ruler he has thrown into the sea.”** (Exodus 15:21)

*A text from Exodus refers to her as ‘Miriam, the prophet.’ After the parting of the Red Sea, she leads the women of Israel in a joyous song and dance: ‘Sing to Yhwh, for he has triumphed gloriously, horse and rider he has thrown into the sea’ (Exodus 15:21). The name of Miriam may have been associated with a particular population, prophetic tradition, or perhaps a local cult of some sort.* Another text, one that most scholars deem to be old (Exodus 20:1), reports that she died and was buried in Kadesh, an oasis on Israel’s border, and it is possible that she was once a venerated figure there.

- *[On the other hand] the book of Numbers portrays her criticizing Moses for marrying an Ethiopian woman...She is...expelled from the camp [she has also been punished with leprosy but healed through Moses’ pleading with God], but the people refuse to continue their voyage to the Promised Land until she is readmitted (Numbers 12).* [Instead of omitting her from the nation’s story as a figurehead for a group rejecting Moses, she is presented as courageous, clever, beloved woman, and prophet, who by saving Moses as a baby on the banks of the Nile took the first step of the nation’s liberation from bondage. [40-42]

# Why the Bible Began 2; Chapter 3, Deborah, A New Dawn

- “One of the earliest and most influential studies of biblical literature is ***“The Spirit of Hebrew Poetry: An Instruction for Lovers of the Same and the Oldest History of the Human Spirit” (1782-1783)... [by] Johann Gottfried von Herder [174-1803]***, one of the first intellectuals in modernity to think in terms of a national identity...[He thought] that the ***ancient Song of Deborah [from the book of Judges; the poem, which many scholars consider the oldest piece of poetry in the Bible]*** depicts the kings of Canaan defeated by the forces of Yhwh] demonstrated that a people consisting of ***diverse ‘tribes’ cold be united in spirit even when...it was not united by a ruler and political borders...Many political communities across the globe have drawn directly from biblical writings when forming a notion of nationhood that is distinct from, and does not depend on, statehood.***” [44]
- “The onslaught of...Sea Peoples delivered the coup de grace to Egypt’s moribund hegemony...About this time [the end of the Bronze Age—1100 BCE] Philistines were settling on the Canaanite coast in the region of Gaza...[Egypt] soon entered a time of decline, division, and political instability...making space for new constellations of power.” [45] ***For several centuries the following territorial states, mentioned in the Tanach jockeyed for power: Israel and Judah (the Northern and Southern eventual Jewish kingdoms) in the central hill country, Aram-Damascus (the Arameans) in the north, Ammon, Moab, and Edom on the eastern side of the Jordan River. City-states on the northern coast (modern Lebanon), and Philistines on the southern coastal plain of Gaza.*** As new superpowers grew in Mesopotamia, the pressure as they advanced across the Levantine land-bridge toward Egypt changed the imperial center of vassal statehood to Mesopotamia.

## Chapter 6 (cont'd)

- “From a long-term perspective...the defeat that decisively shaped the Bible was nothing more than a return to the imperial domination that had been the status quo in the Levant for four millennia...The Bible has nothing to say about the turmoil from 1200 to 1100 BCE [*invasion from the North, earthquakes, famine, disease, the disruption of international trade routes, local revolts and internal unrest among the Minoans, Hittites, Trojans, Babylonian-Kassites, Assyrians, and Egyptians, who also had low flood levels, food shortages, corruption, excessive control of the priests and incessant court bickering*] that toppled the superpowers which had long controlled the Southern Levant...*Instead...it depicts the newly liberated Israelites invading the land and bringing an end to Canaan's ancient city-states.*” [47-48]

- Source of map: [Pinterest.co.uk](https://www.pinterest.co.uk)





# The Book of Judges

- “The book of Joshua tells how the nation’s twelve tribes mount a massive offensive...The book of Judges describes the military conflicts that the tribes faced for generations...[Judges, or saviors] repeatedly rise up to rescue the nation from its foes. These figures represent various regions, tribes, and clans in Israel. Thus ***Deborah is from the hill country of Ephraim, while Gideon...is from the Jezreel Valley north of Ephraim...Having little to do with Israel as a collective people, the older tales pertain to separate regions and clans, and their ancestral heroes.***” [48]
- “When explaining how the Israelites settled in the central hill country, most archeologists today adopt the model of peaceful infiltration: the clans that later formed the Northern and Southern kingdoms coalesced from Canaanite groups or migrated from regions east of the Jordan [some philologists suggest the name Hebrew originally referred to those who passed over the Jordan River and settled on its western side].” [49] ***“We lack archeological evidence for hordes of invaders sweeping across Canaan [as depicted in Joshua].” [50] “Kathleen Kenyon [1906-1978, British archeologist] demonstrated that the city’s impressive walls were built centuries BEFORE Joshua time...Many historians now agree that the early Israelites were in a very real sense ‘Canaanites’, (i.e., indigenous to the land of Canaan)...The name Israel appears to have designated a powerful tribe or alliance of tribes, that posed a threat to Egyptian armies...thanks to Merneptah’s stele [1213-1203 BCE], we know that the name long antedate the emergence of the Northern Kingdom in the tenth and ninth centuries.”***[50-51]

# The four-room house

- “In the 12<sup>th</sup> c. BCE the central hill country suddenly blossomed with roughly 250 new villages, hamlets, farmsteads, and small towns...This settlement wave continued...for several centuries...The dwellings...often featured columns that could support a second floor (called “four-room houses” or “pillared houses”).[51] ***“There was ...little to distinguish them from similar settlement-waves east of the Jordan and in the north. All these peoples spoke basically the same language...”*** [54]
- Picture source: four room house courtyard [www.pinterest.es](http://www.pinterest.es)



# The Place of The Song of Deborah in the Narrative of Israel

- “The biblical texts that imagine Israel as a people of twelve tribes—a natural number corresponding to the months of the year—do so by conceiving of Judah’s smaller territory as comprising two tribes [Judah and Benjamin]. The Song [of Deborah] may be a response to this larger pan-Israelite identity (‘greater Israel’), and if so, **it insists that the nation consists of solely ten Northern tribes and does not include Judah!**...This observation bears directly on the question of the song’s origins. Most agree that it is the work of multiple authors and evolved over time. Some believe that it dates to the period before the establishment of a centralized state, since it has no place for a native king. But it is more likely that **Northern scribes composed the song shortly before or after the downfall of their kingdom in 722 BCE**...The Song of Deborah memorializes a military contest with Canaanite kings fought in the twilight of Israel’s existence...It conveys...a message: **If Israel had already coalesced as a nation at an early point, long before the monarchy, it could do so again now after the monarchy had been vanquished.**” [54-55]
- “Northern scribes not only produced this song, they also composed...**the literary cores of the Family Story in Genesis and the Exodus-conquest Account**...**These writings construct a national identity for Israel by portraying the most formative periods in the nation’s past as a time long before the emergence of the monarchy**, when Yhwh reigned as king and had non-royal leaders (such as Moses, Miriam, Joshua and Deborah) as his representatives...The Song of Deborah...was probably composed as a response to the imperial conquests that removed the Northern monarchy from the scene...**[Still comparatively early] it has nothing to say about either the Sinai covenant or the sacrificial cult**—subjects that figure prominently in later biblical texts...**What’s most remarkable about this piece is that its authors consciously removed the monarchy from their memory of the nation’s early years**...” [55-56]

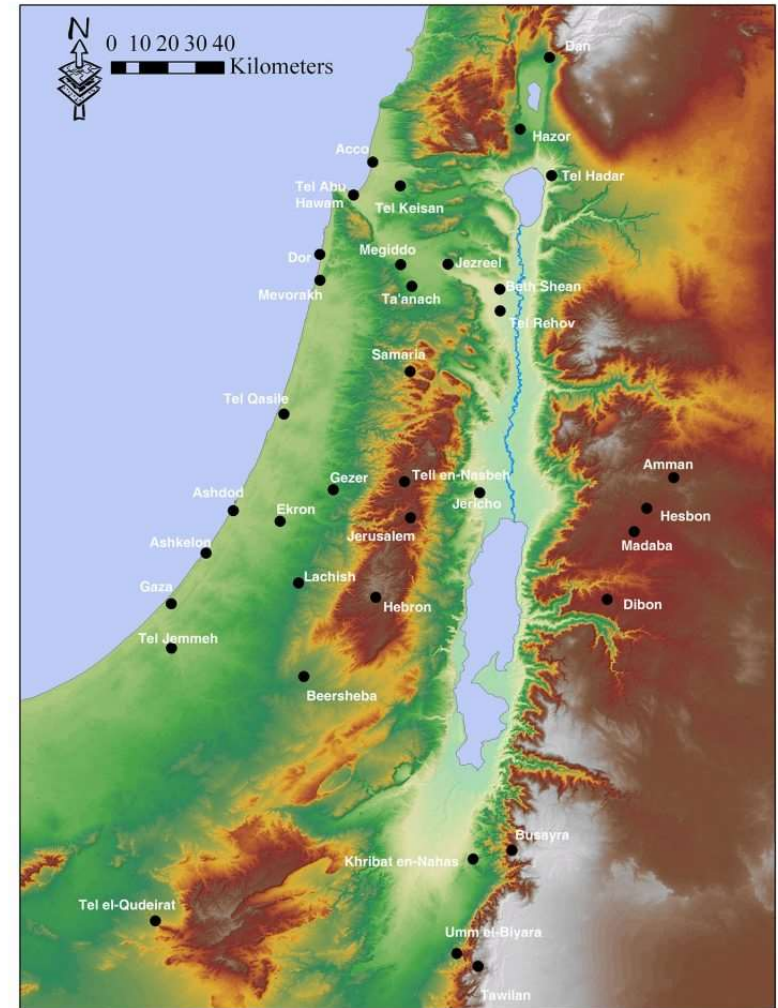
## Chapter 4, King David, Between North and South

- “David, the nation’s beloved warrior-poet, is dancing in the streets, reveling in the triumph that he—with Yhwh’s help—had secured for his people...***[David’s] rise to power is a story...with a narrative arc corresponding to his people’s collective experience...At the end of his impressive reign, he, like his people centuries later, faces catastrophic defeat and manages to return to Jerusalem only after suffering humiliation and exile.*** With the lives of David and Saul, the biblical story begins to converge with history. But only on certain points. ***There is little room for doubt that David built a strong kingdom that endured several hundred years, yet it is UNLIKELY that he ruled over a kingdom that included both the North and the South with Jerusalem at its center.***” [57-58]
- King David dancing before the ark. Richard Gere as David in the film “King David” (1985). Source: [www.pinterest.com](http://www.pinterest.com); 2 Samuel 6:14: “David danced before Yhwh with all his might.”



# Imagining a United Monarchy

- “In the book of Samuel we can reconstruct an older account of David’s life. It depicts him consolidating a kingdom in the South out of separate clans, regions and towns under the banner of the ‘House of Judah.’ **...In this early account, the place David chooses for Judah’s capital is not Jerusalem but Hebron, an ancient city situated directly at the center of the kingdom.,,[the actual move of the capital to Jerusalem would not occur] until the final years of the Northern kingdom, in the late eighth century BCE....[Saul] likely ruled over a region in Benjamin—a small strip of the hill country running between the North and the South where Jerusalem is located.** Over time scribes connected Saul to Jonathan and expanded the traditions into a tale of Israel’s first monarchy...” [59]”...**Founded by David, the kingdom of Judah was older...Whereas repeated puches plagued the Northern kingdom and produced short-lived dynasties, the Southern kingdom benefitted from political continuity...**[Nevertheless] the Southern kingdom’s territory was poorer , its towns smaller, and it had just a fraction of the North’s population. [63]
- Southern Levant, light green coastal plain, darker green Shephelah, brown hill country, source of topographic map American Society of Overseas Research (ASOR); Iron Age,12---550 BCE, [Stephen Batiuk](#), September 2005



# No Raid on Jerusalem?

- “Both the Bible and the Egyptian inscriptions relate that **a pharaoh named Shishak (or Shoshenq) campaigned in Canaan (c. 925 BCE)**...The account of Shishak’s campaign, which is inscribed on the walls of a temple at Karnak...catalogs more than 150 towns and peoples that the pharaoh conquered in the Levant, many from the kingdom of Israel...Yet none of them refer to Jerusalem or any place in the kingdom of Judah. **The reason the scribes at Karnak omitted these Southern towns is most probably that Judah was not on Egypt’s radar by 925 BCE...The biblical book of Kings, however, knows nothing about Shishak’s assault on the Northern kingdom and its neighbors.**” [63-65]
- Picture Pharaoh Shishak, Amun Temple, Karnak (near Luxor), Source: [people.bethel.edu](http://people.bethel.edu)



- The Palace History [Judah] vs. The People's History [Israel]**
- “Found in the books of Samuel and Kings, [the Palace History] does not know of an exodus from Egypt. Instead it presupposes that the ‘Israelites’ had always lived in their homeland, albeit under foreign domination...The Southern scribes in Judah likely would have been composing this narrative about the same time that **Northern scribes were drafting a ‘People’s History,’ which consists of the Family Story of Genesis and the Exodus-Conquest Account...The Palace History imagines a political unity centered on the Davidic dynasty and Jerusalem...**[It] promotes Yhwh’s promise of an eternal dynasty to David and his descendants...The Palace History views the political rupture between the North and the South as the first fall from grace...”
  - “[On the contrary] **the People’s History [from the Northern kingdom] completely removes the monarchy from Israel’s collective identity...**[It] is propelled by Yhwh’s promises to the nation’s ancestors and a covenant that Yhwh makes with the nation as [a] whole...In advanced stages of its composition-history, [it] portrays primordial sins against divine commandments—first in the Garden of Eden and then later, in the wilderness, when the newly constituted nation breaks the covenant by worshipping a golden calf.” [66]

# Why are our oldest sources from Egypt and Akkad?

- “The earliest Hebrew texts found in archeological excavations use the much simpler writing system that we call the alphabet, which was invented long after the logosyllabic scripts of cuneiform [Akkad] and hieroglyphs [Egypt]...[However] **by the seventh and sixth centuries BCE, literacy among elites had risen considerably in the Southern Levant**...Alphabetic Aramaic was also beginning to replace Akkadian as the lingua franca for international diplomacy...the earliest Hebrew inscriptions date to the late tenth or early ninth century BCE. An important exemplar is the Gezer Calendar, which lists a sequence of agricultural duties according [to] monthly or bimonthly periods...The Bible was born in the Iron Age, and **if Hebrew writing was not invented until the late tenth or early ninth century, we can understand why Moses and David were not its earliest authors.**” [67-71]
- Reproduction of the Gezer calendar, Israel Museum, source: [bibleresources.blogspot.com](http://bibleresources.blogspot.com)





# Chapter 5, Ahab and Jezebel, Putting Israel on the Map

- Contrary to our received, (Southern kingdom) revision of the book of Kings in our Tanach, without the efforts of Ahab and Jezebel, members of the Omride Dynasty, to consolidate the Northern kingdom, establish its international repute, and promote a culture in which Yhwh featured prominently, “we would have no Bible today.” Among other sins they are portrayed in the much later Southern editor version of the Tanach’s Palace History, and especially Jezebel, Ahab’s foreign wife, as “ferociously” persecuting “Elijah and Elisha, two prophets of Yhwh, while spreading the worship of other gods...” ***Historically it was Omri and his dynastic successors who, “in just four decades, from 884-841 BCE...--above all his son Ahab—carved out a large and complex territorial state...The Assyrians...knew the Northern kingdom simply as the ‘House of Omri (Bit-Humri)’...Omri ended decades of civil wars..., built a new capital in Samaria, and established a powerful ruling house...He and his descendants expanded Israel’s borders from the hill country and the Jezreel Valley further northwards into the Galilee, as well as across the Jordan River to the Gilead in the East.”***  
[73]
- “In putting Israel on the map, the Omrides created a cosmopolitan culture. The kingdom traded their precious crafts and commodities with cities on the Phoenician coast, where...the alphabetic writing system used for Hebrew was invented. Jezebel, the woman who reigned as Ahab’s queen, came from the Phoenician city of Tyre...The Omrides exerted influence over Judah and constantly interfered in its internal politics. In fact, the Southern kingdom that was emerging at this time relied heavily on Omride patronage...As a part of its vassal obligations, Judah was expected to participate in Israel’s military campaigns...***Samaria’s leverage over Jerusalem goes a long way toward explaining why Judah later inherited Israel’s cultural and literary heritage.***”
- The Omrides ...managed to place one of their own on the throne in Jerusalem. Her name was Athaliah...After her Judean husband King Jehoram (or Joram) died, her son became king in Judah, and “she exerted considerable influence in her role as queen-mother. When her son was assassinated after one year of his reign, she assumed the throne.” [According to the Tanach’s negative assessment of her anti-Davidic dynastic ambitions, she reigned for six years, before being assassinated in a rebellion. [75-76]

# The significance of Israel's chariots

- When Ahab fought with an alliance of Levantine kings against the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III at the battle of Qarqar in 853 BCE [recorded in an Assyrian inscription, but not mentioned in the Bible], Ahab is said to have provided 10,000 foot-soldiers and 2,000 chariots to the coalition, more than the Egyptians, whose contribution to the coalition was just 1,000 troops and NO chariots. ***“Chariots represent the most sophisticated technology of the ancient world. At the nexus of a vast network of knowledge and material goods, they were extremely expensive, and the horses that propelled them required exorbitant amounts of water and food...Israel's chariot battalions were so feared that their members were given posts in Assyria's imperial army after the kingdom's downfall.”*** [74]
- Royal Assyrian of Shalmaneser II chariots in battle, Balawat Gate. Picture source: worldhistory.org



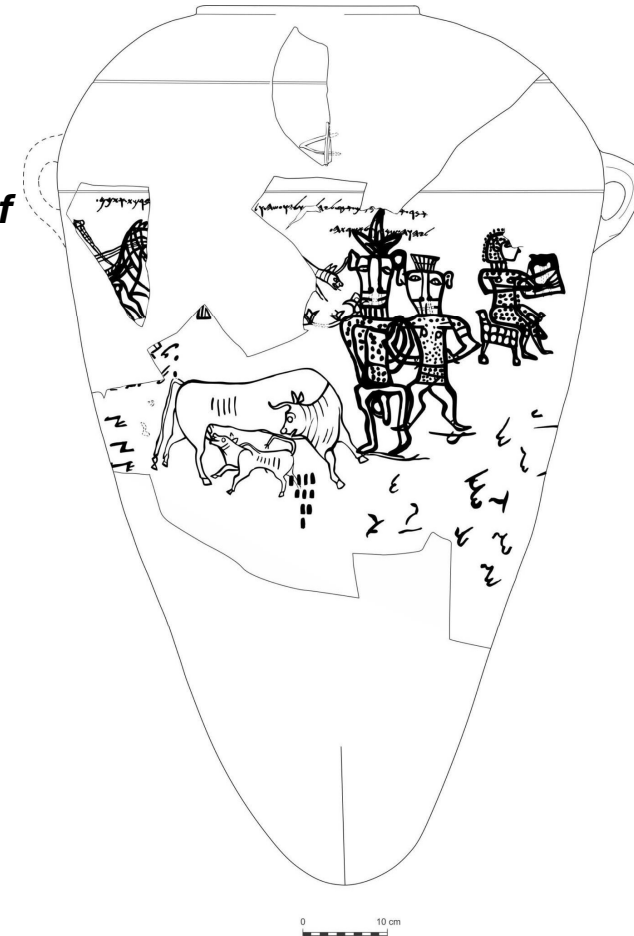
# The Mesha Stele

- “Mesha [is] a foundational ruler in the kingdom of Moab who was previously known only from the Bible...The monument...[commemorates] recovering territories that Omri and his son Ahab had occupied east of the Jordan River...Many epigraphers now claim it is the earliest attestation of the Hebrew script...***We have yet to discover a lengthy inscription like this from an earlier period, and it is unlikely that we will find one...***This move toward ‘textualization’ is historically pivotal, as it laid the foundation for the Bible’s formation...Mesha...appeals to a male deity [Chemosh] to unify his kingdom...In the same way that Mesha promotes the veneration of Chemosh, ***the Omride monarchs used Yhwh to consolidate their kingdom.*** [77,79].” [However, after the defeat of the Northern kingdom by Assyria, scribes from the north] “would narrate Israel’s past from Yhwh’s perspective removing the king from the picture altogether. As the one and only sovereign of the nation, Yhwh makes his will known through prophets and texts, and does not need a human ruler as his representative.” [80] “...What is remarkable is how the scribes who produced our texts found a way to construct a collective past that affirms Israel’s unity without erasing the diversity of its members.” [81]
- The Mesha Stele (the Moabite Stone, c. 840 BCE) discovered at Dibon, now Dhiban, Jordan (1868-1870) by Frederick Augustus Klein, Anglican missionary. Current location—the Louvre. Source: [www.pinterest.com](http://www.pinterest.com)



# Yhwh and his Asherah

- An inscriptions reads: “I have blessed you by the Yhwh of Samaria.”...”**However, this deity is not alone; he’s accompanied by ‘his Asherah’**. Asherah is a well-attested West Asian deity. As the consort of the highest god El, who presided over a large pantheon, she occupied a position of prominence. In the Bible she is often paired with Baal...These findings are undeniably shocking and scandalous. **The coupling of Yhwh with another deity flies in the face of the Bible’s stringent requirements to worship Yhwh alone and its vehement opposition to the veneration of other gods...**[In Judean King Josiah’s reform c. 620 BCE, he removed Asherah’s sacred vessels from the Temple...(2 Kings 23:4,7)...Asherah worship was thus firmly entrenched in both Samaria and Jerusalem...**the intimate relationship between one people and one deity, which is foundational to the biblical concept of covenant, meant that the longstanding union between Yhwh and Asherah had to be dissolved...**The biblical authors envisioned a new marriage between Yhwh and Israel...**Eventually, the authors of Deuteronomy**, in an effort to consolidate a nation from competing centers, would declare that all these Yhwhs [a Yhwh of Samaria and a Yhwh of Teman (Edom),etc.] are one and the same: **‘Hear O Israel, Yhwh is one** (Deut. 6:4).” [82-85]
- Pithos A at **Kuntillet Ajrud, an isolated fortress in the northern Sinai Desert**, discovered in 1975-1976, showing five figures. There are a bull and calf. A seated musician or weaver is to one side. **In the center appear “Yahweh and his Asherah.”** **Scholars date it from late 9<sup>th</sup>-early 8<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE, after the Omride effort to promote Yhwh worship.** Source: Wikipedia [from Ze’ev Meshel?]



# Chapter 6, Jehu and Elisha, Israel's Downfall and Judah's Jubilation—The Tel Dan Stele

- The Tel Dan Stele commemorates King Hazael [842-796 BCE] of Aram-Damascus' success in seizing Dan from the Northern Kingdom of Israel. He also claims to have vanquished 70 kings, two of which are specifically indicated as the ruler of "Israel" [the Northern Kingdom] and the second belonged to "the House of David" [the Southern Kingdom]. ***This "represents our earliest to David in the historical record.*** [88-89]. Hazael: ***"I killed Jehoram son of Ahab, king of Israel, and I killed Ahaziah son of Jehoram, king of the House of David."*** [Tel Dan Stele, ll.7-8]. This first historic mention of David in the archeological record ***made "the front page of the New York Times in 1993..."***[Though the NYT celebrated both proof of David's existence and the extant of his kingdom, only the first claim is true.] Notice the subordinate place that the House of David occupies in the inscription. ***By naming this kingdom second, the scribe indicates that the Northern kingdom led the war effort.*** [90]
- Discovered 1993-94. Basalt, Old Aramaic writing, Phoenician alphabet, 870-750 BCE, The Tel Dan Stele on display at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem. Source: Wikipedia, Oren Rozen



# The Assyrian Enemy

- “The authors of the Palace History [Southern kingdom] were not satisfied with foreign kings conquering the Omrides [Northern kingdom]...**their demise had to be an act of divine judgment...The Assyrians from northern Iraq gradually assumed [the] role [of chief nemesis for the Northern kingdom].**
- A victory monument called the **Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (d. 823 BCE)**, which once stood in the Assyrian capital of Nimrud [now in the British Museum] showing Jehu or his emissary prostrate, kissing the foot of the mighty Assyrian overlord. **This is our oldest image of a member of the Northern kingdom,** and the accompanying inscription lists the tribute paid to Assyria by Jehu, who overthrew Ahab’s dynasty—”The tribute of Jehu, son of Omri: I received from him silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden vase with pointed bottom, golden tumblers, golden buckets, tin, a staff for a king, and spears.” Source: [www.message.to/eagle.com](http://www.message.to/eagle.com)



## The last years of Israel (a)

- “For five decades Israel complied with Assyria’s demands and the imperial records attest to the tribute Jehu’s successors paid as vassals to this foreign power...***Samaria, the capital of Israel, was about fifty times smaller than the Assyrian capital in Nimrud, whose city walls were five miles long***...The long period of Northern prosperity came to an end with the rise of the expansionistic ruler Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727 BCE)... Soon enough [the neo-Assyrian Empire] would begin to annex Israel’s territories, and ***within less than a century [722 BCE], it would conquer its capital, laying waste to the entire kingdom, and deporting its inhabitants***...” [93]
- [Because Judah (under King Ahaz) refused to join an alliance with Israel (under King Pekah) and Aram-Damascus against Assyria] “...the allied armies laid siege to Jerusalem...***This incident is known as the Syro Ephraimite War, and the prophetic book of Isaiah treats the clash at length in its oldest portion (the “Isaiah Memoir of chapters 9-10)...***[Isaiah says]...Thus says my lord Yhwh: ‘It shall not stand, and it shall come to pass...***Within sixty-five years Ephraim (Israel) will be shattered as a people.*** If you do not believe, you will not remain.’ [Isaiah 7:7-8]. Isaiah promises Ahaz...that Israel eventually would be destroyed...The conflict represents one of the lowest points in the Palace History. [94-95]

## The last years of Israel (b)

- “The Palace History...demonstrates... how these foreign powers [Assyria] that Judah invited to the region [to “protect” it from Israel] would eventually set their sights on Jerusalem and in the process destroy much of the Southern kingdom. **Contrary to the biblical depiction, Assyria’s advance against Israel had little if anything to do with Judah’s invitation. The empire [of Assyria] had already begun—a decade earlier—to establish its hegemony in the region...**In 727 [BCE King] Hoshea [of Israel] stopped sending tribute[to Assyria] and sought to form an alliance against Assyria with Egypt’s help. These audacious moves proved catastrophic. Under Shalmeneser IV and Sargon, the empire waged war on the Northern kingdom...After being beleaguered for several years, **Samaria capitulated around 722 [BCE].**” [95]
- “...Samaria was now an imperial province, with foreign governors presiding in the place of native kings...Thus [in] a royal ‘prism-inscription’ discovered at the Assyrian palace in Nimrud, Sargon describes how he conquered Samaria for his god and exiled 27,290 of its inhabitants...**Whereas the later Babylonian deportations [after Jerusalem was conquered in 586 BCE] kept the Judeans together, the Assyrians severed the ethnic cohesion of the population they conquered. Beginning with Tiglath-Pileser III, the empire practiced a policy of ‘two-way deportations,’ resettling the inhabitants of subjugated kingdoms in sparsely populated regions far from their homelands, while bringing in new groups to colonize the conquered territories...**For the region of Samaria, archeologists estimate that the Assyrians deported little more than 10-20% of the population. [Ido Koch, “Assyrian Deportation and Resettlement: The Story of Samaria. 2019]. This means that **many would have been around to carry on Israel’s traditions.** [96-97]



## The last years of Israel (c)

- “According to Stephanie Dalley, an expert on the Horse Lists [a body of texts from Nimrud], the Samarian battalion [remember Israel was famous for its chariots and horses] is ‘the only known unit, from outside Assyria proper that is known as a national unit under its own city name.’ [Stephanie Dalley, “Foreign Chariotry and Cavalry in the Armies of Tiglath-Pileser III and Sargon II” (1985)]...Foreign officers deported from other countries joined the imperial army, yet according to Dalley, **none of them maintained their national affiliation as those from Samaria did...These texts...indicate that Samaria’s downfall did not mean the extinction of the collective identity that the Omride kings had created two centuries earlier to unite their diverse kingdom. Many of the vanquished still took pride in their origins...**”
- “Israel’s disintegration elicited jubilation in Judah. The shadenfreude is palpable not only in the Palace History, which details at length all that Israel had done to deserve its fate, but also in the prophetic writings...Judah...would go on to become a major power in the region, taking the prominent position that Israel had long held. **The sensational rise of the Southern kingdom ...occurred in the span of 135 years, what historians call ‘the long seventh century.’** That politically volatile period **witnessed the growth of many of the most important biblical writings, which consisted of two very different types: those drafted by members of the defeated Northern kingdom and those written in the employ of the Judean court...** Their very different perspectives impart a complexity and diversity to the biblical corpus...” [98-99]