

Old Testament Survey

Week 4 — God's kingdom disintegrates: 930 – 586 BC



Introduction

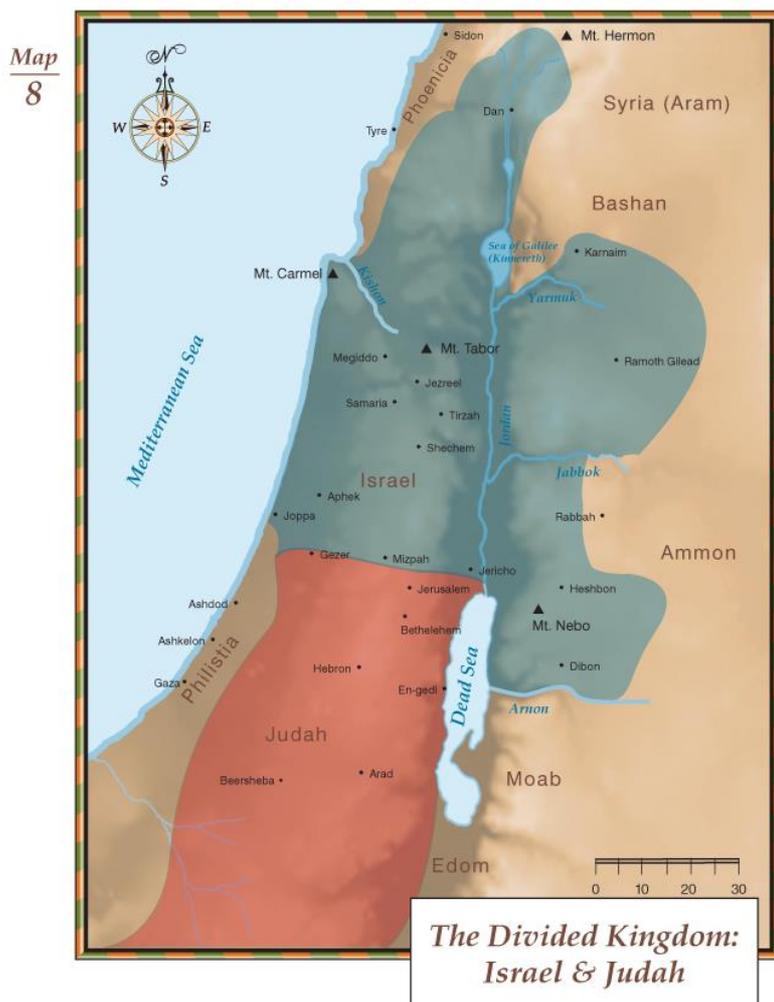
Our heavenly sovereign created the nation of Israel as the people who would represent his reign to the nations (Genesis). He freed them from human rule, established them as his people guided by his laws, and lived among them (Exodus). But without human rulers, they really struggled (Judges). When they asked for a king like the nations, Samuel warned them they would find human rule much more expensive and harsh and oppressive than God’s reign (1 Sam 8, 12).

Samuel was right: human kingship proved problematic for Israel. God’s kingdom disintegrated—consumed by other kingdoms.

The nation splits (930 BC)

When Solomon died in 930 BC, the Israelites were sick of being enslaved and taxed so heavily to build the temple, Solomon’s palace, and other public works. They asked his son Rehoboam to be less demanding. He refused (1 Kings 12). It split the kingdom into:

- **Judah**, the south, capital Jerusalem, David’s descendants rule;
- **Israel**, the north, capital Samaria, various dynasties of kings.



Source: *Standard Bible Atlas*. Cincinnati: Standard Publishing, 2006, 16.

The northern tribes (all except Judah and Benjamin) appointed **Jeroboam** as their king. Jeroboam didn't want its people going to Jerusalem (in Judah) to worship, so he set up their own religious shrines: one at Dan (the extreme north) and the other at Bethel (the extreme south) (1 Kings 12:26-30). Jeroboam set up two pedestals where people could worship Israel's (invisible) God. These pedestals were golden calves. Naturally people ended up worshipping these graven images.

Now the meaning of the word *Israel* has changed:

- Before Solomon's death, "Israel" meant the whole country—all the tribes together as a single nation.
- After the split, "Israel" refers to the northern kingdom—all except Judah. The descendants of King David ruled only Judah (not Israel).

1 & 2 Kings therefore tell **two parallel stories**: the story of **Israel** (north) and the story of **Judah** (south). At any given time, there are two kings: one ruling Judah, and one ruling Israel.

Splitting into two kingdoms has several detrimental effects:

- a) Divided they are much weaker, more vulnerable to attack by other nations. The disintegration has begun.
- b) Judah and Israel war against each other, sometimes even joining forces with other nations to attack each other.
- c) The northern kingdom with its idols always had God's disapproval. He constantly sent prophets to warn them. The southern kingdom (Judah) regularly struggled too.

Remember their calling? These descendants of Abraham are meant to show the other nations how wonderful it is to be ruled by YHWH—living by his laws, guided by his kingship, enjoying his provision and life under his reign. Instead, they now have *two* human kings fighting for power. The nations have no chance of desiring God to rule over them!!! There really looks like no chance of God restoring his reign on earth (the kingdom of God) with things working like this.

Let's take a look at each of these kingdoms in turn.

Israel (north), to 722 BC

How well did Israel's kings represent YHWH's kingship?

<i>King of Israel</i>	<i>BC</i>	<i>Remembered for</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Rating</i>
Jeroboam	931-910	Split the kingdom. Golden calves.	1 Kings 12-14	✘
Nadab	910-909	Assassinated by Baasha	1 Kings 15	✘
Baasha	909-886	Destroyed house of Jeroboam	1 Kings 15-16	✘
Elah	886-885	Assassinated by Zimri	1 Kings 16	✘
Zimri	885	Lasted 7 days	1 Kings 16	✘
Omri	885-874	Mighty. Made Samaria the capital	1 Kings 16	✘
Ahab	874-853	Jezebel. Baal worship. Elijah's context	1 Kings 16-22	✘
Ahaziah	853-852	Fell through the lattice	2 Kings 1	✘
Jehoram	852-841	Elisha's ministry. Siege/famine.	2 Kings 3, 9	✘
Jehu	841-814	Killed house of Ahab & Ahaziah of Judah	2 Kings 9-10	✘
Jehoahaz	814-798	Lost most of his kingdom to Syria	2 Kings 13	✘
Jehoash	798-782	Smote Syria. Conquered Amaziah/Judah	2 Kings 13-14	✘
Jeroboam II	793-753	Restored territory. Conquered Syria.	2 Kings 14	✘
Zechariah	754-753	6 months: assassinated by Shallum.	2 Kings 15	✘
Shallum	752	1 month: assassinated by Menahem.	2 Kings 15	✘
Menahem	752-742	Cruel in war. Invaded by Pul of Assyria.	2 Kings 15	✘
Pekahiah	742-740	Assassinated by Pekah	2 Kings 15	✘
Pekah	752-732	Joined Rezin in attacking Ahaz. Invaded by Tiglath-pileser of Assyria.	2 Kings 15, 2 Chron 28.	✘
Hoshea	732-722	Tribute to Shalmaneser. Conspiracy with Egypt. Siege of Samaria, fall of Israel.	2 Kings 17	✘

God kept reaching out to Israel to woo them back to himself. He kept sending prophets to warn them (1 Kg 13–14). **Elijah**'s contest on Mount Carmel demonstrated that YHWH (not Baal) rules and provides rain for the crops, but **Ahab** refused to change (1 Kg 17–19), abusing his power (1 Kg 21). Ahab finally died in battle (1 Kg 22).

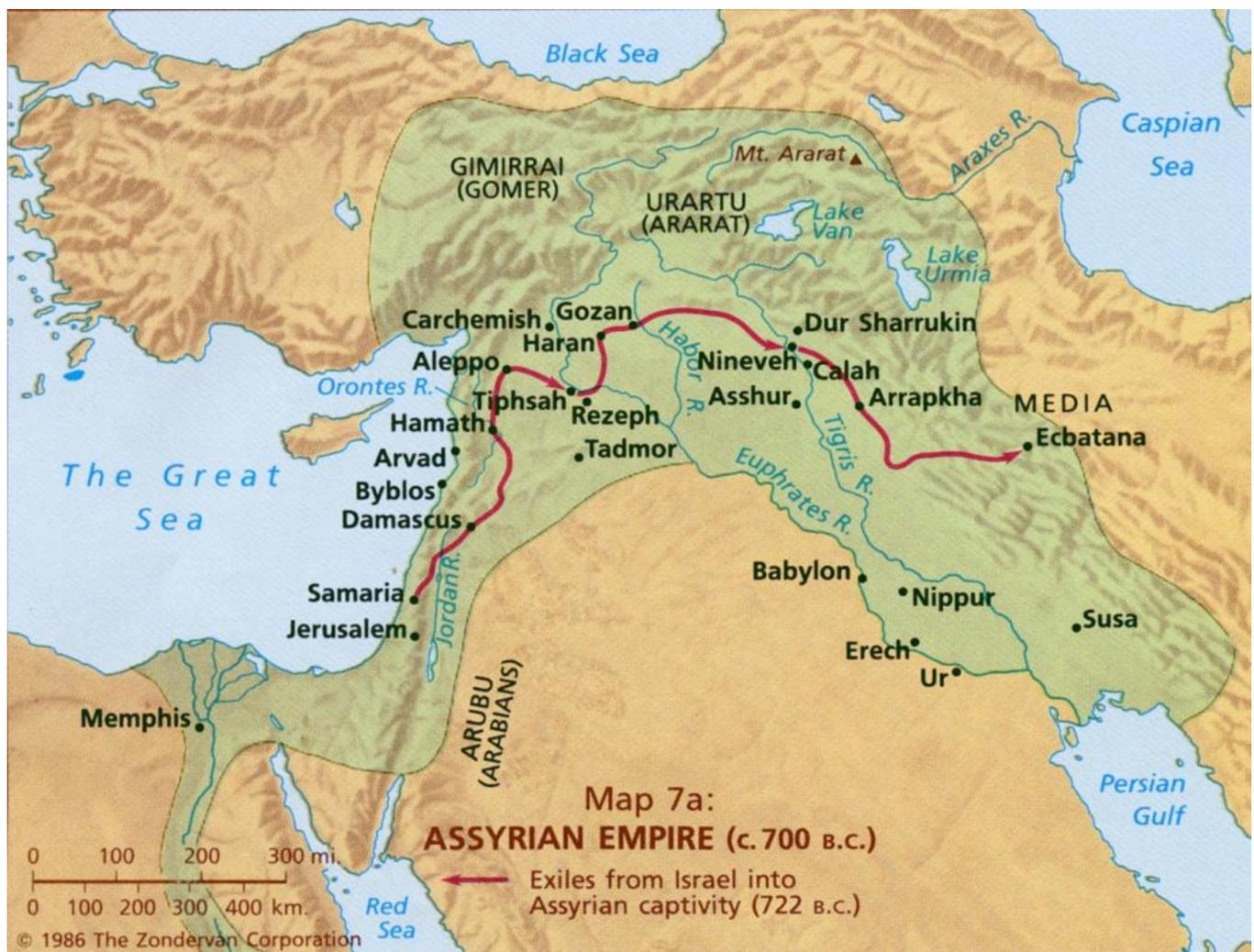
After Elijah, God sent **Elisha** to call Israel back to himself, with amazing evidence of divine support and deliverance (2 Kg 1–8). But the kings of Israel are violent rulers.

Jehu became king in 841 BC (2 Kg 9–10). He slaughtered all the descendants of Ahab's family, establishing a new dynasty that lasted five generations. This was the zenith of Israel's power, especially during the reign of **Jeroboam II** (2 Kg 14).

The empire of **Assyria** gradually began to take over the whole region, from Turkey in the west to Iran in the east, and as far south as Egypt. Israel and Judah were in their sights. In 722 BC, Assyria invaded Israel. The Assyrians took the Israelites captive, replacing them with captives from other places in their empire.

It was the end of the kingdom of Israel:

2 Kings 17:22 The Israelites persisted in all the sins of Jeroboam and did not turn away from them ²³ until the LORD removed them from his presence, as he had warned through all his servants the prophets. So the people of Israel were taken from their homeland into exile in Assyria, and they are still there.



Judah (south) to 586 BC

While all that was happening in Israel, these were the kings of Judah:

<i>King of Judah</i>	<i>BC</i>	<i>Remembered for</i>	<i>Reference</i>	<i>Rating</i>
Rehoboam	931-913	Split kingdom. Shishak (Egypt) invaded.	1 Kings 12, 14	✘
Abijam	913-911	Victory over Jeroboam	1 Kings 15	✘
Asa	911-870	Beat Ethiopia. Good reforms. Backslid.	1 Kings 15	✓
Jehoshaphat	873-848	Religious teachers. Alliance with Ahab.	1 Kings 22	✓
Jehoram	848-841	Married Athaliah. Slew his 6 brothers.	2 Kings 8	✘
Ahaziah	841	Slain by Jehu	2 Kings 8-9	✘
Athaliah (Q)	841-835	Evil queen. Slew all David's house, bar 1.	2 Kings 11	✘
Joash	835-796	Boy king. Repaired temple. Backslid.	2 Kings 12	—
Amaziah	796-767	Conquered Edom, took its gods.	2 Kings 14	—
Uzziah	790-739	Mighty. Became a leper	2 Kings 14-15	✓
Jotham	751-736	Mighty. Threatened by Rezin & Pekah	2 Kings 15	✓
Ahaz	???	Idolatrous. Attacked by Rezin & Pekah.	2 Kings 16	✘
Hezekiah	728-695	Temple cleansed. Sennacherib's invasion	2 Kings 18-19	✓
Manasseh	695-642	Idolatry & cruelty. End announced.	2 Kings 21	✘
Amon	642-640	Continued father's evils. Assassinated.	2 Kings 21	✘
Josiah	640-609	Repaired temple. Found book of the law.	2 Kings 22-23	✓
Jehoahaz	609	3 months. Deposed and taken to Egypt.	2 Kings 23	✘
Jehoiakim	609-597	Enthroned by Pharaoh. Served Babylon.	2 Kings 23-24	✘
Jehoiachin	597	3 months. Deported to Babylon.	2 Chron 36	✘
Zedekiah	597-586	Rebelled. Jerusalem destroyed. Exile.	2 Kings 24	✘

At least *some* of the kings of Judah saw themselves as servants of YHWH. They had a mixed history:

- **Jehoshaphat** taught the people to follow Torah.
He won a great victory over Moab and Ammon (1 Kg 22).
- Queen Athaliah tried to kill *all* David's descendants (2 Kg 11), but little **Joash** escaped. When he turned 12, the high priest assassinated Athaliah and installed Joash as king (2 Kg 12).
- **Uzziah** was a good king, until he became proud (2 Kg 14–15).
- **Ahaz** closed the temple, and lost a war with Israel (2 Kg 16).
- **Hezekiah** miraculously survived the Assyrian invasion (when Israel fell). He prayed, and a plague spread through Assyria's army, so they packed up and went home (2 Kg 18–20).
Assyria never really recovered, as Babylon grew in power.

- **Manasseh** filled Jerusalem with idolatry and violence. He was captured by Babylon, but repented late in life (2 Kg 21).
- **Josiah** was the last good king. As Babylon's power grew, Egypt marched through Palestine to help Assyria fight Babylon. Josiah tried to stop Pharaoh Neco's army, but he was killed at Megiddo. (2 Kg 22).
- The final four kings of Judah were puppets of Egypt and Babylon (2 Kg 23–24).

Babylon finally invaded Judah in 587 BC. After a siege, they destroyed the city of Jerusalem and the temple. They slaughtered Zedekiah's sons before his very eyes, and poked out his eyes. Never again did a descendant of David reign on the throne in Jerusalem.



Try to take in the tragedy of what just happened. God's representative kingdom among the nations split in two. The north was wiped out by Assyria, leaving just Judah. Judah was captured and exiled to Babylon. There was no kingdom any more. It was all over.

The narrator of 1 & 2 Kings wants us to understand that each of these kings got exactly what they deserved. If they were obedient to Torah, they received the blessings promised in Deut 28. If they were

disobedient, they received the troubles promised in Deut 28. For example, 2 Kg 21 describes all that Manasseh did, concluding that **the disaster that happened to Samaria (capital of Israel) would happen to Jerusalem (capital of Judah) also:**

2 Kings 21¹⁰ The LORD said by his servants the prophets,
¹¹ “Because Manasseh king of Judah has committed these abominations and has done things more evil than all that the Amorites did, who were before him, and has made Judah also to sin with his idols, ¹² therefore thus says the LORD, the God of Israel: Behold, I am bringing upon Jerusalem and Judah such disaster that the ears of everyone who hears of it will tingle. ¹³ And I will stretch over Jerusalem the measuring line of Samaria, and the plumb line of the house of Ahab, and I will wipe Jerusalem as one wipes a dish, wiping it and turning it upside down. ¹⁴ And I will forsake the remnant of my heritage and give them into the hand of their enemies, and they shall become a prey and a spoil to all their enemies, ¹⁵ because they have done what is evil in my sight and have provoked me to anger, since the day their fathers came out of Egypt, even to this day.”

But this pattern of each king receiving what he deserved suddenly **falls apart with King Josiah:**

2 Kg 23²⁵ Before him there was no king like him, who turned to the LORD with all his heart and with all his soul and with all his might, according to all the Law of Moses, nor did any like him arise after him. ²⁶ Still the LORD did not turn from the burning of his great wrath, by which his anger was kindled against Judah, because of all the provocations with which Manasseh had provoked him.

Despite being the best king ever, Josiah was crushed:

2 Kg 23²⁹ In his days Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt went up to the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates. King Josiah went to meet him, and Pharaoh Neco killed him at Megiddo, as soon as he saw him.

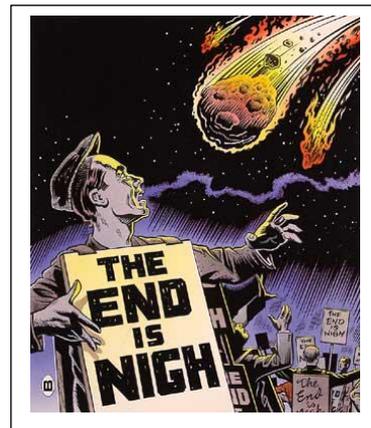
Justice is no more. Israel as a nation is no more. The kingdoms of the world have snuffed them out. God no longer has his representative kingdom. It's all over. This event at **Megiddo** became a focal point of the **mourning** of the loss of the kingship, the end of the Davidic reign and the temple (compare 2 Chronicles 35:25; Zechariah 12:11-14).

The last four kings of Judah were merely puppets of Egypt and Babylon. Then in 587 BC, Babylon invaded and destroyed Jerusalem. 2 Kings 25 describes the horror of Judah being **exiled to Babylon.**

Is this the end?

Have you ever seen those sandwich boards announcing, “The end is nigh!”? In public imagination, they are announcing the end of the world, but the concept behind them goes back to the exile (Lam 4:18). The prophet **Ezekiel** was one of those exiled to Babylon. God gave him this message:

Eze 7:2 Son of man, this is what the Sovereign LORD says to the land of Israel: ‘The end! The end has come upon the four corners of the land!’



So, was this the end for Israel? Had the heavenly sovereign’s project to bring the nations back under his reign failed? His representative kingdom had been obliterated. Israel as a country no longer existed. The Davidic kings who represented God’s reign were permanently cut off. Their capital city was razed to the ground. The temple was destroyed, and God’s throne (the ark) is missing. God’s kingdom on earth had been swallowed up by the kingdoms of the world.

The people wept and mourned this great loss. **Lamentations** expressed the depth of their grief as they try to make sense of what happened. Its five chapters are five poems, expressing deep grief:

- 1) The first is an acrostic: each verse begins with the next letter of the Hebrew alphabet. (There are 22 letters, so 22 verses.)
- 2) The second is also an acrostic—22 verses.
- 3) In the third poem, the first three verses all begin with *aleph*, the next three with *beth*, and so on—66 verses. The unanswered questions are becoming more urgent.
- 4) The fourth poem is an acrostic like the first two, but the verses are shorter and darker. There is no answer for their grief.
- 5) The last poem has 22 verses, but it is not an acrostic and the verses are even shorter. The whole pattern has fallen apart. Gloom descends. Life has no meaning. They are just lost.

The best they can do is to acknowledge that it’s not God’s fault. He is faithful, but perhaps he can no longer cope with them. Are they his ex-people now? The book concludes:

Lam 5²¹ Restore us to yourself, LORD, that we may return; renew our days as of old²² unless you have utterly rejected us and are angry with us beyond measure.

These questions remained unanswered for the next 600 years. God sent prophets to encourage them that he had not rejected them, that there was more to come, but they remained crushed under foreign rule. If there was still a kingdom of God, they no longer seemed to have any part.

Conclusion

How will God ever become king over the earth again when his representative kingdom splintered and both divisions disintegrated? Next week we will examine how they started rebuilding after 70 years in exile. We will also take a brief look at what the major prophets had to say about the exile—the promises that God himself would step in and do what Israel was unable to do for herself.

Memory verse

2 Chronicles 36:15-16 (NIV)

The LORD, the God of their ancestors, sent word to them through his messengers again and again, because he had pity on his people and on his dwelling place. But they mocked God's messengers, despised his words and scoffed at his prophets until the wrath of the Lord was aroused against his people and there was no remedy.

Take home exercise

Are you starting to understand how the pieces of the OT story fit together? See if you can arrange these names in chronological order (the order they impacted the Biblical story):

Abraham	1.	<i>Adam</i>
Adam	2.	
David	3.	
Deborah	4.	
Elijah	5.	
Gideon	6.	
Hezekiah	7.	
Isaac	8.	
Jacob	9.	
Joseph	10.	
Joshua	11.	
Josiah	12.	
Moses	13.	
Noah	14.	
Rehoboam	15.	
Samson	16.	
Samuel	17.	
Saul	18.	
Solomon	19.	
Zedekiah	20.	

In preparation for next week, read:

- **Ezra 3:** After the exile, the Jews build the second temple, dedicating it in 516 BC.
- **Nehemiah 13:** After rebuilding Jerusalem, Nehemiah teaches them to observe Torah.
- **Isaiah 40:** Since the kingship fell apart with the exile, God himself will be their king.
- **Daniel 7:** After the beastly kingdoms, one-like-a-human will receive the reign.