

THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST 853-745 B.C.

David Nichols*

Introduction

All too often secular history is unconsciously regarded by Bible students as nonexistent. The average layman may know nearly nothing about ancient history and yet be a vigorous Bible student. Many fail to realize that History is a tool enabling one to better appreciate the Bible, for it can quicken the pace at which man gains insight into God's message to man.

There is a need among students of the Bible to be knowledgeable about ancient secular history. Too frequently such knowledge is reserved for the college classrooms or for the scholarly minds. It is this author's opinion that the Old Testament is ignored largely due to a lack of understanding of places, names, customs, environment, etc. Since the Bible is not just a Jewish history book, but God's revelation to man, it is necessary to turn to secular sources for additional light on historical events. This is not to say the Bible is incomplete, but historical facts (not theories) help keep the mind from interpretations that are imagined. For instance, much is written concerning the Psalms today supporting the scholarly tagged "sitz en leben" theories, of which some are totally devoid of known facts, but play largely upon the imagination of the reader.

It is a distorted view of the Old Testament that thinks of the believer's life as one of spiritual leisure made existent by a constant parade of miracles. Each day was one of trusting God for the weather for good crops, for protection from the elements, for security from raiding nomads, for good health, for economic security in the markets and cities, etc. History helps us to understand that the Biblical record may sometimes appear to compress narrative events in time. Often people assume all chapters are in a tight chronological order, which causes the reader to develop a stereotyped view of an actually longer period of history. For example, in the historical books, miracles were given to teach as well as help the recipients, but if one doesn't allow for time between various recorded events the result can be a warped view of the true history. Present day saints need to know history, for it will help to destroy the commonly believed story book image of the Old Testament. Never should a Christian be so naive in his faith as to expect an easy life of faith. Today, in America at least, we have much more of an ideal situation for the nurture of faith than in biblical times, but we sadly neglect to take advantage of it.

*Graduate of Wheaton Graduate School, M.A. '73 and now teaching in Jackson, Mississippi.

This article is written to help illustrate what can be learned from history in regard to the Bible. Reading II Chronicles 18-27 will help the reader to assimilate the historical references. Subsequently, a reading of I Kings 22-II Kings 14 will illustrate how secular history adds new dimensions to the reality of God's involvement in all of history.

The Assyrians and Their Neighbors

A person reading the Bible will not find anything concerning the Assyrians until the rise of Tiglath-Pileser III to power about 745 B.C.¹ Secular history, however, reveals that there was a definite Assyrian influence on Israel and Judah for over a century before the first scriptural mention of the Assyrians. Often it was an indirect influence by way of Syrian politics. It may not be expedient to know this to interpret the Bible's message, but to the ancient Hebrew living in this real world, it was a vital issue in his life.

Ashur-nasir-pal II (883-859) had awakened the Assyrian empire to become a nation greatly feared for its ruthless army. Although he marched across Mesopotamia to the Great Sea, he did not really conquer the cities and states he subdued. His son, Shalmaneser III, troubled the western nations for thirty years, yet he never was able to hold onto his conquest. The Assyrian army was combat oriented and was not administratively minded until the reign of Tiglath-Pileser III. Assyria was interested in controlling an area's trade routes and obtaining tribute yearly. The army used terrorist tactics effectively in convincing cities to pay tribute. If this was refused, destruction was certain, and not merciful. Assyrian policies at this time resembled not a developed political machine, but an organized crime syndicate. Many places were merely raided for tribute. More important ones were in the uneasy position somewhere between a vassal and an ally. If a tributary refused payment, such action was regarded as hostile and direct intervention by the army could be expected. A puppet government under military watchfulness might then be set up. If a state swore allegiance to Assyria and then broke the oath, the Assyrians felt this was an offense to their gods. Oaths were not simply political but religious also. To disobey was to insult Ashur, and thus the policy of terror maintained by Assyria was considered a service to Ashur, the war god.²

The Assyrians controlled trade routes for selfish gain. They collected tribute from cities and nations or threatened their destruction. The Assyrians were not businessmen. They kept the roads open for the Aramaeans and Babylonians and collected from them. Therefore, the more territory and resources they controlled, the larger the gain. In the west the Assyrians sought sea ports, routes to the Phoenicians, control of the Cilician silver mines, and the Hittite iron mines.

Assyria's northern neighbors were a constant source of irritation.

¹All the following dates are to be read as "B.C."

²H. W. F. Saggs, *The Greatness that was Babylon*, pp. 242-243. J. Siegfried Schwantes, *A Short History of the Ancient Near East*, p. 118.

Assyria was situated on high steppes and plateaus, being bordered by mountains in the north. In the mountains were the strongholds of various tribes. Eventually they united to become a serious problem to Assyria. The whole northern region is collectively known as Urartu. To the Assyrian it was known as Chaldia (not to be confused with the Chaldea further south). Since Assyria was not particularly fond of business, herding, or farming, it was more attractive for them to raid their neighbors. The state of Nairi was a regular recipient of Assyrian terror because of the horses to be gained in tribute. It was a standing policy to make punitive raids to insure tribute payments. Eventually Shalmaneser, in the last years of his reign, realized the extent to which the states of Urartu had organized. Unification was slow, but hatred of the Assyrians accelerated the process.

The goal of the Assyrians was to control all of Mesopotamia, which meant that the western states near the Great Sea had to be conquered and maintained as tributaries. Assyria was interested in all three geographical zones of Syria, but the city of Damascus in the central zone was of special importance. A people called the Aramaeans occupied much of central Syria as the Hittites began disappearing. They were excellent businessmen and carried their trade all over Mesopotamia. Damascus was the chief city economically and it was positioned strategically on the edge of the desert, a river, and a mountain range for protection. Trade routes around the fertile crescent stopped at Damascus before leading to Phoenicia, Israel, Edom, Moab, Arabia, and Egypt. The importance of the position Damascus played is illustrated by the fact that the Biblical "Syria" is this particular area of Damascus. North of Damascus was Hamath, where the Hittites were dying out as Aramaean culture grew.

After the conquest of Damascus, the most logical move was to the Phoenician cities of Tyre and Sidon. This nation was a seafaring nation known for extensive trade, jewelry and lumber.

In central Syria, Israel and Judah occupied most of the agricultural land. Israel had better soil, more rain, and was therefore more desirable than Judah, which was hilly, rocky, and semi-arid. Damascus and Israel were often at war over the Transjordan area of Gilead. Israel also clashed with Moab, trying to keep them in submission. Judah usually attempted to keep Edom in submission. They valued the trade routes that ran from Damascus west of the Jordan into Arabia. Edom also had routes that ran into Philistia.

It is necessary to be aware of the geographical and economical factors that strengthened a nation. Trade routes were a major cause of war, with each state envying his neighbor and taking advantage of him at weak moments. There is no room in true Biblical studies for idealism concerning life during Bible times.

Ahab (873-853)

Ahab was attacked in 857 by Syria (Damascus) under Benhadad II. This was probably done in hopes of causing Ahab to join him or to submit, rendering him helpless, for it was apparent that within a short

time the Assyrians would attack Syria. Ahab took advantage of the false confidence of Benhadad, believed a prophet, and chose to fight Syria. He won the battle. The Syrians deduced that they had lost because Yahweh was a god of the mountains (Sinai) and theirs were gods of the plains. But they lost again the next time they attacked (I Kings 20:1-30). Damascus then agreed to return to Israel territory they controlled and to give Israel commercial rights in their city. Ahab, though God disapproved, was very lenient with Benhadad. Ahab could have ended the powerful influence of Damascus, but Ahab must have hoped to have Benhadad as an ally. This is a case of a man relying on man and not God (I Kings 20:15-43).

By 853, the Assyrians made their approach. Damascus, Hamath, Israel, North Phoenicia, and other states sent troops to fight Assyria. Tyre and Sidon bought safety through their tribute. The battle was at Qarqar, and Assyria claimed to have won the battle, but indications are that it was more of a draw. At least the Assyrians were stopped and were forced to turn back. This great battle is not referred to in the Bible. Even though each side was tired from battle, Israel made a daring attack on Ramoth-gilead, a portion of Israel that Damascus never gave back to Israel. Judah, under Jehoshaphat, joined him, although Micaiah warned the king against the fight (II Chronicles 18).

Ahab enticed Jehoshaphat into fighting with hope of unifying Israel and Judah, since he speaks of "our" land in I Kings 22:3. Here is an example of a man who wanted something which was good, but who was misdirected in the method of obtaining it. Jehoshaphat was almost killed and Ahab did lose his life. Fortunately for Israel and Judah, Syria was not in a position to follow up the success of this battle.

Assyrian pressure on the west was relieved for a time. Shalmaneser was forced to campaign in Babylon and then in Urartu. As soon as Ahab was dead, Moab, a vassal of Israel, attempted to revolt under their leader Mesha. Ahaziah the new Israelite king did not rule long enough to subdue him.

Jehoshaphat had returned to Israel after the death of Ahab and begun a campaign to teach the law to his subjects (II Chronicles 19:4). Out of a mistake came a desire to obey God more closely. Soon Mesha sent an invasion party to Judah, so Jehoshaphat cried for help from God. The Edomites turned on their allies, the Moabites and Arabians, and battled among themselves so that Judah was left unharmed. Here is an example of God using politics and nationalistic jealousies to deliver His people. Jehoshaphat realized Edom's weakness and opened the trade routes to Ezion-geber, making Edom a vassal of Judah (I Kings 22:47). Ahaziah, while Edom and Moab were temporarily set back, offered to join Jehoshaphat in a trade treaty. God disapproved and the ships that were built were broken, perhaps by a storm (II Chronicles 20:35-37 and I Kings 22:47-49). Soon Ahaziah (853) died and Joram succeeded him.

Joram (853-841)

Mesha regrouped his forces and started trouble again. Joram took the challenge of stopping Moab. He was joined by Jehoshaphat and

together they went around the Dead Sea to the south. The Moabites sought to surprise the Hebrew camp, but God intervened and the Moabites were defeated. Mesha was surrounded and he sacrificed his son to Chemosh. Scripture records that Israel and Judah fled, perhaps as Keil says, because God was displeased they pressed the battle so far that Mesha's concept of survival called for him to sacrifice his son.³

While this action was taking place around 850, Damascus was unable to make any bold plans to trouble Israel because Assyria was heading their way again by way of Hamath. Shalmaneser marched on Damascus in 848 and met fierce resistance. The Assyrians withdrew and marched through Urartu razing Arzashkun again.

In 848 Jehoshaphat died and Jehoram his son reigned. He had married Ahab's daughter and probably, largely on her influence, supported Baal worship. To insure his throne, he murdered his brothers. With the new change in power, Edom revolted and remained politically free of Judah (II Chronicles 21:10). God brought the Philistines and Arabians in judgment against Judah. One must remember that this was not merely a military defeat, but such raids affected economics and politics. Jehoram's whole family, less his youngest son, was taken captive. In 843 he acquired a fatal disease and died two years later.

During this time Shalmaneser had again attacked the west in 845, but failed, despite an enormous army. The next year Shalmaneser was forced east to Namri to quell a rebellion. By 841 he returned to Damascus, now facing Hazael, who had usurped the throne by murdering Benhadad as he lay ill (II Kings 8:15).

Jehu (841-814)

Since Hazael was a new ruler and Assyria was approaching, Joram of Israel attempted to take Ramoth-gilead from Damascus, with the help of Judah's new king Ahaziah (841). He was successful, but he was wounded. The chief officer at Ramoth-gilead, Jehu, was anointed as king of Israel (II Kings 9:1-13). Jehu immediately drove to Jezreel where he murdered the recuperating Joram and mortally wounded the visiting Ahaziah of Judah. Jehu also ordered Jezebel murdered and Ahab's family destroyed. Even Ahab's friends and the priests of Baal were killed. At first glance one might think Jehu was a godly man since he condemned Jezebel and Baalism in Israel to death. What appears to be anti-Balism was simply a case of hatred for Ahab's rule. He certainly was not in favor of true worship in Israel. His action was probably thought safe since Assyria's coming kept Damascus from interfering.

In 841 Damascus had to fight Assyria alone since Hamath had been subdued; nevertheless, Damascus again held them off. Jehu had bought safety by paying tribute to Shalmaneser. The Black Obelisk records the incident, which is not recorded in Scripture.⁴ This is the first real grip

⁴D. Winston Thomas, ed., *Documents from Old Testament Times*, p. 48.

³C. F. Keil, *The Book of Kings*, 2nd ed., p. 307.

Assyria had in Israel. In doing this, Israel was hated by Damascus more than ever. The Phoenicians hated them also because of the wholesale murder of Jezebel, her followers, and the priests of Baal. Judah was in no position to befriend Israel either for Jehu had murdered their king. Israel's relation with other nations was nil. Jehu was not a statesman.

In Judah, upon the death of Ahaziah, his mother murdered all the royal offspring in order to claim the throne. She ruled seven years (841-835) but was then surprised to find one heir had survived, having been hidden by Jehoiada (II Chronicles 22:10-12). Joash was crowned at age seven in 835 (II Chronicles 24:1-3).

By 837, although Shalmaneser had made no real progress in Syria besides tribute collecting, he had secured trade routes in the north. Assyria controlled the Cilician plains to maintain access to the iron mines. Soon after this, Shalmaneser discovered Urartu more united and stronger than he had estimated. The next ten years were spent keeping the northern routes open, which were threatened by Urartu. Shalmaneser died in 824, having used his armies in tribute collecting, punitive raids, and offensive operations, but had little territorial gains to show for it.

Besides border troubles in the north and east, the last few years of Shalmaneser's reign were marred by civil strife. His eldest son had revolted against his youngest son who was chosen by Shalmaneser to be the next king. The younger son, Shamshi-Adad V, was the winner of the clash which lasted until 822.

Shamshi-Adad had been in a weak condition, having lost the support of outlying provinces but keeping the loyalty of major cities and the army. He was forced to swallow his pride and ask the Babylonians for help in the rebellion. They wanted him to admit to the suzerainty of their king. He did, but with intentions of retaliating in force. As soon as he put down the rebellion he marched into Namri for horses and supplies and then continued across the country to gain support. He led an army north and east from Urartu, to Media, on a tribute collecting campaign. Nairi was often raided since it was valued as a buffer state between Assyria and Urartu. Sufficiently strengthened, he invaded the Babylonian provinces in the years 820-818. Shamshi-Adad was the winner again, but successive campaigns were needed until 811 when he sacrificed in Babylon. The same year, however, saw Samshi-Adad's death.

For all practical purposes, Assyria lost dominion in the west. Tribute had ceased to be paid soon after Shalmaneser's inability to act. Assyrian attacks into Urartu served to increase Urartu's intentions of uniting.

Because Assyria was not in the west from 838 until about 806, this gave Hazael the perfect opportunity to harass Israel (II Kings 13:2, 3). God allowed it to happen in judgment of Jehu's actions, for Jehu encouraged calf worship which Jeroboam I had begun. Damascus controlled the Transjordan south to the Arnon River (II Kings 10:32f), which was a great loss to Israel. The transjordan area was fertile land.

Later in Joash's reign, perhaps while he was yet young, he began a rebuilding campaign for the temple. Jehoiada must have influenced him

greatly in this as well as in his other policies. Unfortunately, when the high priest died, Joash seemed to lose his sense of values. He began listening to his officials who urged him to serve the Asherim and idols, perhaps in hopes of gaining a treaty with the Phoenicians. Joash refused the guidance of the prophets and even had one, Zechariah, stoned (II Chronicles 24:17-21).

It is possible to note here a deterioration of Israel and Judah. Israel's troubles stemmed from a tyrant unfit for political office, who had killed nearly all of the trained officials. Israel's international relations were at a very low point. Judah's problems were a natural result of an ill advised ruler. The king's counsellors could bring nothing but trouble to Judah as long as they insisted on following what appeared to be correct but what was wrong in God's sight.

Jehu died in 813, after a reign of about 28 years. It is surprising that he lasted as long as he did under the conditions. Hazael may have supported him as a puppet king, for their aim was not to annihilate the Israelites, but to drain them of their resources. Conditions must have been terribly difficult for the common man, for they suffered under Jehu alone, but the Syrians inflicted more problems on the country.

Jehoahaz (814-798)

At Jehu's death, his son Jehoahaz inherited the kingship. Jehoahaz was also oppressed by Hazael. Stubbornly Jehoahaz allowed the Asherah to remain standing in Samaria, and therefore prolonged Israel's suffering. Hazael reduced Israel's army to ten chariots, fifty horsemen, and 10,000 footmen (II Kings 13:7). This was barely a national police force. No doubt many of them were Syrian agents assigned to Israel. Hazael allowed neighboring countries to raid part of Israel. Amos records the actions of Israel's enemies (Amos 1:1-2, 3). Tyre and Sidon, Edom, Philistia, Ammon and Moab—every pagan neighbor was guilty of kidnapping Israelites to sell on the slave market. It is interesting in history to observe how once a nation is down, other nations cowardly attack like a wolf pack to finish the job and share the spoils.

Hazael decided on pushing further south. He drove south into Philistia. After arriving in Gaza (whether Gaza was an ally, a vassal, or enemy is hard to tell), Hazael headed east to Jerusalem. Judah's army could not stop him. Joash stripped the temple and emptied his own treasury to pay tribute as a bribe. Hazael accepted the spoils and left. Hazael probably felt confident that he could do the same again within a few years (II Kings 12:18), but international politics were again to see Assyrian military might. The Biblical record appears to date this around Joash's death, which was in 798, but the Assyrians were in the area by then and earlier in 805-802. It is, therefore, best to date Hazael's venture about 807-806 for only before the Assyrian revival could Hazael safely take his army south away from Damascus. The Chronicler seems to indicate that Joash was murdered immediately after Hazael's raid but II Kings 12:18-20 allows for a length of time between the events, because Joash was ill.

Jehoahaz visited Elisha and wept before him concerning the army of Israel. Elisha instructed him to shoot an arrow east. It was a sign that Syria would be destroyed at Aphek. He was then to hit the ground with a bundle of arrows. He did so but stopped after three blows which angered Elisha. Jehoahaz may have felt foolish doing this, perhaps showing that he didn't have faith. Whitcomb states that Jehoahaz knew what he was doing but wanted only to wound Syria, not destroy it, in order to use it as a buffer state against Assyria.⁵ Considering Israel's condition it is probable that Israel would welcome the Assyrians just to shake off the yoke of Syrian domination.

Hazael lived at least as long as Jehoahaz, which was until 798 (II Kings 13:22). Therefore he reigned during Adad-nirari II's western campaigns.

Adad-nirari II became king in 811, but did not rule until maturity. His mother, Sammu-ramat, ruled for him until 806. Upon assuming full rule Adad-nirari set out on a campaign west in 805, heading to Arpad to stop Urartu from allying itself to them. He then descended the fertile crescent to Damascus and surrounded the city. He received tribute from nearly all of the north Palestinean states, including Israel under Jehoahaz. This tribute payment is not recorded in Scripture, but is known from an Assyrian Stele.⁶

Jehoahaz had entreated God for deliverance (II Kings 13:4). Some scholars feel that Assyria was God's instrument of deliverance since Damascus was surrounded and tribute exacted. Although Jehoahaz had to pay tribute as a diplomatic gift to Assyria, the land had rest from Syrian terror. Instead of appreciating God's intervention and ensuing peace the people returned to their idols, so it was not long until Syria began pressuring Israel again.

Adad-nirari II now campaigned in the east. Urartu was quickly becoming a major problem. Raids were often made to the stronghold near Lake Urmia at Hubushkia. He was forced to Mansuate in 798 to check Urartu's growing influence. It was about this time that Hazael and Jehoahaz died. Adad-nirari took advantage of the situation and again attacked Damascus while new leaders were assuming office.

There is a problem presented by these two campaigns. Another stele, concerning Adad-nirari II and his second-in-command, Nergal-eres, mention a western campaign where Jehoash of Samaria is said to have paid tribute.⁷ It is dated the first year of Adad-nirari's reign, but Jehoash didn't begin ruling until 798. Cody suggests a coregency, but this is not likely since official records only recognized the active ruling king. Page suggests that Nergal-eres conducted the first campaign in the west and since it was successful, Adad-nirari, in his records, added

⁵John C. Whitcomb, Jr., *Solomon to the Exile*, p. 83.

⁶A. Leo Oppenheim, "Adad-nirari III (810-783)—Expedition to Palestine," *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 282.

⁷Aelred Cody, "A New Inscription from Tell Al-Rimah and King Jehoash of Israel," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, XXXII (1970), 335.

it to his later campaign claiming it as part of his own campaigns.⁸ After Hazael and Jehoahaz died, Benhadad III and Jehoash ascended their father's thrones. Jehoash later defeated Syria three times as Elisha had predicted (II Kings 13:25). These three assaults probably took place after the Assyrian campaign since Syria would be in a weakened condition.

It is interesting that three successive kings of Israel are known to have paid tribute to the Assyrians. Tribute was paid by Jehu in 841 to Shalmaneser II, by Jehoahaz about 804, probably to Nergal-eres, and Jehoash in 798 to Adad-nirari. Scripture is silent on all three of these events, yet knowledge of each enables one to understand the pressures brought to bear by the Assyrians on the Syrians and Israelites.

Jehoash (798-782)

After 797, the Assyrians left the west alone for about twenty years. Damascus was in a weakened condition, leaving Israel free to rebuild after years of oppression. Knowing of Assyria's periodic influence, it is possible to understand the historical books better. It is no accident when Syria appears stronger than Israel and vice versa. God intervened in history by using the Assyrians in international politics. People then had to trust God amid daily routines as we do today.

About the time Assyria departed from the west, Joash of Judah was murdered. Although it was a treacherous deed by his assailants, it was allowed as God's judgment on him for the murder of Zechariah. Amaziah ascended Judah's throne and promptly had his father's murderers killed.

Amaziah of Judah became infatuated with the idea of conquering Edom. Edom was traditionally a vassal of Judah, much as Moab was of Israel. Perhaps Amaziah felt this was the first step towards making Judah greater. He gathered his army of 300,000, but not being satisfied, hired 100,000 mercenaries from Israel. A man of God advised that God did not approve. Amaziah was willing to let them go home but hesitated because he had paid them in advance. The king was assured that God's treasury could stand the loss. The mercenaries, young and eager for battle after years of oppression, were deeply insulted at this (II Chronicles 25:1-10). Amaziah carried out his plans to subdue Edom. In the Valley of Salt, he killed 10,000 of the enemy and executed another 10,000 captives. For some reason Amaziah brought home images of Edom's gods and bowed before them. A prophet pointed out the irony of worshipping a defeated victim's gods. The king was told that destruction awaited his kingdom, but he ignored the message (II Chronicles 25:14-16)

As it turns out, the Israelite mercenaries went home but plundered the countryside as they went (I Chronicles 25:13). Amaziah was infuriated and challenged Jehoash to battle. Israel's king considered Amaziah a foolish, brash youth and told him so. That made Amaziah

⁸Stephanie Page, "Stele of Adad-nirari III and Nergal-eres from Tell Al-Rimah," *Iraq*, XXX (1958), 153.

more determined to fight. Israel badly mauled Judah's army. Jehoash plundered Jerusalem and tore down part of the city wall as a warning. The temple and the king's house were stripped of valuable objects (II Kings 14:11-14) and Amaziah was taken captive. Perhaps it was then that Azariah (Uzziah) was named coregent in 790.

Thiele supports the view that Amaziah was held captive until Jehoash died in 782.⁹ He lived for fifteen years after Jehoash died, but probably left active politics to his son.

Azariah, better known as Uzziah, and his contemporary, Jeroboam II (who followed Jehoash) were destined to produce an era of national prosperity for Israel and Judah.

Jeroboam II (782-753)

Assyria, after Adad-nirari's last venture west (797), was forced to deal with their eastern enemies, especially Media, which had become Urartu's ally. In 782 Syria was threatened by the renegade Zakir who holed up in Hazrek and was in league with the Assyrians.¹⁰ Damascus had regained enough strength to organize a coalition against Zakir. As Elisha had said, the three defeats inflicted on Syria by Jehoash had not been enough to stop Damascan influence. Unfortunately for Syria, the Assyrians, under Adad-nirari II, sent a rescue party to Zakir. It was successful, for it defeated the coalition so that Syria was again weakened. The Assyrians, having trouble elsewhere, did not stay long either, except to help fortify Zakir's position. Zakir's value to the Assyrians was in controlling a supply route through north Syria.

It must have been during this time that Israel was able to control Damascus and Hamath (II Kings 14:28), since Syria and Assyria were too weak or occupied to respond.

In 782 Shalmaneser IV (782-772) took control of the empire of Assyria. His reign was concerned with controlling Urartu and making punitive raids against their allies in Media. He lost provinces in the north and east, while Urartu's influence continued to grow.

In 772, Ashur-dan III (772-754) became king. He continually wrestled with his predecessors' troubles, but added to them were uprisings in the south. In 763 an eclipse occurred that was interpreted as an evil omen. Pestilence swept the land also. It was probably at this time of low strength that Jonah the prophet arrived in Nineveh.

In 754, Ashur-nirari V (754-745) became king. During his reign Babylon declared its independence. His rule was weak and troubled and was the last in this dynasty, since Tiglath-pileser III became the new king in 745.

Since about 797, Israel and Judah were not harmed by Assyria. They even profited by their appearance at Hazrek in 782. Jeroboam II's

⁹Edwin R. Thiele, *The Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, pp. 84-86.

¹⁰D. Winton Thomas, ed., *Documents from Old Testament Times*, pp. 246-247, and James A. Montgomery, "Some Gleanings from Pognon's ZKR Inscription," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, XXVIII (1909), 63.

rule (781-753) was politically and economically a prosperous one. He controlled Damascus and probably the Ammonites and Moabites. Uzziah in Judah operated free of Jeroboam II's influence and probably had friendly relations with him. Judah expanded into Philistine territory and Edom was economically controlled. Elath (Ezion-geber) was again opened as a port. Some Ammonites even paid tribute (II Kings 26:2, 6-8, 11-15). Uzziah built towers and cisterns for livestock and made land available for vineyards and agriculture. About 750, Uzziah attempted to act as priest, and was stricken with leprosy. His son, Jotham, became coregent and ruled until 732.

Israel and Judah together controlled a land area equal to Solomon's kingdom. Caravan routes through their lands brought in much money through tolls. Phoenicia was glad to see the prosperity and trade expanded through Israel and Judah to Arabia, Egypt and Mesopotamia.

Israel and Judah were strong only externally. Most of their people suffered at the hands of their fellow countrymen. The wealth of the country was in the hands of a minority. Rich people and leaders alike lost respect for God's laws. The poor were taken advantage of unmercifully, as seen in Amos and Hosea.

Israel fell before Assyria in 722 as a judgment from God for her years of pagan worship. The years of prosperity were only a veneer covering the rot of spiritual and social decline. The poor could not obtain justice and were forced into debt, often losing the family plot of land. Every possible means of deception was commonly practiced at the expense of one's neighbors. Oddly enough, the people in high offices felt safe as God's people, thinking that their prosperity was God's favor to them. Amos condemned these views vigorously as did Hosea.

When Jeroboam II died (753), the kingdom of Israel fell apart politically. Two new kings were quickly assassinated. Menahem ruled a faltering kingdom and was forced to pay tribute to Tiglath-pileser. The nation fell to the Assyrians in 722. Judah was to feel Assyrian pressure but God's salvation also, only to continue in their sin.

In the next century, Judah fell to the Babylonians, having failed to learn from history what happened to Israel in judgment for pagan practices.

Epilogue

Secular history can be used to compare and contrast Biblical history and man's history. All of Scripture was given by God and it is interesting to see what He chose to put in and what He left out. Because the Bible is God's Word, attention should be given to even the seemingly insignificant event, for God placed it there. Secular history can become a tool used to encourage the study and appreciation of the Word in order that Christ might be honored.