

HISTORY OF OLD TESTAMENT ISRAEL

PERIOD #5—THE UNITED MONARCHY

Emphasis: “A KING LIKE ALL THE OTHER NATIONS”

The sixth period in Old Testament history is known as the United Monarchy. The period of the United Monarchy is recorded for us in 1 Samuel 8-31, 2 Samuel, 1 Kings 1-11, 1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles 1-9. It covers a period of 120 years from the beginning of Saul's reign, through the reign of David and Solomon and ending at the division of the Kingdom at Solomon's death. We will be examining the chronological, geographical, archaeological and cultural aspects of this time period of Israel's history along with a summary of the biblical events from the reigns of Saul, David and Solomon.

I. Chronological Considerations:

There are several chronological considerations that must be worked through as we consider the chronology of the United and Divided Monarchy of Old Testament Israel.

The Matter of Absolute Dates for the Old Testament

In order to determine the dates of the first three kings of Israel (i.e. the kings of the United Monarchy), it is necessary to work backward from the absolute date that is used as the fixed date for all of Old Testament Chronology. As we work backward from the fixed date, we will consider several kings who followed the United Monarchy in order to determine the dates of the United Monarchy.

The matter of an absolute or fixed date for Old Testament Chronology can be determined based off the historical records of the Assyrians. The Assyrians based their history on the data of astronomy. We can check the Assyrian data against the movement of the stars, which our present knowledge enables us to plot accurately. Then we can use that information to pinpoint the dates mentioned in those lists, which show up in the Old Testament.

As stated before, one important source of information are the Assyrian Eponym lists. The term *eponym* means “nickname” or “honorific title.” The Assyrians named each year to honor a certain individual within the government. Clay tablets from Nineveh and other Assyrian cities list the names of these individuals, along with consecutive years of Assyrian history.

These years give us a history from 892 BC to 648 BC. During that time, several Assyrian leaders made contact with Hebrew Kings. At one place, the Assyrian lists mention Bur-Sagale, governor of a region called Guzana. The record says that an eclipse of the sun occurred during his term. Astronomers date that eclipse on June 15, 763 BC. Therefore, Bur-Sagale governed in 763 BC, and using that figure it is possible to date the other Assyrian leaders from the eponym lists with a great deal of accuracy.

One of the Assyrian tablets states that Daian-Assur governed during the sixth year of Shalmaneser III. In that same year, the Assyrians fought an important battle at Qarqar, near the Mediterranean seacoast, and the tablet lists King Ahab of Israel among the combatants. [The Old Testament does not mention this battle.] Other information in the Assyrian lists places the date of that battle and the death of King Ahab as 853 BC.

Another eponym list states that a certain King “Ia-a-u” of Israel began paying tribute to Shalmaneser III in the 18th year of Shalmaneser’s reign. This was certainly King Jehu of Israel. This event can be dated to occur about 841 BC. Thus, the eponym lists have supplied us with two “fixed dates” Old Testament History:

- 853 BC—The year of the death of King Ahab of Israel
- 841 BC—The year Jehu took the throne of Israel

The Matter of dating systems used in the Old Testament

There are three specific matters that must be recognized with regard to the dating systems used in the Old Testament.

1) *The matter of divergent systems of figuring dates.*

After the division of the kingdom at the death of Solomon, the chroniclers in the southern kingdom of Judah evidently used a method of figuring the dates of kings, which was different from that used in the northern kingdom of Israel. The conclusion is that the method used in Judah was to figure the dates based off the beginning of the civil year, while the method used in Israel was to figure dates based off the religious year.

Note: There is no Scriptural passage, which clearly indicates that Israel used the religious year to figure dates. However, Edwin Thiele insists that if we assume the above divergence of method, “the perplexing discrepancies with the reigns of the kings of the divided monarchy” disappear and a harmonious chronological pattern results.

2) *The matter of divergent systems of figuring elapsed time.*

The issue at hand is the method employed in reckoning the regnal years (years of a king’s reign) for the kings in Israel and Judah. There are two distinct systems of counting the years of a king’s reign:

1-The “non-accession year” system: If a king termed the year in which he ascended the throne his first official year, that is called the “non-accession year dating or antedating. So, if a king assumed the throne in mid-year then that portion of the year is considered to be the first year of the king’s reign.

2-The “accession year” system: If a king termed the year commencing with the new year’s day after his accession to the throne, the first official year of his reign and the portion of the year in which he came to the throne his accession year, then he used “accession year” dating or postdating.

Two Divergent Dating Systems for Regnal Years:			
Non-accession-year system	1 st year	2 nd year	3 rd year
Accession-year system	accession year	1 st year	2 nd year

Evidently, a king would decide for himself, which system would be used by his chroniclers. Generally, the non-accession year system was used in Israel, while the accession year system was used in Judah.

The following chart will highlight the differences between the two types of reckoning that Israel and Judah seemed to follow:

Begins with New Year Nisan 1 (in spring) ⇒⇒⇒⇒	Northern Kingdom of Israel: Non-Accession Year Reckoning	Southern Kingdom of Judah: Accession Year Reckoning	Begins with New Year Tishri 1 (in fall) ⇐⇐⇐⇐
	1 st year	Accession year	
	2 nd year	1 st year	
	3 rd year	2 nd year	
	4 th year	3 rd year	
	5 th year	4 th year	

The possibility of the non-accession year system being used in the northern kingdom of Israel can be noted with the reigns of the two kings between Ahab and Jehu. According to the eponym lists, Jehu paid tribute to Shalmaneser III in 841 BC, which was 12 years after King Ahab fought in the battle of Qarqar. The Old Testament places two kings between Ahab and Jehu. According to 1 Kings 22:51, Ahaziah ruled 2 years, while according to 2 Kings 3:1, Joram ruled 12 years. Together they would total 14 years; a figure that does not match the separation of 12 years between Ahab and Jehu from the eponym lists. However, assuming the non-accession year system, one year should be deducted from each reign, bringing the total to 12 years, which is what the eponym lists indicate.

The kings of Judah seem certainly to have used the accession year system, except when that kingdom came under the close influence of Israel, as in the days of Jehoram, who married Athaliah, princess of Israel, and “walked in the way of the kings of Israel...” (2 Kings 8:18; 2 Chronicles 21:6).

3) *The matter of co-regencies in determining the dates of the kings.*

In order to assure that his chosen son would succeed him as king, a monarch would often appoint that son as his co-regent late in his life. So the son’s first years of reign would be the same as his father’s last years of reign. Co-regencies are not explicitly chronicled, but they are often indicated, and they make it possible to reconcile seemingly divergent data.

Given the absolute dates fixed above (reigns of Ahab and Jehu), along with taking into account the three matters relating to the dating systems and the reckoning of time, we can begin with those established dates and figure backward to the kings of the united monarchy.

The following chart attempts to use the above criteria and work backwards from the fixed dates to the united monarchy.

The Kings of Israel	The Kings of Judah
<u>Jehu</u> -anchor date: began his reign in 841 BC	<u>Ahaziah</u> -2 Kings 8:25-26, became king in 12th year of Joram (11th, because Judah using non-accession year system); ruled 1 year -841 BC took the throne
<u>Joram</u> -died in 841 BC -2 Kings 3:1 ruled 12 years [11 years] -841 + 11 = 852 BC took the throne	
<u>Ahaziah</u> -died in 852 BC -1 Kings 22:51 reigned 2 years [1 year] -852 + 1 = 853 BC took the throne	<u>Jehoram</u> -died in 841 BC -2 Kings 8:17, reigned 8 years (7 years) -Co-reign with father for 5 years (2 Kings 8:16; cp. 2 Kings 3:1; 1:17) -841 + 7 = 848 BC took the throne
<u>Ahab</u> -died in 853 BC -1 Kings 16:29 ruled 22 years [21 years] -853 + 21 = 874 BC took the throne	

<u>Omri</u> -died in 874 BC -1 Kings 16:23 ruled 12 years [11 years] -874 + 11 = 885 BC took the throne	<u>Jehoshaphat</u> -died in 848 BC -1 Kings 22:41-42, ruled 25 years -848 + 25 = 873 BC took the throne -Co-reigned with his father for 3 years; sole reign began in 870 BC
<u>Zimri</u> -reigned for 7 days in 885 BC (1 Kings 16:15)	
<u>Elah</u> -died in 885 BC -1 Kings 16:8 ruled 2 years [1 year] -885 + 1 = 886 BC took the throne	<u>Asa</u> -died in 870 BC -1 Kings 15:10, ruled 41 years -870 + 41 = 911 BC took the throne
<u>Tibni</u> -1 Kings 16:21-24 He was a rival during the days of Omri for about 6 years; does not advance the chronology of the period.	
<u>Baasha</u> -died in 886 BC -1 Kings 15:33 ruled 24 years [23 years] -886 + 23 = 909 BC took the throne	
<u>Nadab</u> -died in 909 BC -1 Kings 15:25-31 ruled 2 years [1 year] -909 + 1 = 910 BC took the throne	<u>Abijam</u> -died in 911 BC -1 Kings 15:2, ruled 3 years -911 + 3 = 914 BC took the throne
<u>Jeroboam</u> -died in 910 BC -1 Kings 14:20 ruled 22 years [21 years] -910 + 21 = 931 BC took the throne	<u>Rehoboam</u> -died in 914 BC -1 Kings 14:21, ruled 17 years -914 + 17 = 931 BC took the throne
Solomon's death and the division of the Kingdom in 931 BC	

The Three Rulers of the United Monarchy

After working our way backward through the divided monarchy to the division of the kingdom after Solomon's death, it becomes quite easy to deal with the three kings of the United Monarchy.

Solomon

- **Solomon's death**: Solomon would have died about 931 BC just prior to the division of the kingdom and the reigns of Rehoboam in Judah and Jeroboam in Israel.
- **Solomon's reign**: According to 1 Kings 11:42, Solomon's reign was 40 years. *"Thus the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years."*

So Solomon took the throne around 971 BC and ruled until 931 BC bringing the United Monarchy to a close.

David

- **David's death**: David would have died in 971 BC.
- **David's reign**: According to 2 Samuel 2:11 and 1 Kings 2:11, David reigned 40 years (7 ½ years in Hebron over the tribe of Judah only and 33 years in Jerusalem over all 12 tribes).

2 Samuel 2:11, “*And the time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.*”

1 Kings 2:11, “*And the days that David reigned over Israel {were} forty years: seven years he reigned in Hebron, and thirty-three years he reigned in Jerusalem.*”

So David’s total reign would have been from 1011 BC to 971 BC, while his reign from Hebron would have been from 1011 BC to 1004 BC and his reign in Jerusalem would have been from 1004 BC to 971 BC.

Saul

- Saul’s death: Saul would have died in 1011 BC.
- Saul’s reign: Saul’s reign lasted 40 years, according to Acts 13:21 (cf. 1 Samuel 13:1).

“And then they asked for a king, and God gave them Saul the son of Kish, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, for forty years.”

So Saul’s reign would have been from his anointing in 1051 BC until his death in battle against the Philistines about 1011 BC.

EXCURSUS: The problem concerning the text of 1 Samuel 13:1

The problem here is that the Hebrew Masoretic text manuscript appears to omit the number. The verse reads, “Saul was the son of ... a year when he became king, and he reigned two years over Israel.”

The construction is identical to 2 Samuel 5:4 regarding David’s reign except that it omits the actual age of Saul when he began to reign. The various renderings are simply attempts by the translators to fill in the missing information based on other biblical texts. This is not an error in the text, but a possible omission, which creates some difficulty in determining an accurate chronology. The following is how the various versions translate the verse:

KJV

Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel

NKJV

Saul reigned one year; and when he had reigned two years over Israel

LIVING BIBLE

By this time Saul had reigned for one year. In the second year of his reign

RSV

Saul was . . . years old when he began to reign; and he reigned . . . and two years over Israel.

NIV

Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel forty-two years.

NASU

Saul was thirty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned forty-two years over Israel.

NET BIBLE

Saul was [thirty] years old when he began to reign; he ruled over Israel for [forty] years.

NEW LIVING TRANSLATION

Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned for forty-two years.

ASV

Saul was forty years old when he began to reign; and when he had reigned two years over Israel,

NASB

Saul was {forty} years old when he began to reign, and he reigned {thirty} -two years over Israel.

NEW ENGLISH BIBLE

Saul was fifty years old when he became king, and he reined over Israel for twenty-two years.

CONTEMPORARY ENGLISH

Saul was a young man when he became king, and he ruled Israel for two years.

Three questions arise when dealing with this difficulty:

- *How long did Saul reign as king of Israel?*

Clearly Acts 13:21 gives us the indication that his reign over Israel was 40 years. According to 1 Samuel 14:49, Saul had 3 sons when he became king, and Ishbosheth is not mentioned. According to 2 Samuel 2:10, Ishbosheth succeeded Saul, when Saul died and Ishbosheth was 40 years old at that time. Assuming that Ishbosheth was born soon after Saul became king, then Saul's reign had to be at least 40 years.

- *How old was Saul when he became king over Israel?*

It is impossible to say for certain how old Saul was when he became king. Saul is referred to as a "young man" in 1 Samuel 9:2, but this is a very ambiguous term. Many have guessed him to be about 30, but his son Jonathon was grown and well matured (cf. 1 Samuel 13:2) shortly after Saul became king, so that perhaps is a bit too young. So the suggestion that he would be around 40 years old would fit the situation better.

- *How much time intervened between Saul's becoming king and the events of chapter 13?*

The answer to this question depends first of all upon how the second half of 1 Samuel 13:1 is understood. Is that sentence defining the length of Saul's reign (i.e. Saul reigned ___ years over Israel) or is it establishing how long a time intervened between his coronation and the events of chapter 13 (i.e. After Saul had reigned ___ years over Israel...)? It is really impossible to determine which of these two alternatives is to be preferred. At any rate, it seems the events of 1 Samuel 13 occur shortly after Saul becomes king, as he moves to further fortify and solidify the boundaries of his kingdom.

It seems best to rely upon the explicit statement of Acts 13:21 and that the reign of Saul was 40 years. Thus he assumed the throne in 1051 BC and reigned until his death in 1011 BC.

The following chart overviews the chronology of the United Monarchy:

THE PERIOD OF THE UNITED MONARCHY				
Saul is Anointed As King.	Saul's Reign As King	David's Reign As King	Solomon's Reign As King	Solomon's Death & the Division of the Kingdom
1051 BC	1051-1011 BC	1011-971 BC	971-931 BC	931 BC

II. Historical Considerations:

This period of Israel's history (The United Monarchy) was a unique time for Israel in that they were unaffected by their neighbors. In previous and latter periods of Israel's history there were threats from powerful kingdoms in the Mediterranean world. Nations such as Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia etc... However, during the 120 years of Saul, David and Solomon, there was no threat from these nations.

After 1240 BC, the **Hittites** were in conflict with the migration of the Sea Peoples that brought an end to their nation resulting in the destruction of the Hittite capital, Boghazkoi.

Egypt did not interfere while Saul, David, and Solomon ruled. In fact after Rameses III (c.1195-1164), no Egyptian king crossed the border of Israel until the time of Rehoboam, Solomon's son. In 1 Kings 14:25-26 it is recorded that Pharaoh Shishak, who founded Egypt's 22nd Dynasty, did so in Rehoboam's fifth year.

Assyria would not threaten Israel for almost 100 years after the division of Israel for the first time under Shalmaneser III (859-824). Prior to the Israel monarchy, there had been only one extension of Assyrian power into the west. Tiglath-pileser I (1116-1078) had brought his army as far as the Mediterranean, still far north of Israel, but he could not maintain control.

The threats of **Babylon** would follow much later near the end of the Divided Monarchy.

In fact the only real threat came from the **Philistines** near the end of the period of the judges through the first part of the United Monarchy.

Because of this period of relative peace and little outside interference, the kings of the United Monarchy were able to expand the territory of Israel's control. Although the tribal allotments had been given to Israel's 12 tribes after the Conquest of Canaan, much of that territory had been fought over and in some cases even lost to many of the surrounding Canaanites during the period of the Judges. The following map highlights the territory controlled by Israel under each of the kings of the United Monarchy.



Samuel was the last great judge of Israel, but his sons were corrupt and incapable of leading and judging Israel, as Samuel had done. The people according to 1 Samuel 8 asked for a king. Three reasons were given to Samuel: 1) the desire to conform to the pattern of the Gentile nations around them; 2) the need for a faithful leader in light of the corruption of Samuel's sons; 3) the need for a military commander to lead the Israelites in battle against the Philistines (1 Samuel 8:5, 20).

While God had made provisions in the Law for the appointment of a king (Deuteronomy 17:14-20), Samuel was irritated with the people because he recognized their error in failing to acknowledge God as their true king (1 Samuel 8:7; 12:12). Samuel warned the people of the price for kingship: taxation, military draft, and loss of personal liberty, but the people insisted on a king.

God granted the people their wish in having Samuel anoint Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin as their king. Since Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin rather than the royal line of Judah (Genesis 49:10), his kingship would not endure and really the monarchy did not blossom until the time of David, born of the tribe of Judah.

The Reign of Saul

The people had asked for a king (1 Samuel 8), now they were going to get what they asked for. Saul, Son of Kish, from the tribe of Benjamin was chosen to be Israel's first king and a private ceremony of Saul's anointing took place according to 1 Samuel 9:25-10:1. Saul was not publicly announced as king until he was presented at Mizpah (1 Samuel 10:17-27).

MIZPAH

Aerial View of Mizpah:



Mizpah Ruins:



Saul's major task after his anointment and presentation as king was to unify the Israelite tribes into a nation. This task was necessitated by the ongoing Philistine threat, against which Israel's loosely organized tribes could not cope.

The Jezreel Valley looking North:



The Philistines had a powerful military organization and ruled predominantly the Canaanite populations of the coastal plain and in the Negev and Jezreel Valley's.

Jabesh-Gilead:



Saul's entire reign was spent at war (1 Samuel 14:52). His initial military victory came with the defeat of the Ammonites who had besieged Jabesh-gilead (1 Samuel 11:1-11). This successful campaign served to unite Israel, organize the military, and bring about Saul's acceptance by the people as their king.

Gibeah from the west:

Saul set up his capital in his home town of Gibeah and ran his military campaigns out from there. He moved north to defeat Zobah, east to defeat the Ammonites and Moabites, south to defeat the Edomites and Amalekites, and west to defeat the Philistines.



Saul was an aggressive-minded defender of the young nation of Israel at a crucial time in its history. Saul's great spiritual failure as king is linked to his lack of obedience to the directives God gave him through the prophet Samuel. Instead of waiting for Samuel's arrival as he had been directed (1 Samuel 10:8), Saul took matters into his own hands and sacrificed at Gilgal (1 Samuel 13:8-9).

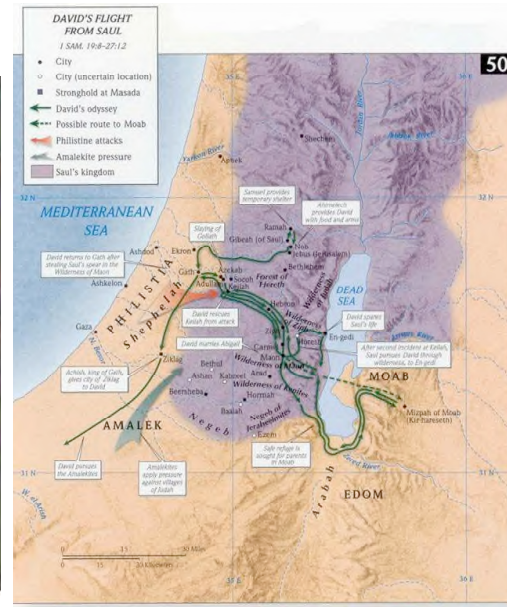
Rather than acknowledging his sin when Samuel arrived, he offered weak excuses to justify his conduct. Saul's greatest disobedience occurred in the Amalekite war, which resulted in his being rejected by God as Israel's king (1 Samuel 15). Samuel then anointed David, a man after God's own heart, to rule God's people Israel.

The Reign of David

David's rise to power began while Saul was still on the throne. Before long, Saul began to hear of the acclaim David was receiving and sent for the young man. Although David's presence had a soothing effect on Saul, the king's periodic jealousy of David led to suspicion, fear and hostility. David eventually had to flee Saul's court to preserve his own life.

During the disintegrating last days of Saul's rule, David was a fugitive in the wilderness. David was constantly on the move in places such as Ramah, Gath, Nob, Mizpah, Ziklag, Moab and the wilderness. It is interesting that David would spend some time among the enemy Philistines in Ziklag.

Ziklag:



Although David had several opportunities to take Saul's life, David was not an usurper and refused to lift up his hand against the Lord's anointed king. In due time God allowed Saul's life to end during a battle with the Philistines (1 Samuel 31), and David was then free to accept the kingship offered to him by the leaders of Judah in the south.

After ruling over the tribe of Judah for seven and a half years at Hebron, the elders of Israel (the northern tribes) came and anointed David as king over all of the land. David established his capital at Jerusalem, where he reigned for another 33 years. Since Jerusalem was in Benjaminite territory, the move from Hebron served to solidify the northern and southern tribes under David's leadership. So, David stands primarily responsible for the unification and development of the kingdom of Israel. The archaeological record confirms the scriptural record (2 Samuel 24:5-8; 1 Kings 4:7-9) that Canaanite holdings along the coastal plain and in the Jezreel and Jordan valleys were brought under Israelite control during David's reign.

David had established his rule from north of the Sea of Galilee to Beersheba and on both sides of the Jordan River.



David turned his attention to foreign affairs. His expansionist policies likely came from his concern and desire to protect the Israelite settlements in the Transjordan. He extended his kingdom north, south, east and west (2 Samuel 8:1-14). In addition to military conquest, David was the first of the Israelite kings to use marriage alliances as an important part of his foreign policy (2 Samuel 3:3-5).

In the Ancient Near East, marital arrangements between royal houses were often used to conclude treaties and cement political relationships. David's conquests and alliances gave him control of territory from the River of Egypt to the Euphrates. For a time, Israel was as strong as any power in the ancient world.

The great turning point in David's brilliant royal career was his sin with Bathsheba and the murder of her husband Uriah (2 Samuel 11). Although David confessed his sin and was forgiven by the Lord, a great deal of family and political turmoil followed, including Absalom's attempt to usurp his father's throne. Bathsheba, with the assistance of Nathan the prophet, was able to orchestrate events with David so that their son Solomon succeeded to the throne.

The Reign of Solomon

Although Solomon's reign was not entirely peaceful, he is not known to have engaged in major military conflict. Most of his activities tended toward strengthening and developing David's achievements through political, economic and administrative means.

While David had transformed the land of Israel from a small state into a powerful kingdom, Solomon developed the country into an international center that boasted one of the most advanced cultures of the day.

Militarily, Solomon sought to defend rather than expand his territory. He focused on fortifying cities and military bases such as Hazor (to defend Israel from the Arameans), Megiddo (to control Via Maris and the Jezreel Valley), and Gezer (to control the coastal plain and guard the western approach to the hill country).

Hazor:



Megiddo:



Gezer:



In addition, Solomon strengthened the military through the introduction of chariots and horses (1 Kings 10:26). The king maintained security and discouraged aggression by building a military that few would care to challenge.

The cornerstone of Solomon's foreign policy was his widespread use of international marriages to conclude treaties and cement relations with neighboring kings and rulers. In fact, through his own multiple diplomatic marriages, Solomon secured treaties with Egypt, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon, and the Hittite nation (1 Kings 11:1).

This proved quite destructive for Solomon spiritually, since his wives brought their pagan gods to Israel, and Solomon's heart was turned from the Lord (1 Kings 11:3-8).

Solomon is best-remembered for his unrivaled wisdom (1 Kings 10:L23-24) and his building of the Jerusalem temple (1 Kings 6). He is also known for his literary contributions (1 Kings 4:32), many of which are recorded for us in Scripture.

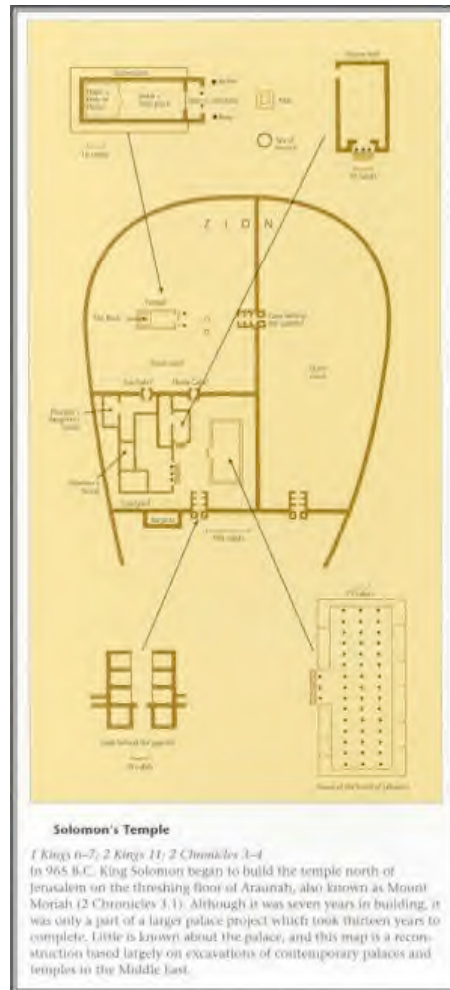


Fig. 13 Solomon's Temple