

PEOPLE OF GOD HAVE LEADERS
Early Leaders in the Rise of the Nation
David and the Prophets

October 28, 2020

Archaeology

Bible offers a fairly concise account of the roughly 500-year history of the Israelite monarchy.

It starts with Saul and ends with the final destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC.

Account is found in the books of 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings, and 1-2 Chronicles.

Supplemental information is scattered throughout the Hebrew prophets.

Ancient evidence corroborates much of the information contained in these books.

Archaeologists have discovered the names of about half of the kings who ruled Israel and Judah.

Ancient inscriptions appear in bullae or clay impressions used to seal official documents.

Names of most of these kings can also be found in inscriptions from rulers of great nations – such as Egypt, Assyria, and Babylonia as well as smaller kingdoms such as Aram and Moab.

It is also significant that the Bible has a chronology consistent with other ancient records.

Biblical writers always have the Mesopotamian kings from Assyria and Babylon in correct order.

Assyrian and Babylonians records confirm the chronology concerning sequence of monarchs.

Bible is a trustworthy source of historical information concerning the nation of Israel.

Mesha Stone

In 1868 a stone was uncovered in the Biblical city of Dibon which recorded victories by Mesha (the king of Moab) who defeated the Israelites. It is uncertain whether the victories on the stone were recorded before or after the kings of Israel and Judah fought against Mesha. It is recorded in 2 Kings 3:4-26 and Israel (with the help of God) was successful in the military campaign.

Here is a translation of the text taken from Line 31 of the Mesha Stone:

And the House of David inhabited Horonaim.

Here is one of the first references to King David and his descendants.

Mesha made a distinction throughout between the men of Israel and the House of David.

Town of Horonaim is also mentioned in Isaiah 15:5 and Jeremiah 48:3.

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Few modern Biblical archaeology discoveries have caused as much excitement as the *Tel Dan* inscription – writing on a 9th Century BC stone slab (or stela) that furnished one of the first historical evidences of King David. The *Tel Dan* (or *House of David*) inscription was discovered in 1993 at the site of Tel Dan in northern Israel.

The broken and fragmentary inscription commemorates the victory of an Aramean king over his two southern neighbors: the *king of Israel* and the *king of the House of David*. In Aramaic characters the Aramean king boasts that he (under the guidance of Hadad) defeated several thousand Israelite and Judahite horsemen and charioteers.

The recovered fragments of the *House of David* inscription do not preserve the names of the specific kings involved in this encounter, but most scholars believe the stela recounts a campaign of Hazael of Damascus in which he defeated both Jehoram of Israel and Ahaziah of Judah.



The *Tel Dan* inscription is one of the most exciting Biblical archaeology discoveries for scholars and the broader public because of its reference to the *House of David*.

It proved that King David was a genuine historical figure. It also established that more than a century after the death of David, one of the ancient Israel's fiercest enemies still recognized David as the founder of the kingdom of Judah.

David

Story of his early career is interwoven with the fateful events of the reign of Saul.

Story was written to glorify the man whose charm and charismatic success made him popular.

Book of Chronicles touched up the portrait of David so his better traits stood out.

Accounts in the books of Samuel and Kings present more candid snapshots of his real life.

Death of Samuel and Saul marked the passing of an era.

With David a new way of life began that was revolutionary when compared to the Confederacy.

With David we see the transition from charismatic leadership to a centralized power.

Israel was transformed into a miniature empire modeled after the surrounding nations.

Problem was to maintain the tribal unity of the Old Confederacy under the new nation-state.

Methods used by David suggest that he was a shrewd politician.

He stopped at nothing to achieve his political ambitions.

At the time of Saul's death David was an exile in Philistia.

His first task was to put himself in a strategic position to set himself up as ruler over Israel.

As an outlaw he ingratiated himself with the Judeans by protecting landlords from robbers.

He divided the spoil taken from raids on his enemies with the elders of Judah.

Shortly after the death of Saul David was anointed king at Hebron.

He reigned for over seven years in that one city.

However David had his eye on the whole territory of Israel.

Northern tribes still owed allegiance to Ishbaal (son of Saul).

Struggle between David and the house of Saul came to an end through the army general, Abner.

Rebuked by Ishbaal, Abner offered the remnant of Saul's kingdom to David.

Part of the deal was for David to take Michal as his wife.

She was the daughter of Saul but also married to someone else.

It seemed like the only way that David could claim the throne of Saul so he married her.

At the age of thirty-seven David became the unchallenged ruler of all Israel.

David's power increased with the union of the Israelite tribes.
Philistines felt it was time to act.
One of the greatest accomplishments by David was breaking the control of the Philistines.
Philistines lost control over Canaan once and for all and they were restricted to the coastal plain.
David also waged successful wars against Moab, Ammon, Edom, Amalek, and Aram.
He became the recognized ruler of an empire.
Never before or after the time of David did Israel exceed his height of political power.

Aside from being a brilliant military commander, he centralized all power around the throne.
He captured the old fortress of Jerusalem despite the boast of its occupants, the Jebusites.
He wisely sought a place for his capital that was neither *northern* nor *southern*.
Jerusalem was a neutral site right on the boundary of the northern and southern tribes.
Jerusalem became known as the *city of David*.
Administration of the law was no longer with the tribal elders or the judges of the Confederacy.
It was taken over by the king himself although he delegated responsibilities to judges.
Israel was rapidly becoming like the other nations.

In order to have the allegiance of all Israel David had to establish religious sanctions.
Political innovations could not take away the sacred heritage of Israel.
Best way to do that was to rescue the Ark of the Covenant and bring it to Jerusalem.
In this way the *city of David* also became known as the *city of God*.
The presence of the Lord was once more *tabernacled* in the midst of Israel.
Religious center of Israel was shifted from Shiloh to this royal shrine of Israel.

All these changes and innovations marked the start of a *royal theology*.
It challenged the anti-monarchy conservatism represented by leaders like Samuel.
According to this view, the Lord made a special covenant with David.
The Lord promised to establish the throne of David securely throughout all generations.
Came to be believed that the Lord would be in favor of any king who was a descendant of David.

David wanted to build a splendid royal temple patterned after the temples of other nations.
Conservative religious tradition of the Confederacy was voiced by the prophet, Nathan.
He argued that the Lord had not dwelt in a *house* since the time of the Exodus.
David was content with building a *tent-shrine* along the lines of a tabernacle.
According to Chronicles, David organized the musicians into guilds.

David in a Different Light

Against the advice of his counselors, he insisted on taking a census of all Israel.
Findings were to be the basis for military enlisting, taxation, and even forced labor.
He forced the people into work camps which later became a hated symbol of tyranny.
David was serving notice that all citizens owed their primary allegiance to the king.
Allegiance was no longer to be within each tribal unit.
Plan backfired as noted in the narrative outlined in 2 Samuel 24.
Story of the plague was interpreted as the wrath of the Lord against the king.

Initial popularity of David started to wane.
People longed for the independence they had enjoyed before Israel became a state.
On the outside, Israel became the envy of the other nations.
David was renowned as was the city of Jerusalem.
Commercial wealth of the Near East poured into the kingdom.
Social life underwent profound changes.
Faith of Israel was exposed to a more cosmopolitan atmosphere.

But . . .

Domestic troubles are recorded in 2 Samuel 9-20 and 1 Kings 1-2.
Unlike Chronicles here we see both the strengths and weaknesses of David.
David was a victim of his own greatness.
In another sense David was in a conflict with the God he sought to serve.
Tradition has attributed Psalm 51 to David (a great penitential psalm).
Setting could have been when Nathan came to David after David had gone to Bathsheba.

In time the weaknesses of David were forgotten and his greatness was extolled.
He was remembered as a *servant of the Lord*.
He was a God-fearing king who executed justice and righteousness to all his people.

Back to 2 Samuel 7 –

Special relationship between the Lord and David was extended to the whole dynasty of David.
David asked Nathan for God's approval to build the Lord a house of cedar.
Lord refused but promised instead to make David a house and to establish his throne forever.
Divine judgment would fall upon individual kings for their failures in office.
However the covenant loyalty of the Lord would not be withdrawn from the house of David.

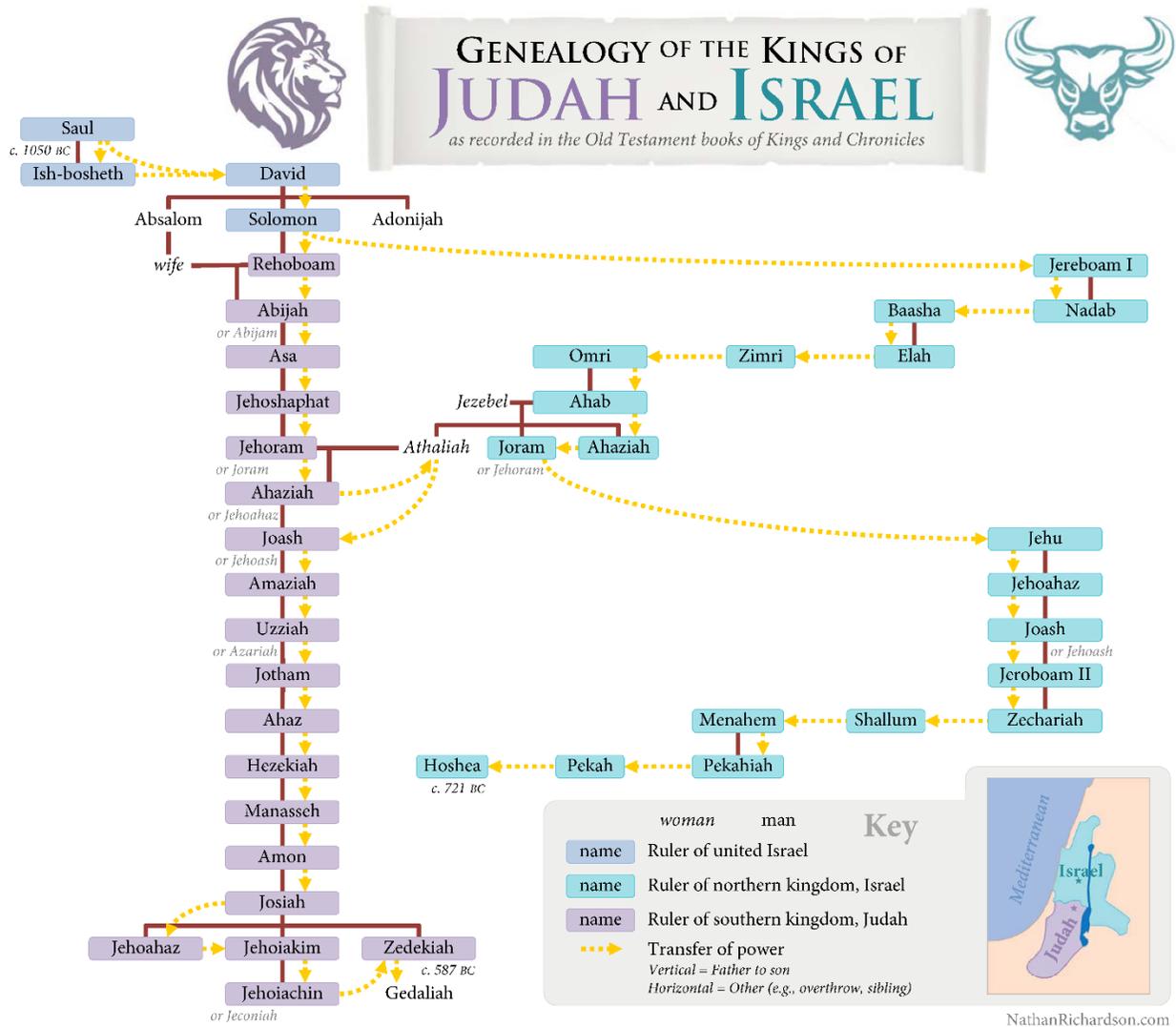
Bitter political experiences of Israel after the death of David gave rise to the hope of Messiah.
Messiah would come and would be of the lineage of David.
He would reunite the tribes of Israel and would restore Jerusalem to a place of prestige.
In times of national despair the people prayed to God to remember the covenant with David.
When all was lost the people looked back to the rule of David as a foreshadowing of future.

Writers of the Narrative

Deuteronomistic historians leave no doubt where they stand on the issue of nationalism.
It was not the intention of the Lord that Israel should become a great nation.
Israel was to be separated from other nations by a covenantal allegiance to God.
Covenant emphasized the Lord's uncompromising demand for absolute loyalty.
However it was difficult to maintain faithfulness to the Mosaic tradition in Canaan.

Another perspective on role of Israel as a nation was put forth by the Yahwist (J) editor.
In this version of the narrative the Lord made the promise to Abraham and his descendants.
They would become a great nation.
Conviction was based on Israel as the *people* of God and the Lord *the God of Israel*.
Existence of Israel as a *nation* was in the context of an unfolding plan that embraced all nations.
Role of Israel was to bring divine blessing upon all the families of the earth.

At this very time the distinctive faith of Israel was in danger of being drowned out. Yahwist reinterpreted the Mosaic tradition to make it relevant to the larger world. Israel was to fulfill its special purpose in the unfolding drama of history.



Rise of the Prophetic Movement

Our English word for *prophet* comes from the Greek word *prophētēs*. It literally means *one who speaks for another* (especially for a deity). Corresponding Hebrew word is *nabī* which means *to call, to announce, to name*. Uncertainty as to whether the Hebrew form has an active meaning or a passive meaning. In the active mode the emphasis would be on the role of a prophet to proclaim a message. In the passive mode the stress would be on the vocation of the prophet. Prophet would be a messenger in the service of the deity. To understand Israelite prophecy it depends on particular Biblical texts. Overall the prophet is one who communicates the will of God. Prophet is an intermediary or a spokesperson (one who acts and speaks on behalf of God). Authority of the prophet did not lie within themselves but in the One who sent them.

Purpose of God speaking in this way was not to communicate information about a time frame. Prophets often made predictions with the conviction that the Lord was shaping course of events. Predictions had reference to the immediate future which was influenced by the present. Prophets were concerned with the urgency of the present moment. Task was to communicate God's message now and to summon the people to respond today.

In a broad sense, Israelite prophecy arose in connection with God's revelation in the Exodus. God raised up a leader to proclaim the meaning of that historical event. Deuteronomy 18:18 and Hosea 12:13 both indirectly call Moses a prophet. Term *prophetess* was used to describe the leadership of Miriam and Deborah. In the time of Samuel the Hebrew word was applied only to a special class of people. Prophets of that day were the immediate forerunners of the great prophets. Elijah came to be regarded as the representative *par excellence*.

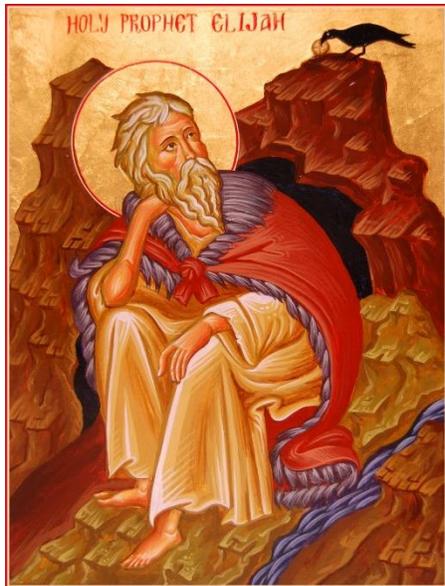
We first learn of the company of prophets in connection with the Philistines. In 1 Samuel 10:5-13 we hear once more that the spirit of the Lord possessed them. Prophets went into a prophetic frenzy and turned into a different person. Such ecstasies made one the instrument of the will of God. In such a prophetic state unusual things happened. Behavior corresponded to prophets in other cultures. There was one main difference between Israelite prophets and the prophets of Canaanite society. Israelite prophets were spokespersons of the Lord. In the message the Lord interpreted the promises and demands of the covenant.

Early prophets belonged to guilds or schools and were known as the *sons of the prophets*. They lived together in communities and were under the leadership of a chief prophet. Chief prophet was referred to as their *father*. In 2 Kings Elijah and Elisha were leaders of prophetic communities at Bethel, Jericho, Gilgal. Guilds were free to travel around and deliver oracles and in some cases to judge (2 Kings 4:1-7).

Other prophets were more closely tied to the sanctuaries of Israel. Sanctuaries like those at Bethel or Jerusalem had on their staff both priests and prophets. They served side-by-side in a joint ministry. These prophets were called *cultic prophets* and had a special part in the worship services. Regarded as experts in prayer they were called upon to bring petitions before the Lord. They would then communicate the answer from God or indicate the need for some offering. At great religious festivals they would announce the demands and promises of the covenant. We might see oracles of cultic prophets embedded in our prophetic literature. Some of the psalms seem to reflect their role in worship (Psalm 81).

Prophecy was intimately associated with politics. Early prophets were zealous for holy wars. They were called to deliver the word of the Lord for a specific situation. At that time there were three channels for hearing the will of God – Dreams and/or the sacred dice (Urim and Thummin) and/or prophecy.

Prophet (not priest) was more likely to be the spokesperson for the Lord in a political crisis. Prophet was able to interpret the meaning of events and to proclaim the will of God concretely. When Israel became a nation the role of prophets proved to be ambivalent. Some prophets (like Elijah) stood outside of the power structure. They were viewed as enemies of the king because prophets advocated for rapid social change. Other prophets (like Nathan) operated within the social structure. Prophetic movement belonged inseparably to the period of Israel as a nation. Prophets kept alive the traditions of the past and reminded the people about God.



In the period between the split of the United Kingdom to the revolution of Jehu (922 to 842 BC) no literature was written by prophets. Instead the tradition about the prophets was interwoven within the historical narrative of the books of 1 and 2 Kings.

Elijah stories are not historical in our sense of the word. Many are based on actual circumstances but became the mirror of the *experienced* history of Israel in one of its many crisis.

First story in the Elijah Cycle is found in 1 Kings 17 and 18. He is introduced with dramatic suddenness. Coming from a rough and semi-nomadic life (on the edge of the desert) he must have been a strange sight in the cultured land of Israel.

Elijah had a way of coming from nowhere to surprise people. In his first acts he announced a drought in the name of the Lord. Rest of Chapter 17 shows the severity of the famine and the great miracles of Elijah. Purpose of the stories was to portray the authority of the Lord over the fertility of the land. It also affirmed that the lives of the people were totally in the hands of the Lord. Writer wanted to communicate the active presence of the Lord through Elijah.

Sequel to the Carmel episode is his flight into the wilderness of southern Judah. Writer portrays the doubt that shadows faith. Elijah portrayed in 1 King 19 is a broken and fatigued man running for his life. In his efforts to crush the power of tyranny and idolatry he seemed no further ahead. Lord supplied him with strength for a longer journey. Significant that Elijah made the journey to Sinai where Moses received the revelation from God. Whole prophetic movement was a pilgrimage back to Sinai (to the source of Israel's faith). Prophets demanded that Israel return to the covenant allegiance demanded by the Lord.

Third episode in the Elijah Cycle (1 Kings 21) took place sometime later. Once more the Baal religion was held in opposition to the faith in the Lord. It was not another dramatic contest like Carmel but it had more to do with social relationships. Prophets were advocates for the stern ethical demands of the Mosaic tradition. Covenant obedience was motivated by gratitude for the great acts of liberation by the Lord.

Lord had created a covenant community in which every person stood equal before the law. Whole community was responsible to the will of God as expressed in the absolute laws of God. Lord intervened to defend the weak and the defenseless and to restore order. Baal religion supported the status quo. Faith in the Lord (as revived by Elijah) gave the people the energy to fight against these evils.

Assignment for November 4

Major and Minor Prophets
Obadiah and Hosea and Malachi

