

Assyrian Expansion and the Commonwealth of Israel

Did the regional empire that was the Commonwealth of Israel influence the development and change the geopolitical dynamics of the Neo-Assyrian Empire?

King David was a leader who willingly sought God's direction in expanding the national bounds of ancient Israel, which in some ways was—from a geopolitical view—a measured fulfillment of the promises of a landed inheritance afforded to the descendants of Abraham.

In this regard, David was said to be a man after God's "own heart," which did not mean that David was righteous by the law of God in his military conquests, but rather it tells us that David did what was right respective to the national interests of ancient Israel according to the will of God. And this becomes apparent in the biblical story that shows us that David—by the will of God—was able to establish a relatively cohesive political union and militarily powerful commonwealth that included all the tribes of ancient Israel.

Creating then a regional Middle Eastern empire that undoubtedly influenced the political and military development of one of the earliest provincial city-states of lower Mesopotamia—a city-state that eventually became the heart of the Neo-Assyrian Empire (I Chron. 16:13-36).

Or, more specifically, we could say that what was formed during the rule of King David was a pseudo-military state comprised of all the tribes of Israel, which is something that may be understood by examining David's military conquests in the region of the Middle East. Noting in particular that David did not expel the Syrians, Moabites, Ammonites, Ishmaelites, Philistines and others from their respective

territories as might be expected.

Instead, David subjected them to military rule and tribute within the bounds of his kingdom, which gives us reason to reflect on the political situation in Israel today.

Now, near the end of the period of the Judges we find that the Assyrian city-states had already begun to assert their influence in Mesopotamia during the reign of Tigleth-pileser I of Assyria (1114-1076 BCE). Then with only the passing of a few years we have the beginning of King Saul's reign as the first appointed king and ruler over the loosely associated tribes of Israel. His reign began about the same time that Samsi-Adad VI (1053-1050 BCE), son of Tigleth-pileser I (Tukulti-apil-Esarra), came to power in lower Mesopotamia.

Therefore, it may be reasoned that the rule of Tigleth-pileser I was influential on the political changes that occurred in Israel after the period of the Judges.

Then, following Saul's rule we see that David came to the throne of Judah and later over the northern tribes when the Assyrian king, Assur-rabi II, son of Assur-nasir-apli I, began to rule in Assyria. Noting also that David's reign and the reign of Assur-rabi ended after 40 years, which marked the beginning of Solomon's first year on the throne over the Commonwealth of Israel. (Kings of Assyria according to the King-List tradition.)

After Solomon's reign the commonwealth was again definitively divided and a dual monarchy was established in 932/931 BCE, which occurred during the reign of Assur-dan II, son of Tigleth-pileser II of Assyria. Which allows us to reasonably say that the decline of the commonwealth that began with the division of Israel's monarchy corresponded with the rise of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. (Some historians consider this period to be the beginning of Assyria's greater dominance in the region, and certainly the beginning of the end for the

Commonwealth of Israel.)

Bringing us then to consider the nature of the rise of the Commonwealth of Israel in the days of King David, because God had said to David through the prophet Nathan that: “I have been with thee whithersoever thou hast walked, and have cut off all thine enemies from before thee, and have made thee a name like the name of the great men that are in the earth (I Chron. 17:8). (Author’s emphasis throughout.)

Consequently, we should expect that King David’s fame was known among the Assyrian city-states whose dynasties continued to war among themselves in the region of Mesopotamia. Also, we can confidently say that David’s influence in the region was certainly understood among the Philistines, Moabites, Ammonites, the Arameans of Syria and the peoples of the Levant.

The sense of this is understood from the conflicts that David had with [Israel’s neighboring kingdoms](#) and the nomadic tribes who attempted—at various times—to overthrow the rule of King David at Jerusalem.

For the chroniclers wrote: “Now after this it came to pass, that David smote the Philistines, and subdued them, and took Gath and her towns out of the hand of the Philistines. And he smote Moab; and the Moabites became David’s servants, and brought gifts. And David smote Hadarezer king of Zobah unto Hamath, as he went to stablish his dominion by the river Euphrates. And David took from him a thousand chariots, and seven thousand horsemen, and twenty thousand footmen: David also houghed all the chariot horses, but reserved of them an hundred chariots. And when the Syrians of Damascus came to help Hadarezer king of Zobah, David slew of the Syrians two and twenty thousand men. Then David put garrisons in Syriadamascus; and the Syrians became David’s servants, and brought gifts [tribute]. Thus the Lord preserved David whithersoever he went” (I Chron. 18:1-6).

What then is of geopolitical interest is that King David, in his subjugation of the Syrians (Arameans) of Damascus, was successful in establishing the bounds of the commonwealth to the Euphrates River. This placed the bounds of Israel's territorial gains into Aramean territory, and expanded the commonwealth's commerce and power to the edge of Assyrian military influence in upper Mesopotamia. (During the reign of Tigleth-Pileser I we see that Assyrian expansion had brought the Assyrians to the Upper Euphrates as far as Lake Van in the region of Urartu.)

Therefore, we may conclude that the expansion of the commonwealth was of significant geopolitical concern to the Assyrians in the time of David, and it was evidently troublesome for the Philistines, those within the Levant, the Amalekites, the Ammonites, the Moabites and the nomadic tribes who were with little doubt desperate to break the yoke of Israel's military domination in the Middle East. A situation that was made apparent when the king of Ammon was deceptively beguiled into breaking diplomatic relations with David when he publicly humiliated Israel's ambassadors and formed a hired coalition against Israel that included Arameans who were beyond the Euphrates in Mesopotamia (*Aram-naharaim*, "Aram of the two rivers").

Allowing us then to conclude that even though there is no biblical or historical evidence to suggest that the Ammonites had hired the Assyrians, and certainly not the Babylonians, to fight against Israel, it would be acceptable to say that the Assyrians were part of a larger regional confederacy that surrounded the Commonwealth of Israel. Therefore, we may conclude that David's kingdom was skirted by a confederacy of some kingdoms whose national aspirations were blocked by the political and military might of the Commonwealth of Israel, and this political situation was certainly apparent—in part—during the reign of Saul, and obviously so during the reign of David, and undoubtedly during the reign of King

Solomon.

Consequently, this remained the geopolitical situation in the region until the power of the commonwealth was broken when the kingdom was politically and militarily divided between Solomon's successors—Rehoboam of Judah and Jeroboam of Israel. Initiating then the collapse of the once great regional empire that was the Commonwealth of Israel, and opening the way for the rise of the Neo-Assyrian Empire under Tigleth-pileser III and its expansion into the Middle East.



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