

The Former Prophets

(Joshua, Judges, 1st & 2nd
Samuel, 1st & 2nd Kings)

I. Introduction

The section of the Hebrew Bible called the Former Prophets in the Jewish canon is called *history* by most Christians. The word ‘history’, however, can be misleading since these books contain more than just history. I will use the name “former prophets” to avoid that misunderstanding and to remind us that these books were seen as ‘prophetic’ in the later life of Israel.

Joshua, Judges, 1st & 2nd Samuel, and 1st & 2nd Kings tell the story of the people of Israel from their entry into the promised land to their expulsion from it many centuries later (**721 BCE** for the Northern Kingdom and **587 BCE** for the Southern Kingdom).

These books assume that *obedience to the LORD brings blessing, while disobedience brings disaster*. This is a perspective shared with the book of **Deuteronomy**. Noting this and other shared elements, many scholars refer to the Former Prophets and Deuteronomy jointly as the *Deuteronomic History*.

We will not have time to look at these books in depth. In stead, I will (1) provide a broad overview of their contents and (2) focus on a few passages as examples of the kinds of stories found in this body of literature. I will also (3) address a number of historical questions raised by the texts.

II. The Former Prophets and the Nature of Israelite Prophecy

In the Jewish canon (the *Tanak*) these books are treated as prophecy. What does it indicate about the nature of Israelite prophecy that narrative books like these can be considered prophecy?

A prophet, in Israel’s religious tradition, **was not a predictor of the future**, but a reader of the present. That is to say, a prophet was one who could look at society critically and discern the will of God for the present time, then speak that will to the people.

The authors of the books we are now considering were prophets in this sense. They looked at Hebrew society of their time and judged that a particular lesson from Israel’s history was needed to insure God’s blessing. They tell the

story of the history of Israel as a form of sermon to that society, and their central message is clear: *If you are faithful to the covenant, God will bless the nation, but if you are unfaithful, God's blessing will be lost and it will not go well with you in the land.* This is the perspective of the speeches of Moses in Deuteronomy.

III. Overview of Joshua and Judges: What's in the Text?

Both Joshua and Judges tell the story of the Hebrew people's entry into Canaan after their wandering in the wilderness, and both relate their early occupation of that land.

A. Joshua

The book of Joshua may be divided into three sections. Chapters **1—12** tell the story of a **violent military campaign** in which "all Israel" is led by Joshua against the people of Canaan. Chapters **13—21** relate the **distribution of the land** among the victorious tribes of Israel.

The final chapters (**22—24**) focus on the **debt of the Hebrew tribes to their God** who has given them the land. This final section may itself be divided into three smaller sections. **Chapter 22** relates the **return of the warriors of the tribes of Reuben and Gad** and half the tribe of Manasseh to their people. They had been given land earlier by Moses on the eastern side of the Jordan with the agreement that they would go into Canaan (west of the Jordan) and fight to win the land for the other tribes. When the war of conquest is over, according to Joshua 22, they return to their families on the eastern side of the Jordan.

In **chapter 23 Joshua gives a farewell speech** in which he reminds the people that their *success depends on allegiance to the LORD*. The people are then gathered at **Shechem** (in what would centuries later become the region of Samaria) for a **ceremony to renew** their commitment to the covenant (**Joshua 24**).

B. Judges

The book of Judges may also be divided into three main sections, but the material within each section is more loosely organized than Joshua. The book opens with a restatement of the **settlement of the land (1:1—2:5)**. The bulk of the book (**2:6—16:31**) is a collection of **short stories** about particular heroes.

Who were some of these “judges”? Do you know the names of any of them? Take a few minutes to look at the biblical text to find the stories of Deborah, Gideon, and Samson.

The final chapters (**17—21**) tell about (1) the tribe of **Dan** moving north and (2) the punishment of the tribe of **Benjamin** in a civil war.

IV. Historical Issue #1: The Conquest of Canaan/Inheriting the Promised Land

A. The Literary Evidence: What’s in the Biblical Text? (Joshua 1—12 and Judges 1:1—2:5)

Joshua 1—12 and **Judges 1:1—2:5** give two perspectives on the entry of the people of Israel into the promised land. The two perspectives offer a helpful balance for each other in much the same way that Genesis 1 and 2 balance each other by providing different approaches to the problem of God’s interaction with creation.

In the book of Joshua the people move into Canaan *in mass* under the direction of Joshua and conquer the entire land (Joshua 1—12), **though** the careful reader will notice that the author acknowledges that **some cities are clearly *not* conquered (13:1)**. Once the conquest is complete, the land is parceled out among the tribes in agreement with the assignments that Moses had given [as reported in the book of Numbers] (Joshua 13—21).

The book of Judges opens with a section which, like Joshua 1—12, discusses the occupation of the land. **Some scholars take Judges 1:1—2:6 to refer to the same time period as Joshua 1—12. The text of Judges itself, however, presents this as a discussion of what took place *after the death of Joshua* (1:1)**. Then in 2:6 there is an *analepsis* back to the time when Joshua dismissed the people (from Shechem) to “take possession” of the land.

Compare **Joshua 24:28** which says that Joshua “sent the people away to their inheritances.” Notice also that Joshua 24:31 parallels the sequence of Judges 2:6—15. In fact the wording of 2:7 is very close to Joshua 24:31.

The people remained faithful to the LORD until after the death of Joshua and “the elders who outlived Joshua” (2:7), but then began to worship the gods of the people whom they had not driven out of the land.

If we accept that Judges 1:1—2:5 is talking about the time *after the death of Joshua* (Judges 1:1), **a significant historical puzzle remains.** After the death of Joshua, according to Judges 1, some cities are still occupied by the native peoples which the book of Joshua says that Joshua himself had destroyed with “all Israel,” killing every living inhabitant.

For example, **Joshua 10:36—37** reads,

Then **Joshua** went up with **all Israel** from Eglon to **Hebron**; they assaulted it, and took it, and struck it with the sword, and its king and its towns, and every person in it; he left no one remaining, just as he had done to Eglon, and utterly destroyed it with every person in it.

But **Judges 1:9—10** says about the time **after Joshua’s death**,

Afterward the people of **Judah** went down to fight against the Canaanites who lived in the hill country, in the Negeb, and in the lowland. Judah went against the Canaanites who lived in **Hebron** (the name of Hebron was formerly Kiriath-arba); and they defeated Sheshai and Ahiman and Talmai.

How are these Canaanites still in Hebron after Joshua killed every living person there and “utterly destroyed” the city (Joshua 10:36—37)?

To solve this problem **many scholars say** that Judges 1:1—2:6 is actually referring to the *same* time as Joshua 1—12 so that **the incidents described in Joshua 10:36—37 and Judges 1:9—10 above are actually the same events** (which took place *before* the death of Joshua). **This solution does not really remove the historical problem, though.** The book of Joshua says that it was “Joshua with *all Israel*” who defeated Hebron (Joshua 10:36). The event described in Judges involves “the people of Judah” (Judges 1:9) or just “Judah” (1:10), but *not* “all Israel.” How can the events be the same if the same people were not involved?

What do we make of this? Perhaps a solution to such problems *can* be found. If we looked hard enough, perhaps we could come up with a way to understand the

texts which would remove the historical difficulty, but it is important to recognize that the texts are not meant as history textbooks. Each story has its own focus and teaches something which its author perceived to be *true*.

Joshua gives the story of the conquest in ideal form. This story portrays the author's view of what happens when the people put themselves fully at the disposal of the LORD. The people succeed in removing the pagan influences from there midst. The book is honest in its portrayal of the people, though, and shows their flaws as well as their successes.

Judges recognizes that God's people are far from flawless. Sometimes they are faithful. Sometimes they are not. But even when they *are* faithful, they still face limitations. They are not able to drive out all of their enemies.

B. Archaeological Evidence

Archaeology has provided no credible evidence for the traditional 15th century BCE date of the conquest. Archaeological evidence does offer some limited support for (1) the major emphases of the book of Joshua (decisive military success by a collective army ["all Israel"]) (2) the picture found in Judges (tribes working independently to take control of local areas) and (3) the semi-peaceful infiltration of some regions of Canaan *if* we assume that the settlement of Canaan by the Israelites took place in the **late thirteenth century BCE**.

Some cities were violently destroyed in the mid- to late thirteenth century BCE (Hazor, for example). Other sites appear to have been empty for some time before the arrival of the Hebrew tribes, and were reoccupied by the incoming forces. Sites in the hill country and the Judean Negev indicate that the migrating Hebrews settled on land that had been unoccupied for a good time.

Still, there are **puzzles** which the archaeological evidence has not been able to solve. No evidence has been found, for example, which would indicate that **Jericho** was occupied at all during the 13th century BCE, and the conquest of Jericho is a significant feature of the early part of the book of Joshua.

C. Reconstructions: Implications of the Evidence

The archaeological evidence does accord well with an understanding of the texts as *complementary*—that is, if we see Joshua and Judges as providing perspectives which balance each other and do not try to make them say the same thing. Under this view the settlement of the land was a complex event which took

a long time. (1) **A core group** of what would later become the nation of Israel came out of slavery in Egypt and moved into the land. They crossed over the Jordan into the western territories probably in the middle of the thirteenth century BCE. (2) **Additional peoples** joined them and took upon themselves the conditions of the Sinai Covenant. Some of these people may have been *members of the traditional twelve tribes*, but had *not* spent time *in Egypt*. Others may have been able to claim some *other kinship relation* to those who came out of Egypt (see, for example, Genesis 25:1—6). Even some *unrelated Canaanite peoples* may have joined Israel. It is clear from the texts that some at least made peace treaties with Israel (Joshua 9:3—27).

The military exploits of Joshua and other strong early leaders gave the people of Israel a significant hold on the land of Canaan, but they did not decisively dominate the entire region.

The complexity of Israel's growing control over the region and the continued presence of older native peoples in the land can be seen in the story of **Jerusalem** itself (as well as other parts of Joshua and Judges). According to **Judges 1:8** the tribe of Judah marched against Jerusalem and took it. In **Joshua 15:63** and **Judges 1:21**, however, we hear that the Jebusites¹ remained in the city after the conquest of the promised land. In fact, **2 Samuel 5:6—10** tells us that the Jebusites were still there far later when David finally conquered the city. Is it possible that an early Judean battle against the city was successful, but that some of the inhabitants remained to rebuild? Could this have happened in other cities as well?

Several scholars (but especially Finkelstein) have suggested that the Israelites settled mostly in the hills and mountains and in the Judean Negev at first and co-existed with some of the Canaanite cities which occupied the plains and remained unconquered. This balance may have continued until about 1100 BCE when the growing **Philistine** forces upset the balance by cutting off supplies from the coastal cities to the highlands, thus forcing the highlanders to modify their lifestyle, settling down and taking up more farming activities. This change would have allowed the highlands to support a larger population. As the situation changed tensions would be inevitable. Local conflicts no doubt broke out, leading to action of individual tribes against cities in their area.

Most scholars today reject a strict “settlement” model of the Hebrew

¹ Jerusalem was formerly called *Jebus*. A *Jebusite* is a native resident of Jebus.

occupation of Canaan. Still, most scholars acknowledge that some semi-peaceful settlement must have taken place along with whatever military activity may have been used.

V. Overview of the Books of Samuel: What's in the Text?

First and Second Samuel tell the story of the **first two Kings of Israel: Saul and David**. The two books may be divided into *five narrative sections* followed by a sixth section containing various other materials.

A. **The Story of Samuel** (1 Samuel 1:1—7:17)

First, there is the story of **Samuel**, a leader who functions as priest, prophet (3:20), seer (9:11, 18—19, Note the comment at 9:9), warrior, and judge (7:6, 15). Even as a child he hears the voice of God (3:1—18). His story provides the necessary transition between the period of the judges and the monarchy.

B. **The Rise of the Monarchy** (1 Samuel 8:1—15:34)

The second section tells the story of how it came about that Israel developed a **monarchy** (1 Samuel 8:1—15:34). **The central figure** in this section is **Saul**, Israel's first king. Samuel is still around until the end of chapter 12, however, and Saul is finally undone by his failure to heed God's word given through the prophet.

C. **David's Rise to Power** (1 Samuel 15:35—2 Samuel 5:10)

The third section tells of **David's rise to power** (1 Samuel 15:35—2 Samuel 5:10). The story is one of conflict between David, to whom God has promised the throne of Saul, and the old King who becomes increasingly jealous of David.

D. **David's Early Reign** (2 Samuel 5:11—12:31)

The fourth section tells of several **events during the reign of David** (2 Samuel 5:11—12:31). These stories focus on an *oracle of the prophet Nathan* in chapter 7 (**2 Samuel 7:16**). Nathan tells David that his descendants will rule in an unending dynasty in Jerusalem and that his son (Solomon) will build a temple for the LORD there.

E. **Absalom's Revolt** (2 Samuel 13:1—20:22)

The fifth section tells the story of the **revolt of David's son Absalom** (2 Samuel 13:1—20:22). David is forced to flee Jerusalem and witnesses the death of two of his sons (Amnon [2 Samuel 13:23—39] and Absalom [2 Samuel 18]).

F. Additional Materials (2 Samuel 20:23—24:25)

Second Samuel ends with a collection of materials including poetry attributed to David, lists of his officers and warriors, and several short narratives connected only loosely with other parts of Samuel and Kings (2 Samuel 20:23—24:25).

VI. Historical Issue #2: The Emergence of the Hebrew State (Centralized Government)

A. The Literary Evidence: What's in the Biblical Text? (Judges 2:6—16:31 and 1 Samuel)

Much of the book of Judges tells of a time before the emergence of a centralized state in Israel, a time when charismatic leaders called “judges” ruled. The books of Samuel tell of the transition to a monarchy and the rule of Israel's first two kings, Saul and David.

It is important to realize that the biblical texts are not intended to answer this historical question. For them the more important question is the theological significance of the decision to have a king.

1. Judges 2:6—16:31

As I mentioned earlier under the overview of Joshua and Judges, most of the book of Judges (2:6—16:31) is a collection of short stories about heroes—charismatic leaders who delivered the people at some point of crisis. These stories usually end with the statement “and _____ judged Israel _____ years.”

We should ask what it means to say they “judged” Israel. Clearly, it does not mean what we typically mean by the term “judge” in our modern context. Most of these leaders are not shown carrying out any judicial function (with the notable exception of Deborah).

Ehud (Judges 3:12—30)

Deborah and Barak (Judges 4—5)
Gideon (Judges 6—8)
Jephthah (Judges 11—12)
Samson (Judges 13—16)

These stories are woven together with a theme which establishes a pattern for understanding the interaction between the people and the LORD. The theme is stated explicitly in **2:11—3:6**. First, the people turn away from their LORD and begin to worship other gods. Then the LORD becomes angry and allows them to be oppressed. After a period of oppression the LORD begins to have compassion and raises up a judge to lead the people. As soon as the judge dies, however, the people turn aside again and begin to worship other gods, and the cycle begins again.

2. 1 Samuel

The book of First Samuel opens with a story of a charismatic leader named Samuel who is somewhat different from the leaders discussed in Judges (1 Samuel 1—12). **Samuel** is presented as a leader who exercised some judicial authority (7:13—20) and was not just a war hero, though he does deliver the people in a time of crisis like the other judges (7:3—17). Samuel is a transitional figure, the last of the judges, the one who anoints the first king.

The next major character in the book is **Saul**, also a charismatic leader and in some senses a transitional figure like Samuel. Saul, however, becomes Israel's first king (11:1—15). Earlier in the narrative (9:1—10:16), **Samuel** had **anointed him** as “**prince**” or “**ruler**” rather than specifically “**king**”, and **in chapter 10 he is chosen by lots** and does not want to accept being made king (10:17—27).

Saul becomes a **tragic figure**. He is rejected by God for performing a sacrifice in the place of Samuel (**13:7—15**) and is quickly overshadowed by David. He becomes depressed. He keeps the title “**king**” but lacks the support to govern effectively.

B. Historical Survey: Philistine Metals Technology and the Centralization of the Hebrew Tribes

When the extrabiblical data (including archaeological data) are added to a critical reading of the biblical narratives, we gain a picture of the general circumstances under which Israel adopted a monarchy. The balance of power

between the Hebrew tribes and their Canaanite neighbors was disturbed by the rise of the Philistines. The Philistines arrived in Canaan in the **12th century BCE** if not earlier. They became rulers of the Philistine plain, an area in what is now southwestern Palestine.

The Philistines had advanced **metals technology** which allowed them to make superior weapons. The Israelites had been out of the reach of the chariot-based armies of the main Canaanite cities, but the Philistine armies were based on heavily armed infantry that could march up into the hills where the Israelites had their strongholds. As the aggressive Philistines began to pressure the Israelites, attempting to annex Israelite territory and charge tolls, the Israelites were forced to either accept domination or organize to resist the Philistine pressure.

Until this point the people had depended on a citizen army which was recruited at times of emergency. To fend off the Philistines a standing army was needed, and a standing army required a reorganization of the loosely affiliated tribal structure in Israel. It required a centralized government that could raise money to support it.

Saul became the first king, but did not have the backing of a fully developed governmental structure. His uncle Abner was his only advisor and his government had only one department—the war department. Saul did manage to secure the central lands of Benjamin and Ephraim, however, and brought Judah into closer alignment with the rest of Israel.

C. The Perspective of the Deuteronomistic History

The authors of the biblical narratives were not interested in providing us with the means for reconstructing an objective history of the period in which the people of Israel adopted a monarchical form of government. They wrote their works to answer certain **theological questions** through the story of Israel's history. In keeping with the perspective expressed throughout the Deuteronomistic History, they address the question, "How does the move to a monarchy relate to Israel's faithfulness to YHWH?" At least **two different approaches** to this question may be found in the text.

On the one hand, the move to a centralized government coincides with the **centralizing tendency of Deuteronomy** and the later **reforms of Josiah**, so it brings about something that the authors see as positive. At the same time, however, it represents a move away from direct dependence on the LORD and introduces the

possibility of diverting the people's loyalty away from the LORD onto a human leader.

In **1 Samuel 8:4—22**, where the people request a king and the Lord instructs Samuel to grant their request, the text is wonderfully ambiguous. God disapproves of their motives, but it is God's will that their request be granted. Does God *want* Israel to have a king? The question remains open.

VII. Historical Issue #3: The Reign of David and Solomon

The reign of David and Solomon may be considered the golden age of Israel. It is **the time when the nation was most unified**. The biblical texts discuss this period at some length, and other sources of information are also available to inform our understanding of the period.

A. **The Literary Evidence: What's in the Biblical Text?** (Second Samuel and First Kings 1—11)

1. **Overview**

The book which in the Christian canon is called "**Second Samuel**" focuses on the rule of David. David begins as king of the **southern territory (2 Samuel 1—4)**, then comes to rule over the entire **United Kingdom** which included both Judah and Israel (**2 Samuel 5—24**). The story discusses both David's achievements and the problems of his personal life.

First Kings 1—11 begins at the death of David and tells the story of how Solomon became his successor (1 Kings 1—2). It then tells of Solomon's great accomplishments (2:13—10:29) and finally of his fall (chapter 11). We will look more closely at the structure of 1 Kings after discussing the reign of David and Solomon (See below, VII. Overview of the Books of Kings).

2. **The Reign of David**

a) **David's Rise to Power**

David was born in the tribe of Judah. He became a gifted and popular soldier and commander of Saul's bodyguard. He was the closest friend of Saul's son,

Jonathan, the heir to the throne, and married Saul's daughter, **Michal**.

Samuel anointed David as the future king while he was still young and Saul was still reigning (**1 Samuel 16:1—13**). It is not clear if Saul knew of this event, but he clearly began to suspect that David planned to overthrow him or succeed him in the place of his son **Jonathan** (1 Samuel 18:6—9, 28—29), but he becomes increasingly suspicious after David defeats the Philistine giant **Goliath** (1 Samuel 17) and the Israelite women sing his praises (1 Samuel 18:7—8). To complicate matters even further, Jonathan seemed happy with David's success (18:1—5; 19:1—7; chapter 20), and **Michal** helped David escape from Saul (19:8—17).

The biblical stories paint David as extremely loyal to Saul despite Saul's suspicions (24; 26). **He is eventually forced to go into temporary exile** in Philistia (21:10—15), **but soon returns** to live in hiding in Judah. Some of his kinsmen there and others who share David's fate give David their support and **he forms a fighting force** with which to challenge the Philistines and other enemies who threatened Judah (22:1—2).

Now that David had an army, he became an even greater threat to Saul, who set out after him with his full military force. David consistently avoided capture and even passed up several opportunities to kill Saul (24; 26). **He finally retreated to Philistine territory** where he placed his army at the service of **Achish, king of Gath** (27:1—4). He was awarded the city of **Ziklag**, a border town (27:5—7). From there he attacked the enemies of Judah within Judean territory, while pretending (to Gath) to be attacking the Judean cities (27:8—12).

When Saul died, David came out of hiding and moved to **Hebron** where he was proclaimed king of the tribe of Judah.² Soon afterward he became king of all Israel and moved his capital northward to **Jerusalem**, a city which he had to first take from the Jebusites who remained there.

David would eventually defeat the Philistines and find himself in charge of an empire as he continued to experience conflict with Israel's neighbors and defeated them.

b) **The Davidic Covenant** (2 Samuel 7:16)

The Prophet Nathan comes to David and delivers a promise from Yahweh

²Note that the confederation of tribes dissolved at the death of Saul.

that David's dynasty will last forever (2 Samuel 7:16). This promise is often called the *Davidic Covenant*.

c) **The Succession Narrative/Court History of David**

Second Samuel 9—20 and **1 Kings 1—2** have a certain amount of overlap and are sometimes treated together as the *Succession Narrative* or the *Court History of David*, since they tell the story of how a successor for David was chosen and of the intrigues of David's court. These stories are told against the background of the Davidic Covenant—the promise to David that his dynasty would last forever (2 Samuel 7:16). The tension over how this promise will be fulfilled replaces the tension over the ancestral promise of land, progeny and blessing (protection), since these have been at least partially filled.

(1) **David & Bathsheba** (2 Samuel 11:1—12:25)

A description of the war with Ammon (chapter 10 and 12:26—31) forms a set of brackets around the story of David and Bathsheba (11:1—12:25).

While his armies are away fighting Ammon, David sees Bathsheba bathing. He has her brought to him and sleeps with her. Bathsheba becomes pregnant. David tries to cover up the act by having her husband, **Uriah** the Hittite, brought home from battle (presumably so that he too would sleep with her). But Uriah refuses to sleep with Bathsheba.

David gives orders to Joab to have Uriah placed on the front lines, and Uriah is killed. The first sin has now brought about a greater one.

The prophet **Nathan confronts David** with a parable (**2 Samuel 12:1—15**): A rich man takes a poor man's only lamb, a pet, and eats it. David is outraged and renders immediate judgment: "As the Lord lives, the man who has done this deserves to die; he shall restore the lamb fourfold, because he did this thing, and because he had no pity" (**2 Samuel 12:5—6**). Nathan responds sharply, "*You* are that man!"

David and Bathsheba's firstborn son becomes very ill, and David pleads with God to spare his life. He refuses to eat and sleeps on the ground at night. After seven days the child **dies**, and David gets up, goes to the tabernacle to worship, then eats for the first time since the child became ill.

David and Bathsheba then have another son and name him **Solomon**. The author of 2 Samuel says "the Lord loved him" (**12:24**).

(2) **The Rape of Tamar** (2 Samuel 13:1—22)

The final years of David's reign were plagued with revolutions led by his own children.

David's son **Amnon** (his firstborn son, contrast "Ammon" above) **rapes his half-sister Tamar** (2 Samuel 13:1—22).³ When David takes no decisive action, Tamar's brother **Absalom kills Amnon** (2 Samuel 13:23—39). Absalom eventually rebels against David, who is forced to flee. Finally Absalom is killed and David grieves bitterly (**2 Samuel 18:33**).

Solomon reenters the picture when **Nathan conspires with Bathsheba to trick David** into naming him as the successor to the throne (**1 Kings 1:11—53**). Solomon's half brother, **Adonijah**, had declared himself King (1 Kings 1:5), and Nathan and Bathsheba move quickly to change the course of events. **David died in 961 BCE**.

(3) **Conclusion**

The succession narrative/court history of David portrays **less direct involvement on the part of the deity** than did the ancestor stories or even the stories of the judges. Like the episodes with Saul, the stories of David and Solomon do emphasize, however, the crucial role of fidelity to the LORD.

3. **The Reign of Solomon** (1 Kings 1—11)

The biblical traditions remember Solomon as a wise person who made some foolish decisions. Perhaps we can understand this when we understand that the "**wisdom**" mentioned here was the **curriculum of the education of bureaucrats**. That is, the people who would work in the administration of an empire were expected to be schooled in the 'wisdom literature' the collections of often very practical sayings which educated people considered essential to successful living. Much of this type of literature in the Hebrew Bible is attributed to Solomon (many psalms, sections of Proverbs, etc.). Solomon was no shepherd boy. He was educated for the task of ruling.

It was **Solomon** who **built the first Temple to the LORD in Jerusalem**.

³Note that this is the second Tamar we have encountered. Judah's daughter-in-law (in Genesis) is also named Tamar.

This was only one of his major building projects. He built himself a magnificent palace and built public buildings all over Israel. Many of these were actually fortifications. These fortified sites were necessary because Solomon adopted a different **military strategy** than his father David. David had used a fairly small, highly mobil fighting force, but Solomon adopted the more traditional practice of placing more or less permanent troops at strategic points throughout the land.

This practice was expensive, and Solomon was forced to institute a systematic form of **taxation** and enforce high tariffs. He even resorted to **enslaving the non-Hebrew peoples** within the land to build the Jerusalem temple, his own palace, and fortifications throughout the land (1 Kings 9:15—22).

He also accepted the usual (but not Hebrew) practice of **diplomatic marriages**, a practice which brought in a large number of pagan wives. Solomon's downfall, from the point of view of the biblical writers, was just this, that he turned aside from the worship of the LORD by permitting these foreign wives to practice their religions in Jerusalem, and perhaps for participating in that worship himself.

B. Historical Evidence for the Reign of David and Solomon

The period of David and Solomon is often pictured as the “Golden Age” of Israel. To reconstruct the history of this period we may (1) consult the narratives in Samuel and Kings and (2) add to them additional material gleaned from a critical reading of Chronicles and (3) incorporate information derived from archaeological research. Unfortunately for the historian, however, many of the sites where we would need to dig to find appropriate archaeological evidence are not available because modern communities occupy those sites. The little bit of information available from archaeology and the literary testimony from Samuel and Kings as well as Chronicles may then be analyzed in light of insights from anthropological investigation to at least gain some insight into what life must have been like at this time.

After the death of Saul, a complex of political, military, and sociological developments raised Israel from the status of a loosely organized ethnic mass to that of a nation. David made tremendous gains for Israel in terms of territory and freedom from domination, and Solomon consolidated those gains but also planted the seeds of the dissolution of the United Kingdom.

VIII. Overview of the Books of Kings

The Books of Kings can be viewed as an historical overview of the time from the end of David's reign (**961 BCE**) through the fall of Judah to the Babylonians in **587 BCE** and the release of King Jehoiachin several years later. The *purpose* of the books is not to give a detailed account of events but to provide a survey which can show the *pattern* of this period.

The texts of First and Second Kings may be divided into *three main sections*. The **first** covers the reign of Solomon (**1 Kings 1—11**). The **second** section tells the story of the Divided Kingdom until the fall of Israel (the Northern Kingdom) to the Assyrians in **722—721 BCE (1 Kings 12—2 Kings 17)**. The **final section** tells the story of the Southern Kingdom (Judah) after the fall of the Northern Kingdom (**2 Kings 18—25**).

IX. Historical Issue #4: The Divided Kingdom

The term *divided kingdom* refers to the period beginning in **922 BCE**—when the kingdom of Israel split into **Israel** in the north and **Judah** in the south—and ending with the destruction of Israel (the northern kingdom) by the **Assyrians** in **721 BCE**. During this period Israel and Judah existed as neighbors, not always on amicable terms.

A. The Literary Evidence: What's in the Biblical Text?

(First Kings 12—22; Second Kings 1—17)

The literary evidence for this period comes from First Kings 12—22 and Second Kings 1—17. The biblical texts are patterned on the lives of the **kings** of the two nations. Frequently the narrative stops to give a **formula** summarizing and evaluating the reign of a particular king. After identifying the king's major flaw, the formula cites **another historical source** where additional information could be found, gives a statement about the length of the king's reign, and names the king's successor. Read 1 Kings 11:41—43. All of the other historical sources mentioned in these documents are now lost.

All of the Northern kings are evaluated negatively, and **all but two** of the Southern kings receive a similar assessment. The two exceptions are **Hezekiah** (2 Kings 18:3—1) and **Josiah** (2 Kings 22:2).

This patterning of the narrative on the reigns of kings is interrupted at times

by a focus on the role of a particular **prophet**. Beginning with the announcement of the division of the two kingdoms by the prophet **Ahijah** (1 Kings 12:5), **every major calamity is foretold by a prophet**. This practice creates a pattern of prophecy and fulfillment which helps structure the narrative. *Disasters are consistently linked to disobedience of the covenant.*

B. Historical Survey

1. The Split

At Solomon's death around **922 BCE**, the crown prince, **Rehoboam**, was accepted as king by the tribe of Judah, but he had to be confirmed by an assembly of the elders from each tribe at Shechem. **Jeroboam**, son of Nebat, was in exile in Egypt at the time of Solomon's death, but he got word soon enough to show up at the Shechem meeting. The ten Northern tribes chose Jeroboam as their king, leaving Rehoboam with the tribes of Judah and Benjamin in the South. For the next two hundred years two nations descending from the Hebrew people would exist as neighbors, sometimes cooperatively and sometimes as enemies.

2. Israel (The Northern Kingdom)

The new Northern Kingdom retained the name "Israel." It was the stronger of the two kingdoms with a larger population and better agricultural lands. The original capital of the northern kingdom was Shechem, but the location of the capital changed regularly (with Tirzah being a popular location) until the reign of **Omri** (the most famous of the Northern Kings) who built a new city as his capital and named it "**Samaria**." By the time of Jesus much of the surrounding territory would be called by that name.

The Northern kingdom suffered from serious **dynastic instability**. Only two ruling families lasted more than four generations (Omri and Jehu). In **722 BCE** the capital city of Samaria fell to **Sargon II** of the **Assyrians** after a three-year siege, and he took most of the upper levels of society off into captivity.

3. Judah (The Southern Kingdom)

The weaker Southern Kingdom experienced much more stability. The line of David continued on the throne until the end. Under **Hezekiah** (after the fall of the

Northern Kingdom [Israel]) Judah expanded northward to take in most of what had been David's kingdom (but without the ruling families of the northern tribes). This expansion was quickly reversed, however, when the Assyrians pushed through the region and even took Egypt in the 7th century (600s) BCE. The reign of **Manasseh** in Judah was one of a vassal ruler, in complete obedience to Assyria. (Notice the Deuteronomist's contrasting assessment of Hezekiah and his son Manasseh [2 Kings 18—21].)

When the Assyrian empire finally collapsed under pressure from the Medo-Babylonian alliance (612 BCE, the fall of Nineveh), **Josiah** was just coming of age to rule. He, like Hezekiah, instituted a religious reform and expanded the Southern kingdom far into the north. He died, however, in 609 BCE while trying to stop the Egyptian forces from moving through his territory on their way north. The Egyptians deposed his heir (Jehoahaz) and replaced him with Jehoiakim.

In **597 BCE**, shortly after the death of the Jehoiakim, the Babylonians (under **Nebuchadnezzar II**) invaded Judah taking Jehoiakim's son, Jehoiachin and many other prominent Judeans captive. Nebuchadnezzar II allowed Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah, to become king in place of his nephew, but Zedekiah soon rebelled against Babylon. The Babylonian troops returned in **587 BCE**, sacked Jerusalem, and tore down the temple that Solomon had built.

A glimmer of hope is seen in a postscript at the end of 2 Kings which tells the reader that the Davidic King (Jehoiachin) has been released from prison and is living well in Babylon. The Promise to David (the Davidic Covenant) is in danger, but it is not abandoned.

X. Summary and Conclusions

The Former Prophets tell the story of the rise and fall of the state of Israel. This story is told in light of the conviction that *obedience to the LORD brings blessing while disobedience brings calamity*. This is a theme shared with the book of Deuteronomy, and for that reason these books are often called the *Deuteronomic History*.

Questions for Reflection

1. Compare the perspective taken in the *Deuteronomic History* (that obedience to God brings blessing while disobedience brings calamity) with the comments of Jesus in Luke 13:1—5 and John 9:1—3. Is the perspective taken in the *Deuteronomic History* valid? If so, how may Jesus' words be understood?

2. How do we interpret the view of war demonstrated in the Former Prophets? Is it ever okay for a modern-day nation to exercise total annihilation as a means of controlling their neighbors?

[Consider these two things: (1) A positive answer to this question would run the danger of condoning the Holocaust, and (2) No modern nation is in the privileged position of hearing the voice of God directly.]