**How We Met**

The **unified kingdom** of David and Solomon was **split** into two following Solomon's death. As stated in the Hebrew Bible, Rehoboam reigned over Judea and his opponent, **Jeroboam**, reigned over the **Kingdom of Israel** (10th century BCE). At first, Shechem served as the ancient capital of the Kingdom of Israel, but it was transferred to Samaria during the reign of King Omri.

The realm of the kingdom stretched across the Galilee, Samaria, and the northern coastal plain, and control of it changed hands over the years between the latter and Phoenicia. Regional **politics**, which involved many parties, dictated historical events in the kingdom. **Aram** in the northeast, the **Phoenicians** in the northwest, and the **Kingdom of Judea** in the south surrounded the Kingdom of Israel. Hovering over them was the great shadow of the two empires: **Egypt** in the far south, and **Assyria** in the north (Iraq).

The Kingdom of Israel forged **alliances** with its neighbors in accordance with its interests, but nevertheless it underwent four significant **invasions** throughout its existence: **Pharaoh Shishak** embarked on a war campaign (925/6 BCE) whose purpose was to plunder. His withdrawal left cities in Israel destroyed, especially along its northern border. The Kingdom of **Aram** exploited the weak state of the Kingdom of Israel for a series of invasions during which it took over vast territories in the north of the kingdom. The most significant of the invasions was that of Hazael in the second half of the 9th century BCE.

The rise of **Tiglath-Pileser** to power strengthened the Assyrian empire. It invaded the Kingdom of Israel, which was then forced to raise taxes for Assyria. After many attempts by the Israeli Kingdom to rebel against Assyria, the successors of Tiglath-Pileser advanced upon Israel. Ruler of Assyrian and Babylon **Shalmaneser** **V** launched an attack against Samaria, and after his death, his son **Sargon** **II** continued the siege until the city was destroyed.

The **destruction of Samaria** (721/2 BCE) marked the **end of the kingdom**, and the **emergence** of the **Samaritans**. Most of the Israelites were exiled, some fleeing to Judea and Philistia. Some maintain that the Samaritans are descendants of the Israelites who remained in the land, while others identify them with the Cutites brought by the Assyrians to settle Samaria.

Israelite Society

A **single king** headed the kingdom, but unlike the Judean kingdom, which was ruled by a single clan—the house of David—the royal **dynasties** of Israel came from different lineages. Well-known among these households are the house of **Jeroboam**, whose capital was in Shechem, and the house of **Omri**, whose capital was in Samaria.

The **king's court** included ministers, officials, military men, nobles, and probably also prophets. The status of the **priesthood** in Israelite society is unclear; according to the Old Testament, the priests were chosen from different tribes.

The **kingdom's structure** was based on a **capital city** - first Shechem and then Samaria (in time, Jezreel joined Samaria as a second capital), large cities with royal representatives and suburban field towns, villages, estates, and farmhouses. A large portion of the kingdom's inhabitants were **villagers**.

**Class differences** in the cities were emphasized, but unlike in the Judean Kingdom, which was starkly divided between a small but wealthy stratum of nobility and a wide proportion of the poor; the Kingdom of Israel also had an affluent **middle class**, and an apparently smaller segment of poor denizens. In the **villages**, which maintained the tradition of independent households holding family land, the status and economic situation was essentially uniform.

The strong ties between the Kingdom of Israel and its neighbors created an eclectic society ripe for cultural influences from its surroundings, which were expressed primarily in administration, religion, and the arts.

Law and Order

The process of overseeing the **kingdom's** administration and taxes collection was aided by a branched-out clerical system whose men were deployed in the large cities. These **administrative cities** (Samaria, Hatzor, Megiddo, Gezer) were entrusted to governors who built huge warehouses containing the (mostly agricultural) product tax collected from across the kingdom.

According to an assemblage of **ostraca** (inscription-bearing pottery) discovered in **Samaria** ("Samaria Ostraca"), it appears that each year, one village would provide agricultural produce to one of the officials in the Samaria districts for a certain period of time: "In the ninth year, these were the deliveries:

גת פארן לשמריו, קצה לגדיו, גבע ויצת לאדניעם, ושפתן לבעל-זמר."

In addition, the **villages** had an internal administrative system. Central warehouses, wells and light fortifications found in the villages point to a decision-making mechanism that oversaw public construction. It is likely that the decision-makers were the village elders and the heads of paternal households, who even ran the village affairs vis-à-vis the kingdom.

No apocryphal evidence was found of the kingdom's laws, and it should be presumed that legal matters were brought before the city's dignitaries or king's representatives. **Law** **and punishment** were most often meted out at the city gate.

The Economy

**The land of milk and honey.** The livelihoods of the kingdom's subjects depended largely on agricultural produce grown both on private and state-owned estates. Farm animals were **kosher**. The Israelites enriched their palate with sea products and honey used for various purposes. In Tel Rechov, an Israelite city, a beehive designed to produce honey on an industrial scale was discovered: it produced about 500 kg of honey per year and about 70 kg of beeswax.

The majority of the kingdom's economic **wealth** was based on trade with its neighbors. The Kingdom of Israel profited greatly by strengthening its ties with the Phoenician port cities of **Tire** and **Sidon**, and providing them access to its **ports** such as Dor, Shikmona, and Acre. In order to expand the boundaries of trade, the kingdom extended its arm south to Sinai to establish the way station of Khan Teiman (Yemen) (probably in collaboration with the Kingdom of Judah) for merchants arriving from Egypt and Arabia.

In return for agricultural produce, luxury items and raw materials such as metal and wood were traded into the kingdom. Trade was conducted as a barter system and by using silver pieces.

The Good Life

The good life of the Samaritan **elite** is mentioned in the Old Testament (Amos 6). Under the **influence** of the Phoenician cities of **Tzur** and **Sidon**, houses were built of hewn stones and decorated with columns and capitals. These opulent houses were furnished with ivory-plated wood furniture, which drew their imagery from Phoenician, Egyptian, and Mesopotamian cultures, as befitting a culturally eclectic kingdom. Luxury vessels containing perfumes and ointments were acquired by trade across the sea and from Arabia.

Fortified Cities and Fierce Warriors

The Israelite **cities** were surrounded by **walls** of various kinds. The **gate houses** consisted of four or six cells, to which **towers** were adjoined. At the gate and the plaza beside it, public activities such as adjudication and administration took place, and the gate cells revealed evidence of storing goods and merchandise for commerce.

Complex **water systems**, designed to supply water during a siege, were dug inside the fortified city, and reached groundwater below. The army was made up of three **divisions**: infantry, cavalry, and chariot corps. The warrior's equipment included: lance and spear, bow, sling, sword and dagger. In defense, the warrior wore scale armor and shield. The chariot was manned by a driver and carried warriors.

As was customary in ancient times, **divine assistance** was always appreciated and those who went to battle were aided by rituals and symbols before and during the battle.

Great Gods!

Although the Israelites were commanded to worship **one god**, the Old Testament and the archaeological record attest to the practice of **idolatry** prevalent throughout the Israelite kingdom. The most interesting evidence of this phenomenon was found in the temple of the Israelite road station Khan Yemen. Inscriptions written on the stucco and large storage jugs shed light on the gods and their worshipers in this temple: "said ... Say to XXX and to XXX and to... I have blessed you before the Lord of Samaria and his Ashera" – God the lord of Samaria and the Kingdom of Israel and his consort Ashera.

**Temples** **and ritual platforms** were erected in worship centers scattered throughout the kingdom where priests worshiped God and other idols. In Dan, a state temple was discovered, consisting of a rough stone altar and a staircase. Next to the altar an elongated structure was found that probably served the priesthood.

Apart from institutionalized worship, it was customary to worship God and idols in private homes, particularly fertility **goddesses**.

Home Sweet Home

The **village house** wasdivided into **four** **main** **spaces**, three long rooms and one transverse, and included a second floor. A courtyard served as the central area where household activities took place, such as caring for farm animals and preparing food. With **farm animals** concentrated on the lower level, the **household members** lived on the upper floor.

The structure of the urban Israelite house was smaller than its rural counterpart: it appears that the **nuclear family** structure predominated in the city whereas **extended families** resided in the village homes.

To Health!

According to the Old Testament, **sickness and cure were derived from God**, a belief shared by Near Eastern peoples at the time. Talismans and spells appealing to the gods were intended to control disease and pain.

**Folk medicine** was also practiced, based on experimentation and healing with herbs such as ראש, Artemisia, nigella, cumin, and onions, which are mentioned in the Bible, as well as wild gourds/watermelon for skin diseases and worms (Second Kings 4: 39-40), hyssop for disinfection, and dried figs for wounds. In addition to plants, honey was used for disinfecting wounds and burns.

**Hygiene** was the result of **purification** ceremonies, but emphasis was placed on drainage systems in cities that prevented the spread of disease.

Rest in Peace

**Where are the dead?** The small number of burial caves found in the Kingdom of Israel, in contrast to Judea, indicates that most Israelites were buried in simple **pit graves**. The simplicity of the burial probably stemmed from an **ideology** for which burial does not reflect the wealth of the deceased and their relatives. In the few cases where burial caves were found, these were very simple and the dead and their implements were placed on the floor.

An exception to these simple burials is two **tombs carved** in the shape of rooms beneath the palace of the Omri dynasty in Samaria. It is possible that these belonged to the **royal family**.