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Israel and Judah: 7. Conspiracy and War

by David Sielaff, March 2015

Read the accompanying [Newsletter for March 2015](#)

Israel and Judah: 7

Conspiracy
and
War

King David and Israel's armies had been victorious in several battles because **"Yahweh saved David everywhere he went"** (2 Samuel 8:6, 14; 1 Chronicles 18:6, 13). The enemies of Israel next began to conspire with Hadadezer, the former king of Zobah and other enemies of Israel. They organized and gathered their forces for battle. But first, King David took care of "old business" in the persons of potential rivals, the last living heirs of King Saul. This is an example of the adage, "Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer."

King David's predecessor was King Saul. Saul began to threaten David as a potential rival to his throne and dynasty. Saul's son, and presumed heir or prince, was Jonathan. Jonathan was a great friend of David. He asked David to make a promise with him. So David made a covenant or "contract" with Prince Jonathan, who asked David:

"You shall not cut off your kindness from my house [meaning Jonathan's descendants] for the eon, not even when Yahweh cuts off [defeats] the enemies of David, each man off the surface of the ground.

Thus has Jonathan contracted with the house of David; and Yahweh will seek it out from the hand of David's enemies."

• 1 Samuel 20:15-16

Their friendship lasted until Jonathan died in battle beside his father, King Saul. Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, had grown and he had a son named Mica. Both were potential rivals to the dynasty of the house of David, although Mica less than Mephibosheth, King Saul's grandson and most direct heir of his family line.^a We pick up the story at this point. There is no parallel account in Chronicles.

^a See the narrative of the battle and deaths of Saul and Jonathan at "[Israel and Judah: 1. Saul and David.](#)"

TEXT: King David and Mephibosheth, Son of Saul

2 Samuel 9:1–13

¹ David inquired, **“Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul, that I may show **kindness** [*chesed*] to him for the sake of Jonathan?”** ² Now there was a servant of the house of Saul, and his name was Ziba. When they called him to David, the king asked him, **“Are you Ziba?”** He replied, **“I am your servant.”**

³ The king continued, **“Is there nobody, even one man, left of the house of Saul, that I may show him the **kindness** [*chesed*] of Elohim?”** Ziba answered the king, **“There is still a son of Jonathan, smitten on both feet.”**

⁴ Then the king asked him, **“Where is he?”** Ziba replied to the king, **“Behold, he is in the house of Machir son of Ammiel, in Lo-debar.”** ⁵ So king **David sent out to take him** from the house of Machir son of Ammiel at Lo-debar.

⁶ When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan son of Saul came to David, he fell on his face and prostrated himself. David said, **“Mephibosheth!”** And he replied, **“Behold, I am your servant.”**

⁷ David told him, **“Do not fear, for I shall show, yea show **kindness** [*chesed*] to you for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the field of your grandfather Saul; and you shall eat bread regularly at my table.”**

⁸ He prostrated himself again and said, **“What is your servant, that you turn around to a dying cur such as me?”**

⁹ Then the king called Ziba, Saul’s **lad**, and said to him, **“I give to your lord’s grandson all that belonged to Saul and to all his household.”** ¹⁰ **You will cultivate the ground for him, you and your sons and your slaves. You will bring in the yield, that there will be bread for your lord’s household, and they can eat. As for your lord’s grandson Mephibosheth, he shall eat bread regularly at my table.”** (Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty slaves.)

¹¹ Ziba replied to the king, **“According to all that my lord the king has instructed his servant, so shall your servant do.”** So Mephibosheth ate at David’s table like one of the king’s sons.

¹² Mephibosheth had a young son, and his name was Mica. All those dwelling in Ziba’s household became Mephibosheth’s servants. ¹³ Yet Mephibosheth was dwelling in Jerusalem, for he ate regularly at the king’s table. **He was lame in both his feet.** [end text]

Reading this passage I sense that sarcasm seems to ooze from all participants. David was checking up on potential rivals to his throne. David did not ask about the house of Jonathan, rather he asked:

“Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul?” (verse 1, addressed to the court)

“Is there nobody, even one man, left of the house of Saul?” (verse 3, addressed to Ziba)

A man named Ziba, once a servant of Saul’s house was summoned before David. The words “servant” or “servants” occur seven times, each instance being the focus of the sentence. The king wants to meet Jonathan’s son. By so doing, David keeps a potential rival close to him.

The way David asked, **“Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul,”** implies he knew the answer already. If anyone lied, there would have been serious consequences, but truth resulted and everyone benefited. David gave to Mephibosheth **“all that belonged to”** Saul (verse 9), including his lands (verse 7). The land holdings must have been extensive. The lands were to support Mephibosheth’s son Mica, the servant Ziba, his 15 sons and 20 slaves, and presumably their households as well. ^b Mephibosheth was to **“eat bread regularly at my table”** (verses 7 and 9) at David’s palace. Being lame, Mephibosheth could not travel easily,

^b Ziba encounters David two more times in 2 Samuel chapters 16 and 19. While he helps David, he lies about Mephibosheth.

so David kept him near to his presence. Mephibosheth's initial response to David indicates he expected to be killed: **"What is your servant, that you turn around to a dying cur such as me?"** (verse 8), saying in effect, "I'm dying anyway, don't bother killing me." Three times the word **"kindness"** [Hebrew, *chesed*, loving-kindness] is used. When God uses the term, it refers to His gentle and compassionate attitude and mercy toward Israel or to individuals. David is expressing the same attitude by using the word *chesed*.

"Machir son of Ammiel in Lo-debar" mentioned in verse 4 raised Mephibosheth to adulthood from 5 years old, the time Saul and Jonathan were killed (2 Samuel 4:4), according to the Jewish historian Josephus (*Antiquities* 7.113). Machir later assists David during Absalom's rebellion (2 Samuel 17:27–29).

Mephibosheth being lame is mentioned in verses 3, 12, and earlier in 2 Samuel 4:4. Being lame would hinder his ability to carry out the kingly role of heroic military leader in battle. This was expected of young leaders in ancient times to prove their virility and power. Only older leaders could hold back and not be at the head of the armies, as David's men insisted (2 Samuel 18:3–4, 21:17). Ziba had 15 sons and is called a **"lad."** Mephibosheth, who is lame, has but one son. Irony is strong in this passage. Sarcasm and dynastic politics aside, in 2 Samuel 9:1–13 David honors and fulfills his covenant promise to Jonathan. He does so through his **"kindness"** and provision of Mephibosheth and his son Mica, although David had to ask (as if he had forgotten) about the son of his friend. David's kindness to Mephibosheth was accepted.

David's acts of kindness to Mephibosheth were followed by a gesture of kindness to a young King of Ammon, who was mourning his predecessor and father. David's gesture of kindness was rejected in an insulting and public manner.

TEXT: David's Kindness Rejected

2 Samuel 10:1–5

¹ It occurred afterward that the king of the sons of Ammon died, and his son Hanun reigned in his stead.

² David said, **"I shall show kindness [*chesed*] to Hanun son of Nahash, just as his father showed kindness [*chesed*] to me."** So by means of his courtiers, David sent word to console him over his father. But when David's courtiers came to the land of the sons of Ammon,

³ then the chief officials of the sons of Ammon said to their lord Hanun,

"Is David glorifying your father in your eyes because he sent consolers to you? Is it not rather in order to sound out the city, to spy in it and to overturn it that David sent his courtiers to you?"

⁴ So Hanun took David's courtiers and shaved off a half side of their beards; he cut their coats in half up to their buttocks and sent them away. ⁵ When others told David about it,

he sent to meet them, for the men had been utterly put to shame. So the king said, **"Remain in Jericho! When your beard sprouts, then you can return."**

1 Chronicles 19:1–2

¹ It occurred afterward that Nahash king of the sons of Ammon died, and his son reigned in his stead.

² David said, **"I shall show kindness [*chesed*] to Hanun son of Nahash, for his father showed kindness [*chesed*] to me."** So David sent messengers to console him over his father. But when David's courtiers came to the land of the sons of Ammon to Hanun to console him,

³ then the chief officials of the sons of Ammon said to Hanun,

"Is David glorifying your father in your eyes because he sent consolers to you? Is it not rather in order to sound out the city, to overturn it and to spy in the land that his courtiers came to you?"

⁴ So Hanun took David's courtiers and shaved them; he cut their coats in half up to the buttocks and sent them away. ⁵ When others went and told David about these men,

he sent to meet them, for the men had been utterly put to shame. So the king said, **"Remain in Jericho! When your beard sprouts, then you can return."**

[end text]

The biblical record is not clear what “kindness” King Nahash did for David (1 Chronicles 19:1). “Nahash,” sometimes spelled *nachash*, means “serpent” in Hebrew. A King Nahash of Moab (not Ammon) was defeated at the beginning of Saul’s reign in 1 Samuel chapter 11, but that was some 40 years before this incident with Hanun. It is possible **“that Nahash, the father of Hanun, was a son or grandson of the king defeated at Jabesh-gilead by Saul,”** but commentators vary greatly in their opinions.^c Whoever he was, we know that some king of Ammon performed a “kindness” to David, and the Israelite king sought to reciprocate to his heir on the throne.

One can wonder. While Hanun undoubtedly insulted David, did David actually use the delegation as an opportunity to spy, as Hanun’s officials said? Was their mission in fact to accomplish the three tasks cited by Hanun’s advisors: “[1] **to sound out the city**, [2] **to spy in it and** [3] **to overturn it**”? (2 Samuel 10:3).^d An intentional insult was made to the dignity of King David’s authority and his dignity as ruler of an empire. The words of the **“chief officials”** of Ammon could only have come from court discussions told by survivors of the (soon coming) war between the kingdoms of Israel and Ammon.

This insult was also a message to all countries which had a relationship with Israel. It was a message to Israel’s present vassals that King Hanun of Ammon would no longer bow as his father had done to Israel’s sovereignty and lordship. It was an act of rebellion which meant war between the kingdom of Ammon and Israel. If King David did not respond with strength militarily, many of Israel’s alliance partners, and most of its vassals would break their covenant with David. The regular tribute from vassals helped fund Israel’s treasury. Weakness in powerful kings can be sensed, like the smell of blood in the wind to jackals.

Rather than reconciling with David, Hanun, and the Ammonites prepared for war. They called for allies to help them. They found several willing helpers, including the forces from Zobah.^e

A Pretext for War

In my opinion, this entire episode was a pretext for a larger event that was to take place. Saul fought against many peoples who attacked Israel, and several of them were the same Syrian city-states David fought against. Since the Exodus and the conquest of the Land of Promise, all the nations around Israel have hated the twelve tribes. They left them alone when they were weak and the Book of Judges is a litany of oppression by many of these same peoples. When Saul unified the tribes of Israel briefly, the surrounding nations took notice. They continued to do so when David made Israel even more unified and powerful.

Now, war preparations were being made throughout the region. Neighboring kingdoms will make alliances with each other and money will change hands in a conspiracy against Israel. The leaders of Ammon knew what King David could do to defeated enemies because of what he did to their brother-people, the Moabites. Two thirds of the survivors of their battle with Israel were killed (2 Samuel 8:2). Recall that Israel defeated several armies all around the land of Israel in the years soon after David became king. Israel was always victorious. As background to this supposedly unprovoked “incident” done by the Ammonites against David’s envoys, remember what David accomplished (with God’s miraculous help). He had stunning victories against great odds against many kingdoms and peoples:

^c Article “Nahash” in ISBE, *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, 1914, 1st Edition, Dr. Stanley Morris, IBT, 1997.

^d Joab accused Abner (military leader of the rival Israelite king) of spying when Abner met with David to arrange a truce and a peace (2 Samuel 3:24–25). Joab’s true motive for objecting to Abner’s presence became clear later. He wanted an opportunity for revenge against Abner, who had killed Joab’s brother, Asahel (2 Samuel 2:22–24).

^e King Saul had several victories over many of the same peoples David fought. Look at 1 Samuel 14:47:

“So Saul took the kingdom over Israel, and fought against all his enemies on every side, against Moab, and against the children of Ammon, and against Edom, and against the kings of Zobah, and against the Philistines: and whithersoever he turned himself, he vexed them.”

Saul’s combats with Ammon, Moab, and others, might have been limited and not great battles. Perhaps they were small clashes of dozens or hundreds of men fighting. We are not given details. In fact, throughout the Bible, God and the writers are rarely interested in giving the details of battles. Readers are given only glimpses of the tactics and stratagems that led to victory.

“King David sanctified them [the plunder from victory] to Yahweh, along with the silver and the gold that he had sanctified from all the nations he had subdued: from [1] Syria and from [2] Moab, from [3] the sons of Ammon and from [4] the Philistines, from [5] Amalek and from [6] the loot of Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah.”

• 2 Samuel 8:11–12

A seventh nation, [7] Edom, also fought and lost against David and the armies of Israel (2 Samuel 8:13). Several of those nations submitted to become vassals when defeated in battle. They still hated Israel.

For that story reread [“Israel and Judah: 6. David’s Foreign Wars.”](#) Read also my coverage of Psalm 60 at the end of the article.

These countries did not forget their defeats at the hands of David and Israel. This entire incident with Hanun was a pretext for a war with the intent to wipe out Israel as a nation. That war was to be fought by Israel’s many enemies surrounding Israel, with troops brought from as far as Assyria, in a period of decline until Solomon died. The background for the battles told in 2 Samuel chapters 10 and 1 Chronicles chapter 19 is given to us by a contemporary of King David, in the last of the Psalms of Asaph, Psalm 83.

Look again at the first verse of Psalm 60:

“A Davidic Inscribed Psalm, For Teaching, When he ravaged Aram-naharaim and the Syrian Zobah, and Joab returned and smote Edom in the salt ravine, twelve thousand.”

• Psalm 60:1

The Hebrew word **“Aram-naharaim”** means **“Aram** of the two rivers.” Aram is another word for Syria, thus: **“Syria** between the two rivers.” **“Aram-naharaim”** means the same as **“Mesopotamia,”** which itself is derived from Greek and it means **“between the rivers,”** all referring to the same land between the Euphrates and the Tigris Rivers (north and east of the country of Syria today). but occupied by many Syrian people, the people of Aram.

“Syrian Zobah” refers to David’s victory over Hadadezer, who was subordinate or a vassal to some unnamed ruler in **“Aram-naharaim.”** Keep all this in mind as I shift topic for a short while.

Conspiracy — and Plans within Plans

In his article [“The Prophesied State of Palestine,”](#) Dr. Martin stated that the events described in Psalm 83 have not yet happened in history, but will happen in the future.

“That prophecy in Psalm 83 has not yet occurred in history, and the Philistines will be very much involved in helping to fulfill it! That’s right. There are prophesied to be ten nations in the Middle East that confederate together in an effort to destroy the nation of Israel into oblivion.

Besides Psalm 83, there are only two other sections of scripture, which speak of a ten nation confederacy of peoples that will be evident at the End of the Age just before the second advent of Christ. This confederacy is mentioned in the Books of Daniel and Revelation. As I have stated for the past 27 years, it is entirely possible [emphasis Dr. Martin’s] that the ten nations of Psalm 83 are the same as those referred to in Daniel and Revelation. If so, we have some essential information about the precise peoples who will comprise that End-Time confederacy. And one of those ten nations is the nation of the Philistines (Psalm 83:7). It is important for prophetic interpreters to know who the Philistines are and where they are geographically located at this present time.”

• Dr. Martin, [“The Prophesied State of Palestine”](#)

I now disagree with Dr. Martin regarding the historical setting of Psalm 83, although I still think he is correct regarding its future prophetic fulfillment. My thinking changed when I read a chapter in a book by Steven M. Collins.^f In my opinion, Collins’ writing on the history of David and Solomon’s empire is useful

^f Steven M. Collins, *The Origins and Empire of Ancient Israel: Book One, “The Lost Tribes of Israel”* (Royal Oak, MI: Bible

and correct. I hope to provide additional primary sources from scholars in a later article to strengthen this thesis, that Psalm 83 gives us direct information about the narratives of 2 Samuel chapter 10 and 1 Chronicles chapter 19.

Psalm 83 is a production of Asaph, one of three lead musicians chosen by King David (1 Chronicles 6:39). Asaph was a “seer” exhibiting a visionary prophetic gift (2 Chronicles 29:30, 35:15). He wrote during King David’s reign. Psalms 50 and 73–83 inclusive are attributed to Asaph, with Psalm 83 being the last of his psalms.

Several books have been published in recent years recognizing the future prophetic nature of Psalm 83. There are too many to list and not one is useful. Dr. Martin published his information in 2001. More authors are beginning to accept the prophetic nature of Psalm 83 like Dr. Martin. By the way, Steven Collins does not believe Psalm 83 has any prophetic information for events future to us. He only believes it has historical importance.

Contrary to all other authors on this subject, I agree with Collins that Psalm 83 has valuable information about the past, and I am in agreement with Dr. Martin that Psalm 83 identifies the 10 nations discussed in Daniel and Revelation to occur before Christ returns.

Most commentators of Psalm 83 believe it refers historically to the time of righteous King Jehoshaphat of Judah. This was long after Asaph’s time in the era of King David. Therefore, they consider the “Asaph” of Psalm 83 to be one of the musicians of “the school of Asaph.” The problem with this identification is that the conspiracy and gathering of enemies around Judah does not fit the times. Few of the 10 nations participate in any war with Jehoshaphat. Before I detail the texts, I want to cover important connections linking the three biblical accounts.

The Links to the Evidence

Steven Collins connects Psalm 83 to events in 2 Samuel chapter 10 and 1 Chronicles chapter 19. He bases his assertion by identifying several of the combatants against Israel with countries in the area of northern Mesopotamia, and particularly Assyria, which is named in Psalm 83:8. In other words, when different documents tell about the same people from the same place conspiring and gathering to attack the same opponent during the same period, it is reasonable to conclude that all the documents are telling about related events. Collins correctly points out (p. 158) that Psalm 83 records David’s thoughts, although Asaph put those thoughts into the “call to action” of the psalm.

The conspiracy in Psalm 83 occurred in the time of David

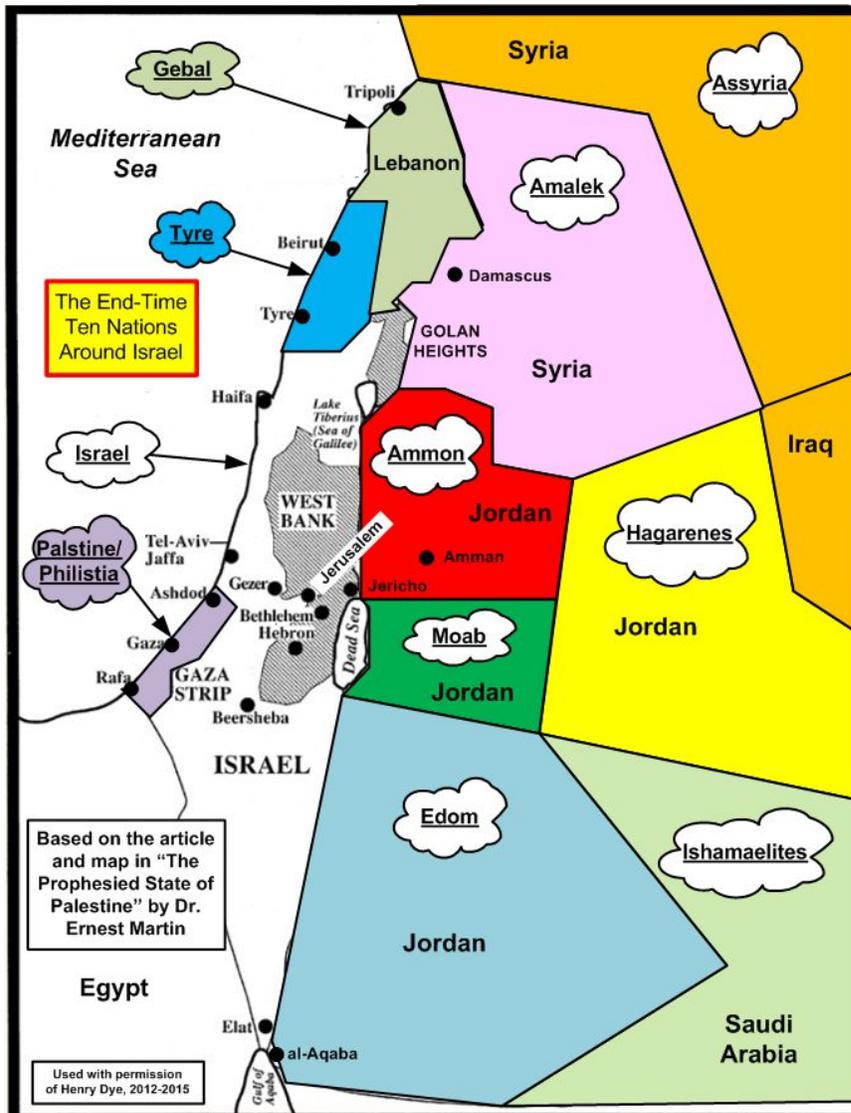
Mesopotamia, the country between the two rivers (Heb. **Aram-naharaim**; i.e., **“Syria of the two rivers”**), the name given by the Greeks and Romans to the region between the Euphrates and the Tigris (Genesis 24:10; Deuteronomy 23:4 Judges 3:8, 10). In the Old Testament, it is mentioned also under the name “Padan-aram”; i.e., the plain of Aram, or Syria (Genesis 25:20). The northern portion of this fertile plateau was the original home of the ancestors of the Hebrews (Genesis chapter 11; Acts 7:2). From this region Isaac obtained his wife Rebecca (Genesis 24:10, 15) and here also Jacob sojourned (Genesis 28:2–7) and obtained his wives, and here most of his sons were born (Genesis 35:26, 46:15).

The petty, independent tribes of this region, each under its own prince, were warlike, and used chariots in battle. They maintained their independence till after the time of David, when they fell under the dominion of Assyria, and were absorbed into the empire (2 Kings 19:13).

“Mesopotamia,” *Easton’s Bible Dictionary*

Blessings, 2003), Chapter 5, “King David and Israel’s Rise to Greatness,” pp. 143–190. Collins wrote several books on British Israelism, which I reject. Dr. Martin strongly refutes the theory of British Israelism from evidence in the New Testament in three articles: “[Who Are the Northern Ten Tribes of Israel Today?](#)”; “[Just Who Is an Israelite Today?](#)”; and “[Is David’s Throne in Existence Today?](#)” The apostle Paul and James, the half-brother of Jesus, both state categorically (and the epistle of James discusses at length) that the ten “lost” tribes, kept the Law of Moses. Greeks and Romans were very familiar with “Jewish laws.” However, secular history, particularly Greek and Roman history, give no evidence that the Celts, Gauls, Angles, Saxons, or any of the supposed “Israelite” tribes of Europe, ever kept the Law of Moses.

before the Ammonite wars. Ten nations conspired to eliminate Israel as a nation, along with its people. David found out about the conspiracy. Those same nations will form again and attack Israel in the future, the same 10 nations described in Daniel and Revelation. In the past, the Philistines not only had a presence south of the cities of Tyre and Sidon in Palestine, but also had a presence north on the Mediterranean coast.



The ten nations of Psalm 83 who conspire against Israel
(in “clouds”):

1. Edom
2. Ishmaelites
3. Moab
4. Hagarites
5. Gebal
6. Ammon
7. Amalek
8. Philistia
9. **“the dwellers of Tyre”**
10. Assyria, **“the arm of the sons of Lot”**
(allied with the above 9 nations)

This stylized map shows the situation described in Psalm 83, past and future. The map was created by Henry Dye from an earlier rough map sketched out by Dr. Ernest Martin, with other details from information Dr. Martin published in various articles about the nations of Psalm 83.

As the last of the Psalms of Asaph, read Psalm 83 with the understanding that it tells about nations conspiring against Israel during David’s reign. Psalm 83 is not ONLY about the future. It also had relevance to the time when it was written. Asaph describes what is happening “real-time” in his day.

The nations conspiring in Psalm 83 are not the only nations **fighting** Israel in 2 Samuel chapter 10 and 1 Chronicles chapter 19. This is only one “front” of the war coming from the conspiracy. Philistine troops are not mentioned, nor is a Phoenician army from the city of Gebal mentioned in the battles. This may be because they were involved with some other type of attack in the larger war. They nonetheless were part of the desire to destroy Israel and no doubt contributed in some measure to their part of the fight.

TEXT: Conspiracy against Israel; the Conspirators Identified

Psalm 83, a Song, a Psalm of Asaph

- ¹ O Elohim, let there not be silence on Your part;
Do not be silent, and do not be quiet, O El.
- ² For behold, Your enemies, they are clamoring,
And those hating You, they lift up their head.
- ³ Against Your people are they carrying on deliberation in craftiness,
And they are intriguing against Your secluded ones.
- ⁴ They say, “**Come, and let us suppress them as a nation,
That the name of Israel not be remembered any more.**”
- ⁵ For they have intrigued in heart together;
Against You are they contracting a covenant,
- ⁶ The tents of **Edom** and the **Ishmaelites**, **Moab** and the **Hagarites**,
⁷ **Gebal** and **Ammon** and **Amalek**, **Philistia** with the dwellers of Tyre;
⁸ Even Assyria is allied with them;
They have become an arm to **THE SONS OF LOT**.
- Interlude [*Selah*]
- ⁹ Do to them as You did to Midian, as to Sisera,
As to Jabin at Wadi Kishon:
- ¹⁰ They were exterminated at Endor;
They became manure for the ground.
- ¹¹ As for their patrons, set them down like Oreb and like Zeeb,
And all their overlords like Zebah and like Zalmunna,
- ¹² Who said, “Let us tenant for ourselves
The oases of Elohim.”
- ¹³ O my Elohim, set them aside like tumbleweed,
Like straw before the wind.
- ¹⁴ Like fire that consumes the wildwood,
And like a blaze that sets the mountains aflame,
- ¹⁵ So pursue them with Your tempest
And fill them with panic with Your sweeping whirlwind.
- ¹⁶ Fill their faces with dishonor,
So that **men** [they] shall seek Your Name, O Yahweh.
- ¹⁷ May they be ashamed and filled with panic for the future,
And may they be abashed and perish,
- ¹⁸ So that **men** [they] may realize that **You, You, Whose Name is Yahweh, Yours alone**,
[You] Are the Supreme over all the earth.
- Permanent, On the Gittith [a stringed instrument]. [end text]
-

This psalm is divided into two sections, indicated by the term for a pause or “interlude” (in Hebrew, *Selah*) at the end of verse 8. One can then balance the two portions in skeleton outline (from: Thomas Boys and E.W. Bullinger, *A Key to the Psalms* (New York: Young & Co, 1899), p. 78.

Outline of Psalm 83

Verse 1	Vindicate Yourself	←
2–3	Combination of enemies	↪
4	What they said	↪
5–8	Combination of Enemies	↪
	<i>Selah</i>	
9–11	Punish them. Comparisons	↪
12	What they said	↪
13–15	Punish them. Comparisons	↪
16–18	Vindicate Yourself	←

Note that the verbs in verses 2 through 5 tell what the enemies of God and Israel are doing. They [1] clamor, [2] hate, [3] “**lift up their head**” (a threatening pose), [4] deliberate “**in craftiness**,” [5] intrigue against God’s chosen, [6] desire to “**suppress**” Israel, [7] try to cause Israel’s name to be forgotten, [8] intrigue in their heart, and finally [9] contract a covenant among themselves to do as they all planned. This creation of a covenant indicates a religious ritual between each of the 10 nations, and with a god or gods of each nation. Their covenant, between themselves and their gods, did them no good.

They had a busy agenda and took some time to work out all details in secret. Remember, Psalm 83 was written in the time of David, before the two major attacks by the conspirator peoples. David knew this was coming. Joab knew this was coming. Even so, the army of Israel was caught in a trap and threatened with destruction.

- Verse 1, Asaph pleads with God to listen.
- Verse 2, these are your enemies, God; they hate you.
- Verse 3, they create a conspiracy against Israel, your people.
- Verse 4, they want to destroy your nation and commit genocide against your people Israel.
- Verse 5, these nations were “**contracting a covenant**” (verse 5) with each other (with their gods as witnesses) against you God to hurt you by attacking and destroying your people. Obviously, they thought YHWH was an ordinary god like their gods.
- Verses 5, 6, 7, the conspiratorial nations are named. Most have been defeated by Israel in the recent past (2 Samuel 8:1–14).
- Verse 8, “**Assyria is allied with them**,” as the tool of the sons of Lot, meaning Moab and Ammon. In reality, Assyria allowed itself to be “**an arm to the sons of Lot**” and did so willingly! Moab and Ammon did not have power to compel Assyria to help them attack Israel. Assyria allied because it was a powerful people, rebuilding their power, who wanted to punish David and Israel for defeating them at an earlier time across the Euphrates River, “**between the two Rivers**” in Syrian Mesopotamia.

In verse 4, what the ten nations sought to do to Israel was to “**suppress them as a nation, That the name of Israel ...**” be forgotten in history. The way to accomplish this would be to enslave the people of Israel (as they were in Egypt) — or kill all of them. They looked forward to a “world order” which no longer had Israel in it. This is the same desire many nations have today.

In verse, 7 “**the tents**” of Israel’s enemies is a poetic phrase for the entire nation.[§] Verse 7, the city of Gebal is a Phoenician city (in the country of Lebanon today). It was independent from Tyre and Sidon. “**The**

[§] Mitchell Dahood, *Psalms II, 51–100*, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1968), p. 274.

“dwellers of Tyre” are mentioned, meaning the inhabitants of Tyre and probably the surrounding Phoenician area who joined with the conspirators. Remember, the Phoenicians were very mercenary people. If they saw advantage in the downfall of Israel, many of the people of Tyre, Gebal and the surrounding area would “get on board” to receive their share of spoils should Israel fall. But Hiram the King of Tyre is not mentioned, neither is the city of Sidon, just **“the dwellers of Tyre.”** This makes sense because Hiram had a valuable trade covenant and treaty with David and later with Solomon. There is no hint of Israel’s two kings having any doubt about Hiram’s covenant loyalty or friendship.

In verses 9–18, Asaph’s plea becomes formal, calling on God to fulfill His covenant responsibility and protect His subjects. Asaph almost demands for God to honor His covenant with Israel. God’s name is on the line. His honor and His promises risk being denigrated by the nations if YHWH’s own people are destroyed. In fact, YHWH’s reputation as **“Supreme over all the earth”** (verse 18), would be ruined. He reminds God of His own Words of promise which demand His intervention to save Israel.

In verses 16 and 18, the word “men” is not in the Hebrew text, but is added for clarity in English. Truly, those referred to are not “men” but are the ten peoples or nations listed. Each are enemies of God, enemies of YHWH (**“your enemies,”** compare verses 2, 16, and 18).

In Psalm 83:10, Asaph appeals to God for a victory similar to what He did in the battle at Endor when Deborah and Barak were victorious over the forces of Sisera, the general of King Jabin of Hazor (Judges chapters 4 and 5). The Psalmist makes a final argument, that God’s power be manifested in Israel’s victory so the nations will “realize” (have full knowledge), that YHWH is **“supreme over all the earth”** (verse 18). They will realize that YHWH is the supreme El, the supreme God, above all other gods, over all the earth. Asaph’s appeal is not to God’s covenant with David, but it calls on God to honor His own words, His promises, and His own name.

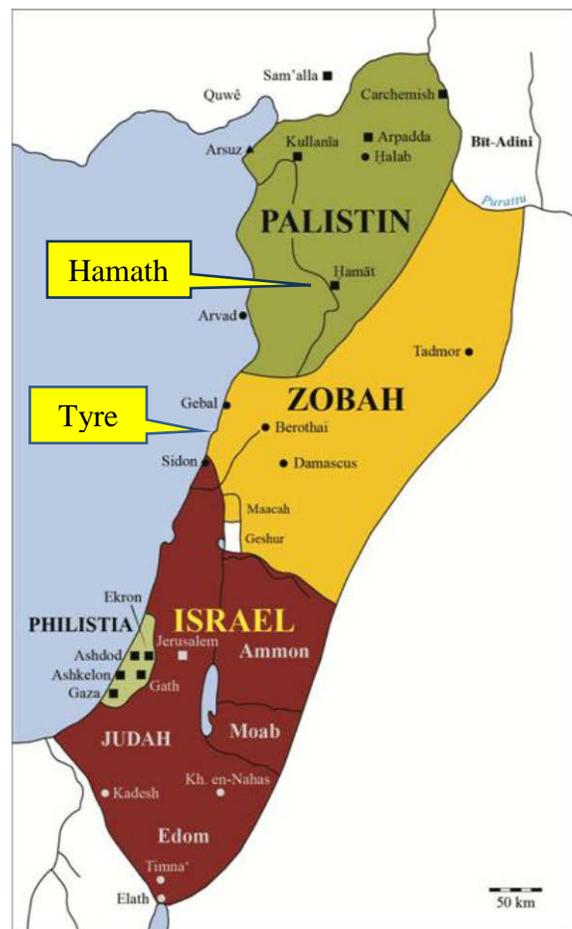
Another Philistine Homeland

In my January 17, 2015 Commentary [“News about King David,”](#) I reprinted a recent press release about inscriptions published by Gershon Galil, Professor of Biblical Studies and Ancient History at the University of Haifa in Israel. This new information indicates a different group of the Philistine people had a major presence north of the city of Tyre in what is Lebanon, south of Turkey today. (The map to the right from the press release, shows boundaries close to the time of David’s military and political expansion to the limits God gave to Abraham.)

Prof. Galil shows that a King Tai called himself “King of Palastin” (or “King of Philistia” as we would phrase it). Galil identifies King Tai with the Toi of Hamath from 2 Samuel 8:9–10 and Chronicles 18:9–10:

“When Toi king of Hamath heard that David had smitten the entire army of Hadadezer, Toi sent his son Hadoram to king David to ask him about his well-being and to congratulate him because he [David] fought against Hadadezer and smote him; (for Hadadezer had been a man engaged in warfare against Toi). In his hand were articles of silver, articles of gold and articles of copper.”

• 2 Samuel 8:9–10, CLV



Israel's encounter with the armies of Hadadezer was discussed in my article, "[Israel and Judah, 6. David's Foreign Wars](#)." Toi, the king of Hamath, ruled over northern lands populated by Philistine people. Prof. Galil does not say if Toi himself was a Philistine. Although not named, these Philistines may have participated in one of the two battles described below

TEXT: Ammonites and Syrians Attack, the First Great Battle

2 Samuel 10:6–14

⁶ The sons of Ammon discerned that they *were* in bad odor with David. So the sons of Ammon sent *and hired Syrians of Beth-rehob and Syrians of Zobah, 20,000 men on foot, and the king of Maacah with 1,000 men, and Ish-tob with 12,000 men.*

⁷ When David heard of it, he sent Joab with the entire military host and the masters of war.

⁸ Then the sons of Ammon marched forth and arranged themselves for the battle at the portal of the city, while the *Syrians of Zobah and Rehob, Ish-tob and Maacah* were alone by themselves in the field.

⁹ When Joab saw that the battle-line was against him **both front and rear**, then he chose some of all the choice men of Israel and arrayed them to meet the Syrians. ¹⁰ The rest of the soldiers he gave into the hand of his brother Abishai and arrayed them to meet the sons of Ammon. ¹¹ And he said,

"If the Syrians are too steadfast for me, then you come to my salvation. But if the sons of Ammon are too steadfast for you, then I will go ahead to save you. ¹² Be steadfast and let us encourage ourselves in behalf of our people and in behalf of the cities of our Elohim. As for Yahweh, He shall do what is good in His eyes."

¹³ When Joab and the soldiers with him drew close for the battle against the Syrians, they fled before him.

¹⁴ As for the sons of Ammon, they saw that the Syrians had fled, and so they took to flight before Abishai and went into the city. Then Joab *returned from his campaign against the sons of Ammon and* came to Jerusalem.

1 Chronicles 19:6–15

⁶ The sons of Ammon discerned that they *had brought themselves* in bad odor with David. So *Hanun and* the sons of Ammon sent *1,000 talents of silver to hire for themselves from Aram-naharayim, from Syrian Maacah and from Zobah chariots and horsemen.* ⁷ *Thus they hired for themselves 32,000 chariots and the king of Maacah and his people; then they came in and encamped before Medeba.*

As for the sons of Ammon, they were gathered from their cities and came in for the battle.

⁸ When David heard of it, he sent Joab with the entire military host and the masters of war.

⁹ Then the sons of Ammon marched forth and arranged themselves for the battle at the portal of the city, while the *kings who had come in* were alone by themselves in the field.

¹⁰ When Joab saw that the battle-line was against him **both front and rear**, then he chose some of all the choice men in Israel and arrayed them to meet the Syrians. ¹¹ The rest of the soldiers he gave into the hand of his brother Abishai, and they arrayed them to meet the sons of Ammon. ¹² And he said,

"If the Syrians are too steadfast for me, then you come to my salvation. But if the sons of Ammon are too steadfast for you, then I will save you. ¹³ Be steadfast and do let us encourage ourselves in behalf of our people and in behalf of the cities of our Elohim. As for Yahweh, He shall do what is good in His eyes."

¹⁴ When Joab and the soldiers with him drew close for the battle facing the Syrians they fled before him.

¹⁵ As for the sons of Ammon, they saw that the Syrians had fled, and so they *themselves also* took to flight before *his brother* Abishai and went into the city. Then Joab came *back* to Jerusalem.

[end text]

The forces on both sides were large. First Chronicles 19:6 tells us the Ammonites paid **“1,000 talents of silver”** to buy support for allied armies. This was substantial money, but difficult to accurately translate to today’s money because of the uncertainty of the weight of a talent.^h Another question needs to be asked, why was the payment to hire the mercenary armies paid in silver and not gold? (Collins, p. 155). The answer is, Ammon had to pay gold and silver tribute to Israel from their previous defeat and vassalage after defeat in battle (Collins, p. 155). This payment is described in 1 Chronicles 18:11:

“King David sanctified them to Yahweh, along with the silver and the gold that he had carried off from all the nations, from Edom and from Moab, from the sons of Ammon and from the Philistines and from Amalek.”

Also included is tribute from **“the spoil of Hadadezer, son of Rehob, king of Zobah”** (2 Samuel 8:12). This is another reason all hated David and Israel. A substantial amount of their national (and personal) wealth was being sent to Israel’s treasury. A mass rebellion by all the surrounding nations paying tribute would ease the financial drain on all their kingdoms. This is the topic of Psalm 83. The wars were fought as the result of the rebellion by Israel’s vassal kingdoms conspiring with Mesopotamian kings from the east.

Both Hebrew and Greek texts for 1 Chronicles 19:7 say there were 32,000 “chariots.” This would mean at least 64,000 horses, plus thousands more as replacements. Again, there is a problem with large numbers in this text, compared with the more understandable numbers in 2 Samuel 10:6.ⁱ

First Chronicles 19:6 speaks of those from “Aram-naharayim” which most English translations render as “Mesopotamia” and all the Greek Septuagint verses of the phrase have *“Συρίας Μεσοποταμίας”* or “Syrian Mesopotamia.” The King James Version has **“Hanun and the children of Ammon sent a thousand talents of silver to hire them chariots and horsemen out of Mesopotamia”** (1 Chronicles 19:6). This should be the correct translation.^j There were in fact Syrians in Mesopotamia. The Jewish historian Josephus specifically states that the Ammonites paid their **“thousand talents of silver to the Syrian king of Mesopotamia”** (*Antiquities of the Jews* 7.121). The Concordant Literal Version should have translated it the same way. Collins believes these “Syrian Mesopotamians” were Assyrians. I think he is correct.

The Ammonite soldiers came from all over their land and arrived at Medeba. The Ammonite capital was nearby at Rabbah (today the city of Amman, capital of Jordan). The allied armies from the north met the army of Ammon near the fortress-city of Medeba (1 Chronicles 19:7), then went north while the Ammonite army stayed near the protection of Medeba. The trap was set.

Joab with the Israelite army traveled through Jericho, crossed the Jordan River there, and approached Medeba from the west. Where was David? He remained in Jerusalem.^k The Israelite army camped, apparently to the north near Medeba. The great battle took place before the gates of Medeba (1 Chronicles 19:7).

^h To be conservative, a low estimate for the weight of a talent is about 48 pounds. It could have been more, perhaps double that weight. This meant 48,000 pounds of refined silver (about 24 tons) was the bribe for Ammon to “hire” armies to help them fight Israel.

ⁱ As Collins points out, Solomon had only 1,400 chariots during the height of his power (1 Kings 4:26, 10:26, 29 and 2 Chronicles 1:14 and 9:25), with 12,000 horses for those chariots, and each horse had to be trained. Solomon had vassal kings supply him with those horses, and mules (verse 25).

^j Again, the term “Aram-naharayim” is translated as “Mesopotamia” in Genesis 24:10, Deuteronomy 23:4; Judges 3:8, 10; and 1 Chronicles 19:6 in the King James Version. Few English translations consistently translate “Aram-naharayim” by a single term, although Mesopotamia fits all contexts, including in Psalm 60:1, KJV, which should read:

“To the chief Musician upon Shushaneduth, Michtam of David, to teach; when he strove with [burned] Aram-naharaim [Mesopotamia] and with Aram-zobah, when Joab returned, and smote of Edom in the valley of salt twelve thousand.”

^k David stayed at Jerusalem and both texts say, **“He sent Joab with the entire military host and the masters of war.”** This likely meant David’s “mighty men,” the heroes of his army, including Uriah the Hittite. Perhaps David was organizing the kingdom at the capital and focusing against attacks threatened by the Philistines from the west, the Amalakites in the southwest, and other enemies in the north. He likely met with representatives of his allies such as Toi of Hamath and Hiram of Tyre.

When the Ammonites saw their Syrian allies approach from the north in battle formation, they formed their line of battle outside the walls of Medeba. Together they outmaneuvered and trapped Israel's army between two larger forces in a classic pincer envelopment. It was a situation much desired by generals.

The texts to me give the feeling of a severe crisis. As stated in 2 Samuel 10:11–12 and 1 Chronicles 19:12–13, Joab's tactics, at best, were for the army of Israel to fight through so some of the army to escape. Joab's words talk of "salvation" and "saving" one another, not of fighting to victory. Joab even referred to God, "**As for Yahweh, He shall do what is good in His eyes.**" This is hardly a rousing, inspirational speech to the troops. He said in effect, ... "oh well, YHWH will do what He will do."

With forces in front of them and behind them, if the army of Israel was defeated, few soldiers would survive to go home. The grand conspiracy seemed on the verge of success, and the revenge of the conspirators seemed near, and their dream of destroying Israel was at hand. Joab split his forces with his best men fighting with him against the Syrians (2 Samuel 10:9; 1 Chronicles 19:10). Israel outfought their enemies.

When the battle result is told, no mention is made of a great victory, just a statement that the Syrians fled before Joab's forces. The Ammonites, seeing the Syrian retreat, also fled from Israel's now-combined army. If the Syrians fled without too much loss, they could fight another day, which is exactly what they did.

Israel's army survived and remained on the field of battle, which indicated a victory, but they did not destroy the enemy. The battle was a really a stalemate. Note also, Joab did not follow up Israel's "victory" by attacking the nearby city of Rabbah (capital of Ammon). Nor did the losers sue for peace, give allegiance to Israel, or become vassals. The last passages simply say Joab and the army went back to Jerusalem. They needed to nurse their wounded and recuperate after a hard fought battle.

It may be they returned to Jerusalem for another reason, other armies were massing in the northeast. Further preparations were made to meet the new threat.

TEXT: *The Second Great Battle*

2 Samuel 10:15–19

¹⁵ When the Syrians saw that they were stricken before Israel, they gathered themselves together.

¹⁶ Hadadezer sent messengers and brought forth the Syrians who were from across the stream; they came to Helam with Shobach, chief of Hadadezer's military host before them.

¹⁷ When this was told to David, then he gathered all of Israel's men, crossed the Jordan and advanced to Helam. Now the Syrians drew up in battle array to meet David and

fought against him.

¹⁸ Yet the Syrians fled before Israel; and David killed of the Syrians seven hundred charioteers and 40,000 men on foot. He also smote Shobach, the chief of their host, who died there.

¹⁹ When all the kings, the servants of Hadadezer, saw that they were stricken before Israel, then they made peace with Israel and served them; and the Syrians feared to save the sons of Ammon any more.

1 Chronicles 19:16–19

¹⁶ When the Syrians saw that they were stricken before Israel,

they sent messengers and brought forth the Syrians who were from across the stream,

with Shophach, chief of Hadadezer's military host before them.

¹⁷ When this was told to David, then he gathered all of Israel's men, crossed the Jordan and advanced against them and drew up in battle array against them. When David drew up in battle array to meet the Syrians, then they fought against him.

¹⁸ Yet the Syrians fled from before Israel; and David killed of the Syrians 7,000 charioteers and 40,000 men on foot. He also put to death Shophach the chief of their host.

¹⁹ When all the kings, the servants of Hadadezer, saw that they were stricken before Israel, then they made peace with David and served him; and the Syrians were not willing to save the sons of Ammon any more. [end text]

David was present with Israel's army when they met again to battle the Syrians led by **Hadadezer** (the former king of Zodah before David took his kingdom from him). He was likely a ringleader of this conspiracy along with the Ammonites. He survived several earlier battles and continued his hatred against Israel and David (see "[Israel and Judah: 6. David's Foreign Wars](#)" about the earlier battles). Hadadezer was instrumental in gathering the forces to fight Israel, and Hadadezer's military commander, Shobach, put them **"in battle array."**

In verse 16 of both passages the forces gathered by the Syrians came **"from across the stream,"** meaning the Euphrates River, as most translations and commentaries state.¹ Those Syrians came from the land area of Assyria. As soon as David received word that the Syrian forces and their allies crossed the Euphrates (moving south-southwest toward Israel), David left Jerusalem with the army of Israel, crossed the Jordan River, and traveled to Helam. Both armies set themselves in order for battle. The Syrian war leader was Shobach or Shophach.^m

The Syrian army's deployment of troops is described in 2 Samuel 10:17, while 1 Chronicles 19:17 tells about Israel's deployment of troops. The numbers in verses 18 of both passages cannot be reconciled: 700 charioteers in 2 Samuel and 7,000 in 1 Chronicles. There is an obvious textual problem, which is also in the Greek texts of these passages.

God gave the Israelites the victory, without details. In verse 18 of both texts the numbers of casualties are only those of the Syrians. The 40,000 deaths of the Syrian army is not unheard of in ancient battles.ⁿ Shobach or Shophach, the military leader of the combined Syrian army was also killed. For him to be named in the text meant he was a leader of great reputation, on the order of David, of Joab (the captain of Israel's host), or of David's "mighty men." Under Hadadezer, Shobach likely organized and promoted this last great expedition to destroy Israel, its king, the nation, and its people. He failed. God received the glory.

Hadadezer's fate is unknown; scripture does not tell his fate. In the last verses the various Syrian kings and peoples **"made peace with Israel [or, "with David"] and served them [or, "him"]."** Again, this means they became vassals to Israel and paid tribute to David as king of Israel, a king sovereign over them, although they continued to rule their own kingdoms and lands. The war begun by the Ammonites, Moab, and other kingdoms, in cooperation with Syrian allies, supported by Mesopotamian and Assyrian forces, was now ended. The conspiracy revealed in Psalm 83 failed.

God intervened on behalf of His people Israel as Asaph requested with his prayerful psalm. All the plans and bloodshed by Israel's enemies gained them nothing and they lost much. The Ammonites in particular were abandoned to face alone the wrath and retribution of David and Israel.

Israel's attack and subjection of the Ammonites by David will be presented next time from Second Samuel and First Chronicles, along with the beginning of David's relationship with Bathsheba.

David Sielaff, March 2015

¹ This conclusion is based on 2 Samuel 8:3 (and 1 Chronicles 18:3, which is similar):

"David also smote Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah, as he was going to restore his hand at the stream Euphrates."

Hadadezer did not die in that earlier battle; he was a survivor. He conspired and organized armies to again confront the armies of Israel. One of Hadadezer's former associates, Rezon, was troublesome to King Solomon according to 1 Kings 11:23–24:

"Then Elohim raised up another adversary against him, Rezon son of Eliada, who had fled away from his lord Hadadezer king of Zobah. Then he convened men about himself and became chief of a raiding party, when [or after] David killed the Syrians. Later they [this band of men] went to Damascus and dwelt in it and reigned over Damascus."

In other words, this former leader in Hadadezer's army formed a group of raiders which troubled Solomon. Eventually Rezon took control of Damascus and became its king, starting a new Syrian dynasty there.

^m This is perhaps a difference in consonant pronunciation between the text of Second Samuel and the later text of Chronicles.

ⁿ In 216 BC the Roman army lost 50,000 men to the Carthaginian forces under Hannibal at the battle of Cannae. Israel's victory over the Syrians was on a similar scale of killing, all done face to face with arrows, spears, and swords.