

### AN OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

#### From Abraham to Modern Israel

#### Lesson 6

At this point in our OT survey, we have arrived at the era of the Kings of Israel. Kings Saul, David, and now Solomon have come and gone. It's about 920 B.C.

Calling this time the era of the Kings doesn't mean that it was known as that to the Israelites of that day because eras are but human-designated historical periods that bear unique characteristics that seem important and impactful to us. And they are spoken of only in retrospect, defined by historians long after those eras are over. Thus before the era of the Kings was the era of the Judges, and perhaps the primary difference between these two eras is that Judges were established by the Lord to deliver and/or govern only certain of the 12 Israelite tribes; not all. That is, a Judge was raised up to deal only with a dire situation that concerned his or her own tribe and that Judge (*shofet*) had no serious thought of re-organizing all of Israelite society into a unified nation of all 12 tribes. Why is that? Because the foundational principle of a tribal society is that the most dominant tribe in a region becomes the ruling tribe. And therefore any tribal leader (whether that leader is a tribal prince or a Judge) has the duty to do his or her best to bring their own tribe to dominance, which usually involved helping to diminish the other regional tribes. It was a zero-sum game.

After nearly 3 centuries of tribal Judges, aggressive gentile neighbors more and more saw the 12 Israelite tribes as generally a related entity and so their attacks upon various Israelite tribal territories expanded with the Philistines leading the way. But a defining moment arrived that set Israel on a new course when just before 1040 B.C. various Israelite tribal leaders agreed that only with their combined military forces could they ever hope to stave off the Philistines and their other enemies, but still they couldn't tolerate the concept of having a single leader ruling all 12 tribes. This combined Hebrew force met in a great battle not far from Jaffa and they were soundly defeated. The consequence of that humiliation led the tribal leaders to a reluctant

change of heart, and now they concluded that to survive they would have to do the heretofore unthinkable: choose a single leader to govern them all. The highly respected Prophet Samuel was put in charge of finding the right man for the job. He chose and installed Saul of Benjamin, and from a historian's viewpoint, this was the moment of transition from an era of tribal Judges to an era of national Kings.

Saul never united the tribes into a sovereign nation as hoped for. The old traditional alliances of the 2 southern tribes versus the 10 northern tribes continued and there was constant discomfort and distrust of the 12 tribal chieftains towards this new office of King. Saul was eventually killed in battle and momentarily replaced by his surviving son Ishbosheth, however this situation was short-lived and Ishbosheth ruled in name only and only over the northern tribes. In response, the southern 2 tribes installed David as their king, but within 7 years David overcame objections of the northern tribes and created the first fully united and sovereign nation of Israel.

As David aged he had several sons by a number of women, and naturally, a number of them wanted to succeed their father when the time came. Therefore Absalom and Solomon became the chief rivals for the throne. When Absalom sensed that his father would not choose him, he conducted a coup and his elderly father David fled but later regrouped and retook the throne, with Absalom being killed in the process.

Near his death, David, through his Prophet Nathan's urging, announced that Solomon would follow him and so David and Solomon co-ruled for a couple of years until David died. Solomon turned Israel into a regional powerhouse and made coalitions with hundreds of small kingdoms, but turned the Israelite people against him when he overspent and ordered forced labor of Hebrews and destructively high taxes in order to continue his grandiose plans. By the time of his death, the northern tribes were seething in anger, and only the southern tribes truly missed him because, after all, Solomon was of the tribe of Judah. But even worse, Solomon had become tolerant of paganism and even somewhat participated in pagan rituals in the name of peace and prosperity. He died in 925 B.C. and things fell apart rapidly.

### **ISRAEL IS DIVIDED INTO TWO KINGDOMS**

Rehoboam, one of Shlomo's (*Solomon's*) sons, became king following his father's death. Spoiled and pampered from the moment of his birth, he was as vain as his father but unlike his father, he was utterly inept. In no time, he alienated many of the powerful tribal elders and had to flee for his life. Within 3 years of Shlomo's death, Rehoboam's incompetence drove Israel to become a divided nation. The tribe of Y'hudah (*Judah*), which by now had absorbed the tribe of **Ben'yamin** (Benjamin), controlled the south. The 10 other tribes shared the north, but the tribe of Ephraim had become the largest and thus dominant [**I Kgs. 12**]. It is interesting to note that after centuries of typical tribal warfare and an ebb and flow of power among the 12 tribes of Israel, the 2 that eventually dominated and absorbed the other 10 were Ephraim and Judah. Hundreds of years earlier, as Israel stood on the edge of the Land of Canaan, ready to enter and to inherit the land so long promised to them, Moses had ordered that each of the 12 tribes were to choose a single man to form a group to spy on the Canaanite people and report back what they saw. Ten of those spies focused on the fearful challenge ahead of them and reported that it would be suicide to confront the Canaanite people. The men (Joshua and Caleb) from the tribes of Judah and Ephraim, however, reported that Israel should stand on God's promise of victory and go forth in faith and courage. And, now, it was these 2 tribes which lorded over the other 10. Coincidence? Hardly.

The former nation of Israel now consisted of two nations, or better, Kingdoms. The northern Kingdom was called Ephraim-Israel, the southern Kingdom was called Y'hudah (*Judah*). Each would choose distinctly different directions in their development.

Jeroboam was the son of an elder of the powerful tribe of Ephraim. Having fled to Egypt a few years earlier after a failed attempt to wrest power from Solomon, Jeroboam returned at this opportune moment of national weakness and became King over the 10 tribes of the northern Kingdom (Ephraim-Israel) [**I Kgs. 13, 14**]. Even though residing in Egypt for only a few years, he had largely forsaken Yahweh worship and learned to worship Egyptian gods. He turned the cities of Dan and Bethel into cult cities and instituted calf worship (the worship of the Egyptian Apis Bull). The people embraced the change. Big mistake. God sent a prophet to inform Jeroboam that Israel would be taken out of the land and scattered if its idolatry continued. Some 200 years into the future, with the warning unheeded, it would happen exactly as foretold.

When Jeroboam died, and his son was murdered, Ba'sha became king of Ephraim-Israel and reigned for 25 years; all the while warring against Judah. Ba'sha died and his son ruled less than 2 years before he was killed, while in a drunken stupor, by a general who wanted to be king [**I Kgs. 15**]. And so it went. Ephraim-Israel had begun the slide down the slippery slope the prophets had warned them about. Ephraim-Israel also found itself in a strategic pincers between the powerful Arameans controlling its northern border and Judah chipping away at its southern boundary. Even the hated Philistines had lined up with Judah against Ephraim-Israel. Worse, Judah and the Arameans had formed, at least temporarily, an alliance against Ephraim-Israel (what is the old Proverb? The enemy of my enemy is my friend). Weak kings, assassination plots, subversion, and a growing love for their neighbors' paganism all served to turn Ephraim-Israel's government into a shambles. Who was actually king?

Eventually, a military field commander named Omri defeated other rivals to the throne of Ephraim-Israel in a battle and he took over [**I Kgs. 16**]. He built a city on a hill in central Israel for his capital, named it **Shomron** (Samaria), and ruled from there for about a dozen years. His new capital was designed as a military stronghold. It was built on a solitary hill, some 300 feet high, that afforded the defenders a view westward all the way to the Mediterranean. A local spring supplied ample water. The city walls were made of solid limestone blocks, and constructed to a thickness of 15 feet at the narrowest point, to as much as 30 feet in areas Omri must have felt were the most important.

Before he died he stopped the warring with Judah, re-established some control over the trade routes, and brought a few years of stability to the Northern Kingdom. Yet, God condemned him for his ways, and Omri was considered an evil king by the people.

Omri was succeeded by his daughter-in-law, the infamous Jezebel, and she set up Baal worship in Shomron (*Samaria*). The 10 northern tribes had been heavily influenced by the Canaanites' pagan practices, and now easily accepted worshipping both Baal and Yahweh. God responded to this atrocity with a drought.

The severe lack of rain as punishment upon the Northern Kingdom had been foretold by the prophet **Eliyahu** (Elijah) [**I Kgs. 17-22**]. Famine and starvation set in. At the command of Queen Jezebel, 400 priests of Baal meet on Mt. Carmel to offer a sacrifice to Baal for rain.

**Eliyahu** (Elijah), an unwelcome adversary, shows up and challenges Jezebel's pagan priests to light their sacrificial altar fire supernaturally. All their dancing, yelling, and sacrificing is futile. Near Baal's sacrificial altar is an ancient and abandoned altar to Yehoveh that had been torn down when Jezebel declared Baal the highest god of the Kingdom. Elijah and his associates rebuild the stone altar, put a bull on it, and call for God to rain fire down to burn up the sacrificial animal. God does, and the people cheer as **Eliyahu** then hauls off the pagan priests to a river bed and kills them. Then he goes back up the hill, prays for rain, and God grants it. Queen Jezebel was quite unimpressed and threatened Elijah for killing her priests; he fled.

Over the next several years, a veritable orgy of blood took the lives of several Israelite kings and those who sought power. Queen Jezebel herself was thrown from a window and splattered on a street below.

400 years have passed since **Y'hoshua** (Joshua) led the Israelites across the Jordan River and conquered Canaan. A few hundred miles to the north of Ephraim-Israel, God was readying a growing power, Assyria, to use as the vehicle with which to wreak His Holy judgment upon Ephraim-Israel. Jehu is the new King of Ephraim-Israel, and within a year he will bow down in submission before the pagan King of Assyria.

King Jehu, then his descendants, ruled Ephraim-Israel for about a century, but under the yoke of Assyria [**II Kgs. 9, 10**]. The last in Jehu's line, Jeroboam II, took advantage of a momentary period of Assyrian weakness, and together with King Uzziah of Y'hudah (*Judah*), retook some lost territory, re-established several trade routes, and brought 40 years of prosperity to the land. The prophet Amos warned King Jeroboam II that the stench of idolatry and his mistreatment of the Israelite people would lead to the destruction of the northern Kingdom of Ephraim-Israel. Those closest to the king became very wealthy but at the expense of the peasants. Idol worship ran rampant.

In 746 BC King Jeroboam II dies and the Northern Kingdom becomes unstable. A former Assyrian general named Tiglath-Pileser III takes the throne in Assyria and begins to build an empire. In Greece, Homer has finished writing the legends of the Trojan War and its aftermath in *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey*. Olympia hosts the first Olympic Games. In Italy, the city of Rome is founded.

Ephraim-Israel and Judah are now starkly different nations. The Northern Kingdom is so dominated by the tribe of Ephraim that the people living there now call the nation “Ephraim”, not Israel. They considered themselves Ephraimites rather than Israelites. Some ancient manuscripts reintroduce the word “Israel” and make the nation of “Ephraim” into Ephraim-Israel probably for the sake of clarity. Oddly, today’s Biblical translations have done the opposite by erroneously referring to the northern kingdom as simply Israel, instead of Ephraim or Ephraim-Israel. This rather sloppy scholarship has caused significant confusion in our modern understanding of Biblical times and has clouded the meaning of some key end-times prophecies.

Ephraim-Israel’s leaders easily adopted, even sought after, their pagan neighbors’ ways. The Nimrod-Mesopotamian gods of old were never far from the Ephraimites’ minds, and they found them comfortable and familiar. **Y’hudah** (Judah), though hardly pure, was more determined to stay true to the God of Israel.

The powerful nation of Assyria (called Iraq in our time) was now in an imperialistic frenzy, conquering and soaking up nations at an alarming rate. Kingdom builders and conquerors up to this time usually were after tribute. That is, taxes and booty from the conquered.....a steady source of income. So traditionally in the past, the conqueror’s goal was not necessarily to add new territory to their own, but rather to simply lord over a number of sovereign nations for the purpose of adding wealth and power to the conquering nation. Almost always that meant leaving the conquered nations’ governments and social structures intact, though subservient so that the economies did not suffer and thereby reduce the amount of tribute that could be extracted.

However, the Assyrian method and aims were different. They wanted to annex the conquered territories; that is, Assyria wanted to greatly expand their national borders by owning the lands and peoples they conquered that they might create a Greater Assyria. They also required each conquered people to add manpower to the growing Assyrian army. After the Assyrians defeated an enemy they would garrison troops there to hold the land. Nations that resisted their occupation too strongly, like Ephraim- Israel had done, saw their cities burned and their people deported to distant lands, en masse, and replaced with people from another conquered nation. This mass population exchange procedure was calculated to weaken the social fabric

of the defeated nations and it was hoped that, in turn, this would produce more cooperation and less chance for rebellion. And of course, it typically resulted in full assimilation of the conquered nations' citizens into a common Assyrian culture.

After King Jeroboam II's death, his son Zechariah ruled Ephraim-Israel for only a few months. During the next 10 years no fewer than 5 Kings would rule. Everyone was a disaster, serving only themselves and whatever new manner of debauchery and idolatry suited them. Each was murdered by the one to follow. Assyria, tired of the constant rebellious attitude of these Hebrews, the government instability, and difficulty in extracting the agreed-to tribute from Ephraim's rulers, finally attacked the capital city and center of Ephraim- Israel's pagan worship, **Shomron** (Samaria). The grand city with its astonishingly thick walls was well fortified, and it held up under the Assyrian siege for almost 3 years.

Siege warfare was a common practice since the invention of walled cities. It was a simple strategy: surround the city, cut off food and water supplies, and nobody gets in or out. The inhabitants either give up or they eventually starve to death or die of disease. Depending on the invader, surrender could mean being put to the sword; not the best of choices, to be sure.

### **THE ASSYRIAN EXILE**

Samaria finally fell to the Assyrian army in 722 BC [ **II Kgs. 16, 17**]. It was the end of the nation of Ephraim-Israel and the fulfillment of Biblical prophecy. During a 5 year period prior to the fall of **Shomron**, the Assyrians had decimated Ephraim-Israel to the point that all that remained of the Northern Kingdom was the 20-acre capital city of Samaria and a few square miles of hills and fields leading up to it. The bulk of Ephraim-Israel's residents had, even before the fall of **Shomron**, been removed. True to their methods, the Assyrians deported the Ephraimites and scattered them throughout the 120 conquered nations that formed their empire. The Ephraimites, generally representing 10 of the 12 original tribes, were then absorbed into the various cultures and races of the many Assyrian provinces to the point that within several generations few could trace their family history back to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The land itself (the northern kingdom) had become just another of the many provinces of Assyria, occupied by peoples of several other conquered nations that had been moved in to repopulate the land. Egypt was the Assyrian's next target and all that stood in the way of their plan to

move on to Egypt was Judah.

The people of **Y'hudah**, despite the litany of Kings who ruled them that were evil in God's eyes, had stayed relatively pure in Yehoveh worship. The hills and mountains that provided a natural territorial boundary between Ephraim-Israel and **Y'hudah** also served to somewhat isolate Judah from outside influence. King David's descendants continued to reign. It is about this time that the tribal people of **Y'hudah** begin to be called **Yehud**: Jews.

It is now key to understand and carefully consider that from this point forward in Israel's history, for all practical purposes, the only identifiable remnant of the people from the original 12 tribes of Israel who called themselves Israelites, were the Jews. And the Jews consisted only of the tribe of **Y'hudah** (Judah) and the tribe it absorbed, **Ben'yamin** (Benjamin). The Levites, who were never granted territory within the Holy Lands, but lived in designated cities among all the 12 tribes, continued to exist as those set apart to serve God as His priests. But they seemed to consider themselves affiliated with Judah, which is all that remained of Israel and therefore were regularly referred to as Jews. Over the centuries, no matter what culture, what nation, or what religion, the precise meaning of words, vocabulary, has steadily evolved; therefore, what these words meant to communicate also changed. So although we have learned that technically a Levite is a person who is from the Israelite tribe of Levi; and, conversely, a Jew is a person who is from the Israelite tribe of Judah; at the point in history at which we have arrived the words 'Levite' and 'Jew' communicated something slightly different than they did only a few decades earlier. To the minds of the remnant of Israel, a Levite was but a sub-group of a people called Jews. A Levite would, to a gentile, identify himself as a Jew, that description being specific enough to properly communicate WHAT he was. But to a Jew, a Levite would identify himself as a Levite because being a Levite represented a certain status as the set-apart group of Hebrews who performed the all-important priestly duties that ONLY Levites could perform.

The Ephraimites, that conglomerate representing the 10 other original tribes, are now gone. Their genes thoroughly mixed with a multitude of other nationalities, races, and cultures.... all gentiles. In other words, a significant portion of Ephraimites had become gentiles, losing their Hebrew identity and any connection to the land. God had granted them their desire to become as their neighbors, and their neighbors were, of course, gentiles. Interestingly God refers to these former Ephraimites as a **lo-ammi**, a "non-people". Every scholarly attempt to discover what had become of these 10 tribes has led to nothing; until relatively recently. It now is certain that remnants of these 10 tribes retained a memory of their Israelite family roots, have reconstituted their tribal communities, and many are pushing to rejoin their Jewish brothers in



the reborn nation of Israel. So while the vast majority of the Ephraimites blended their genes with gentiles, and therefore became gentiles themselves, a few stayed separate and stubbornly held on to their heritage.....and they are alive and well today and many have migrated to Israel in the last few years.

Backing up a little: about 5 years prior to the Assyrians' conquering the northern kingdom of Ephraim- Israel, King Ahaz of Judah, the Southern Kingdom, made a peace treaty with the Assyrians while he still had a little bargaining power. King Ahaz was wined, dined and bedazzled with the power of the Assyrians and their culture, and brought back with him an appetite for their pagan ways. History shows no proof that the Assyrians forced their gods on anybody.....King Ahaz willingly embraced their pagan ways and then tried to foist them on his Jewish subjects.

The **Book of Chronicles** tells us that King Ahaz of *Y'hudah* openly worshipped the Aramean god, a horror to the Jews he governed. The Assyrians and Arameans had by now, through treaty, integrated themselves so closely to one another as to be nearly indistinguishable cultures. The Aramean language, quickly becoming the primary language of the region, is introduced into Judah. King Ahaz dies in 715 BC, and his son, Hezekiah, ascends to the throne. He does not have his father's appetite for foreigners or their pagan gods. The prophet **Yesha'yahu** (Isaiah), who began his ministry during King Achaz's reign, was ignored by the former king and his court. The new king, Hezekiah, was more inclined to listen to him and set about ridding Judah of the paganism his father had promoted. Yet he had to be careful because his father had pledged loyalty to the then king of Assyria, Tiglath-Pileser III, in order to avoid the same fate as Ephraim-Israel had suffered. To move too fast would have meant a violent confrontation with a mighty Assyrian army that would have crushed him like an over-ripened grape.

Simply holding on to an empire proved to be a never-ending business. The Assyrians were regularly fighting rebellion from several of their conquered provinces, simultaneously. The Philistines, also under Assyria's thumb, broke out into anti-Assyrian riots. Other oppressed nations took notice and joined with the Philistines in rebellion. The people of **Y'hudah** thought it would make sense to join these rebels. Isaiah thought otherwise, and convinced King Hezekiah to sit this one out. Though Hezekiah showed his sympathy for his neighbors' cause, he remained officially aloof.

It turned out that **Yesha'yahu** was right. The rebellions failed and the retributions were terrible. But in 705 BC, Sargon, the latest Assyrian King, died suddenly. The entire empire used his death and subsequent vacuum in leadership as a call to break the hold Assyria had over them. This time Judah joined in the rebellion; but not before King Hezekiah spent much money and manpower to strengthen **Yerushalayim's** (Jerusalem) defenses in preparation for what he knew would be a battle for Judah's existence. The thick walls were repaired, turrets erected, and houses too near the inside perimeter of the wall were torn down. And in a remarkable engineering feat that was only rediscovered in 1880, a tunnel was bored through sheer rock to access the city's sole water supply. Over 500 yards in length, the secret water tunnel routed the life sustaining liquid from its source, the Gihon Spring, located outside the massive protective walls of Jerusalem, to the pool of Siloam located safely inside the city. Ingeniously, somehow they had managed to construct the mouth of the tunnel entrance below the water line of the exposed spring, so its existence was hidden from the invaders.

The new Assyrian King, Sennacherib, wasted no time in re-establishing control within his Empire. One by one he squashed each rebel province, moving from north to south. The Assyrian army came to Judah; but they first attacked the city of Lachish. Hundreds of inhabitants were butchered as the high walls were battered down and the well trained and battle-hardened Assyrian troops poured into the city. Then they moved on to Jerusalem but the thick walls held. The battle went on and on. Then suddenly, unexpectedly, it stopped. The Bible tells us that an "angel of the Lord" smote the Assyrian army and killed 185,000 troops overnight. Sennacherib withdrew and went back to Assyria, the Holy City still intact. Isaiah had prophesied that the Holy City would not fall to the Assyrians.

In 687 BC King Hezekiah died and his son Manessah, at the age of only 12, became King of **Y'hudah**. He ruled for about 50 years as, arguably, the most hated King in the history of Judah. Assyria was now at the height of its power, and King Manessah relished his close relationship with them. Not only did he worship their pagan gods, he outlawed the worship of Yehoveh and murdered any who disobeyed. The Temple of Solomon became the center of all sorts of cult practices including child sacrifice and fertility rights that involved ceremonial prostitution. Images of gods were erected and worshipped. **Y'hudah** was at peace with their powerful ally, and so the doorway to Egypt was opened for Assyria. Assyria took advantage.

Assyria successfully invaded Egypt in 663 BC. About 10 years later, Egypt escaped the grip of her conqueror, and for whatever reason, Assyria showed little interest. Perhaps, Egypt was just too far from the Assyrian seat of government to control. Or, maybe as with all imperialistic cultures, the appetite for war had finally diminished. A few years later the nation of Babylonia

rebelled against Assyria and fairly easily regained its independence. Media, another of the scores of vassal states under Assyria's rule, formed an alliance with the Babylonians, and together they attacked their former conqueror with the hopes of taking over the empire. In 612 BC the allies attacked Ninevah, the crown jewel of the Assyrian empire, and leveled it. Babylonia is about to become the next world power.

While the Assyrians were busy trying to survive, the Babylonians were building their power in the north. So King Josiah of Judah now had a brief window of opportunity to cleanse the land of pagan influence while the two bullies of the region were focused elsewhere. A century has gone by since Ephraim-Israel ceased to exist and its idol-worshipping people cast into the air and dispersed like so much chaff in a heavy wind. King Josiah of *Y'hudah* sensed that God would allow the Jews to suffer the same fate as the former northern tribes if the Jews didn't change their ways. His intuition was proved correct when a worker, busy restoring the crumbling Temple, stumbled upon an ancient scroll. The worker took it to a scribe, who took it to the King, and the King had him read it.

It was the words of Moses spoken as he stood in Moab looking across the Jordan into the Promised Land. The scroll began, "I am the Lord your God that brought you out of Egypt".....and it went on, "you shall have no other gods before Me". It was a reminder of their Hebrew heritage, the deliverance from their Egyptian masters, and what Yehoveh expected of them. But, it was more. What followed was a system of codes and laws: "Revere only the Lord your God and worship Him alone.....Tear down their altars.....cut down the images of their gods"..... "Take care not to sacrifice your burnt offerings in any place you like, but only in the place which the Lord will choose".

Teaching and commands concerning festivals, eating, taxation, loaning money, crime and punishment, and more were laid out. But, what really made the King fall on his knees, tear his clothes, and cry out in fear and anguish was the dire warning that if they failed to follow these laws, destruction would follow. Hastily King Josiah gathered the elders and read them the scroll. Changes were enacted immediately. The Torah had been re-discovered.

Idolatry became a crime punishable by death. Throughout Judah, all the pagan altars and images were destroyed. The only acceptable place of worship and sacrifice again became the Temple in Jerusalem; reform, true revival, swept over Judah and the Jewish people.

A new relationship formed between God and the remnant of His people, the Jews. The relationship moved from the mystical, magical arena to the rational and tangible. God lives in Heaven, not in the Temple. Only His spiritual essence, His glory, His **Sh'khinah** resides on Earth. Yehoveh loves mankind, and mankind is to love God. **Shabbat**, the Sabbath, is not so God can rest, it's so man can rest and renew physically and spiritually. God's people are to be Holy and stay separate from the pagan nations and their perverted ways. Man is to strive for peace, humility, love, and kindness to one another. The Jews are to teach each new generation to love God's laws and doctrines, and to obey them.

### **THE BABYLONIAN EXILE**

During this time of great revival in Y'hudah (*Judah*), a curious regional alliance had been formed. The Assyrians, desperately trying to continue their empire, and the Egyptians, most alarmed at the new and menacing 800 pound gorilla called Babylonia, put aside their differences and joined forces. In a decisive battle that would change the balance of power for years to come, the new allies fought together against Babylonia. Egypt's armies were defeated, and Assyria ceased to be an empire. Her people were enslaved. Babylon now ruled the world. It's just before 600 BC.

The Babylonians took a different approach to empire control than Assyria. While Assyria employed mass population exchange, the Babylonians simply leveled everything in sight, sent the people away, and left the conquered land a vacant wilderness.

King Josiah of Y'hudah, so wise to try to bring his people back to God, was killed in a senseless battle to try to stop the Egyptian army from marching through Judah on its way north to link up with Assyrian forces. There appears to have been no intention on the part of the Egyptians to harm or to subjugate **Y'hudah**; rather, they simply intended to pass through it on their way to do battle in Ninevah. But, since King Josiah wounded Egypt's army, a contingent of Egyptian troops was stationed in Y'hudah (*Judah*). King Josiah was replaced by Jehoiakim; but he was handpicked by, and under the control of, Pharaoh.

One bright morning in 598 BC, the residents of Yerushalayim (*Jerusalem*) awoke to find the Babylonian army taking up siege positions around their city [**II Kgs. 25**]. King Jehoiakim was killed in battle almost immediately, and his son Jehoiachin assumed leadership and instantly surrendered. Jehoiachin, all his father's court, and about 10,000 scribes, teachers, priests, and prophets were hauled off to Babylonia. His uncle, Zedekiah, was left in charge of Y'hudah (*Judah*), as a regional puppet governor for Babylon. He soon showed himself to be a most unwise leader. This would prove to be the first of three occasions on which the Babylonians would deport segments of the population of Y'hudah to Babylon. Life for the Jews would never again be the same.

We'll continue with our saga next week.