

# MID-EAST e-NEWS

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Amman

## Contexts

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## Welcome

I have been experimenting with the layout of **This Month** recently. The original layout, I felt, focused on individual events and neglected the long-term issues that develop more gradually. Issues such as the Palestinians considering a one-state solution (an Israeli state), the progress (and impact) of the Fence, improved relations between India & Pakistan, and background issues in both Israel/Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan and Sudan - these were not getting the mention they deserved.

Over the Christmas vacation we were able to travel to Jerusalem and Bethlehem. Amongst our experiences:

- ✓ people are basically trustworthy (my wife's lost purse was returned by the Palestinian taxi driver)
- ✓ it *is* possible to get through checkpoints without ID (all our passports were in the purse)



The unusual heart-shaped stones found on Peniel's western tell. (p.2)

- ✓ people are often helpful (a shopkeeper who I had bargained down to 20 shekels, from 100, for a small guide book, the next day left his shop to show me how to find the Ethiopian monastery that I had seen mentioned in the book)
- ✓ people will go a long way out of their way to please you (the driver who brought us to Jerusalem from the border happened to see us, heard our plight, offered to track down the purse for us, and was successful, even though the taxi was not a registered taxi, and the driver was by then in Hebron)
- ✓ God's timing is perfect (the pastor of the church we visited on Sunday '*happened*' to see us leave the Bethlehem checkpoint, gave us a ride back to Jerusalem, where we met the driver from the border)
- ✓ the locals do not have the same experience that we do (the Pastor's American passport is all that allows him to be able to move between the Bible College, home, church, and his flock).

Sudan	(Peace talks are progressing between the govt. and southern rebels)	Rebels kill 6	Govt./Rebels sign pact
Libya	Libya admits WMD research, opens for inspection		
Iran	Earthquake in Bam kills 30,000+		Liberals barred from election
Pakistan	2 <sup>nd</sup> attempt on Pres. Musharraf (Relations with India are improving lately)	Weapons seized on Afg. border 1 <sup>st</sup> flight between I & P in 2 yrs. Indian PM visits Pakistan	
Afghan-istan	(Loya Jirga meets for new constitution) L.J. approves democratic constitution, with strong presidency (Taleban rebels intimidate by kidnappings)	Aniti-Karzai delegates boycott vote –differ on strong presidency (compromise reached on Jan 4 <sup>th</sup> ) Christian aid worker kidnapped 18 killed by Kandahar bomb	
Jordan		5 earth tremors in Dead Sea region PM Blair in Petra Blair meets with King Abdullah	
Iraq	Roadside bomb kills 2 soldiers  (Kurds want control of Kirkuk. Arabs & Turkmen oppose this)	Restaurant bomb-8 die Helicopter downed-1 killed 5 die in riots over Kirkuk	2 French shot nr Fallujah Troops kill 7 fuel thieves Attacks kill 3 soldiers Blair visits troops in Basra Sistani demands popular vote
Syria		Assad visits Ankara	
Egypt	(Egypt is attempting to negotiate ceasefire by Pal. militants)	Plane crash kills 148	
Israel	Isr. commandos refuse to serve in Pal. (Construction of the 'Fence' expands, attracts criticism) 2 soldiers die in Gaza Tel Aviv bomb kills 2 (Population demographics become an issue)	Plans to expand settlements in Golan (US is critical) Israeli & Pals. protest Fence construction Arrest of soldier who shot Gaza peace activist in April (activist dies on Jan 13 <sup>th</sup> ) 4-month blockade of Jenin lifted In Israel/Palestine-Jews: 5.2m, Palestinians: 4.9m 4 killed in Nablus confrontations	30ft wall in Abu Dis
Palestine	Isr. raid on Gaza-9 die (Peace talks are delayed) Egypt FM assaulted in Al Aqsa compound		Qorei suggests 'binational state'

<b>Dec.</b>	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T	W	T	F	S	S	M	T

### Old Testament Lands – Peniel

Peniel (also known as Penuel) is first mentioned in the Bible on Jacob’s return from Haran. Having sent his family across the river he remained, and in Gen.32:24 we are told that “Jacob



① Viewing the larger (western) tell from the East

was left alone, and a man wrestled with him till daybreak.” As a consequence of this, “Jacob called the place Peniel,…” On the river Zarqa is a possible site for Peniel. There are actually two adjacent hills, both of them showing signs of occupation, which are known as ‘Tel Dhahab el-Sharqi’ (Tell of Gold, East) and ‘el-Gharbi’ (West). It is interesting to consider Jacob’s route as he was probably coming downstream (from the East).



③ Looking north between the two tells, the river flows towards us, and then off to the left.

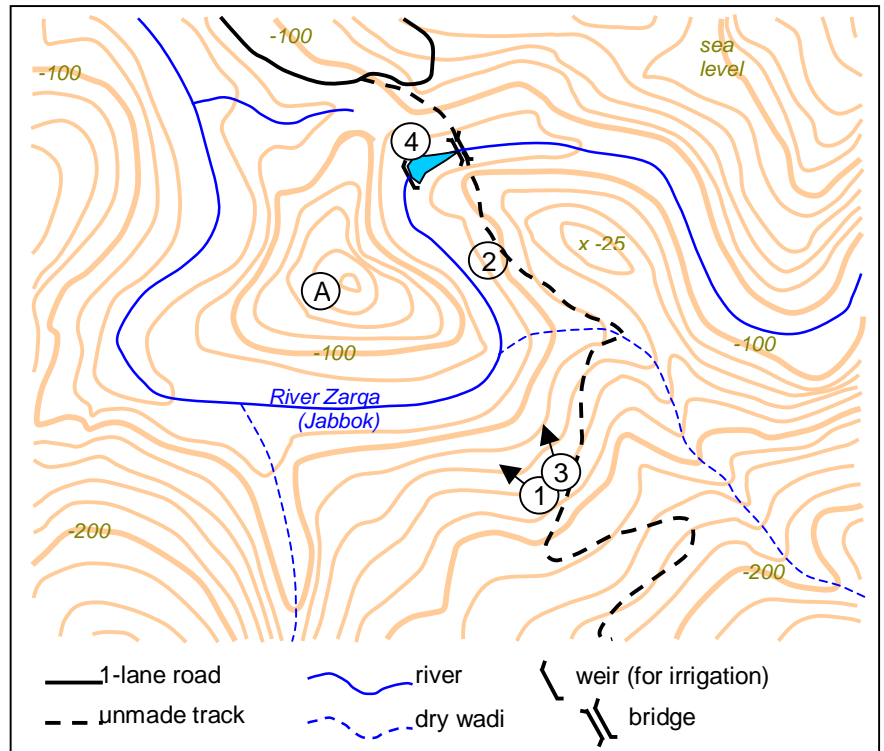
Peniel is also mentioned in Judges 8, where Gideon is pursuing the kings of Midian. Succoth (a few miles downstream from this site) and Peniel both refused him aid. Judges 12:17 relates how Gideon made good his threat to pull down Peniel’s tower.

Peniel is mentioned in 1 Kings 12. The city was strengthened by Jeroboam, Solomon’s successor. The base of a tower is still visible on the slopes of the eastern tell, just below the track. It is best seen from across the river on Tell El-Gharbi. A limestone cliff below it emphasizes its height above the river. In the cliff has been constructed a tunnel. It runs into the hillside for about 70 meters. Exploration is difficult because of the bats that have made their home there!

I was completing a difficult hike one day when I heard a cry “Ashrab shay!” (*Drink tea*). I followed the boy to his family’s tent (4) where I was given water (very grateful) and tea. My Arabic was stretched to breaking point (easily done!).

On Tell El-Gharbi the settlement must have been quite extensive. Pottery is abundant, walls and ruined buildings are evident, and on the summit are the ruins of some kind of temple. Six columns, now toppled, are aligned in a N-S direction. The columns must have stood 3-4m high, and are made up of stones that are about 30cm deep. Unusually, each stone has a heart-shaped cross-section.

Contemporary meets ancient at the foot of the tell. A catchment weir diverts water through a screening system, and this then is piped down the valley and used for irrigation. About 10km upstream is the King Talal Dam, which can hold 70 MCM of water. Much of it comes from Amman, and its quality depends upon the effectiveness of the water treatment facilities.



② The tower base on the eastern tell



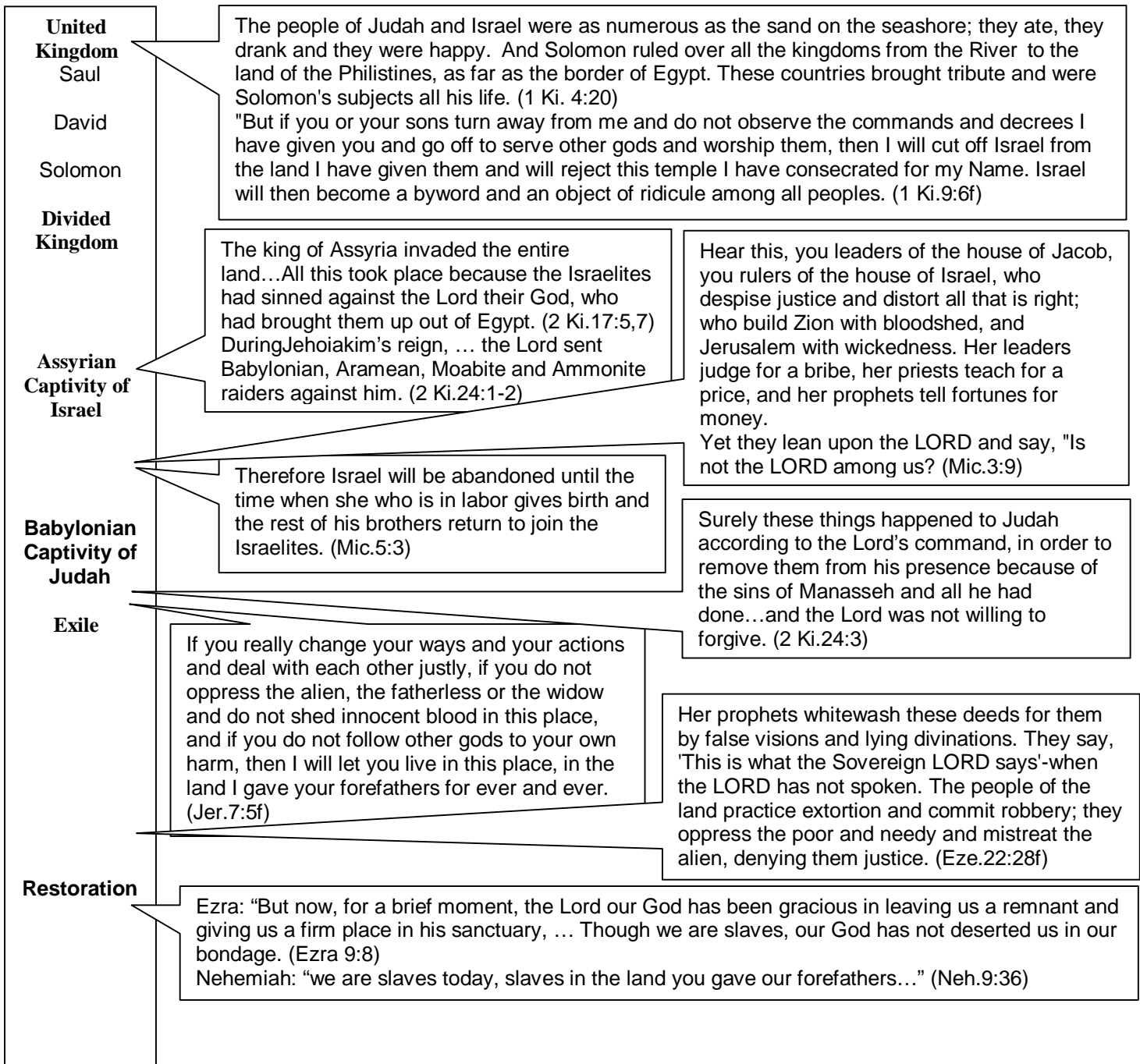
④ Below Peniel, salt springs make the water unsuitable for irrigation. This weir diverts most of the Zarqa river water before it becomes saline.

*How Far Back Does It Go? (Kingdom and Captivity)*

As the kingdom declined, and Israel went into Assyrian captivity, prophets warned of impending disaster for the people of Judah too. Micah criticized the leaders for their wickedness, “despising justice”, and foretold that Israel would be abandoned. The writer of 2 Kings (Ezra?) recognized too that the exile of Judah was punishment for the sins of the people.

High on the list of offenses, and repeated by different prophets, was oppression of the weak, whether they were aliens, orphans or widows. Jeremiah writes that residence in the land of promise was as dependent on eliminating injustice in these things, as it was on avoiding idolatry.

When some of the people returned from exile, Ezra among them, they were still subject to the emperor in Babylon. Ezra and Nehemiah recognized this and described themselves, and all the returnees, as slaves.



## Syrian History Since World War I

- 1919** Before World War I Syria, *Greater Syria*, included what is now Lebanon, Palestine and Jordan. It was a district of the Ottoman Empire. In 1917 letters between Sharif Hussein of Mecca and the British government committed the Allies to the establishment of an Arab state in Greater Syria. This commitment was broken by the Sykes-Picot agreement when the British and the French arranged to share the administration of the territory. Britain withdrew in 1919, and France expelled **Feisal**, son of Hussein, the would-be king of Syria.
- Just as the British experienced in Iraq, Syrian nationalistic sympathies were aroused against French rule. Revolts were put down in 1920, and in 1925-27, this last led by Shukri Al-Kuwatli. In 1938 France and the Syrians had agreed to Syrian independence when France cancelled the treaty. (The rising tensions leading up to WW II had caused France to rethink its territorial needs). The following year, France ceded the province of Alexandretta to Turkey. Today Turkey and Syria still dispute control of this region. **1938**
- France surrendered to Germany in 1940. Syria then came under Vichy control, but in 1941 British & French allied forces took over the country. After declaring Syria's independence, elections in 1943 had provided for a new government under the nationalist, **Shukri al-Kuwatli** but France continued to occupy the country until 1946. **1940**
- During the Israeli War for Independence in May of 1948, Syrian forces attempted to resist the Jewish takeover of Palestine. **1948**
- 1949** A series of coups began with three in 1949 alone. First, (Mar.30) the Kurd, **Husni Al-Zaim**, established a dictatorship, overthrown by a military group in August. In November 1949 General Abdil al-Shishakli led another coup which installed respected elder statesman, Hashimal Atasi, as president.
- During 1951 Israel and Syria clashed over Israeli work on draining Lake Hula, in the northern Jordan valley. During the instability that followed UN intervention, in November, Gen. **1951** Abdil Al-Shishakli led another coup and formed a new government (Atasi had resigned) that promulgated a new constitution in 1953. Having acted as dictator for a short period Shishakli was ousted by another coup in 1954. Pres. Hashimal Atasi was reinstated, along with the 1950 constitution. At this point Syria was increasingly anti-Western. **1954**
- 1955** The Baghdad Pact, signed in 1955 was a defensive treaty between Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan and Britain. Just a year later Israel's invasion of Egypt – a consequence of Nasser's nationalizing of the Suez Canal – and the collusion of Britain and France in the affair, increased the antipathy of much of the Arab worlds towards the west. During the next years Syria received increasing financial and military support from the USSR.
- A government vote in February, 1958, (Feb.21) approved the union of Syria and Egypt as the United Arab Republic, under **Gamel Abdul Nasser** as president. **1958**
- Increasing nationalization of industry and commerce over the next years aroused the more conservative of the Syrians, until an army coup in September 1961 (Sept.28) took Damascus and declared independence for Syria. The government was only short-lived, however, and in 1963 another military coup occurred when Major-General Amin Al-Hafez took control of the Baathist government. Internal divisions led to an internal coup mounted by younger, radical, Baathists, and in February 1966 they installed **Nur Al-Din Atasi** as president. **1961**
- 1963**
- Border violations against Israel by Syrian-based guerrillas declared (Jun.5), Israel quickly overran Syrian positions on the Golan, approaching to within 65km of Damascus. **1967**
- Hafez Al-Assad** seized power in November 1970, his success in part due to the demoralization of the military after the severe losses in the war. Most government positions were given to fellow Baathists, and many of them were, like him, from the minority Alawite community. **1970**
- 1973** (Oct.6) At the outset of the Yom Kippur War Egypt attacked the Israeli positions where they overlooked the Suez Canal. Syria attacked Israel on the Golan Heights, initially succeeding until Israel was able to put a massive emergency airlift of military equipment into the field. Then, on the counterattack, Syria was pushed back to within 30km of Damascus. Again, as in 1967, a UN cease-fire was agreed to.
- During 1976 Syria became involved in the Lebanese civil war. The balance of power between the various militias had been disrupted by the arrival of PLO refugees from Jordan, King Hussein having expelled them in 1970-71. **1976**
- In 1982 Assad forcibly put down growing unrest fomented by the Muslim Brotherhood. The town of Hama was largely destroyed by his military. Thousands of citizens were killed in the process. Assad's son, Basel, was involved in the effort to suppress internal dissent by making an example of Hama. **1982**
- 1987** Syria increased its presence in Lebanon sending thousands of troops to quell inter-communal hostilities in Beirut in 1987. Syria also has had strong relations with Iran, and participated in the offensive against Iraq in 1991. This policy can be explained through an understanding of the Alawite heritage, particularly their close relationship with the Shia Islam dominant in Iran.
- In February, 1994, Basel, Hafez Assad's intended successor, was killed in a car accident, calling into question the smooth transfer of power in Syria. **1994**
- On June 10<sup>th</sup>, 2000, Hafez Assad died, and his son Bashar Al Assad was quickly named as his successor. Since then Bashar has maintained his father's policies of intransigence over negotiations with Israel, refusing to consider reducing demands for the whole of Golan – to the shore of Lake Tiberias – to be returned to Syria. **2000**