

The Life and Times of David Ben Jesse

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USA

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The Life and Times of David Ben Jesse

David¹ is known as the "man after God's own heart" (1 Sa. 13:14; Ac. 13:22), a man who "served God's purpose in his own generation" (Ac. 13:36). His life was marked by a wide variety of occupations and interests. He was a shepherd, poet, musician, courtier, soldier, outlaw and king--a thorough-going man of his times. What Leonardo da Vinci was to the Renaissance, David was to ancient Israel. The significance of David's life lies not only in the opportunity to observe his strengths and weaknesses, but also, in the fact that ultimately his family became the family of the Lord Jesus Christ. This latter factor is so significant that Paul could say, "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. This is my gospel!" (2 Ti. 2:8).

The End of the Tribal League

The world of David takes us back to about a millennium before Christ.² The Tribal League, which had lasted since the time of Joshua's conquest, faced a major crisis toward the end of the 11th century. It will be remembered that although under Joshua the Israelites had become firmly entrenched in Palestine, the land was by no means under their full control. Joshua's campaigns were but the first stages of the conquest. The second stage was to be accomplished by individual tribes after the

¹The name David may be connected with the Hebrew verbal root *d-w-d* (= to love). If so, then the name David means "beloved," presumably by Yahweh, cf. D. Payne, *JSBE* (1979) I.871.

²The dates for all periods of the OT are somewhat tentative. The reign of David, depending upon which chronology is followed, was circa 1000-961 BC or circa 1010-970 BC.

division of the land (Jos. 13:1-7). The Israelites' firmest control was in the central hill-lands where fighting could be done on foot. The plains were a continuing problem because Israel had difficulty in combating the sophisticated weaponry of chariots (cf. Jg. 1:19, 34).

After Joshua's death, when the clans were to have completed their conquest (Jg. 1:1), they failed to dislodge a number of tenacious groups (Jg. 1:21, 27-36). These enclaves became constant irritations to the Israelites during the days of the *shophetim* (= judges). The period of the *shophetim* is a long history of the fight for supremacy between these Canaanite peoples and the tribes of Israel. The surviving Canaanites were not unified to the extent of posing a national threat, but they were stubborn in their resistance to Israel.

The unity of the Tribal League was neither national, political or even wholly ethnic, but primarily religious. There was no statehood, government, capital or administration. The elders of the various clans as well as the military leaders (the *shophetim*) ruled. The tribes were bound together by their shrine (the Tent of Meeting), their three major festivals (feasts of passover, weeks, tabernacles, cf. Dt. 16), and their clergy (priests and levites).

Under Rameses III, Egypt had been forced to defend herself against an invasion by the so-called Peoples of the Sea, that is, various Aegean and Mediterranean peoples who were migrating to the south and east (cf. Ge. 10:14; 1 Chr. 1:12; Am. 9:7).³ Many of these sea peoples settled as colonists on the south coast of Palestine after being repulsed by the Egyptians. The reader meets them in the Bible as the Philistines, and it is from them that Palestine derives its name.⁴ The Philistines posed the strongest threat to Israel, because they were a military aristocracy unified around a pentapolis of five key cities in the coastal plain: Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron⁵ and Gath. Each of these cities was ruled by a *seren* (= tyrant).

The Israelite Tribal League ended due to a national crisis. The Philistines had gained control of the Negev, some areas of the central mountains and the entire Plain of Esdraelon. They captured the sacred Ark of the Covenant when they destroyed the shrine at Shiloh (1 Sa. 4:1-11; Je. 7:12).⁶ They deployed controlling

³V. Karageorghis, "Exploring Philistine Origins on the Island of Cyprus," *BAR* (Mar.-Apr. 1984) 16-28.

⁴J. Greenfield, *IDB* (1962) III.791-795; T. Dothan, "What We Know About the Philistines," *BAR* (Jul./Aug. 1982) 20-44.

⁵Major archaeological excavations have been undertaken in Ekron, providing much information concerning the Philistines, how they lived, worked and worshiped for 500 years, cf. T. Dothan and S. Gitin, "Ekron of the Philistines," *BAR* (Jan./Feb. 1990) 20-36; *BAR* (Mar./Apr. 1990) 32-42.

⁶For the archaeological information about Shiloh, see I. Finkelstein, "Shiloh Yields Some, But Not All, of Its Secrets," *BAR* (Jan./Feb. 1986) 22-41; A. Kaufman, "Fixing the Site of the Tabernacle at Shiloh," *BAR* (Nov./Dec. 1988) 46-52.

garrisons at key locations (1 Sa. 10:5; 13:3) and destroyed Israel's metal industry (1 Sa. 13:19-22).⁷ The religious leadership of the sons of Eli and Samuel had been consumed by an overpowering degeneracy (1 Sa. 2:12-17, 22-25; 8:1-5). Clearly, the Tribal League of Israel was at a low ebb and on the verge of a national collapse. To add to their disorientation, the Ammonites were apparently mobilizing against them on their eastern frontier (1 Sa. 12:12).

The Birth of the Monarchy

It was in this situation that Israel elected to become a monarchy. Saul of Gibeah in Benjamin became her first king (1 Sa. 8:4-22). Although Saul's first campaign was against the Ammonite threat in the transjordan (1 Sa. 11:1-11), his primary task was to respond to the Philistine threat in the West and North (1 Sa. 9:16). He mustered an army and began a campaign to drive the Philistines from their fortifications in the lower hills (1 Sa. 13:1-4). The bravery of Jonathan, Saul's son, turned the tide, and the Philistines were routed (1 Sa. 13, 14).

Saul's court was quite humble by even the modest standards of minor powers in the ancient Near East. His early kingship was not much different than the judgeships before him, with the exception that his kingship was recognized as a permanent institution. His administration brought little change to the internal structure of the nation. He had no bureaucracy, no large harem, no officer except Abner, and no palace. Gibeah, his headquarters, was primarily a military encampment. Saul, however, began a standing army, and he opened the way for military conscription.

Although Samuel had anointed and confirmed Saul to be king of Israel (1 Sa. 10:1, 20-25; 11:14-15), two incidents turned Samuel against Saul. In the first case, Saul usurped the priestly function of offering sacrifice (1 Sa. 13:7b-12). As a result, Samuel informed Saul that he would be replaced as king by a better man (1 Sa. 13:13-14). Secondly, Saul deliberately disobeyed Samuel's injunctions in the war with Amalek (1 Sa. 15:1-3, 9-29). By ignoring the *herem* (= irrevocable ban on the captives and booty of holy war), Saul incurred Yahweh's disfavor (cf. Dt. 7:1-2, 16; 13:12-16; 20:16-18; Nu. 21:1-3).

The Rise of David: 1 Sa. 16-17

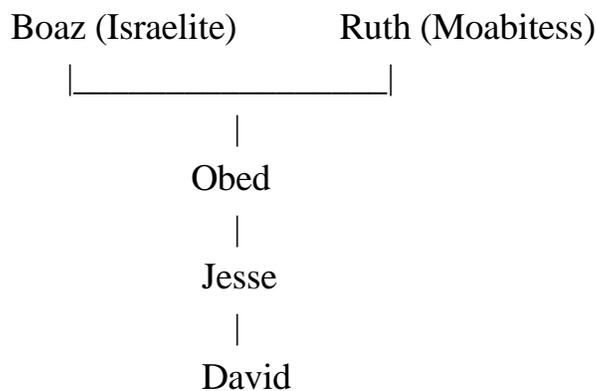
David's rise to national prominence was meteoric. From his lowly position as the youngest in a family of eight sons, a particularly unenviable position in the ancient Near East, he rapidly captured the hearts and imaginations of both his king

⁷J. Muhly, "How Iron Technology Changed the Ancient World--and Gave the Philistines a Military Edge," *BAR* (Nov./Dec. 1982) 40-54.

and his countrymen.

The Family of David

David was born in the distressing period of Israel's transition from the tribal league to the monarchy. His family roots actually begin in the period of the judges with the romance of Ruth and Boaz (R. 1:1; 4:13-17). Ruth, of course, was a Moabitess, and her story is one of several reminders in the OT that the Israelites, like many other people, could not boast of strict racial purity. The family tree of David, then, is as follows:



The Youthful David

The biblical writer gives the reader a threefold introduction to David as a shepherd, a court musician and a warrior. In these three settings, one sees the diversity and capability of the man who was to replace Saul.

The implications of Samuel's public retraction of Saul's kingship must have been devastating for the Benjamite hero (1 Sa. 13:13-14; 15:26-29). His position was now cast in doubt before the whole nation. Rapidly, he began to deteriorate, and as the pressure mounted both from the external threats to the nation and from the internal insecurity of his position, he became increasingly disturbed mentally. By the end, he was probably on the verge of insanity if not insane altogether. In the story line, Saul's decline is juxtaposed with David's rise.

The Young Shepherd is Anointed (1 Sa. 16:1-13)

Yahweh now instructed Samuel to secretly anoint a new king. Although Saul's rejection by Yahweh did not entail his immediate dismissal, his successor was

already being prepared for his kingly role. Secrecy was paramount, since Saul would not be slow to react if he discovered this threat to his regency.

David, a shepherd and the youngest of Jesse's sons, was probably about fifteen years old⁸ when Samuel anointed him as king over Israel.⁹ His qualifications were more in terms of his character than his physique (16:7), though certainly his appearance was pleasing as well (16:12).

David in Saul's Court (1 Sa. 16:14-23)

When the biblical writer states that "the Spirit of Yahweh had left Saul," it indicates primarily that his anointing as king was concluded. He was no longer to be charismatically empowered by the Holy Spirit to function as Israel's leader. From that time on, he acted purely at his own initiative and from within his own resources.¹⁰ At the same time, an "evil spirit from Yahweh tormented him."¹¹ In view of his acute distress, Saul's attendants determined to find relief by music,¹² and David, a skilled harpist,¹³ was selected. David became a court musician and one of Saul's personal armor-bearers. When Saul's attacks became unbearable, David's music soothed him.

David Slays Goliath (1 Sa. 17:1-58)

How David came to be home at the outbreak of war, the reader is not told, except that he apparently made occasional trips back and forth between his home and the army bivouac (17:15). Nevertheless, he came to the battle-front with provisions for his oldest brothers who had been drafted by Saul (cf. 1 Sa. 14:52).

⁸L. Wood, *A survey of Israel's History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970) 246.

⁹Anointing with oil in the OT was primarily a symbolic action which signified holiness, that is, the dedication or separation of something or someone to God. In the monarchy, it is associated with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on an individual in order to empower him for his role as king, cf. J. Motyer, *NBD* (1962) 39; J. Payne, *The Theology of the Older Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1962) 175.

¹⁰W. Kaiser, *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 148.

¹¹Probably the text intends that Yahweh allowed rather than actively sent an evil spirit to torment Saul. The active sending of the demon may be attributed to Satan himself. The Hebrew word *ba'ath* (= torment) carries the idea of fright and terror. Perhaps this indicates that Saul experienced fits of depression or some other deep, manic imbalance. In any case, in the OT there is a tendency to refer all things back to God's sovereignty, even the occurrence of disaster (cf. Is. 47:7; 1 Kg. 22:19-23; Job 1:6-12; 2:1-7). For more extensive discussion of this passage, see L. Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 126-144; A. Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Scribners, 1910) 302-304.

¹²For any example of an ancient piece of music, this one a cult song from Ugarit in Syria, as well as information on ancient music in general, see "World's Oldest Musical Notation Deciphered on Cuneiform Tablet," *BAR* (Sep./Oct. 1980) 14-25.

¹³For information concerning ancient musical instruments, see B. Bayer, "The Finds That Could Not Be," *BAR* (Jan./Feb. 1982) 20-33. As to what David's lyre may have looked like, based on a jasper seal unearthed in Jerusalem, see "What Did David's Lyre Look Like?" *BAR* (Jan./Feb. 1982) 34-35 and D. Freedman, "But Did King David Invent Musical Instruments?" *BR* (Summer 1985) 49-51.

The battle lines had been drawn at Elah,¹⁴ and the Philistines sent out a champion, Goliath of Gath, a giant some 10 1/2 feet tall who wore bronze armor weighing 125 pounds and wielded a spear with a 15 pound head.¹⁵ David's courageous victory over the giant instantly established him as a hero in Israel, a warrior *par excellence* in the ideals of holy war. In the rout that followed, the Philistines were driven out of the central mountains and pushed back into the eastern strongholds of their pentapolis on the coastal plain.

Two points of clarification are in order here. First, when Saul asked about David (17:55), his inquiry was probably directed toward knowing more of David's family, since apparently he already knew David from his previous contact with him as a court musician. Second, in 2 Sa. 21:19, a certain Elhanan is said to have killed Goliath. This discrepancy may be due to a copyist's mistake, so that what is meant is that Elhanan killed Goliath's brother (cf. 1 Chr. 20:5),¹⁶ or Elhanan may simply have been a throne name for David himself.¹⁷

David, the Poet

David was unquestionably a man of amazing versatility. Early on, the reader is exposed to him as a rural shepherd, a court musician and a fearless warrior. Now, David will be introduced as a poet. The biblical record does not indicate when David began composing poetry, but he may well have been writing Hebrew verse by the time he fell into Saul's disfavor, inasmuch as Saul called upon David to play his harp during his fits of depression. Several Psalms contain headings that allude to this early period of David's life, though the precise circumstances of composition are unknown (cf. Ps. 34, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 142). Without question he became a patriarch and patron of literary and musical artists. Seventy-three psalms are titled "of David" or "belonging to David."

It is not clear whether the Hebrew phrase "of David" should be taken as "by David" (i.e., authorship) or "to David" (i.e., dedication).¹⁸ Furthermore, the name "David" may sometimes refer to David's dynasty as well as David himself. Consequently, the phrase "of David" is difficult to assess and may sometimes refer to David's own compositions, sometimes to compositions in honor of David, sometimes to compositions collected by David, or yet sometimes to compositions for the kings of David's line. Still, David's contribution and influence upon the

¹⁴Modern Wadi es-Sant, 11 miles southwest of Jerusalem.

¹⁵The discovery in Palestine of human skeletons of similar size from roughly the same period gives archaeological plausibility to the story, G. Grogan, *NBD* (1962) 481.

¹⁶E. Young, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1964) 185-186.

¹⁷J. Bright, *A History of Israel*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 187-188.

¹⁸See the informative discussion in P. Craigie, *Psalms 1-50* (Waco, TX: Word, 1983) 33-35.

Psalter must have been significant. He is described as "anointed by the God of Jacob, Israel's singer of songs" (2 Sa. 23:1). He was also apparently skilled at musical improvisation (Am. 6:5).

Central Characteristic of Hebrew Poetry

It will be well to briefly touch upon the character of Hebrew poetry, since it is somewhat different than our more familiar English variety. The fundamental character of Hebrew poetry is the parallelism of ideas, that is, the way in which the poet matches thought patterns and places them side by side. English poetry, by contrast, is fundamentally a matching of sounds. One sort of Hebrew parallelism is the technique by which the second idea reinforces, repeats or elaborates on the first idea (cf. Ps. 19:1; 29:1,2). This is very common in the Psalter and is called *synonymous parallelism*. Another sort of parallelism is the technique in which the second idea stands in sharp contrast to the first one (cf. Ps. 30:5; 1:1-6). This technique is called *antithetic parallelism*, and about 90% of the Proverbs are antithetic. In addition, Hebrew poetry also contains a wealth of figures of speech and phonetic devices as well as other kinds of parallel structures.¹⁹

The Psalms of David

The careful reader will observe that the Psalms are divided into five books, beginning respectively at 1, 42, 73, 90 and 107. These various books were probably independent collections. While many of the psalms, seventy-three of them to be exact, are connected in the superscriptions with the name David, some fourteen of them are linked to particular episodes of his career. These are Psalms 3, 7, 18, 30, 34, 51, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 60, 63, and 142.

The Shepherd's Psalm²⁰

Psalms 23 is perhaps the best known and loved passage in the entire OT. If David is indeed the author, he wrote from his own experience as a Judean shepherd. The psalm is an extension of the shepherd metaphor which depicts Yahweh as the Great Shepherd.

23:1 The word picture of Yahweh as the one who leads, protects and cares for his flock is common enough in the OT (Eze. 34:11-31; Mi. 5:4; cf. Jn. 10:1-18; 1 Pe. 5:4). In the ancient Near East, the metaphor of the shepherd was frequently used to describe the king, not only among the Israelites (cf. 2 Sa. 5:2; 7:7; Je. 3:15; 10:21;

¹⁹For a full discussion of Hebrew poetic techniques, see W. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry* (Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1986).

²⁰A popular and interesting treatment of this Psalm may be found in P. Keller, *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970). A number of the following insights were gained from this volume.

22:22), but also among other nations.²¹ As the divine Shepherd, Yahweh provided all that was necessary for the sustenance of his sheep. Like a rural shepherd who lived with his flock and served as its guide, physician and protector, Yahweh was always near his people.

23:2 For sheep to lie down in a quiet place is important, for they tend to panic easily, while in mating season they can become aggressive. Green pastures are places of calm, and the sheep often could not be secured without some effort on the part of the shepherd (i.e., clearing the field of rocks, etc.). Also, sheep manage to contract a variety of nasal flies, ticks and other parasites, and until these external problems are solved, they cannot lie down without annoyance. Because of the shape of their nose, sheep do not drink easily from running water. Therefore, the shepherd wisely leads them to quiet waters.

23:3 Sheep will sometimes become cast (i.e., they end up on their backs and are unable to right themselves). A good shepherd will put them upright and massage their legs to aid circulation. He, in effect, restores them. Also, it is important that sheep do not overgraze a pasture. The wise shepherd will lead his flock on long tours to avoid ruining the grasslands. These are comparable to "paths of righteousness."

23:4 In the summer, the shepherd leads his sheep to the high country to allow them to feed on the mountainous grasslands. This trek takes them through deep ravines infested with animals which attempt to prey upon the sheep. It is imperative that the sheep remain close to their shepherd! The rod, a cudgel some two feet or so long, and the staff, the shepherd's walking stick, were used as weapons against intruders, as instruments for examining the sheep or disciplining them if necessary, and for extricating them from the tangles of underbrush.

23:5 Traditionally, commentators assume that the metaphor changes completely at this point from shepherd to host. Several scholars, however, have argued that the shepherd metaphor is retained throughout.²² If so, then the shepherd watches out for poisonous plants and stagnant water so that the flock will not be harmed. He guards them while they are eating. With a flask of oil, he anoints their heads to rid them of flies and parasites as well as skin diseases. When a shepherd was forced to draw water from wells for his flock, he would do so by carving drinking holes in the ground into which he put the water, a sort of natural "cup."

23:6 As the sheep follow the careful guidance and provision of the shepherd, they remain safe. Followed by goodness and *hesed* (= loyal love), they find their

²¹Hammurabi, for instance, is called the shepherd, and Shamash is also so designated, cf. A. Anderson, *Psalms 1-72* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 196.

²²Craigie, 204-205.

true home in the courts of the Lord.

Saul Turns Against David: 1 Sa. 18-20

David, whose career began so favorably, now bore the brunt of Saul's insane jealousy. Saul's divine task to rid God's people of the Philistine stranglehold (1 Sa. 9:16) was shelved indefinitely in his fixation to destroy David.²³ It is in David as the victim of an unjust persecution that much of his greatness shines forth.

The Tide Turns (1 Sa. 18)

As a court musician, David stood in Saul's favor. His position of privilege quickly changed, however, after the contest with Goliath. David's popularity as a young national idol finally drove Saul beyond the bounds of rational behavior. As a hero and court musician, David developed a close friendship with Saul's son, Jonathan, who was also a young military hero (cf. 1 Sa. 14:1-15, 45). In fact, David now stayed permanently at the royal court.

In the East, it was considered to be a special symbol of respect to be given the garments of a prince that the prince himself had worn (2 Sa. 18:11; Est. 6:6-9). Jonathan's gift of his own clothing and weapons to David was a profound mark of honor and friendship.

David's success was so apparent that he was promoted to high military rank. Saul, his military staff and above all, the populace were all instrumental in David's rise. The euphoria was to be short-lived, however, for the women of Israel, in their ecstatic expressions of David's valor, chose Saul himself as the unfortunate object of comparison to David. In the traditional antiphony of victory, they placed David above the king! Saul, already aware that Yahweh had rejected him for a better man, viewed this with the utmost suspicion.

On the very next day, Saul twice attempted to murder David with a javelin. It is interesting to note that according to Asiatic custom, when a dart was thrown at a freedman, and he escaped by flight, he was no longer bound in allegiance to his master.²⁴

Fearing what might happen if he continued to personally harass this idol of the people, Saul resorted to subterfuge. Making David the captain of a thousand soldiers, he sent him into war (presumably against the Philistines), no doubt hoping that David's life would end in the campaigns. Instead, David's success was insured

²³ For an insightful literary treatment of the Saul/David tension, see J. Fokkelman, "Saul & David," *BR* (Jun. 1989 Vol. V No. 3) 20-32.

²⁴J. Freeman, *Manners and Customs of the Bible* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos, 1972) 139.

by Yahweh, and he became even more popular.

Saul's next scheme was even more involved, and he was not above using his own family members to accomplish his ends. It will be remembered that David was promised the daughter of Saul in marriage after his victory over Goliath (1 Sa. 17:25), and now Saul saw this as an opportunity. He offered to David his eldest daughter, Merab, on the grounds that David would continue in the Philistine campaign. His deeper motive was David's death, and when David did not succumb to the Philistines, Saul reneged on his promise and gave Merab in marriage to another man.

Next, Saul was informed that another of his daughters, Michal, was in love with David. Again he determined to use the affections of his offspring to destroy his enemy, thinking that if David became preoccupied in genuine love and marriage, he might be less careful on the battlefield, and so become a ready target for the Philistines. As a dowry, he demanded that David circumcise a hundred Philistines. Hopefully, David would meet his death in the seemingly impossible effort. With the help of his men, however, David not only completed the task but doubled the dowry, and Saul had no choice but to surrender Michal.

Saul's fear and frustration continued to grow. The skirmishes with the Philistines went on, and David persisted as the most capable and successful of Saul's officers. Whether or not David understood the tenacity of Saul's deep obsession against him at this time, the record does not state.

Saul's Deadly Obsession (1 Sa. 19)

By this time, Saul had made the death of David the central goal of his life. From attempting to use his unwitting daughters to snare David, he now appealed directly to his retainers and to Jonathan, his own son. Jonathan, however, was bold to plead David's case, and Saul was temporarily convinced. He even took an oath before Yahweh that David would not be harmed. Accordingly, David once again joined the royal retinue.

All seemed to be well until the occurrence of another outbreak of fighting with the Philistines. David's leadership and bravery were again decisive in favor of Israel, and he became more famous than ever. Back at the courts, while playing his harp, David was once more viciously attacked by Saul, who tried to impale him against the wall with a javelin. David fled for his life under the cover of darkness.

David's escape in the early darkness enabled him to reach home safely, but Saul sent killers to ambush him as he left in the morning. Michal somehow discovered the plot and helped David to escape through a window. Taking *terephim* (idols--probably in the shape and size of a human), she adroitly fixed a dummy in

David's bed, announcing to Saul's henchmen that David was sick.²⁵ When her father discovered her scheme, she lied again, intimating that David had bullied her into allowing him to escape. Apparently, she considered her prevarication to be justifiable under the circumstances.

"Saul's Murderous Pursuit" (Psalm 59): The Hebrew preface to Psalm 59 reads, "...when Saul sent, and they watched the house to kill...." In this Psalm, the treachery of Saul's hired killers represent the entire company of the wicked who oppose God and justice. The poet moves from David's immediate confrontation with evil (59:1-4, 6-7) to the universal problem of evil (59:5, 8). The poem reaches beyond a plea for personal vengeance and calls for the eschatological judgment of God who will purge the earth. It expresses an ultimate faith in the God who alone is the fortress of the righteous. The righteous must "wait for God," that is, they must wait for his divine justice to be exercised. In the meantime, there is a positive factor in the saint's confrontation with evil, for if evil were removed immediately, the righteous might forget their dependence upon Yahweh (59:11). Adverse circumstances in no way diminished David's profound trust and regard for the sovereignty of Yahweh.

When David fled the courts of Saul, he went directly to Samuel at Ramah about two miles to the north. (The mention of Naioth probably refers to a quarter in Ramah where the fraternity of prophets lived). When Saul was informed of David's whereabouts, he sent three different companies of men to apprehend him, and when they each failed, he went himself. On each occasion, the groups of soldiers were moved by the Holy Spirit and joined the company of the prophesying prophets under Samuel's leadership. Prophecy, here, probably means that they were giving voluble praise to God (see 1 Chr. 25:1-3 for a similar use of the term "prophesy"). Saul also did the same, stripping off his royal robes (probably his outer garments) and lying in a trance.²⁶

²⁵Michal, like her ancestor Rachel (Ge. 31:19, 30-35; cf. 35:2), possibly kept some household gods without David's knowledge.

²⁶Ecstasism was a rather common phenomenon in the religions of the ancient world (and still is in the dervishes of the Middle East). It was expressed in dancing, trances, music, unrecognizable speech which was interpreted by another, and an intensely emotional state of mind. Whether or not such practices were also followed by Israel's early prophets is debated. Many scholars see strong parallels in such passages as Nu. 11:25-29; 1 Sa. 10:5-7; 18:10; 19:19-24; 1 Ki. 18:29; 22:6, 10-12; 2 Ki. 9:11; Je. 29:26. One must admit that the above passages indicate a heightened mental state in some sense, but we should make a clear line of separation between what occurred under the influence of the Holy Spirit and what occurred among pagan prophets. Granted, there are external resemblances at times, but the general thrust of prophecy in the OT is not in ecstatic experience but in speaking for God. While there is much discussion as to the etymology of the verb "to prophesy," it almost universally is agreed that it means "to speak for another" and usually to speak for Yahweh. For thorough discussions on this subject, see: H. Freeman,

David and Jonathan (1 Sa. 20)

1 Samuel 20 is an extended account of how David, through the help of Jonathan, preserved his life but became a confirmed outlaw. When Saul came to Ramah to capture David, David fled to Jonathan for counsel and assistance. Saul habitually discussed his intended plans with Jonathan, and so Jonathan agreed to inform David as to whether Saul's mad obsession was a temporary aberrance or a permanent one. Together, they entered into a covenant with appropriate oaths before Yahweh. They arranged a signal by which to communicate Jonathan's intelligence to David about Saul.²⁷

While David hid in a field, Jonathan fulfilled his promise to draw out the intentions of his father. In the altercation that followed, Saul became so inflamed that he attempted to kill his own son. Then Jonathan knew beyond any doubt that David must remain a fugitive as long as Saul was alive. He was angry and grieved, but there was no alternative except to warn David to flee permanently for his life.

At this point, David had no choice but to become a confirmed outlaw. He could not remain loyal to Saul else Saul would have him killed. He could not remain faithful to his military rank for the same reason. If he was to survive, he had to turn against the word of his king.

After Jonathan had given the signal of the long bowshot, he and David had a

An Introduction to the Old Testament Prophets (Chicago: Moody, 1968) 53-66; L. Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 90-112.

In the New Testament the Greek term for ecstasy is used several times, where it also indicates a heightened experience (Mk. 2:12; 5:42; 16:8; Lk. 5:26; Ac. 3:10; 10:10; 11:5; 22:1; 2 Co. 5:13). However, Paul instructs believers to clearly distinguish between what happens through paganism and what happens through the power of the Holy Spirit (1 Co. 12:1-3; 10; 14:37, 38).

²⁷The idea of covenant is very central in the OT, both in personal relationships and in Israel's relationship to Yahweh. A covenant is a solemn promise made binding by an oath, either verbally or symbolically. The most famous covenants in the OT are those God made with Abraham and the nation Israel at Sinai, but one also sees covenants confirmed between individuals at various times.

Closely associated with the idea of covenant is the Hebrew word *hesed* (= loyal love, faithfulness). Older translations usually translated this word as "mercy" or "lovingkindness," but while such definitions are not inaccurate, they do not do justice to the essence of the word in the context of covenantal or personal relationships. Even the translations "love" or "unfailing love," which one finds in the modern translations, while better, do not always give the complete idea. Primarily, *hesed* should be understood as covenant-love, that is, determined faithfulness to a covenant. The idea is not that of emotion but rather of keeping faith regardless of circumstances. *Hesed* is love that is strong, firm and steadfast. The *hesed* of God is not merely his mercy but his unbending loyalty to his covenantal obligations. In the psalms associated with David, *hesed* appears frequently in praise to Yahweh whose love will not fail. This is why David declares, "Your covenant-love is better than life" (Ps. 63:3).

Thus, the word *hesed*, as it appears in 1 Sa. 20:14, 15 is in the context of the covenant that David made with Jonathan. Years later, when David shows benevolence toward Jonathan's crippled son, Mephibosheth, his action is motivated by *hesed*, his covenant love (2 Sa. 9:1,7). For extensive background on the word *hesed*, see N. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946) 118-166; Harris, Archer & Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1980) I.305-307.

brief but anguished parting. No longer could they be free in their friendship. As far as the Scripture records, only once after this did David and Jonathan meet face to face, and that was when Jonathan sought out David in one of his many hideouts to encourage him in the Lord (1 Sa. 23:15-18).

David, the Outlaw: 1 Sa. 21-30

The remainder of the book of 1 Samuel gives a vivid and captivating account of David's struggle to subsist and survive while outlawed by his own king. It is a story of flight and pursuit -- David always one step ahead of his obsessed enemy. In this period of his life, David further endeared himself to the Israelites, especially the citizens of Judah. There are also six magnificent psalms associated with this period of David's life which speak of his absolute dependence upon God in times of harrowing difficulty.

David at Nob (1 Sa. 21:1-9)

After fleeing upon the impetus of Jonathan's warning, David passed through Nob, a village on the outskirts of Jebus (Jerusalem). Apparently, after the capture of the ark of the covenant and the destruction of Shiloh some years earlier (1 Sa. 4:11), the priests of Yahweh had fled to Nob (1 Sa. 22:19).²⁸ Ahimelech, the priest in charge, gave to David the left-over Bread of the Presence for food and Goliath's sword as a weapon. In addition, he sought Yahweh's will in David's behalf (1 Sa. 22:10-15), although apparently David's lack of forthrightness prevented Ahimelech from fully understanding David's circumstances (cf. 1 Sa. 22:15).

It is instructive to observe that although David transgressed the Mosaic law by eating the Bread of the Presence (Lv. 24:5-9), Jesus considered his action to be justifiable in the interests of survival (Lk. 6:2-4). This vindication seems to point toward a hierarchy of ethics in which human need is more important than legal or religious technicalities.

David at Gath (1 Sa. 21:10-15)

From Nob, David fled to Gath, one of the cities in the Philistine Pentapolis. He probably hoped to go unnoticed, but instead was soon recognized. Fearful for his life, the ever resourceful David feigned insanity, writing graffiti on the city gates and slobbering into his beard. In this way, he passed himself off as a harmless lunatic. Concerning this brief stay in Gath, two Psalms were composed.

"My Imprisonment by the Philistines in Gath" (Psalm 56): That David should

²⁸F. Gunner, *NBD*, (1962) 891-892.

have fled to Gath, the home of the slain Goliath, surely suggests the extremity to which he was pressed. Barred from his home and surrounded by foreign hostility that he dared not arouse, he was indeed in desperate straits! The panic following his discovery must have been devastating for David! The Philistines had not only lost a champion, they had suffered the ignominy of defeat at the hands of a shepherd lad. Their memories were still keen, and they were acutely aware of David's heroic popularity among the Israelites (cf. 1 Sa. 21:11). Psalm 56 is a striking poem that arises from David's arrest by the Philistines and his presentation before Achish, the tyrant of Gath.

In this poem, the poet recounts the unrelenting pursuit (56:1), the arrogant attacks (56:2), the constant harassment (56:5), and the ongoing conspiracy against him (56:6). The paradox in 56:3-4 is timeless: "I am afraid," and yet, "I will not be afraid." Human resources had utterly failed, and fear was real! Yet over this groundswell of fear there mounted a mighty confidence in the all-sufficiency of God. Twice the poet declared that he would not fear the attack of man (56:4, 11). This kind of faith is a deliberate faith that defies emotional terror!

As in Psalm 59, the present predicament becomes an analogy for the age-long struggle between the righteous and the wicked (56:7-9), a struggle that ultimately finds its answer in the Apocalypse (cf. Rv. 19:1-8). The final verses express thankfulness for God's deliverance. The statement in 56:12 suggests that David had made vows to God when in extreme duress, and he did not neglect to keep them when the danger was past!

"When I Feigned Insanity Before Abimelech" (Psalm 34): This psalm bears all the marks of jubilation after God's deliverance (cf. 34:4). The Hebrew title connects it with David's feigned insanity and subsequent escape from Gath to the cave of Adullam (cf. 1 Sa. 22:1). The reference to Yahweh's guardian angel (34:7) has long been a comfort to believers in their times of trouble.

The stanza beginning with 34:11 is taken by some to be David's proclamation to his men regarding the ethics by which they were to live while outlaws (1 Sa. 22:1, 2).²⁹ The passage in 34:18 may well speak of David's despair at his arrest and 34:20 of his deliverance from Gath. (Incidentally, 34:20 also becomes a messianic foreshadowing, if indeed this is the passage the evangelist had in mind, cf. Jn 19:36). The conclusion of the Psalm assures all who trust in Yahweh that they will not be condemned.

²⁹W. Scroggie, *The Psalms: Psalms I to CL* (Old Tappan, NJ: Revell, 1965) 197.

David at Adullam (22:1, 2; 1 Chr. 11:10--12:40)

After being expelled from the Philistine county, David escaped to the Judean wilderness and hid in the cave of Adullam, an encampment within ten miles of his Bethlehem home. While there, a band of followers began to grow around him. At first, it was apparently made up of relatives, but soon others who were fugitives, malcontents, political refugees and persons distressed for whatever reason gathered as well. Out of this motley group, David formed a tough fighting force of about 400 men. Until Saul's death, David led the life of a Robin Hood--the precarious existence of a bandit chief. He played a game, as John Bright has said, of "both ends against the middle, striking the Philistines as opportunity offered (23:1-5), dodging continually to escape the clutches of Saul (23:19--24:22; ch. 26), and meanwhile supporting himself by exacting 'protection' from wealthy citizens who could afford it (25:7ff., 15ff., 21)."³⁰

Psalm 142 is prefaced by the Hebrew title, "When he (David) was in the cave." From the tone of the poem, it is clear that David was beset by great loneliness before he was encircled by relatives and his band of 400. The final line of 142:4, "...no man cared for my soul," epitomizes the sense of emptiness and frustration that David must have felt in view of his exile from home and his lack of recourse even in neighboring lands. He was truly a man without a country.

My complaint (142:2): The idea behind this Hebrew word is not petulance nor petty griping but rather "troubled thoughts."³¹

When my spirit grows faint (142:3a): The TEV makes this idea vivid with the rendering, "When I am ready to give up..."

You know my way (142:3b): David's conviction that God knew his pathway of distress echoes the words of Job (cf. Job 23:10). Such a conviction is the believer's ultimate resource. When he is ready to surrender to the opposing forces, he/she is supported by the fact that God is fully aware. God's awareness of his children's suffering implies that in the end he will balance the score and give justice.

My portion (142:5) is another way of saying "everything I want."

My prison (142:7a) is probably a metaphor for David's seemingly hopeless circumstances.

The righteous will gather (142:7b) refers to the thanksgiving to be offered by David's friends when he is finally acquitted. It may even suggest a coronation assembly, and if so, would be David's anticipation that God's promises of kingship

³⁰J. Bright, *A History of Israel*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 189.

³¹D. Kidner, *Psalms 73-150* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1975) 473.

anticipated by Samuel's anointing were certainties.³²

David Secures Safety for his Family (22:3-5)

Saul had apparently defeated Moab, a nation in the transjordan, a few years earlier (cf. 1 Sa. 14:47). Possibly David felt that the Moabites would be a suitable hideout for fugitives from Saul. Probably more important, Moab was the home of David's grandmother (cf. Ru. 4:13-21). In any case, David determined to remove his family from any possible reprisals from Saul. What route he took to Moab is unknown, but after the move was made, the prophet Gad advised David not to stay in Moab but to go back into the teeth of the lion--back to Judah--which he did. He returned to the Forest of Hereth (unknown location to us today).

Saul Butchers the Priests at Nob (22:6-23)

This narrative describes one of the most barbaric acts committed in an age already marked by cruelty. The picture of Saul in 22:6-8 is graphic in its portrayal of a man whose obsession had driven him over the brink of sanity. He sits in his court, spear in hand, suspicious of his retainers, petulant about Jonathan's friendship with David, and spewing forth accusations of treason against David. What had been said about false accusations was not idle speculation (cf. Ps. 59:7, 12; 56:2, 5)!

It is at this point that the reader is introduced to a figure whose name becomes almost synonymous with treachery and barbarism, Doeg the Edomite. If we are to understand Psalm 52 as descriptive of Doeg, he was a wealthy man who accumulated his wealth by oppressing others (52:7). He was Saul's chief shepherd and had been present on the day that David had received aid from Ahimelech (21:7; 22:22). Doeg now volunteered what he had seen to Saul. Since David was no longer at Nob, there seems to have been no reason for Doeg to have made such an exposure except his dastardly nature. Saul, with revenge in his heart, sent for Ahimelech and the priests.

Ahimelech's attempts at self defense were quickly rebuffed. Saul called for a mass execution. However, his own retainers recoiled at the command to strike down the innocent priests of Yahweh in a cold-blooded massacre. It was left to Doeg, who performed the deed with relish. That day Doeg butchered eighty-five unarmed clergymen. As if that were not enough, he further butchered the town of Nob, killing men, women, children, infants and livestock. Only one man escaped, Abiathar, a son of Ahimelech and the high priestly successor to his father. From the atrocity at Nob, Abiathar fled to David, presumably bringing with him the ephod

³²Kidner, 474.

and the Urim and Thummin.³³ When he reported the massacre to David, David responded with deep grief over the murder of the priests and the realization that he was at least partly responsible (cf. 22:22). Associated with the atrocity at Nob is Psalm 52.

Psalm 52 is no faint cry for help. It is a strident denunciation of the arrogant and evil Doeg. With biting sarcasm, the poet describes Doeg's absorption with his own cleverness and the irony of his "mightiness" --the sickening "mightiness" of one who butchers unarmed men, women and babies (52:1). Doeg's depraved character is graphically outlined (52:2-4), and the certainty of God's vengeance is described (52:5-7). By way of contrast, the poem closes with a renewal of the poet's confidence in God's *hesed* (= unfailing covenant love). He compares himself to an olive tree, one of the world's longest living trees, which will flourish eternally.

David Saves Keilah (23:1-6)

Keilah was a walled town nestled in the shephelah, the rolling hills between the Philistine coastal plain and the central highlands of Israeli occupation. As such, it was squarely in the path of any Philistine raids toward Israel. The Philistines had been kept in check as long as David led Israel against them, but now that David was himself a fugitive, the Philistines seized their opportunity. They attacked Keilah, and Saul did not even attempt to come to the defense of this village in his own territory.

When David heard the news, he asked directions from Yahweh. After receiving assurance that God would give them victory, David defended Keilah and rescued it.

³³When Abiathar the high priest came to David after the murder of his father, he brought with him the sacred ephod to which was attached the high priest's breastplate with a small pouch carrying the Urim and Thummin (cf. Ex. 28:30; Lv. 8:8). By Urim and Thummin, the high priest could ascertain God's purpose for Israel's leader and the people (cf. Nu. 27:21; Dt. 33:8). It is through this means that David "inquired of the Lord" (1 Sa. 23:2, 4, 9ff.).

The kind of questions asked, that is direct questions requiring a simple affirmative or negative answer (cf. 1 Sa. 23:2, 9-12), suggest that Urim and Thummin were a form of casting lots, possibly tossed from the pouch or drawn out by the high priest (cf. 1 Sa. 14:3, 41). It may be noted, however, that the use of Urim and Thummin was not simply mechanical, for on occasion God refused to speak by this means (cf. 1 Sa. 28:6).

No place in the OT details the exact nature and use of Urim and Thummin. Josephus suggested that a supernatural light played in the gems of the high priest's breastplate and gave the answer in response to questions, cf. *Antiquities* III.8. Another possibility is that Urim and Thummin were flat stones, each bearing a positive and a negative response on their respective sides. Thus, a double affirmative was needed for a clear "yes," a double negative for a clear "no," and a "no reply" for a mixed response, cf. J. Motyer, *NBD* (1962) 1306.

Saul Pursues David in the Desert Wastelands (23:7-29)

Saul's obsession to apprehend David now became even more intense. News of David's defense of Keilah reached him, and he determined to lay siege to the city until David was captured. Two things especially point up Saul's irrationality. One was that he refused to accept the fact that Yahweh was now against him (cf. 23:7, 21). The other was his willingness to attack a city within his own territory, a city of one of Israel's own clans, in his eagerness to destroy David.

As for David, he asked direction from God by Urim and Thummin, and God advised him to leave Keilah for the sake of the city and for his own safety. By this time, his band of 400 had grown to 500, and they all left Keilah and continued shifting locations to avoid Saul.

In Scripture, the words "desert" and "wilderness" include not only wastelands of sand, dune and rock but also steppe and pasture lands used for grazing livestock. This sort of geography is liberally sprinkled throughout Judea, especially as one approaches the rift valley containing the Jordan and the Dead Sea. It is here that David hid as Saul searched for him daily.

While hiding in the Desert of Ziph, Jonathan made a daring visit to help David "find strength in God." Jonathan's spiritual maturity, his loyalty to his covenant with David, and his willingness to be consigned by God's will to a supporting role is unparalleled in the OT.

The natives of the Desert of Ziph were loyalists to Saul. They consequently betrayed David's hideout and promised Saul that if he would come, they would hand David over. Saul agreed and almost captured his avowed enemy. However, a providential raid by the Philistines drove Saul back to his western borders, and David escaped once again.

"My Betrayal to Saul by the Ziphites" (Psalm 54): When David was betrayed by Doeg, there was hardly cause for surprise. Now, however, he had been betrayed by the Ziphites, people of his own Judean tribe. This betrayal had to be bitterly disappointing.

The reference to God's name is a synecdoche (54:1), that is, a figure of speech in which a part is used for the whole (God's name represents God himself). The word "vindicate" is a legal term. David is not just asking for safety, but for justice. The word "strangers" (54:3) need not mean that David did not know the Ziphites but that they were behaving as strangers toward him. The final lines (54:6-7) anticipate God's deliverance. The significance of the freewill offering is that an offering was made without it being required, since no vow had been made. David did not bargain with God and say, "If you will save me, I will bring an offering." His offering arose out of his deep thankfulness, not a sense of obligation.

David Spares Saul's Life (24:1-22)

En-gedi is a fresh-water spring in the barren wastelands on the shores of the Dead Sea. After his narrow escape in Ziph, David and his men hid out there. Saul was soon pursuing David again, this time with an army of 3000. By chance, he entered the very cave where David and his men were hiding, and David adroitly cut off a corner of Saul's robe without Saul knowing it.³⁴ Out of his deep respect for Saul's office,³⁵ David refused to allow his men to harm Saul.

When David discovered himself to Saul, he graciously gave Saul the benefit of the doubt as though Saul was the victim of false information (24:9). However, in reality it was Saul himself who apparently concocted the story that David was out to ambush him (cf. 22:7, 8, 13). Saul was now in the most awkward of positions. He had assured his retainers that David was a dangerous assassin only waiting for an opportunity to murder the king. Now David, in full view of Saul's regiment, laid bare the truth. He had publicly called for the justice of Yahweh in the presence of hundreds of witnesses. Saul had little choice but to acknowledge David's innocence.

Whether or not his tears and repentance were sincere (and there is substantial reason for believing that they were not), Saul at least acknowledged David's righteousness and selection by Yahweh to be the next king. In response, David gave his oath: when he came to power, he would not utterly destroy Saul's family.

Psalm 57: Psalm 57 is prefaced by the caption, "When he (David) had fled from Saul into the cave." The beautiful metaphor of the "shadow of God's wings" symbolizes the divine protection in which David trusted. David was wise enough not to depend upon Saul's apparent change of heart. He knew that the present danger was not over, and he relied wholly upon God Most High.

It is significant that in the midst of all his trouble, David confidently saw God's purpose for himself being fulfilled (57:2).³⁶ How easy it would have been in

³⁴The KJV contains a very literal translation (cf. 24:3), when it says: "Saul went in to cover his feet." This rendering has led many to assume that Saul entered the cave to sleep. However, the expression "to cover the feet" is an ancient euphemism for relieving oneself (cf. Jg. 3:24) cf. J. Gray, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth [NCB]* (London: Nelson, 1967) 265. The Living Bible quite correctly paraphrases this: "Saul went into a cave to go to the bathroom."

³⁵The expression David uses for Saul's office of kingship is *meshiah* (= the anointed, the messiah). It is used both here (24:6, 10) and elsewhere (1 Sa. 12:3, 5; 16:6; 26:9, 11, 16, 23; 2 Sa. 1:14, 16; 19:21) as a title for Israel's king. Later, of course, the title messiah will have tremendous significance in the ministry of Jesus of Nazareth, cf. D. Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1981) 236-252.

³⁶There is some question as to how this phrase should be rendered, but the idea of God's purpose being fulfilled is to be found in both the NIV and the RSV.

times of difficulty to say either that one had strayed from God's purpose of else lacked faith for victory. David, to the contrary, realized that God's purpose was sometimes fulfilled as one passed through hard times. God's ultimate purpose, of course, is not that his people experience defeat. The statement in 57:3 explains God's purpose as saving, vindicating and loving his people. Nevertheless, hard times become part of the formula by which God reveals himself.

Thus, in spite of vicious enemies, the poet declared, "My heart is steadfast." The beautiful figure of speech, "I will awaken the dawn," should be taken to mean that he would arise before the sunrise to symbolically "awaken" it with his music of thanksgiving. The poem closes with a reference to God's great *hesed* (= covenant love, 57:10).

David is Prevented from Avenging Himself (25:1-44)

Samuel was now dead, and the next episode in David's outlaw career concerned his relationship with a wealthy rancher, a descendent of Caleb who lived in the vicinity of David's hide-out.

David and his men had been acting as a "protection" force for the sheep-shearers of Nabal³⁷ (25:7, 14-16, 21), and it is probable that they rendered the same service to other ranchers of the area. Bedouin robbers were not uncommon, and in fact David's band of men would not have been perceived as greatly different than other nomadic groups who were dangerous to the indigenous farmers. It was customary for such groups, when they did not resort to plunder, to expect some sort of tribute in return.³⁸ Furthermore, at the time of shearing it was customary to give provisions to neighbors who were in need.³⁹

Consequently, David sent an ambassador to Nabal to collect what he felt was due to him. Of course, David's "protection" service had not been sanctioned by Nabal, and he was unwilling to pay for services he had not ordered. Nabal not only refused to aid David, he insulted him as well. The statement, "Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days," is an indirect way of calling David a rebel and a runaway slave. When David heard this, a wave of revenge rose up in him. With two-thirds of his force, he determined to repay Nabal's insolence with execution.

In the meantime, word came to Abigail, Nabal's wife, of her husband's meanness. She well understood the inevitable retaliation which threatened, so

³⁷The name Nabal means "fool" or "churl," that is, a rude, stingy, ill-bred person. Abigail's statement in 25:25 is a play on words.

³⁸C. Pfeiffer, *Old Testament History* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973) 258.

³⁹Pfeiffer, 258.

quickly, without Nabal's knowledge, she gathered a gift of food staples for David's men and set out to find them. They met abruptly in a mountain ravine -- Abigail with her supply train and David with his fighting force. With the utmost diplomacy, Abigail appeased David's anger and turned him aside from his vengeful passion. The thrust of her argument was that David must avoid avenging himself. Such an appeal was in line with David's better nature in any case, for not only had David expressed the same ethic to Saul (24:12), the concept of divine deliverance as opposed to self-deliverance is implicit in the various psalms connected with this period (Ps. 34, 52, 54, 56, 57, 59, 142). Even Moses had expressed the same ideal (Dt. 32:35). Thus, David was prevented from taking vengeance into his own hands.

When Abigail broke the news to her husband of his narrow escape, he apparently suffered a paralytic stroke. Ten days later he died.

Word came to David of Nabal's decease, and David lost no time in sending for the beautiful, wealthy and intelligent widow (cf. 25:3). Such a marriage was advantageous not only in domestic terms, but also for social, political and remunerative reasons.

David's first wife, Michal, had been remarried by her father to Paltiel (though David would later retrieve her, cf. 2 Sa. 3:12-16). David had also by this time acquired another wife, Ahinoam from Jezreel (a local Judean village).⁴⁰

David Spares Saul's Life Once Again (26:1-25)

Saul's apparent contrition over his attempts to kill David was short-lived. Once again, at the invitation of the Ziphite loyalists, he came to the Desert of Ziph to continue his obsessive search. David, of course, was not caught by surprise. By night he took with him Abishai, one of his officers who was a deadly fighter (cf. 2 Sa. 23: 18, 19; 1 Chr. 11:20, 21), and together they slipped through the sentries to the very side of the sleeping Saul. David once more refused to harm Saul but instead took his spear and water jug. After withdrawing to a safe distance, David confronted Abner, Saul's cousin and commander in chief (cf. 1 Sa. 14:50), with the evidence of their visit. Saul, now fully awake, recognized David's voice. Once again, he promised to break off his pursuit. As far as the biblical record shows, this

⁴⁰The word polygamy means "many wives," and the practice of polygamy was not uncommon in the cultures of the ancient Near East. The earliest recorded occasion in the Bible is among the descendents of Cain (Ge. 4:19), but it was also practiced by such notables as Abraham and Jacob as well as others among the Israelite clans. While there is no specific injunction against polygamy in the OT, there is an implicit pattern against it in the creation account (Ge. 2:21-24). Under Mosaic law, certain statutes at least presupposed the practice of polygamy without necessarily endorsing it (i.e., Dt. 21:15-17). Probably, most Israelites practiced monogamy, if not from moral scruples, at least from the standpoint of financial capacity. In later times, the Talmud fixed the number of wives a man might have (four if he were a subject, eighteen if he were a king). Jesus, of course, made clear that God's purpose has been monogamy from the beginning (Mt. 19:4-6), cf. R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Social Institutions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965) I.24ff.

was the last personal confrontation between David and Saul.⁴¹

David Becomes a Philistine Vassal (27:1-12)

There was no way that David could trust the mercurial Saul, and outlaw life was becoming unbearable, especially with his own two wives to protect as well as the others. Therefore, David determined to offer himself and his retinue to the Philistines as a warrior vassal. He went to Achish, the warlord over Gath, to offer his services.⁴² Gath was the farthest city east of the Philistine pentapolis and the closest to the Israeli borders. Achish gave David the city of Ziklag for a military base.

David's vassalship was a dangerous move, for it would immediately throw David under suspicion of disloyalty to his own people. Therefore, David was careful to avoid any hostilities toward Israel. He raided various Canaanite enclaves in the nearby Negev,⁴³ always careful to leave no survivors and always allowing Achish to think that he was attacking Israel. These campaigns, in effect, continued the conquests begun by Joshua. To be sure, the other Philistine warlords were suspicious (cf. 1 Sa. 29:1-4), but Achish trusted David implicitly.

David is Spared from Battle Against His Own People (28:1-2; 29:1-11)

Now that David was gone from Judah, and the southern hill country seemed reasonably secure for Israel, the focus of the Philistine wars shifted north to the Plain of Jezreel (also known as the Plain of Esdraelon, 29:1).⁴⁴ It is not completely clear why this shift occurred. Possibly Saul wished to bring the areas north of

⁴¹The similarity between this story and the one in Chapter 24 have led many critics to argue that one story was derived from the other or else both were derived from the same tradition and redacted in different ways, cf. P. McCarter, Jr., *1 Samuel [AB]* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980) 386-387. For a detailed comparison between the accounts, see R. Klein, *1 Samuel [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1983) 236-237. However, there are some rather notable differences between the two accounts as well, and there is no reason to suppose that two similar incidents could not have happened during Saul's pursuit of David, cf. L. Porter, "1 and 2 Samuel," *IBC* (1986) 371.

⁴²The Philistines lived as a military aristocracy and often used mercenaries and indigenous Canaanites to fight in their wars. Thus, it was not a novelty for David to offer his services as a military vassal. It was in keeping with standard practices already in effect, cf. J. Greenfield, "Philistines," *IDB* (1962) III.792.

⁴³The Negev, the area in which most of David's raids occurred while he was a Philistine vassal, is a triangular shaped steppe land to the south of Judea. It is conducive to dry farming and irrigation (annual rainfall is less than 5 inches), cf. E. Blaiklock, *The Zondervan Pictorial Bible Atlas* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1969) 21, 11. See also, O. Borowski, "The Negev--the Southern Stage for Biblical History," *BR* (Jun. 1989 Vol. V, No. 3) 40-44.

⁴⁴Esdraelon (the Greek form of the name Jezreel) was a crucial geographic area in northern Israel. A low, nearly flat plateau, it stretched between Mt. Carmel on the Mediterranean to Beth-shan overlooking the Jordan Valley. Notable battles were fought here, because whoever controlled Esraelon controlled the North (cf. Jos. 17:16-18; Jg. 6:33ff). The Philistines had already dealt Israel a crushing blow here in the previous generation when they captured the sacred ark (1 Sa. 14:1ff), and about four centuries later, Josiah would die here while trying to prevent Pharaoh Necho II from joining forces with the Assyrians (2 Chr. 35:2-24). Megiddo is here also, the site made famous in the Apocalypse of John as Armageddon (Re. 16:16).

Esraelon into unity with the south, and such a plan would entail gaining control of the crucial geography of the Jezreel Plain which was under Philistine control.⁴⁵ On the other hand, perhaps the Philistines, after being thwarted in the Judean mountains, determined to invade the northern plain where their chariots could function with greater efficiency. Perhaps they could deliver a knockout blow to Israel there.⁴⁶ In any case, there was a mobilization of the Philistine and Israeli armies in the north.

Such a circumstance immediately put David, a Philistine mercenary, in an awkward position. His surreptitious raids into the Negev were halted, and the call came for him to mobilize his men with the Philistine armies. Would David fight on the side of the Philistines against his own countrymen? Or, would he turn in the midst of the battle and double-cross his Philistine lord? That the latter possibility did not escape the Philistine generals is apparent in 1 Samuel 29. They were not about to give to David the crucial position in the rearguard (29:2) if there was a chance that he might turn against them. If such a thing happened, the Philistines would discover themselves to be in a crushing pincer with Saul on one side and David on the other. Their route of escape would be totally blocked. Therefore, in spite of Achish's testimony to David's loyalty, the Philistine commanders sent David back to Ziklag. This course of action was no doubt wise, for David had been careful not to commit himself against his own people. His words, "Then you will see for yourself what your servant can do" (28:2), are a masterpiece of non-commitment!

David Destroys the Amalekites (30:1-31)⁴⁷

The respite from the Philistine-Israeli war to the north was short-lived. David and his men returned to Ziklag only to find that the city had been sacked and burned during their absence. The citizens had been taken for slaves. To add to the precariousness of the situation, David's men were on the verge of mutiny. Only in God could David find strength!

After inquiring of Yahweh through Urim and Thummin, David marshaled his forces and set out on a grueling march into the Negev. At the Besor Ravine, he was forced to leave behind a third of his men, who were physically spent, but with the others he pressed on. Providentially, the army discovered an abandoned slave who

⁴⁵F. Bruce, *Israel and the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) 27.

⁴⁶Bright, 189, 190 (see especially footnote 27).

⁴⁷The Amalekites were a semi-nomadic clan inhabiting areas of the Negev and the Sinai peninsula. Descendants of Esau (Ge. 36:10-12), the Amalekites harried Israel during the Exodus (Ex. 17:8ff.), were condemned by Balaam (Nu. 24:20), were marked for destruction by Moses (Dt. 25:19), and formed coalitions with the Moabites, Ammonites and Midianites against Israel in the days of the Tribal League (Jg. 3:12-14; 6:3-5, 33; 7:12; 10:11, 12). The Amalekites, of course, were the object of Saul's war in which he disobeyed Yahweh's instructions (cf. 1 Sa. 15), G. Landes, "Amalek," *IDB* (1962) I.101-102.

led them to the Amalekite encampment. David immediately attacked and was victorious, just as Yahweh had promised. Everyone and everything was recovered plus more besides.

After settling a dispute among his men over the division of the booty, David determined to make the best advantage out of his captured plunder. He sent a portion of the booty to each of thirteen towns in Judah, where he had received friendly assistance in the preceding months.⁴⁸ Such generosity would have assured the clans of Judah that David was still on their side in spite of his Philistine vassalship. Furthermore, it would pave the way for a great deal of local support in view of David's upcoming kingship.

The Death of Saul (2 Sa. 1:1-27)

Circumstances in David's outlaw career were now converging toward a climax. In the decisive battle at Jezreel, from which David was spared, the armies of Israel were routed (31:1). During the Israeli retreat, Saul's sons were killed, and Saul himself was critically wounded (31:2,3). He resorted to suicide in order to cut short his misery (31:4-6).

Three days after David returned from his raid on the Amalekites, he was confronted by a refugee of the northern battle who reported to him the deaths of Saul and his sons. This refugee, an Amalekite himself, even claimed to have given to Saul the final death blow, although in view of the account in 1 Samuel 31 there is reason to doubt his story. In any case, he was probably there shortly after Saul's expiration, for he was the first to strip the dead and brought to David Saul's crown and bracelet. If the Amalekite had thought to win David's favor by claiming to have killed Saul, he made a poor judgment. David immediately had him executed.

The ode in 2 Sa. 1:19-27, which David composed in honor of Saul and Jonathan, is one of the most moving pieces of poetry in the OT. It is called the "Lament of the Bow," a title which probably indicates that it was a martial ode inasmuch as the bow was a symbol of war, and especially a weapon skillfully mastered by Saul's clan, the Benjamites (cf. 1 Ch. 8:40; 12:1,2; 2 Ch. 14:8; 17:17).⁴⁹ All the men of Judah were required to memorize it from the Book of Jashar.⁵⁰ The

⁴⁸For information concerning the archaeological work at the site Aroer, mentioned in 1 Sa. 30:26-31, see A. Biran, "And David Sent Spoils...to the Elders in Aroer," *BAR* (Mar./Apr. 1983) 28-37.

⁴⁹Keil and Delitzsch, 288-289.

⁵⁰It is evident that the historical books of the OT were composed with the aid of already existing documents which are referenced in various passages. These sources have long since been lost to us, but their titles can at least be listed from the OT citations:

*Book of the Kings of Judah and Israel (2 Ch. 25:26, etc.)

*Book of the Acts of Solomon (1 Ki. 11:41)

*Book of the Acts of the Kings of Israel (1 Ki. 14:19)

elegy is arranged in three strophes, each opening with the exclamation, "How the mighty have fallen" (1:19-24; 1:25-26; 1:27). It voices the bitterness of defeat (1:20), it curses the scene of the battle (1:21),⁵¹ and it lauds the heroism of Saul and Jonathan (1:22-23). It calls for Israel's lament (1:24) and expresses David's deep grief at the loss of his closest friend (1:25-26).

The death of Saul created a political vacuum with serious implications. The Philistines were unafraid to follow up their advantage and once more pushed deep into the central mountains (2 Sa. 5:17ff.; cf. 34:14). Furthermore, a standard procedure for the transition of power had not yet been established in Israel. Saul's kingship was not completely unlike the *shophetim* who were before him, and they, of course, became judges for reasons apart from genealogical considerations. As the ensuing events make clear, the principle of dynastic succession was not well accepted in Israel at this early date. Finally, Yahweh's choice of David to be the next king was not a complete secret (1 Sa. 24:20; 25:28, 30; 28:16-17), and this meant that a dynastic succession for Saul's family would not be automatic. All these reasons combined to produce political instability.

The Relationship Between the Books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles

The early form of the books which we know as 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles was somewhat different than we are accustomed to seeing in our English Bibles. Originally, there were only three volumes, Samuel, Kings and Chronicles. In the Septuagint, the Jewish translation of the OT into Greek, the three books were divided into the Books of 1, 2, 3 and 4 Kingdoms (Samuel and Kings in 4 divisions) and 1 and 2 Chronicles. In the Latin Vulgate, the four divisions within the Books of Kingdoms were finalized into our present form.

It may also be noted that the placement of these books was different in the Hebrew canon. While Samuel and Kings were together in a section called the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, Samuel and Kings), the Chronicles were at the end of the Hebrew Bible due to their late composition. The books may be harmonized, at least generally, in the following manner:

*Book of the Acts of the Kings of Judah (1 Ki. 14:29)

*Book of the Wars of Yahweh (Nu. 21:14)

*Book of Jashar or Book of the Upright (Jos. 10:13; 2 Sa. 1:18)

The Book of Jashar was probably a collection of ancient national songs with themes on war and may have originated as early as the sojourn in the wilderness (Jos. 10:13), cf. O. Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 132-134; R. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 670.

⁵¹The exact significance of the practice of rubbing shields with oil is unclear, but it at least seems to denote customary care.

1 Samuel: The careers of Samuel and Saul and the rise of David

2 Samuel parallels 1 Chronicles: David's kingship

1 & 2 Kings parallels 2 Chronicles: Solomon's kingship, the division of the kingdom, the histories of Israel and Judah, the careers of Elijah and Elisha, and the decline and fall of Israel and Judah.

The Civil War: 2 Samuel 2-4

The next seven and a half years (cf. 2 Sa. 2:11) marks a period of civil war in which the family of David and the family of Saul struggled for political supremacy. The political instability which remained after the death of Saul was not easily resolved. The account of the civil war is detailed only in 2 Samuel. 1 Chronicles simply summarizes the transition by saying, "Yahweh turned the kingdom over to David ben Jesse" (10:14).

David Becomes King of Judah (2:1-7)

It is noteworthy that even when David's greatest opportunity for political success was upon the threshold, he still moved only after inquiring of Yahweh. At Yahweh's word, David relocated from Ziklag to Hebron, the central and principle city of Judah. This move marked the end of his outlaw career. Soon after, David's kindness to the clans of Judah in protecting their livestock and in dividing the Amalekite booty with them bore fruit. They anointed him king over Judah. The writer of 2 Samuel does not comment on how this circumstance was perceived by the Philistines to whom David was a vassal. Such a silence suggests that they still regarded David as one of their own. The fact that David's family would become a hostile rival to Saul's family for control of the nation would not have been unwelcome to the Philistines.⁵²

David's first act as king was both gracious and advantageous. When the corpse of Saul had been discovered at Gilboa, the Philistines had mutilated it and exhibited it for public shame (1 Sa. 31:8-10). The clan of Jabesh Gilead in the transjordan, who had earlier been rescued by Saul (1 Sa. 11), performed a heroic feat. They retrieved Saul's body, cremated it, and buried the bones (1 Sa. 31:11-13). In honor of this heroism, David sent an official embassy to express admiration for their loyalty to Saul. At the same time, he gave an implicit call for them to be loyal to him, the newly crowned king of Judah. Without doubt, David's intentions were toward national unity.

⁵²F. Bruce, *Israel and the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) 28.

Ish-Bosheth Becomes King of Israel (2:8-11)

Unfortunately, David's designs for national unity were met by a stubborn remnant of Saul's family. Abner, Saul's cousin (1 Sa. 14:50,51), determined to keep his family in control. He quickly organized a coronation for Ish-Bosheth⁵³ at Mahanaim in the Transjordan. It seems apparent, however, that the real driving force in Saul's family was Abner himself, the man behind the throne, while Ish-Bosheth was little more than Abner's "stooge."⁵⁴

Ish-Bosheth's claim was over a rather vast territory (2:9), but the claim cannot be understood as much more than a boast. At best, his government was a refugee court away from the center of his claimed territory and well out of reach of his Philistine enemies, not to mention David and Judah.⁵⁵

The Gladiatorial Contest at Gibeon (2:12-16)

The aggressor in the civil war seems clearly to have been Abner, who gathered up Saul's refugee army and moved them to Gibeon, a city in Benjamin near the border of Judah. David's general, Joab, mobilized David's army for defense. The two armies met at the Pool of Gibeon.⁵⁶ Upon their arrival, the two opposing generals agreed to a gladiatorial duel between a dozen young soldiers from each side. Just what was supposed to be decided by such a war game is uncertain. The selection of twelve soldiers from each army might possibly have signified that the winner would gain dominion over all the tribes of Israel, but whatever the case, all of the young men perished in combat, and there was no certain outcome except that the incident served to initiate a major battle. The bloody duel earned the place a special name, "The Field of Sharp Edges."

The Rout of Abner's Army (2:17-32)

David's men defeated Abner's army so that Abner and his men were forced to flee. In the melee that followed, one of David's men, Asahel, the brother of Joab, set himself to catch the escaping field commander. Although Abner gave him full

⁵³The original name of Saul's surviving son was Esh-Baal, which means "fire of Baal" (1 Chr. 8:33; 9:39), but by popular designation, he became known as Ish-Bosheth which means "man of shame," cf. A. Edersheim, *Bible History* (rpt. Wilmington, DE: Associated Publishers and Authors, n.d.) 308.

⁵⁴B. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 2nd. ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966) 140.

⁵⁵J. Bright, *A History of Israel*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 191.

⁵⁶Since 1959, J. B. Pritchard has excavated the area of Gibeon and has uncovered what is probably the very pool to which the author of 2 Samuel refers. Hebrew inscriptions on the handles of the clay pots found in the dig give the exact name (Gibeon). The pool is a rather large one, measuring some 35' deep and about 37' in diameter, with stairs descending toward the bottom, cf. J. Thompson, *The Bible and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) 100. For an excellent color picture of the Pool of Gibeon and general information on how ancient Israelite water tunnels were constructed and worked, see D. Cole, "How Water Tunnels Worked," *BAR* (Mar./Apr. 1980) 8-29.

warning, Asahel would not desist and was killed for his efforts. At last, Abner's scattered army made a final stand and called for a truce. The truce was effected, and Abner's army went home to Ish-Bosheth's court. The battle casualties were lopsided. David lost only 20 men, while Abner lost 360.

David's Harem Increases (3:1-5; 1 Chr. 3:1-4a)

As the civil war dragged on, David's clan became stronger and Saul's clan became weaker. An important indication of David's strength was the increase of his harem.⁵⁷ By this time, David had accumulated six wives, and in a society which tolerated polygamy, a large harem was indicative of wealth and station.⁵⁸ Such marriages would have connected David with powerful Israeli families,⁵⁹ and at least one of the marriages, the one to Maacah the daughter of Talmi, king of Geshur, was a political alliance with a foreign king. Geshur was a city in Syria to the northeast of Bashan (Jos. 12:4, 5; 2 Sa. 15:8), and it was strategically located on the far side of Ish-bosheth's claimed territory, thus effectively containing him.

Abner Defects to David (3:6-21)

Israel's civil war was now reaching a climax. Although open fighting had ceased, David's position was becoming increasingly secure while Ish-Bosheth's was becoming increasingly fragile (3:1). David's new ally, Talmi the king of Geshur, effectively kept Ish-Bosheth boxed in from the north (3:3). Apparently, powerful families in Ish-Bosheth's kingdom were privately wishing to recognize David's kingship (3:17). Abner's hands were full trying to hold Ish-Bosheth's refugee kingdom together (3:6). The situation at last came to a climax when Ish-Bosheth accused Abner of having sexual relations with a surviving concubine of Saul. Whether Abner did so or not, the text does not say, but at least the suspicion of such an act indicates that Ish-Bosheth feared that Abner had designs on the throne (cf. 2 Sa. 16:21, 22; 1 Ki. 1:1-4; 2:20-22).⁶⁰ In any event, Abner became furious and

⁵⁷The names of David's sons in many ways reflect his station in life and his implicit faith in Yahweh. As is generally true, the names listed here have Hebrew meanings, though in one or two cases the meaning is questionable, cf. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel* (Waco, TX: Word, 1989) 49-50.

Amnon = Faithful

Ileab = The Father Prevails (?); also named Daniel = God is My Judge (cf. 1 Chr. 3:1)

Absalom = The Father is Peace

Adonijah = Yahweh is Lord

Shephatiah = Yahweh has Judged

Ithream = Left Over (?)

⁵⁸R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Social Institutions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965) I.115.

⁵⁹Edersheim, 309.

⁶⁰Edersheim, 309. In a society which tolerated polygamy, concubines were second-class wives. They may have

threatened to defect to David. Impotent in the face of Abner's rage, Ish-Bosheth cowered in silence.

To make good his threat, Abner began negotiating with David so as to transfer Ish-Bosheth's claim to his rival. David made only one demand--that his first wife Michal should be restored to him (cf. 1 Sa. 25:44). This demand was met, though to the understandable consternation of Paltiel, her second husband. Immediately, Abner began conferring with Israel's influential family heads (elders) and with Saul's own clan, the Benjamites. When the transfer of power was ready to be made, he went to Hebron, David's capital, with the news.

Abner is Killed by Joab (3:22-39)

To understand this next section, it is necessary first to recall two important facts. First, Abner had killed Asahel, the brother of both Joab and Abishai, in an act of self defense (2 Sa. 2:18-23). Second, unless Abner remained in a city of refuge, he was liable to retaliation by Asahel's brothers, Joab and Abishai, in legal vengeance.⁶¹

When Joab, David's general, heard that Abner had defected to David, he was immediately suspicious. It is unclear whether or not his proclaimed fear for national security was justified, but it is certain that his bitterness over the death of his brother was never far from the surface. When David refused to listen to him, Joab took matters into his own hands. Without David's knowledge, he recalled Abner to Hebron and killed him at the city gate.

Joab's treachery, while technically lawful, could hardly have happened at a worse time. The entire negotiation between David and Israel to the north was jeopardized by this act of violence. David was quick to disclaim any part in the deed, not only from a personal standpoint, but also from a political one. To reinforce his abhorrence of Abner's death, David pronounced a curse on Joab's family. On the day of the funeral, he called for a national fast. David himself followed the funeral procession and composed a dirge in honor of the deceased. These extra efforts did not go unnoticed. The people's confidence in David's

been slave wives, either purchased or received as gifts, or they may have been war captives. There was a clear social distinction between wives and concubines (cf. Ge. 21:9, 10; Jg. 8:29-31). While polygamy was tolerated, it was clearly not ideal. The ideal marriage, even in the OT, was monogamous (Ge. 2:24; Pro. 31:10ff.; Mal. 2:14-16), cf. J. Thompson, "Concubine," *The New Bible Dictionary*, ed. J. Douglas (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962) 246.

⁶¹When an Israelite was guilty of manslaughter, he could be punished by death by the nearest male relative in the victim's family. However, six cities were provided to which such a person might flee and live in safety from the avenger. This law effectively distinguished between manslaughter and murder. Murder required capital punishment. Manslaughter was also serious -- serious enough so that it might be avenged -- but not so serious that the guilty person was without relief (Nu. 35:6a, 9-28). When Joshua's conquest was near an end, six cities of refuge were established (Jos. 20:1-9; 21:13, 21, 27, 32, 38). Ironically, David's new capital in Hebron was one of these cities, and it is just outside of Hebron that Abner was killed.

integrity was restored (3:36-37). He was in no way connected with the death of Abner.

The Assassination of Ish-Bosheth (4:1-12)

The final blow to Ish-Bosheth's refugee government was the assassination of Ish-Bosheth himself. Without Abner as the power behind the throne, Ish-Bosheth was totally inadequate to cope. His loyal citizens were alarmed at the absence of any effective leadership. There was no one to succeed Ish-Bosheth if he capitulated altogether, except the crippled son of Jonathan, who could not have been more than twelve years old at the time.⁶²

In this confusing state of affairs, two of Ish-Bosheth's officers assassinated him while he was taking a midday nap. They not only murdered him in his sleep, they decapitated him and brought the grisly head to David in Hebron, apparently hoping for a reward.

Once again, the opportunity for a unified Israel was precariously balanced. David had successfully disclaimed any connection with Abner's death, and the people apparently believed him. However, any suspicions they might have had would be likely to spring up again if it was thought that David had engineered a military *coup d'etat*. No Israelite could be expected to sanction a king who tolerated or instigated a reign of terror. To disclaim any connection with this last act of violence, David had the perpetrators executed on the spot. Yet even this was not enough. Ghastly though it was, David publicly mutilated the assassins' bodies to show Israel that he utterly repudiated their deed. He graciously buried the head of Ish-Bosheth in Hebron.

David Consolidates the Kingdom: 2 Sa. 5:1--6:23; 1 Ch. 11:1-9; 12:23-16:43

At this point in the story of David, the reader is able to draw from two largely independent sources, 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles.⁶³ As will be seen, 1 Chronicles is not just a repetition of 2 Samuel, for it adds numerous details which are omitted in the earlier records.

After David ascended to the throne of a united Israel, his immediate task was to consolidate the kingdom. Torn by the insane obsessions of Saul, weakened by

⁶²Mephibosheth was five at the death of his father (4:4), and the civil war lasted an additional seven and a half years.

⁶³ At one time, it was almost axiomatic among some scholars that 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles drew from a common source, and that the Chronicler tendentiously distorted his canonical sources. This opinion can no longer stand. Rather, 1 Chronicles derives from a different textual family than the Masoretic Text of 2 Samuel, and it serves, in many cases, as an independent witness which, so far as it can be checked, has proved to be historically accurate, cf. G. Hasel, "Chronicles, Books of," *ISBE* (1979) I.667-668.

the years of civil war, and threatened by Canaanite enclaves and Philistines on several fronts, David's task loomed large. Not only was there political upheaval, Israel had not yet recovered religiously from the destruction of Shiloh and Saul's butchery of the priesthood. Samuel, the last of the judges and for years the central figure of Israel's religion, was long since dead, and no one of equal stature had risen to succeed him. Thus, David's task of consolidating the kingdom had to be pursued on two levels, political and religious.

David Establishes National Security (2 Sa. 5:1-25; 1 Ch. 11:1-9; 12:23--16:43):

Representatives from the clans of Israel assembled at Hebron to crown David king. They clearly remembered David's heroism in earlier times and were by now aware of Samuel's role in anointing David to be king (cf. 1 Sa. 16:1-13; 23:16, 17; 24:20; 25:30, 31; 2 Sa. 3:17, 18). David was now 37 years old. The emergency of national security is clearly reflected in the eager volunteers for military service. David's tough fighting force, which was formed during his outlaw days, was still with him (cf. 1 Chr. 11:10--12:22). Now, however, his coronation was welcomed with a tremendous standing army, warriors anxious to serve in the ranks for Israel's cause.

To the north of Hebron was the city of Jebus, better known as Jerusalem.⁶⁴ This fortress, the ancient city of Melchizedek, originally had been burned by the men of Judah (Jg. 1:8), but the original inhabitants had regained control. David determined to remove this pocket of Canaanite resistance. The Jebusites considered their city impregnable, but under the leadership of Joab, David's army was victorious, probably by gaining entrance into the citadel through an underground water tunnel.⁶⁵ David made Jerusalem his capital, since it was more centrally located than Hebron. It became known as the "City of David" (not to be confused with Bethlehem which, because it was David's birthplace, is also called David's city, cf. 1 Sa. 16; Lk. 2:11).⁶⁶ As David's power increased, his harem grew proportionately.

⁶⁴For information concerning the archaeological excavations of ancient Jerusalem, see Y. Shiloh and M. Kaplan, "Digging in the City of David," BAR (Jul./Aug. 1979 Vol. V, No. 4) 36-49; H. Shanks, "The City of David After Five Years of Digging," BAR (Nov./Dec. 1985 Vol. XI, No. 6) 22-38; E. Mazar, "Royal Gateway to Ancient Jerusalem Uncovered," BAR (May/Jun. 1989 Vol. XV, No. 3) 38-51. The article by Hershel Shanks contains a fascinating artist's conception, based on archaeological evidence, of what the City of David may have looked like in the 10th century B.C., pp. 34-35.

⁶⁵H. Shanks, *The City of David: A Guide to Biblical Jerusalem* (Washington D.C.: The Biblical Archaeology Society, 1975) 31-37. It may be noted that the text of the OT is very uncertain at this point, and there is lack of clarity as to the meaning of the words which are here taken to refer to a water shaft, cf. Bright, 195 (especially footnote #37); Thompson, 98-99.

⁶⁶Jerusalem, also called Salem (Ge. 14:18; Ps. 76:2), Moriah (Ge. 22:2; 1 Ch. 3:1), Jebus (Jg. 19:10; 1 Ch. 11:4), Zion and the City of David (2 Sa. 5:7), means "foundation of peace" or "city of peace." Isaiah called it the holy city, a name by which it is still known today (52:1). Jerusalem lies at about 2500' above sea level and is built on the hills rising out of the Valley of Hinnom and the Valley of Kidron. From the time that David conquered Jerusalem and

The construction of David's palace in Jerusalem by a foreign king, Hiram of Tyre, is indicative of David's status.

The biggest threat to Israel since the days of Eli had been the Philistines. After the decisive battle at Jezreel, when Saul had been killed, the Philistines had occupied many Israeli cities (1 Sa. 31:7). During the period of civil war, the Philistines had apparently been content to watch from the sidelines. Presumably, they still considered David as loyal to the Philistine cause. Now, however, it was apparent that David was no longer willing to play the part of a vassal, and the Philistines mobilized their army to teach him a lesson. When the Philistine army arrived at Rephaim, a hollow plain to the west of Jerusalem, David escaped to his familiar mountain retreat of outlaw days -- the "stronghold" (cf. 1 Sa. 22:4, 5; 23:14, 19, 29; 24:22).⁶⁷

The Philistine-Israeli conflict was decided in two stages. At Yahweh's word, David defeated the Philistines in the initial encounter and burned their gods according to the Deuteronomic code (Dt. 7:5, 25). In the second conflict, Yahweh instructed David to avoid a head-on confrontation and to circle around the Philistine flank. There he was to wait until he heard a sound of marching in the balsam trees. At Yahweh's signal, David attacked and again decisively defeated the Philistines. He pushed them back to Gezer on the coastal plain. Never again would the Philistines gain a stranglehold on Israel.

In 2 Sa. 21:15-22; 23:9-17 and 1 Ch. 11:12-19; 20:4-8 there are several recorded anecdotes that occurred during the Philistine campaigns.⁶⁸ The exact placement of these events is uncertain, but the mention of the Valley of Rephaim (1 Ch. 11:15) may place one of them at the time of the above mentioned wars. The determination of David's men not to allow him to accompany the army to the battlefield also points to David's kingship over a united Israel rather than to some earlier time (2 Sa. 21:17). Together, however, these anecdotes are simply arranged as a sort of appendix, and their precise chronology within the career of David is unknown.

David Establishes Religious Unity (2 Sa. 6:1-23; 1 Ch. 13:1-14; 15:1--16:43)

Political security, crucial though it may have been, was only half of David's

established it as the capital of Israel, the city became the most important site of the Bible--both the political and religious center for Israel, M. Burrows, "Jerusalem," *IDB* (1962) II.843-868.

⁶⁷ The "stronghold", Masada in Hebrew, may refer to the large escarpment along the shores of the Dead Sea famous as the place of the last vestige of resistance against Rome in AD 70.

⁶⁸One of the curious details offered in 2 Sa. 21:20-21 is the mention of a giant Philistine with six fingers and six toes on each hand and foot respectively. In the ancient Near East, polydactylism was considered to be a mark of the Rephaim, a race of giants, cf. R. Barnett, "Polydactylism in the Ancient World," *BAR* (May/Jun. 1990) 46-51.

task. The heart of Israel's national consciousness was religious even more than political, and it was the faith of Israel, not the government of Israel, that made her unique among the nations. The nation also faced a serious religious crisis.⁶⁹ From the time of the exodus, the center of Israel's worship had been the Tent of Meeting (the Tabernacle). It had resided at Shiloh from the days of Joshua (Jos. 18:1; 19:51) to the destruction of Shiloh by the Philistines in the childhood of Samuel (1 Sa. 4:1-11). At that time, the Ark of the Covenant was separated from the Tent of Meeting and never brought back. The Ark, after a brief exile as a Philistine trophy (1 Sa. 5:1 - 7:1), was returned to the borders of Israel. The Tent of Meeting was apparently not destroyed by the Philistines, for it turned up later at Nob (1 Sa. 14:3; 21:1ff.) and would still later be brought to Solomon's temple (1 Kg. 8:4). During the period following the destruction of Shiloh, the head of religious worship became Samuel, who judged Israel in a sort of circuit court (1 Sa. 7:15-17). The rift between Samuel and Saul severely divided the political and religious aspects of Israel's national life, and Saul's butchery of the priests at Nob had exacerbated the problem. Now that Samuel was dead, the nation was bereft of either a religious head or a religious center for worship. It is to this crisis that David next turned his attention.

After conferring with his officers, David determined to bring back the ark⁷⁰ which had been gone for some 70 years.⁷¹ He had taken oath before Yahweh that he would do so (Ps. 132:2-5). The emphasis in the Chronicles narrative is upon the united effort of a nation that was no longer divided (notice the reoccurring phrases "the whole assembly of Israel" and "all the Israelites," cf. 1 Ch. 13:2-6, 8). The moving of the ark, which was at the western borders of Israel in Kiriath-Jearim, was accompanied by a noisy celebration. Unfortunately, David and the priesthood had neglected to research the Torah to discover how the ark was to be handled. Instead of bringing it properly (i.e., carried on poles by the Levites, cf. Ex. 25:14; Nu. 4:15), David arranged for it to be carried on an ox-cart, much as had the Philistines years earlier (1 Sa. 6:7-12). In the procession, a man was executed by Yahweh as a result

⁶⁹W. Caldecott and J. Orr, "Tabernacle, Structure and History," *ISBE* (1943) V:2887-2892.

⁷⁰Alternative called the Ark of God, Ark of Yahweh, Ark of the Covenant of Yahweh, and Ark of the Testimony, this rectangular box measured 4' x 2 1/2' x 2 1/2'. It was constructed of acacia wood overlaid with gold and was carried on poles inserted into four golden rings at the lower corners (Ex. 25:10-16). The lid of the ark was called the atonement cover or mercy seat. It was adorned with two sculptures of cherubim (Ex. 25:17-22). Over the ark's lid and between the cherubim statues rested the glory of Yahweh in a visible cloud (Lv. 16:2; 1 Sa. 4:4; 2 Sa. 6:2; He. 9:5). The English word "glory" derives from the original languages as *kavod* (Hebrew), *shekinah* (Aramaic) and *doxa* (Greek). The ark was used for the storage of the ten commandments written on stone ledgers, a jar of the original manna, and the staff of Aaron that budded (Ex. 16:32-34; 40:20; Nu. 17:10-11; Dt. 10:1-5; He. 9:4). Because the ark was considered to be the throne of Yahweh (1 Sa. 4:4; 2 Sa. 6:20), it served as a point of contact for meetings between Yahweh and Israel's leaders (Ex. 25:22; 30:36; Jos. 7:6; 1 Chr. 13:3). On the day of national atonement, Yom Kippur, the high priest approached the ark to make atonement for himself and the nation (Lv. 16:11-17), cf. W. Lotz, *ISBE* (1943) I.242-246.

⁷¹L. Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970), 235, 266 (see footnotes especially).

of this careless planning. David was angry, probably more at himself than anyone else, and he became afraid to proceed any farther. Accordingly, he arranged for the ark to be stored temporarily in the home of Obed-Edom, a Philistine from Gath (the term "Gittite" indicates someone from Gath).⁷²

Three months had passed since the frustration of David's first attempt to bring back the Ark of Yahweh (2 Sa. 6:11). During this time, David heard that God had blessed the family of Obed-Edom where the ark was stored. Taking this as a sign for the good, David again determined to bring the ark to the capital. This time, however, he planned more carefully. He had evidently discovered the impropriety of his first effort (cf. 1 Chr. 15:2, 13, 15). Now, he arranged for the ark to be carried by the Levites. In addition, not only did David reassemble the Levitical family in honor, he arranged for singers and musicians to accompany them.

The geneologies in 1 Chr. 6:31-47 list the musical guilds which David established. Whether or not these were innovations or were following ancient precedents is uncertain, but at least they were something not called for by Torah.⁷³ David's action points to the legitimacy of creativity in worship forms and liturgy. As long as David did not violate the law (as he did in hauling the ark on an ox-cart), he was apparently free to design liturgical functions in honor of Yahweh without censure.

A choir-master and three directors of music were chosen for the procession of the ark (1 Chr. 15:17, 22). The three choir directors, Heman (named as the composer of Psalm 88), Asaph (whose name is associated with Psalms 50, 73-83) and Ethan (the composer of Psalms 39, 62, 77),⁷⁴ became permanent fixtures after the ark arrived in Jerusalem. They staged their choirs in front of the tent which David erected for the ark (1 Chr. 6:32). These choirs corresponded to the three Levitical families who had camped around the Tent of Meeting during the wilderness sojourn (cf. Nu. 3:23, 29, 35; 1 Chr. 6:33, 39, 44). One may observe that there appears a note attached to some fifty-five Psalms and also to the Prayer of Habakkuk that says "to the choirmaster" or "for the director of music" (Ps. 4-6, 8, 9, 11-14, 18-22, 31, 36, 39-41, 51-62, 65, 68-70, 109, 139, 140; Hab. 3:19b). Most of these Psalms are assigned to David or were composed in his honor, and they were apparently composed especially for choral arrangements.

Besides the choirs designed to accompany the procession of the ark, David arranged for accompanying musicians who played in at least four orchestral groups: cymbalists, harpists, those who played the lyre (zither), and trumpeters (1 Chr.

⁷²W. Stinespring, "Gath," *IDB* (1962) II.355.

⁷³H. Williamson, *1 and 2 Chronicles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1982) 73.

⁷⁴D. Kidner, *Psalms 1-72* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973) 35.

15:16, 19-21, 24).

Appropriate sacrifices were offered both at the beginning of the ark procession (2 Sa. 6:13) and at its conclusion (1 Chr. 16:1, 2). During the procession, full of pomp and noisy rejoicing, David expressed his enthusiasm by uninhibited dancing and leaping, not an uncommon cultural expression in the ancient Near East. Michal, who was watching from a window, was chagrined at her husband's lack of dignity and reprimanded him for it, but David was unmoved by her scorn. After the celebration had been completed with a special Psalmic presentation arranged by the king (see below), David gave food gifts to everyone present and sent them home.

Whether or not David was the composer of this psalm, the text does not state. However, it is clear that the celebration psalm is a composite of sections of the Psalter in the following way:

- vs. 8-22 = Psalm 105:1-15
- vs. 23-33 = Psalm 96:1-13
- vs. 34-36 = Psalm 106:1, 47, 48

This fact suggests that one source is dependent on the other, though scholars disagree as to which is the original.⁷⁵ The psalm is not difficult to follow. It emphasizes Yahweh as the universal Lord of history. He is not the God who is far removed from people and their lives, but the God who has acted decisively--the God who made covenants and remained loyal to them. Yahweh is Lord, not only Lord of his people but also Lord of the nations and the physical world.

After the great day of celebration had ended, David retained the reconstructed Levitical worship order and its leaders. Some were to stay at Jerusalem and minister in choir and orchestra before the ark. Others were to minister at the original Tent of Meeting, now pitched in Gibeon, a few miles to the northwest. In this way, David not only established a continuum for religious unity, he did so in such a way as to bring honor to the traditional shrine (the Tent of Meeting) as well as to his new religious capital (Jerusalem).

The Davidic Covenant

At this point in the story of David, the reader encounters one of the most significant and far-reaching themes in the Bible. When Paul says, "Remember Jesus

⁷⁵ C. Keil, *The Books of Chronicles* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 209-218; J. Meyers, *1 Chronicles* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965) 121.

Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David...this is my gospel," he is capsulizing the hope of Israel in one phrase (2 Ti. 2:8; Ro. 1:3). To fully appreciate God's promises to David, it is necessary to go beyond the bounds of the books of 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles. The covenant God made with David, its implications for the faith of Israel, its basis for the hope of Israel, and its fulfillment in Jesus Christ reaches to the conclusion of human history.

God Makes a Promise to David (2 Sa. 7:1-29; 1 Chr. 17:1-27)

The political and religious consolidation of the kingdom was part of a much grander and magnificent ideal. David determined to build a cedar temple for Yahweh and the ark. The impetus for this project was the Deuteronomic Code, which envisioned a permanent shrine in Palestine to be established after the Canaanite nations had been subdued (Dt. 12). Although initially Nathan the prophet instructed David to go ahead, Yahweh subsequently spoke to Nathan and instructed him that David must forego his plans. Much later, in recounting this story to his son Solomon, David revealed that he was forbidden to build a house for Yahweh due to his violent career as a soldier (1 Chr. 22:6-10). However, even though Yahweh forbade David to build a cedar temple, he did establish with David a solemn covenant, mediated through the prophet Nathan.

God's promise to David was threefold. Its provisions were for a home, a house and a son. Yahweh promised to secure for the nation Israel a home in which she would not be disturbed or oppressed. This assurance of national peace stood in sharp contrast to the previous history of the nation, a history marked by bloody battles and almost constant war. Instead of David building Yahweh a house, Yahweh promised to build David a house. There is an obvious play on words here, for David's intention was to build a wooden structure, while Yahweh's promise almost certainly refers to David's posterity, and particularly his dynasty. The Hebrew word *bayit* (= house) may equally indicate a structure or a family.⁷⁶ From the posterity that Yahweh guaranteed to David would arise a son. For this son, Yahweh promised to establish a kingdom and an eternal throne. This son, rather than David, would be the one to build a house for Yahweh. Yahweh also guaranteed his loyal love to this son, a sharp contrast with Saul who was rejected. If this son did wrong, he would not be rejected as was Saul, but Yahweh would lovingly chastise him so that he would learn to follow the right way. The son would not only be considered the son of David, but he would also be reckoned as the son of Yahweh (cf. 1 Chr. 22:10). He would be established eternally over Yahweh's kingdom.

⁷⁶W. Wilson, *Wilson's Old Testament Word Studies* (rpt. McLean, VA: MacDonald, n.d.) 223.

It is especially to be noted that God's promises to David are set against the background of Israel's previous king, Saul. During Saul's reign, Israel had no security at home. Saul's house did not become the ruling family in Israel. Yahweh's love to Saul was broken by Saul's disobedience. The reverse is expressed in this covenant. The tragedies of Israel's homeland, Saul's house and Saul's son would not be repeated.

After hearing this profound communication from Nathan, David was overwhelmed and sat down to pray. He marvelled at his own place in these lofty promises of God. He exulted in Yahweh as a saving God, for Yahweh was the only deity in the world who took the initiative and "went out to redeem a people for himself." David remained awestruck by the implications of such promises.

For David personally, the implications of God's promises were staggering. In a spiritual way, they reflected his assurance of salvation (2 Sa. 23:5). In a practical way, they indicated that his son, Solomon, would build a temple on Mt. Zion, the site where now stood the special tent of the ark (1 Chr. 22:6-10). The covenant inspired David to prepare materials for the future temple (1 Chr. 29:1ff.) and to draft plans for its construction (1 Chr. 29:11, 12ff.).

For the nation Israel, the implications of God's promises were no less profound. In the first place, the monarchy could be seen as more than just a political structure. It was also a religious institution. The choice of David, Judah, Jerusalem and Zion were connected into a secure theological matrix which stood in sharp contrast to the destruction of Shiloh in the days of Eli (Ps. 78:56-72). The king was not only chosen by Yahweh, he was responsible to the laws of Yahweh and was obliged to study them (Dt. 17:14-20). Whereas in most nations the word of the king was law in itself, in Israel the king, no less than the people, was to be under the law of Yahweh. Where else but in Israel could a prophet beard the king in his palace and live to tell the story (2 Sa. 12)? The esteem with which the nation came to view David is evident in their titles for him:

- *The Lamp of Israel (2 Sa. 21:17)
- *The Shepherd of Israel (1 Chr. 11:2)
- *One like an Angel of God (2 Sa. 14:17, 20)
- *The Shield of Israel (Ps. 86:9)
- *The Son of Yahweh (Ps. 2:7)

This last designation, the Son of Yahweh, is especially important, for it sets Israel's monarchy in sharp relief against the monarchies of the surrounding pagan nations. For the pagans, the king was divine. There was no difference between the

king and a god.⁷⁷ In Israel, however, Yahweh alone was the deity who ruled from the heavens as the king of the universe (Ps. 5:2; 10:16; 24:7-10; 29:10; 44:4; 47:2, 6-8; 48:1, 2, etc.). Yahweh's son sat upon Yahweh's throne (1 Chr. 29:23). While Israel's king was not divine, he held a special relationship to Yahweh in that he was regarded as Yahweh's son (2 Sa. 7:14; 1 Chr. 17:13; 22:10; Ps. 2:7; 89:26). This sonship, of course, should be understood in terms of adoption, not begetting. The Davidic king was not divine. As the adopted son of Yahweh, the king became the representative of the life of the nation (Lam. 4:20) and the channel of divine blessing (Ps. 72)

It is due to this special relationship between the Davidic king and Yahweh that the southern nation remained faithful to David's dynasty after the rupture in the monarchy at the death of Solomon (1 Kg. 12:16-17, 19; 2 Chr. 10:16-17, 19; Ps. 18:46-50; 89:3-4, 28-29; 122:3-5). Not only was the Davidic king Yahweh's choice, the city of Jerusalem and Mt. Zion was his selected dwelling-place based on the Deuteronomic ideal (Dt. 12; Ps. 132:11-14).

Israel's great anticipation which accompanied the Davidic covenant was relatively short-lived. To be sure, the predictions of national peace were fulfilled in the reign of Solomon, and he indeed became the Davidic son to build a temple for Yahweh (1 Chr. 22:9; 1 Kg. 5:4). Nevertheless, Solomon sowed the seeds of political disaster, and when his son Rehoboam came to power, the monarchy split along lines similar to the civil war factions in David's time (1 Kg. 12; 2 Chr. 10). Although the tiny southern nation remained loyal to David's dynasty until it fell to Babylon in 587-6 B.C., its history was one of constant struggle for survival. Only too clear was the truth that neither the united kingdom of Israel under David and Solomon nor the southern kingdom under David's family was the kingdom of God.⁷⁸ The northern kingdom, meanwhile, passed through eight dynasties, none of which were from David's line.⁷⁹

By the late 8th century B.C., the southern nation was under dire threat of extinction by the powerful empires from Mesopotamia. Israel to the north had already succumbed to Assyria in 722-1 B.C. (2 Kg. 17:5, 6, 18-23). In spite of this eminent danger, Judah still supposed that her national security was guaranteed by God's promises to David. It is at this juncture that the prophets played a crucial role. They announced to Israel that her national theology was unsound (Je. 21:11-14; 22:1-9). God intended to destroy the nation (Am. 2:4, 5; Eze. 21:25-27). God's future for Judah was not peace and prosperity, but a brutal, devastating shock (Is.

⁷⁷E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. A. Heathcote and P. Allcock (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) 238.

⁷⁸J. Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1953) 71.

⁷⁹H. Flanders, Jr. and B. Cresson, *Introduction to the Bible* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1973) 154, 158, 168.

3:1-26; 5:1-7)! This ghastly prediction came to pass (2 Kg. 25:1-11; La. 1:1-5). It is Amos who described this disaster as "David's fallen booth" (9:11). David's house, which was given such great promises, lay in devastation.

Accompanying the fall of David's house and the exile of the nation was a severe crisis of faith. What about the covenant? Was Yahweh really all-powerful and faithful--could his promises be trusted? The heart-rending cry of a bewildered nation is poignantly described in Psalm 89. The seemingly unconditional nature of the Davidic promises (89:3-4, 19-29, 34-37) is set in blunt contrast to the national tragedy (89:38-45). The "how long" of 89:46 is full of grief and perplexity. The haunting question of verse 89:49 and the plea of 89:50-51 show how deeply was the shock of God's action. For Israel, it was indeed an alien and strange work (Is. 28:21).

The Hope of Israel

It is out of the ashes of national despair that the hope of Israel was born. When her national dreams were dashed to pieces, she began to build a new dream--the dream of a Davidic king yet to come who would restore the nation. This hope found vibrant expression in the voices of the prophets. The Davidic throne would again be established (Is. 9:2, 6-7; Je. 23:5-6; 30:8-9; 33:14-26; Eze. 34:22-28). David's fallen tent (booth) would be restored (Is. 16:4b-5; Am. 9:11). The covenant promises would be renewed (Is. 55:3). Israel would repent and seek the Davidic line (Ho. 3:4-5). In view of this prophetic hope, Israel was, as it were, "standing on tiptoe" waiting for God (Is. 40:27-31).⁸⁰

The Hope is Deferred

When the exiles were finally allowed to return to Palestine and to rebuild Jerusalem and the temple, it was only natural for them to expect a fulfillment of the Davidic promises at that time.⁸¹ However, even the new temple was disappointing to those who had seen the previous one (Ezr. 3:10-12), and no Davidic king arose to lead Israel to international prominence. Instead, the Davidic promises were again pushed into the future. Now, however, they took on a strange twist. While the house of David would certainly be established, it would somehow be coupled with a deep mourning for the murder of a man who would be Yahweh's special representative (Zec. 12:7-14). Yet, somehow, the death of this man would be connected with cleansing from sin (Zec. 13:1).⁸² When the writings in the OT were closed, the Davidic promises were still postponed to some unknown future

⁸⁰B. Anderson, *The Eighth Century Prophets* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978) 85.

⁸¹F. Bruce, *New Testament Development of Old Testament Themes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 74.

⁸²J. Baldwin, Haggai, Zechariah, *Malachi* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1972) 187-195.

generation.

The Gospel of David's Greater Son

It is significant that the first verse in the NT begins with a reference to "Jesus Christ, the son of David!" It was the unanimous conclusion of the writers of the NT that what God had promised to David was inaugurated in the appearance of our Lord Jesus Christ. The annunciation to Mary included both that her child was to be Yahweh's son and the ascendent to David's throne (Lk. 1:30-35). Zechariah, the father of John the Baptist, exclaimed by the Holy Spirit that the time of fulfillment had arrived (Lk. 1:67-75). Accordingly, Jesus was born into the family of David at David's old home village (Lk. 2:4-7). The questions of the Jews regarding whether or not Jesus was David's son were vastly more than an idle curiosity about his ancestry. It was not so much a question, "Is he *a* son of David?" as it was a question, "Is he *the* son of David?" (Mt. 12:23). The affirmations that Jesus was indeed David's son are grounded in this hope of Israel (Mt. 9:27; 15:22; 20:30, 31; 21:9; Mk. 11:9, 10). That the Pharisees were indignant about this Davidic designation of Jesus shows their own fear and insecurity (Mt. 21:15-17).

The Sure Mercies of David

In the apostolic preaching of the early church, the apostles proclaimed that David's greater son, Jesus Christ, had been enthroned through the resurrection (Ac. 2:29-36). Paul declared that Jesus was the Davidic son (Ac. 13:22-23). The OT idea of the Davidic king as Yahweh's son (Ps. 2:7) has been brought to NT fruition in Jesus the Son of God (Ac. 13:32-33). The resurrection of Jesus was evidence of the certainty of the covenant promises to David (Is. 55:3; Ac. 13:34). The restoration of the house of David is complete (Am. 9:11; Ac. 15:15-18). The house of God, which David's son was to build has, in fact, been built--not by Solomon out of wood and stone but by Jesus Christ out of the company of believers (Ep. 2:22). It is Jesus, the Root of David and the Lion of Judah, who rules over the house of David (Re. 3:7; 5:5; 22:16).⁸³ This is why Paul could say, "Remember Jesus Christ, raised from the dead, descended from David. *This is my gospel...*" (2 Ti. 2:8)!

Israel Becomes an Empire: 2 Samuel 8:1-18; 10:1-19; 1 Chronicles 18:1--19:19

After consolidating the kingdom politically and religiously, and after receiving the most astounding promises by Yahweh, David began expanding the kingdom in all directions. The phrase, "Yahweh gave David victory everywhere he

⁸³ G. Ladd, *A Commentary on the Revelation* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 58-59, 83-84, 294.

went," appears twice in the narratives (2 Sa. 8:6, 14). In this period of David's life, the conquest of Canaan was finally completed.

The Southwestern Expansion (2 Sa. 8:1; 1 Chr. 18:1)

Earlier, David had effectively removed the Philistine menace which had for years threatened to swallow up Israel. Now, he went further and took Metheg Ammah. This phrase "took Metheg Ammah" might possibly refer to a geographical location (NIV, RSV, KJV), or perhaps even better, it should be rendered literally as "took the bridle of the mother out of the hand of the Philistines" (RV, ASV, NASB). *Metheg Ammah*, which means "bridle of the mother," is possibly a figurative name for Gath, the chief city of the Philistine pentapolis. If so, then the phrase would say, in effect, that David brought all of Philistia under his control by capturing its chief city.⁸⁴

The Southeastern Expansion (2 Sa. 8:2; 1 Chr. 18:2)

Moab, to the east of the Dead Sea, was brought under tribute. Two-thirds of the Moabite standing army was executed.⁸⁵ Benaiah, one of David's soldiers, gained recognition in the Moabite war (cf. 1 Chr. 11:22a).

The Eastern Ammonite Campaign (2 Sa. 10:1-19; 1 Chr. 19:1-19)

The chronology of David's expansion wars is uncertain. 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles both describe the Ammonite campaign after the wars with Damascus, Zobah, and Edom. However, it seems probable that at least some of these wars, and perhaps all of them, were incidents within the larger scope of the Ammonite campaign.⁸⁶

The cause for the war with Ammon began with a gesture of kindness on David's part. Nahash, the Ammonite king, had previously shown kindness to David, and when David heard of his death, he wished to extend sympathy to the crown prince. However, the prince and his advisors became suspicious and accused the Israeli ambassadors of spying. They shaved off the ambassadors' beards from one side of their faces, cut away their robes so that their bare buttocks were exposed, and sent them home in shame. The cutting of the beard was a great indignity inasmuch as the beard was the symbol of manhood in the ancient Near East. To be shaved

⁸⁴ J. Douglas, "Metheg-Ammah," *NBD* (1962) 818-819; W. Stinespring, "Metheg-Ammah," *IDB* (1962) III.368; C. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Books of Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 355- 356.

⁸⁵ The odd procedure of marking off for execution two thirds of the enemy soldiers by measuring them with a cord is described only here in the OT. Its significance is unknown.

⁸⁶Edersheim, 320.

was so disgraceful that many would have preferred death.⁸⁷

The Ammonites, of course, knew that such an act called for war. They mustered their army and hired mercenaries from Aram, Zobah and other areas to the north. David mobilized the Israeli army under Joab. In spite of the formidable coalition which confronted them, front and back, Joab deployed his forces in two separate attacks, and the Israeli army was victorious. The transjordan and the north were now under David's control. All that was left of the Ammonite campaign was a "mopping up" operation which could wait until the spring. Only Rabbah, the Ammonite capital, remained (cf. 1 Chr. 20:1ff.).

The Northern Expansion (2 Sa. 8:3-12; 1 Chr. 18:3-11)

Zobah is difficult to pinpoint geographically, but the context of the passage infers its proximity to Damascus in Syria. Apparently, Zobah and Damascus were in alliance with each other against David. Nevertheless, David's army was again victorious. He cut the hamstrings of most of their chariot horses (the hamstring is the large tendon above and behind a horse's hock), and he established military outposts in this northern region to enforce tribute upon its citizens. The plunder David stockpiled for Yahweh, presumably as resources to aid in the building of the future temple. Hamath, a kingdom still further to the north which had previously been at war with Damascus, became allied with David.

The Southern Expansion (2 Sa. 8:13-14; 1 Chr. 18:12-13)

The Edomite campaign to the south of Moab brought David fame, and as usual, he established forts to house militia capable of enforcing tribute.

Psalm 60

The inscription at the head of Psalm 60 connects it with the expansion wars of David against the Ammonite mercenaries in the north and the opportunistic Edomites to the south. Apparently, David's armies were spread rather thin due to the vast territory they were now controlling, north and south. With the bulk of his armies far to the north and east (perhaps as far as the Euphrates, cf. 2 Sa. 8:3), David's kingdom was vulnerable to the south, and the Edomites saw their chance to plunder.⁸⁸ The psalm describes how they laid waste the south of Judah (60:1-3). It is obvious from 60:9-12 that the Psalm was composed prior to the final victory over Edom. In fact, 60:1, 10 suggest that David's southern army may even have been defeated! It is in this desperate situation that David prayed for help. He was fully

⁸⁷J. Freeman, *Manners and Customs of the Bible* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos, 1972) 143-144.

⁸⁸F. Delitzsch, *The Psalms*, trans. F. Bolton (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) II.193-195; D. Kidner, *Psalms 1-72* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973) 215-218.

aware that human resources were insufficient (60:11).

David's Gesture of Loyal Love (2 Sa. 9:1-13):⁸⁹

Sandwiched between the accounts of the expansion wars is one of the most gracious stories in the OT. This is David at his best! It will be remembered that in his younger years David had established a covenant with Jonathan, the son of Saul (1 Sa. 20:1-23). In that covenant, Jonathan and David pledged to each other and to each other's families *hesed* (= unflinching love, kindness). *Hesed* is a very important concept in the OT, for it describes covenant-love, that is, the loyal and unswerving faithfulness which one maintains to a covenant, not just because of obligation but because of steadfast love.⁹⁰ Thus, when David says, "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show *hesed*," he does so in the context of the covenant he had made earlier with Jonathan. The word *hesed* appears three times in the passage (9:1, 3, 7).

David's act of *hesed* was demonstrated toward a surviving, crippled son of Jonathan named Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth had been injured in both feet at the tender age of five, when a nurse had dropped him as she was fleeing at the news of Jonathan's death (2 Sa. 4:4). Now, his disability was relieved as David made him a royal pensioner. All the properties previously belonging to Saul's family, David restored to Mephibosheth. Mephibosheth became part of the king's retinue and ate with the princes.

This marks the high point of David's glory. He was king over a united Israel, the benefactor of Yahweh's great promises, and the founder of an empire. Following this climax, David's court history is filled with trouble and despair, both personal and national.

David's Great Sin: 2 Samuel 11:1-27; 1 Chronicles 20:1

If the *hesed* shown toward Mephibosheth is David at his best, the next episode is David at his worst! It has been said that power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely. This maxim certainly holds true in the upcoming event in David's life.

The details of David's great sin are recorded only in 2 Samuel, although the surrounding circumstances are mentioned in 1 Chronicles. 1 Chronicles also is silent about all of the personal troubles of David following his sin. Why this is so is

⁸⁹This section of 2 Samuel begins what many scholars term "The Court History of David." See footnote #97, page 74.

⁹⁰It is also to be noted that *hesed* was usually reciprocal, that is, the one who received an act of *hesed* usually responded with a similar act of *hesed*, H. Zobel, *TDOT* (1986) V.47-48. Thus, David's act of *hesed* was a response to Jonathan's act of *hesed*.

not immediately apparent, but it has been observed that almost everything relating to the personal lives of David and Solomon are omitted from the Chronicles record, whether good or bad, so it is not necessary to suppose that the Chronicler was attempting to avoid only the embarrassing episodes of David's career, as some have suggested.⁹¹ Furthermore, a special concern of the author of 2 Samuel is the Deuteronomic Code. This code, which calls for a judgment in history as retribution for disobedience to Torah, is graphically illustrated in the various stories of the books Joshua through 2 Kings.⁹²

The Renewal of the Ammonite Campaign (2 Sa. 11:1; 1 Chr. 20:1)

In the preceding year (probably late summer), David's army successfully defeated the Ammonites and their northern mercenaries (2 Sa. 10). However, it will be remembered that the Ammonites, when they realized the campaign was going against them, withdrew inside the walls of their fortified city, Rabbah (2 Sa. 10:14). Joab declined to lay siege to the city at that time,⁹³ presumably because it was not customary to carry on the campaigns in the winter months due to severe weather.⁹⁴ In the Spring, it was possible to renew the campaign, and this David proceeded to do. He ordered Joab and the army to put Rabbah under siege, although he himself stayed at the palace. Much has been made of David staying at home in Jerusalem, but it is not necessary to accuse him of either cowardice or laziness. It is probable that he felt the siege of Rabbah to be nothing more than a "mopping up" operation that could be safely left to others. Alternately, his own officers may have discouraged him from going, as they did on another occasion (cf. 2 Sa. 21:15-17). Whatever the case, David stayed at the capital.

David Commits Adultery (2 Sa. 11:2-5)

David's great sin is recounted very briefly. After rising from his midday rest, David strolled on the palace roof. While doing so, he noticed a beautiful woman bathing in a nearby courtyard. Inquiries were made, and David was informed that she was the wife of one of his soldiers on the front lines at Rabbah. David promptly

⁹¹R. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 1162.

⁹²W. Rast, Joshua, *Judges, Samuel, Kings [PC]* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978) 15ff.

⁹³Laying siege to a city was a primary way in which war was carried out in the ancient Near East. Cities under siege used several methods of fortifying themselves for defense. Of first importance was the city wall, either a solid structure or a casemate structure (two parallel walls divided into elongated rooms). The wall was usually built in an offset-inset pattern so as to provide a better defense of the wall line against scalers. Outside the walls was the glacis, a sloping rampart built of layers of dirt, stone and debris. This device provided protection against undermining and/or battering rams. Towers on the walls were usually situated in strategic locations to provide maximum fire-power by bow or sling, cf. O. Borowski, "Five Ways to Defend an Ancient City," *BAR* (Mar./Apr. 1983) 73-76.

⁹⁴J. Freeman, 144.

sent for her. After their illicit union, she performed the customary purification (Lv. 15:18) and went home. In time, Bathsheba realized that she was pregnant and sent word to David. Her message would not only have informed David of their predicament, but also, that he must take the necessary steps to avert the penalty of capital punishment, which according to Torah, was due to them both (Lv. 20:10).

David's Watergate (2 Sa. 11:6-27)

David initiated a creative and systematic scheme to hide the evidence of his adultery.

Initially, David sent orders for Uriah, Bathsheba's husband, to come home from the siege in Rabbah to report on the war. Secretly, of course, David intended for Uriah to spend the night at home with Bathsheba, so the child would appear to be the consequence of a normal marriage union. Perhaps Uriah was bewildered at his new position as a war correspondent, or perhaps he had suspicions that all was not well. In any case, sex was not permitted while engaging in holy war (1 Sa. 21:4; cf. Dt. 23:10; Jos. 3:5). To the chagrin of David, he refused to go home. He spent the night in the palace courtyard with the servants.

David did not panic easily--he had spent too many years as a campaigner for that! The second attempt was couched in the guise of wining and dining with the king. Dismayed at Uriah's loyalty to Israel's cause and to his fellow-soldiers, David arranged to inebriate Uriah, hoping that in his intoxication he would forget his loyalties and go home. Instead, even though he became drunk, Uriah once more spent the night in the courtyard.

Frustrated in his first two attempts, David had little choice but to eliminate Uriah. Like Hamlet on his way to England,⁹⁵ Uriah carried sealed orders that arranged for his own death. The murder was to appear as an accident of war, of course. A push close to Rabbah's wall with Uriah at the front, a quick retreat leaving Uriah alone in the open, and the mission was accomplished.

David's callousness when the "accident" was reported is despicable. After the customary period of mourning, perhaps as short as seven days (cf. 1 Sa. 31:13), David brought Bathsheba safely into his harem. The cover-up was complete. How graphically David's descent into sin follows the description given by James in the NT (Ja. 1:14, 15). The only thing with which David had not reckoned in his mad fling was the all-seeing eye of Yahweh. 2 Samuel 11 closes with the fateful words, "But the thing David had done displeased the Lord."

Nowhere but in Israel could a prophet beard the king in his palace and live to tell the story! Israel, however, was not like the surrounding nations. For Israel, it

⁹⁵ Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act IV, Scene iii.

was *lex rex* (= law is king), not *rex lex* (= the king is law).⁹⁶

David's Exposure (2 Sa. 12:1-12)

David's exposure came through Nathan, a prophet of Yahweh. In a simple parable, Nathan led the unsuspecting David through the events of his adultery, and when David's anger against the outrageous sin of the rich farmer in the parable reached the point of overflow, Nathan calmly indicted the king: "You are the man!"

David's Repentance (2 Sa. 12:13; Ps. 51)

Through Nathan, Yahweh pronounced judgment on David--a series of calamities which are described in the closing half of 2 Samuel.⁹⁷ A summary of these calamities demonstrate that David's final years were troubled indeed:

- ♦ Amnon, David's son, rapes his half-sister Tamar
- ♦ Absalom, another son and Tamar's brother, murders Amnon
- ♦ Absalom is exiled to Geshur, the home of his grandparents
- ♦ Absalom's conspiracy against David
- ♦ The Absalom revolt and David's abdication of the throne
- ♦ Absalom's death by Joab
- ♦ The Sheba revolt
- ♦ The census plague
- ♦ Adonijah, another royal son, attempts a coup d'etat while David is on his deathbed

It is significant that in this pronouncement of judgment, Yahweh declared that in his sin, David had despised Yahweh himself. Sin is much more than the breaking of a law code. It is the breaking of a relationship--the breaking of fellowship between a person and God. That David understood this is clear from his confession, "I have sinned against Yahweh."

God's gracious forgiveness is never better seen than in Nathan's reply to

⁹⁶F. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1981) 32. *Lex rex*, meaning "law is king," refers to the head of a government which is under law and not a law to himself. *Rex lex*, meaning "king is law," is just the opposite, that is, the king stands above the law. For most Canaanite nations, *rex lex* was the standard.

⁹⁷The last half of 2 Samuel, beginning at 9:1, is labeled the "Court History of David" or the "Succession Narrative." Some scholars believe that this section had a different author than the rest of the book, perhaps even someone living in David's court, and it was simply incorporated into the other materials, cf. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel [WBC]* (Waco, TX: Word, 1989) xxv-xxxvi.

David's confession: "Yahweh has taken away your sin." The relationship between Yahweh and David was effectively restored, just as Yahweh had promised in the covenant to the Davidic king, "My love will never be taken away from him" (2 Sa. 7:15). On the other hand, even though David was saved from the death penalty, he was not spared the suffering promised to him by Yahweh. The covenant also promised, "When he does wrong, I will punish him with the rod of men" (2 Sa. 7:14). Forgiveness does not in all circumstances mean a reversal of God's promise of judgment in history.⁹⁸

Psalms 51 bears an inscription which connects it with David's great sin.⁹⁹ In this masterpiece, the Hebrew vocabulary and the insights given are exceedingly rich! In 51:1, David's plea is grounded in the concept of covenant. The opening line, "Have mercy on me, O God," expresses a plea for God's unmerited favor. David asks for Yahweh's *hesed*, that is, his covenant love. In 51:2 there are three graphic descriptions of sin, descriptions which are echoed repeatedly in the OT:¹⁰⁰

- ♦ *Pesh'a* (= transgression) ...signifying open rebellion
- ♦ *'Awon* (= iniquity) ...meaning to turn aside, to become lost, or to deviate from the right way
- ♦ *Hatta't* (= sin) ...meaning to miss or to abandon the straight way; this is the word used to indicate "missing the mark," as in reference to a sling (cf. Je. 20:16).

Equally graphic are the Hebrew words describing God's forgiveness and compassion:¹⁰¹

- ♦ *Hanan* (= mercy) ...signifying the graciousness of God--the free bestowal of his kindness
- ♦ *Rahamim* (= great compassion) ...always used in the plural in this sense; in its singular form, this word indicates the womb or bowel and expresses pity, possibly in the sense of a mother's feelings for her infant. In the OT, bowels were regarded as the center of the

⁹⁸W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967) II.455.

⁹⁹51:18-19 pose a dating problem, at least if David wrote the psalm himself, in that these verses seem to refer to the exile. If so, then either they were added later, or else the entire psalm was composed during the exile, but written with David's great sin in view, cf. M. Dahood, *Psalms 51-100* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968) 2, 9-10; D. Kidner, *Psalms 1-72* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1973) 43-46, 194. In either case, the Psalm should certainly be read as though it proceeds from the heart of David.

¹⁰⁰W. Dyrness, *Themes in Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1979) 105-107; E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, A. Heathcote and P. Allcock (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) 281.

¹⁰¹R. Girdlestone, *Synonyms of the Old Testament* (1987; rpt. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 107-109, 148-149; A. Anderson, *Psalms 1-72* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 391-393.

emotions.

- ♦ *Mahah* (= blot out) ...to rub or wipe off, as in expunging the account of David's sin from the divine records
- ♦ *Kabas* (= wash me) ...literally, to tread or wash by treading--an ancient procedure for cleansing clothes

Similar in content to 2 Sa. 12:13, 51:4 once again expresses that all sin is sin against God. In this way, sin becomes a personal rather than an impersonal thing. To break a law is impersonal; to break affection toward another person is much deeper (cf. Ge. 39:9).¹⁰² Thus, sin is not only the infringement of natural, human rights, but it is also the infringement of rights which have been bestowed as God's gift.¹⁰³

In 51:5, David expresses the universality of sin (cf. 1 Kg. 8:46; Ro. 3:23). The human propensity toward sin precedes any actual act of sin. It is present from conception (cf. Ge. 8:21). As such, sin is both an act and a state, but it is a state before it is an act. Humans are in the state of sin at birth inasmuch as they are estranged from God.¹⁰⁴

In 51:6, the OT concept of *emeth* (= truth) should be understood as somewhat different than our modern, western concept, which we inherited from the Greeks. For the Greeks, truth was the opposite of falsehood--reality as opposed to mere appearance.¹⁰⁵ For the Hebrews, truth carried the idea of faithfulness, trustworthiness, steadfastness and reliability.¹⁰⁶ Thus, when David says, "Yahweh desires truth in the inward parts," he is speaking in this latter sense.

Hyssop (51:7) is the small, bushy plant used for various types of ceremonial cleansing, such as, cleansing for lepers (Lv. 14:6-8) and contamination from a corpse (Nu. 19:18, 19). It was also used at the first Passover (Ex. 12:22). No doubt the author has in mind the repeating phrase, "He will be clean" (Lv. 13:6, 17, 34, etc.). In 51:8, forgiveness results in joy. The crushed bones, which are a symbol of God's judgment, will dance (NEB). By the word "create" (51:10), David is asking for something that God alone can do.

When David asked Yahweh not to remove from him the Holy Spirit, he is not

¹⁰² A. Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament* (New York: Scribners, 1910) 213-214.

¹⁰³ H. Rowley, *The Rediscovery of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1946) 154.

¹⁰⁴ The statement in the KJV, "In sin did my mother conceive me," has sometimes been taken to mean that David was an illegitimate child, but this interpretation is unlikely. Rather, the point is the universality of human sin, cf. A. Anderson, *Psalms (1-72) [NCBC]* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980) 395.

¹⁰⁵ D. Bloesch, *Essentials of Evangelical Theology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1978) 92-94.

¹⁰⁶ L. Morris, *The Gospel According to John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 293.

so much speaking of personal salvation as he is referring to the special endowment and anointing of the Spirit for his kingly task.¹⁰⁷ The Holy Spirit came upon David when Saule anointed him king (1 Sa. 16:13), just as it had upon Saul before him. However, when Saul sinned, the Holy Spirit departed (1 Sa. 16:14), indicating God's rejection of Saul as king (1 Sa. 13:13, 14; 15:26-28). It is this that David prays would not happen.

David's guilt over the murder of Uriah is bound up in the word "bloodguilt" (51:14). His plea, "Open my lips," is a call for the free-flowing avenue of worship that had been cut off by sin. Finally, David recognizes that true repentance and forgiveness are fundamentally inward (51:16-17). Outward ritual, while it carries symbolic importance, can never be a substitute for inward repentance and faith. Notice how closely this resembles other prophetic passages regarding ritual (Is. 1:11-20; 58:5-9; Am. 4:4, 5; 5:4-6; 21-24; 6:5; Mic. 6:6-8). This is not to say that ritual is dispensable, as though, for instance, temple sacrifice was a thing indifferent. It is to say, however, that the essence of a thing is far more important than the symbolic vehicle which carries it!

The Death of the Child (2 Sa. 12:14-25)

Nathan warned David that his illegitimate child would die, because as the prophet said, "You have made the enemies of Yahweh show utter contempt," that is, David had given an occasion for unbelievers to blaspheme and ridicule the true faith of Israel. Though David fasted for a week, the child died just as Nathan had predicted. David's reaction to the news of the child's death is moving: he cleansed himself and went to the house of Yahweh to worship.

Bathsheba bore to David another son, and they named him Solomon (= peace or peaceful). Yahweh loved Solomon and expressed this love by bestowing a special name upon him, Jedidiah (= loved by Yahweh). Solomon was to become the Davidic son to ascend to the throne as the first heir of the covenantal promises.

The Fall of Rabbah (2 Sa. 12:26-31; 1 Chr. 20:2-3)

Meanwhile, the siege of Rabbah lingered on. When Joab finally captured the citadel, probably the lower city surrounding the acropolis,¹⁰⁸ he sent for David to come for the final crushing of the particularly well-built and fortified stronghold. With Israel's entire army, David captured this last bastion and plundered the city. He took for himself the heavy crown of the Ammonite king, which weighed some 75 pounds, and he consigned the Ammonites to the corvee.

¹⁰⁷ L. Wood, *The Holy Spirit in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976) 51.

¹⁰⁸ C. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Books of Samuel*, trans., J. Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 394.

The Dire Predictions of Nathan Begin to Come to Pass: 2 Samuel 13:1-19:43

When Yahweh promised David, "Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity upon you" (2 Sa. 12:11-2), these were not idle words. The next several narratives in 2 Samuel thoroughly describe a series of these calamities.

The Rape of Tamar (2 Sa. 13:1-22)

The opening phrase, "In the course of time," does not give any precise bearing with which to fix dates, but since two of the main characters in the narrative were David's children, both the offspring of Maacah whom David married only after he had become king in Hebron (cf. 2 Sa. 3:3), the reader may assume that the events occurred at about or later than the 20th year of his reign.¹⁰⁹

Life within the royal harem was no doubt plagued with special tensions, but the news of Tamar's rape must have been devastating. To recount the facts briefly, Amnon, with the help of an unscrupulous cousin, designed a scheme to rape his half sister Tamar, with whom he was infatuated. Since apparently the harem families lived in different houses, this required some special intrigue. Nevertheless, the plot was successful, and afterward, as is often the case, Amnon's lust turned into flaming repudiation, a rather striking illustration of the fact that biological passion is a vastly different thing than altruistic love. Tamar was expelled from the house, and she made her way home in disgrace. David was furious, but his own recent adultery apparently made him reluctant to do anything. Absalom, Tamar's brother, said little, but subsequent events show that he only bottled his anger for a future day.

Absalom Murders Amnon (2 Sa. 13:23-29)

Two years passed before Absalom found his opportunity for revenge. At a celebration of the sheep-shearing, Absalom arranged for Amnon to be killed. After the murder, Absalom fled in self-imposed exile to the northern city-state of his grandfather (cf. 2 Sa. 3:3; 13:37). David's grief over this tragedy was surely all the more bitter as the rape and murder within his own family reminded him of his own illicit affair with Bathsheba and his murder of her husband. Nevertheless, after three years had passed, David longed to see Absalom again.

The Return of Absalom (2 Sa. 14:1-33)

Joab, David's general, discovered that David wished to see his son Absalom.

¹⁰⁹Keil and Delitzsch, 397.

Why David was reluctant to repeal the banishment, the text does not say, but Joab determined to arrange a reconciliation, if at all possible. His interest in Absalom is not apparent, but it seems not unlikely that he considered Absalom to be the best prospect for succeeding David as king.¹¹⁰ If so, then Joab's action may well have been opportunistic. With the help of a clever woman who came to David in the guise of seeking a domestic judgment, David was induced to make a decision which could be applied to his own relationship with Absalom. Joab's ruse worked, and David agreed to recall Absalom from Geshur. Nevertheless, David refused to meet his son face to face.

Back in Israel, Absalom became a favorite of the populace because of his striking good looks. His luxurious hair was greatly admired, for full, heavy hair was an emblem of manhood.¹¹¹ For two years, he lived in Jerusalem without seeing his father. Eventually, with the help of Joab, he was accepted back into the king's favor.

Absalom's Coup d'Etat (2 Sa. 15:1-37)

Absalom's reconciliation with his father was little more than a front, for he immediately set in motion a four-year plan by which to strip the kingdom from David. During this time, he managed to cast suspicion upon David's adequacy to deliver justice to the people while at the same time inspiring public confidence in himself. Under the guise of performing a vow at Hebron, Absalom garnered a large following for his intended conspiracy.

When David discovered the plot, he quickly made plans to evacuate with his faithful retainers. Leaving ten slave wives to tend the palace, he, along with the royal family, his private army and his mercenaries, crossed the Kidron amidst the confusion and bewilderment of Jerusalem's citizens. This was not the David of old, who would have quickly moved to the attack against such a usurpation. This was a David who had become weakened by age and the ever present consciousness of his great sin (cf. 15:25-26; 16:11-12). David did have the presence of mind to send Hushai back as a spy into the company of conspirators.

David's Psalms of Distress (Psalm 3, 63)

How poignant must have been the prayers of David as he fled from his capital! Two psalms bear historical inscriptions relating to this flight, and together they provide deep insights about David's inner struggle.

Psalm 3: In Psalm 3, David inwardly fights against the growing disloyalty

¹¹⁰ Keil and Delitzsch, 406.

¹¹¹ H. Luering and R. Vunderink, *ISBE* (1982) II.596.

within his kingdom (3:1, 6). He is fully aware of the rumors that God is no longer on his side (3:2). It may well be that as far as the public was concerned, his abdication threw into question the legitimacy of the Davidic covenant. It was a dark hour for the king, but in his blackest moment, David sought the help of Yahweh. He refused to lash out in bitterness or to resort to his own devices. What a contrast is to be seen between Psalm 3:3b and 2 Sa. 15:30! Every morning that he awakened, David was fully aware that his life was God's gift (3:5). He looked confidently to God's ultimate victory (3:7-8).

Psalm 63: David's flight was in the direction of the Judean desert near the fords of the Jordan River to the north of the Dead Sea (2 Sa. 15:28). His longing for God found a graphic metaphor in the barrenness of the desert (63:1). In his desolation, David recalled earlier times when he had witnessed God's power and glory in Jerusalem (63:2). His faith remained constant in God's hesed (= loyal love, cf. 63:3). As did Job of old (Job 13:15), David determined to praise God until death (63:4-5). The sleepless nights became for him an opportunity for meditation (63:6-8). God's justice would surely prevail, and he would vindicate his faithful servant (63:9-11)!

Ziba's Opportunism (2 Sa. 16:1-4)

Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth, now met David's fleeing company. He gave to them a large selection of foodstuffs, but it is apparent that his motives were opportunistic. What he really wanted was the ownership of the farms he was tending for Mephibosheth. Ziba told David that Mephibosheth was staying in Jerusalem in the hopes of being restored to the throne, which was not the case at all. David, filled with anxiety and grief, failed to see through this deception, and he granted all the farmland of Mephibosheth to Ziba. Later, of course, Ziba's opportunism would be exposed (cf. 2 Sa. 19:26ff.).

Shimei's Rascality (2 Sa. 16:5-14)

Without doubt, Israel still had a contingency of citizens who were loyalists to the family of Saul and were not enamored with David's reign. During David's flight, one of these loyalists seized upon the opportunity to express his antipathy toward the administration of David. Running alongside the retreating royal company, he hurled curses at David, pelting the group with rocks and showering them with dirt.

Abishai, one of David's toughest soldiers (he had personally killed 300 men, cf. 2 Sa. 23:18), requested permission to execute this fanatic, but David refused. The king felt that perhaps this was all somehow justified. Obviously, David was still struggling with his guilt over his great sin. On his death bed, however, David

would later instruct Solomon to exact revenge, and in time, Solomon carried out his father's wishes (cf. 1 Kg. 2:8-9, 36-46).

The Battle of the Advisors (2 Sa. 16:15--17:14, 23)

When David had heard the distressing news that his personal advisor, Ahithophel, had joined the Absalom conspiracy, he had sent his close friend Hushai back into Jerusalem to perform the two-fold task of spying and opposing Ahithophel's counsel (cf. 2 Sa. 15:31-37). Hushai effectively managed to allay any suspicions on the part of Absalom (16:16-19).

Ahithophel's first advice to Absalom was to copulate with David's slave wives, whom David had left to take care of the palace (cf. 2 Sa. 15:16). Such an act would accomplish two things: it would alienate Absalom from his father beyond all repair, and it would be a raw symbol of the complete usurpation of the throne. The appropriation of the royal harem by a successor was generally a sign of the complete transition of power (cf. 2 Sa. 3:7-8; 12:8; 2 Kg. 1:1-4; 2:13-25).¹¹² This advice Absalom followed, and he did so in a tent on a roof in the full view of Israel's citizens. In so doing, another of Nathan's dire predictions was fulfilled (cf. 2 Sa. 12:11).

Ahithophel's reputation as a counsellor was unsurpassed. His next advice was aimed at crushing David's small force quickly and completely. He counseled Absalom to muster a small army and quickly overtake David in flight, while the royal company was exhausted.

Fortunately for David, Hushai's opinion was also solicited, and in a desperate bid for time, Hushai convinced Absalom that Ahithophel's advice was unsound. He warned Absalom that a premature attempt on the fleeing monarch's life might very well backfire. Instead, Hushai advised Absalom to muster the entire Israelite army from all the tribes, a process that would require several days at least, and pursue David with a huge force.

Hushai's fast-talking probably saved David's life, and the popular acceptance of Hushai's words were prompted by Yahweh himself. When Ahithophel realized that his counsel was overturned, he feared for his life -- not so much from Absalom as from the fact that he knew Hushai's counsel was a disastrous course. From the moment Absalom determined to follow it, the conspiracy was doomed. Time was the one thing that could not be given to an old campaigner like David! A huge force, blundering through the wilderness after a desert fox, did not have a chance in a thousand of finding David, who for years evaded Saul when he had tried the very same thing. Rather than fall into the hands of his former lord, as Ahithophel knew

¹¹²R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Social Institutions* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965) I.116-117.

would inevitably happen if David were not executed immediately, he took the route of suicide.

The Successful Espionage Mission (2 Sa. 17:15-22)

As soon as Hushai knew that Absalom had accepted his ploy for time, he did not lose a moment in relaying this information to the priests at Zion, the next link in the chain of intelligence. Word must reach David without delay. Zadok and Abiathar arranged for a slave girl to carry the news to their two sons who were staying at En-Rogel (= the Wanderer's Spring), which lay just beyond the joining of the valleys of Kidron and Hinnom.¹¹³ To their alarm, someone recognized the priests' sons lingering there and reported them to Absalom. A sympathetic family at Bahurim, a village to the east of Jerusalem, hid them in a well until the danger had passed, and they escaped through the desert to the Jordan fords to deliver their intelligence to David.

David's Flight to Mahanaim (2 Sa. 17:23-29)

What an irony that David's final defense was staged in the transjordan at Mahanaim, the capital chosen by Ishbosheth in the civil war period. This turn of events no doubt brought back to David some rather uncomfortable memories. Now, instead of David and Joab pursuing Ishbosheth and Abner in Mahanaim, David and Joab themselves were holed up in Mahanaim trying to escape Absalom and his general, Amasa. At Mahanaim, David's company was provided with staples by three prominent transjordan families who were still loyal.

Absalom's Death (2 Sa. 18:1-18)

The end of Absalom's conspiracy was abrupt and tragic. David deployed his army in three forces, which by this time had swelled to several thousand. It is not unlikely that David was able to draw upon the soldiers stationed at the garrisons in Damascus and Edom (cf. 2 Sa. 8:6, 14). Two of the regiments were under Joab and his brother, and the other one was under Ittai, the Philistine mercenary. The battle spread over the whole landscape in the woods of Ephraim, with David's men gaining the edge amidst heavy casualties. By chance, Absalom ran head-on into a company of David's soldiers, and in his flight, his head was caught in the heavy branches of an oak so that he was swept from the back of his mule.¹¹⁴ When word reached Joab, he quickly pierced the prince with three javelins in deliberate disobedience to David's instructions. Joab's armor-bearers brutalized the corpse before burying it

¹¹³ G. Barrois, "En-Rogel," *IDB* (1962) II.105-106.

¹¹⁴ The difficulty of the Hebrew text at this point prevents the reader from ascertaining whether it was Absalom's entangled hair or wedged skull that prevented him from escaping, cf. Keil and Delitzsch, 438.

under a landslide of boulders.

David is Informed of Absalom's Death (2 Sa. 18:19-33)

In ancient times, vital communication was accomplished by runners, young men swift of foot who could travel great distances. Ahimaaz, the priest's son, wanted to be the runner to inform David that the conspiracy was overturned, but Joab appointed an African runner to bear the news. Still, Ahimaaz insisted, so he was allowed to run. Though he managed to outrun the African, Ahimaaz did not have the full report. He knew that David's army had won, but he knew no vital details about Prince Absalom. The African runner, arriving shortly after Ahimaaz, informed David of the tragic news. David was deeply shaken. His wrenching grief over the death of his son still rings in the hearts of all who read the story!

Joab's Heartlessness (2 Sa. 19:1-8a)

Although Joab had been with David since his outlaw days, he never managed to see things through David's eyes. David had warned his soldiers not to harm Absalom (cf. 2 Sa. 18:5), and instead Joab had brutally killed him at the first opportunity (cf. 2 Sa. 18:10-15). Now, in the midst of David's grief for his son, Joab once more showed his insensitivity. He harshly rebuked David for his grief and warned him that if he did not encourage his soldiers after their hard-fought victory, another defection was likely. This was quite possibly a true assessment, but Joab's manner was unnecessarily harsh. Nevertheless, David swallowed his grief and received his army in the gateway of Mahanaim.

David Returns to the Capital (2 Sa. 19:8b-40)

The death of Absalom left Israel in a state of political uncertainty. Although the conspiracy had failed, David's flight from the capital and the fact that most of Israel apparently had supported the conspiracy left the nation in a state of confusion. If the king was brought back, would there be a bloody purge of all who had been involved in the conspiracy?

Realizing their confusion, David, once more acting as the diplomat *par excellence*, took the initiative to set things right. He informed the important family heads (elders) that he was open to an invitation to return to the capital. However, to assure them that he would not seek retribution, he guaranteed immunity to Amasa, Absalom's general. Furthermore, he promised to establish Amasa as the first commander of the army, thus replacing Joab, who by his callousness had fallen from the king's graces. This message assuaged the elders' fears, and they sent to David the invitation for his return. David departed Mahanaim and returned to the fords of the Jordan to be received back into the capital.

There were at least two men who had excellent reasons to be alarmed at David's return. One was Shimei, the Benjamite who had thrown clods and cursed David as he and the royal company had fled the capital (cf. 2 Sa. 16:5-13). The other was Ziba, who had bilked his master Mephibosheth out of the family property (16:1-4). David may have granted immunity to Amasa, but that was no guarantee for these two, and they knew it. Had not Ahithophel, one of the wisest men in the nation, committed suicide as soon as he knew the conspiracy was doomed? Thus, these two men rushed to the Jordan fords to make amends to the returning monarch.

Shimei prostrated himself before David in asking for the king's pardon. His timing was perfect, for David could hardly resort to revenge, since his reclaimed kingship was still on very uncertain ground. Abishai, who had wanted to execute Shimei earlier (cf. 2 Sa. 16:9-12), again pressed David for permission to kill the dissident, but David wisely refused and granted Shimei full pardon. Such a pardon, of course, only extended to the king's death (cf. 1 Kg. 2:8, 9, 36-46).

Ziba, also, was quick to express loyalty to the king (19:17-18), not that such an expression was necessarily sincere. He had been playing both sides of the fence. He had enamoured himself to David by supplying him with foodstuffs when David fled the city (cf. 2 Sa. 16:1, 2). However, if the conspiracy had been successful, he had managed to secure possession of all Mephibosheth's property. Now that Mephibosheth had appeared to welcome back the king, his treachery and opportunism came to light. When David questioned Mephibosheth about his ungainly appearance, Mephibosheth recounted how Ziba had betrayed him and had lied to the king. David realized that he had made a hasty and unfair judgment, and yet to strip Ziba of everything and publicly admit his own lack of discernment at this moment might well have resulted in a disenchanting populace. Thus, although David offered to divide the property between Ziba and Mephibosheth, he was no doubt relieved when Mephibosheth graciously allowed Ziba to have it all.

David's return to cross the Jordan ended on at least one happy note. He was accompanied by Barzillai, the elderly but wealthy patriarch from Gilead who had supplied the king and his royal company with food staples in Mahanaim (cf. 2 Sa. 17:27-29). David invited Barzillai to accompany him as a pensioner of the state, much like Mephibosheth, but Barzillai valued his independence too highly. Instead, Barzillai agreed to allow Kimham to go (possibly his son, cf. 1 Kg. 2:7).¹¹⁵

The Instability of the Monarchy (2 Sa. 19:41-43)

Factionalism lay deep in the bones of the clans of Israel. Though the clans

¹¹⁵Josephus understood Kimham to be Barzillai's son, cf. *Antiquities of the Jews*, VII.11.4.

had united under Saul, the outlaw years of David and the civil war between the family of Saul and the family of David had left permanent grievances. Apparently, Judah's troops had been the first to arrive at the Jordan fords to escort the king back to the capital. The troops of the northern tribes had not all arrived, but the gala ceremonies began without them. By the time of the arrival of the rest of the northern troops, who had much further to come, the celebration was already over, and they felt that they had been jilted. Jealousies broke out anew, and harsh words were exchanged. Once more, the kingdom teetered on the verge of a political rupture.

The Sheba Revolt: 20:1-22

Before David could get back to Jerusalem, the controversy at the Jordan fords erupted into yet another rebellion. The leader this time was Sheba, a clansman of the Benjamites and probably a loyalist to the tribe of Saul, the former king. Sheba called for a secession of the northern clans.¹¹⁶ Moving quickly to the capital, David provided security for his harem and at once sent Amasa, his newly appointed general, to muster the soldiers of Judah. When Amasa took longer than expected, David felt compelled to dispatch his personal troops, largely mercenaries (cf. 2 Sa. 8:18; 15:18; 20:7),¹¹⁷ to hunt Sheba down before his following became too large.

Near Gibeon, Amasa joined the mercenaries with the troops of Judah, and Joab, still seething because he had been replaced as the Chief of Staff, saw his opportunity to rid himself of the newly appointed general. To approach Amasa with dagger in hand was too obvious, so the wily Joab managed to drop his dagger from his sheath near Amasa. In the seemingly innocent act of picking it up combined with a gesture of greeting, he suddenly plunged the weapon into Amasa's stomach. This violence temporarily halted the pursuit of Sheba until Amasa's corpse was removed from the road.

In the meantime, Sheba was apparently having troubles of his own. That his support was scanty seems evident in that he finally was run to ground in the far north at Abel Beth Maacah. The only ones who came to his support were the Berites (possibly to be identified with a family of the Asher clan, though this is not certain, cf. 1 Chr. 7:30, 36).¹¹⁸

When Joab arrived, having now assumed control of the troops, he immediately laid siege to the city intending to break down the wall (see Footnote

¹¹⁶Notice that there is a clear distinction being made here between Judah and Israel, a distinction which had already been made during the civil war and which, after the death of Solomon, would flower into two nations.

¹¹⁷The Kerethite and Pelethite mercenaries were probably of Philistine origin, cf. E. Dalglish, "Pelethites," *IDB* (1962) III.709-710.

¹¹⁸H. Guthrie, Jr., "Beri," *IDB* (1962) I.386.

#93, Page 72). The siege ramp of 20:15 probably refers to an earthen mound which served double-duty as a protection for archers and as a causeway for battering rams. When the wall had been breached, heavily armed infantry could then invade the city under the cover of a withering fire of arrows from the archers.¹¹⁹ However, before the siege was complete, the leaders of the city, under the direction of a farsighted woman, arranged to execute Sheba and throw his decapitated head over the wall. When this was accomplished, the siege ended.

The Administration of the State: 2 Sa. 20:23-26; 23:8-39; 1 Chr. 11:1-47; 23:1--27:34

We know very little about the administration of the Davidic state except what little can be gleaned from this passage and its parallel in 2 Sa. 8:15-18. We may assume that David directly headed his own government, since there is no hint of a prime minister. The closest parallel to David's administration is to be found in Egypt. David may have become aware of Egyptian politics through Canaanite city-states which had formerly been under Egyptian influence.¹²⁰ State revenues were derived from tribute of vassals whom David conquered rather than by the taxation of Israeli citizens (cf. 2 Sa. 8:2, 6, 8, 10; 12:30, 31).

David's Cabinet

David's immediate bureaucracy consisted of:

- ♦ *Commander in Chief/Commander of the Israeli Army:* Joab (who murdered Abner, Absalom and Amasa)
- ♦ *Commander of Mercenaries:* Benaiah (see 2 Sa. 23:20-23; 1 Chr. 11:22-25 for a sketch of his fighting prowess. Later, Benaiah would become Solomon's "hit man" in the purge at the beginning of his reign. It may well be that David used mercenaries for his personal body guard, cf. 2 Sa. 15:18; 20:6-7).
- ♦ *Royal Recorder:* Jehoshaphat (not to be confused with the later king by the same name)
- ♦ *Secretary of State:* Sheva, also called Seraiah
- ♦ *Commander of the Corvee:* Adonairam (corvee = forced labor)
- ♦ *Advisors:* David's friends, Hushai (cf. 2 Sa. 15:32-36) and Ahithophel (who defected to Absalom and later committed suicide, cf. 2 Sa. 15:31; 16:23; 17:23)

¹¹⁹J. Wevers, "War, methods of," *IDB* (1962) IV.804.

¹²⁰J. Bright *A History of Israel*, 2nd. ed. (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972) 201.

- ♦ *Chief Priests:* Zadok, Ahimelech and Abiathar
- ♦ *David's Personal Priest:* Ira

The Problem of Throne Succession

By this time, Israel was fully committed to the monarchy. The days of the judges were too far back for there to be any realistic hope of returning. Nevertheless, there remained a serious threat to the monarchy--the problem of throne succession. This problem had given rise to the civil war after Saul's death in battle. Now, in the waning years of David's reign, there was still no precedent. It was generally expected that one of the king's sons would follow, but it was not clearly established who was to be the one. Whereas Samuel had anointed David, when David was still a young man, there was no corresponding event, at least of which the public knew, in the latter years of David's reign. To be sure, Solomon was at least implied to be David's successor in the message that Nathan gave to David (cf. 2 Sa. 12:24-25), but this apparently was not widely known. David had informed his own family of his choice of Solomon (cf. 1 Kg. 1:13), but for whatever reason, he had not announced this to the nation.

It is probable, therefore, that both the Absalom conspiracy and the Sheba revolt were symptomatic of Israel's uncertainty about the future. Later, when David was on his deathbed, yet another usurpation would occur under another prince, Adonijah (1 Kg. 1).

David's Extended Administration

David's administration was undoubtedly progressive and became more complex as his reign advanced. Some of the final acts of organization did not take place until the waning years of his kingship, when he made Solomon vice regent (cf. 1 Chr. 23:1). Nevertheless, it will be appropriate to sketch in this extended administration without addressing it piece-meal throughout the remaining narrative.

David's personal army, called "the mighty men" (2 Sa. 23:8-39; 1 Chr. 11:10-47), began attaching itself to him while he was still an outlaw (1 Chr. 12:1-22). Others joined him at his coronation in Hebron (1 Chr. 12:23-40). Among his soldiers were tough leaders singled out for special recognition. They consisted of "The Three," under the leadership of Abishai, Joab's brother, as well as "The Thirty" elite guardsmen.

Apparently, the conscripted army of David (1 Chr. 27:1-15) was divided into relays, so that the various divisions could be on duty one month a year during times of peace. Each division consisted of 24,000 soldiers.

David divided the levitical clan into four general orders (1 Chr. 23:1--26:32): *temple workers* (24,000), *civil judges* (6,000), *gatekeepers* who were porters

serving as guards and probably collectors of the offerings at the places of worship (4,000), and *musicians* (4,000).¹²¹ Because there were so many priests, they were divided into twenty-four orders so that each could minister twice per year for a week at a time.¹²² This division of priests harmonized well with the twelve lunar months in the Israelite annual calendar.¹²³ The singers-musicians were also divided into twenty-four orders so as to minister by course.

Officers (1 Chr. 27:16-24) were appointed over the twelve tribes, presumably to carry out David's civil administration. Rather extensive storage was arranged to hold the various royal foodstuffs as well as special holding grounds for the royal herds (1 Chr. 27:25-31). Besides his counselors and other cabinet members, David had an overseer to supervise the lives of his sons (1 Chr. 27:32-34).

The Closing Events of David's Reign: 2 Sa. 21:1-14; 22:1-51; 24:1-25; 1 Chr. 21:1--22:19; 28:1--29:20

The last few chapters of 2 Samuel and 1 Chronicles are difficult to put into any certain chronology. Phrases such as "during the reign of David" (2 Sa. 21:1) and "in the course of time" (2 Sa. 21:18) are too general to be of much help. It is not uncommon to regard the narratives from 2 Samuel 21 and following as a sort of appendix.¹²⁴ We may associate 1 Chronicles 21 and following with the latter part of David's reign, but beyond that, chronology and harmony with 2 Samuel is quite speculative.

The Gibeonites are Avenged (2 Sa. 21:1-14)

The strange story of the Gibeonites' revenge is difficult to place except to say that it occurred after David had accepted Mephibosheth as a pensioner of the state (cf. 2 Sa. 9). The background for the event involves a treaty which was made by Joshua with an alien clan of Amorites during the early conquests of Canaan (Jos. 9). Even though this pact should never have been made, Israel was bound to honor it. All treaties were sacrosanct before Yahweh.

During his reign, Saul had evidently attempted to exterminate the Gibeonites for reasons unknown. Now, a three-year famine was upon Palestine as divine judgment for this broken treaty.¹²⁵ David was informed by Yahweh (whether by

¹²¹ C. Wold, "Doorkeeper," *IDB* (1962) I.864.

¹²² L. Morris, *The Gospel According to Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974) 68.

¹²³ There is evidence that in ancient Israel the calendar was influenced by both lunar and solar phenomena. However, the organization of the year was based on a lunar month pattern, cf. D. Morgan, "Calendar," *ISBE* (1979) I.575.

¹²⁴ D. Payne, "Samuel, Books of," *NBD* (1982) 1066.

¹²⁵ It must not be forgotten that the concept of covenantal solidarity was extremely important in ancient Israel. In the

prophet or oracle, we do not know) that the cause was Saul's Gibeonite purge. In attempting to expiate this sin, David agreed to the Gibeonites' demand for blood vengeance, presumably upon the basis of the statute in Numbers 35:33-34. He offered to them two sons of Saul by a concubine and five grandsons of Saul through Saul's daughter Merab (who at one time almost became David's wife, 1 Sa. 18:17-19), and all these were killed and exposed.¹²⁶ Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son, was spared because of David's covenant with Jonathan (cf. 1 Sa. 20). The concubine of Saul, whose two sons were among those executed, began a vigil over the corpses. Her wake did not cease until God sent rain to end the drought. When David heard of her vigil, he decreed a collective burial for the remains of Saul's fallen house. When this had been accomplished, the famine ended.

David's Song of Victory (2 Sa. 22:1-51)

Again, the reader faces uncertainty with regard to when David composed the following psalm of deliverance, but it may be safely put in the latter half of his reign. The text given in 2 Samuel parallels very closely the text in Psalm 18. The superscription of the psalm attributes authorship to David after all his enemies had been subdued.

Yahweh is here depicted as David's refuge (22:1-3). The descriptive words of this section recall the various places of fortification and safety which David had used in his battles, such as:

sela = the rock or cliff (1 Sa. 23:25)

metsudah = the fortress or stronghold (1 Sa. 22:4-5; 24:22; 2 Sa. 5:17; 23:14)

tsur = a rock or crag (1 Sa. 24:2)

sojourn, 24,000 Israelites died in a plague due to the immorality of a minority (Nu. 25:1-9). Sin and/or covenantal transgression by even an individual bore national consequences, as may be seen in the transgression of Achan (Jos. 7:24, 25). This collective liability for sin is evident in the national disaster which resulted from David's census (2 Sa. 24). On occasion, such solidarity is to be seen in terms of a clan, such as, the annihilation of the family of Ahab by Jehu (2 Ki. 9:6-10). The effect of the individual upon society is particularly true of the king, who by his faithfulness to Yahweh (or lack of it) affected the nation for better or worse (Ps. 72:15-17; 2 Kg 22:14-20//2 Chr. 34:22-28). The climax of solidarity may ultimately be seen in the prophecy of Caiaphas, "It is better for you that one man die for the people than that the whole nation perish" (Jn. 11:49-52), cf. H. Robinson, *Corporate Personality in Ancient Israel* (rpt. Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980); W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. Baker (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1967) II.428ff.; E. Jacob, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. Heathcote and Allcock (New York: Harper & Row, 1958) 237.

¹²⁶The Hebrew word rendered "expose" in the NIV ("hang" in the KJV) actually means to be alienated or dislocated, but it is used idiomatically for the idea of execution by hanging, impaling (or crucifying) and the exhibition of the corpses after they were executed. It is probably to be taken in this latter sense here in 2 Sa. 21:9, cf. Harris, Archer and Waltke, *TWOT* (1980) I.397.

David describes his struggle with death (22:4-6). There is nothing to indicate whether he is recalling a specific situation or is simply lumping all of his near-escapes into one description, but the parallel phrases representing death are very vivid.

Enemies = the Hebrew plural is at times used to denote a superlative; as such, death is the highest enemy.¹²⁷

Waves (breakers) of death = a metaphor of violent floods

Torrents of Belial (rendered, "torrents of destruction") = Belial is an ancient Hebrew word that is rendered by English translations such as "scoundrel," "base," "godless," and "abominable." The precise meaning of the word is not certain, but a feasible possibility is that it comes from a root meaning "worthlessness" or "uselessness". By the time of the NT it had become a synonym for Satan.¹²⁸

Cords of sheol (rendered, "cords of the grave") = the metaphor of a hunter laying traps or snares for wild game; *sheol* is an OT word referring to the place of the dead. It is a flexible word and alternately can mean the grave or the state of death or the underworld.¹²⁹

Verses 22:7-20 depict a theophany of Yahweh as David's rescuer.¹³⁰ Typical of other theophanies (cf. Ex. 19:16-20; Hab. 3:3-16), David describes God's intervention on his behalf in cosmic terms. God's presence is so awesome, terrible and overwhelming that the universe is stricken at his appearance. The imagery is intended to describe Yahweh's raw power. In his mighty strength, Yahweh reached down to rescue David from death.

From 22:21-25, It might appear that David is indulging in extravagant self-

¹²⁷M. Dahood, *Psalms 1-50* (New York: Doubleday, 1965) 105.

¹²⁸D. Payne, "Belial," *IDB* (1962) I.129; Keil and Delitzsch, *Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 471-472.

¹²⁹D. Innes, "Sheol," *IDB* (1962) IV.1103.

¹³⁰The word theophany, meaning "God made manifest," refers to a visible and/or tangible manifestation of God in time and space. Sometimes the figure appears as the *Mal'ak Yahweh* (= Angel of the Lord), sometimes as the *panim* (= face) of God, and sometimes as some other anthropomorphic figure. Sometimes it is not clear whether the description of a theophany is to be taken as representative or as an actual appearance. Nevertheless, the concept of theophany expressed Yahweh's freedom to manifest himself in time-space history. This does not, of course, indicate that God is corporeal. John Calvin aptly remarks: "Such modes of expression, therefore, do not so much express what kind of a being God is, as accommodate the knowledge of him to our feebleness. In so doing, he must, of course, stoop far below his proper height," cf. J. Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 13:1.

acclaim, but we should understand that his words are spoken in the context of the covenant.¹³¹ The words "laws" (judgments) and "decrees" (statutes) are commonly coupled together to describe the Mosaic Torah.¹³² Thus, David says that he has been faithful to uphold his end of the covenant stipulations (excepting, of course, his lapse in the affair with Bathsheba). However, beyond David himself there is the real possibility of messianic overtones in the passage, so that the righteousness which is described points beyond David to Jesus Christ.

This next section of the psalm describes David's triumph over his foes (22:26-46). On the one hand, it begins with a description of Yahweh's reciprocity to the faithful, the blameless, and the pure, and on the other hand, his shrewdness to those who were crooked. It also speaks of his favoritism toward the weak and helpless.¹³³ Though David was overwhelmed by his own weakness and the power of his enemies, Yahweh made him strong. It is not David's own skill or strength that are exalted, but Yahweh's (cf. 22:28, 30, 33-37, 40-41, 44). The whole passage anticipates Paul's well-loved words: "For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Co. 12:9-10).

The last stanza is a doxology (22:47-51). The phrase "Yahweh lives" is analogous to the frequent name for God in the OT, "the living God." This divine quality sets Yahweh apart from humans, whose lives are temporal. It also sets Yahweh over against the pagan deities, either because they are lifeless idols or because their worshipers conceived of them as dying and resurrecting annually.¹³⁴ But Yahweh lives! Again, David resorts to the metaphor of the rock. He closes with a praise to Yahweh as the covenant-maker who will show *hesed* (= loyal love) to his dynasty.

David's Great Census (2 Sa. 24:1-25; 1 Chr. 21:1-30)

Besides his illicit affair with Bathsheba, David's great census is the other significant sin in his life. The reader is not told why David decided to take a census nor what was the real nature of the sin involved, but it must surely have been more

¹³¹The concept of *tsedaqah* (= righteousness) in the OT, especially in the early periods, was primarily concerned with human action in accord with some outside norm, such as, the Mosaic law. It was an active quality rather than a passive one, that is, it described not so much what a person was but what a person did. Later, in the writings of the 8th century prophets, the word took on a deeper content as the prophets emphasized that the norm for righteousness was not only God's law but God's character, cf. D. Lewis, "Righteousness: The Old Testament Norm for Relationships" (William Tyndale College, n.p. 1982).

¹³²D. Kidner, *Psalms 1-72* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP: 1973) 93.

¹³³The word *ani* (= humble) refers primarily to a person's circumstances rather than his/her character. It receives alternative renderings in the English versions as "afflicted," "lowly," "poor," "weak" and "needy," and it generally describes those who are underdogs, cf. Kidner, 94.

¹³⁴Jacob, 38ff.

serious than a matter of counting heads. A general census of Israel was commanded by God himself on at least two occasions (Nu. 1:1-4; 26:1-4), so the severity of the sin does not seem to have been merely the census itself. It has been reasonably suggested that such a census was a step toward military conscription, taxes and/or forced labor levies from among the Israelite citizens.¹³⁵ Too, it might have been an outgrowth of David's pride. In any case, the questionable nature of David's order was so apparent to those close at hand that even Joab, who was by no means a paragon of virtue, was reluctant to obey it and even omitted the census of two tribes (1 Chr. 21:6; cf. Nu. 1:47-49).

There is a very curious difference between 2 Sa. 24:1 and 1 Chr. 21:1. The former describes David's census as being prompted by God, because Yahweh was angry at the nation. The latter attributes the census to the work of Satan. Most conservative scholars suggest that the Lord permitted Satan to encourage David to undertake the census, because both the king and the nation had developed a bad case of self-dependency and were relying upon their own powers rather than upon God. Therefore, God deemed it necessary to give them disciplinary judgment so as to correct this waywardness.¹³⁶

Besides the foregoing famous discrepancy, there are some 18 numerical discrepancies between the Chronicles and the Samuel/Kings narratives of which the census figures in 2 Sa. 24:9 and 1 Chr. 21:5 are examples. Conservatives usually understand these to be scribal errors resulting from the difficulty of making out numerals in worn-out or smudged manuscripts.¹³⁷ However, in the example cited above, it is also possible that one census reflects a number including the tribes of Levi and Benjamin while the other does not.¹³⁸

Whatever the real nature of David's sin, he was conscience-stricken and realized his error. The next morning, God communicated to David three options for punishment, and it is characteristic of David that he chose not merely the one shortest in duration but the one directly associated with God's hand, for as David said, "Yahweh's mercy is great." The plague of three days cost 70,000 lives. Here again, as in the case of Saul's treachery to the Gibeonites, one sees the idea of solidarity in Israel, that is, the actions of one person affecting the nation.

When the plague drew near Jerusalem, Yahweh decided it was enough. David and Israel's elders had apparently been on their way north to Gibeon to

¹³⁵J. Bright, *The Kingdom of God* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1953) 39; L. Wood, *A Survey of Israel's History* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970) 278.

¹³⁶G. Archer, "Alleged Errors and Discrepancies in the Original Manuscripts of the Bible," *Inerrancy*, ed. Norman Geisler (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980) 79-81.

¹³⁷Archer, 60-61.

¹³⁸J. Myers, *I Chronicles* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1965) 147.

inquire of God for help, and while on the way, they met the angel of destruction (1 Chr. 21:29-30). When they saw him with outstretched sword, they prostrated themselves and pled for mercy. David accepted the full blame. The Angel of Yahweh then instructed David to build an altar on the threshingfloor north of the capital.¹³⁹ David purchased the property, refusing to accept it as a gift, and built the altar as God had instructed. Fire from heaven fell and consumed the sacrifice as a symbol of God's acceptance. The plague ceased.

David's Preparations for the Temple (1 Chr. 22:1-19; 28:1--29:20)

The property which David purchased from Araunah, the Jebusite, was decided upon as the site for the future temple (22:1). Although not allowed by God to construct it, David determined to set in motion all the preliminary processes for its construction. These preparations included the gathering of building materials and the assembly of craftsmen (22:2-5, 14-16). Solomon was made co-regent with David in order for him to be familiar with the work from the very beginning (23:1).

At a special assembly of his entire court, David unveiled his intentions for the transition of power after his death and for the building of the temple (28:1-10). The co-regency of Solomon was strengthened by the specific announcement that he would succeed his father. The announcement was made in the context of God's covenant with David, so that Solomon was not only David's choice, but Yahweh's choice. Yahweh had chosen the tribe of Judah, the clan of Jesse, the family of David, and Solomon as the royal son. In full view of the court, David charged Solomon with his responsibility.

Under inspiration from God, David commissioned drawings and notations for the building of the temple and its furniture as well as for the decorum of the priests and levites (28:11-21). Although Solomon is often thought to have been the genius behind the temple, the Chronicler credits David with the basic plans. No doubt Solomon expanded and detailed the plans his father committed to him.

In addition to the resources already amassed, David contributed much of his own personal wealth to the cause of the temple as did many prominent families in Israel (29:1-9).

To conclude the assembly, David offered a prayer of praise and thanksgiving (29:10-20). In this prayer, he emphasized that God was the ultimate owner of all

¹³⁹Threshingfloors were located near the villages of the ancient Near East in places where the wind would assist in the winnowing. The idea of a "floor" was that such a place was a rock outcropping or soil area coated with clay. Sheaves were scattered about a foot or so deep and protected at the edges with a ring of stones. Animals, such as oxen, were driven around over the sheaves until the grain had been loosened from the stalks. Sometimes a wooden sledge, with iron or stone fragments fastened to the underside, was pulled over the sheaves for the same effect. At winnowing, the sheaves were tossed into the air with wooden forks to let the breeze blow the larger pieces of straw away. The remains could be further sifted and bagged, cf. H. Richardson, *IDB* (1962) IV.636.

material things and that humans were primarily stewards of these resources.

The Death of David and the Transition of Power: 2 Sa. 23:1-7; 1 Kg. 1:1--2:12; 1 Chr. 29:21-30

As pointed out earlier, the chronology of events during David's final days is uncertain at best. Two questions must be answered in trying to sort through the various narratives, namely:

1. When did the Adonijah conspiracy occur? It is described only in 1 Kings 1 and follows a description of David as very aged and bedfast.
2. Why was Solomon inaugurated twice (or even three times) as the succeeding monarch after David (1 Chr. 29:22)? Descriptions of Solomon's inauguration appear in three passages (1 Kg. 1; 1 Chr. 23:1; 1 Chr. 28 and 29).

In answering these questions, the interpreter is forced into a dilemma. If the Adonijah conspiracy and subsequent inauguration of Solomon is the first coronation to occur, and if it happened when David was bedfast and unable even to attend the ceremonies (1 Kg. 1:1-4, 15, 33-35), one must account for David being able to be up and around at Solomon's second inauguration (cf. 1 Chr. 28:1-2, 11; 29:1, 20, 22). On the other hand, if the Adonijah conspiracy occurred after the inauguration described in 1 Chr. 28 and 29, one must explain why 1 Chr. 29:22 is called a "second" inauguration. Bible scholars are divided on how to treat this problem, and it is beyond the scope of these studies to explore it. It is sufficient to say that the transition of power from David to Solomon was not a smooth one, but in the end, Solomon was fully established on his father's throne.

Solomon's "Second" Inauguration (1 Chr. 29:21-25)

On the day after David had committed his temple plans to Solomon in full view of the royal court, a celebration was staged to honor Solomon's kingship. Solomon was anointed by Zadok the priest. It is worth pointing out that the throne of Israel is called the "throne of Yahweh," and as such, Solomon's kingship derived from Yahweh's kingship.

The Adonijah Conspiracy (1 Kg. 1:1-53)

The problem of throne succession once more surfaced in David's final days. David was not only old but was suffering from a loss of body heat. Both factors combined to point to the king's imminent death. Accordingly, David's servants

arranged for a beautiful young virgin to lie beside him and to attend him. Whether this action was merely out of concern for the health of the king or was to ascertain whether the king was still sexually potent¹⁴⁰ is not clear, but it is unnecessary to go to the extreme of supposing that the king "sought to warm himself at the dead embers of his former lusts."¹⁴¹

It is in this situation, with the king apparently near the end, that Adonijah determined to secure the throne for himself. He was now the oldest surviving son (Kileab was apparently deceased as were Amnon and Absalom, cf. 2 Sa. 3:2-4). David's failure as a father is apparent in that he had never checked Adonijah in his waywardness (1:6).

Adonijah managed to gain a modest following including Joab, David's general, and Abiathar, the priest. With this entourage, he went to the Stone of Zoheleth (lit., the Serpent's Stone)¹⁴² for a clandestine coronation. Nathan, the prophet, discovered the plot and quickly informed Bathsheba, who was in danger of being executed with her son, Solomon, if the conspiracy succeeded (1:12, 21). David was immediately approached by Bathsheba and Nathan. From his bed, David arranged for Solomon's immediate coronation. According to the arrangement, Benaiah along with the mercenary army, Zadok the priest, and Nathan the prophet, escorted Solomon to Gihon, a spring to the east of Jerusalem and not far from the Serpent's Stone (which was probably hidden from view by the rugged terrain). Solomon was quickly anointed king and the spectators responded so noisily that Adonijah and his company, further to the south, heard the celebration.

Adonijah's geniality melted when he was informed of Solomon's enthronement. His guests fled, and in terror, he escaped to one of the sacred altars for sanctuary.¹⁴³ Only when Solomon promised him immunity did he leave.

David's Last Charge to Solomon (1 Kg. 2:1-9)

When David knew that his end was near, he summoned Solomon to give him his final advice.

First, David reminded his son of the two covenants by which he must abide--the covenant of Torah and the covenant of the Davidic throne. It is sometimes

¹⁴⁰A monarch's sexual potency was an ancient sign of a king's ruling capability, cf. C. Pfeiffer, *Old Testament History* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1973) 270.

¹⁴¹Contra B. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966) 148.

¹⁴²Zoheleth was possibly the place where kings of Jerusalem had been installed in the Jebusite era, F. Bruce, *Israel and the Nations* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1963) 34.

¹⁴³Which altar he claimed for sanctuary is not certain. There are three possibilities: (1) the one on Zion at the tent of the ark (2) the one at Gibeah at the Tent of Meeting (3) the newly built altar on Araunah's threshingfloor, cf. C. Keil, *The Books of the Kings*, trans. J. Martin (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970) 25.

overstressed that the latter of these covenants is unconditional simply because God said, "I will" (2 Sa. 7:14).¹⁴⁴ However, it is quite evident that David understood there to be a conditional element implicit within the covenant. In one sense, the covenant may be considered as unconditional in that it relates to the coming of Christ, but in another sense, it is conditional in that it relates to David's dynasty and the empire in Palestine.

In David's final warnings and wishes, the reader approaches an area that causes ethical discomfort because of its obvious predilection towards vengeance. However, one must not impose upon David some sort of NT ethical standard, for he was very much a child of his times. David instructed Solomon concerning three people. Two of them, Joab and Shimei, were threats to Solomon's national security, and David knew that Solomon must eliminate them if he was to have peace. Joab was an incurable opportunist. He had murdered two men to keep his position as commander of the armies and had joined in Adonijah's conspiracy against Solomon (2 Sa. 3:22-27; 20:8-10; 1 Kg. 1:7). Shimei had cursed and humiliated David during the Absalom revolt (2 Sa. 16:5-12), and though David had been obliged to give him immunity to preserve peace (2 Sa. 19:16-23), he never forgot. Both Joab and Shimei were executed by Solomon as was Adonijah (1 Kg. 2:23-25, 28-35). Abiathar, who had joined Adonijah's conspiracy, was removed from priestly office (1 Kg. 2:26-29).

On the other hand, David requested kindness to be performed to the family of Barzillai of the transjordan. Barzillai had aided David during the Absalom revolt (2 Sa. 17:27-29; 19:31-39).

David's Last Song (2 Sa. 23:1-7)

David's last psalm is more or less a prophetic will and testament. He envisioned the security of his future dynasty as guaranteed by the covenant and the salvation which that covenant signified. By God's providence, the outside agencies of wickedness would not thwart God's promises.

David's Death (1 Kg. 2:10-12; 1 Chr. 29:26-30)

When David died, his remains were interred in Jerusalem. He had reigned seven years in Hebron and thirty-three years in Jerusalem--forty years in all. Further details of his reign were recorded in a variety of documents preserved in the state archives, but they have long since been lost to us.

¹⁴⁴ Typical of dispensationalists, J. Hartill argues that the Davidic covenant is completely unconditional, cf. *Principles of Hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1947) 24. This viewpoint betrays an unawareness of the conditional language that is found later regarding the Davidic covenant both in 1 Kings as well as in the prophets, particularly Jeremiah.