found in the readiness with which Araunah, the Canaanite, sold his land to David (II Samuel 24:18-24) and the stubborn refusal of Naboth, the Hebrew, to even trade his little holding to Ahab, the king, though he was offered a good bargain.

With the moneylenders congregated in the cities, and loaning money to hard-pressed farmers that they might pay their taxes, the contest between the cities and the rural districts became a badly mixed affair. As the moneylenders undertook to seize the land in payment of the debts, and employed the *gibborim* commissioned by the courts in ejecting the debtor-landowners, the struggle often took on the double aspect of a religious and an economic struggle on the part of the rural farmers against the capitalistic urbanites. As the Assyrian crisis developed, the economic crisis inside Israel and Judah was at its height.

16. What was the Assyrian crisis?

The Assyrian Empire, spreading out across the valleys of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, was a very ancient state. Its history ran back into the dim and misty centuries to a time when written records were only beginning to take form. At one time Assyrian armies had penetrated deep into the region of the Nile, but for several hundred years prior to the eighth century B.C. the Empire had been altogether occupied with enemies on its eastern and northern borders, or with internal problems. Meanwhile the Palestinian world, with its dozen or more little states, had been allowed to live in peace.

In 746 B.C. an energetic and ambitious monarch came to the Assyrian throne in the person of Tiglath Pileser III, sometimes called "the Roman of the East." Under his vigorous leadership the nation's affairs were quickly put in order and Assyria began to dream again of world conquest, which meant the subjugation of Egypt.

17. What was the state of affairs in Egypt?

Egypt was a shoestring strip of a country clinging to the banks of the Nile and content to live in the luxury made possible by the incredibly rich soil of the valley. Cut off from the rest of the world by sand and desert, Egypt had been content for the most part to develop her own culture and amass her own wealth in comparative isolation and safety. On a few occasions ambitious Pharaohs struck out toward the east (Amenhotep, 1557-1537 B.C., and Thutmose, 1537-1529 B.C.) with considerable success, but by the time our story begins Egypt was living quietly behind her own borders threatening no one. Assyria was the aggressor.

18. What was the cause of Assyria's aggression?

The territory of Assyria, lying along the uplands of the Tigris and Euphrates, was a stern and reluctant land which yielded its fruit only at a price. It supported its people adequately but at the cost of much hard labor. This of course contributed to the nation's strength but not to its spirit of content. The rich, lush valleys of the Nile and of the lower levels of the Tigris and Euphrates were a constant temptation, and the vast stores of loot which might be seized by a successful campaign stirred the cupidity of emperor and people alike.

Equally important were the political ambitions of Tiglath Pileser III, who came to the throne as the successor of a long line of incompetents infatuated with the dream of becoming master of the world. Having consolidated his position inside his Empire, and having built up a huge war machine in doing so, he faced what was, to him, a pleasant necessity—a new war front. Under such circumstances Egypt was the inevitable choice. Thus the first great world crisis was precipitated.

19. Why call it a world crisis?

Until the beginning of the eighth century B.C. the world of the East was divided up into a large number of small states—tiny kingdoms which were usually content to live inside their own borders and attend to their own affairs. None were of any great military or political significance. Their armies were little more than bands of raiders intent on pilage. Professional soldiers were almost unknown. It was still the early morning of civilization, and political ambitions had not yet had time to develop in terms of world domination.

When Assyria struck at Egypt it was something new in world politics. True, there had been other times when invading armies had ravaged over wide areas, but Tiglath Pileser III aimed at one great political organization which should rule the world. Huge armies had to be transported great distances. Numerous kingdoms and peoples were involved. The fortunes of every little state in the ancient world were affected by the outcome. Neutrality was almost an impossibility, and independence degenerated into a mirage. In such a world diplomacy and intrigue came into their own.

20. How did the crisis affect Israel?

Israel was the northern Hebrew Kingdom and would be the first to feel the blow as the Assyrian armies came marching south, en route to Egypt. There was no highway by which Tiglath Pileser could reach the Nile without crossing Israel's borders. Neutrality was out of the question. Her land was certain to be a battleground. She was compelled to choose her role—either as an enemy of Assyria and an ally of Egypt, or as an enemy of Egypt and an ally of Assyria. In either case an alliance meant vassalage. She was the ancient Belgium.

21. How did the crisis affect Judah?

Judah's position was slightly better. Her territory did not extend as far west as the sea, but lay east of the great trade routes, atop the Judean hills.