Households have become a major topic of interest in the archaeological literature. However, despite the large archaeological database available from ancient Israel, households have received relatively limited attention in the archaeological research of this region (for exceptions, see, for example, Singer-Avitz 1996; Gadot and Yasur-Landau 2006). Scholarship has tended to concentrate on more “interesting” topics, mainly those relevant for the study of political, biblical history; daily life has received less attention. Households, however, are the backbone of practically every society, and the ancient societies of the Near East are no exceptions. Without proper attention to this basic level of social analysis, no large-scale study of ancient societies is feasible.

The study of houses and households has many dimensions (e.g., Wilk and Rathje 1982; Deetz 1982; Blanton 1994; Hendon 1996; Nevett 1999; Souvatzi 2008). Many studies concentrate on the single structure, by either trying to identify the use of space within the building through an analysis of the artifacts uncovered or by discerning various architectural patterns (e.g., Hendon 1996; Singer-Avitz 1996; Haddad 2004; Gadot and Yasur-Landau 2006; see also various papers in Kent 1990c; Allison 1999b). These can be seen as microlevel analyses. Other studies concentrate on examining a number of structures within their contexts, i.e., on the study of a settlement or a community, sometimes as part of its natural and social environment (e.g., Bermann 1994; Nowicki 1999). These can be seen as meso-level studies. In many cases, scholars then extrapolate from their findings onto the society at large (cf., Kramer 1982a: 664). A third type of analysis consists of studies on the role and position of households within an entire society. This is often accomplished through an analysis of many households from diverse locations (e.g., Blanton 1994; see also Nevett 1999). This latter research can be seen as an example of macrolevel studies. In addition to these levels of analysis outlined here, there are many more types of research questions that can be asked, but of the wide range of possible topics, most studies of household economy have concentrated on
examining either the division of labor within the family or household production (e.g., Hendon 1996; Souvatzi 2008: 14–15, and references; see also various papers in Allison 1999b).

It should be noted that, although the large body of archaeological data we possess from ancient Israel allows us to gain many insights into the study of houses and households at all levels of analysis, the present study, which is part of a larger study of Iron Age Israelite society, concentrates on studying the household economy at the macrolevel. This will be accomplished through an examination of data from dozens of structures located in many settlements. Therefore, no attempt is made in this article to examine single structures or even settlements, nor does this article try to study the production or consumption of a particular household. The first part of the article will discuss the evidence from urban and rural settlements in the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah during the Iron Age II, and will draw some general conclusions regarding society in those settlement sectors and the place of the households within those economies. This will be followed by a broader discussion of the roles of the various types of households within the larger Iron Age economic spheres of the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

Households in the Kingdoms of Israel and Judah

Many studies have discussed the ancient Israelite family, but these have been primarily text oriented (e.g., Lemche 1985; Cowling 1988; Wright 1990; 1992; Bendor 1996; Blenkinsopp 1997; Meyers 1997; see also Pedersen 1926; Porter 1967; De Vaux 1965; Reviv 1993), and most of the archaeologically oriented studies, albeit few in number, have focused on the Iron Age I (e.g., Stager 1985a; for a summary of previous research, see Faust 2005, forthcoming b). The few studies that have examined, from an archaeological perspective, the family structure in the Iron Age II have usually referred to excavation results from urban

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1 In the following, I discuss the entire ninth–seventh-century time span (the “Divided Monarchy” in Israel and Judah) as one, and treat the available information as representative of the entire period. In the future, it might be worthwhile to try to dissect the data chronologically and geographically in order to focus on internal variation within this era and among the various regions.