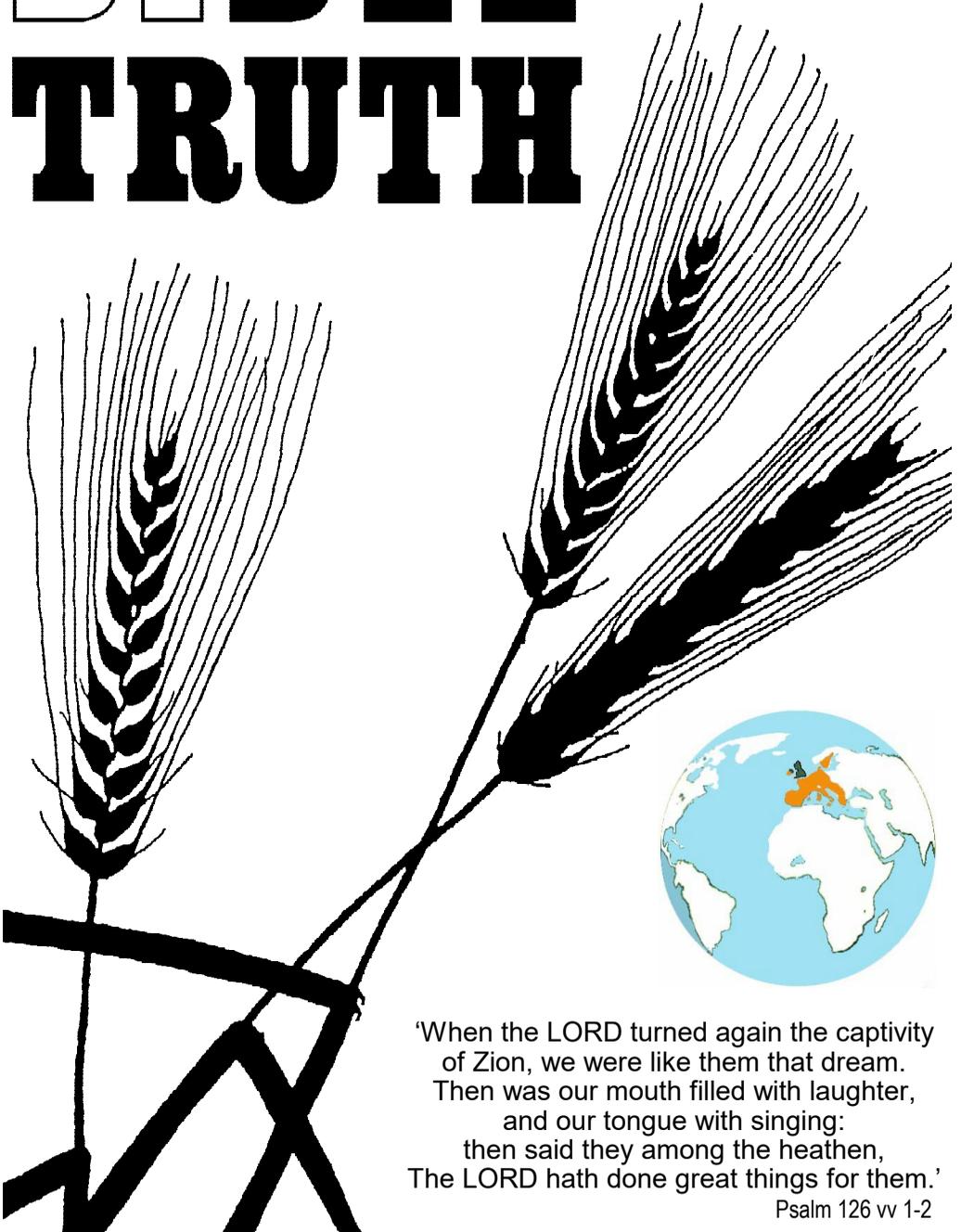


BIBLE TRUTH

No. 283
July/September 2016



'When the LORD turned again the captivity
of Zion, we were like them that dream.
Then was our mouth filled with laughter,
and our tongue with singing:
then said they among the heathen,
The LORD hath done great things for them.'

Psalms 126 vv 1-2

Cutting Israel Short

by Pastor Dr Jory Steven Brooks

We read a fascinating and much overlooked statement recorded during the reign of the important Israelite King Jehu.

‘In those days the LORD began to cut Israel short: and Hazael smote them in all the coasts of Israel;’

2 Kings ch.10 v.32

How was the Lord cutting Israel short, and why?

The tumultuous and violent days of King Jehu were in the ninth century BC. This king came to the throne of the House of Israel about 842 BC after overthrowing the wicked dynasty of Omri, whose kings, including the evil Ahab and his queen Jezebel, had promoted the worship of Baal and thrown out the law of God, replacing it with a long-lost legal composition apparently of their own creation (see Micah ch.6 v.16).

In contrast, Jehu is often considered one of the House of Israel's few relatively good kings, although a bloody one in accomplishing his ends. He was a commander of chariots under previous King Joram (also called Jehoram), the last ruler of the Omride (House of Omri) dynasty, who was wounded in battle with the Syrians at Ramoth-Gilead. While convalescing in Jezreel, Joram was visited by his nephew, King Ahaziah of Judah (see 2 Kings ch.8 v.29).

Events were now in place for the fulfilment of prophecy and the overthrow of the worship of Baal in Israel. The prophet Elisha sent a disciple to anoint chariot commander Jehu with a message:

‘And he arose, and went into the house; and he poured the oil on his head, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, I have anointed thee king over the people of the LORD, even over Israel. And thou shalt smite the house of Ahab thy master, that I may avenge the blood of my servants the prophets, and the blood of all the servants of the LORD, at the hand of Jezebel. For the whole house of Ahab shall perish: ...’

2 Kings ch.9 vv 6-8

Upon learning of this, Jehu's fellow soldiers cheered, threw their robes before his feet ‘and blew with trumpets, saying, Jehu is king’ (see 2 Kings ch.9 vv 11-14). Knowing his mandate, Jehu moved quickly to fulfill his divine commission. He rode a chariot to Jezreel and greeted Kings Joram and Ahaziah with deadly arrows.

Proceeding to the queen's residence, Jehu saw her in an upper room and ordered the servants to throw her out of the window, which they did. In righteous anger, Jehu drove his chariot over her body and dogs devoured her flesh; thus ended the life of the wicked Queen Jezebel, who was King Joram's mother.

Jehu continued his bloody rampage with a letter commanding the chief officers of the capital city of Samaria to execute all of the royal princes of the family dynasty of Omri. They obeyed their orders, and soon afterward seventy heads were piled in heaps at the city gate (see 2 Kings ch.10 vv 7-8). Next, forty-two relatives of the royal family, probably cousins and nephews, were slain at 'the pit [or well] of the shearing-house' [Hebrew: Beth-eked], (see 2 Kings ch.10 vv 13-14).

Upon entering Samaria, Jehu deceptively summoned the priests and worshippers of Baal to a great celebration in honour of the pagan god held in the temple of Baal that had been constructed by King Ahab. Hundreds of Baal worshippers filled their temple 'from one end to another' (see 2 Kings ch.10 v.21). The literal Hebrew says 'from mouth to mouth', standing room only from one end to the other. Once they were all inside, Jehu ordered his soldiers to commit a mass slaughter. The temple of Baal was then burned and turned into a public latrine (2 Kings ch.10 v.27). Such was the heavy hand of retribution wielded by King Jehu.

However, Jehu's bloody purge of Baal worship in Israel was in fact motivated by political rather than pure religious motives. His true aim was to secure the kingship for himself by killing off any heirs who might have a claim to the Omride throne of Israel.

'Thus Jehu destroyed Baal out of Israel. Howbeit from the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, Jehu departed not from after them, to wit, the golden calves that were in Bethel, and that were in Dan. And the LORD said unto Jehu, Because thou hast done well in executing that which is right in mine eyes, and hast done unto the house of Ahab according to all that was in mine heart, thy children of the fourth generation shall sit on the throne of Israel. But Jehu took no heed to walk in the law of the LORD God of Israel with all his heart: for he departed not from the sins of Jeroboam, which made Israel to sin.'

2 Kings ch.10 vv 28-31

God's patience with King Jehu and the wayward House of Israel had reached its limit. Judgment came, and so we read in the next verse, 2 Kings ch.10 v.32,

‘... the LORD began to cut Israel short ...’.

An alternate translation of this verse says, ‘[So] in those days the Lord began to cut off parts of Israel’ (*Amplified Version*; so also *The English Standard Version*) Similarly, *The Complete Jewish Bible* states that the Lord ‘began to dismember Isra’el’.

Reformation scholar, Matthew Poole, stated, ‘To cut Israel short; either to diminish the number of the people ... or to straiten their borders’. In fact, both results were true: the House of Israel began to be severely reduced in Palestine in both territory and population.

The Keil and Delitzsch Bible Commentary agrees and adds,

‘In Jehu’s days Jehovah began “to cut off in Israel”, i.e., to rend away certain portions from the kingdom. Hazael smote them [the Israelites] ... from Jordan to the sun-rising [i.e., the eastern side of the Jordan River], the whole of the land of Gilead ... namely, the territory of the tribes of Gad, Reuben, and Half-Manasseh.’

This area was the richest agricultural land in all of Israel, and it was lost to God's people.

God was not finished with his judgment upon the House of Israel. The Assyrian armies came against Israel in wave after wave (853 BC, 845 BC, 841 BC, etc.), culminating in the final overthrow of the kingdom and its capital Samaria in 721 BC. The slow, steady decline, or ‘cutting away’ of Israel thus took place during a period of well over a century, during which time the kingdom lost both land and people. Ancient historian, George Rawlinson, in *Historical Evidences*, page 113, wrote this.

‘that from this date [840 BC] both the Jewish and the Israelitish kings held their crowns as fiefs, dependent on the will of the Assyrian monarch, with whom it formally lay to “confirm” each new prince “in his kingdom”.’

Thus for over a century before its final destruction, the ten-tribe House of Israel was an Assyrian prefecture, with its continued nationhood a growing delusion.

Only a few years earlier, Israel's King Ahab and his allies successfully fought off Assyrian King Shalmaneser at the Battle of Karkar on the Orontes River in 853 BC. Although not mentioned in the Bible, the Assyrian ‘Monolith’ inscription reveals that the foes battled to a stalemate, and that Ahab's anti-Assyrian coalition fielded ‘2,000

chariots, led by 10,000 men of Ahab the Israelite.' (lines 91-92) Dr. C.F. Whitley, in *Vetus Testamentum Journal* says '... of all the allies Ahab contributed far the greatest number of chariots ... In fact, altogether, Ahab's entire contribution might be regarded as the most powerful of any of the allies' (2:141). Some historians believe that the Assyrians were actually defeated in this battle.

Yet as God's judgment began to fall upon the kingdom of Israel, its enemies began to overrun the land. Just a few years after the Battle of Karkar, Ahab struggled to muster only 7,000 men for battle (see 1 Kings ch.20 v.13). We also read that the king of Damascus attacked Israel, overran the border town of Ramoth-Gilead (see 2 Kings ch.8 v.28 & ch.9 v.14), and besieged the capital city of Samaria itself. In 1 Kings ch.20 v.4 King Ahab in despair tells the Damascus Syrians who are attacking, 'I am thine, and all that I have'. Indeed, due to the people's continual wickedness, the Lord had begun to cut Israel short even before Jehu took the throne.

Historians have noted that the army and population of Israel were in serious decline beginning with the later years of King Ahab. Were people fleeing the land for safer homes elsewhere, and were some migrating by ship westward to new lands across the Mediterranean? It is curious that at this same time the Israelites began a shipbuilding program in conjunction with the Phoenicians, who had stepped up their westward sea voyaging during this period. In fact, King Ahab's wife Jezebel was the daughter of Phoenician king Ethbaal, whose granddaughter, Dido, founded Carthage in the West (*Outlines Of General History*, W.F. Collier, p.24).

We read in the book of Kings the following.

'And Jehoshaphat the son of Asa began to reign over Judah in the fourth year of Ahab king of Israel. ... And Jehoshaphat made peace with the king of Israel. ... There was then no king in Edom: a deputy was king. Jehoshaphat made ships of Tharshish to go to Ophir for gold: but they went not; for the ships were broken at Ezion-geber. Then said Ahaziah the son of Ahab unto Jehoshaphat, Let my servants go with thy servants in the ships. But Jehoshaphat would not.'

1 Kings ch.22 vv 41, 44 & 47-49

Here we see the rivalry and contention between Israel's two Houses.

A parallel passage is recorded in 2 Chronicles.

'And after this did Jehoshaphat king of Judah join himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who did very wickedly: And he joined himself

with him to make ships to go to Tarshish: and they made the ships in Ezion-geber. Then Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the LORD hath broken thy works. And the ships were broken, that they were not able to go to Tarshish.'

2 Chronicles ch. 20 vv 35-37

How were the ships broken, and did the shipbuilding restart again? Jewish historian Flavius Josephus gives additional information passed down through Hebrew history. He states that the ship's destruction was 'due to their great size' (*Antiquities of the Jews* ch.9 vv 1-17). They were building ships out of wood so large that they apparently collapsed under their own weight. Were they building such large vessels only for commerce?

The Phoenicians were expert shipbuilders and had by far the world's largest navy. Did Israelites take passage on Phoenician ships to sail away westward across the Mediterranean to places like Egypt, Carthage and Ithica in North Africa, Greece, Italy, Spain (the Biblical Tarshish), and Britain? See the book *Israel's Lost Empires* by Steven M. Collins for compelling evidence from scholars to support this migration westward.

The traumatic situation within eighth and ninth century Israel was coupled with looming conquests by the brutal and deadly Assyrian armies, which promised only death or slavery in exile. Israel's population decline during this period can be explained by a large-scale emigration out of the country by sea and land — a migration mainly away from Assyria in the east, westward across the Mediterranean Sea out of harm's way to settle both the African and European isles and coast lands with new colonists.