



Zondervan Illustrated Bible Backgrounds Commentary

1 & 2 Samuel



V. Philips Long

John H. Walton, *General Editor*

Contributors to 1 and 2 Samuel

General Editor • John H. Walton (PhD, Hebrew Union College), Professor of Old Testament, Wheaton College and Graduate School, Wheaton, Illinois

1 and 2 Samuel • V. Philips Long (PhD, Cambridge University), Professor of Old Testament, Regent College, Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada

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ePub Edition January 2016: ISBN 978-0-310-52760-2

Requests for information should be addressed to: Zondervan, 3900 Sparks Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546

The Library of Congress has cataloged the printed edition as follows: Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel / John H. Walton, general editor.

p. cm. — (Zondervan illustrated Bible backgrounds commentary ; v. 2) Includes [index](#).

ISBN 978-0-310-25574-1 (hardcover, printed) 1. Bible. O.T. Joshua—Commentaries. 2. Bible. O.T. Judges—Commentaries. 3. Bible. O.T. Ruth—Commentaries. 4. Bible. O.T. Samuel—Commentaries. I. Walton, John H., 1952-BS1295.53.J68 2009 222'.07—dc22 2009005116

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- Every Bible book and chapter hyperlink in the Bible text returns or goes back to the full chapter listing at the beginning of the [Appendix](#). Or, use the device's "back" button or function to go back to the last selection.

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Acknowledgments

We are grateful for so many who have provided us photographs, some at reduced prices and others free of charge, to help make this work a visual resource on the ancient world. Credits appear by each photograph, but we would especially recognize the following:

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We would like especially to thank Marie-Lan Nguyen, who provided so many photos in public domain on Wikimedia, as well as Rama, who even went and took specific photos that we wanted. Others who provided numerous photographs through Wikimedia include Guillaume Blanchard and Keith Schengili-Roberts.

We are grateful to so many who posted their photographs on Flickr and made them available to us when we requested them. Lenka Peacock, Manfred Nader, and Peter White were particularly generous and gracious as they allowed us to use many of their photographs.

The Schøyen Collection supplied many photographs at no charge, and we are grateful to Elizabeth Sorensen for her capable help.

Edward Loring, Research Fellow and Network Administrator Russian Academy of Sciences Centre for Egyptological Studies, Moscow (CESRAS), Russian Institute of Egyptology in Cairo (RIEC), provided photographs we could not have otherwise gotten.

Photography Suppliers were very helpful in our endless searches for photographs and we would especially like to acknowledge Todd Bolen (www.bibleplaces.com), Zev Radovan (www.biblelandpictures.com), Art Resource (www.artres.com, with thanks to Ann and Jennifer), Werner Forman (www.werner-forman-archive.com, with thanks to Themis), Jim Martin (see [photo credits](#)), Jack Hazut (www.israelimage.net), Richard Cleave (Rohr

Productions), and Neal Bierling (www.phoenixdatasystems.com).

Thanks also to my colleagues who provided photographs: Fred Mabie, Steven Voth, John Monson, Jim Monson, Rami Arav, Scott Noegel, Aren Maier, Daniel Master, the Leon Levy Foundation, Alan Millard, Stephen Bourke, Constance Gane, and Randall Younker.

We are also grateful to those who supplied photographs from their personal collections: Michael Greenhalgh, Tim Bulkeley (eBibleTools.com/israel), Caryn Reeder, Christina Beblavi, Lisa Jean Winbolt, Brian McMorrow, Kim Walton, David Hall, and the late Maurice Thompson (photographer of the Bible Scene Set), his sons Peter and Andrew, and Geoff Tucker, who scanned the slides for us.

Our gratitude also goes to Patti Ricotta, who provided helpful financing for Song of Songs pictures.

For artwork we are grateful to Susanna Vagt, Alva Steffler, and Jonathan Walton.

For help with the maps, we are most grateful to Carl Rasmussen, the author of the *Zondervan NIV Atlas of the Bible*.

Thanks also goes to Charlie Trimm for the preparation of the visuals index.

We would like to thank the always helpful staff at Zondervan whose hard work made this project possible: Katya Covrett, Verlyn Verbrugge, and Kim Zeilstra deserve special mention, as well as Jack Kuhatschek, who got the project started while he was still at Zondervan.

Finally, my entire family was involved in the project. Jill and Josh provided photos and Jonathan provided artwork. But far beyond those contributions, words cannot express the gratitude I owe to my wife, Kim, who for three years served as my research assistant in tracking down pictures with her consummate research skills. Without her perseverance, creativity, and companionship, the product here provided could not have been achieved. Through countless hours working by my side, going through the manuscript entry by entry to decide what visuals to provide and then painstakingly researching where they could be found, she became expert in iconography and art from the ancient world. But more than that, she stepped into my world as a cherished partner in my work and ministry, making every day “a day for a daydream.” To her these volumes are dedicated with love, respect, and admiration.

John H. Walton
General Editor

Methodology: An Introductory Essay

John H. Walton

Comparative Studies

For over a century, studies comparing the OT and the ancient Near East have hovered on the fringe of hermeneutics and exegesis. Since these studies were at times exploited by critical scholars for polemical attacks against the biblical text, evangelicals were long inclined to avoid or even vilify them. They viewed the idea that the OT borrowed or adapted ancient Near Eastern ideas or literature as incompatible with Scripture's inspiration. Even as evangelicals in recent decades have grown more interested in tapping into the gold mine of comparative data, the results have often been considered tangential to the ultimate theological task. The influence from the ancient world has been identified with all that Israel was supposed to reject as they received the revelation from God that would purge their worldview from its pagan characteristics. Comparative studies served only as a foil to the theological interpretation of the text.

Consequently, comparative studies have been viewed as a component of historical-critical analysis at best, and more often as a threat to the uniqueness of the literature of the Bible. In contrast, today more and more biblical scholars are exploring the positive uses of comparative studies. As a result of half a century of the persistent scholarship of Assyriologists, Hittitologists, Egyptologists, and Sumerologists, we are now in a position to add significant nuances to the paradigms for studying the impact of the ancient Near East on the authors and editors of the Hebrew Bible. The end result is a more thorough and comprehensive understanding of the text.

Ever since the discovery of the Babylonian flood and creation accounts, critical scholarship has been attempting to demonstrate that the OT is derivative literature, a disadvantaged step-sister to the dominant cultures of the ancient Near East. These scholars have attempted to reduce the OT to converted mythology, whose dependency exposes its humanity. For confessing orthodoxy, however, there is no room for the conclusion that the OT is man-made theology. If the Flood is simply a human legend invented by people and borrowed into Israelite thinking, if the covenant is merely Israel's way of expressing their optimism that God has specially favored them through a treaty agreement with them, if the prophets never heard the voice of God but simply mimicked their ancient Near Eastern counterparts, then Christians are greatly to be pitied for having been duped in what would have to be considered the greatest hoax in history. It is no surprise, then, that evangelicals have often rejected the claims of these critical schools of thought.

There is, however, nothing inherently damaging to orthodox theology and beliefs about the Bible *if its authors were interacting at various levels with the literature current in the culture*. All literature is dependent on the culture in which it arises—it must be, if it intends to communicate effectively. Even when a text engages in polemic and correction of culture, it must be aware of and interact with current thinking and literature.

If we think about the example of creation texts, we realize that if God were to reveal his work of creation in our modern culture, he would have to explain how it related to the Big Bang theory or to evolution. His revelation would focus on the origins of the physical structure of the universe because that is what is important in our cultural perspective. In the ancient world, though, physical structure was relatively insignificant. People at that time were much more interested in the aspect of bringing order out of chaos and the divine exercise of jurisdiction demonstrated in giving everything a role and a purpose. In this context, any account of origins would of necessity have to be presented with these ancient ideas in mind.

The biblical text, in other words, formulated its discussion in relation to the thinking found in the ancient literature. It should be no surprise, then, if areas of similarity are found. This is far different from the contention that Israelite literature is simply derivative mythology. There is a great distance between borrowing from a particular piece of literature (as has been claimed in critical circles) and resonating with the larger culture that has itself been influenced by its literatures. When Americans speak of the philosophy of “eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die,” they are resonating with an idea that has penetrated society rather than borrowing from the writings of Epicurus.

Another area where we must be sensitive to cultural issues is in the way we understand literary genres. It should be no surprise that OT genres need to be compared to genres in the larger culture. Whether we are looking at wisdom literature, hymnic literature, historical literature, or legal literature, we find generous doses of both similarities and differences. Understanding the genre of a piece of literature is necessary if we desire to perceive the author’s intentions. Since perceiving such intentions is essential to our theological interpretation of a text, we recognize that understanding genre contributes to legitimate theological interpretation. Some genres will operate differently in the ancient world than they do in our own culture, so we must become familiar with the mechanics of the genres represented in the ancient Near East.

Where there are similarities, they help us to understand the genre parameters and characteristics as they existed in the ancient mind. What defined historical

writing in the ancient world? How close was it to the journalistic approach of today, which relies heavily on eyewitness accounts? How did genealogies function in OT times? Were they compiled for the same purpose that we compile them for?

Occasionally comparisons within genres reveal close similarities between the biblical and ancient Near Eastern literatures on the level of content. Such similarities do not jeopardize inspiration. Even if the OT had the very same law or the very same proverb that was found in the ancient Near East, inspiration would be involved in the author choosing to incorporate that law or proverb into the canonical collection and to nuance it properly in appropriate context.

Where there are differences, it is still important to understand the ancient Near Eastern genres because the theological points will often be made by means of contrast. The theology behind the book of Job, for example, is built primarily on the distinctives of the ancient Near Eastern view (represented in the arguments of Job's friends), which was based on an appeasement mentality. The book's message is accomplished in counterpoint. If we are unaware of the contrasts, we will miss some of the nuances.

In fact, then, we must go beyond the simple identification of similarities and differences to articulate the relationships on a functional level. Similarities could exist because Israel adapted something from ancient Near Eastern culture or literature, or, as previously mentioned, because they simply resonated with the culture. Differences could reflect the Israelites' rejection of the ancient Near Eastern perspective, or they might emerge in explicit Israelite polemics against the views of their neighbors. In all such cases, the theology of the text may be nuanced by the cultural context.

In light of all of this, it may be logically concluded that without the guidance of comparative studies, we are bound to misinterpret the text at some points. A text is a complex of ideas linked by threads of writing. Each phrase and each word communicates by the ideas and thoughts that they will trigger in the reader or hearer. We can then speak of these underlying ideas as gaps that need to be filled with meaning by the audience. The writer or speaker assumes that those gaps will be filled in particular ways based on the common worldview he shares with his audience. Interpreters have the task of filling in those gaps, and when interpreting authoritative texts, it is theologically essential that we fill them appropriately.

For example, the Tower of Babel is described as being built "with its head in the heavens." Without the benefit of ancient Near Eastern backgrounds, early

interpreters were inclined to provide the theological explanation that the builders were trying to build a structure that would allow them to launch an attack on the heavens. Comparative studies have allowed modern interpreters to recognize that this is an expression used to describe the ziggurats of Mesopotamia, which were intended to serve as a bridge or portal between heavens and earth. Such an understanding leads to an alternative, and arguably more accurate, interpretation of the text. In conclusion, then, as our interpretation of the text requires us to fill in the gaps, we have to be careful to consider the option of filling those gaps from the cultural context before we leap to fill them with theological significance.

As we make this transition in our thinking, we must expand the focus of our comparative studies. Too often in the past, comparative studies have been limited either to individual features (e.g., birds sent out from the ark) or to the literary preservation of traditions (e.g., creation accounts, vassal treaties) and have been conducted with either apologetics (from confessional circles) or polemics (against confessional traditions) in mind. As those interested in the interpretation of the text, we should recognize in addition the importance of comparative studies that focus on conceptual issues, conducted with illumination of the cultural dynamics behind the text in mind.

We can now create a spectrum to define the varieties of differences and similarities that can classify these nuances. The spectrum extends from differences to similarities while the matrix takes account of three categories: individual elements, worldview concepts, and literary preservation. This is represented in the following chart:

Relationships	Elements	Concepts	Literature
Totally ignores and presents different view	Sexual activity of gods	Theogony	Apotropaic rituals
Hazy familiarity leading to caricature and ridicule	Napping gods	Making of idols	Tammuz literature
Accurate knowledge resulting in rejection	Monogenesis/polygenesis	Divine needs	Omen texts
Disagreement resulting in polemics, debate, or contention	Ziggurats	Theomachy; Flood	Cosmology texts
Awareness leading to adaptation or	Circumcision	Kingship ideology; Classical prophecy	Words of the wise; Song of Songs

adaptation or transformation		Classical prophecy	or songs
Conscious imitation or borrowing	Covenant-treaty format	Calf/bull image	Psalm 29
Subconscious shared heritage	Use of lots	Netherworld conditions; temple ideology	Proverbs

In conclusion, there are ten important principles that must be kept in mind when doing comparative studies:

Both similarities and differences must be considered.

Similarities may suggest a common cultural heritage rather than borrowing.

It is common to find similarities at the surface but differences at the conceptual level and vice versa.

All elements must be understood in their own context as accurately as possible before crosscultural comparisons are made.

Proximity in time, geography, and spheres of cultural contact all increase the possibility of interaction leading to influence.

A case for literary borrowing requires identification of likely channels of transmission.

The significance of differences between two pieces of literature is minimized if the works are not the same genre.

Similar functions may be performed by different genres in different cultures.

When literary or cultural elements are borrowed, they may in turn be transformed into something quite different.

. A single culture will rarely be monolithic, either in a contemporary cross-section or in consideration of a passage of time.¹

Successful interpreters must try to understand the cultural background of the ancient Near East just as successful missionaries must learn the culture, language, and worldview of the people they are trying to reach. This is the rationale for us to study the Bible in light of the ancient Near East. What we contend, then, is that comparative studies has three goals in mind:

We study the *history* of the ancient Near East as a means of recovering knowledge of the events that shaped the lives of people in the ancient world.

We study *archaeology* as a means of recovering the lifestyle reflected in the material culture of the ancient world.

We study the *literature* of the ancient Near East as a means of penetrating the heart and soul of the people who inhabited the ancient world that Israel shared.

These goals are at the heart of comparative studies and will help us understand the OT better.

Comparative Studies and Historical Literature

Cultural studies from the ancient Near East can provide much information to fill in the background of the second and first millennia B.C. Royal inscriptions are particularly helpful as we try to reconstruct the political events that impacted the lives of the peoples of this period. Some actually refer to Israel or to various kings of Israel.² Others give information about kings who interacted with Israel on various levels. Archaeological excavations help to reconstruct the daily life of the people.³ Biblical genres such as genealogies⁴ or conquest accounts⁵ can be explored profitably in relation to genres in the ancient Near East. Others try to establish lines of comparison between sections of the OT and ancient Near Eastern literary works such as the Middle Assyrian Epic of Tukulti-Ninurta.⁶

Beyond the reconstruction of the events of ancient history and the study of the genres in which history is recorded, comparative studies can also help us to penetrate how people in the ancient world thought about history and what their values were in recording it.⁷ Studies in ancient historiography help us to assess how to read the literature in a way that will honor the ideas, intentions, and values of the authors. Some of the conclusions from this sort of study alert us to important differences between the ancient and modern worlds. We learn that while our historians often ignore deity altogether, one of the main values of history writing in the ancient world was to clarify what the gods were doing. Modern historians often consider texts that focus on divine activity in history to be unreliable sources; ancient historians would consider modern history books that give no room for divine activity as trivial and irrelevant.

This radical difference can be explained when we understand that ancient historians were not recording events as much as they were interpreting outcomes. The truth of what “really happened” was not assessed by what the eyewitness saw but by what the final outcome was. As a result, they did not promote the role of the eyewitness as our history writing tends to do. Instead, the various subgenres of historiography promoted various people or ideas. Royal inscriptions characteristically promoted the king as they articulated what the gods were doing through his kingship. Biblical historiography often promoted the prophetic role to articulate what Yahweh was doing, particularly with regard to the covenant. This general survey indicates just a few of the ways that comparative and cultural studies will be seen to impact and illuminate our study of the historical literature in this volume.

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Abbreviations

AAA Annals of Archaeology and Anthropology
AASOR Annual of the American Schools of Oriental Research **AB** Anchor Bible **AB** *Assyriologische Bibliothek*
ABC *Assyrian and Babylonian Chronicles*. A. K. Grayson. TCS 5. Locust Valley, New York, 1975
ABD *Anchor Bible Dictionary*. D. N. Freedman. 6 vols. New York, 1992
ABL *Assyrian and Babylonian Letters Belonging to the Kouyunjik Collections of the British Museum*. R. F. Harper. 14 vols. Chicago, 1892–1914
ABR *Australian Biblical Review*
ABRL Anchor Bible Reference Library
AbrN *Abr-Nahrain*
ABS Arab Background Series
ACCS Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture
ACEBT *Amsterdamse Cahiers voor Exegese en bijbelse Theologie* **ADD** *Assyrian Deeds and Documents*. C. H. W. Johns. 4 vols. Cambridge, 1898–1923
AEL *Ancient Egyptian Literature*. M. Lichtheim. 3 vols. Berkeley, 1971–1980
AfO *Archiv für Orientforschung*
AfOB *Archiv für Orientforschung: Beiheft*
ÄgAbh *Ägyptologische Abhandlungen*
AHw *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*. W. von Soden. 3 vols. Wiesbaden, 1965–81
AJA *American Journal of Archeology*
AJBA *Australian Journal of Biblical Archaeology* **AJSLL** *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literature* **AMD** *Ancient Magic and Divination* **AnBib** *Analecta biblica*
ANEP *The Ancient Near East in Pictures Relating to the Old Testament*. J. B. Pritchard. Princeton, 1954
ANET *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. J. B. Pritchard. 3rd ed. Princeton, 1969
ANF *Ante-Nicene Fathers*
AnOr *Analecta orientalia*
AnSt *Anatolian Studies*
AO *Antiquités orientales*
AO *Der Alte Orient*
AOAT *Alter Orient und Altes Testament*
AOB *Altorientalische Bilder zum Alten Testament* **AOS** *American Oriental Series*
AOTC *Abingdon Old Testament Commentary*
AOTS *Archaeology and Old Testament Study*. D. W. Thomas. Oxford, 1967
APOT *Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha of the Old Testament*. Ed. R. H. Charles. 2 vols. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1913
ARAB *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylonia*. Daniel David Luckenbill. 2 vols. Chicago, 1926–1927

Arch Archaeology

ARI Assyrian Royal Inscriptions. A. K. Grayson. 2 vols. RANE. Wiesbaden, 1972–1976

ARM Archives royales de Mari

ARMT Archives royales de Mari, transcrite et traduite

ArtH Art History

ARW Archiv für Religionswissenschaft **AS** Assyriological Studies **ASJ** Acta Sumerologica (Japan)

ASOR American Schools of Oriental Research

ASORDS American Schools of Oriental Research Dissertation Series **ASTI** Annual of the Swedish Theological Institute **ATJ** Ashland Theological Journal

AThR Anglican Theological Review

ATSDS Andrews Theological Seminary Dissertation Series **AuOr** Aula orientalis **AUSDS** Andrews University Seminary Dissertation Series

AUSS Andrews University Seminary Studies

AUU Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis

BA Biblical Archaeologist

BAIAS Bulletin of the Anglo-Israel Archeological Society **BAR** Biblical Archaeology Review **BARead** Biblical Archaeologist Reader

BASOR Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research **BASORSup** Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research: Supplement Series **BAW** Bayerischen Akademie der Wissen **BBB** Bonner biblische Beiträge

BBET Beiträge zur biblischen Exegese und Theologie

BBR Bulletin for Biblical Research

BBVO Berliner Beiträge zum Vorderen Orient

BCOTWP Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms **BDB** Brown, F., S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford, 1907

BeO *Bibbia e oriente*

BES *Bes*

BETL Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologiarum lovaniensium **BETS** Bulletin of the Evangelical Society **BHH** *Biblich-historisches Handwörterbuch*. B. Reicke and L. Rost. Göttingen, 1962–1966

Bib *Biblica*

BibOr *Biblica et orientalia*

BibSem *Biblical Seminar*

BibRes *Biblical Research*

BiOr *Biblioteca Orientalis*

BJRL *Bulletin of the John Rylands University Library of Manchester* **BJS** Brown Judaic Studies **BM** British Museum

BN *Biblische Notizen*

BO *Bibliotheca orientalis*

BR *Biblical Research*

BRev *Bible Review*

BRM *Babylonian Religion and Mythology*

BSac *Bibliotheca sacra*

BSC *Bible Student's Commentary*

BSOAS *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* **BT** *Bible Translator* **BTB** *Biblical Theology Bulletin*

BWL *Babylonian Wisdom Literature*. W. G. Lambert. Oxford, 1960; reprinted Eisenbrauns, 1996

BZ *Biblische Zeitschrift*

BZABR *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte* **BZAW** *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* **CAD** *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago*. Chicago, 1956– **CAH** *Cambridge Ancient History* **CahRB** *Cahiers de la Revue biblique*

CANE *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*. J. Sasson. 4 vols. New York, 1995

CAT *Commentaire de l'Ancien Testament*

CAT *Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani and Other Places*. M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartin. Munster, 1997

CBC *Cambridge Bible Commentary*

CBET *Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology*

CBQ *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*

CBQMS *Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series*

CH *Code of Hammurabi*

CHANE *Culture and History of the Ancient Near East*

CHI *Cambridge History of Iran*. 7 vols. 1968–91

CIS *Corpus inscriptionum semiticarum*

CIS *Corpus inscriptionum semiticarum*

CJ *Classical Journal*

CL *Code of Lipit-Ishtar*

CML *Canaanite Myths and Legends*. G. R. Driver. Edinburgh, 1956. J. C. L. Gibson, 1978²

CNI *Carsten Niebuhr Institute*

ConBOT *Coniectanea biblica: Old Testament Series*

COS *The Context of Scripture*. W. W. Hallo. 3 vols. Leiden, 1997–2002

CT *Cuneiform Texts from Babylonian Tablets in the British Museum* **CTA** *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques découvertes à Ras Shamra-Ugarit de 1929 à 1939*. A. Herdner. Mission de Ras Shamra 10. Paris, 1963

CTH *Catalogue des textes hittites*

CTU *The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani, and Other Places*. M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. Münster, 1995

CU Code of Ur-Nammu

CurTM *Currents in Theology and Mission*

DANE *Dictionary of the Ancient Near East*

DBAT *Dielheimer Blätter zum Alten Testament*

DBI *Dictionary of Biblical Imagery*. T. Longman and L. Ryken. Downers Grove, 1998

DCH *Dictionary of Classical Hebrew*. D. J. A. Clines. Sheffield, 1993– **DDD** *Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible*. K. van der Toorn, B. Becking, and P. W. van der Horst. Leiden, 1995. 2nd ed., Grand Rapids, 1998

DISO *Dictionnaire des inscriptions sémitiques de l'ouest*. Ch. F. Jean and J. Hoftijzer. Leiden, 1965

DNWSI *Dictionary of the North-West Semitic Inscriptions*. J. Hoftijzer and K. Jongeling. 2 vols. Leiden, 1995

DOTHB *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books* **DOTP** *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*. T. D. Alexander and D. W. Baker. Downers Grove, 2003

DOTT *Documents from Old Testament Times*. D. W. Thomas, London, 1958

DSB Daily Study Bible

EA El-Amarna tablets. According to the edition of J. A. Knudtzon. *Die el-Amarna-Tafeln*. Leipzig, 1908–1915. Reprint, Aalen, 1964. Continued in A. F. Rainey, *El-Amarna Tablets, 359–379*. 2nd revised ed. Kevelaer, 1978

EA *Epigraphica anatolica*

EAEHL *Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land*. M. Avi-Yonah. 4 vols. Jerusalem, 1975

EBC *Expositor's Bible Commentary* **ECC** Eerdmans Critical Commentary **EPRO** *Études préliminaires aux religions orientales*

ErIsr *Eretz-Israel*

ET *Evangelische Theologie*

ETS Evangelical Theological Society

ETSS Evangelical Theological Society Studies

EvQ *Evangelical Quarterly*

EvTh *Evangelische Theologie*

FAOS *Freiburger altorientalische Studien*

FAT *Forschungen zum Alten Testament*

FB *Forschungen zur Bibel*

FCI *Foundations in Contemporary Interpretation*

FOTL *Forms of the Old Testament Literature*

GKC *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*. E. Kautzsch. Translated by A. E. Cowley. 2nd ed. Oxford, 1910

GM *Göttinger Miscellen*

GTTOT *The Geographical and Topographical Texts of the Old Testament*. J. J. Simons. Studia Francisci Scholten memoriae dicata 2. Leiden, 1959

HALOT *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. L. Koehler, W. Baumgartner, and J. J. Stamm. Translated and edited under the supervision of M. E. J. Richardson. 4 vols. Leiden, 1994–1999

HANEL *History of Ancient Near Eastern Law*. R. Westbrook. 2 vols. Leiden, 2003

HAR *Hebrew Annual Review*

HAT *Handbuch zum Alten Testament*

HBD *HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*

HBS *Herders Biblische Studien*

HCOT *Historical Commentary on the Old Testament*

HDR *Harvard Dissertations in Religion*

HKM *Hethitische Keilschrifttafeln aus Masat*. Ed. Sedat Alp. Ankara: Turk Tarih Kurumu Basimevi, 1991

HL *Hittite Laws*

HO *Handbuch der Orientalistik*

HS *Hebrew Studies*

HSM *Harvard Semitic Monographs*

HSS *Harvard Semitic Studies*

HTR *Harvard Theological Review*

HUCA *Hebrew Union College Annual*

IB *Interpreter's Bible*. G. A. Buttrick *et al.* 12 vols. New York, 1951–1957

IBC *Interpretation Bible Commentary*

IBD *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. J. Douglas. 3 vols. Leicester, 1980

IBHS *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax*. B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor. Winona Lake, 1990

ICC *International Critical Commentary*

IDB *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*. G. A. Buttrick. 4 vols. Nashville, 1962

IDBSup *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: Supplementary Volume*. K. Crim. Nashville, 1976

IEJ *Israel Exploration Journal*

IOS *Israel Oriental Society*

IrAnt *Iranica Antiqua*

Iraq *Iraq*

IRT *Issues in Religion and Theology*

ISBE *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. G. W. Bromiley. 4 vols. Grand Rapids, 1979–1988

IVPBB-OT *IVP Bible Background Commentary on the OT*. J. H. Walton, V. H. Matthews, and M. W. Chavalas. Downers Grove, 2000

JAGNES *Journal of the Association of Graduate Near Eastern Studies* (University of Berkeley) **JANESCU** *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* **JAOS** *Journal of the American Oriental Society* **JB** *Jerusalem Bible*

JBL Journal of Biblical Literature

JCS Journal of Cuneiform Studies

JDS Judean Desert Studies

JEA Journal of Egyptian Archaeology

JEOL Jaarbericht van het Vooraziatisch-Egyptisch Gezelschap (Genootschap) Ex oriente lux JESHO Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient JETS Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society JJS Journal of Jewish Studies JNES Journal of Near Eastern Studies

JNSL Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages

JPS Jewish Publication Society

JPSTC JPS Torah Commentary

JQR Jewish Quarterly Review

JR Journal of Religion

JRAS Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society

JSem Journal of Semitics

JSJ Journal for the Study of Judaism (in the Persian, Hellenistic, and Roman Periods) JSOT Journal for the Study of the Old Testament JSOTSup Journal for the Study of the Old Testament: Supplement Series JSS Journal of Semitic Studies JSSEA Journal of the Society for the Study of Egyptian Antiquities JTS Journal of Theological Studies KAH Keilschrifttexte aus Assur historischen Inhalts KAI Kanaanäische und aramäische Inschriften. H. Donner and W. Röllig. 2nd ed. Wiesbaden, 1966–1969

KAR Keilschrifttexte aus Assur religiösen Inhalts. E. Ebeling. Leipzig, 1919–1923

KAT Kommentar zum Alten Testament

KBo Keilschrifttexte aus Boghazköi

KHC Kurzer Hand-Kommentar zum Alten Testament

*KTU Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit. M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. AOAT 24/1. Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976. 2nd enlarged ed. of *KTU: The Cuneiform Alphabetic Texts from Ugarit, Ras Ibn Hani, and Other Places*. M. Dietrich, O. Loretz, and J. Sanmartín. Münster, 1995 (= *CTU*) *KUB Keilschrifturkunden aus Boghazköi LAE Literature of Ancient Egypt. W. K. Simpson. 3rd ed. New Haven, 2003**

LAPO Litteratures anciennes du Proche-Orient

LBI Library of Biblical Interpretation

LCL Loeb Classical Library

LE Laws of Eshunna

Levant Levant

LH Laws of Hammurabi

LIMC Lexicon iconographicum mythologiae classicae. Edited by H. C. Ackerman and J.-R. Gisler. 8 vols. Zurich, 1981–1997

LL Laws of Lipit-Ishtar

LU Laws of Ur-Nammu

LXX Septuagint

Maarav *Maarav*

MAL Middle Assyrian Laws

MANE Monographs of the Ancient Near East

MAOG Mitteilungen der Altorientalischen Gesellschaft

MCAAS Memoires of the Connecticut Academy of Arts & Sciences **MARI** *Mari: Annales de recherches interdisciplinaires* **MDOG** Mitteilungen der Deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft **MGWJ** *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* **MOS** Midden-Oosten Studies **MSJ** *The Master's Seminary Journal*

Muses Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature. Benjamin R. Foster. 2 vols. Bethesda, 1993

MVAG Mitteilungen der Vordersasiatisch-ägyptischen Gesellschaft. Vols. 1–44. 1896–1939

NAC New American Commentary

NBD *New Bible Dictionary.* J. D. Douglas and N. Hillyer. 2nd ed. Downers Grove, 1982

NBL Neo-Babylonian Laws

NCB New Century Bible

NCBC New Century Bible Commentary

NEA *Near Eastern Archaeology*

NEAEHL *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land.* E. Stern. 4 vols. Jerusalem, 1993

NEB New English Bible

NERT *Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament.* W. Beyerlin. OTL. London, 1978

NGTT *Nederduitse gereformeerde theologiese tydskrif* **NIBC** New International Bible Commentary
NIBCOT New International Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament **NICOT** New International Commentary on the Old Testament **NIDBA** *New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology.* E. M. Blaiklock and R. K. Harrison. Grand Rapids, 1983

NIDOTTE *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis.* W. A. VanGemeren. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, 1997

NIV New International Version

NIVAC NIV Application Commentary

NJPS *Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures: The New JPS Translation according to the Traditional Hebrew Text*

NRSV New Revised Standard Version **NSBT** *New Studies in Biblical Theology*

NTOA *Novum Testamentum et orbis antiquus*

OBC *Orientalia biblica et christiana*

OBO *Orbis biblicus et orientalis*

OCD *Oxford Classical Dictionary.* S. Hornblower and A. Spawforth. 3rd ed. Oxford, 1996

OEAE *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Ancient Egypt.* D. Redford. 3 vols. New York, 2001

OEANE *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Archaeology in the Near East.* E. M. Meyers. 5 vols. New York, 1997

OIP Oriental Institute Publications

OLA *Orientalia lovaniensia analecta*
OLP *Orientalia lovaniensia periodica*
OLZ *Orientalistische Literaturzeitung*
Or *Orientalia* (NS)
OrAnt *Oriens antiquus*
OS *Oudtestamentische studiën*
OTE *Old Testament Essays*
OTG *Old Testament Guides*
OTL *Old Testament Library*
OTP *Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*. J. H. Charlesworth. 2 vols. Garden City, 1983, 1985
OTS *Old Testament Studies*
OTWSA *Ou-Testamentiese Werkgemeenskap van Suid-Afrika* **OtSt** *Oudtestamentische Studiën* **PAPS** *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* **PBS** *Publications of the Babylonian Section* **PEQ** *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*
POTT *Peoples of Old Testament Times*. D. J. Wiseman. Oxford, 1973
POTW *Peoples of the Old Testament World*. A. Hoerth, G. Mattingly and E. Yamauchi. Grand Rapids, 1994
PRU *Le palais royal d'Ugarit*
PT *Pyramid Texts*
RA *Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale* **RAI** *Recontre assyriologique internationale* **RANE** *Records of the Ancient Near East*
RANE *Readings from the Ancient Near East*. B. Arnold and B. Beyer. Grand Rapids, 2002
RB *Revue biblique*
RevB *Revue de Qumran*
RevistB *Revista bíblica*
RGG *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. K. Galling. 7 vols. 3rd ed. Tübingen, 1957–65
RHA *Revue hittite et asianique*
RHPR *Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuse*
RHR *Revue de l'histoire des religions*
RIDA *Revue internationale des droits de l'antiquité* **RIM** *The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia Project*. Toronto **RIMA** *The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Assyrian Periods* **RIMB** *The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Babylonian Periods* **RIME** *The Royal Inscriptions of Mesopotamia, Early Periods* **RISA** *Royal Inscriptions of Sumer and Akkad*. G. A. Barton. New Haven, 1929
RivB *Rivista biblica italiana*
RIA *Reallexikon der Assyriologie*. Erich Ebeling *et al.* Berlin, 1928– **RQ** *Römische Quartalschrift für christliche Altertumskunde und Kirchengeschichte* **RS** *Ras Shamra* **RSP** *Ras Shamra Parallels*
SAA *State Archives of Assyria*

SAALT State Archives of Assyria Literary Texts

SAAS State Archives of Assyria Studies

SAOC Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations

SBAB Stuttgarter biblische Aufsatzbände

SBAW Sitzungsberichte der bayerischen Akademie der Wissenschaften **SBB** Stuttgarter biblische Beiträge
SBC Student Bible Commentary

SBFLA *Studii biblici Franciscani liber annus*

SBH *Sumerische-babylonische Hymnen nach Thonafeln griechischer Zeit.* G. A. Reisner. Berlin, 1896

SBLABS Society of Biblical Literature Archaeology and Biblical Studies **SBLDS** Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series **SBLMS** Society of Biblical Literature Monograph Series **SBLRBS** Society of Biblical Literature Resources for Biblical Study **SBLSP** *Society of Biblical Literature Seminar Papers* **SBLSymS** Society of Biblical Literature Symposium Series **SBLWAW** Society of Biblical Literature Writings from the Ancient World **SBONT** Sacred Books of the Old and New Testament **SBS** Stuttgarter Bibelstudien **SBT** Studies in Biblical Theology **SBTS** Sources for Biblical and Theological Study

SC Sources chrétiennes. Paris, 1943–

ScrHier Scripta hierosolymitana

SDOAP Studia et Documenta ad Iura Orientis Antiqui Pertinentia **SE** Studies in Egyptology **SemeiaSt** Semeia Studies

SHANE Studies in the History of the Ancient Near East

SHCANE Studies in the History and Culture of the Ancient Near East **SHJPLI** Studies in the History of the Jewish People and the Land of Israel **SHR** Studies in the History of Religion **SJLA** Studies in Judaism in Late Antiquity

SJOT *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament* **SNN** Studia Semitica Neerlandica

SO Symbolae osloenses

SOTSMS Society for Old Testament Studies Monograph Series **SSI** *Textbook of Syrian Semitic Inscriptions.* 3 vols. Oxford, 1971–82

SSN Studia semitica neerlandica

SSS Semitic Study Series

ST *Studia theologica*

StBoT Studien zu den Boghazkoi Texten

StudOr Studia orientalia

Sumer *Sumer: A Journal of Archaeology and History in Iraq* **SWBA** Social World of Biblical Antiquity
Syr *Syria*

TA *Tel Avi*

TAD *Textbook of Aramaic Documents.* B. Porten and A. Yardeni. 4 vols. Jerusalem, 1986–99

TAPS Transactions of the American Philosophical Society **TB** Theologische Bücherei **TBC** Texts from the Babylonian Collection (Yale)

TCL Textes cunéiforms. Musée du Louvre

TCS Texts from Cuneiform Sources

TDOT *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*. G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren. Translated by J. T. Willis, G. W. Bromiley, and D. E. Green. 15 vols. Grand Rapids, 1974– **TGUOS** Transactions of the Glasgow University Oriental Society **Them** *Themelios* **TJ** *Trinity Journal*

TLOT *Theological Lexicon of the Old Testament*. E. Jenni, with assistance from C. Westermann. Translated by M. E. Biddle. 3 vols. Peabody, Mass., 1997

TOB *Traduction Oecuménique de la Bible*

TOTC Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries

Transeu *Transeuphratène*

TS *Theological Studies*

TSF Bulletin *Theological Student's Fellowship Bulletin* **TSTT** Toronto Semitic Texts and Studies **TWOT** *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*. R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer Jr. 2 vols. Chicago, 1980

TynBul *Tyndale Bulletin*

TZ *Theologische Zeitschrift*

UBL Ugaritisch-biblische Literatur

UCOP University of Cambridge Oriental Publications

UF *Ugarit-Forschungen*

UNP Ugaritic Narrative Poetry. Simon B. Parker. SBLWAW 9. Atlanta, 1997

UT *Ugaritic Textbook*. C. H. Gordon. AnOr 38. Rome, 1965

VAB Vorderasiatische Bibliothek

VAT Vorderasiatische Abteilung Tontafel. Vorderasiatisches Museum, Berlin **VB** Vorderasiatische Bibliothek **VT** *Vetus Testamentum*

VTE Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon

VTSup *Vetus Testamentum Supplements*

WBC *Word Biblical Commentary*

WHJP *World History of the Jewish People*

WO *Die Welt des Orients*

WOO *Wiener Offene Orentalistik*

WTJ *Westminster Theological Journal*

WVDOG *Wissenschaftliche Veröffentlichungen der deutschen Orientgesellschaft* **WZKM** *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde des Morgenlandes* **YNER** *Yale New Eastern, Researches* **YOS** *Yale Oriental Series, Texts*

ZA *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie*

ZABR *Zeitschrift für altorientalische und biblische Rechtsgeschichte* **ZÄS** *Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* **ZAW** *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* **ZDMG** *Zeitschrift der deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft* **ZDPV** *Zeitschrift des deutschen Palästina-Vereins* **ZKT** *Zeitschrift für katholische Theologie*

ZNW *Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft* **ZPEB** *Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the*

Bible. M. C. Tenney. 5 vols. Grand Rapids, 1975

ZTK Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche

1 Samuel

by V. Philips Long



Captive Sea Peoples in Egyptian relief at Medinet Habu

Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

Introduction¹

Few Old Testament books have attracted more attention than 1 and 2 Samuel, and for good reason! The stories of Hannah, Eli, Samuel, Saul, David, Absalom, and many others are riveting, often praised as among the finest narratives to be found anywhere in world literature.² In addition, the events that these books trace—namely, those involved in Israel’s transition from tribal league to monarchy—are among the most momentous in the history of ancient Israel. Given the societal and theological ramifications of these changes—and especially in the light of the prominent place that the famous king David occupies in them—it is hard to overstate the significance of the books of Samuel.

But 1 and 2 Samuel were written long ago and in a culture different in many respects from the world in which we live. In order to understand them, therefore, and to discern their historical and theological import, we must discover what we can of the cultural context in which these books took shape. Our focus in what follows will be on how knowledge of the ancient Near Eastern cultures and literatures of Israel’s near and far neighbors can elucidate our understanding of the text and how the growing body of archaeological knowledge can help us understand the places and “life-ways” that figure in the biblical narratives. Before launching into our specific explorations of the texts, a few general comments about the historical and literary settings of these two books are in order.

Historical Setting

The events described in 1 and 2 Samuel took place in the eleventh and early tenth centuries B.C. This time period (which archaeologists call Iron Age I, ca. 1200–1000 B.C.) was one in which the superpowers of the preceding Bronze Ages had little impact in Syria-Palestine. The Anatolian kingdom of the Hittites had been essentially destroyed by “the ‘Sea Peoples’ and other land-based movements.”³ The Egyptians exercised limited control along the coast of Canaan until the mid-twelfth century and then withdrew.⁴ The Assyrians were occupied with troubles closer to home, especially their rivalry with Babylonia to their south. The Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser I did push as far westward as the northern Mediterranean coast near the end of the twelfth century, defeating some Aramean territories along the way, but he did not move southward into Palestine itself.



Fertile Crescent

Babylonia, too, was incapable at this time of giving much attention to Syria-Palestine, finding plenty to keep it busy protecting its interests against neighboring Assyria and Elam.⁵ Thus, as 1 Samuel opens, the land in which the Israelites are set was experiencing an eclipse of the Great Powers. Conditions were ripe for the emergence of smaller territorial powers—mini-empires, as Kitchen calls them⁶—such as the kingdom ascribed to David in the text of Samuel (see [sidebar on “The ‘Empire’ of David”](#) at 2 Sam. 8).

The transition to monarchy was a new departure in the political and religious life of tribal Israel. But it was not a surprising or unanticipated development. The concept of kingship was well known in the ancient Near East from at least early in the third millennium and was widely practiced not only by the major powers in Egypt, Anatolia, and Mesopotamia, but also by Israel’s immediate neighbors, whose kings are regularly mentioned (e.g., Judg. 3:8, 12; 4:2; 8:5).⁷ The Israelite tribes themselves had experienced at least one abortive attempt to introduce monarchy (i.e., Abimelech in Judg. 9).

The opening books of the Bible, moreover, clearly hint of a coming time in which Israel will have a human king (e.g., Gen. 49:10; Num. 24:7, 17–19). In Deuteronomy, Moses even prescribes how the eventual Israelite kings are to be chosen and how they are to behave (Deut. 17:14–20). More surprising, then, than Israel’s eventual installation of a king is its reluctance for so long to do so. The words of the judge-deliverer Gideon, when offered an opportunity to establish dynastic rule, are suggestive of what may have underlain Israel’s hesitancy: “I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The LORD will rule over you” (Judg. 8:23).



King (here Sargon) with all the symbols of power
Marie-Lan Nguyen/Wikimedia Commons, courtesy of the Louvre

How human kingship could exist within an authority structure that allowed Yahweh to remain the “Great King” is one of the key questions addressed by the books of Samuel. Understanding ancient Near Eastern patterns of royal accession and vassal kingship, the interplay of religion and politics, the interaction of prophets with kings, and so forth will aid us in grasping the social and religious dynamics reflected in these two books.

Literary Setting

In order to read any text with understanding, one must have some sense of the genre or genres represented in the text. Otherwise, misunderstandings and misinterpretations will result. Determining precisely what genre(s) one is reading is not always an easy task, especially when one is reading texts from a distant time and place. A good way to begin is to become familiar with the various literary genres available at the time and in the place that the text was written. Here again knowledge of the ancient Near Eastern background of the Old Testament can help us.

In seeking to discover what 1 and 2 Samuel should be “read as,” we must bear in mind the broader ancient Near Eastern literary culture in which the texts were first written. Difficulty in putting a date on texts that refuse to date themselves is self-evident, and 1 and 2 Samuel have been assigned dates across a wide spectrum—from early, close to the tenth-century events they describe, to late, in the exilic period. It is not our purpose to resolve the questions of time or place of writing, nor is it likely that these questions can be resolved. A possible scenario sees them as containing early sources edited to one degree or another in order to incorporate them into a larger corpus, such as the conventionally designated Deuteronomistic History (Deuteronomy to 2 Kings) or the Primary History (Genesis to 2 Kings). For current purposes, the best we can do is to view 1 and 2 Samuel against the broad background of ancient Near Eastern literatures.

Underneath the broad genre categories of story (narrative) and poem, these books seem to incorporate a number of more specific literary forms or subgenres, such as birth narratives, call narratives, dream theophanies, prophetic judgement speeches, battle reports, accession accounts, court intrigues, and regnal formulae/summaries. Many of these subgenres are attested not only in the Bible but also in the ancient Near East more generally. Where consideration of these subgenres illuminates the biblical text, I will note them in the entries below.

Taking a slightly wider view, scholars in search of the building blocks of 1 and 2 Samuel have variously isolated larger, hypothetical entities, such as an Ark Narrative, a Samuel Cycle, a Saul Cycle, a History of David’s Rise, a Court History (or Succession Narrative), and so forth. Some scholars contend that these entities enjoyed an independent existence before being incorporated into the larger narrative as we have it. Difficulty in actually delimiting these hypothetical entities, however, and their current high degree of integration into the larger text in which they now stand suggest that our time is better spent exploring the text we have rather than texts that are assumed to have once

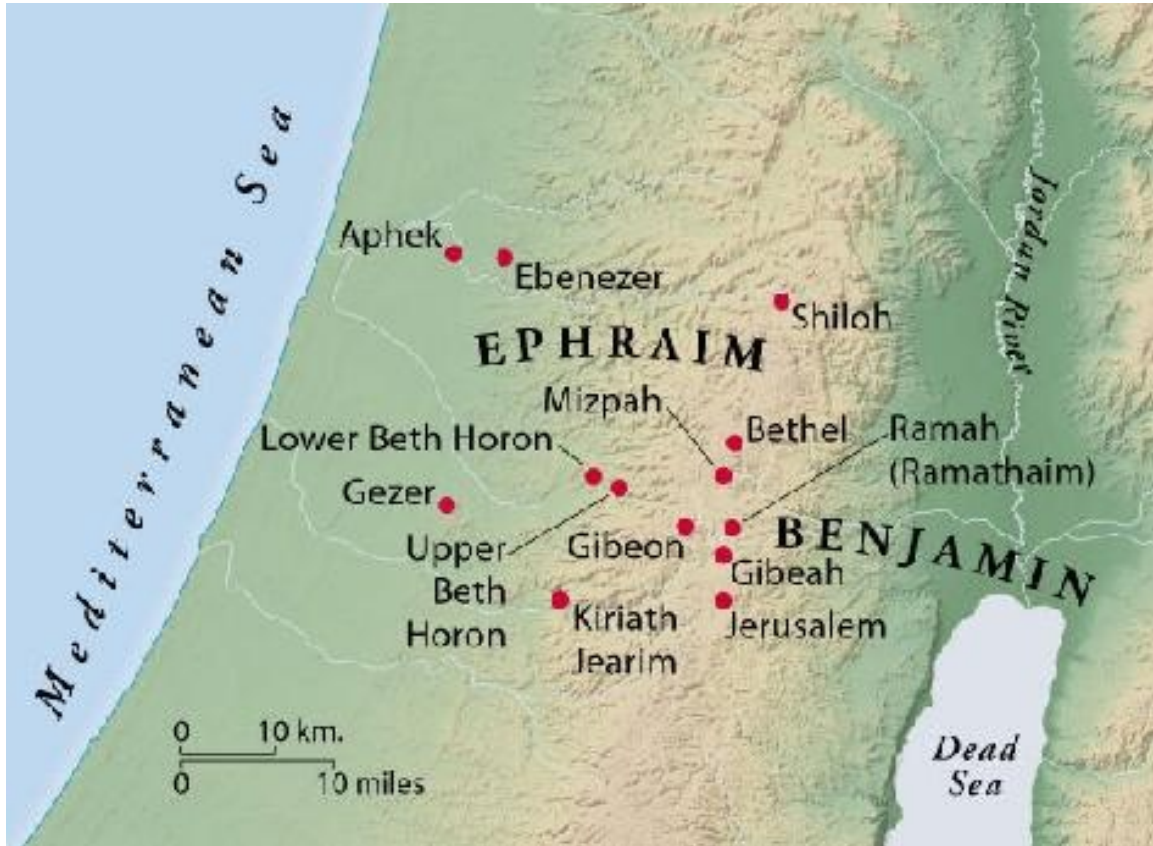
existed.

While familiarity with extrabiblical ancient Near Eastern literature can enlighten our reading of the books of Samuel in many ways, taken as a whole these books are *sui generis*. They are without parallel, at least in terms of literary and theological breadth and depth. Should we be forced to offer one genre description, apart from such general descriptions as “narrative” or “Scripture,” then “royal apology” is a candidate worth considering.

David is without doubt the central human character in 1 and 2 Samuel. Although the biblical writers show no reticence in exposing his serious failings, David is defended from start to finish as rightly occupying the throne of Israel. Royal apologies are well known from the ancient Near East,⁸ and though no example of the genre comes close to the books of Samuel in terms of length, depth, complexity, or tone, there are some shared traits. Ancient Near Eastern royal apologies offer a defense of the right of a certain individual to occupy the throne. This individual is typically not the hereditary heir and often comes to the throne by a path that some, then as now, regard as suspicious. That charge of usurpation is often a catalyst for writing a royal apology. Some ancient Near Eastern royal apologies are, to be sure, little more than deceptive political propaganda. But the mere fact that circumstances may be such that an individual, such as David, requires defense in no way proves that the individual is unworthy of defense.⁹

Samuel's Birth and Dedication (1:1–28)

There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim (1:1). The manner of Elkanah's introduction, including his rather full genealogy, suggests he was an important individual.¹⁰ That Elkanah is called a Zuphite may reflect his descent from Zuph (1 Chron. 6:35; cf. 6:26), or it may reflect the district in Ephraim from which Elkanah's people came (see 1 Sam. 9:5)—or possibly both.¹¹ According to the genealogies of 1 Chronicles 6:16–30, 33–37, Elkanah was a Levite, not an Ephraimite. But as we learn from Joshua 21:1–26, the Levites received no tribal territory of their own but were allotted "Levitical cities" within each of the other tribal territories. Thus Elkanah's Levitical forebears may well have lived in the district of Zuph in Ephraim.



Ephraim and Benjamin

More puzzling in Elkanah's introduction is the name Ramathaim ("twin heights"). This name occurs nowhere else in the Old Testament, whereas the hometown of Elkanah (and later his son Samuel) is elsewhere consistently called Ramah (probably the Ramah allotted to the tribe of Benjamin in Josh. 18:25). To

Ramah Elkanah returns in [1:19](#) and [2:11](#).¹² This suggests that Ramathaim and Ramah refer to the same place and should probably be associated with modern er-Ram, some five miles north of Jerusalem.¹³



Ramah

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

He had two wives (1:2). The biblical creation account envisages monogamy as God’s design for marriage, in which one man and one woman forsake all others to become “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24). Nevertheless, polygamy, or more accurately polygyny (having more than one wife), is attested already as early as Genesis 4:19, in the story of Lamech. Polygyny was less prevalent among commoners than among the well-to-do; in fact, Elkanah is the only commoner described in the books of Samuel or Kings as having more than one wife.¹⁴ This social situation is implicit in Nathan’s parable—told in the aftermath of David’s adultery with Bathsheba and murder of Uriah—in which the poor man has but one lamb (signifying one wife), while the rich man has many ([2 Sam. 12:1–3](#)).



Family group statue, thirteenth century Manfred Näder, Gabana Studios, Germany

Polyandry (a woman having more than one husband at the same time) is not attested in the Bible. From the biblical and extrabiblical examples we have, it appears that taking more than one wife was prompted less by romantic desire than by concerns about having offspring to continue the family line and having a large enough family (wives and children) to do the work involved in seminomadic and agricultural living.¹⁵ Having multiple wives or concubines (and thus many children) was also sometimes intertwined with status issues. For a woman to remain childless, therefore, was a cause of grief and shame (see the [next comment](#)).

Polygamy is recognized in the Old Testament as a common practice and is regulated (Deut. 25:15–17), but it is not endorsed or encouraged. Similarly, ancient Near Eastern law codes do not necessarily promote polygamy; rather, the detailed regulations are intended to lessen its abuses.¹⁶ Compared to the systematic treatment of marriage in some extrabiblical texts, the Old Testament's treatment is more occasional and ad hoc. For this reason, one should not seek to infer God's standards of marital conduct from the (mis)adventures of biblical characters any more than one should infer traffic laws from the behaviors of individual drivers.¹⁷

Peninah had children, but Hannah had none (1:2). Hannah finds herself not only in the difficult position of having a rival wife, but in the pitiable position of having no children. Given the order in which she and Peninnah are named, Hannah is probably Elkanah's first wife, and it may have been her barrenness that prompted Elkanah to take a second wife. In the ancient Near East generally, as indeed in many agrarian societies today, fertility was a major concern for women¹⁸ and even for men,¹⁹ the more so as fertility was regarded as under the control of God (see 1:5) or the gods, and lack of fertility could be understood as a curse. A curse is not necessarily implied, however, in the Bible. It refers to numerous women whose initial barrenness becomes the backdrop for God's demonstration of his grace and power.



Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice (1:3). Religious life in the ancient Near East was marked by feasts or festivals. For example, a year in the life of the Egyptian city of Thebes might include as many as fifty or sixty religious festivals.²⁰ The number of festivals mentioned in the Bible is modest. The Pentateuch refers to three annual pilgrim festivals: the Feast of Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks, and the Feast of Tabernacles (Deut. 16:16; cf. Ex. 23:14–17; 34:18–23; Deut. 16:1–15). An “annual festival of the LORD in Shiloh” (Judg. 21:19) may be the festival to which Elkanah and his family go here, or they may have gone to Shiloh simply to observe a family ceremony (the existence of family ceremonies is suggested by David’s excuse in [1 Sam. 20:6](#)).

LORD Almighty (1:3). This divine appellation occurs here for the first time in the Old Testament. Generally in the Hebrew Bible, the word “LORD” (i.e., *yhwh*, perhaps pronounced Yahweh) represents the God of Israel in his personal, covenantal character (and is thus more specific and intimate than the general designation “God”). The second word (*šēbā ’ôt*) is the subject of ongoing debate, but has traditionally been understood as a military term meaning “hosts” or “armies.” This term seems to encompass, depending on the context, the hosts of Israel (cf. [17:45](#)), the cosmic hosts (i.e., the celestial bodies; Deut. 4:19), or the angelic hosts (Josh. 5:14). The title is then expressive of Yahweh’s sovereignty over all earthly and heavenly powers.²¹ Alternatively, or perhaps additionally, *šēbā ’ôt* may be taken as an abstract noun, yielding “LORD of Might” or “LORD, the Almighty.”²² In any case, a reminder of the Lord’s might, military and otherwise, is not inappropriate at the beginning of 1 Samuel.

Shiloh (1:3). Shiloh is to be identified with modern Khirbet Seilun, which lies midway between Shechem to the north and Bethel or Jerusalem to the south. First mentioned in Joshua 18:1, Shiloh was the place where Joshua designated the tribal allotments after the initial conquest (19:51) and the place where the “cities of refuge” and the “Levitical cities” were named (chs. 20–21). Shiloh became the site of an annual festival during the time of the Judges (Judg. 21:19), and by the end of that period it was the home of the priestly family of Eli and of the ark of the covenant ([1 Sam. 4:3; 14:3](#)). Psalm 78:60 and especially Jeremiah 7:12 suggest that Shiloh may have served as Israel’s first “central sanctuary,” and Jeremiah 7:14 and 26:6, 9 imply the city was destroyed or at least abandoned after Israel’s defeat by the Philistines in [1 Samuel 4](#).



Shiloh

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With this scenario the archaeological evidence converges nicely. The most recent excavations (between 1981 and 1984) have led to the tentative conclusion that Shiloh may have been “primarily a sacred *temenos* [sacred enclosure] rather than an ordinary village.” The eventual destruction of the city in a “fierce conflagration” was probably, according to the site’s excavator, “the work of the Philistines in the aftermath of the battle of Ebenezer in the mid-11th century B.C.E.” (i.e., the battle described in [1 Sam. 4](#)).²³

Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the LORD (1:3). That Eli is simply mentioned without further introduction suggests that he must have been well known to the original audience(s) of this story. He appears to have been both judge (cf. [4:18](#)) and high priest as the period of the judges was drawing to a close—though he is never explicitly called high priest. Combining the evidence of several biblical passages ([1 Sam. 22:9, 11, 20; 14:3](#); [1 Chron. 24:3](#)), we may conclude that Eli descended from Aaron’s fourth son, Ithamar, rather than from his third son, Eleazar, whose line occupied the high priestly office at the beginning of the period of the judges (see, e.g., [Josh. 22:31–32](#); [Judg. 20:28](#)).

How the transfer of responsibility from the house of Eleazar to the house of Ithamar took place remains obscure. In any case, the sons of Eli, with their Egyptian names, Hophni (“Tadpole”) and Phinehas (“The Nubian”),²⁴ prove as unworthy and disappointing as Aaron’s sons Nadab and Abihu ([Lev. 10:1–7](#);

Num. 26:61).

Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat (1:4). While some sacrifices were completely consumed by fire (e.g., whole burnt offerings; see Lev. 1), others (e.g., fellowship offerings, Lev. 3; 7:11–34) stipulated portions to be eaten by those participating in the sacrifice. That similar practices existed among Israel’s neighbors is clear from the Ugaritic ’Aqhatu Legend, which includes among the duties of a son the following lines: “To eat his grain (-offering) in the temple of Ba’lu, his portion in the temple of ’Ilu.”²⁵

But to Hannah he gave a double portion (1:5). Deuteronomy 21:19 speaks of a “double share” being given to the firstborn son, even if he is the son of an unloved wife. Many commentators assume a similar meaning here of a “double portion” given to the beloved but barren wife. The Hebrew expression here is, however, different from the one in Deuteronomy 21:19, and its sense is much debated. Some argue that Hannah must have received a particularly special or honorable portion.²⁶ The LXX reads simply, “to Hannah he would give a single portion, still it was Hannah he loved,” and this rendering is probably closest to the original sense.

In any case, Elkanah’s attempts to lessen Hannah’s sorrow by expressions of his own love (see v. 8) are ineffectual, inasmuch as his love alone cannot compensate for other factors, such as the social stigma associated with barrenness, the need for offspring to assure the social security of aging parents, and so on.²⁷

Eli the priest was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the LORD’s temple (1:9). Mention of “the LORD’s temple” at this stage in Israel’s history may seem anachronistic, inasmuch as Solomon’s temple in Jerusalem will not be built until more than seventy years later; moreover, 2 Samuel 7:6 indicates that the Lord’s house prior to King David’s time is a tent. This is confirmed by Psalm 78:60, which speaks unmistakably of the Lord’s “tent” at Shiloh. The best approach is to understand the “temple” here (cf. also 1 Sam. 3:3) as referring to the “tabernacle” (see NIV text note).



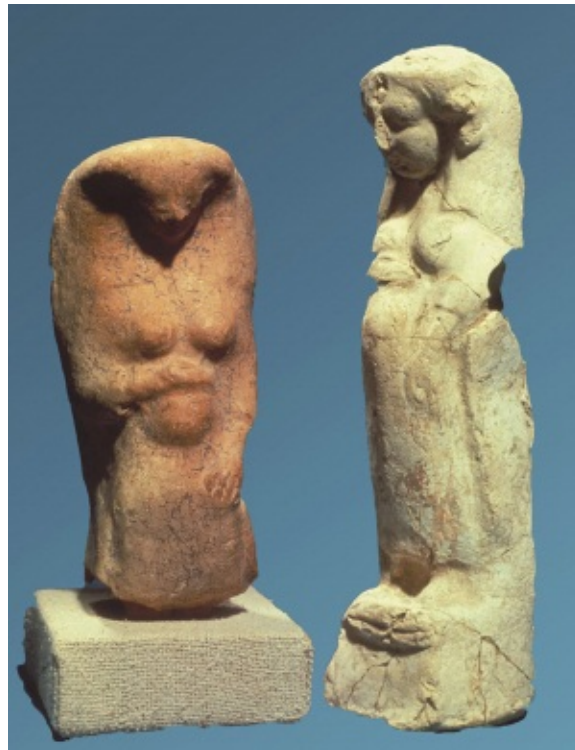
Golden portable shrine from the tomb of Tutankhamun Scala/Art Resource, NY, courtesy of the Egyptian Museum, Cairo

Given the fact that the tabernacle is designated in several different ways in Samuel—e.g., “the house of the LORD” in [1:7](#); [3:15](#); “the tent of meeting” in [2:22](#)—and the fact that other portions of Scripture exhibit a similar variety of expression (e.g., Ps. 27:4–5 uses “house of the LORD,” “temple,” “dwelling,” and “tabernacle” as virtual synonyms), one should not make too much of the fact that the tabernacle is called the Lord’s temple. The mention of “doorposts” in [1:9](#) and “doors” in [3:15](#) does seem to suggest a more permanent structure than has typically been associated with the tabernacle; indeed, there may have been a more substantial “house” at Shiloh that held the tabernacle inside it,²⁸ though no archaeological evidence of such a structure has been uncovered at Shiloh.²⁹

The biblical tabernacle was once regarded by some scholars as a fictional retrojection from a later time period, created perhaps on the model of the temple itself. But archaeological evidence of portable shrines similar in construction to

the biblical description of the tabernacle has generally silenced such speculations.³⁰ While portable shrines are known from various parts of the ancient Near East, particularly striking are several examples from Egypt, ranging from the time of Moses to about a thousand years earlier.³¹ Though the Egyptian examples do not match the construction of the tabernacle precisely, they do demonstrate that the idea of tent shrines and the methods of constructing them—wooden framework wrapped in gold and covered with embroidered fabric or animal skins—were well known long before Israel’s day.³²

She made a vow (1:11). The making of vows was common in the Old Testament and in the ancient Near East (they are widely attested among Mesopotamians, Hittites, Phoenicians, Egyptians, etc.).³³ Often the vow was made to God (or a god) and involved an agreement by the one making the vow to do a particular thing (offer a sacrifice, erect a stele, etc.) on the condition that the deity fulfill a request. The Old Aramaic Melqart Stele of Bar-hadad, which dates from the last decades of the ninth century B.C., attests to this kind of vow-making among one of Israel’s closest neighbors (see [sidebar on “The Melqart Stele”](#)).



Figurines of pregnant women used to bring fertility Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

The Bible itself attests many instances of vow-making. It is worth noting that

apart from vows described in biblical narratives (e.g., Hannah’s vow here), vow-making is strikingly attested also in the “lament psalms” of the Psalter. In these laments (the most common of the Psalter’s genres), the psalmist typically cries out to God in time of need, expresses confidence that God can meet the need, and vows to praise God in the assembly (or to fulfill some other vow) once God has answered. “Songs of thanksgiving” often make reference to the fulfillment of these vows (see [sidebar on “A Vow in the Psalms”](#)). Thus, Hannah is not so much bargaining with God as pouring out her soul in her distress, asking for a son, and vowing to give him over to the Lord, probably as a Nazirite (see [next comment](#)), for his entire life.

The Melqart Stele

A succinct translation of this stele is as follows:

The stela which Bir-Hadad the son of Attarhamek, [] king of Aram, set up for his lord Melqart, to whom he made a vow and who heard his voice.^{A-1}

No razor will ever be used on his head (1:11). Hannah’s vow that no razor will ever be used on her son’s head recalls the second prohibition of the so-called “Nazirite” vow (described most fully in Num. 6:1–21). The term “Nazirite” apparently derives from the Hebrew verb *nzr*, meaning “to separate, consecrate, abstain”; thus, the nature of the vow has to do with being set apart, or consecrated, to God.

The evidence of this consecration is the avoidance of certain things. According to Numbers 6:1–8, the man or woman who takes the vow carefully avoids any consumption of the fruit of the vine (vv. 3–4), any cutting or shaving of the hair of the head (v. 5), and any contact with corpses (vv. 6–7). While the origin of Israel’s Nazirite vow is obscure, votive individuals—individuals voluntarily set apart to the deity—are common in ancient Near Eastern religions. Distinctive in Israel’s practice is not the Nazirite vow itself so much as the God to whom the individual is set apart. That the practice continued in some form into the New Testament period is evidenced by passages such as Acts 18:18 and 21:23–24.³⁴

A Vow in the Psalms

Psalm 66:13–14 makes clear reference to a vow with the promise of

fulfillment:

I will come to your temple with burnt offerings and fulfill my vows to you— vows my lips promised and my mouth spoke when I was in trouble.

While Nazirite vows were commonly made for a limited period of time (the end of which was marked by shaving the head and returning to “normal” status),³⁵ Hannah consecrated her son for “all the days of his life.” In this respect, Hannah’s vow is reminiscent of the Nazirite charge included in the annunciation of Samson’s birth (Judg. 13:3–7).

Hannah was praying in her heart (1:13). While spontaneous prayer is common in the Bible, silent prayer is mentioned explicitly only here. An interesting parallel is found in the Egyptian Instruction of Any, a portion of which reads as follows:

› not raise your voice in the house of a god, He abhors shouting;
ay by yourself with a loving heart,
hose every word is hidden.
› will grant your needs,
› will hear your words,
› will accept your offering.³⁶

Hannah apparently has nothing to offer, which must have made Eli’s favorable response to her—once he realizes that she has been praying, not drinking (1:13–17)—all the more comforting and reassuring (v. 18).

She named him Samuel (1:20). Names in the Bible and in ancient Near Eastern texts are usually more than simple labels; rather, they denote the “essence of a thing.”³⁷ Theophoric names (names bearing the name of a deity) are common. In the Bible, characters sometimes state the significance of a name, as in the present instance where Hannah explains why she gives her child the name “Samuel”: “Because I asked the LORD for him.” Sometimes names are changed (Abram [“exalted father”] was changed to Abraham [“father of multitudes”]; Hoshea [“salvation”] to Joshua [“the LORD saves”]; Naomi [“pleasant”] to Mara [“bitter”], etc.). And sometimes the biblical narrators themselves creatively exploit the semantic potential of homophony (what a name sounds like) in the telling of their tales: “punning upon names . . . functions [in the Bible] as a significant literary device to enrich and intensify the plot through a correspondence between names and themes.”³⁸ Naming in the Old Testament seldom operates on the basis of etymology; rather, it is on the basis of the potential of a name to be invested with meaning in keeping with the historical or

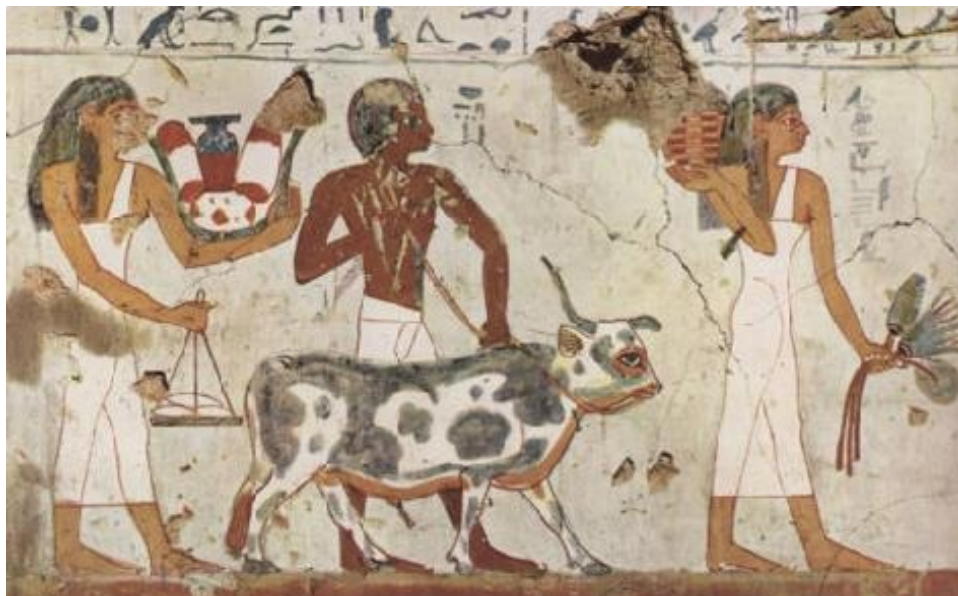
literary context of the episode.

After the boy is weaned (1:22). In antiquity, a child might be nursed for three years or more. In the Egyptian Instruction of Any, a father instructs his son to care for his mother:

She had a heavy load in you,
but she did not abandon you.
When you were born after your months,
she was yet yoked <to you>,
for her breast was in your mouth for three years.³⁹

Similarly, 2 Maccabees 7:27 states, “I carried you nine months in the womb, suckled you three years.” Because the return of ovulation after giving birth can be delayed by breast-feeding, an extended period of nursing may have served as a kind of natural contraceptive.⁴⁰ In any case, weaning may have been celebrated by a feast (Gen. 21:8).

A three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour and a skin of wine (1:24). The Hebrew text reads “three bulls,” but a majority of modern translations and commentators follow 4QSam^a, the LXX, and the Peshitta in reading a “three-year-old bull,” assuming that the Hebrew text has wrongly divided two words.⁴¹ The Masoretic text as it stands is not without defenders, however. Wenham, for example, in commenting on Hannah’s offering, suggests that “one bull was for the burnt offering, one for the purification offering that was expected after childbirth (Lev. 12), and the third for the peace offering, in payment of her vow.”⁴²



Tomb painting of bull being brought for offering [The Yorck Project/Wikimedia Commons](#)

According to the stipulations of Numbers 15:8–10, a young bull for sacrifice was to be accompanied by “a grain offering of three-tenths of an ephah of fine flour” mixed with oil, as well as a drink offering of wine. That Hannah’s offering included “an ephah of flour”—more than three times the amount stipulated—may support the notion that she brought three bulls. On present evidence, it is best to leave the question open.

Hannah's Prayer (2:1–11)

Horn (2:1). On a literal level the word “horn” refers to the antlers or horns that serve as weapons for various animals; the Old Testament uses *qeren* to describe the natural headgear of rams and wild oxen, and even for the tusks of elephants. In addition, horns tend to give their possessors a majestic, even regal, appearance. The raised horn sometimes suggests prosperity or progeny, or both. Throughout the ancient Near East, “the wild ox himself was symbol of strength and virility.”⁴³



Winged genie from dur-Sharrukin wears a horned helmet. In Assyrian art, gods and genies are the ones who wear horned helmets rather than the kings.

Marie-Lan Nguyen/Wikimedia Commons, courtesy of the Louvre

It is not surprising, therefore, that horns regularly appear in depictions of Mesopotamian deities and kings. As a general metaphor, one's horn represents one's strength, pride, and security. Hannah clearly understands Psalm 75:10, that the Lord is the One who exalts the horn of the righteous but cuts off the horn of the wicked. Thus, she rejoices in the Lord that her “horn is lifted high”—an

expression that may sometimes refer to having posterity.⁴⁴

At the end of her song (1:10) Hannah speaks of the Lord as exalting the horn of his anointed, his king. Later on, David, the king of God's own choosing, extols the Lord as "my shield and the horn of my salvation" (2 Sam. 22:3). Grasping the metaphorical use of "horn" in the Old Testament and in ancient Near Eastern literature and iconography is vital for understanding the horn imagery in Daniel 7–8, Revelation 12–13, and elsewhere.⁴⁵

There is no Rock like our God (2:2). The term "rock" (or "mountain"; *šûr*) occurs in theophoric personal names in both the ancient Near East and the Old Testament.⁴⁶ As a title (and not a mere metaphor) for the God of the Bible, *šûr* is concentrated in poetic passages (e.g., the song of Moses, Deut. 32; the song of David, 2 Sam. 22; Psalms; Isaiah). Modern readers, familiar with the use of explosives and heavy machinery to move or even pulverize rocks, must use their imaginations to grasp the sense of "impervious solidity" that a large rock evoked in the minds of ancient people.⁴⁷

In the Bible, "rock" is suggestive of God's strength and sovereignty and of the security, stability, and salvation of those who trust in him. Hannah's focus here is on the uniqueness of the one true Rock as opposed, presumably, to all false sources of security (cf. Isa. 44:8 and the contrast with false gods, also called "rock," in Deut. 32:31, 37). That the same God who affords sanctuary to some is to others a stone of stumbling and a rock that makes them fall is clear in Isaiah 8:14 (cf. Rom. 9:33; 1 Pet. 2:8).

The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up (2:6). The conviction that the fate of human beings is in the hands of God (or the gods) runs deep in ancient Near Eastern cultures. In the Akkadian creation epic known as *Enuma Elish*, we read the following lines: "Thou, Marduk, art the most honored of the great gods, thy decree is unrivaled, thy word is Anu [i.e., it has the authority of the sky-god Anu]. From this day unchangeable shall be thy pronouncement. To raise or bring low—these shall be (in) thy hand."⁴⁸ From the Egyptian Instruction of Amenemope comes the following: "He [the deity] tears down and builds up every day, he makes a thousand poor as he wishes, and makes a thousand people overseers, when he is in his hour of life."⁴⁹

To this general notion of the sovereignty of the deity, Hannah adds the nuance that the true and living God acts compassionately toward the humble, arming with strength those who stumble (2:4), filling those who are hungry (2:5a), blessing the one who is barren with a full complement of children (seven being

the number of perfection; 2:5b), and, conversely, abasing the proud. In short, Hannah knows and trusts the God who can reverse human fortune and bring blessing out of hardship.

He will thunder against them from heaven (2:10). Few displays of nature evoked such a sense of power and danger among ancient people as a severe thunderstorm. Not surprisingly, the ancients perceived booming thunder as evidence of the powerful presence and judgment of the deity. In the Akkadian flood stories, it is the weather god Adad who rumbles and thunders in the clouds.⁵⁰ In Hittite mythology, Telipinu, also a weather god, comes raging with lightning and thunder.⁵¹ In Ugaritic texts, the Canaanite god Baal makes “his voice ring out in the clouds, by flashing his lightning to the earth”; he opens “a rift” in the clouds and makes “his holy voice” resound.⁵²



Storm god

Kim Walton, courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum

The poets and psalmists of Israel use similar imagery in describing their God, both because they share the same cultural milieu as their neighbors and perhaps to express Yahweh's superiority over the false gods of their neighbors. A prime example is Psalm 29, in which the bulk of the psalm (vv. 3–9) is a celebration of the powerful “voice” (thundering) of Yahweh⁵³ (see [comment on 2 Sam. 22:14](#)).

He will give strength to his king (2:10). That Hannah should refer to the Lord's “king” may seem surprising, inasmuch as kingship has not yet been introduced in Israel. Kingship was certainly well known among Israel's neighbors, and it was widely practiced in Egypt and Mesopotamia from at least the third millennium B.C.⁵⁴

Israel itself had flirted with the idea of kingship in the days of Abimelech (Judg. 9). Jotham's fabled response to Abimelech's bid for power explicitly mentions anointing a king (9:8). Prior to Judges, numerous references in the Pentateuch make clear that God intended for Israel one day to have a king (e.g., Gen. 17:6; 49:10; Num. 24:7, 17–19; Deut. 17:6, 16; 35:11). Hannah's anticipation that the time for a king draws nigh is, therefore, not so surprising. Her invocation of blessing on the Lord's king makes clear that kingship per se need not be a problem in Israel—only kings who refuse to rule as vassals of the Great King (see [next comment](#)).

Exalt the horn of his anointed (2:10). Anointing with oil was practiced in ancient Israel and the ancient Near East. Egyptian officials were anointed to high office, though it is unclear whether the Egyptian pharaoh himself was anointed. From the Amarna letters, it appears that local kings in Palestine were anointed as an expression of vassalage to their Egyptian suzerain. Among the Hittites, the suzerain commonly bound his vassals to him by formal rites undergirded by religious sanctions. Among these rites was the anointing of the vassal ruler. Hittite kings themselves were anointed with the “holy oil of kingship,” and their titles sometimes referred to their anointed status (e.g., “Tabarna, the Anointed, the Great King”).⁵⁵



This anointing scene from Kom Ombo dates to the first couple of centuries B.C. The motif of the gods anointing the king with life (ankh signs) was a long-standing motif in ancient Egypt.

Steve Nicholls

Similar practices are represented in the Old Testament. While both religious objects and religious personnel were anointed (Ex. 30:22–33), it was the king who ultimately held the title “the LORD’s anointed” or, in shortened form, “the anointed [one].” This title expressed the king’s vassal status as the Lord’s earthly representative and his consecration to and authorization for divine service (on vassal kingship, see also [comments on 1 Sam. 8:7; 16:13; 24:6](#)). The king’s status as “the anointed” implied his divine enabling and his inviolability.

Eli's Sons (2:12–26)

The servant of the priest would come with a three-pronged fork in his hand (2:13). Implements such as tongs and, as here, three-pronged forks were used in cultic practice for various purposes, such as adjusting sacrificial animals on the altar. Here Eli's wicked sons are simply plunging the forks into the pot of sacrificial meat, contrary to procedures prescribed in the Pentateuch, in which only certain portions of the sacrificial animal were to be eaten by the priests (Lev. 10:14–15). Three-pronged forks, shovels, and other cultic instruments have been discovered in archaeological excavations from a wide range of time periods.⁵⁶



Three-pronged fork from Gezer

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

Even before the fat was burned (2:15). Throughout the ancient Near East, the offering of sacrifices was a common feature in religious observance, though conceptions of their meaning and purpose varied considerably. In Mesopotamia, for example, sacrifices were thought to feed the gods. Although one occasionally hears an echo of this notion in the Bible (e.g., Lev. 21:6, “offerings made to the LORD by fire, the food of their God”), this is probably little more than a figure of speech; in fact, the idea that God eats “the flesh of bulls” or drinks “the blood of goats” is explicitly denied (Ps. 50:13). In ancient Israel, sacrifices were offered to express contrition or thanksgiving, to honor God, and for other purposes.⁵⁷ Certain portions of the sacrificial animal carried special significance, and the portions reserved for God were to be burned.



Egyptian model of man cooking the meat from a sacrifice in a stew pot
Kim Walton, courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum

Israel was not unique in this regard; a Hittite temple dedication text, for instance, after describing how the image of a new deity is to be smeared with the blood of a sacrificial sheep, concludes by stating that “the fat is burned up. No one eats it.”⁵⁸ In the biblical tradition, beginning with Abel’s pleasing offering of “fat portions from some of the firstborn of his flock” (Gen. 4:4), the fat portion came to represent the best portion (cf. Num. 18:29–32, where “best” renders the Hebrew word “fat”; cf. also the expression “fat of the land” in Gen. 45:18). As the best portion, the fat (along with the blood) belonged to the Lord.

Why the fat portions take on this metaphorical significance remains a mystery, especially in light of the fact that the “fat” may refer to inedible “suet” derived from the “the layers of fat beneath the surface of the animal’s skin and around its

organs . . . in contrast to the fat that is inextricably entwined in the musculature.” There is evidence along the Mediterranean littoral of sacrificial flesh being burned in kidney fat, but in Mesopotamia proper the use of suet in sacrifices is not attested, “probably for the reason that in Mesopotamia the food offerings to the gods were not burned but were subsequently eaten by the priests.”⁵⁹

Perhaps the offering of inedible suet to Yahweh was deemed appropriate precisely because it was understood that Yahweh did not need to be fed (though this remains no more than a speculation). In any case, the priest’s duty was to burn the fat on the altar as a pleasing aroma to the Lord (Lev. 3:16; 7:31). Both fat and blood were barred from human consumption (3:17; cf. 7:33; Ezek. 39:19; 44:7, 15), and anyone who offended in this matter was to be “cut off from his people” (Lev. 7:25). Against this background, the abuses of the sons of Eli, described as “wicked men” here (1 Sam. 2:12), were grave indeed (2:17).

A boy wearing a linen ephod (2:18). “Ephod” refers to three distinct but related items in the Bible: (1) the “simple linen garment worn by priests” (as here); (2) the “very elaborate high-priestly ephod” described especially in Exodus 28 and 39, on which was attached a breastplate containing the Urim and Thummim (see [comments on 14:3, 18–19](#)); and (3) some other object, perhaps an idol or, more likely, a sacred garment that clothed an idol.⁶⁰ What all three types of ephod have in common is their character as a sacred vestment of some sort. Old Assyrian texts from Cappadocia attest the possibly cognate term *epattu*, which designates a “rich and costly garment.”⁶¹ Samuel’s wearing a linen ephod indicates he has entered the priestly service as an apprentice.



Linen clothing worn in ritual contexts

Fredduf/Wikimedia Commons, courtesy of the Louvre

His mother made him a little robe (2:19). The “little robe” provided by Hannah is probably an outer garment of some sort to be worn over the linen priestly ephod. In both the Bible and the ancient Near East generally, special garments often carried symbolic significance or marked the wearer as holding a particular office or status (see [comment on 18:3–4](#)).

Robes in 1-2 Samuel

In 1-2 Samuel, robes play a significant role in numerous places. Note, among

others:

1 Sam. 15:27 (Samuel's torn robe marking Saul's loss of the kingdom)

1 Sam. 18:3–4 (Jonathan transferring his princely robe to David)

1 Sam. 19:24 (Saul's divestment of his royal robe)

1 Sam. 24:4–5 (David's carving a corner off of Saul's robe)

1 Sam. 28:14 (Samuel recognized by his robe)

2 Sam. 1:11 (David and his nobles tearing their robes in mourning for Saul and Jonathan)

2 Sam. 13:18–19 (Tamar's torn robe marking her violation and loss of virginity).

Women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting (2:22). The “Tent of Meeting” (cf. Ex. 27:21) frequently refers to the pre-Solomonic portable sanctuary where the Lord appeared to his people and their leaders, initially and especially to Moses. Here the designation may be virtually synonymous with the tabernacle. Portable shrines have been discovered by archaeologists excavating in the ancient Near East.⁶²

The comment that Eli's sons slept with the women who served at the entrance of the Tent of Meeting, while aptly contributing to the depiction of Eli's sons as wicked men (see 2:12), is uncertain in several respects. First, the comment may not belong to the original text.⁶³

Second, even should the reference be genuine, its meaning is not clear. Some commentators have assumed that the women were engaged in cultic prostitution and have compared their activities to those of fertility cults believed to have existed in Canaan. Recent studies have questioned the link between prostitution and fertility, however, and have expressed doubt about the prevalence of cultic prostitution in the ancient Near East—cultic prostitution being defined as “religiously legitimated intercourse with strangers in or in the vicinity of the sanctuary . . . [that] had a ritual character and was organized or at least condoned by the priesthood, as a means to increase fecundity and fertility.”⁶⁴

To be sure, a kind of “sacred” prostitution of women and sometimes men was practiced in the ancient Near East, sometimes as a means of bringing funds into the temple coffers and sometimes as a way for an individual to earn money to fulfill a religious vow; but such activities are condemned in the Old Testament. For example, Deuteronomy 23:17–18 reads:

No Israelite man or woman is to become a shrine prostitute. You must not bring the earnings of

a female prostitute or of a male prostitute into the house of the LORD your God to pay any vow, because the LORD your God detests them both.

Finally, unlike many of its neighbors, ancient Israel seems not to have included women in the priesthood. In fact, Hebrew does not have a word for “priestess,” in contradistinction to references to priestesses among the Assyrians, Phoenicians, and others.⁶⁵

In sum, while much uncertainty surrounds the notice that Eli’s sons “slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting,” there is no uncertainty about the fact that “Eli’s sons were wicked men” (2:12).

Eli's Rejection (2:27–36)

A man of God came to Eli (2:27). The descriptor “man of God” is often used in the Old Testament as a synonym for “prophet” (cf. 9:8–11). The phenomenon of prophecy is widely attested in the ancient Near East, from Mesopotamia (Uruk, Mari, Assyria, etc.) to Anatolia (where the Hittites also referred to prophets as “men of God”)⁶⁶ to Syria-Palestine (Ebla, Emar, Ugarit, Phoenicia, Aram, Ammon) to Egypt (though in Egypt, distinguishing prophets from priests and sages is of uncertain validity: “In actuality there is very little known from Egypt that illustrates the prophet as an inspired speaker of divine oracles”).⁶⁷ Although definitions of “prophecy” range from “foretelling the future” to “decrying injustice,” the key element in biblical (and some ancient Near Eastern) prophecy is that it constitutes “inspired speech at the initiative of a divine power.”⁶⁸ The key distinction between biblical and ancient Near Eastern prophecy is the identity of the divine power at whose behest the prophet speaks—the true God Yahweh or one of the gods of the nations around Israel (see also [comments on 3:1](#)).

To wear an ephod in my presence (2:28). On the three senses in which “ephod” is used in the Bible, see [comment on 2:18](#). The present context, which speaks of Eli’s house approaching the altar and burning incense, suggests that the high priestly ephod is in view.

He will minister before my anointed one always (2:35). On the Lord’s anointed, see [comment on 2:10](#).

Samuel's Vision and Initiation as a Prophet (3:1–21)

Not many visions (3:1). Judging from the extant evidence, ancient Near Eastern cultures were deeply theological, whether their allegiance was to the myriad of local deities or, as in the case of ancient Israel, to the one true God. It is not surprising, therefore, that “visionaries,” or prophets, who (ostensibly) brought messages from the gods to the people, were a regular feature in most such societies (see [comment on 2:27](#)).



Zakkur Stele

Rama/Wikimedia Commons, courtesy of the Louvre

The biblical terms for prophetic individuals find parallels in other ancient Near Eastern literatures, as in the Old Aramaic inscription of Zakkur, king of Hamath (c. 800 B.C.): “Now I raised my hands to Ba’lshamayn and Ba’lshamayn

answered me. Baʿlshamayn [spoke] to me through seers and diviners.”⁶⁹ The Aramaic word for “seer” is cognate with the Hebrew word for “seer” (*hōzeh*), which is related to the noun “vision” (*hāzôn*) in 3:1. In 3:20, Samuel is called a “prophet” (*nābî*). While the Bible also applies this term to prophets of Baal, this sharing of terminology must not obscure the distinction between true and false prophecy, any more than the worship of false gods should be confused with worship of the true God. For a dramatic illustration of the difference, see the contest between the prophet Elijah and the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18.

Samuel was lying down in the temple of the LORD (3:3). On “the temple,” see [comment on 1:9](#). That Samuel is described as “lying down in the temple of the LORD, where the ark of God was” (3:3), has led some to speculate that he may have been engaging in a well-attested ancient Near Eastern practice called “incubation.”⁷⁰ Incubation involves spending a night in the temple precinct in the hope of receiving a divine vision or oracular dream. The practice is attested among the Egyptians, with manuals of dream interpretation being used as early as the New Kingdom period,⁷¹ among the Hittites of Anatolia,⁷² and in Canaan during the biblical period.⁷³

An early example of oracular dreams prior to temple building is that of Gudea of Lagash (near the end of the third millennium). As Averbeck notes, “Dreams, dream incubations, and dream interpretation are a major concern in the Gudea Cylinders.”⁷⁴ Significantly, Averbeck observes that while the second and third dreams of Gudea involved ritual procedures, “it is not certain that Gudea’s first dream was incubated.”⁷⁵ In this respect, we are reminded of Samuel’s experience, as there is no hint here that Samuel intends to incubate a revelatory dream; quite the contrary, for he repeatedly assumes that the voice he hears is Eli’s. Samuel’s experience is best called an (unanticipated) auditory dream theophany.

Extrabiblical examples of such theophanies, or auditory message dreams as they are sometimes called, come from Egypt (Thutmose IV, fifteenth century),⁷⁶ Ugarit (in both the Kirta Epic and the ‘Aqhatu Legend),⁷⁷ Hatti (Ḫattušiliš, thirteenth century),⁷⁸ and Babylonia (Nabonidus, sixth century).⁷⁹

Ark of God (3:3). Built during the time of Moses (see Ex. 25:10–22), the ark of God (also called the ark of the testimony and the ark of the covenant) was a relatively small box (about 45 inches long, 27 inches wide, and 27 inches high) made of acacia wood, overlaid with gold, and fitted with rings so it could be carried with poles. Items of similar size and construction have been discovered in the tomb of the Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamun (ca. 1336–1327). The biblical ark was a visible symbol of God’s presence with his people; when not mobile

(e.g., accompanying Israel into battle or leading them through the Jordan), it was kept in the Most Holy Place of the tabernacle, later the temple.⁸⁰ The ark was not a magical object and was not to be trifled with, as is made apparent especially in [1 Samuel 4–6](#) and [2 Samuel 6](#).

Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD (3:20). On prophecy in the ancient Near East and the Bible, see [comments on 2:27](#) and [3:1](#).

The Ark of God Lost to the Philistines (4:1–11)

The Israelites camped at Ebenezer (4:1). No site called Ebenezer is mentioned in the extant ancient Near Eastern corpus, and archaeologists have been unsuccessful in positively identifying Ebenezer’s location. The biblical text in view here indicates that Ebenezer must have been in the vicinity of Aphek (see [next comment](#)), because it describes the Israelites at Ebenezer spoiling for a fight with Philistines nearby at Aphek.

Philistines

“Don’t be such a Philistine!” For centuries in the English language, and still today, the word “Philistine” has been used as a term of opprobrium. To be called a Philistine is to be branded as uncultured or concerned only for the material and the commonplace. Given the biblical depiction of the Philistines as Israel’s archenemies during the periods of the judges and the early monarchy, it is not surprising that they have been viewed negatively.

Archaeological excavations, however, and indeed the Bible itself, hardly justify calling the Philistines uncultured. A careful reading of the biblical texts suggests not so much that the Philistines lack culture—in many respects their material culture surpasses Israel’s—as that they are staunch enemies of Israel and, by extension, of Israel’s God.^{A-2} They are, to use the biblical censure, the “uncircumcised” (e.g., [1 Sam. 14:6](#); [17:26](#), [36](#); [31:4](#); [2 Sam. 1:20](#)).^{A-3} They are the quintessential foreign adversary, a fact that may be reflected in LXX’s rendering of the word “Philistine” most often simply as *allophylos* (“foreigner, Gentile, heathen, pagan”).^{A-4}

The Philistines are reasonably well attested in extrabiblical ancient Near Eastern literature, the earliest known references coming from the time of the Egyptian pharaoh Ramesses III (ca. 1184–1153 B.C.). Inscribed on the walls of his temple at Medinet Habu in Thebes is an account of a war he fought against various Sea Peoples, among whom the Philistines are included: “Their confederation was the Philistines, Tjeker, Shekelesh, Denye(n), and Weshesh, lands united.”^{A-5} According to Ramesses III’s inscription, “The foreign countries made a *conspiracy* in their islands,” and they proved almost an irresistible force as they migrated into the eastern Mediterranean: “No land could stand before their arms, from Hatti, Kode, Carchemish,” and so on.^{A-6}

It was a different story, however, when they approached Egypt: “Those

who reached my frontier, their seed is not, their heart and their soul are finished forever and ever.”^{A-7} The walls of the temple at Medinet Habu celebrate Ramesses III’s victory over the Sea Peoples not only verbally but visually, as in the wall relief shown in the accompanying picture (the Philistine warriors can be identified by their characteristic headdress).

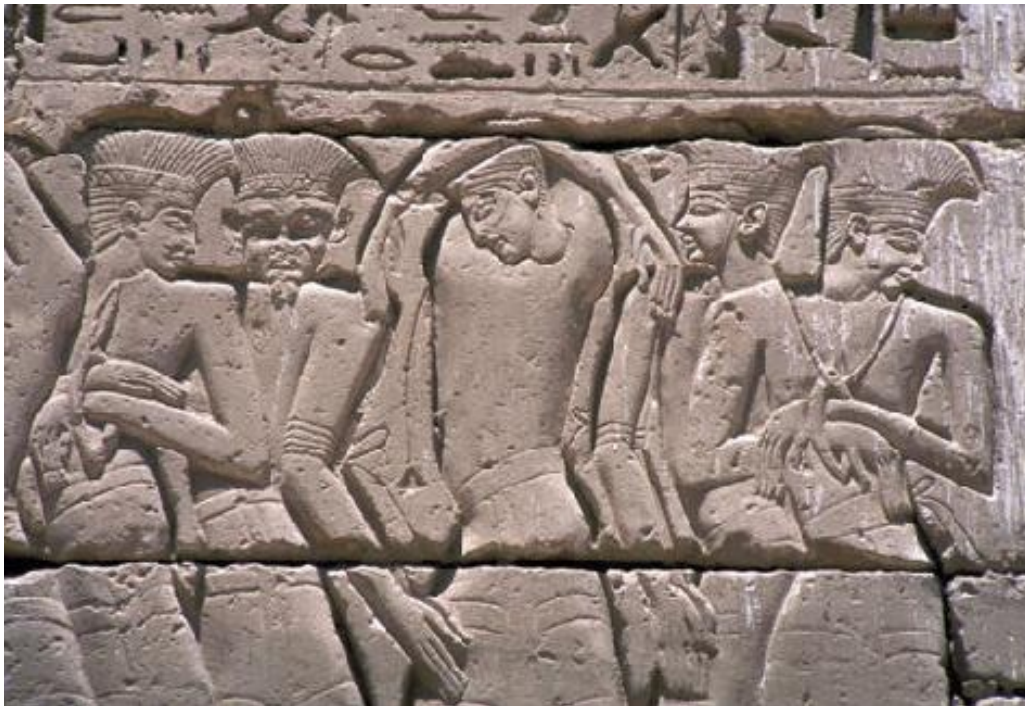
The Philistines are also frequently mentioned in eighth-and seventh-century Assyrian records, the earliest reference coming from an account of a north-to-south expedition down along the eastern Mediterranean by Adad-Nirari III (810–783 B.C.): “I subdued from the bank of the Euphrates, the land of Ḫatti, the land of Amurru in its entirety, the land of Tyre, the land of Sidon, the land of Israel (Ḫumri), the land of Edom, the land of Philistia, as far as the great sea in the west.”^{A-8} Under Tiglath-pileser III (744–727 B.C.), Assyria reduced Philistia to tributary status, along with Judah and other neighboring states.^{A-9}

While the Philistines loom large in both the biblical record—particularly the Samson narratives (Judg. 13–16) and 1-2 Samuel—and ancient Near Eastern texts, the question of their origin remains something of a mystery.^{A-10} The general view is that the Philistines, along with other Sea Peoples, migrated in large numbers from “the islands and coastlands of the Aegean Sea, including the island of Crete,”^{A-11} as part of a general social upheaval that characterized the latter part of the second millennium B.C.

The Bible confirms the Philistines’ association with the Aegean and with Crete (biblical Caphtor; Jer. 47:4; Amos 9:7), but this may not be the end—or, more precisely, the beginning—of their story. The Table of Nations in Genesis 10 ties the Philistines to the little-known Casluhites (10:14), who “may have been the Philistines’ progenitors before the Philistines went to Caphtor.”^{A-12} Furthermore, the Table of Nations traces the Philistines back to Noah’s son Ham (forbear of, among others, the Canaanites) and not to his son Japheth (forbear of the Indo-Europeans associated with the Aegean). Perhaps, then, “the Philistines actually were an amalgamation of several different peoples and . . . the Philistines descended from the Casluhites were different from those who came from Caphtor.”^{A-13}

Pertinent to this issue may be the controversial theory of C. H. Gordon, based on his putative decipherment of Linear A as a (West) Semitic language, that Minoan civilization of the island of Crete must have had Semitic as well as Greek (Linear B) roots.^{A-14} Though Gordon’s theory has not gained general acceptance, if it should prove true it would help to explain, for example, how Samson, an Israelite, could have communicated with Delilah, a Philistine, as both would have been of Semitic stock.^{A-15}

What we do know is that at least by the beginning of the Iron Age (ca. 1200 B.C.) the Philistines were settling along the southwest coast of Canaan from somewhere south of modern Jaffa to the border of Egypt. Their five most important cities, the so-called Philistine pentapolis, were Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron (Josh. 13:3; [1 Sam. 6:17](#)). Beyond their so-called pentapolis, the Philistines exhibited expansionist tendencies—already in the time of Samson and increasingly in the period of Samuel and the early monarchy—which brought them into direct conflict with their Israelite neighbors to the north and east.^{A-16}



Sea Peoples captives in Egyptian relief from Medinet Habu

Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

The discovery in 1973 of a small Iron Age I settlement some two miles east of Aphek, across the Aphek Pass, has led some scholars to suggest that this settlement (called 'Izbet Şarṭâ) or perhaps one of several similar sites nearby may well be biblical Ebenezer. Excavated in four seasons, from 1976 to 1978, 'Izbet Şarṭâ revealed three strata, which show potential convergences with early Israelite history as known from the books of Samuel. The oldest settlement was founded at the end of the thirteenth or beginning of the twelfth century B.C. and abandoned in the early eleventh—perhaps in the aftermath of the battle of

Ebenezer recounted in [1 Samuel 4](#).

The site was reoccupied in the late eleventh century but was abandoned again after one or two decades—perhaps as a result of “the Philistines’ consolidation of power in their war with Saul” ([1 Sam. 13–14](#)). The site was occupied yet again at the beginning of the tenth century—perhaps reflecting “a resumption of Israelite expansion to the west under David.”⁸¹ The final abandonment of the site may have been due simply to the increasing freedom of the Israelites under David to move into the more fertile Yarkon Basin.⁸²

One of the more interesting finds at ‘Izbet Şarṭâ is an ostrakon inscribed with eighty-three alphabetic signs in proto-Canaanite/Hebrew script.⁸³ The final line is most deeply inscribed and contains a twenty-two-letter alphabet, suggesting that the ostrakon is a practice abecedary (alphabet list). The letters in the preceding lines appear to be random and rather repetitive, again suggesting a practice text. The significance of this find is that it attests alphabetic writing—and someone attempting to learn it—in a small Iron I (probably Israelite) village. Given the simplicity of alphabetic writing (as opposed to pictographic or syllabic writing), and given this evidence of literacy in a small village, it is not unreasonable to assume that literacy may well have been more widespread in early Israel than is often assumed.⁸⁴

Philistines at Aphek (4:1). Of several biblical Apheks, the city in view here is to be identified with modern Ras el-‘Ain (now sometimes referred to as Aphek-Antipatris).⁸⁵ The site lies some seven and a half miles east of Tel Aviv in the plain of Sharon near the source of the Yarkon River and is strategically located on an important trade route.⁸⁶ Aphek is mentioned in various extrabiblical sources, beginning with the nineteenth-century B.C. Execration texts from Egypt⁸⁷ and including the fifteenth-century topographical lists of the pharaohs Thutmose III⁸⁸ and Amenhotep II,⁸⁹ and various later documents.⁹⁰ Lying less than twenty-five miles north of the Philistine city of Ekron, the city of Aphek naturally was of interest to the Philistines and provided a strategic launching pad for further military excursions to the north and east.



Aphek

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

Archaeological investigations of the site, especially in the 1970s and 1980s, discovered large quantities of Philistine pottery from the Iron Age (1200 B.C. and following), as well as “the heads of Ashdoda-type statuettes and a fragment of a clay tablet containing an inscription in an unknown and as yet undeciphered script.”⁹¹ The discovery at Aphek of eight Akkadian cuneiform texts or fragments from the end of the Late Bronze Age (1200 B.C.) further underscores the importance of the site, as the number of such texts so far discovered in Israel/Palestine is limited.⁹²

Let us bring the ark of the LORD’s covenant from Shiloh (4:3). On the ark, see [comment on 3:3](#); on Shiloh, see [comment on 1:3](#).

Enthroned between the cherubim (4:4). Not to be confused with the portly baby-like “cherubs” of Western art, the “cherubim” (plural of Heb. *kêrûb*) of the ancient Near East and the Bible were fanciful, celestial, composite creatures, often with the head of a lion or a human (sometimes both), with two or four legs, and always with wings. Cherubim were, by virtue of their unnatural number and nature of features, symbols well suited to their associations with divinity. While the constellation of features varied from one depiction or description to another, the one constant feature was wings, suggestive of the unusual mobility of cherubim. This and other characteristics of cherubim made them, as C. Meyers observes, “apt symbols for divine presence, since deities moved where humans

could not and were something other than either animals or humans.”⁹³



Cherub-flanked throne on Ahiram sarcophagus
Werner Forman Archive/The National Museum, Beirut

The Hebrew text does not explicitly indicate whether Yahweh is enthroned “between” or “upon” the cherubim, but the latter seems more likely, as the ark with its cherubim served in biblical symbolism as the footstool of the invisible deity.⁹⁴ Visual representations of winged creatures fitting the description and symbolic function of cherubim have been brought to light by archaeological investigation throughout the ancient Near East.⁹⁵

Hebrew/Habiru

The Philistines’ query regarding the “shouting in the Hebrew camp” (4:6) marks the first occurrence of the designation “Hebrew” in the books of Samuel, and it is perhaps not surprising that this label is found on the lips of a non-Israelite people. Throughout 1-2 Samuel, as well as elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, the designation “Hebrew(s)” is often used by foreigners or in the presence of foreigners. A possible explanation for this phenomenon has to do with the much-debated link between the “Hebrews” and the so-called Habiru (variously spelled *‘apirû*, *Ḥabirû*, *Ḥapiru*, or using the Sumerian logogram SA.GAZ) known from many documents throughout the ancient Near East, particularly in the second millennium B.C.^{A-17}

It was the discovery in 1888–89 of the now famous Amarna letters that first sparked debate over possible links between the Habiru and the “Hebrews” of

the Canaanite conquest. More than 380 tablets were discovered in the royal archives at el-Amarna, the site of ancient Akhetaten, in Egypt.^{A-18} Covering less than a thirty-year period, mostly during the reign of the “monotheist” Amenophis IV (called Akhenaten, ca. 1352–1336 B.C.), the bulk of the letters (over 300) “were exchanged between Egypt and vassal kingdoms in Canaan and northern Syria.”^{A-19} Some 16 letters from city-states within Canaan mention the troublesome Habiru (spelled ‘*apiru*) and appeal to Egypt for assistance.^{A-20} These Habiru “appear as marauding mercenaries who at times pose a threat to all the Canaanite states and at other times are to be found on opposing sides of intercity warfare.”^{A-21}

Not surprisingly, as N. Na’aman wrote in a 1986 study,^{A-22} “the resemblance between the names Ḥabiru and Hebrew, the proximity of their location, as well as the close chronological relationship between the Amarna *Ḥabiru* and the Israelites aroused the imagination of scholars, bringing about the immediate equation of the two groups.”^{A-23} The excitement was to be short-lived, however, for it soon became apparent that the Habiru, as noted already above, were virtually ubiquitous in the Fertile Crescent throughout much of the second millennium.^{A-24}

It became equally clear that the Habiru did not represent an ethnic group per se, but landless and often troublesome people who had been “uprooted from their original political and social framework and forced to adapt to a new environment.”^{A-25} Arguing from evidence at Mari, Na’aman suggested that the Habiru should be understood as “migrants.”^{A-26} More recently, D. Fleming has argued that a better etymology for biblical “Hebrews” is provided by Mari’s ‘*ibrum*, a designation for backcountry herders that was particularly popular among the Binu Yamina tribespeople of southwest Syria.^{A-27} Fleming maintains that his ‘*ibrum* hypothesis offers a better etymology for biblical “Hebrew” (‘*ibrî*; “the *qitl* noun form offers an exact match”), and a better social fit for biblical “Hebrews” than either the Eberite derivation of Genesis 10:21 or the Habiru linkage.^{A-28}

So what, in the end, have the biblical “Hebrews” to do with the Habiru? And why would the Philistines use the label “Hebrews” for the Israelites? It is now clear that a straight equation of Hebrews and Habiru is impossible—not all Habiru could possibly have been Israelites; the geographical and temporal distribution is simply too great.^{A-29} But this does not mean that there can be no relationship whatsoever. Perhaps the Israelites, as they are described in the books of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel, were *viewed as* Habiru by some of their Canaanite opponents. As Na’aman notes, “With their status as uprooted

people living on the margins of society, the bands described in the books of Judges and Samuel are identical to the *Habiru* of the ancient Near Eastern texts.”^{A-30}

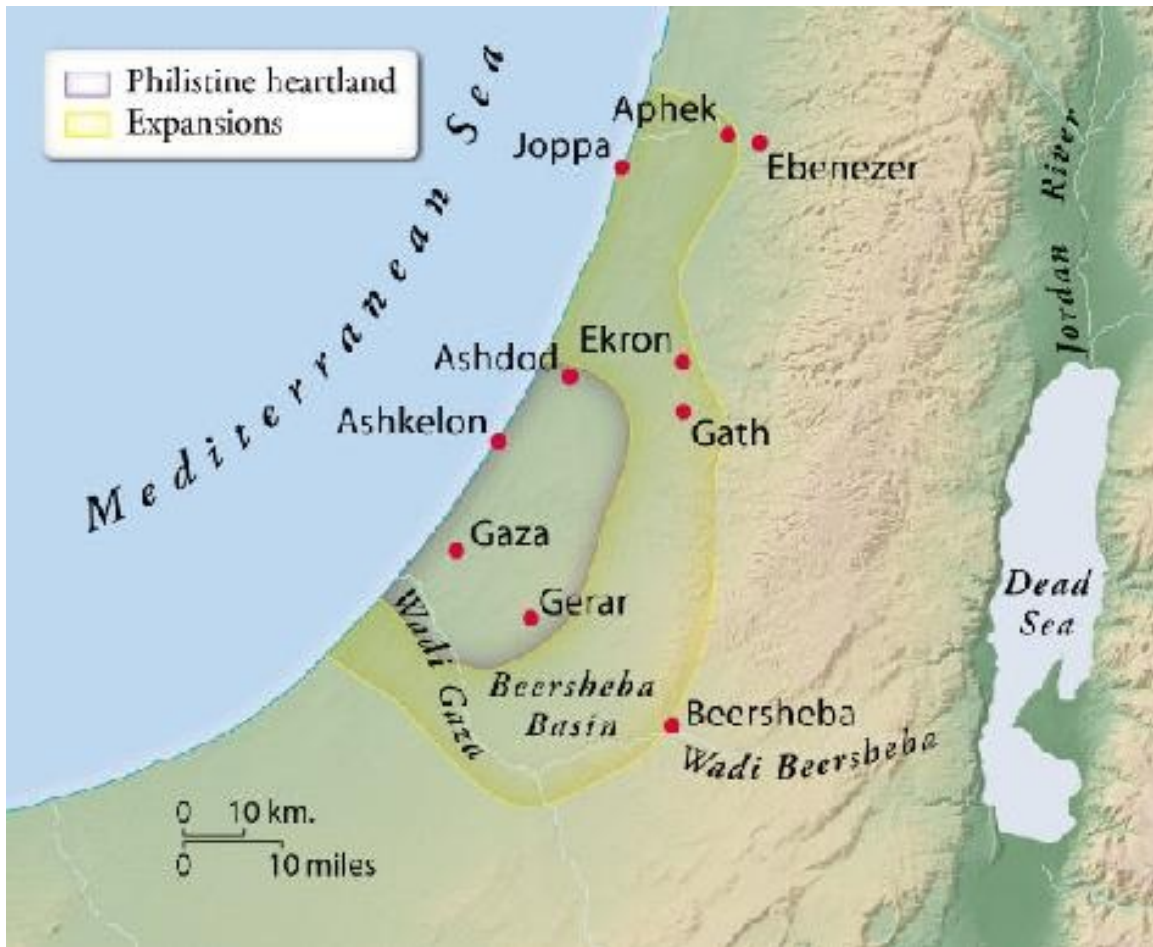


Amarna Letter number 299 is one of many that refers to the Apiru.
Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

Quite conceivably, therefore, threatened Canaanites (in this instance, Philistines) may have viewed menacing Israelites as Habiru, and this perception may have been reinforced by the *coincidental* similarity of the

term Habiru to the gentilic *‘ibrî* (“Hebrew”).^{A-31} Worth noting is the fact that the designation “Hebrew” is often applied to Israelites by those wishing to cast aspersions on them (e.g., Potiphar’s spurned wife in reference to Joseph in Gen 39:14, 17; Pharaoh’s daughter in reference to Moses in Ex. 2:6; the Philistines in reference to Israelites in general in 1 Sam. 4:6, 9). Even the biblical narrators seem at times to distinguish between Hebrews and Israelites, as in 14:21: “The Hebrews who previously had been with the Philistines and had gone up with them into the camp turned and joined the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan.” It is perhaps, then, as a term of opprobrium that the Philistines refer in 4:6 to the Israelite camp as the camp of the “Hebrews.”

You will be subject to the Hebrews, as they have been to you (4:9). As evidenced by biblical references to Philistine outposts in Israelite territory (e.g., 10:5; 13:3), the Philistines were for a time successful in expanding beyond the Philistine heartland in which the Philistine Pentapolis was located. Particularly “with the breakdown of Egyptian hegemony in Canaan after the death of Ramesses III (1153 B.C.), the Philistines [began] to expand in all directions beyond their original territory, north to the Tel Aviv area, east into the foothills (Shephelah), and southeast into the Wadi Gaza and Beersheba basin.”⁹⁶ By the middle of the eleventh century, the Philistines were putting enough pressure on the highlands of Israel to trigger a major shift in Israelite polity, namely, the demand for and granting of a king.



Philistine Territory

Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers (4:10). The question of how to interpret the large numbers of the Old Testament has elicited extensive debate among biblical scholars. No approach has been generally agreed upon, although several plausible theories have been suggested. This question is bound up with estimates of the general population that the land of Israel could have supported in antiquity.⁹⁷



Slaughter on the battlefield in relief depicting the Assyrian victory at Til-Tuba
Alan Saunders, courtesy of the British Museum

One approach is to take all the numbers literally, but this sometimes runs into seemingly insuperable problems. For example, the census numbers of Numbers 1 and 26, if read literally, imply a total Israelite population of some two to three million people. But passages such as Deuteronomy 7:7 insist that in comparison to the Canaanites, the Israelites were “the fewest of all peoples.”⁹⁸

Attempts to resolve the difficulties of the large numbers in the Old Testament have observed that the Hebrew word rendered “thousand” can also mean “chieftain, family leader, clan, military unit” (assuming appropriate revocalizations of the consonantal Hebrew text). Further, some numerals seem to function as round numbers or to carry symbolic value.⁹⁹ In military reportage, there is even some evidence that numbers may have been multiplied by a factor of ten to underscore the magnitude of victories or losses.¹⁰⁰ Inconsistencies between numbers in parallel passages can sometimes be explained on the basis of textual corruptions.

In the end, each case must be decided on its own merits, and some problems remain to challenge future researchers. In the present context, an approach other than the strictly literal seems justified—for example, that Israel suffered the loss of thirty “units” of foot soldiers, which would yield a number of anywhere between three hundred and three thousand soldiers, is still a significant loss. The

narrator's point in reporting the military damage seems to be to stress how disastrous was Israel's attempt to manipulate Yahweh to their own advantage.

Eli's Death and Ichabod's Birth (4:12–22)

His clothes torn and dust on his head (4:12). The Benjamite messenger's appearance leaves no doubt that he brings bad news. Grief and distress are often indicated in the Bible by actions such as fasting, wailing, breast-beating, tearing of one's garments, putting on sackcloth, or throwing dust (dirt or ashes) on one's head.¹⁰¹ While such practices were common among Israel's neighbors, their origin remains a matter of debate. For instance, E. F. de Ward comments regarding the practice of throwing dust on the head:

The use of earth or ash in all types of mourning rites is widespread, its original motives obscure. In moments of disaster, it may have been a dramatic reaction to shock; in funeral customs the dust may have been taken from the grave, the ash from the pyre, in some kind of covenant with the dead; or the motive may have been to seek anonymity at times of numinous portent.¹⁰²

The origin of tearing one's garment is equally obscure. Perhaps it is simply as a sign of self-abasement, as an attempt to disguise oneself from impending doom, or even as an alternative to the harsher practice of self-mutilation.¹⁰³ Whatever the logic of each of these actions, they were certainly widespread in the ancient Near East. An interesting example is offered in the Ugaritic Myth of Baal. Upon hearing that Baal is dead,

Benign El the Beneficent

ascends from his seat, sits on the footstool, [And] from the footstool, sits on the earth.

He pours dirt on his head for mourning, Dust on his crown for lamenting; For clothing he puts on sackcloth.¹⁰⁴

The Ark's Wanderings in Philistia (5:1–12)

Ashdod (5:1). Later called Azotus (cf. Acts 8:40), Ashdod in the Old Testament was one of the cities of the Philistine Pentapolis (see [sidebar on “Philistines”](#) at 4:1). The city, along with “its surrounding settlements and villages,” was assigned to the tribe of Judah in Joshua 15:47, but from the arrival of the Sea Peoples at the end of the Late Bronze Age (late thirteenth/early twelfth century B.C.) until the time of King David (tenth century), the city seems to have been in Philistine hands. Tel Ashdod, which today lies some two miles inland from the Mediterranean coast (north of Ashkelon and on about the same latitude as Jerusalem), was “a major seaport in the Late Bronze and Iron Ages.”¹⁰⁵



Ashdod

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

The first mentions of Ashdod outside the Bible come from Ugarit in Late Bronze II. A commercial text, written in Akkadian, suggests that Ashdod was “a textile center from which purple dyed garments were traded,” while an alphabetic Ugaritic text includes an Ashdodite among a group of “tin merchants.”¹⁰⁶ Nine seasons of excavation at Tel Ashdod between 1962 and 1972, under the direction of M. Dothan, uncovered twenty-three strata, giving evidence of occupation from the Middle Bronze Age to the Byzantine period.

At its height, the city included an acropolis of some twenty acres and a lower

city of seventy acres.¹⁰⁷ The city “was violently destroyed by fire toward the end of the thirteenth century B.C. and covered by a thick ash layer, apparently by the ‘Sea Peoples.’ ”¹⁰⁸ Thereafter, throughout Iron Age I, the site exhibits typically Philistine material culture, including two seals that constitute some of the “earliest written evidence found in a Philistine context.”¹⁰⁹

In the half-century preceding the rise of the Israelite monarchy, Ashdod expanded beyond the acropolis and eventually developed a fortified area within the lower city. A rather substantial gate (13.7m long and 16.2m wide), attached to a five-meter wide wall, “was destroyed in the first half of the tenth century, perhaps at the end of the reign of King David or during the expedition of Pharaoh Siamon, in about 960 B.C.E.”¹¹⁰ No temple from the Philistine period has yet been discovered at Ashdod, though some Philistine “cult installations” have been found.¹¹¹

Perhaps the most significant cultic artifact uncovered at Ashdod is the so-called “Ashdoda,” a female figure merged into the form of a chair or throne and painted in typically Aegean style.¹¹² The “Ashdoda” “probably represents a Philistine goddess whose prototype seems to be the figurines of the Mycenaean Great Mother.”¹¹³



Ashdoda

Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

The Ubiquitous God Dagon/Dagan

The worship of Dagon—or Dagan, as he is typically called in ancient Near Eastern literature outside the Bible—is widely attested in Mesopotamia from as early as the third millennium B.C. In the West Semitic city of ancient Ebla, for example, “temples, festivals and even a section of the city were dedicated to Dagan.”^{A-32} In Palestine, the existence of a Dagon cult already in the second half of the second millennium is evidenced by a proper name in the Amarna Letters, which includes the theophoric element Dagon.

In Philistia—judging from biblical evidence—Dagon was the head of the pantheon of gods. Judges 16:23 speaks of the rulers of the Philistines assembling to offer a “great sacrifice to Dagon their god” after their capture

and humiliation of Samson. After King Saul's death, the Philistines place his armor in the temple of their gods and hang his head "in the temple of Dagon" (1 Chron. 10:10). (On archaeological evidence of this temple, see [comment on 31:10](#).)

Extrabiblical confirmation of the importance of Dagon for the Philistines is sometimes sought in the sarcophagus inscription of 'Eshmun'azor, a fifth-century B.C. king of Sidon, which "refers to Dor and Joppa (modern Jaffa) in the Plain of Sharon as 'the mighty lands of Dagan.'"^{A-33} Uncertainty in translation, however, renders this confirmation dubious; a more recent critical edition reads "Dor and Joppa, the majestic corn lands that are in the Plain of Sharon."^{A-34} The translational uncertainties arise from the fact that the name of the deity Dagon and the West Semitic word for "grain" involve the same three consonants, *dgn*.



Sarcophagus of Eshmunazor II, king of Sidon

Brian J. McMorrow

The vexed question of what kind of deity Dagon must have been has elicited several etymological theories. The first, favored by Jerome and some

Jewish traditions and promoted by Wellhausen in the nineteenth century, is that Dagon was a fish god, the chief evidence being the similarity of the deity's name to the Hebrew word for fish, *dāg*. As further support, some postulated a relationship between the god Dagon and one "Odakon, a fish-man character in Berossus' *Babyloniaca*."^{A-35} While intriguing, not least because this theory enabled Wellhausen (after a slight textual emendation) to propose a solution to the difficult phrase in [1 Samuel 5:4](#), "only Dagon was left upon him" (Wellhausen read "only his fish-part . . ."), this etymology of Dagon has not gained general acceptance.

A second theory links the name to the word *dāgān* ("grain"), but again there are problems. Healey points out, for instance, that "the grain-related meaning of the root *dgn* is distinctively West Semitic . . . and would not have been known to a Mesopotamian worshipper of the deity."^{A-36} There is some evidence, however, that Dagon/Dagan may have been regarded in Mesopotamian religion as inventor of the plow and that his consort may have been the goddess Shala, "an agricultural deity . . . represented symbolically by a barley stalk."^{A-37} This would lend some support to the "grain" etymology.

A third theory, which goes back to W. F. Albright, links the name Dagon to an Arabic root *dajana* ("to be gloomy, cloudy") and makes Dagon a storm god, a notion that finds some support in the positioning of Dagon as the father of Ba'al, also a god of storm.^{A-38}

None of these three major theories has gained a consensus, and while Dagon/Dagan is frequently attested in Mesopotamian literature, these attestations do little to clarify his specific character and role. In a *zukru* festival tablet from Emar, for instance, Dagan is variously referred to as "Lord of the Brickwork," "Lord of the Firstborn," "Lord of Creation," "Lord of the Camp," "Lord of Habitations," "Lord of the Valley," "Lord of Shade and Protection," "Lord of the Fortress," "Lord of the Quiver," and "Lord of" several villages.^{A-39}

Given this evidence, many specific questions regarding Dagon remain open. What can be said is that Dagon was widely worshiped in Mesopotamia over a vast stretch of time (Dagon worship being attested as late as the second-century B.C. Maccabean period; see [1 Macc. 10:83–85](#)), and that his ascendancy to the head of the Philistine pantheon possibly took place after the Sea People's arrival in Canaan.^{A-40}

They carried the ark into Dagon's temple and set it beside Dagon (5:2).

Whether worshipers of the one true God, Yahweh, or of the false gods of the nations, ancient Near Eastern people were convinced that their fates were ultimately in the hands of the gods. In keeping with this (poly)theistic mindset, battles were viewed as contests not just between the human opponents but especially between the deities of the respective sides. A defeat, therefore, was a humiliation not only for the human participants but also for the gods of the losing side. As part of the victor's despoiling the vanquished, the gods of the losing side were typically carried off and deposited in the temple of the winning god(s) as adjunct deities and/or as a sign of the inferiority and subordination of the captured gods. References to this practice are ubiquitous in ancient Near Eastern battle reports (see [sidebar "The Treatment of Defeated Deities"](#)).¹¹⁴ Although not an idol, the ark of God was treated as such by the Philistines—and with disastrous results for their own chief deity Dagon (see [comment on 5:3–4](#)).

The Treatment of Defeated Deities

The practice of capturing the gods (i.e., their images or symbols) of vanquished enemies and depositing them in the temples of the victorious deities was widespread in the ancient Near East. In a study of Neo-Assyrian instances of “godnapping,” for instance, Holloway remarks that “contrary to the niggardly reports of burnt temples, Assyrian royal inscriptions and palace reliefs are almost voluble with their tales of plundered idols.”^{A-41} The following texts offer a brief sampling from various quarters. From a royal inscription of the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser I (1115–1076) comes this inscription:

With the mighty power of the god Ashur, my lord, I marched to the land of Sugu of the land of habhu, (people) insubmissive to the god Ashur my lord. . . . I conquered the entire land of Sugu. I brought 25 of their gods, their booty, their possessions, (and) their property. . . . At that time I donated the 25 gods of those lands, my own booty which I had taken, to adorn the temple of the goddess Ninlil, beloved chief spouse of the god Ashur, my lord, (the temple of) the gods An (and) Adad, (the temple of) the Assyrian Ishtar, the temples of my city, Ashur, and the goddesses of my land.^{A-42}



Images of deities being carried off as booty

Mark Borisuk/www.BiblePlaces.com

Here is a statement from the chronicle of the fall of Nineveh by the Neo-Babylonian king Nabopolassar (626–605):

In the month of Ab the king of Akkad (and) his army went upstream to Mane, Sahiri, and Balihu. He plundered them, sacked them extensively, (and) abducted their gods. In the month of Elul the king of Akkad and his army returned and on his way he took (the people of) Hindanu and its gods to Babylon.^{A-43}

As a diplomatic or magnanimous gesture, captured deities that fell into the hands of a third party were sometimes returned to their original cities, as in the following notice from the accession year of Nabopolassar (626–605): “The accession year of Nabopolassar: In the month Adar Nabopolassar returned to Susa the gods of Susa whom the Assyrians had carried off and settled in Uruk.”^{A-44}

There was Dagon, fallen on his face. . . . His head and hands had been broken off (5:3–4). Decapitation of defeated foes was a common practice in the ancient Near East and, indeed, in the books of Samuel (cf. 17:51; 31:4; cf.

18:24). The Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 B.C.), for instance, boasts of his defeat of twenty thousand men-at-arms and five kings of the land of Kadmuhi: “Like a storm demon I piled up the corpses of their warriors on the battlefield (and) made their blood flow into the hollows and plains of the mountains. I cut off their heads (and) stacked them like grain piles around their cities.”¹¹⁵ Severing hands (and sometimes other body parts; see comment on 18:24) was a convenient way of tabulating and demonstrating enemy casualties. Dagon’s loss of head and hands, therefore, was a sign of unmistakable defeat by the supposedly captive Israelite God, Yahweh, as symbolized by the ark.



Hands broken off from a statue at the Ramesseum in Luxor
Manfred Näder, Gabana Studios, Germany



Dagon fallen before the ark

Jonathan Walton

Statues and idols of this period were often constructed in several parts, with head, hands, and feet attached to the trunk, so that loss of head and hands would have followed natural breaking points. Occurrences involving statues, whether of gods or kings, were often interpreted as omens in the ancient Near East, as the following text from Seleucid-period Uruk suggests:

(An omen reads:) If the image of the king of a country in question or the image of his father or the image of his grandfather falls over and breaks, or its *shape warps*, (this means that) the days of the king of that country will be few in number.¹¹⁶

Step on the threshold (5:5). Peoples of the ancient Near East had a sense of sacred precincts and especially of sacred spaces within the sacred precincts. In Israel, for instance, one may think of the Most Holy Place within the temple. In the book of Ezekiel, thresholds appear to be of special significance (cf. Ezek. 9:3; 10:4, 18; 46:2; 47:1). The avoidance of stepping on the threshold of a sacred precinct was known, if not approved, in Israel (see Zeph. 1:9). Philistine avoidance of thresholds may have begun with the humiliation of Dagon described in the present episode, or it may have been a preexisting practice that the biblical narrator, for purposes of irony and ridicule, links to the fall and destruction of Dagon at the threshold.



Altar and threshold of Philistine temple at Tell Qasile
Kim Walton, courtesy of the Eretz Israel Museum

Afflicted them with tumors (5:6). Debate over the nature of the Philistine affliction has revolved around two main possibilities: bacillary dysentery and bubonic plague (characterized by tumors, or swellings of the lymph nodes).¹¹⁷ Both afflictions could be caused by pathogen-bearing rodents,¹¹⁸ a particular bane for coastal cities such as Ashdod, where infected rodents could arrive by ship. The LXX's longer reading for this verse (cf. NIV text note) mentions rats appearing in the land and bringing "death and destruction." That the Philistines suspected their woes to be the result of infestation may be inferred also from the Hebrew text of the next chapter, which mentions rodents several times (6:4, 11,

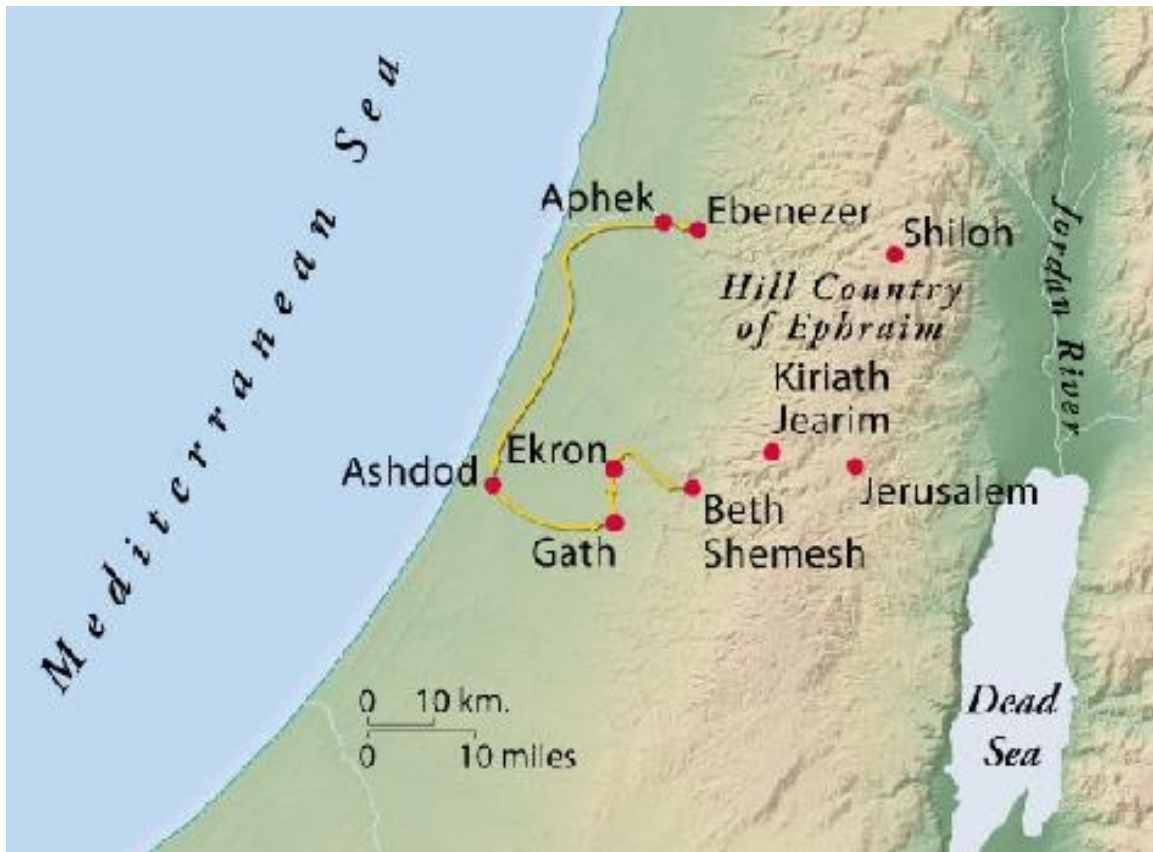
18).¹¹⁹

Have the ark of the god of Israel moved to Gath (5:8). While the identification of Philistine Gath with the site of Tel Zafit (Tell es-Safi) is not absolutely certain, the balance of evidence seems to support it.¹²⁰ The earliest excavation of the site dates back to 1899 and was limited in scope because of human occupation of significant portions of the site and cemeteries in other portions. A surface survey in 1955 yielded pottery evidence sufficient to confirm the occupation of the site in the Bronze and Iron Ages. Ample quantities of Philistine pottery along with the discovery of Hebrew materials (stamps bearing personal names or the phrase *l'melek*, “for/belonging to the king,” etc.) attest to the shifting fortunes of this border town, indicated also in the biblical texts (e.g., 7:14). Excavation of the site resumed in the mid-1990s, and the current excavators are convinced that Tel Zafit is Gath, though the case is not yet proven.¹²¹



Fresco from third century A.D. synagogue of Dura Europos shows the ark of the covenant and the temple of Dagan.

Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com



Travels of the Ark

Tel Zafit/Gath lies some twelve miles east-southeast of Ashdod, the city to which the Philistines first brought the ark in the aftermath of the battle of Ebenezer (4:1–5:1). While the biblical text explains why the citizens of Ashdod want to rid themselves of the ark—the “LORD’s hand was heavy” upon them, bringing devastation and disease (5:6)—it does not explain why sending the ark to another Philistine city is deemed sensible. According to the LXX (and the Vulgate), the citizens of Gath themselves suggest that the ark be sent to them. Perhaps the answer has to do with the fact that Ashdod was a port city, while Gath lay inland. It is well known that shipping can contribute to the spread of disease by transporting infected carriers such as rodents.



Gath (Tell es-Safi)

Joshua Walton, courtesy of Tell es-Safi excavations

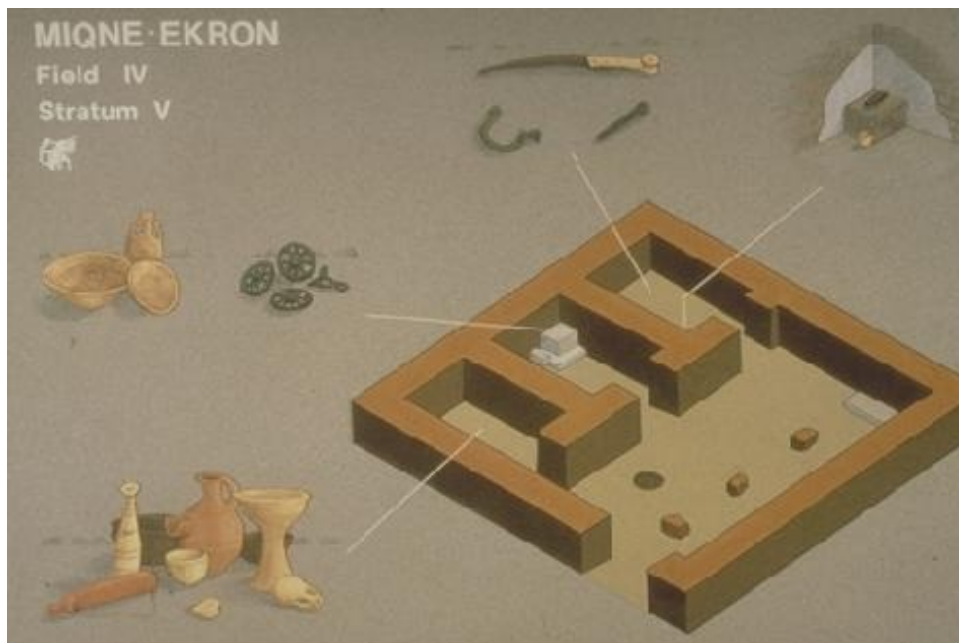
The LXX of [5:6](#) even mentions rodents bursting forth from ships at Ashdod and precipitating a “deathly panic” in the city. Later references to rats and tumors ([6:4–5](#)) confirm the nature of the problem. Perhaps some Philistines were skeptical of any link between the distress in Ashdod and the ark’s presence there and preferred a natural explanation of the outbreak of plague. After all, such outbreaks were common enough in port cities. By taking the ark inland to Gath they perhaps hoped to confirm this natural explanation. Immediately and dramatically, however, their experiment failed ([5:9](#)).¹²²

So they sent the ark of God to Ekron ([5:10](#)). The Gittites lose no time in sending the ark on its way, this time to Ekron, another member of the Philistine Pentapolis. Ekron has now been decisively identified with Tel Miqne, a site lying some five miles north of Gath and about eight miles west of Beth Shemesh. As evidence of the frequent difficulty in identifying sites, in the early twentieth century Albright thought Tel Miqne to be the biblical Eltekeh (Josh. 19:44; 21:23). After a survey in 1957, however, Naveh challenged this identification on the grounds that the modest importance of Eltekeh in the Bible seemed inconsistent with the archaeological evidence at Tel Miqne—a fifty-acre site and one of Israel’s largest in the Iron Age. At around the same time, an alternate site for Eltekeh was proposed by B. Mazar.¹²³



Ekron (Tel Miqne)

David Hully, Tel Miqne-Ekron Excavation and Publications Project

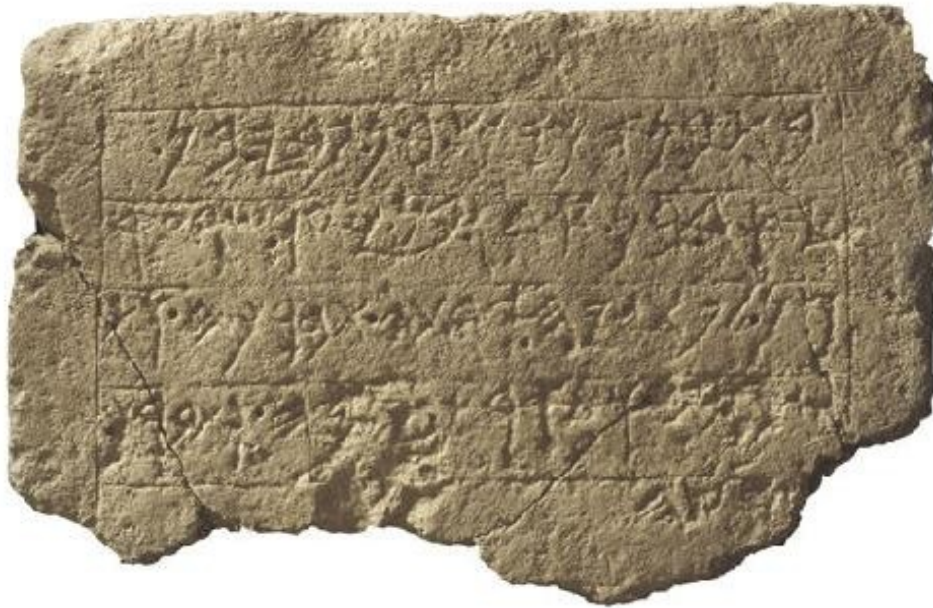


I. Sztulman, the Tel Miqne-Ekron Excavation and Publications Project

It was not until 1996, however, that an inscription discovered at Tel Miqne effectively put the site's identification as Ekron beyond dispute. In their thirteenth season, directors T. Dothan and S. Gitin discovered the now-famous

Ekron Inscription in the destruction debris of a seventh-century temple complex. The inscription reads as follows:

The temple (house) that Akhayus, son of Padi, son of Ysd, son of Ada, son of Ya'ir, ruler of Ekron, built for PTGYH, his lady. May she bless him, and prote[ct] him, and prolong his days, and may she bless his []and.¹²⁴



Ekron Inscription

Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

The inscription is complete and appears to be a royal dedicatory inscription.¹²⁵

Two of the individuals named in the inscription appear in other ancient Near Eastern texts. Padi appears as the erstwhile king of Ekron in the Neo-Assyrian annals of Sennacherib:

The officials, the nobles, and the people of Ekron who had thrown Padi, their king, (who was) under oath and obligation to Assyria, into iron fetters and handed him over in a hostile manner to Hezekiah, the Judean, took fright because of the offense they had committed.¹²⁶

Further on in the inscription, Sennacherib takes credit for restoring Padi to his throne in Ekron:

I advanced to Ekron and slew its officials and nobles who had stirred up rebellion and hung their bodies on watchtowers all about the city. . . . I freed Padi, their king, from Jerusalem and set him

on the throne as king over them and imposed tribute for my lordship over him.¹²⁷

Akhayus (Achish, though not the Achish of [1 Sam. 21ff.](#)) is listed as “Ikausu, king of Ekron” in Esarhaddon’s (680–669 B.C.) account of his Syro-Palestinian campaign.¹²⁸ On the basis of this and other evidence, “there is no doubt in the mind of all qualified scholars,” as Rainey puts it, that the Ekron Inscription is authentic and “a discovery of the first magnitude.”¹²⁹

Tel Miqne, therefore, establishes the location of biblical Ekron in relation to the other cities of the Philistine pentapolis. Only five miles north of Gath, the Ekronites must surely have been aware of the devastation wrought by the ark in both Ashdod and Gath, and they were dismayed that the ark was coming in their direction ([5:10b](#)).

The Ark's Return to Israel (6:1–7:1)

Philistines called for the priests and diviners (6:2). In the ancient world, an outbreak of plague was often considered the work of an angry deity, perhaps the god of an enemy people. From ancient Hatti, for instance, we have rituals designed to appease an angry god and remove a plague. One begins this way:

Thus says Uḫḫamūwa, man of Arzawa. If in the land there is continual dying and if some god of the enemy has caused it, then I do as follows: They bring in one wether [i.e., a castrated ram] and they combine blue wool, red wool, yellow-green wool, black wool and white wool and they make it into a wreath and they wreath the one wether and they drive the wether forth on the road to the enemy and they say to him (the god) as follows: “What god of the enemy has made this plague, now this wreathed wether we have brought for your pacification, O god! Just as a fortress is strong and (yet) is at peace with this wether, may you, the god who has made this plague, be at peace in the same way with the land of Hatti. Turn again in friendship to the land of Hatti.” Then they drive the wreath-sheep into the enemy territory.¹³⁰

In this text, an enemy god is assumed responsible for an outbreak of plague, and in response a chosen animal is decorated and driven back into enemy territory in the hope of pacifying the angry god and ending the plague. This procedure loosely parallels the Philistines' actions in [1 Samuel 6](#).

A second Hittite ritual text offers further parallels, except that it involves human beings (enemy captives) as scapegoats. The text begins by describing a situation in which a king, having won a victory, leaves the conquered territory only to discover that a plague has broken out among his people, the action perhaps of an angered male or female deity of the enemy land. This is what he is to do:

As he [is marching a]way from the border of the land of the enemy, they take one prisoner and one woman of the (enemy's) land. [On which(ever) road] the ki[ng] came from the land of the enemy, the king tr[avels] on that road. All of the lords travel with him.

The text then describes how the male prisoner is to be clothed in the king's own garments and addressed as follows:

If some male god of the enemy land has caused this plague, for him I have just given an adorned man as a substitute. This o[ne] is gr[eat] with respect to his head, this one is great with respect to his heart, and this [one is gr]eat with respect to his limb. You male god, be pacified with t[his ad]orned man. Turn [agai]n in friendship to the king, the [lords], the ar[my], and] to the land of Hatti. [. . .] but [let] this prisoner be[ar] the plague and transport (it) ba[ck into the land

of the enemy.]¹³¹

The last lines above describe a kind of apotropaic (turning away) ritual that vaguely resembles the scapegoat ritual in Leviticus 16:7–10, 21–22 and is even closer (though certainly not identical) to the procedure enacted by the Philistines in [1 Samuel 6](#): Both the Philistines and the Hittites express some uncertainty regarding whether their plague has been caused by an offended deity (cf. [6:9](#)); both return something or someone representative of the plague or its agents back to enemy territory, accompanied by “all the lords” (cf. “the rulers of the Philistines” in [6:12](#)); both are concerned that the apotropaic objects or persons be of value sufficient to pacify the offended deity. The Philistine account is distinctive in its references to sending a “guilt offering” ([6:3](#)) and paying “honor to Israel’s god” ([6:5](#)). See also [next comment](#).

Five gold tumors and five gold rats ([6:4](#)). While commentators have traditionally assumed, as do the NIV translators, that a total of ten golden objects are returned with the ark, Tsumura has recently argued on the basis of the structure of ancient Near Eastern lists (specifically in Ugaritic economic texts) that the actual number of objects is probably five. Such lists typically involve several parts: title, item list, and narrative summary. Inspecting [6:17–18](#) in the light of this structure, Tsumura concludes that verse [18a](#) should be translated not “and the golden mice” but “namely, the golden mice,” making this phrase a parallel explication of the golden tumors of verse [17](#). In other words, the five golden objects are referred to “both as ‘golden tumors’ and ‘golden mice.’”¹³² The bubos (tumors) caused by plague sometimes approach the size of a chicken’s egg and thus about the size of a mouse. Thus, the golden objects may have in some general sense resembled both mouse and tumor.



Bronze votive statue of a rodent from Twenty-Sixth Dynasty Egypt

Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY, courtesy of the Kunsthistorisches Museum, Vienna, Austria

More important than the number of golden objects is the Philistine understanding of their function. It seems likely, especially given their stated intent to “pay honor to Israel’s god” (v. 5), that the use of gold is a sign of honor and submission. Further, the golden objects (tumors/mice) probably serve an apotropaic function.¹³³ As Tsumura explains, “making and sending off the golden mice was ‘sympathetic magic’ whose purpose was to get rid of the disease itself, as represented by the tumor-shaped mice, not to get rid of mice as the cause of the disease.”¹³⁴ Like the Israelite scapegoat of Leviticus 16 that was to “carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place” (v. 22), the golden tumors/mice are meant to bear away the plague afflicting the Philistines.

A similar procedure involving a mouse is attested in the Hittite Ambazzi ritual, described by Wright¹³⁵ and reported by Tsumura. In this Hittite ritual, “the practitioner, after attaching to a mouse a bowstring ‘symbolic of the patients’ pollution,’ declares: ‘I have taken away from you evil and I have put it on the mouse. Let this mouse take it to the high mountains, the deep valleys and the distant ways!’ (Ambazzi ii 37–40).”¹³⁶

Get a new cart ready (6:7). In keeping with the ritual character of the proceedings, the Philistines prepare a new cart (thus ritually clean), to which they attach cows that have recently calved. The point of the exercise is to determine whether their distress is wrought by Israel’s God or has come upon them simply by chance (v. 9). If, contrary to nature, they forsake their calves and, accepting the yoke, pull the cart toward Israelite territory, this will be a sure sign that Yahweh is the cause of their recent distress (cf. [comment on 6:2](#)). The aims of the Philistine procedure are to ascertain the cause of their affliction, to pacify the offended deity if necessary, and by sympathetic magic to bear the plague away.



Egyptians use a calf to get the cows across the Nile River. In the Philistines' test they expected the cows to go to their calves.

Werner Forman Archive



Philistine cart from the relief at Medinet Habu of the Sea Peoples' battle with the Egyptians

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

Beth Shemesh (6:9). Of several towns bearing the name Beth Shemesh (“house/temple of the sun”), the one in view here was strategically located in the Valley of Sorek, in the northeastern Shephelah (foothills), overlooking a major

ancient route linking the coastal plain and the central hill country near Jerusalem. As a border town between Philistine and Israelite territory (see 6:12), Beth Shemesh is a logical destination for the pestilent ark, once the Philistines have tired of feeling the heavy hand of Yahweh and wish to return the ark (5:10–12).



Beth Shemesh

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

While Beth Shemesh is not mentioned in any known extrabiblical texts, the name seems to have survived in the name of the modern Arabic village, ‘Ain Shems (“spring of the sun”). Just to the west of this village lies Tell er-Rumeilah, identified already in 1838 by Edward Robinson as ancient Beth Shemesh. This identification, which locates Beth Shemesh a few miles south of Zorah and Eshtaol and some eight miles east of Ekron, comports nicely with the biblical association of Beth Shemesh with these other sites (Josh. 19:41–42).

Two series of excavations (1911–1912; 1928–1933) unearthed evidence of more or less continuous occupation of the site from the Middle Bronze period to the Byzantine period. The Late Bronze city appears to have been prosperous, yielding archaeological evidence of “fine domestic structures, many cisterns, a smelting furnace, a Proto-Canaanite ostrakon, a jewelry hoard, and several

tombs.”¹³⁷ In addition to the Proto-Canaanite ostrakon, this level also yielded a cuneiform tablet in Ugaritic.¹³⁸ It has been suggested that both texts may be abecedaries, but this remains uncertain.

The Iron Age I period evidences “a large but relatively unplanned village, still somewhat in the Late Bronze tradition, but with Philistine bichrome ware.”¹³⁹ This Iron Age village, with its apparent Philistine presence, experienced a massive destruction near the beginning of the eleventh century, and it may have been at that time that it returned to the more complete Israelite control indicated by the text before us. That Beth Shemesh was frequently disputed by the Philistines and the Israelites seems clear from 2 Chronicles 28:18.¹⁴⁰

Kiriath Jearim (6:21). The location of Kiriath Jearim (“city of the forests”) has not been positively identified, though some authorities believe it to be “Tell el-Azhar, near modern Qaryet el-‘Enab.”¹⁴¹ This would place Kiriath Jearim almost nine miles east-northeast of Beth Shemesh in the general direction of Jerusalem, seven or eight miles farther east. First mentioned as one of the Gibeonite cities in Joshua 9, Kiriath Jearim housed the ark for twenty years (7:2) following its return to Beth Shemesh by the Philistines, until King David brought it to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6). That the site is sometimes called Kiriath Baal (Josh. 15:60; 18:14), Baalah (15:9), and Baalah Judah (2 Sam. 6:2) may reflect a Canaanite cultic background—Baal was one of Canaan’s chief deities, and Baalah is a feminine counterpart. The name change to Kiriath Jearim may be intended to mute this association.¹⁴²



Possible site of Kiriath Jearim

Bible Scene Multimedia/Maurice Thompson

Samuel's Defeat of the Philistines at Mizpah (7:2–17)

Put away their Baals and Ashtoreths (7:4). Samuel's exhortation in 7:3 and the people's response here is indicative of just how syncretistic Israelite worship had become on the eve of the monarchy. But this was not a recent development. Already in the period of the judges, forsaking Yahweh and serving the Baals and the Ashtoreths was a recurrent problem (Judg. 2:11–13 and *passim*). Baal, whose name means "lord, owner, husband," was the Canaanite god of fertility and storm and as such corresponded to the Mesopotamian god Hadad, whose name means "thunderer."¹⁴³ The father of Baal/Hadad according to Mesopotamian and Syrian sources was Dagan/Dagon (see [comment on 5:2](#)).

A Hymn to Baal

Baal sits enthroned like the sitting of a mountain
Haddu li[es in wait] like the subterranean waters,
In the midst of his mountain, the divine Zaphon,
On his [pleasant] mountain of victory.

Seven lightnings [are in his hand],

Eight storehouses of thunder—

The shaft of lightning he [brandishes.]^{A-45}



Baal above the waters with lightning bolt Marie-Lan Nguyen/Wikimedia Commons, courtesy of the Louvre

Ashtoreth, or Astarte as she was generally known, was a goddess of fertility and war. Along with Anat, she was a consort of Baal, as is widely attested in biblical and extrabiblical (especially Ugaritic) literature.¹⁴⁴ The vocalization of Ashtoreth is peculiarly biblical and likely represents the replacement of the name's original vowels with the vowels from the Hebrew word *bōšet* ("shame"). The same intentional distortion may lie behind Molech, the biblical name of another Canaanite deity known in Ugaritic as Milku and in Ammonite as Milcom.¹⁴⁵ Perhaps the clearest instances of intentional distortions involve such

personal names as Esh-Baal and Merib-Baal (1 Chron. 8:33–34), which appear elsewhere in the Old Testament as Ish-Bosheth and Mephibosheth (2 Sam. 2:8; 9:6).

Baal and, less frequently, Ashtoreth were sometimes associated with specific locations (e.g., Baal Hazor, Baal Hermon, Baal Gad, Baal Meon, Baal Peor), but this should not be construed as suggesting a multiplicity of Baals or Ashtoreths. Ugaritic texts now confirm that the compound names refer simply to “local manifestations” of the two deities.¹⁴⁶ Frequent biblical reference to the Baals and Ashtoreths (as here) may reflect these local manifestations but more likely “is simply a way of speaking about Canaanite gods and goddesses generally.”¹⁴⁷ Samuel’s exhortation, then, is aimed at the Israelites’ ridding themselves of *all* “foreign gods” (cf. 7:3).¹⁴⁸

Mizpah (7:5). Because Mizpah means something like “place of watching,” implying a lookout or high vantage point, it is not surprising that several biblical sites bear the name (e.g., 22:3 mentions a Mizpah in Moab).¹⁴⁹ The site in view here is probably Tell en-Naşbeh, located some eight miles north of Jerusalem and nine miles northeast of Kiriath Jearim (see [comment on 6:21](#)).¹⁵⁰ Support for this identification consists not only of topographical fit but also of the fact that the Arabic name Naşbeh seems to reflect the original Hebrew name Mizpah.¹⁵¹



Mizpah (Tell en-Naşbeh) Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

Five seasons of excavation between 1926 and 1935 uncovered about two-

thirds of the 7.7 acre site, revealing occupation as early as the Chalcolithic and Early Bronze I periods, but there is a gap in occupation from the end of this period to the beginning of the Iron Age. Despite extensive erosion of the central part of the site, “the remains uncovered at Tell en-Naşbeh correlate with what is known of Mizpah” from the biblical text.¹⁵² Mizpah played a prominent role in premonarchic Israel (Judg. 20:1; 21:1–24; [1 Sam. 10:17](#)) and became one of the regular stops in Samuel’s circuit ([7:16](#)).

They drew water and poured it out before the LORD (7:6). Although this apparently ritual act of pouring out water before the Lord (called a “libation”) is without parallel elsewhere in the Old Testament, its association with fasting and confession in the present context (see [next comment](#)) suggests that in this instance at least it is meant to imply repentance and a desire to do serious business with God. One is reminded of Hannah’s metaphorical reference to “*pouring out* my soul to the LORD” in [1:15](#). In [2 Samuel 23:15–16](#), David receives “water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem” but refuses to drink it, choosing rather to pour it out “before the LORD.” Given the distinctive circumstances of David’s action, this does not offer a valid parallel to the water libation in the present episode.



Luxor relief of priest pouring out libation Frederick J. Mabie

Water (as well as beer and wine) libations are attested in the ancient Near East. An Old Babylonian libation prayer, for instance, includes the following: “Sin [a god], you are god of heaven and earth. In the morning I am pouring

water to you for the family of Sin-nasir son of Ipqu-Annunitum. Release the family of Sin-nasir son of Ipqu-Annunitum, that they may eat his bread and drink his water.”¹⁵³ This was apparently a water libation over the grave of an ancestor, probably repeated at regular intervals. Because of its distinctive context, it does little to elucidate the significance of the Israelites’ water libation in the present episode, other than to attest to the general practice of pouring out water libations.

More generally, water libations in Mesopotamia and in Syria-Canaan seem to be offered as drink for the gods,¹⁵⁴ just as animal sacrifices represented food for the gods. For ancient Israel, however, such practices appear to have been emptied of their literal significance even while being retained as ritual features.

They fasted (7:6). On fasting in the ancient Near East, see [comment on 2 Samuel 1:12](#).

Samuel was leader of Israel (7:6). The word rendered “leader” (*šōpēt*) is elsewhere rendered “judge,” and indeed the Semitic word in view has been shown in various contexts to denote a leader in the sense of ruler or deliverer, as well as judge in the more administrative sense.¹⁵⁵ At Mari, for instance, the *šāpiṭum* is described as a provincial or district ruler or administrator. Thus, Samuel is depicted as combining several roles, namely, prophet, priest, and judge. The transitional period in which Samuel serves, along with his own personality and divine calling, may well account for his combining of roles that later in Israel’s development are kept separate.¹⁵⁶

When the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled (7:7). That word of an Israelite assembly in progress raises concern among the Philistines is understandable, given the fact that in the ancient Near East impending battles were typically preceded by cultic assemblies designed to entreat the deity for a favorable oracle. Babylonian and Assyrian historical texts ranging in time from Hammurabi (eighteenth century) to the siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib a thousand years later make frequent reference to (trust-inspiring) oracles of the deity/deities prior to battle.¹⁵⁷ Mediation of the oracle through prophets or priests is not explicitly mentioned in these passages, though the king sometimes assumes the title of high priest.¹⁵⁸

An inscription from the reign of Ashur-nasir-apli II (884–858 B.C.), however, distinguishes “king” and “diviner” among the conquered forces of Karduniash, and it is particularly noteworthy that the diviner is also described as a “commanding officer,” suggesting a combined religious and military role.¹⁵⁹ Mesha, king of Moab, is commanded by Chemosh to attack Nebo in Israel,¹⁶⁰ but

again the means by which this message was delivered is not described.

Of special interest is the eighth-century Zakkur Inscription written in Old Aramaic, in which King Zakkur of Hamath and Lu'ath, under threat from Barhadad of Aram and an alliance of seventeen kings, receives an "oracle of salvation" through the mediation of "seers" and "messengers."¹⁶¹ It is in the Mari letters, however, that prophetic involvement in military affairs is most apparent.¹⁶² The Ugaritic Prayer-Song of El¹⁶³ provides a parallel example of the offering of prayer and sacrifices in a situation of (apparently military) crisis (see [next comment](#)).

In the Old Testament it was customary to "consecrate" war and to speak of warriors as "consecrated." An attempt to consult Yahweh, through priest or prophet or otherwise, generally preceded a battle and was sometimes accompanied by sacrifice and/or prayer.¹⁶⁴ In the light of this, it is understandable that the Philistines are concerned that the assembly of Israelites to Mizpah at a time unconnected to a regular festival may signal an imminent war.

Samuel took a suckling lamb and offered it up as a whole burnt offering (7:9). Samuel's sacrifice accompanies his crying out to Yahweh in a time of military distress. This combination of prayer and sacrifice in a context of military crisis is found also in a Ugaritic prayer-song to the god El, excerpts from which read as follows:

· gracious, O El!

· a support, O El!

· salvation, O El!

El, hasten, come swiftly!

· the help of Zaphon,

the help of Ugarit.

ith the lance, O El,

th the upraised (?), O El,

ith the battle-axe, O El,

th the shattering, O El.

·cause of the burnt offering, O El,

cause of the appointed sacrifice (?), O El, because of the morning sacrifice, O El.¹⁶⁵



Assyrian camp with sacrifice being offered at top left Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

The LORD thundered . . . against the Philistines (7:10). See [comment on 2:10](#).

Beth Car (7:11). The location of Beth Car, not mentioned elsewhere in the Old Testament, is unknown, unless we are to assume a corruption of another name, such as Beth Horon, which lay some six miles west of Mizpah.

Samuel took a stone and set it . . . named it Ebenezer (7:12). The use of (often inscribed) boundary stones was widespread throughout the ancient Near East.¹⁶⁶ The stones were sometimes named and believed to be under divine protection. Curses against those who moved them were sometimes included in the inscription. This stone erected by Samuel is named Ebenezer, which is not to be confused with the site called Ebenezer in [4:1](#) and [5:1](#) (see [comment on 4:1](#)). The present Ebenezer does, however, recall that earlier episode in which the Israelites, having tried to force Yahweh's hand by bringing his ark into battle, suffered defeat at the hands of the Philistines. Having now (for the time being at least) learned their lesson (cf. [7:4](#), [6](#), [8](#)), the Israelites realize a great victory over the Philistines.

Samuel's setting up of a memorial stone with the name Ebenezer—which sounds like “Stone of Help”—and with the explanation “thus far the LORD has helped us” both acknowledges Yahweh's decisive role in the victory and serves

as an oblique reminder of the strikingly different results brought about by presumption, on the one hand, and by penitence, on the other. Samuel's explanation may carry both a spatial and a temporal meaning. Spatially, Samuel is proclaiming that Yahweh has given Israel victory up to the place marked by the boundary stone. Temporally, the sense may be that to this point in time Yahweh has helped Israel against its foes. The temporal sense takes on ironic significance in the light of the succeeding chapter, in which the Israelites insist that they be given a human king, such as other nations have, "to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles" (8:20).

The towns from Ekron to Gath that the Philistines had captured from Israel (7:14). As border towns between Philistine territory to the west and Israelite territory to the east, the towns in the vicinity of Ekron and Gath doubtless changed hands from time to time, depending on which power was in the ascendancy. On Ekron and Gath, see [comments on 5:10](#) and [5:8](#) respectively.

There was peace between Israel and the Amorites (7:14). In 1-2 Samuel, the Amorites are mentioned only here and at [2 Samuel 21:2](#) (the Gibeonites being survivors from a former Amorite population). Along with the Canaanites, the Amorites are frequently mentioned as among the early inhabitants of the land of promise prior to the arrival of Israel. The full geographic range of the Amorites is much wider, including northern Syria and Mesopotamia from as early as 3000 B.C. Mendenhall argues, in fact, that "from the Middle Bronze Age on there was no region of the Levant that had not been influenced by the Amorite language and culture in various ways and to various degrees."¹⁶⁷ Their name is attested in Sumerian and Akkadian, and sounding like "west(erner)" seems at times to have geographic as well as ethnic significance.

Amorite power and geographic distribution peaked in the middle of the second millennium and declined thereafter, so that by this episode they are counted among the several minor powers in Canaan.¹⁶⁸ When the term is nevertheless used in a general sense in the biblical narratives, it may refer to inhabitants of the more mountainous regions of the land, while the "Canaanites" inhabit the coast and valleys.¹⁶⁹ Thus, this notice seems to suggest that in Samuel's day Israel experiences a degree of peace with those populations remaining in its heartland.

Samuel continued as judge . . . went on a circuit (7:15–16). Assuming that "Bethel" is to be located at or near Beitin (but see comment on 10:3) and that "Gilgal" is located in the vicinity of Jericho (see [comment on 10:7–8](#)), Samuel's circuit takes him on a journey of more than thirty miles. As a possible analog to this circuit, Malamat has drawn attention to a letter from Asqudum, "the chief

diviner at the Mari palace in the Old Babylonian period,” to Yasmah-Addu, “the viceroy of Mari,” that appears to describe a four-town circuit in which Asqudum performs extispicies (inspections of the entrails of sacrificial animals for purposes of divination).¹⁷⁰ The towns he visited were Saggaratum (near the confluence of the Habur and Euphrates), Terqa (Tell Ashara), Šuprum or Šuprum (Tell Abu Hassan? on the east bank of the Euphrates near Mari), and his home-base at Mari (Tell Hariri on the west bank of the Euphrates). A circuit among these four cities covered over a hundred miles.¹⁷¹ The relevant portion of the Mari text in question is translated by W. Heimpel as follows:

[To] my lord] Yasmah-Addu *speak!* Your servant Ašqudum (says), “As of my arrival in Terqa, Tarim-Šakim arrived, and I asked him the following: I (said), ‘Did Zunan perform extispicies for the well-being of the land and the strong cities?’ He answered me as follows: ‘He did not make (them).’ I returned with him to Saggaratum at the clearing of this month, and I made extispicies for the well-being of the city of Saggaratum for 6 months, and the extispicies were sound. And prior to my (departure) I will make (extispicies) for the fortress of my lord, Terqa, Šuprum, and Mari, and I will promptly *write* a full report to my lord.

The text continues for a few lines describing the favorable extispicy.¹⁷² Heimpel’s rendering implies that Asqudum intended to complete extispicies for the other three cities while still in Saggaratum, but it rests on a textual emendation. The text as it stands may suggest that Asqudum desired to perform extispicies in each of the towns, beginning with the northernmost (see [map](#)). At the end of the day, it remains uncertain whether Malamat’s suggested analogy to Samuel’s circuit is apt, especially when one considers the general mobility of administrative officials from Mari: “Many officials spent their careers moving back and forth between Mari and the provincial centers.”¹⁷³ Samuel’s circuit, in any case, was a regular, annual affair.



Samuel's Circuit

He built an altar there to the LORD (7:17). With Shiloh being destroyed at the hands of the Philistines in the aftermath of Israel's loss in [1 Samuel 4](#), sacrifices can no longer be offered there (on Shiloh, see [comment on 1:3](#)). Whether Samuel's altar at Ramah is intended for sacrifice or merely as a memorial is not specified by the text, but the former seems more likely. While the proliferation of local altars is discouraged after the establishment of Jerusalem as Israel's central sanctuary, there was no absolute prohibition at earlier periods, only a command not to sacrifice in the Canaanite way (cf. Deut. 12).

Israel Demands a King (8:1–22)

Samuel . . . appointed his sons as judges . . . they served at Beersheba (8:1–2). While Samuel’s sons bear pious Israelite names (v. 2), their behavior proves anything but pious (v. 3). Unless Samuel has grown as dull as Eli, his appointment of men of such poor character to judge Israel raises questions.



Beersheba

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

Perhaps an answer is suggested by the rather remote location of Beersheba and its insignificance in Samuel’s day. In the biblical tradition, Beersheba, in the Negev, was early considered the southern extremity of the territory of Israel, in the same way that Dan was considered the northernmost city (note the expression “from Dan to Beersheba” in, e.g., Judg. 20:1; 2 Sam. 3:10). The modern identification of Beersheba’s precise location, however, is debated. The ancient name seems to be preserved in the modern name Bir es-Seba’, which designates a section of the industrial heart of the modern city of Beersheba, but

the most likely location of biblical Beersheba now appears—in the light of current knowledge—to be Tell es-Seba¹⁷⁴ located some three miles to the east.

It may be, as Manor observes, that Beersheba was “a dual site consisting of the royal city (i.e., the tell) along with a civilian settlement further W on the banks of the wadi (where the modern city now stands).”¹⁷⁵ Rainey argues the two sites (Bir es-Seba¹⁷⁶ and Tell es-Seba¹⁷⁷) may both have had the same name in antiquity, thus placing Beersheba among other ancient examples of two cities with the same name. Tell es-Seba¹⁷⁶ is a small mound of only 2.5 acres, and excavation at the site suggests that the population in Samuel’s day (eleventh century B.C.) was small, perhaps fewer than two hundred people.¹⁷⁷ Excavator Herzog estimates that a community of perhaps twenty families could have lived in the settlement in the first half of the eleventh century and notes that the first houses at the site appear to have been built in the third quarter of the eleventh century,¹⁷⁸ the approximate time of Samuel’s judgeship. Given this situation, Samuel’s appointment of his two sons as judges in Beersheba is a minor appointment indeed.¹⁷⁹

Accepted bribes and perverted justice (8:3). It is not just in the Bible that accepting bribes and perverting justice are considered serious offenses. In a well-attested Hittite text containing instructions from “His Majesty Arnuwanda the great king” to his officials in border towns, the king insists that “border governors” (or “margraves”) are to judge each “case properly and make things right” or else refer it to the king himself. The margrave is specifically warned against perverting justice: “Let no one take a bribe. He is not to make the stronger case the weaker, or the weaker the stronger one. Do what (is) just.”¹⁸⁰



Relief of ruler (Hammurabi) making report of his justice to the god Shamash
Soumit Nandi, courtesy of the Louvre

They have rejected me as their king (8:7). Not just in Israel, but in the ancient Near East generally, kingship was intertwined with religion. While in Egypt the king himself was worshiped as divine, in Mesopotamia kingship was regarded as “one of the basic institutions of human life devised by the gods for mankind.” The opening words of the famous Sumerian King List (ca. 2100), for example, read, “When the kingship was lowered from heaven, the kingship was in Eridu.”¹⁸¹ The concept of divine sponsorship of kingship was foundational in the cognitive environment of the ancient Near East. Commenting on the Neo-Assyrian period, Holloway writes:

The Neo-Assyrian royal titularies, narrative inscriptions, astrological prognostications and unctuously flattering correspondence hammer away at the theme of the unique proximity of the king to the divine realm and extol his godlike powers. The kings were summoned prenatally to kingship, suckled by goddesses, warned by eclipses and other portents of imminent personal hazards, and succored by upbeat, motherly prophecies uttered by goddesses. Kings, like the gods, strode into battle surrounded by the *melammu*, a radiant, terrifying nimbus devastating to foes . . . and kings embodied godlike wisdom and could be characterized as the very image of the gods. The kings were not members of the state pantheon, but they dwelt in closer physical and ontological proximity to the gods than any other mortals.¹⁸²

In Israel, the emphasis falls on God himself as the Great King, with the human

king to serve not as a demigod, but as vice-regent (vassal) to the Great King (cf. [comments on 2:10](#)). The “law of the king” (Deut. 17:14–20) makes it clear that the king in Israel is to be subservient to the divine law and must not “consider himself better than his brothers” (v. 20). Though [1 Samuel 8:7](#) does not elaborate, something in the elders’ demand for a king “such as all the other nations have” represents a rejection of the supreme kingship of Yahweh, and this is a serious sin indeed (cf. [10:19](#); [12:17](#), [19](#), [25](#)).

This is what the king . . . will do (8:11–17). Whatever advantages the elders imagine a king like those of the nations will bring, Samuel—speaking for Yahweh—is intent on making plain the disadvantages that a human king, particularly if self-serving, will bring.

Samuel begins his warning with a word about sons. Sons were particularly important in the ancient Near East—for reasons relating to the security and continuity of the family line—but, as Samuel warns, the king “will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots” ([8:11](#)). The practice Samuel describes finds a loose analogy in a Hittite text prescribing the protocol to be followed by the royal guard when the king travels. One section reads: “The guard sets up the stool. The king comes forth. The chief of the palace staff is holding him by the hand. The king sits in the carriage. The officers of the spear-men bow. Then they run (up) and walk in front. They march with the man of the [golden] spear.”¹⁸³

Apart from the fact that the sons will be taken from the family to serve the king, Samuel’s warning that they will be required to run in front of the king’s chariot may not have sounded particularly negative to Israel’s elders. Indeed, a couple of eighth-century Aramaic inscriptions seem to suggest that “running at the wheel” of one’s lord was an honor,¹⁸⁴ though the fact remains that the absence of sons will prove a hardship, for example, at harvest time. Perhaps Samuel’s warning progresses from the less obviously to the more obviously abusive royal practices (cf. [8:18](#)).



Runners by ruler's chariot

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

In any case, a centralized monarchical government will require courtiers and servants of the court, agricultural workers for the king's fields, artisans to craft the king's weapons (v. 12), domestic workers to prepare meals for the court and to keep the palace (v. 13), and a standing army to protect it all (vv. 11–12). To make all this happen, there will be royal taxation and expropriation of “the best” of the fields, flocks, and servants of the people (vv. 14–17). The end result, Samuel warns, is that “you yourselves will become his slaves” (v. 17).

While some older biblical commentators supposed that the abuses Samuel describes in this passage reflect the bitter experiences of a later writer familiar with Israel's own kings, Mendelsohn insists that Samuel's “summary of ‘the manner of the king’ does not constitute ‘a rewriting of history’ by a late opponent of kingship but represents an eloquent appeal to the people by a contemporary of Saul not to impose upon themselves a Canaanite institution alien to their way of life.”¹⁸⁵ Specifically, he shows on the basis of texts from Alalakh and Ugarit that Samuel's warnings about the costs of a standing army with chariot forces, royal expropriation of land, taxation including the royal tithe, and corvée labor all reflect an accurate understanding of “the semi-feudal Canaanite society as it existed prior to and during the time of Samuel.”

As regards Samuel's warnings about a chariot force, we know that Israel's neighbors were already making use of chariots when the Israelites arrived in Canaan (cf. the coalition of northern kings in Joshua 11 and the Canaanites of Josh. 17 who lived in the plain), but we are not told whether King Saul ever

acquired them. David captured many and destroyed most (2 Sam. 8:4; 10:18), but the actions of his sons Absalom and Adonijah, both of whom made a bid for the throne, strongly recall Samuel's warning (see 2 Sam. 15:1 and 1 Kings 1:5, respectively).

Samuel Anoints Saul (9:1–10:8)

A **Benjamite, a man of standing . . . Kish (9:1)**. As a small tribe wedged between the two more powerful tribes—Judah to the south and Ephraim to the north—and as the home of the yet to be conquered city of Jerusalem, Benjamin was an ideal choice as home of Israel’s first centralized regime, since it would be less likely to provoke jealousy among the other tribes.



Tribe of Benjamin

Saul, an impressive young man without equal (9:2). While commentators usually assume that Saul at this point in his life was a diffident youth, the

emphasis in his introduction is on physical stature and good looks, not youth.¹⁸⁶ In the ancient Near East, a high priority was placed on the commanding appearance and heroic qualities of leaders. For example:

- Sargon of Akkad receives the appellation “King of Battle.”¹⁸⁷
- King Tukulti-Ninura of Assyria is described as “glorious in his heroism . . . reckoned as flesh godly in his limbs . . . cast sublimely from the womb of the gods.”¹⁸⁸
- Nebuchadnezzar I of Babylon is described as a “valiant male whose strength is directed towards doing battle.”¹⁸⁹
- Of the legendary Gilgamesh it is said, “Two-thirds of him is god, [one-third of him is human]. The form of his body [. . .] He is made fearful like a wild ox, lofty.”¹⁹⁰

By ancient Near Eastern standards, therefore, Saul shows great potential. By biblical standards, however, the focus of his introduction exclusively on external qualities, with no reference to Yahweh being with him (contrast the introduction of David in [16:18](#)), is unsettling.



King Ashurnasirpal II holding the symbols of sovereignty
Werner Forman Archive/The British Museum

Go and look for the donkeys (9:3). While donkeys may not enjoy a high reputation among nonagrarian people (who associate them more with stubbornness than utility), they were valued in the ancient Near East. The early second-millennium Egyptian Protests of the Eloquent Peasant revolves around the peasant's loss of donkeys (through his opponent's trickery) and their eventual recovery.¹⁹¹ Also worth mentioning is a letter from Alalakh seeking the return of stolen donkeys.¹⁹² Most noteworthy is a letter from the diviner Asqudum to King Zimri-Lim of Mari, in which Asqudum reports on the king's acquisition of a donkey and then describes the loss of some other donkeys in a provincial town in the far north of the kingdom of Mari.¹⁹³



Donkey relief from tomb of Urirenptah
Lenka Peacock, courtesy of the British Museum

What these parallels demonstrate is that while Saul's search for lost donkeys over a large area may strike the modern reader as odd, it is fully in keeping with life in the ancient Near East, where animals "at times went astray and search parties were sent out in order to return the missing animals."¹⁹⁴ But as important as recovering his father's lost livestock is, it pales in comparison to the truly momentous events of the day, when Saul encounters Samuel.

Ephraim . . . Shalisha . . . Shaalim (9:4). Ephraim refers to the tribal territory of that name. Shalisha and Shaalim have generally eluded

identification.¹⁹⁵ Among the most popular speculations are Baal Shalisha and Shaalbim, respectively, lying at the northwest and southwest extremities of Ephraimite territory. If these identifications are correct, then Saul's search covers some sixty miles over its three-day duration.¹⁹⁶

What can we give the man? (9:7). In the ancient Near East, prophets, prophetesses, diviners, and the like were sought out for consultation on all manner of issues ranging from health and fertility to cultic observance, political fortune, military enterprises, and lost items. Recipients of services naturally expected to pay and generally did so without need of reminder.¹⁹⁷ Remuneration for solicited prophetic services is well attested in the Mari corpus,¹⁹⁸ where payment is occasionally even demanded. In one text, a "shock-head of Dagan" ("shock-head" refers to a female given to trances and with unkempt hair), after delivering a prophetic message concerning the king, requests "a straight ewe-wool garment and a nose-rope."¹⁹⁹

Unsolicited prophetic revelations, which describe most biblical prophecies, were often delivered without expectation of payment. In fact, the biblical writing prophets express disapproval of those who prophesy for money; Amos denies being such a prophet (Amos 7:12), and Micah explicitly condemns prophets who divine for money (Mic. 3:5, 11; cf. Jer. 6:13). The attitude of preliterary Yahwistic prophecy is less clear, however, making it difficult to decide whether Saul's concern to pay the "man of God" is normal or is, as Josephus suggests (*Ant.* 6.48), yet another hint of religious ignorance.²⁰⁰

Quarter of a shekel of silver (9:8). Silver was a common form of currency in Canaan as well as in Assyria and Babylonia. In Hebrew, the word for "silver" eventually came to mean "money." Coinage was not invented until the seventh century B.C., but as Youngblood observes, "it is likely that much earlier there were pieces of silver of fixed weight . . . for use in trade and commerce."²⁰¹ A quarter shekel weighed less than a half-ounce and likely represented several days' wages for any ordinary worker. (David later pays fifty shekels for the oxen and threshing floor of Araunah [[2 Sam. 24:24](#)].) It seems likely, then, that the quarter shekel available to Saul would be an appropriate payment for a solicited inquiry.²⁰²



Stone weights inscribed with their values
Michael French, courtesy of the British Museum

They met some girls coming out to draw water (9:11). At least until underground water systems were developed (see [comment on 2 Sam. 2:13; 5:8](#)), village dwellers had to make periodic trips to draw water from the nearest source, often near the base of the hills on which most towns were situated. Wells or springs, located on the outskirts of towns, were often the places where newcomers to town first met townspeople; they were usually women, who typically bore the responsibility of porting water.



Egyptian carving of woman carrying water

Rama/Wikimedia Commons, courtesy of the Louvre

The people have a sacrifice at the high place (9:12). “High places” (Heb. *bāmôt*; sg. *bāmâ*) are mentioned over a hundred times in the Old Testament, but their precise “nature, appearance, and architecture are disputed.”²⁰³ The word is used in the Old Testament in its mundane senses to mean “hill, height, ridge,” and in a cultic sense to mean a sacred “high place,” either a cultic site on a natural elevation or a raised platform.²⁰⁴ Whether high places were open-air or enclosed structures is debated.²⁰⁵ Often sites of Canaanite worship, “high places” were viewed in the Old Testament as endangering the purity of Israelite worship (see, e.g., Num. 33:52; Deut. 12:2–3; Jer. 2:20).

Nevertheless, in the period between the destruction of the sanctuary at Shiloh and the building of the temple in Jerusalem, worship of Yahweh at “high places” was sometimes conducted without explicit censure, as here. After the division of the kingdom, worship at “high places” constituted a severe problem both in the north (cf. 1 Kings 12:31–32; 13:32–34) and the south (cf. 14:22–24). Removal of “high places” became a major goal of reform movements under southern kings such as Hezekiah (e.g., 2 Kings 18:4) and Josiah (e.g., 23:5).

The LORD had revealed this to Samuel (9:15). On the various modes of divine revelation, see [comment on 28:6](#).

Eat, because it was set aside for you for this occasion (9:24). Having instructed the cook to set aside a special cut of meat (v. 23), namely, the “shank” (v. 24; NIV reads “leg”), Samuel has it placed before Saul. Special portions of meat were often reserved for important personages, such as an officiating priest, who was to receive the right shank of the sacrificial animal (Lev. 7:32–34). That a special portion has been set aside for Saul in advance of his arrival suggests both the momentousness of the occasion and its providential direction.

Samuel talked with Saul on the roof of his house (9:25). While archaeologists are generally only able to excavate the foundations of houses,²⁰⁶ Israelite houses at the time of David typically included a second story and a flat roof. The main living space may have been on the second floor, with the ground floor serving for storage, stabling of animals, and the like. In warm weather, the upper story and even the flat roof of the house offered cooler living and sleeping conditions because of better ventilation.²⁰⁷

Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on Saul’s head (10:1). The word rendered “flask” connotes a small jug or vial. Special oils and cosmetics, because of their preciousness, were often held in tiny containers in antiquity, as today.²⁰⁸ An archaeological find made in the 1980s in the Judean desert, though dated to a thousand years after Saul, may offer an example of a small jug containing ceremonial oil. Archaeologists working in the vicinity of Qumran discovered a small pottery flask (five inches in diameter) carefully hidden three feet underground in a cave some two miles north of Qumran. Astonishingly, the juglet still contained oil after two thousand years! Tests indicated the oil to be of vegetable origin, possibly balsam, because rare balsam trees grew in the area in antiquity. The jug was wrapped in palm fibers, some of which still survive. The care with which the flask was wrapped and hidden underground suggests that the oil it contained was special, perhaps oil for some kind of anointing.²⁰⁹



Philistine-era anointing vessel

Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

Has not the LORD anointed you leader over his inheritance? (10:1). See [comments on anointing at 2:10](#) and [16:1](#). The term rendered “leader” in this context means something like “king-elect”²¹⁰ or “one who is designated as ruler of the people.”²¹¹ Yahweh’s “inheritance” comprised both the land and the people of Israel (see Deut. 32:9). In acceding to the people’s demand for a king, Yahweh does not relinquish his rights as the Great King over his inheritance to the human monarch. Rather, the human king is to be Yahweh’s vice-regent and is to subordinate himself within an authority structure that Yahweh himself will stipulate ([10:25](#)).



Portion of an Egyptian relief shows a king being anointed as life is pouring forth from the jars.

Manfred Näder, Gabana Studios, Germany

Prior to the monarchy, judge-deliverers were raised up by Yahweh on an ad hoc basis and both received and carried out Yahweh's instructions. With the inauguration of kingship, however, the tasks of receiving and carrying out Yahweh's instructions were usually divided between prophet and king. The former were Yahweh's mouthpiece to the king, and the king was to carry out Yahweh's instructions as received through the prophet. This authority structure is evidenced in the first charge Saul receives in [10:7–8](#), and grasping its significance is essential to understanding the nature of the eventual breach between Saul and Samuel (and Yahweh!).

Rachel’s tomb (10:2). The location of Rachel’s tomb has, understandably, not been positively identified. One theory places it near Kiriath Jearim (see [comment on 6:21](#)), some eight miles west of Samuel’s home in Ramah.²¹² Well-known places, tombs, trees, and even geographical features often served in antiquity to give orientation.

Gibeah of God, where there is a Philistine outpost (10:5). The association of “Gibeah of God” with a Philistine outpost suggests that it should probably be equated with “Geba” of [13:3](#), also associated with a Philistine outpost (see [sidebar on “Outposts in Subject Territories”](#)). Geba, in turn, is probably to be equated with Gibeah of Benjamin/Gibeah of Saul (see [comment on 10:26](#)). Thus, Saul must be well aware that his hometown hosts an occupying Philistine force. The significance of Samuel’s explicit reference to the Philistines may be understood in relation to [9:16](#) and to Saul’s first charge as “king-elect” (see [comment on 10:7–8](#)).

Outposts in Subject Territories

The stationing of outposts, or garrisons, in subject territories was a common means in the ancient Near East of maintaining some measure of control over subject territories (cf. David’s own stationing of garrisons in “the Aramean kingdom of Damascus” [[2 Sam. 8:6](#)] and “throughout Edom” [[2 Sam. 8:14](#)]). The precise meaning of the Hebrew word *n^ešîb* (“garrison, outpost”) is debated, as it can also mean something like “governor” or even “stele” (something set in place).^{A-46} In any case, the presence of the one may have entailed the presence of the other. King Shamshi-Adad I of the Old Assyrian period (early second millennium) mentions all three at some point in his inscriptions:

I established my great name and my steles in the land of Lebanon on the shore of the Great Sea.^{A-47}

I kissed the feet of the god Adad, my lord, and reorganized that land. I installed my governors everywhere. . . . I captured all the fortified cities of the land of Arbela. I established my garrisons everywhere.^{A-48}

Relatively few such garrisons, or small fortresses, have been excavated in the ancient Near East, as archaeologists have tended to focus on larger sites. But a few locations may be mentioned. For Mesopotamia, Roaf describes a “small hilltop settlement at Yemniyeh on the Euphrates [which] has been

interpreted as a ninth-century military guardpost,” as well as a “square, compact mud-brick fortress on the top of Tell Gubba,” which “may have marked the border between Media and Babylonia in the early sixth century.”^{A-}

⁴⁹ In Israel, the Iron Age II fortress at Arad in the Negev is worthy of mention.^{A-50}



Iron Age outpost fort at Arad

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

A procession of prophets . . . with lyres, tambourines, flutes and harps being played before them . . . prophesying (10:5). Though prophets and prophecy were certainly not unknown in Israel’s premonarchical period—e.g., Abraham, Moses, and Miriam are described as prophets—it was with the inception of the monarchy that the prophetic office and the prophetic guild came into their own. This statement reflects the fact that prophets such as Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha served in the election, rejection, and instruction of the king. F. M. Cross observes that “the institution of prophecy appeared simultaneously with kingship in Israel and fell with kingship,” though of course prophets such as Haggai and Zechariah continued to function in the postexilic period.²¹³ See sidebar on “Prophetic Bands and Music.”

Prophetic Bands and Music

On the eve of the monarchy in Israel, prophetic bands described as “sons of the prophets” began to appear, often under the leadership of a prominent individual. Samuel himself presided over such a group of prophets (19:20), in a role similar to that of Elisha in 2 Kings 2; 6:1; 9:1. Particularly in times of spiritual decline and apostasy, this company of prophets constituted zealous defenders of true religion. As the monarchy developed, these prophetic bands “served as a refreshing counterpoise to the potential despotism of the monarchy and the tendency toward formalism in the priesthood.”^{A-51} It is one such band that Saul will encounter at Gibeah of God, and they will be playing musical instruments and prophesying.

That “music was often associated with prophecy in antiquity,” as King and Stager note,^{A-52} seems a reasonable assumption, though extrabiblical evidence of this association is difficult to come by. Some have suggested that music may have induced a kind of prophetic ecstasy, such as is attested among Mari prophets.^{A-53} The Bible does attest to a role for music in inducing prophetic receptivity (2 Kings 3:15–16), but in contexts where prophecy devolves into erratic behavior the focus tends not to be on true worshipers of Yahweh but on those at odds with him (e.g., Saul in 1 Sam. 18:10; the prophets of Baal in 1 Kings 18:29). Biblical prophets are occasionally referred to as “madmen” (2 Kings 9:11; Jer. 29:26; Hos. 9:7), though never by the authoritative narrator with respect to true prophets of Yahweh.

Whatever may have been the effect, the procession of prophets that Saul was to encounter at Gibeah of God, according to Samuel, would be bearing musical instruments—lyres, tambourines, flutes, and harps—and be making music as they went. Much mystery surrounds the specific connotations of the rather extensive vocabulary of music in the Bible, but Israel’s stock of musical instruments included stringed, percussion, and wind instruments, such as were known among Israel’s ancient Near Eastern neighbors generally. A particularly interesting archaeological find from the Philistine city of Ashdod is a terra cotta cult stand with five figures, four of which appear to be playing musical instruments: “cymbals, double pipe, lyre, and tambourine.”^{A-}



Philistine cult stand from eleventh-tenth-century Ashdod is decorated with musicians
Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

The “flute” was likely a “double pipe,” such as is illustrated by a terra cotta figurine discovered at Tel Malḥata. The “tambourine” was a “small, shallow, handheld frame drum,” stretched with animal skin and played with the hand.^{A-55} The metal disks of modern tambourines were almost certainly absent. Archaeologists in Mesopotamia and the Levant have discovered numerous female figurines holding disk-like objects that, according to the detailed studies of Carol Meyers, represent tambourines.^{A-56} On the harp and the lyre, see [comment on 16:16](#).^{A-57}

The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power . . . prophesy . . . be changed into a different person (10:6). The range of activities of the “Spirit of God” or “Spirit of Yahweh” in the Old Testament can be understood by consulting such passages as Genesis 1:2; 41:38; Exodus 31:3; Numbers 24:2; Judges 3:10. Bestowal of the divine Spirit often connoted God’s empowering of an individual to accomplish a particular task. Conversely, the Spirit of God might thwart someone intent on a particular action (e.g., [1 Sam. 19:23](#)).



Cylinder seal impression of Mushezib-Ninurta, ninth century B.C. The king, shown in mirror image, is protected by guardian genii sprinkling holy water from a bucket using what may be a fir cone or sponge. Above a stylized tree is a god in the winged disc probably representing the sun god Shamash or the supreme god of Assyria, Ashur. In this way the god is depicted giving power and authority to the king.

HIP/Art Resource, NY, courtesy of the British Museum

Verse 10 describes the “Spirit of God” coming upon Saul “in power,” a verbatim repetition of what is often said of Samson (Judg. 14:6, 19; 15:14). Such visitations of the Spirit appear to have been temporary and designed to empower (or prevent) a particular action. Dignity and the power to command authority were in the ancient Near East often linked to divine prerogative and were endowments for which one might pray.²¹⁴ In Akkadian, oath formulae often invoked or implied the *adû* (majesty?) of the king. This *adû* was not the oath itself but was “regarded as a special supernatural manifestation of royal power comparable but not identical to ‘life’ in the Hebrew oath.”²¹⁵

In the present episode, the divine Spirit fundamentally—if temporarily—alters Saul (“different person” [v. 6]; “changed Saul’s heart” [v. 9]) in order that “all these signs” might be “fulfilled that day” (v. 9). Only of David is it later said that his endowment with the Spirit was permanent (16:13). In her discussion of prophecy in the Bible and the ancient Near East, Kitz observes that the results of “anthropomancy [divine manipulation of human beings] could be permanent or transitory.”²¹⁶

Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do. . . . Go down ahead of me to Gilgal (10:7–8). While ancient Gilgal has not been identified, it must have been near Jericho in the Jordan Valley and would have had special significance for Israel ever since Joshua built there a memorial of twelve stones from the middle of the Jordan (Josh. 4:19–20). Commentators have generally found Samuel’s instructions to Saul to be confusing, even contradictory. Is Saul to “do what lies at hand,” or is he to “go down to Gilgal” and wait?

A coherent understanding of Samuel’s instructions is possible, however, if one recognizes that Saul’s charge entails two tasks, the second to be undertaken only after the first.²¹⁷ Taking his cue from Samuel’s otherwise unnecessary mention of a Philistine outpost at Gibeah of God where the final sign will be completed, Saul is to understand that his first task (“what lies at hand”) is to strike the Philistine outpost. Such an action will provoke—not defeat—the Philistines. Saul’s second task, therefore, is to repair to Gilgal and await Samuel, who will come, offer prebattle sacrifices (see [comment on 7:7](#)), and give Saul further instructions from Yahweh. This procedure constitutes an important test for Saul, as the successful accomplishment of both parts of his first charge will demonstrate not only Saul’s courage but, more importantly, his willingness and ability to subordinate himself to an authority structure whereby Yahweh can continue to reign. In the event, Saul doesn’t attack the Philistine garrison and thus derails the process by which he is to come to public attention. This in turn

necessitates the lot-casting described in [10:17–27](#) (see [below](#)).

Saul's Response (10:9–16)

God changed Saul's heart, and all these signs were fulfilled (10:9). See [comment on 10:6](#).

The Spirit of God came upon him in power (10:10). See [comment on 10:6](#).

Saul Selected by Lot (10:17–27)

At Mizpah (10:17). On the probable location of the Mizpah in view here, see [comment on 7:5](#). There is perhaps a touch of irony in the fact that the assembly to select Israel’s first king—the demand for which was interpreted as a rejection of Yahweh’s kingship (ch. 8)—is called at the very place where Yahweh earlier wrought a great deliverance, leading Samuel to proclaim, “Thus far has the LORD helped us” (7:12).

Samuel explained to the people the regulations of the kingship . . . wrote them down on a scroll and deposited it before the LORD (10:25). This verse raises three interesting questions: What were these “regulations of the kingship”? What was the state of writing and literacy in Samuel’s day? What did it mean to deposit something “before the LORD”? None of these questions can be answered with certainty, but studied conjectures can be offered.

(1) The “regulations of the kingship” likely stipulated the responsibilities of the people to the king, the king to the people, and, most significantly, the king to Yahweh (perhaps similar to the “law of the king” in Deut. 17:14–20). Assyrian kings sometimes made formal agreements (*adû*-agreements) with their servants “in front of the great gods.”²¹⁸ Something similar may be implied here, but the text offers little detail.

(2) The question of popular literacy in ancient Israel is widely debated,²¹⁹ but there are grounds for optimism that, after the invention of the easily mastered phonetic alphabet in the second millennium, literacy could have spread rapidly (see [comment on 4:1](#)).²²⁰ In any case, Samuel’s upbringing as a priest in the house of Eli likely afforded educational opportunities beyond the ordinary.

(3) The statement that the document was deposited “before the LORD” suggests that it was deposited in the sanctuary. In the ancient Near East (e.g., among the Hittites),²²¹ covenant documents were frequently deposited in sanctuaries. In fact, as Ben-Barak points out, the events recounted in 10:25 share features with Hittite vassal treaties: “a ritual ceremony, a legal document read in public and deposited in the sanctuary.”²²² Similarly, the Mizpah covenant of 20:25 appears to be “a suzerainty covenant between two unequal parties, the king and the people, in which the latter undertake an obligation to the former. The covenant has the character of a politico-social pact bearing the seal of religious sanction.”²²³ Other biblical references to documents deposited before the Lord include Deuteronomy 31:26 and Joshua 24:26.

Saul also went to his home in Gibeah (10:26). While several sites with the

name Gibeah (“height, hill”) are mentioned in the Old Testament, by far the most prominent is Gibeah of Benjamin, home of Saul. The location of this Gibeah has been a matter of lengthy debate, not least in respect to its relationship to “Geba” (mentioned, e.g., in [13:3](#), and called “Geba of Benjamin” in [13:16](#); “Geba” and “Gibeah” are variant spellings of the same word).

This debate has been well summarized by Arnold,²²⁴ but a few highlights are worth noting here. In 1841 E. Robinson launched the search for Gibeah of Benjamin by suggesting that Gibeah and Geba should be regarded as variant toponyms for the same site, or at least as closely proximate sites, to be associated with modern Jeba^ʿ, which lies about six miles north of Jerusalem, south of the Wadi Swenit and across from modern Mukhmas (biblical Micmash). Robinson subsequently altered his view in the light of Judges 19:10–14 and linked Gibeah with Tell el-Fûl (3.5 miles north of Jerusalem), continuing to identify biblical Geba with Jeba^ʿ.



Geba

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

W. F. Albright’s excavations at Tell Tell el-Fûl in the 1920s and 1930s reinforced an emerging scholarly consensus that King Saul’s capital at Gibeah of Benjamin was indeed to be associated with Tell el-Fûl, not least because excavators found a large architectural structure that was plausibly associated

with a fortress Saul may have built (it is worth noting, however, that the biblical text makes no mention of such a fortress).²²⁵ Publication by L. Sinclair (1960) of detailed results of Albright's 1933 expedition, however, along with subsequent archaeological study of the site by P. Lapp (1965), caused scholars to question the identification. Today many are returning to the earlier view that Gibeah and Geba are both to be associated with Jeba'.²²⁶



Tell el-Fûl (believed by some to be the ancient site of Gibeah) and the ruins of what some have associated with Saul's kingship

David Bivin/www.LifeintheHolyland.com

But some troublemakers said, “How can this fellow save us?” (10:27). While culpable for refusing to accept the one whom Yahweh chose, the “troublemakers” (“insurrectionists”) nevertheless ask a valid question, especially when viewed against the typical process by which leaders in the ancient Near East often came to power. As several studies have shown, the accession process in the ancient Near East typically comprised three stages: (1) divine designation of the new leader; (2) some kind of demonstration by the new leader that gains public attention and rallies support; (3) public confirmation of the new leader.

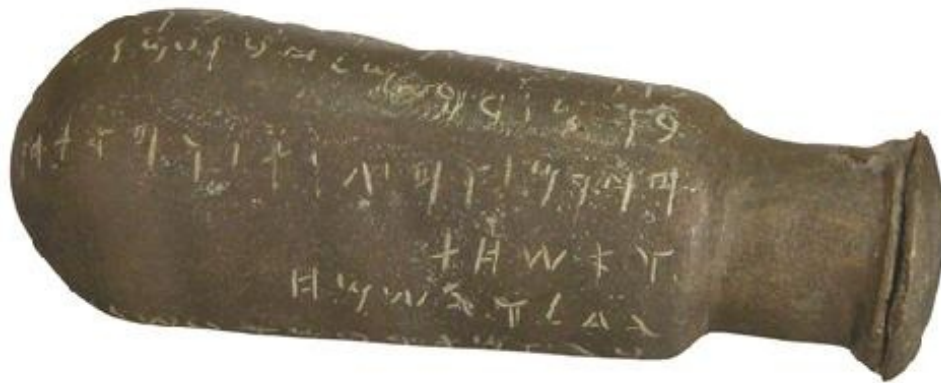
The essential case for such a pattern was first made by B. Halpern, basing his

analysis on the book of Judges (e.g., Jephthah) and on ancient Near Eastern texts such as the Babylonian epic *Enuma Elish*, in which Marduk is first chosen in the divine assembly to confront Tiamat, does so, and, after his victorious return, is enthroned.²²⁷ If all had gone according to plan, Saul's anointing and first charge (10:1–8) would have served as his designation (stage 1); an attack on the Philistine outpost in Gibeah of God would have served as the demonstration (stage 2); and a public confirmation of Saul as Israel's first king would have followed (stage 3).

Saul's failure to execute stage 2 means that he did not come to public attention. To rectify this situation, Samuel convenes the assembly at Mizpah, where Saul is selected by lot. This means, however, that Saul has still done nothing to distinguish himself or gain public confidence; in fact, he has been dragged from behind the baggage, where he was hiding. Eventually (ch. 11) Saul's victory over the Ammonites will silence the dissenters, but it will leave his first charge—intended to test his fitness as a vassal-king to Yahweh—yet unfulfilled. Only in chapter 13 does the first charge come back into play, and there Saul fails.

Saul Rescues the City of Jabesh Gilead (11:1–15)

Nahash the Ammonite (11:1). The first extrabiblical references to the Ammonites are found in Neo-Assyrian documents beginning with the reign of Tiglath-pileser III in the late eighth century²²⁸ and include the reigns of Sargon II,²²⁹ Sennacherib,²³⁰ and Assurbanipal.²³¹ The latter mentions an Ammonite king whose name, Amminadab, appears also on the Tell Sīrān bottle inscription from ca. 600 B.C.²³²



Tell Sīrān Inscription: “May the produce of ‘Amminadab king of the Ammonites, the son of Hissal’il king of the Ammonites, the son of ‘Amminadab king of the Ammonites—the vineyard and the garden(s) and the hollow and cistern—”) COS, 2.25

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

The territory of the Ammonites lay in Transjordan, south of the Jabbok River, with a capital at Rabbath Ammon (modern Amman in Jordan). Archaeological excavations at Rabbath Ammon have unearthed ample evidence—in the form of tombs, pottery, a temple, and fortifications—of the Ammonites’ presence and prominence from the eighteenth century B.C. onward.²³³ One interesting find is the Amman Citadel Inscription,²³⁴ discovered on the acropolis of the city. This inscription, though partially damaged, is sufficiently preserved to show the close similarity between Ammonite and Hebrew. To learn more of the earlier history of the Ammonites, we must turn to the Bible.



Amman citadel inscription

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

From the latter part of the period of the judges into the early monarchy, the Israelites were harassed from the west by the territorially ambitious Philistines and from the east by the Ammonites. Not until David's reign were both the Philistines and the Ammonites decisively defeated ([2 Sam. 8:11–12](#)). Rather than seeing the Ammonite and Philistine oppressions as occurring sequentially, we should probably understand them as occurring concurrently.²³⁵

The Ammonites, according to biblical tradition, were descendants of Abraham's nephew Lot ([Gen. 19:36–38](#)) and enjoyed protected status during Israel's initial approach to the Promised Land ([Deut. 2:19](#)). Even during the early monarchy period, there were periods of friendly relations with Israel (e.g., [2 Sam. 10:2](#)), but for the most part the Ammonites' stance was hostile. Here the Ammonite king Nahash is besieging Jabesh Gilead (see [next comment](#)), in the heart of the territory of the Israelite tribe of Gad.

According to a longer reading of [1 Samuel 10:27](#) attested at Qumran (4QSam^a), and reflected in Josephus (*Ant.* 6.5.1), the siege of Jabesh Gilead was part of a larger offensive by Nahash against the tribes of Gad and Reuben. The longer reading is adopted by several modern translations, including NAB, NEB,

and NRSV, which renders the text as follows:

Now Nahash, king of the Ammonites, had been grievously oppressing the Gadites and the Reubenites. He would gouge out the right eye of each of them and would not grant Israel a deliverer. No one was left of the Israelites across the Jordan whose right eye Nahash, king of the Ammonites, had not gouged out. But there were seven thousand men who had escaped from the Ammonites and had entered Jabesh-gilead.²³⁶

Jabesh Gilead (11:1). Jabesh Gilead was a city in Transjordan with an eventful relationship with the Cisjordanian tribes, particularly Benjamin. In the period of the judges, the city was virtually annihilated because its inhabitants failed to join in the general retaliation against the Benjamites in the aftermath of the outrage at Gibeah (see Judg. 19–21). Only four hundred women of Jabesh Gilead were spared to provide wives for the decimated tribe of Benjamin (21:12–14). Perhaps in part because of this Benjamite connection, and especially because of the city’s rescue by Saul in the present chapter, the citizens of Jabesh Gilead later retrieved the bodies of Saul and his sons from Beth Shan, after journeying through the night (1 Sam. 31:11–13).



Jabesh Gilead (Tell Maqlub)

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The precise location of Jabesh Gilead is still under debate, but the likeliest suggestion is Tell Maqlub. This is the only known site that (1) “lies within the

range of travel time described in [1 Sam 31:11–13](#),” (2) “has yielded evidence of Iron I occupation in surface survey,” (3) lies along the Wadi el-Yabis in northern Gilead (“Yabis” seems to preserve the name Jabesh), and (4) comports reasonably well with Eusebius, *Onomasticon*.²³⁷

Gouge out the right eye (11:2). In the ancient Near East, losing a battle sometimes resulted in physical mutilation of one sort or another, and punitive action by regimes against those considered rebels often included mutilation such as the removal of eyes, ears, or hands.²³⁸ In the present context, submission to mutilation is presented as a precondition for avoiding battle.

Threats of physical mutilation appear frequently in ancient Near Eastern treaty documents, specifically in the curse sections that describe what will befall treaty violators. These threats were not only pronounced but sometimes, at least, symbolically enacted, as in the following excerpt from a mid-eighth-century, Old Aramaic treaty from Sefire: “Just as (this) bow and these arrows are broken, so may Inurta and Hadad break [the bow of Mati’el], and the bow of his nobles! And just as the man of wax is blinded, so may Mati[’el] be blinded!”²³⁹

The purposes of blinding the vanquished varied, as the Bible itself indicates. Samson was blinded by the Philistines to humiliate and incapacitate him (Judg. 16:21); King Zedekiah of Judah was blinded by the king of Babylon in order that his last visual memory might be the slaughter of his own sons (2 Kings 25:7; cf. Jer. 39:6–7). In the case before us, the Ammonite king’s intention was certainly to humiliate the Jabesh Gileadites, but also, it seems likely, to render the fighting men ineffectual in battle. As Josephus (*Ant.* 6.68–72) explains, “since the left eye was covered by the buckler” (i.e., the shield), blinding the right would render the warriors “utterly unserviceable.” Right-handed warriors (the majority) would be able to see little in battle, unless they were willing to lower their shields or literally stick their necks out. In any case, with only one eye, they would lack depth perception and thus be at a severe disadvantage in hand-to-hand combat. Sparing the left eye would leave them capable of agricultural work and menial tasks, but little else.²⁴⁰

When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul (11:4). The Hebrew text of this verse can also be rendered, “So the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul.” It seems likely that the messengers are in fact sent directly to Gibeah and not “throughout Israel” (the elders’ request in v. [3](#) involving an element of deception). Not only would this have been a logical action after the assembly in Mizpah in which Saul was selected as Israel’s king-elect, but pragmatic considerations make a more general dispersal of messengers unlikely. The rate of marching for armies in the ancient Near East was about fifteen to twenty

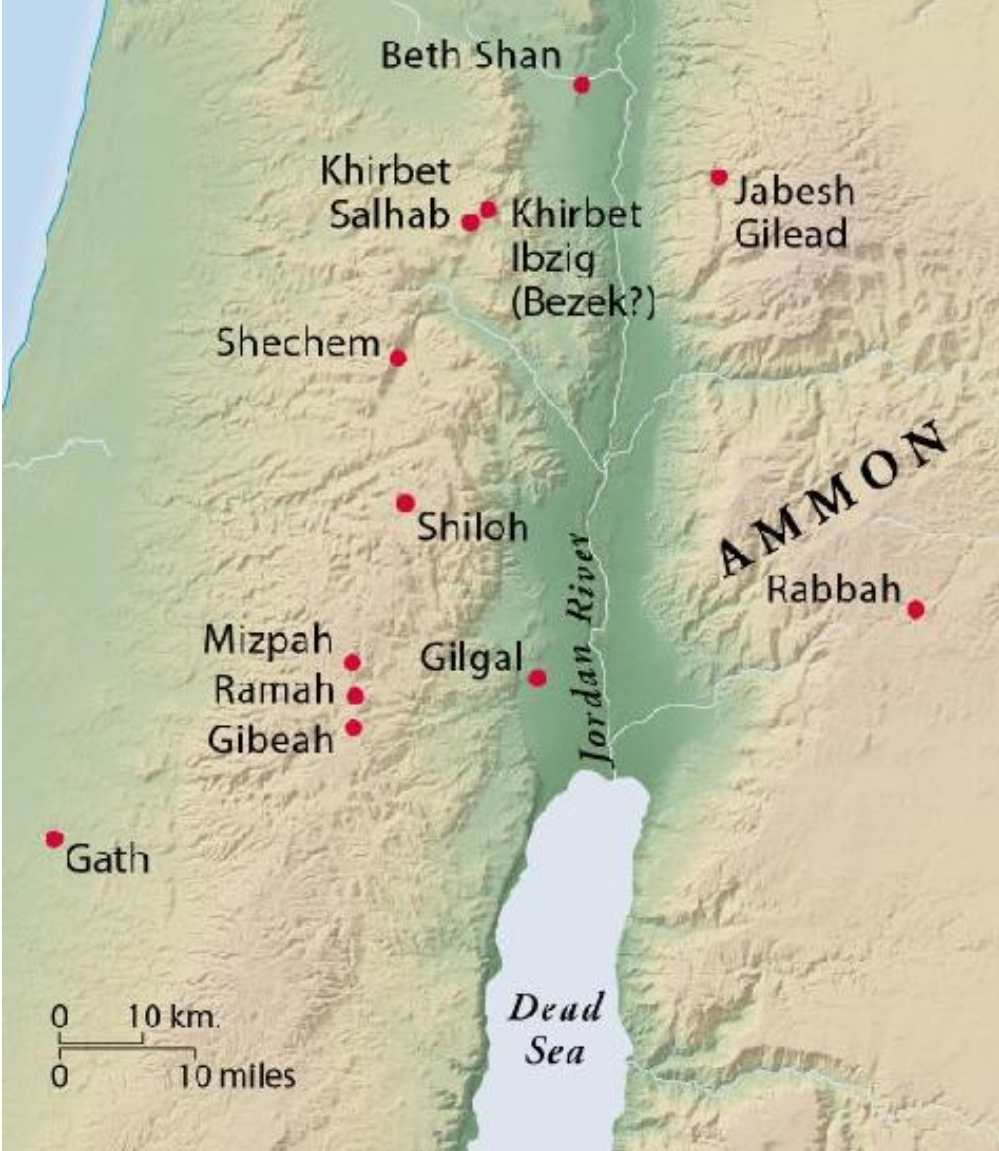
miles a day.²⁴¹ Messengers on an urgent mission could probably double that rate.

The distance from Jabesh Gilead to Gibeah was between fifty and sixty miles, depending on the route taken. This places the messengers in Gibeah late on the second day. Their subsequent dispersal “throughout the territory of Israel” (v. 7) would have taken another two or three days, leaving two or three days of the permitted seven days for the general muster at Bezek (vv. 7–8).²⁴²

The Spirit of God came upon him in power (11:6). On empowering by the Spirit of God, see [comment on 10:6](#). In the present context, the Spirit propels Saul into action, who, though king-elect, has apparently gone back to farming.

He took a pair of oxen, cut them into pieces, and sent the pieces by messengers throughout Israel (11:7). The intent is to evoke a strong reaction, reinforced by the threat that those who do not respond may suffer similar treatment. As Gordon observes, the dismemberment of the oxen “evokes the world of execration and treaty curse where the threat was directed not so much at the individual’s property as at the individual himself.”²⁴³ The ancient Near East was accustomed to gruesome actions intended to prompt a certain response. A text from Mari, for example, records a request for permission to sever the head of a prisoner and parade it throughout the territory so as to shock reticent warriors into assembling for battle.²⁴⁴

Saul mustered them at Bezek (11:8). While it is tempting to identify Bezek with Khirbet Ibziq, which lies nine miles west of the Jordan on approximately the same latitude as Jabesh Gilead, Zertal maintains that the name has shifted and that the original site of Bezek was at Khirbet Salhab, about two miles southeast.²⁴⁵ In either case the distance between Gibeah and Bezek is about seventeen miles. Judges 1:4–5 mentions a different Bezek, near Jerusalem.



Area of Saul's activities



Region of Bezek

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

Samuel's Instructions and Warnings concerning Kingship (12:1–25)

Testify against me in the presence of the LORD and his anointed (12:3). It was widely understood in the ancient Near East that those in positions of power were responsible to execute justice and to protect the vulnerable in society (see [comment on 2 Sam. 8:15; 15:4](#); cf. [5:12; 12:1–4](#)). When rulers were deposed, it was not uncommon for those who replaced them to trump up charges of injustice against them and seek to eliminate them. Thus, Samuel is intent on clearing his name before redefining his leadership role.

While the context is markedly different, the so-called “negative penance” section of the Egyptian Book of the Dead employs phrases in some respects similar to Samuel’s protestations: for example, “I have committed no injustice against men. I have not mistreated the cattle (of God). . . . I have not done violence to a poor man. . . . I have neither increased nor diminished the bushel.”²⁴⁶ Similar protests are attested in the archival records of Hittite court cases,²⁴⁷ as well as in Hittite canonical compositions: “What have I done? What? I haven’t taken anything from anyone. I haven’t taken an ox from anyone.”²⁴⁸

Is it not the wheat harvest now? (12:17). Wheat harvest took place early in Israel’s dry season (in May-June). In this period of almost complete drought, Yahweh’s sending of “thunder and rain” at Samuel’s request serves both as a sign of divine approval for Samuel and as a mild punishment for Israel’s sin, as rain is never welcome at harvest time. Rain at harvest time can cause what is called preharvest sprouting—water is absorbed into the head of the grain, stimulating hormone production leading to germination and thus a lower-quality yield.



Fertile wheat fields are seen in the foreground with Mount Zaphon, the Canaanite mount of assembly for the divine council, towering in the back as clouds form behind it. Baal was considered the “Rider on the Clouds” who came from Mount Zaphon and brought fertility to the ground so crops would grow. But for Israel, Yahweh was the one who brought rain and who caused the fields to yield their harvest, or sent destructive storms.

John Monson

Saul's Disobedience at Gilgal (13:1–15)

Saul was **thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel forty-two years (13:1)**. As the half-brackets in the NIV indicate, “thirty” and “forty” do not actually appear in the Hebrew text, which reads literally, “Saul was a year old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel two years.” This appears to be a (defective?) regnal formula. In the historiography of the Old Testament, regnal formulae stating the age of the king at accession and the length of his reign typically mark the official beginning of a king’s reign (cf., e.g., [2 Sam. 2:10](#); [5:4](#); [1 Kings 14:21](#)). Clearly, Saul could not have been literally a year old when he began to reign. Perhaps the number is to be understood differently—for instance, it may have been a year since Saul’s anointing, when he was “changed into a different person” (see [comment on 10:6](#)); perhaps the two-year reign refers to the time elapsed between Saul’s inauguration and his definitive rejection by God in [1 Samuel 15:23, 28](#).²⁴⁹

If the regnal formula is to be read literally, however, we must assume that one or two numerals are missing from the text. Examples of omitted numerals do occur in the ancient Near East—for example, in two economic texts from Ur, in a list of personal names from the Old Babylonian period, in the Sumerian King List, and in the Babylonian Chronicles.²⁵⁰ At present the question of Saul’s age at accession must remain open, but a rough estimate would make him at least forty, assuming that the events of chapter [13](#), in which his son Jonathan is already in charge of troops, take place early in his reign.

As for the length of Saul’s reign, twenty(-two) years is a good estimate. In one place, Josephus accords Saul a reign of twenty years (*Ant.* 10.143). In another place, the text of Josephus states that Saul reigned eighteen years during Samuel’s lifetime and “two and twenty” thereafter. But the “twenty” is text-critically and logically dubious; if Saul reigned twenty-two years after Samuel’s death, and David became king at age thirty ([2 Sam. 5:4](#)), then at the time of Samuel’s death David was only eight years old—having already killed Goliath, served as a commander in Saul’s army, incurred Saul’s jealousy, escaped to the Philistines, gathered a troop of six hundred men while on the run in the wilderness, and so on. Full discussion is not possible here, but a reign of about twenty or twenty-two years for Saul seems to work best.²⁵¹

Micmash (13:2). This is a hilltop village to be identified with the present-day city of Mukhmas, some seven miles northeast of Jerusalem and just a couple of miles from Geba/Gibeah to the southwest, across the Wadi Swenit. Micmash has

not been excavated.



Michmash

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

Jonathan attacked the Philistine outpost at Geba (13:3). On the link between this action and Saul’s first charge at the time of his anointing, see [comment on 10:7–8](#). For the location of Geba, see [comment on 10:26](#).

Saul had the trumpet blown (13:3). The word rendered “trumpet” is *šôpār*, which designates a “sounding horn” crafted (usually) from the horn of a ram. Such horns were frequently used in battle contexts for summoning troops or for signalling advances or retreats.²⁵² Use of trumpets for battle signals is attested in the battle scenes in ancient Egypt. Two trumpets were found in the tomb of Tutankhamun, which are likely war trumpets for they bear the names of some of the army divisions known to have been used in Egypt.²⁵³ Other instances of trumpet blasts as signaling devices in military situations include Judges 3:27 (Ehud vs. Moab); 6:34 (Gideon vs. Midian); and [2 Samuel 20:1](#) (Sheba vs. Judah).

The *šôpār* must be distinguished from metal trumpets, also used in the monarchical period, but which, unlike the modern instrument of the same name, had no valves. The latter would have been more like a straight bugle. Both the

ram's horn and the trumpet "were signal and alarm instruments, much like today's military bugles, automobile horns, emergency vehicle sirens, or fire and civil defense alarms." They "could not play a wide variety of notes and, hence, could not easily contribute melodically to music," but "they could produce a loud and piercing sound, which, when of a higher pitch or played in a higher register, could be heard over other noises. This contributed to their use in cultic contexts as noisemakers."²⁵⁴

The Philistines assembled to fight Israel, with three thousand chariots (13:5). Whether Jonathan's attack on the Philistine outpost was a solo performance or part of a larger strategy, it succeeded in provoking a massive Philistine reaction. The phraseology of verse 5—namely, the notice that the Philistines first assemble for battle, presumably in "safe" (Philistine?) territory,²⁵⁵ and then advance to take up battle positions in Micmash, east of Beth Aven²⁵⁶—suggests a procedure similar to what Saul followed in mustering troops in Gilgal (v. 4), away from the scene of the impending conflict. The Philistine muster, however, is reported as markedly more successful than Saul's (v. 5). On the chariots, see [sidebar on "Chariots."](#)

Chariots

The Hebrew text of [13:5](#) refers to 30,000 chariots, while LXX and Syriac attest the number 3,000. Even the lower figure seems high by ancient Near Eastern standards, though not impossible: for example, Sisera had 900 (Judg. 4:3); David killed 700 Aramean charioteers ([2 Sam. 10:18](#)); Solomon had 1,400 chariots (1 Kings 10:26); Tukulti-Ninurta II had "2,702 horses in teams [and chariots], more than ever before."^{A-58} If the NIV is correct in reading "six thousand charioteers," this would further confirm that the Philistines had 3,000 (not 30,000) chariots. The word translated "charioteer" can also be rendered "horseman/cavalryman" and "(chariot) horse."

In view of the fairly late introduction of cavalry in Canaan^{A-59} and the pictorial evidence of travelling bands of Philistines comprising "three main elements: chariots, infantry, and noncombatants,"^{A-60} but no cavalry, the decision of many modern translations to read "cavalry" or "horsemen" seems misguided. Moreover, if the Philistines, like the Hittites, employed three-man chariot crews,^{A-61} then the number 6,000 best refers to the chariot *horses*, not charioteers (which would number about 9,000).^{A-62} But some variation of the chariot team is certainly possible. Assyrian chariot crews could consist of two,

three, or even four men.^{A-63} And there is possible evidence of two-man chariots among the Mycenaeans, to whom the Philistines are thought to be related.^{A-64}



Chariots portrayed on the Balawat Gate

Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

Assuming that chariots would have been of little use in hilly terrain, some (especially older) commentators have doubted the accuracy of the present verse.^{A-65} Such judgments, however, overlook the fact that one of the chief functions of chariots in antiquity was to terrorize the enemy.^{A-66} Moreover, we have the explicit witness of numerous Assyrian royal inscriptions that chariots were indeed sometimes transported into “unsuitable/impassable” terrain. In an inscription of Tiglath-pileser I, for example, we read: “Taking my chariots and warriors I hacked through the rough mountain range and difficult paths with copper picks and made a good way for the passage of my chariots and troops.”^{A-67}

This is not to imply that geographic features never necessitated the abandoning of chariotry,^{A-68} but even in “impassable” regions, a way was sometimes found. Note this statement again from Tiglath-pileser’s inscription: “In the high mountains, which cut like the blade of a dagger and which were impassable for my chariots, I put the chariots on (the soldiers’) necks (and thereby) passed through the difficult mountain range.”^{A-69} While allowing for the hyperbolic nature of such reports, we are still left with the impression that the Assyrians could be persistent in overcoming obstacles in order to get their chariotry to the scene of battle. We probably underestimate the Philistines if we imagine that they were less so. In any case, the present verse dramatizes

the odds facing the Israelites.

You acted foolishly (13:13). The precise nature of Saul's folly has elicited considerable debate among commentators, most assuming that his offense must have been in arrogating to himself the priestly privilege of offering sacrifices. It should be noted, however, that both biblical and ancient Near Eastern kings often served some priestly functions (see [comment on 2 Sam. 8:18](#)). Furthermore, the text does not accuse Saul of cultic infraction but rather of failing to keep the "command/charge" of Yahweh.



It was common in the ancient world for kings to serve in the role of priest and to make offerings to deity. Here in the Hall of Offerings at Luxor a multitude of bulls are being offered by the king, including the offering in front of him that is comprised of a trussed-up bull at the bottom, a thigh, and some fowl.

Mike Murrill

The "charge" that Saul failed to keep is the two-part first charge that he received at the time of his anointing by Samuel (see [comment on 10:7–8](#)). Jonathan did the first part ("what lay at hand") by attacking the Philistine outpost at Geba (cf. [10:7](#); [13:3](#)), Saul initiated the second, going "down to Gilgal" to await Samuel's arrival (cf. [10:8](#); [13:4, 8](#)). But he fails to wait *until Samuel arrives*, which is not a minor infraction. Yahweh's "charge" to Saul at the time

of his anointing was intended as a test of Saul's willingness and ability to understand and abide by the all-important authority structure whereby Yahweh could continue to rule, with the human king remaining obedient to the divine will (as mediated, often, by the prophet).

Saul's sweeping aside of this arrangement when under pressure is a culpable act of folly, the consequences of which are that his kingdom will not be established (v. 14). This understanding of Saul's failure finds further confirmation in 1 Chronicles 10:13–14.²⁵⁷

A man after his own heart (13:14). McCarter has argued that the phrase “after his own heart” says nothing of “any great fondness of Yahweh's for David or any special quality of David”; rather, it should be rendered “of his own choosing.”²⁵⁸ Reserving judgment on McCarter's first assertion for the moment, we may add in support of the suggested rendering “of his own choosing” the following excerpt from the Babylonian Chronicle concerning the early years of Nebuchadnezzar II:

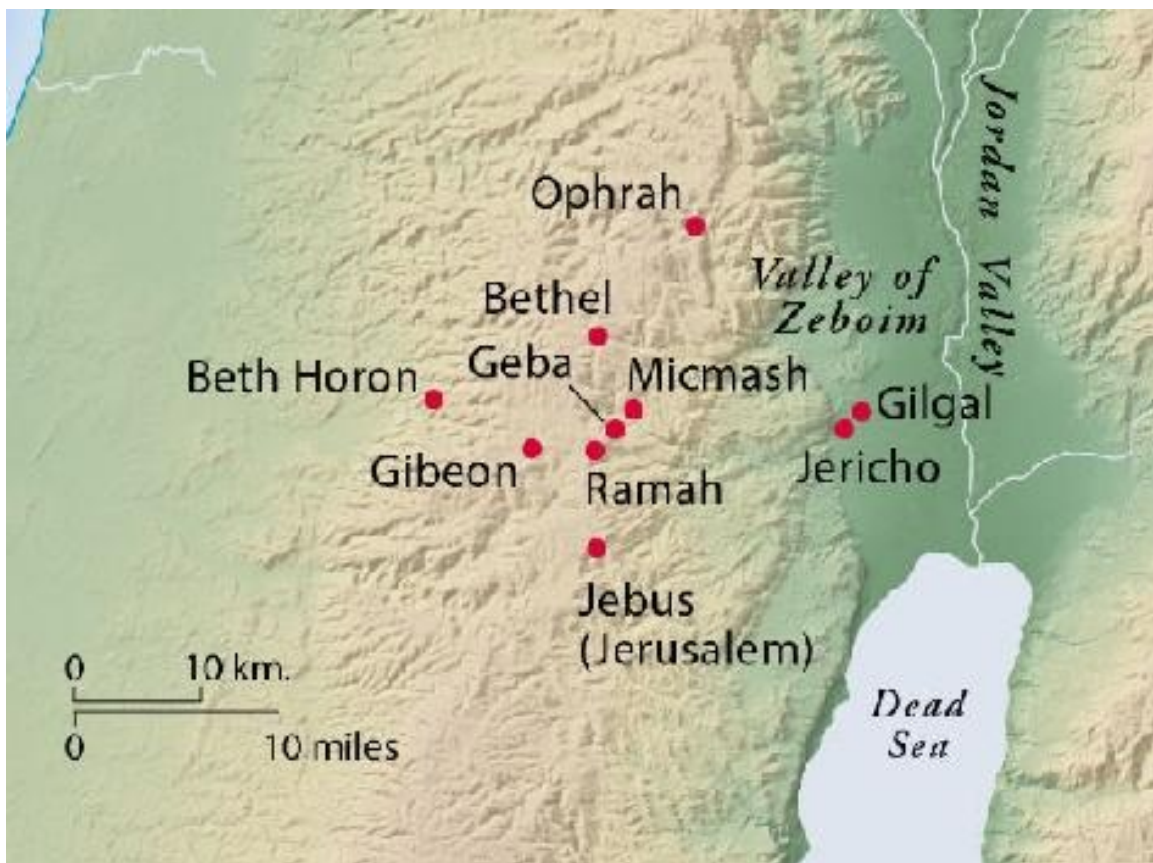
The seventh year: In the month Kislev the king of Akkad mustered his army and marched to Hattu. He encamped against the city of Judah and on the second day of the month Adar he captured the city (and) seized (its) king. A king of his own choice [*šarra šā libbi-šu* = lit., “a king according to his heart”] he appointed in the city (and) taking the vast tribute he brought it into Babylon.²⁵⁹

Compare also the following: “Enlil will install a king of his own choosing (*šà ša' -šua*).²⁶⁰

The evidence validates putting the accent on Yahweh's sovereign election of David, but in the light of such passages as 2:35 and 16:7, the idea that Yahweh's king, David, has a heart attuned to Yahweh's will and purposes should not be diminished (cf. the similar usage in 14:7).

Israel's Predicament (13:16–23)

Raiding parties went out from the Philistine camp in three detachments (13:17). Having established their base of operations at Micmash, the Philistines send out raiding parties to the north, west, and east. The first party moves north toward Ophrah (identified with modern et-Taiyiba, some six miles north of Micmash), where according to a theory proposed by Garsiel²⁶¹ they turn east-southeast along a route leading down into the Jordan Valley near Jericho.²⁶² Another party moves west toward Beth Horon, probably in order to secure access to Philistine territory. A third travels east along the “border road.”²⁶³ Garsiel, assuming that the Philistines must have learned that Saul is centralizing his forces in Gilgal, argues that the strategic aim of the two eastbound parties may be to create a “pincer movement” to put pressure on Saul’s camp. Alternatively, these two eastbound units may have been to control two major passes into the hill country from the Jericho region and thus to eliminate the possibility of a flanking action by Israelite forces coming up from the Jordan Valley.



In any case, the obvious freedom of movement enjoyed by the Philistines in [13:16–18](#) signals their military superiority in the area and contributes to the impression that the diminutive Israelite forces at Geba are in an almost hopeless situation. Division of troops into three detachments is a frequently attested practice in the premonarchical and monarchical period (cf. Judg. 7:16; 9:43; [1 Sam. 11:11](#); [2 Sam. 18:2](#)).

Not a blacksmith could be found in the whole land of Israel (13:19). Whether the Philistines led their neighbors in iron-working technology or simply were militarily powerful enough in this period to deny Israel access to blacksmiths remains an open question. The point, in any case, is that the Philistines prevent the Israelites from arming themselves properly. See [sidebar on “Iron Technology.”](#)

Iron Technology

Iron objects are not unknown prior to the so-called Iron Age,^{[A-70](#)} but at earlier periods iron was generally not preferred to bronze (an alloy of copper and tin), because bronze was stronger than simple wrought iron. Only when iron was “carburized” (had carbon added to it) and “quenched” (doused in cold water) did it become steel. Because of its higher melting temperature (1528° C, as opposed to 1200° C for copper), iron could not be melted and cast; ancient furnaces could achieve at best 1300–1400° C. The only solution was “forging”—repeatedly heating and then hammering the spongy hot iron to remove slag and compact the metallic iron.^{[A-71](#)}

In most parts of the ancient Near East, iron ore was in fact more common and available than copper or tin, but the technological challenges of smelting iron meant that its use for weapons and tools did not become widespread until shortages of (often imported) copper and tin created a necessity that could not be ignored.^{[A-72](#)}

Iron technology may have developed first in Hittite Anatolia, as evidenced by increasing textual references to iron towards the end of the so-called Late Bronze Age. An interesting example from the first half of the thirteenth century is the following excerpt from an Akkadian letter sent to an Assyrian king by a Hittite king:

In the matter of the good iron about which you wrote, good iron is not (currently) available in my storehouse in Kizzuwatna. I have already told you that this is a bad time for producing iron. They will be producing good iron, but they won't have finished yet. I shall send it to you when they have finished. At present I am sending you an iron dagger-blade.^{A-73}

There are even earlier references to metallic iron, which treat it as a luxury item, obtained most often from meteors (the Egyptian word for iron is “metal of heaven”^{A-74}). The following excerpt is from a letter dating to the Old Assyrian period (early second millennium):

Please do not smuggle anything. If you pass through Timilkia leave your iron which you are bringing through in a friendly house in Timilkia, and leave one of your lads whom you trust, and come through yourself and we can discuss it here.^{A-75}



Iron ingots were considered precious metal in this period.

Kim Walton, courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum

One of the earliest allusions to the quenching of carburized iron is found in Homer's description of the blinding of Cyclops by Odysseus and his men, using a massive olive stake made red-hot in the flames:

So we seized our stake with its fiery tip and bored it round and round in the giant's eye till blood came boiling up around that smoking shaft and the hot blast singed his brow and eyelids round the core and the broiling eyeball burst—its crackling roots blazed and hissed—as a blacksmith plunges a glowing ax or adze in an ice-cold bath and the metal screeches steam and its temper hardens. (*Odyssey* 9.433–52).^{A-76}

The price was two thirds of a shekel . . . a third of a shekel (13:21). The Hebrew word *pym*, rendered “two thirds of a shekel,” occurs only here in the Old Testament, and it baffled interpreters until archaeologists uncovered stone weights with the word inscribed. These stones weighed .268 oz., or “two thirds of a shekel,” the shekel being the standard monetary weight at that time. If the average monthly wage was one shekel,²⁶⁴ then this charge was exorbitant.



Weight inscribed with the word *pym*

Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

Jonathan's Valor (14:1–14)

Saul was staying on the outskirts of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree in Migron (14:2). Migron is to be associated with the Wadi Swenit, which ran between Micmash to the north and Geba to the south. The word “tree” is not present in the Hebrew text, and Arnold has proposed the attractive theory that the “pomegranate” refers to a large cave in the south wall of the wadi (the Migron). The cave’s pitted interior gives it the resemblance of an open pomegranate and may have earned it the name Rimmon (Heb. for “pomegranate”). Judges 20:45 speaks of a Rock of Rimmon to which six hundred Benjamites fled, and so it is conceivable that the six hundred men with Saul could have been stationed “under the Pomegranate.” Saul’s location in a cave also explains his need for lookouts to inform him of activities in the Philistine camp (14:16).

Ahijah, who was wearing an ephod . . . son of Ichabod’s brother Ahitub (14:3). On the three senses in which “ephod” is used in the Bible, see [comment on 2:18](#). In the present context, the ephod that Ahijah is “wearing” (or “carrying”—the Heb. verb can mean either) is probably the high priestly ephod containing the Urim and Thummim, devices used in divine inquiry (see Ex. 28:15, 30 and [comment on 1 Sam. 14:18–19](#)). The presence of these oracular instruments among Saul’s entourage might encourage hope that Saul will seek and receive divine guidance, as David later did on several occasions, using the ephod (23:9–12; 30:7–8). Ahijah, the bearer of the ephod, is provided with a genealogy that not only identifies him as a member of the rejected priestly house of Eli, but makes a rather unusual step sideways to mention an uncle, Ichabod, whose name means something like “No glory, no weight” (4:21). Commentators have struggled to explain this genealogy, but its purpose is probably to recall, if only indirectly, that Saul’s glory, too, is much diminished after the events of [1 Samuel 13](#).²⁶⁵

On either side of the pass . . . was a cliff . . . Bozez . . . Seneh (14:4). The topography of the area around Geba and Micmash, especially where the Wadi Swenit begins to develop the steep sides of a gorge, is well suited to the bold exploit of Jonathan and his armor-bearer. The meanings of Bozez and Seneh are debated, but if the suggestions of “slippery” for the former and “thorny” for the latter are correct, these names may have been mentioned to dramatize the challenge facing Jonathan.²⁶⁶



Pass of the Wadi Swenit near Micmash

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com



Micmash

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

Let's go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows (14:6). To be called “uncircumcised” was a strong censure in the thought world of ancient Israel (see [comment on 4:1](#)). Here Jonathan uses “uncircumcised” as a derogatory synonym for the Philistines (cf. the parallel injunction of [14:1](#)). Circumcision was instituted in Genesis 17:10–14 as a sign of the covenant between Yahweh and Israel, but Israel was not the only ancient Near Eastern people to engage in the practice. As Jeremiah 9:25–26 (which mentions Egypt, Edom, Ammon, and Moab, as well as Judah) indicates, many of Israel's neighbors circumcised their males.²⁶⁷ There is no evidence, however, that the practice served as a covenant sign outside Israel.²⁶⁸



Flint knife

Kim Walton, courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum

While in Israel the rite was administered to male babies at eight days old, in Egypt circumcision appears to have been more a rite of passage, administered either prior to marriage or at puberty. An Egyptian inscription from the twenty-third century B.C. provides a first-person description of the circumcision of a young man along with 120 others:

I was one beloved of his father, favored of his mother, whom his brothers and sisters loved. When I was circumcised, together with one hundred and twenty men, there was none thereof who hit out, there was none thereof who was hit, there was none thereof who scratched, there was none thereof who was scratched.²⁶⁹

The large number of men circumcised at one time suggests a kind of “circumcision festival,” such as is depicted on a relief from the Sixth Dynasty (2350–2000 B.C.) tomb of Ankhmahor at Saqqara.²⁷⁰ The legend to the relief mentions not only the Egyptian word for circumcision, but gives evidence also that a flint knife was used²⁷¹ (a practice attested also in Josh. 5:2–3). The left side of the relief appears to show an attendant supporting and perhaps restraining the arms of a young man as he is being circumcised. Perhaps the statements in the inscription that no one “hit out” or “was hit,” “scratched” or “was scratched” should be understood in the light of the fear that such a painful operation would engender and the discipline required not to react.²⁷² That all Egyptian males were to be circumcised—as were their Israelite counterparts—seems unlikely,²⁷³ but priests were required to be; traces of the circumcision of priests can still be detected on Egyptian mummies.²⁷⁴

Circumcision does not appear to have been practiced among the east Semitic peoples of Mesopotamia. Judging from the gruesome tale of the circumcision and subsequent slaughter of the Shechemites by Simeon and Levi in Genesis 34, circumcision was apparently not a universal practice in Canaan.²⁷⁵ That the Philistines did not practice circumcision is often attributed to their apparent Aegean origin. Perhaps some such explanation may apply also to the Shechemites.

Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few (14:6). Though distinctive in its monotheism, Israel’s belief that the Divine Warrior ultimately decided the outcome of battles was not without analogy among neighboring peoples. The ancient Near Eastern pantheons included gods or goddesses of war—Baal and Anat in Canaan, Nergal and Ishtar in Assyria, Marduk in Babylon, and so forth.²⁷⁶ Battles were regarded as ultimately decided by the gods, the stronger god defeating the weaker.

Thus, an inferior human force led by a superior deity could defeat a superior human force led by a weaker deity. In this instance, Jonathan’s faith in the power of Yahweh emboldens him to go over, accompanied only by his armor-bearer, to confront an entire Philistine troop. This action causes the reader to revisit Saul’s earlier excuse for his not waiting for Samuel at Gilgal—“the men were scattering” (13:11)—and to view it in a more negative light.

Saul's Folly (14:15–48)

The ground shook. It was a panic sent by God (14:15). In keeping with the belief that in warfare the gods actually did battle (see [comment on 14:6](#)), people of the ancient Near East associated this divine activity with dramatic manifestations in nature—the shaking of the earth, the splitting of the heavens, thunder and storm, and so forth (cf. [2 Sam. 22:8–10](#)). From Ugaritic writings, for instance, we read:

Ba[al gives] forth his holy voice,
Baal discharges the ut[terance of his li]ps.
His h[oly] voice [convulses] the earth . . . the mountains quake,
A-tremble are . . .
East and west, the earth's high places reel.²⁷⁷



Egyptian relief of an army in panic being decimated
Aaron and Estelle Morton

Such descriptions are widespread in the ancient Near East.²⁷⁸ Weinfeld cites the following examples:

- in Akkadian: “which at the sound of his voice the heavens shake, the earth quakes, the mountains tremble”; “who set his voice in the heavens like Adad, and all the earth trembles at his voice.”
- in Egyptian: “the earth trembles when (Amon) sends forth his voice.”
- In Greek: “Zeus, whose voice is borne afar, himself sat upon his throne of gold, and beneath his feet great Olympus quaked” (*Iliad*)

8.442–43); “the high mountains trembled and the woodland beneath the immortal feet of Poseidon as he went” (*Iliad* 8.18–19).²⁷⁹

In the present passage, Yahweh manifests himself by causing the ground to shake and throwing the Philistines into confusion so that their swords turn on each other (14:20). It was indeed a “panic sent by God”! The Hebrew expression can also be read as a superlative, in the same way that English speakers use expressions of divinity as superlatives: e.g., “the food was divine.” Thus, some translations read, “an exceedingly great panic.”

Bring the ark . . . withdraw your hand (14:18–19). Having learned that Jonathan and his armor-bearer have left the camp, Saul orders Ahijah to “bring the ark of God.” Mention of the “ark” is surprising at this point in the narrative: (1) in 14:3 Ahijah is in possession of an “ephod,” not the ark; (2) judging from 7:1 and 2 Samuel 6, the ark appears to have remained at the town of Kiriath Jearim throughout the reign of Saul (1 Chron. 13:3 confirms that the ark was not sought during Saul’s reign); (3) Saul’s order that Ahijah “bring near” the object seems appropriate in reference to an ephod (cf. 23:9; 30:7) but not in reference to the ark; (4) Saul’s command in 14:19 to “withdraw your hand” makes little sense if the ark is in view but excellent sense if Ahijah is in the process of grasping the Urim and Thummin, or the container holding them,²⁸⁰ in the breastplate of the priestly ephod.²⁸¹

Based on Akkadian evidence, it is possible that oracular inquiry using Urim and Thummim was a form of psephomancy (“divination by means of white and black stones”).²⁸² Considerations such as these have led a majority of commentators to follow the LXX (cf. also Josephus, *Ant.* 6.115) in reading “ephod” instead of “ark” in the present context—the two words are orthographically fairly similar in Hebrew.²⁸³ It seems likely, then, that Saul initiates an oracular inquiry involving the ephod but almost immediately aborts the process when it becomes apparent that the battle is heating up. Having failed to wait for Samuel in 1 Samuel 13, Saul now finds it difficult even to wait the few minutes necessary to inquire of Yahweh regarding the battle in progress, and this trend of increasing indifference to gaining divine direction adds to the unfavorable portrayal of Saul.²⁸⁴ On the customary practice in the Bible and the ancient Near East of seeking divine guidance before entering battle, see [comment on 7:7](#).

Hebrews who had previously been with the Philistines . . . went over to the Israelites (14:21). This statement seems to distinguish “Hebrews” from “Israelites.” The “Hebrews” here may refer to the “Habiru,” landless,

troublesome mercenaries who may have shifted allegiances opportunistically (see [sidebar on “Hebrews/Habiru” at 4:6](#)).

Beth Aven (14:23). See [comment on 13:5](#).

Cursed be any man who eats food (14:24). In the ancient Near East, fasting is often associated with mourning, but it is unattested in battle contexts such as this. See comments on 7:16; [2 Samuel 1:12](#); [12:16](#).

From Micmash to Aijalon (14:31). Reference to Aijalon is lacking in the LXX, and the shorter text is preferred by some commentators.²⁸⁵ The precise location of Aijalon has not been determined, but it lies somewhere in the valley of the same name. Two possible sites have been suggested: Yalo (which seems to reflect the ancient name) and Tell Qoqa. Surface surveys reveal that both sites were occupied in Iron Age I (time of Saul and Jonathan).²⁸⁶ Whichever site is correct, the Israelite pursuit of the Philistines after the initial victory at Micmash covers sixteen miles. Outside the Bible, Aijalon is mentioned in the fourteenth-century Amarna letters as Ayyaluna and in a list of conquered territories by Pharaoh Shoshenq I (945–924 B.C.).²⁸⁷



Aijalon Valley

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

Sinning against the LORD by eating meat that has blood in it (14:33). Not just in the Old Testament but throughout Egypt, Mesopotamia, and the Levant, blood was regarded with awe as the “true life substance,” the “bearer of life.” As such, it gave rise to seemingly conflicting attitudes: “On the one hand, [people treated] blood with reverential awe and surround[ed] it with a series of taboos; on the other hand, [they hoped] to make use of these powers in appropriate rites.”²⁸⁸

In the Old Testament, control over the lifeblood belongs to God, the giver of life, and prohibitions against eating blood are pervasive (Gen. 9:4; Lev. 3:17; 7:26–27; 17:10, 12; 19:26; Deut. 15:23; Ezek. 33:25). The juxtaposition in Leviticus 19:26 of prohibitions against eating meat with the blood still in and the practice of divination or sorcery suggests that the two were linked, and it was probably this link rather than any dietary restriction that stood behind the breach of protocol by Saul's troops. (For more on occultic practices involving blood, see [comment on 28:8](#).)

Saul's Disobedience in Battle with the Amalekites (15:1–11)

I will punish the Amalekites (15:2). To date, no explicit reference to the Amalekites has been discovered in the ancient Near Eastern corpus. Archaeologically, some scholars have suggested links between the Amalekites and certain “small fortified settlements in the Negev highlands,” while others have debated whether “the city of Amalek” in 15:5 is to be identified with Tel Masos, a site some seven miles east-southeast of Beersheba.²⁸⁹ For explicit information about the Amalekites, however, the Bible is our only source.



Tel Masos, possible site of the city of Amalek
David Bivin/www.LifeintheHolyland.com

According to Genesis 36:12, the eponymous ancestor of the Amalekites was Amalek, a grandson of Esau, a “chief” (*'allûp*) in the land of Edom (36:15), while Numbers 13:29 locates the Amalekites in the Negev, south of Judah and in the proximity of Edom. As a nomadic or seminomadic people, the Amalekites seem to have ranged widely, from the hill country of Ephraim in the north (Judg. 12:15) to the Philistine territory around Ziklag in the west (1 Sam. 30:1–2). The description of Saul’s victory over the Amalekites “from Havilah to Shur, to the east of Egypt” (15:7) places them in a broad territory stretching from the western Sinai eastward, possibly to the Arabah of Arabia (the location of Havilah is

uncertain).²⁹⁰

It was in the wilderness of Sinai at Rephidim that the Israelites, after escaping from Egypt, first encountered the Amalekites, and this encounter, like virtually every subsequent one between Israel and Amalek, was hostile (Ex. 17:8–13). What was so abhorrent in Amalek’s first attack on Israel was, according to Stern, its timing. Yahweh had just “exercised his cosmogonic powers, allowing Israel to safely pass through the *Un-Welt* in two manifestations, Egypt and the Sea.” The Amalekite aggression threatened to return Israel to “the *Un-Welt*,” to chaos, to nonexistence. Because of this heinous act, Amalek “became officially set apart as the ‘enemies of YHWH’ and deserving of being fought against from generation to generation.”²⁹¹

A battle ensued in which Joshua led the Israelites to victory, while Moses sat atop a nearby hill with his hands raised. After the victory, “the LORD said to Moses, ‘Write this on a scroll as something to be remembered and make sure that Joshua hears it, because I will completely blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven’ ” (Ex. 17:14). The severity of the treatment of the Amalekites commanded by Yahweh here must be seen in the light of their initial and ongoing opposition to Israel (see, e.g., Judg. 3:13; 6:3–5, 33; 7:12; 10:12).

Attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them (15:3). The curse pronounced against the Amalekites in Exodus 17 is now to be worked out. The order of “total destruction” (*hērem*), sometimes referred to in English as placing someone or something under the “ban” or as “devoting to destruction,” is clearly attested outside the Old Testament only in the ninth-century Mesha Inscription (line 17). The Moabite king Mesha recounts how he was sent by the god Chemosh to attack “Nebo from Israel,” and having done so how he “slew all in it, seven thousand men and women, both natives and aliens, and female slaves; for I had devoted it to Ashtar-Chemosh.”²⁹² In both Hebrew and Moabite the root *hrm* describes the act of “totally destroying” or “devoting” to the deity that which is under the ban.



Mesha Stele

Jill Walton, courtesy of the Louvre

Elsewhere in the ancient Near East, it was believed that the gods controlled the outcome of battles and that they therefore also controlled the spoils of battle. In Israel, failure to treat banned persons or objects properly drew the offenders under the ban as well and left them liable to destruction (cf. Achan in Josh. 7). Simply put, contact with “devoted/banned” objects was “contagious, the transgressor becoming devoted in turn—and as such, foredoomed to death.”²⁹³

Telaim (15:4). This is probably to be equated with Telem, listed in Joshua 15:24 as one of the cities of Judah. The LXX mentions Gilgal here instead, which some have suggested may have been the site of Samuel’s instructions to Saul.

Two hundred thousand foot soldiers (15:4). See [comment on 4:10](#).

Kenites (15:6). On linguistic grounds the Kenites have been associated with metalworking, their name perhaps meaning something like “(metal)smith.”²⁹⁴ In Genesis 4:22, Tubal-Cain (“Cain” and “Kenite” are variant English spellings of

the same Hebrew root) is described as a forger of metal tools. If Tubal is to be identified with the nation of Tabal mentioned in Assyrian texts, then the link with metalworking and the copper trade is strengthened.²⁹⁵

According to Judges 1:16, Moses' father-in-law was a Kenite; his descendants went up from the "City of Palms [Jericho] with the men of Judah to live among the people of the Desert of Judah in the Negev near Arad."²⁹⁶ A late seventh/early sixth-century Hebrew ostrakon from Arad²⁹⁷ mentions a site called Qinah/Kinah (cf. Kenite) along with Arad, possibly confirming the association of Kenites with Arad. The first half of the ostrakon is mostly unreadable, though the addressee's name, Elyashib, is preserved. The line mentioning Qinah reads: "from Arad fifty (or five) and from Qina[h]." The succeeding lines state that this quantity of something (?) from Arad and Qinah is to be sent to Ramat-Negeb, by order of the king.²⁹⁸

The Kenites are attested mostly in the southern parts of Palestine—such as Midian, Edom, Amalek, and Sinai. They were likely seminomadic; for instance, Judges 4:11 recounts how "Heber the Kenite had left the other Kenites . . . and pitched his tent by the great tree in Zaananim near Kedesh." Not only in the present context of Saul's battle against the Amalekites but elsewhere in the Bible (e.g., Num. 24:20–21) Kenites and Amalekites are mentioned together. But whereas the Amalekites were consistently hostile toward Israel, the Kenites were consistently friendly, and so Saul is careful to send the Kenites away from danger before attacking the Amalekites.

Havilah to Shur (15:7). See [comment on 15:2](#).

Saul's Trial and Rejection (15:12–35)

Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor (15:12). On Carmel, see [comment on 25:2](#) (cf. [23:24](#)). It was common practice in the ancient Near East for victorious kings to set up monuments, or victory stelae, with inscriptions celebrating their glorious achievements and crediting their success to their god(s). The ninth-century Assyrian king Ashur-nasir-apli II, for instance, makes repeated reference to erecting stelae or statues in praise of his mighty power. After describing his massacre and decapitation of enemy troops, as well as the execution of the son of the ruler of the city Nishtun by flaying and draping his skin over the city wall, he writes: “At that time I made an image of myself (and) wrote thereon the praises of my power.”²⁹⁹



Relief of a hilltop with a stele at the top, a monument to the king

Zen Liu/www.flickr.com/photos/zenra

In the aftermath of another victory, apparently not content with a single monument to himself, Ashur-Nasir-Apli II erected a “colossal royal statue of

myself” in the palace of his vanquished foe and also deposited “steles” in praise of his own might in the enemy’s gate.³⁰⁰ Saul’s monument may have been such a victory stele, but that it was erected “in his own honor” is disconcerting. Absalom will later honor himself similarly with a monument (2 Sam. 18:18).

Arrogance like the evil of idolatry (15:23). The word rendered “idolatry” is *t̄rāpîm*; see comment on 2 Samuel 19:13.

Saul caught hold of the edge of his robe, and it tore (15:27). Although the Hebrew text does not state explicitly *who* caught hold of *whose* robe, the context suggests it was Saul who took hold of Samuel’s robe (so NIV).³⁰¹ More uncertain is the precise significance, or intent, of Saul’s seizing the hem of Samuel’s robe. Several Akkadian texts from Mari³⁰² attest the practice of cutting a lock of hair and a piece of hem from the garment of one who has prophesied and sending these items to the king of Mari.



King’s elaborate hem can be seen in contrast to the hem of his attendant
Caryn Reeder, courtesy of the British Museum

Some have argued that taking and sending hair and hem expressed distrust of the one who prophesied and that Saul, by grasping and tearing Samuel’s robe, is challenging Samuel.³⁰³ This argument overlooks both the fact that the tearing of the robe seems to have been accidental (as indicated by the Hebrew grammar) and the fact that in one text a prophetess *voluntarily* sends hair and hem: “Here then I have given you my hair and hem, that one may [ritually] cleanse them.”³⁰⁴ That the prophetess would be expressing self-distrust is hardly likely.

In the present episode, moreover, no lock of hair is mentioned but only the grasping of the hem of a robe. Closer parallels may be offered, therefore, by texts that mention only the grasping of the hem. In addition to several texts in Akkadian,³⁰⁵ at least one can be found in Old Aramaic³⁰⁶ and one other in Zechariah 8:23: “This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘In those days ten men from all languages and nations will take firm hold of one Jew by the hem of his robe and say, “Let us go with you, because we have heard that God is with you.”’ ” In the light of these texts, Saul’s grasping of Samuel’s hem may be read positively, indicating supplication or submission.³⁰⁷ But this positive construal of Saul’s action assumes more regarding Saul’s motives than the context will support.

A further instance of grasping the hem is found in the Ugaritic Myth of Baal and Mot, in which Anat seizes the hem of Mot’s garment in order to constrain him.³⁰⁸ Anat’s action, in context, is suggestive of supplication but hardly of penitence or submission; when she next “seizes” Mot,³⁰⁹ Anat “hacks him up, pulverizes him, and scatters his remains for the birds to eat.”³¹⁰ Taking this evidence together, we may conclude that grasping the hem can mean various things in various contexts.³¹¹

In the present context, Saul’s grasping and (inadvertently?) tearing the hem of Samuel’s robe is best understood as a last desperate attempt to rescue a situation that has gone badly awry and to wrest from the prophet a word of comfort or concession.³¹² As it happens, however, the torn robe becomes a symbol of the kingdom now “torn” from Saul (15:28).³¹³

Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind (15:29). The ninth-century Assyrian king Ashur-nasir-apli II begins one of the longest extant Assyrian royal inscriptions with line after line of praise to the god Ninurta, whom he describes as, among other things, “the splendid god who never changes (his mind).”³¹⁴ In a subsequent edition of the same text, Grayson alters his earlier translation slightly, reading “the splendid god who never once changes.”³¹⁵

The question that arises is whether Ninurta is being described as immutable generally (in his character and general decrees) or specifically (in his judicial judgments). The Akkadian verb *enû* III, with the general meaning of “turn (around), change,” has a broad range that includes both these senses.³¹⁶ Therefore, the specific sense in which Ninurta “never once changes” must be determined from the immediate context, where he is called “the god without whom no decisions are taken in heaven and underworld . . . the one whose command is unalterable . . . the one whose command none of the gods in the divine assembly can alter.”³¹⁷ Particularly the latter statement suggests the

supremacy of Ninurta's commands over against any attempts by others to alter them.

Also worthy of consideration are a few lines from a Sumerian Hymn to Enlil:

You are lord An and king Enlil (in one),
judge and decision maker
for (both) heaven and earth,
you know no rescinder of your great decrees.³¹⁸

In the context of Saul's trial, the sense seems to be similar—no amount of cajoling or manipulation will succeed in mitigating the sentence pronounced against him, for it has been issued by Yahweh, whose judgment is supreme. As Eichrodt noted long ago, “the purpose of Num 23.19 and 1 Sam 15.29 . . . is to combat the erroneous idea that it is easy to talk God round, and that his threats and promises need not be taken seriously.”³¹⁹

Samuel Anoints David (16:1–13)

Fill your horn with oil (16:1). Whereas Samuel anointed Saul in 10:1 from a “flask” or small jug (see [comment on 10:1](#)), here he is instructed to take his “horn” of oil and go to Jesse to anoint one of his sons as Saul’s replacement. The horn in view is probably an animal horn fitted out to contain oil. The word for oil is a general one, but here it probably refers to a vegetable oil of an aromatic variety.³²⁰ While anointing per se was fairly widespread in the ancient Near East and served various functions (see [comment on 2:10](#)),³²¹ Keel suggests that “anointing from an *oil-horn* seems to have been distinctive to Syria-Palestine,”³²² and current evidence does not suggest otherwise.



Ivory anointing horn

Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY, courtesy of the Israel Museum (IDAM)

A depiction from the tomb of the Egyptian Sebekhotep in Thebes (ca. 1420 B.C.) shows a Semitic/Syrian envoy (recognizable by his clothing and beard)

carrying an ornate anointing horn.³²³ Also mentioning an oil-horn is a letter from a king of Ugarit (in Syria) to his Queen Mother. The central issue has to do with the king's designs on an Amurrite princess, although lacunae in the text obscure the king's precise intentions. The lines pertinent here state that one Yabninu, who has been dispatched to the court of Amurru bearing gifts, "has also taken oil in a horn and poured it on the head of the daughter of the king of Amurru."³²⁴ The significance of this anointing is not stated, but perhaps it was meant, among other things, to establish a kind of "first contact, however remote," between groom and bride.³²⁵

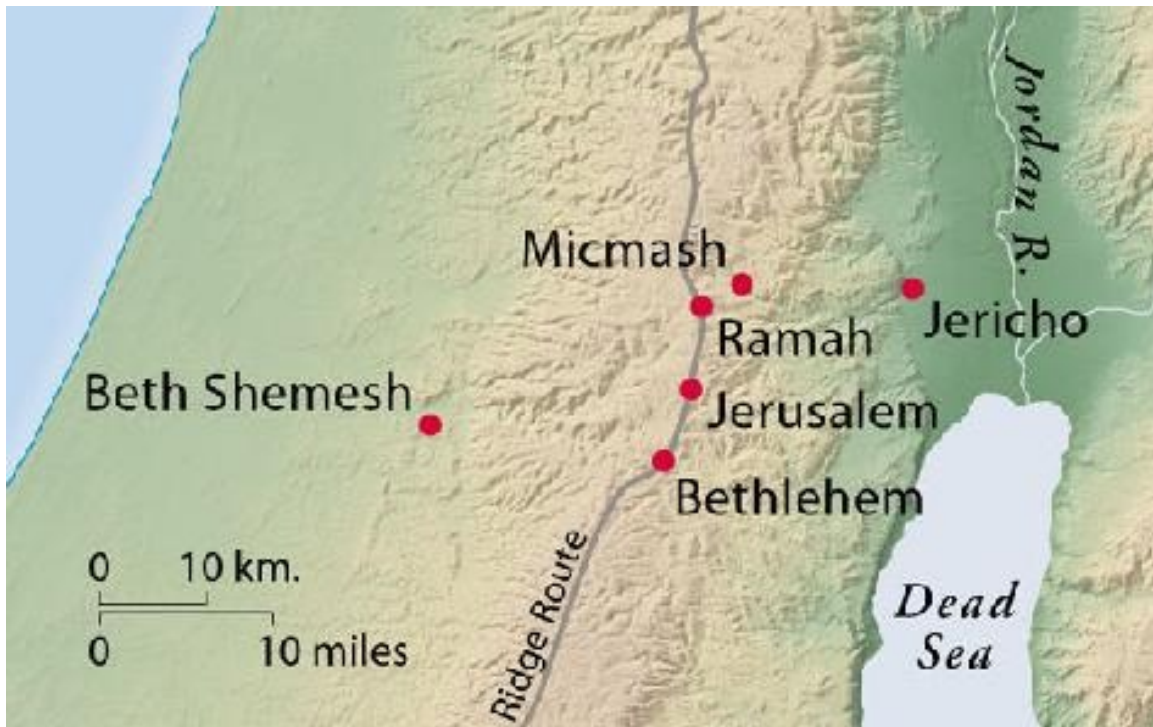


In top register, one envoy carries ivory horn perhaps for anointing oil.

Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

Bethlehem (16:1). Because of its rich associations—e.g., vicinity of Rachel's tomb (Gen. 35:19), setting of the book of Ruth, hometown of David, birthplace of Jesus (Matt. 2:5–6; John 7:42; cf. Mic. 5:2)—Bethlehem figures more prominently in biblical history than its size merits. Located less than six miles south-southwest of Jerusalem, the ancient site is today occupied by a modern town, limiting the possibility of excavation. Only in the vicinity of the Church of the Nativity, or where fresh construction is undertaken, has excavation been attempted. Enough has been found to confirm the presence of an Iron Age town

in the time of David.



Bethlehem

A fourteenth-century B.C. Amarna letter mentions “a town belonging to Jerusalem, Bit-^dNIN.URTA by name, a city of the king.”³²⁶ Reading the city name as “Bit-Lahmu” or the like, which is possible in the syllabic Akkadian language, some have suggested that this may be an early reference to Bethlehem. The name may originally have meant “house of Lahmu,” a Mesopotamian god, and only later been transposed to Bethlehem, “house of bread.” This theory, while interesting, remains unproven.³²⁷

The LORD looks at the heart (16:7). In the ancient Near East, the heart was viewed as far more than the seat of the blind passions. In Mesopotamia, it was “the locus of the emotions that are more subject to the will (desire, love, friendship, mercy, faithfulness, etc.), of consciousness, wisdom, and understanding.” In Egypt, the heart was “the focus of the individual—body, spirit, soul, and will—the center of the entire personality and its relationship to God.” As the “locus of an individual’s ethical competence,” the heart “was weighed in the judgment of the dead.”³²⁸ Some texts speak of the deity seeing into or searching the heart.³²⁹

The Hebrew concept of the heart as the center of intellectual, ethical, moral,

and religious consciousness is similar. Unlike human appraisal that judges by external appearances, Yahweh passes over the tall, impressive older brothers (indeed, he “rejects” them, subtly recalling the rejection of Saul, who exceeded his fellows by a head) and chooses the youngest (in Heb., the smallest), David.

Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel. . . . “There is still the youngest” (16:10–11). While this passage and [17:12–13](#) make David the youngest of Jesse’s eight sons, 1 Chronicles 2:13–15 lists David as the youngest of seven sons. It seems likely that David is in fact the eighth son and that the Chronicler lists only seven in order for David to occupy the favored seventh position. Alternatively, the “seven” in the present passage may be intended simply to connote the full complement (see [comment on 2:6](#); [13:8](#)). Ascendancy of a younger brother is a common motif in the Bible and in the ancient Near East. One interesting parallel is offered by a mid-third millennium Sumerian epic in which the eighth son, Lugulbanda, joins seven older brothers and performs heroically in an attempt to conquer a city.³³⁰



Bethlehem with flocks still wandering the hills
Bible Scene Multimedia/Maurice Thompson

Rise and anoint him; he is the one (16:12). On the anointing of kings in ancient Israel and in the ancient Near East, see [comment on 2:10](#).

From that day on the Spirit of the LORD came upon David in power (16:13). The statement that David is endowed with the Spirit of Yahweh “from that day on” is meant either to suggest a contrast with the more occasional coming of the Spirit of God on Saul (e.g., 10:10; 11:6; 19:23) or simply to underscore that David is henceforth the king through whom Yahweh will work, since Saul’s royal status has been revoked. Prior to the monarchy, the Spirit of Yahweh came on certain individuals to empower them to perform certain tasks, military or otherwise. These Spirit-endowments were occasional, aimed at specific competencies, and impermanent—one need only think of the way in which the Spirit came on Samson “in power” to enable a specific feat of strength or deliverance and then departed (Judg. 14:6, 9; 15:14).

Against this backdrop, David’s apparently more permanent endowment with the Spirit, commensurate with the more permanent nature of his role as Yahweh’s anointed and future king, is striking. By the same token, the departure of the Spirit from Saul (see [comment on 16:14](#)) is commensurate with his rejected status.

Kingship was a sacral office, sanctioned and empowered by the deity, which was a widespread notion in the ancient Near East, though with considerable variation in specifics.³³¹ The Egyptian pharaohs were regarded as divine and to be worshiped. Mesopotamian kings were sometimes regarded as divine by adoption, or at least as bearers of the *melammu* of the gods, that is, the “radiance, supernatural awe-inspiring sheen (inherent in things divine and royal).”³³²

Israel’s notion was different, for the Israelite king was regarded simply as Yahweh’s Spirit-endowed *human* representative on earth, who, as God’s vassal ruler, was like any ordinary Israelite citizen in having a duty to “fear the LORD and serve and obey him and . . . [not] rebel against his commands” (12:14–15). Failure in this duty could lead to rejection from office and withdrawal of the empowering Spirit, as in the case of Saul.

David Enters Saul's Service (16:14–23)

The Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him (16:14). The Hebrew adjective *ra'* (“evil”) has a broad range of possible meanings, including the following: “of bad quality, inferior, disagreeable, displeasing, vicious, harmful, bad, evil.”³³³ The noun *rûah* (“spirit”) also has a broad range, including: “wind, breath, transitoriness, volition, disposition, temper, spirit, Spirit.”³³⁴ Of particular note for the present context is the use of *rûah* to mean “the natural spirit of humanity, as **sense, mind, intellectual frame of mind.**”³³⁵ Thus, the “evil spirit” visited on Saul may connote not a malevolent spiritual being per se, but an ill temper or even psychological affliction.³³⁶

That music provides some relief for Saul (see 16:15–17) seems to support this more mundane interpretation of the “evil spirit” that comes on Saul after the departure of the “Spirit of the LORD.” In the ancient Near East, unworthy kings could provoke similar displeasure and disciplinary actions from their deities. For instance, near the end of his law code, Hammurabi invokes a curse on anyone who disobeys his law. Should the offender be a king, then “may mighty Anum, the father of the gods, who proclaimed my reign, deprive him of the glory of sovereignty, may he break his scepter, may he curse his fate!”³³⁷ The Akkadian notion of “a spirit or demon representing the individual’s vital force,” which could become alienated from the individual or driven away by evil, may offer some degree of conceptual parallel, as also to a lesser degree the Akkadian phrase *mukîl rēš damiqti/lemutti* (good spirit/evil spirit).³³⁸

Harp (16:16). Music played a major royal in ancient societies, both in private and in public spheres, in the royal court as well as the cult.³³⁹ In the Bible, music and musical instruments are mentioned as early as Genesis 4:21 and 31:27. From the inception of monarchy in Israel, music would have been a part of court life. The present reference offers evidence of this fact, as David’s skill as a harpist is the chief reason for his induction into Saul’s court.



Philistine jug with shepherd playing lyre as he watches his animals

Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

The precise significance of some Hebrew musical terms is uncertain (see [sidebar on “Prophetic Bands and Music”](#) at 10:5). The word rendered “harp” in the NIV (*kinnôr*) probably refers to a “lyre,” of which there were several types in antiquity (see [illustrations](#)).³⁴⁰ (Conversely, the term that the NIV renders “lyre” [*nēbel*] probably refers to a “harp.”)³⁴¹ The type of lyre David played was presumably the “Eastern,” or “thin,” lyre, which was strung with four to eight strings and was played with a plectrum. The “thick” lyre had ten to thirteen strings and was played with the fingers. No evidence of thick lyres has been discovered in Palestine.³⁴²

Lyres were constructed using “a rectangular soundbox, two asymmetrical arms, and an oblique yoke,”³⁴³ with strings stretched between the soundbox and the yoke. Archaeological discovery has yielded many representations of lyres, such as the remains of nine lyres from the Sumerian royal cemetery at Ur (ca. 2500 B.C.), a depiction of “an Amorite/Canaanite lyre player entering Egypt with his clan” (ca. 1900 B.C. wall painting at Beni Hasan in Egypt), a depiction of a female lyre player on an ivory plaque from Megiddo (twelfth century B.C.), and a male lyre player on a Philistine bichrome jug (Megiddo, eleventh century B.C.).³⁴⁴

David Kills Goliath (17:1–58)

Philistines (17:1). See [comments on 4:1](#).

Pitched camp at Ephes Dammim, between Socoh and Azekah. Saul and the Israelites . . . in the Valley of Elah (17:1–2). While the precise location of Ephes Dammim has not been determined, the locations of the other sites mentioned are reasonably certain. The Valley of Elah (Wadi es-Sant) was part of a major east-west corridor from the Judean hill country through the Shephelah westward down into Philistine territory. There is evidence that in biblical times a road running westward from Jerusalem picked up the Elah Valley as it ran past Socoh and Azekah, then continued on to the Philistine cities of Gath and Ashkelon.³⁴⁵

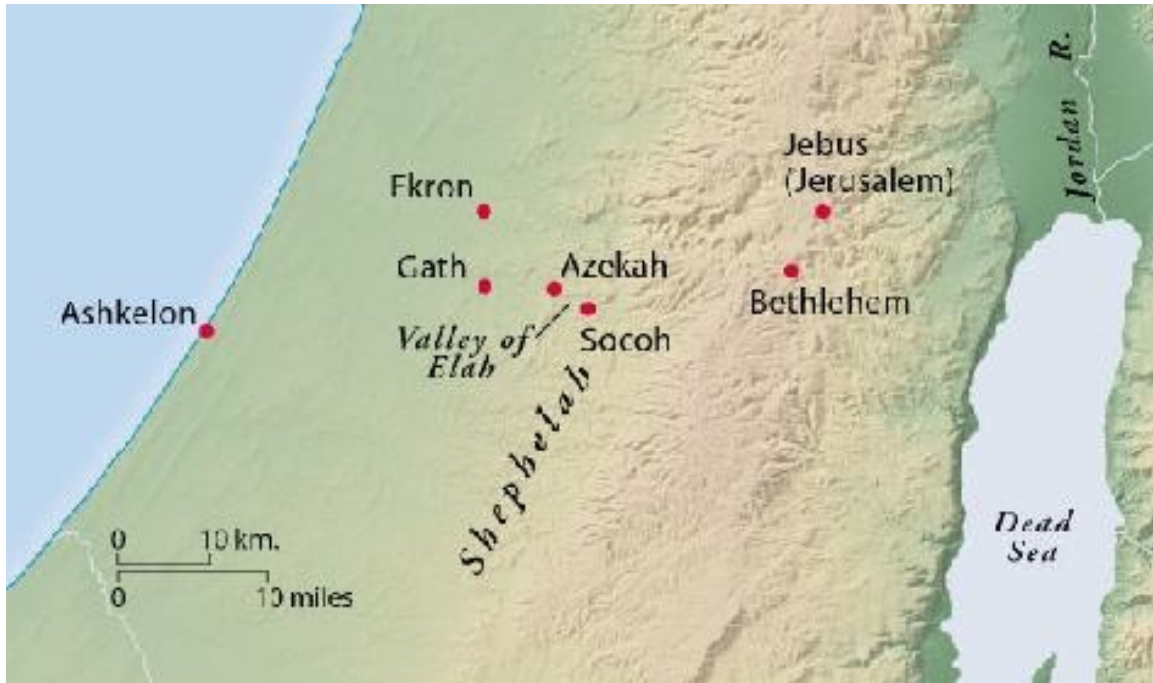


Valley of Elah

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

Socoh, identified with modern Khirbet ‘Abbad, lay almost fifteen miles due west from Bethlehem, Azekah (modern Tell Zakariya) is three miles northwest of Socoh, and Gath (Tel Zafit; Tell es-Safi; see [comment on 5:8](#)) another five miles west of Azekah. Socoh has not been excavated, but pottery collected on the surface confirms its occupation in the requisite period.³⁴⁶ Just to the east of Khirbet ‘Abbad is Khirbet Shuweikeh, which seems to preserve the ancient name Socoh, and the two sites together may have formed twin villages, as Eusebius supposed, called Socoth (plural of Socoh).³⁴⁷

Azekah was excavated in 1898–1899, revealing continuous occupation from 1500 B.C. to the Byzantine period. A sense of its strategic location overlooking the Elah Valley is conveyed in an Assyrian source from the time of Sargon II: a “stronghold, which is situated in the mid[st of the mountains . . .] located on a mountain ridge like a pointed dagger.”³⁴⁸ Ephes Dammim, located somewhere between Azekah and Socoh and within a few miles of Philistine territory presented a logical and dramatic location of the confrontation between the Israelite David and the Gittite Goliath.



Philistines under Saul

Champion named Goliath (17:4). The contest joined between the “champion” Goliath and the temerous young David is perhaps the best-known example from antiquity of a military conflict decided by “single combat,” namely, a fight between representatives of the warring factions intended to avoid a more general engagement. The logic behind such contests was grounded in the belief that battles were ultimately decided by God or the gods; thus, the champion representing the more powerful deity would triumph.

In his 1959 seminal essay, R. de Vaux drew attention to numerous examples of single combat in the Bible and to several from other ancient sources. Among the latter, de Vaux cited Homer’s *Iliad* (Paris versus Menelaus, Hector versus Ajax) and the Egyptian Tale of Sinuhe, in which Sinuhe triumphs over a Syrian challenger, felling him with an arrow and dispatching him with his own sword.³⁴⁹

While certain similarities with the story of David’s triumph over Goliath are striking, H. A. Hoffner in a 1968 essay correctly observed that some of the presumed ancient Near Eastern parallels are better described as *duels*, not representative combat, inasmuch as the grievances to be settled were personal and the fates of larger contingents were not at stake. A better parallel, Hoffner argued, is to be found in the Hittite Apology of Ḫattušiliš III. Massively outnumbered in one particular engagement—the enemy boasting 800 chariot teams and countless infantry versus Ḫattušiliš’s 120 chariot teams and no infantry—Ḫattušiliš nevertheless “personally” defeated the enemy: “For when I

slew the man who was the *piran ḫuyan*za, the (rest of the) enemy fled.”³⁵⁰

The literal meaning of the Hittite *piran ḫuyan*za is “one who runs/marches in front,” which offers a remarkable parallel to both the Greek and Hebrew words for champion, both of which “are descriptive of persons who have *gone out in front* of their own host in order to engage an opponent.” The technical term in Homer’s *Iliad* is the Greek word *promachizein*, “of which the preverb *pro* signifies that he fights in a cleared area in front of the host.” The Hebrew term, used of Goliath in the present context is *’iš habbē-nayim*, the “man between two (armies).”³⁵¹ Thus, David’s confrontation with Goliath, and the resulting flight of the Philistines, fits nicely within the frame of “single combat” as attested particularly “in Western Asia Minor and along the Levantine coast.”³⁵² For a biblical example of representative combat between two select teams of champions, see [2 Samuel 2:12–16](#).



Apology of Ḫattushili

Istanbul Archaeological Museum; © Dr. James C. Martin

Gath (17:4). See [comment on 5:8](#).

Goliath . . . was over nine feet tall (17:4). The Hebrew text records Goliath’s height as six cubits (a cubit being the distance from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger) and a span (the distance from the tip of the thumb to the tip of the smallest finger of a hand fully spread). There was considerable variation in the precise lengths of cubits and spans in antiquity, but by any standard Goliath would have been “over nine feet tall,” as the NIV has it.

Codex Vaticanus of the LXX, as well as numerous manuscripts of the Lucianic recension, reduces Goliath’s height by a third to “four” cubits and a span, making him about six feet six inches—still tall by ancient standards, to be sure, but not a giant (a claim that the biblical text never makes). If this lesser height should be correct, then the Hebrew text (or its copyists) are perhaps engaging in narrative hyperbole commensurate with the larger than life character of the story. It should be noted, however, that examples of giantism on the order of what the Hebrew text claims for Goliath are attested in numerous sources both ancient and modern.³⁵³

Within the Bible itself, both giant individuals (e.g., King Og of Bashan; Deut 3:11) and entire races of giants are described (e.g., the Nephilim, Anakim, and Rephaim [the latter being the race of which Og was a remnant]). A noteworthy extrabiblical reference is found in the thirteenth-century Egyptian Papyrus Anastasi I, which “describes bedouin in Canaan, ‘some of whom are of four cubits or five cubits (from) their nose to foot and have fierce faces.’”³⁵⁴ The spies sent by Moses to reconnoitre the land of Canaan also encountered fearsome giants: “We saw the Nephilim there (the descendants of Anak come from the Nephilim). We seemed like grasshoppers in our own eyes, and we looked the same to them” (Num. 13:33). Joshua was largely successful in wiping out the Anakim, but with some survivors in the Philistine cities of Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod (Josh. 11:21–22). As Mattingly has observed, “It is most probable that Goliath of Gath and the other giants of 2 Sam. 21:16–22 (cf. 1 Chr. 20:4–8) were regarded as descendants of the Anakim remnant in Philistia.”³⁵⁵

Bronze helmet . . . scale armor . . . bronze greaves . . . spear shaft (17:5–7). The character and significance of Goliath’s armor has elicited considerable discussion. See [sidebar on “Goliath’s Armor.”](#)



Scale armor

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

Goliath's Armor

By biblical standards, Goliath's defensive and offensive equipment is described in far greater detail than is typically dedicated to physical objects. Such elaborate description of a hero's panoply is far more typical of the writings of Homer (eighth century B.C.). Some have cited this as evidence that the Goliath episode is a later addition to the text of Samuel, or at least an editorial recasting of the episode, under the influence of Greek culture.^{A-77} It is further argued that Goliath's armor and weaponry were not common among the Philistines at the time of David; for instance, Philistines in the reliefs from Medinet Habu sport feathered headdresses, not bronze helmets, and Goliath's shield, apparently large enough to require a shield-bearer, is unlike the small shields born by Philistines in Egyptian reliefs.^{A-78}

On the basis of these and related arguments, recent studies have taken exception to Yigael Yadin's earlier opinion that "the detailed Biblical description of the weapons of Goliath is one of the most important documents for an understanding of Philistine armaments, their features and attributes, at the beginning of the Davidic period."^{A-79} It may well be the case that Goliath's armaments reveal little or nothing about *normal* Philistine military equipment, but this does not necessarily mean that Goliath's description is anachronistic. Even Finkelstein, who strongly disagrees with Yadin, allows that "every single item in the description of Goliath's armament can be compared to Aegean weapons and armour from the Mycenaean period to Classical times. . . . In all periods within this time-frame one can find metal helmets, metal

armour and metal greaves.”^{A-80}

Finkelstein’s point is not that such gear is absent but that it is not prevalent in the time of David: “At any given period until the seventh century BCE, each of these items was not the most common of its kind.”^{A-81} Azzan Yadin, who also disagrees with the earlier Yadin, similarly argues that Goliath’s gear “is not common in the Bible.”^{A-82} But is this not precisely the point the biblical narrator is trying to make, with his unusual amount of descriptive detail? Goliath is not a typical Syro-Palestinian warrior; indeed, he is not even a typical Philistine warrior, either in stature or in military hardware. (We may note in passing that Saul offers David the use of his own “bronze helmet” in v. 38, though such helmets were not likely to be standard issue for Israelite soldiers.)

G. Philip notes that “both the javelin and the greaves are unusual for Syro-Palestinian warriors” of the Iron Age, but this may simply “hint at [Goliath’s] foreign connections.”^{A-83} The fact is that his equipment is *not* out of keeping with the Aegean background of the Philistines.^{A-84} The well-known twelfth-century Mycenaean Warrior Vase depicts Mycenaean warriors whose armor resembles Goliath’s in at least some significant respects: for example, they apparently wear (bronze) greaves, which were probably lined with leather and protected the entire calf.^{A-85}



Mycenaean warrior vase

N. Croll, courtesy of the Athens National Archaeological Museum

Ephrathite (17:12). While Ephrathite may be used as a synonym for Ephraimite,³⁵⁶ in the present case it designates a kinship group within the larger tribe of Judah and is associated with the town of Bethlehem.³⁵⁷ In fact, Ephrath(ah) was sometimes used as an alternate name for Bethlehem in Judah, as distinct from Bethlehem in Zebulun (Josh. 19:10, 15).³⁵⁸

Bethlehem (17:12). On the history and importance of Bethlehem, see [comment on 16:1](#). David's trek from Bethlehem to the battle scene in the Valley of Elah covers over fifteen miles (see [comment on 17:1–2](#)).

Take an ephah of roasted grain . . . ten loaves of bread . . . ten cheeses (17:17–18). Throughout history, resupplying troops in the field has always presented logistical challenges. In the ancient Near East it often fell to local populations to resupply troops campaigning in their regions. Among the Hittites, for instance, troops on the march, along with their horses, were typically provided with food from strategically placed supply depots, but once outside Hittite-controlled territory, the soldiers either foraged and lived off captured booty or were resupplied by the host country, if it was a treaty partner.³⁵⁹ In the

present instance, Jesse’s provisions may have gone to a supply officer rather than to his sons directly (see next two comments).

Bring back some assurance from them (17:18). The English translation of this instruction from Jesse to David suggests that he is to bring back assurance that his brothers are faring well. This is one possible understanding of ‘*rubbatām* (“their pledge, token”).³⁶⁰ There may also be a sense that David is to bring back some indication that he has fulfilled his mission and delivered the goods.³⁶¹ In view of the responsibility of local populations to supply troops in their area (see [preceding comment](#)), a further possibility is that David is to bring back a token as “proof that Jesse had met his obligations to supply the army,” which would in turn be “the brothers’ way of collecting their rations.”³⁶²

David left his things with the keeper of supplies (17:22). If the grain and loaves brought by David are for the resupply of the troops, his depositing them with the “keeper of supplies”³⁶³ marks the fulfillment of that part of the errand. But if his task is to deliver the grain and loaves directly to his brothers (and the cheeses to the commanding officer), then he is simply placing them in safe-keeping as long as attention is directed toward the battle lines. In either case, the context favors the view that David acts responsibly both in the case of the supplies and in the case of the sheep he earlier entrusted to a shepherd (lit., “keeper”; v. 20), contrary to the charge of irresponsibility laid against him by his older brother Eliab (v. 28).



Mealtime in an army camp

Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

Exempt his father’s family from taxes in Israel (17:25). Taxes are not

explicitly mentioned in the Hebrew text; rather, “exempt . . . from taxes” is simply “free” (*ḥopšî*), most often used to distinguish those who are not slaves. Attempts have been made on the basis of similar sounding terms in Akkadian and Ugaritic to liken these “free” people to social classes in ancient Near Eastern societies (craftsmen, farmers, serfs, etc., who fell midway between slaves and landowners),³⁶⁴ but as McCarter observes, “this is contrary to Israelite usage, where there is no evidence of a distinct *ḥopšî* class.”³⁶⁵ McCarter finds Rainey’s paralleling the current context with the situation attested in Ugaritic of a soldier who by his exploits is “granted freedom by the king from service to the palace” (RS 16.269:14–16) to be more persuasive.³⁶⁶

In the end, certainty of what precisely the promised freedom would be is elusive, but it may well have involved exemption from further obligations to the king (including the obligation to pay taxes). Perhaps it even involved the right of the hero’s family to live “as pensioners of the royal house.”³⁶⁷

Uncircumcised Philistine (17:26). See [comments on 14:6](#) and [31:4](#). David’s words reflect a theologically based confidence similar to that of Jonathan when he, too, went up against the Philistines despite apparently unfavorable odds (see [14:1–14](#)).

Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear (17:36). The land of the Bible today is remarkably diverse in its ecological zones with their respective flora and fauna, and perhaps was even more so in antiquity. This diversity is especially noteworthy in a land so modest in size. Just as ancient Palestine was the bridge of the Fertile Crescent, connecting Mesopotamia on the north and east with Egypt on the south and west, it was also the meeting place of very different ecological zones: “the Palearctic, the Irano-Turanian, the Tropical, and the Saharo-Arabian, each with its own characteristic climate, flora, and fauna.”³⁶⁸



Heroes and kings are often portrayed as fighting lions
Caryn Reeder, courtesy of the British Museum

Within these zones, the diverse climates in Israel/Palestine have apparently remained fairly constant from biblical times to the present. That progressive deforestation and the resultant erosion of hilltops have changed the landscape and certain ecosystems since biblical times seems likely.³⁶⁹ Such changes inevitably affected animal habitat and range. Thus, although references to lions and bears may seem implausible to those familiar with the land today, in biblical times these creatures were well known and rightly feared.³⁷⁰

The lion that David encountered was probably of the Asiatic variety (*Panthera leo persica*), which closely resembles the African lion but is now virtually extinct—there are less than three hundred still in the wild in the Gir Forest of northwestern India and two hundred or so in zoos worldwide. The last sure evidence of a lion in Palestine was one killed in the thirteenth century A.D.³⁷¹

The bear David defeated was likely a brown bear of the subspecies *Ursus arctos syriacus*, a somewhat smaller and paler relative of the well-known grizzly bear (*Ursus arctos horribilis*). These bears can still be found in parts of the Middle East, but they disappeared from Palestine in the first half of the twentieth century. Preferring fruits and wild forage, bears would likely have menaced livestock mostly in winter months when such vegetarian fare was scarce. Despite their seemingly gentler eating habits, bears may have been even more feared than lions because of their greater strength and more erratic behavior.³⁷²

Tangible evidence of lions and bears—in the form of their remains—has been unearthed by archaeologists excavating Iron Age levels in Palestine (the period of the settlement and monarchy).³⁷³ The obvious point of David's words to Saul is not to boast in his own prowess but to stress that the God who delivered him from the most terrifying of beasts can surely deliver him from the terrifying Philistine giant.

Saul dressed David in his own tunic (17:38). On the use of armor in antiquity, see [sidebar on "Goliath's Armor"](#) at 17:5–7. Whether Saul's motive was to help David or vicariously to share in any possible victory (or something else), dressing David in the royal armor presents an ironic, if unintentional, foreshadowing of things to come (cf. Jonathan's willing transfer of royal regalia to David in 18:3–4).

With his sling in his hand, [he] approached the Philistine (17:40). One is not to think of a forked stick with an elastic catapult stretched between it, which

is a modern invention, but of a leather or cloth pouch to which two cords were attached. A slingstone, either crafted by hand or, as in the present instance, rounded by water action, was placed in the pouch and then, after swinging the sling overhead or to the side to gain momentum, was released at great speed by letting go of one of the cords. Slings were affordable but effective weapons used, for instance, by shepherds to drive off predators. David's background as a shepherd would have afforded him opportunity to develop considerable skill in the use of a sling. In time, slings became (along with bows and arrows) a regular part of the long-range arsenal of ancient Near Eastern armies.



Slinger on Orthostat from Tell Halaf
© The Trustees of the British Museum

Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks? (17:43). Dogs were not highly esteemed in the ancient Near East (see [comment on 24:14](#)). Goliath's taunting words were typical in prebattle situations, especially when a contest of champions was involved (see [comments on 17:4; 2 Sam. 2:14](#)). In such situations, an exchange of insults, termed "flyting," was intended to ridicule and shame the opponent. Flyting has been variously defined as "a verbal contest in which opponents try to outdo one another, often by hurling 'cutting words' at one another or words that will shame the opponent",³⁷⁴ "antiphonal insults from

opposing forces”; or “an exchange of verbal provocations between hostile speakers in a predictable setting.”³⁷⁵ Often, “the boasts and insults are traditional, and their arrangement and rhetorical form is highly stylized.”³⁷⁶

Not surprisingly, flyting takes place in numerous contexts both ancient and modern (today, the term “trash-talking” captures the idea). One kind of flyting (“ludic”) consists of words only, while a second kind (“heroic”) leads to physical combat.³⁷⁷ The Bible contains numerous examples of flyting, mainly of the “heroic” variety (e.g., the altercation between Abijah and Jeroboam [2 Chron. 13:2–17], between Amaziah and Jehoash [2 Kings 14:8–14], and in a modified sense between Elijah and prophets of Baal [1 Kings 18:21–40, esp. v. 27]).³⁷⁸

Goliath’s specific taunt to David, “Am I a dog that you come at me with sticks?” may suggest that he does not see David’s sling, which he would certainly know to be a dangerous weapon in skilled hands (see [comment on v. 40](#)). Among the ailments that often attend giantism is poor eyesight, often a kind of tunnel vision.³⁷⁹ The shepherd’s simple sling hanging limp in his hand may have appeared to Goliath as no more than a stick, though we know from verse 40 that David has both a staff and a sling in his hands.

The battle is the LORD’s (17:47). See [comment on 14:6](#).

Struck the Philistine on the forehead (17:49). Questions have been raised concerning whether a stone from David’s sling could have struck Goliath’s forehead, given the kinds of helmets that Philistines are depicted as wearing (see [illustration](#)).³⁸⁰ But the biblical text does not suggest that Goliath’s armor was *typical* Philistine hardware but exceptional (see [sidebar on “Goliath’s Armor”](#) at [17:5–7](#)). That said, it is interesting to note that the Hebrew word rendered “greave” in verse 6 (*mishâ*), which occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible, is very close, if not identical, to the Hebrew word for “forehead” (*mēšah*).³⁸¹ Noting this curiosity, A. Deem has suggested that David’s stone finds its mark not in Goliath’s forehead but at the “greave” in the gap required for walking.³⁸² It is difficult to decide between these two interpretations; in either case Goliath is toppled and quickly dispatched by David, using Goliath’s own sword (v. 51).



Captured Philistine on relief of Ramesses III at Medinet Habu

Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY

He cut off his head (17:51). Decapitation of enemy dead was a common practice in the ancient Near East and a recurrent motif in Samuel (see [comments on 5:3–4](#); [31:4](#); cf. 18:2). Sometimes, as here, the enemy’s own weapon is used. Having bested his opponent with an arrow in his neck, the Egyptian hero Sinuhe boasts: “He cried out and fell on his nose. I felled him with his (own) battle-axe and raised my cry of victory over his back, while every Asiatic roared”³⁸³ (cf. also Benaiah’s killing of a “huge Egyptian” with his own spear in [2 Sam. 23:21](#)).



Warrior holding head of enemy

Kim Walton, courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum

Their dead were strewn along the Shaaraim road to Gath and Ekron (17:52). On Gath, see [comment on 5:8](#); on Ekron, see [comment on 5:10](#). Shaaraim has been identified with modern Khirbit esh-Sharia, which lies some six miles east of Gath, seven miles east-southeast of Ekron, and a couple of miles northeast of Azekah.

Saul Fears David (18:1–30)

Jonathan made a covenant with David . . . took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David (18:3–4). The covenant described here is probably made “on an equal basis between Jonathan and David, with a certain stress on the initiative of Jonathan.”³⁸⁴ Jonathan’s transfer of his robe, tunic, sword, bow, and belt to David is a subsequent, symbolic act. In the light of Jonathan’s later references to David’s ascendancy (20:14–15; 23:17), the act here seems to symbolize “a deliberate and free transference of the right to the throne by Jonathan to David.”³⁸⁵

Jonathan’s action may be likened to symbolic acts performed by the prophets, but it almost certainly also has legal significance. Texts from Ugarit and Emar, for instance, illustrate the symbolic significance of mantles (robes) in matters relating to inheritance or even royal succession. Two texts describe how “a son who refuses to obey his father is forced to leave the house and deposit his mantle on the stool or the door-bolt.”³⁸⁶ The implication is that the son no longer holds legal status as a member of the family. Another addresses a situation in which a prince must choose whether to stay with his father, Ammistamru, king of Ugarit, or follow his divorced mother. Should he choose to follow his mother, he must leave his mantle on the throne and depart,³⁸⁷ the implication being that he has relinquished his legal status as prince.

These and other extrabiblical examples do not fully match Jonathan’s action, as they mention only the relinquishment of the mantle, not its transference to another, but the general point seems clear. A special robe or mantle could serve as a symbol of a person’s identity and status; thus, to transfer it to another signified a transfer of status. In this instance and the later ones, Jonathan acknowledges David’s right to the throne.

Women came out . . . to meet King Saul with singing and dancing (18:6). Judging from both the (biblical) textual evidence and artifactual evidence unearthed by archaeologists, we may conclude that dancing, often accompanied by music, was a common feature in religious and secular celebrations in tenth-century Israel, as well as in other periods. Indeed, dancing seems to have been an integral part of ritual ceremonies among Israel’s neighbors as well, such as Philistia and Phoenicia.



Musicians greet the king on his return from battle as the dead float down the river.

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

Representations of dancers and musicians are found throughout the ancient Near East. Mazar has drawn attention to the complementary nature of the so-called “Dancer’s Stand” from Tel Qasile and the “Musician’s Stand” from Ashdod.³⁸⁸ The biblical writers employ a dozen different verbal roots to designate dancing but do not describe the dances in any detail.³⁸⁹ For more on dancing in ancient Israel, see [comment on 2 Samuel 6:14](#).

All Israel and Judah loved David (18:16). On the character of “love” as political loyalty and service, see [comment on 2 Samuel 19:6](#).

Price for the bride (18:25). Twice Saul offers to make David his son-in-law. This second time he seems less mindful of the promise made earlier (17:25), which he may have regarded as no longer valid, and he is more intent on David’s proving his martial skill (or dying in the attempt!). Payment of a bride price was common in the Old Testament world, as it is still in some cultures today. It was the prerogative of the bride’s father to set the price, and Saul sets it dangerously high at a hundred Philistine foreskins. Body parts (heads, hands, etc.) often served as trophies of war, and Saul’s unusual choice is designed to assure that David actually kills *Philistines*—other of Israel’s neighbors were likely circumcised (see [comment on 14:6](#)).



Armies would remove body parts from the slain enemy to number the casualties. Though often heads or hands, in this relief it is a pile of phalli reminiscent of David's collection of Philistine foreskins.

V. Philips Long

Merenptah's Great Libyan War Inscription from Karnak repeatedly mentions that the "phalli with foreskins" were being collected from slain enemies. This shows that the request made of David is not that odd.³⁹⁰ David meets Saul's challenge twice over, presenting two hundred foreskins (v. 27). Saul views this success as evidence that Yahweh is with David (v. 28), and his fear of him grows into full-blown enmity (v. 29).

Saul Seeks David's Life (19:1–24)

Michal took an idol and laid it on the bed (19:13). The nature of Michal's "idol" (*t^erāpîm*) is somewhat mysterious. Attempts to clarify the character of "teraphim" etymologically have not proved successful. More fruitful has been a phenomenological approach, focusing on the apparent function of teraphim in their fifteen biblical occurrences. The general consensus that teraphim must have been "household gods"³⁹¹ has been challenged recently by van der Toorn, who prefers the notion that teraphim were "ancestor statues."³⁹²

The latter theory may help to explain the Bible's somewhat ambivalent attitude toward teraphim, but a definitive answer to the question of what the teraphim were remains elusive.³⁹³ Even their size seemed to vary considerably. While Rachel was able to conceal Laban's teraphim in the camel's saddle on which she was sitting (Gen. 31:34–35), Michal's teraphim are apparently large enough to simulate a reclining David. About all that can be said with relative certainty is that teraphim figured more prominently in "folk religion" than in the official cult.

Naioth (19:18). This word, which occurs only in [1 Samuel 19–20](#), is associated with the place name Ramah and is probably a noun signifying "camps," where the prophets at Ramah were active (the prophets' lodge in [2 Kings 6:1–2](#) may provide an analog).

A group of prophets prophesying (19:20). For discussions of prophecy in the Old Testament and the ancient Near East, see [comments on 3:1](#) and [10:5](#).

The great cistern at Secu (19:22). Secu is probably not a proper noun but a common noun meaning a "bare height," perhaps here associated with a threshing floor near Ramah.³⁹⁴

He stripped off his robes (19:24). As discussed at [18:3–4](#), both in the Bible and the ancient Near East more broadly, special garments often marked a person's identity, status, or rank. Saul's (involuntary) divestment of his royal robes here serves as yet another reminder that, in Yahweh's eyes, he is no longer the rightful king (cf. [15:28](#)).

Jonathan Aids and Encourages David (20:1–42)

Tomorrow is the New Moon festival (20:5). The Mesopotamian calendar included various festivals, or special days. Many were celebrated on certain days of the month—the seventh day, the fifteenth, or the beginning of the month (the new moon).³⁹⁵ In Israel, too, the New Moon festival was a time of rejoicing. Marked by special sacrifices (Num. 28:11–15) and the sounding of trumpets (10:10; cf. Ps. 81:3), the festival is often mentioned in conjunction with the most regular of special days, the Sabbath (2 Kings 4:23), and it may have been subject to similar regulations (Amos 8:5). Judging from the prominence of the king in ancient Near Eastern festival celebrations³⁹⁶ and from passages such as Ezekiel 45:17, David’s absence from Saul’s table may have had political repercussions. Observance of the New Moon festival continued into the postexilic period (Neh. 10:33; cf. also Col. 2:16).³⁹⁷

Ceremonially unclean (20:26). The issue is not so much one of physical as of ritual purity, though the boundary between these two was vague in the ancient Near East.³⁹⁸ Thus, any uncleanness, whether incurred by contact with bodily fluids, unclean objects, or dead bodies, typically required more than a bath, often some kind of sacrifice, or a waiting period. Cleanliness legislation is presented most fully in Leviticus 11–15. On the present circumstance of uncleanness barring one from a festal meal, cf. 7:19–21.

They kissed each other (20:41). On possible connotations of a kiss in the ancient Near East, see [comment on 2 Samuel 20:9](#). Here Jonathan and David, in the face of the dire situation they face, kiss each other as an expression of their friendship and the covenant existing between them. The Gilgamesh Epic speaks of a similar exchange between the hero Gilgamesh, apparently about to embark on a dangerous venture, and Enkidu, who has failed to dissuade him: “They kissed each other and formed a friendship.”³⁹⁹

David Deceives Abimelech at Nob and Escapes to Gath (21:1–15)

Nob (21:1). The exact location of Nob is uncertain, but several sites within a couple of miles of Jerusalem are plausible candidates. Isaiah 10:32 speaks of an invader standing at Nob and shaking his fist at Jerusalem, which confirms the proximity of the two sites. After the destruction of Shiloh as a cultic center (see [comment on 1:3](#)), Nob became the “town of the priests” (22:19).

Consecrated bread . . . provided the men have kept themselves from women (21:4). Consecration, or purification, of soldiers prior to battle was a common practice in the ancient Near East,⁴⁰⁰ as in the Old Testament. Ritual purity would be all the more required before handling “consecrated bread,” usually reserved for the priests. Uncleanness could be brought about in various ways (see [comment on 20:26](#)). Sexual intercourse could lead to a state of ritual uncleanness (Lev. 15:18), and abstention was often ordered for a period prior to an auspicious occasion (Ex. 19:15). Fear of contaminating the camp may have played some part in Uriah’s refusal to visit his wife, Bathsheba, in [2 Samuel 11:11–12](#).



Bread was often part of offerings and would have been consecrated to be used ritually.

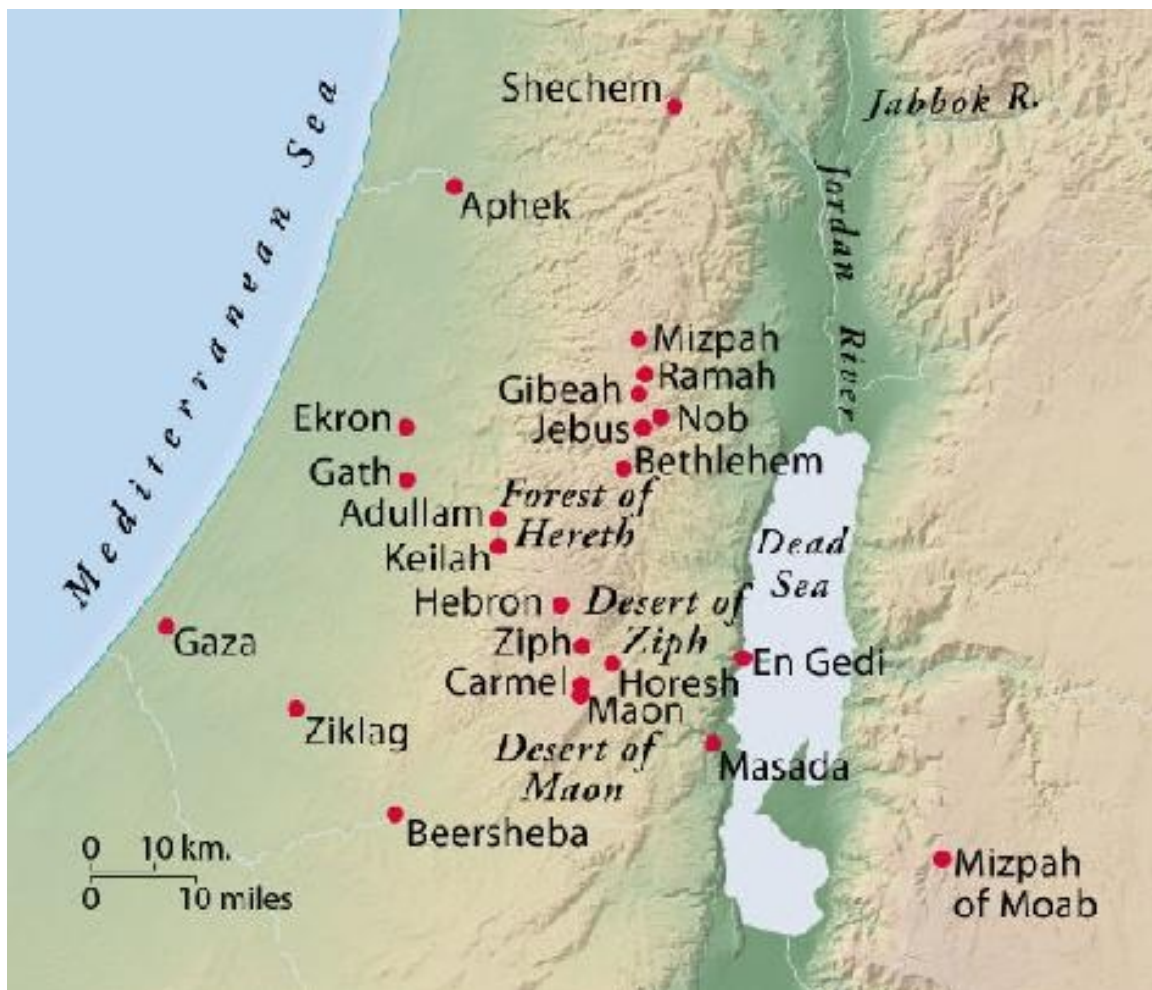
Goliath’s sword . . . behind the ephod (21:9). On the three senses of “ephod” in the Bible, see [comment on 2:18](#). All three designate sacred garments of some sort, from simple linen ephods worn by regular priests to the highly elaborate ephod worn by the high priest to costly garments not associated with a human wearer. In the ancient Near East, ornate vestments not only were worn by high officials but also sometimes adorned the statues of deities.⁴⁰¹ It has been suggested that the ephod here in Nob is not a garment at all but “some kind of object of veneration, perhaps even a divine image.”⁴⁰²

This suggestion may be unnecessary, however, as the more ornate garments, often containing gold threads, would likely have been draped over something—either a statue or a stand—when not being worn. In the present context, with the ark unavailable (see [comment on 6:21](#)), the ephod at Nob may have been “the holiest relic of the sanctuary,” lending plausibility to the notion that “captured articles of power such as Goliath’s sword” would have been placed near it, as the ark had earlier been placed in the temple of Dagon (cf. [5:2](#)).⁴⁰³

Achish king of Gath (21:10). On Gath, see [comment on 5:8](#). “Achish” may be a title rather than a proper name; in either case it appears to be, like “Goliath,” of Philistine origin.⁴⁰⁴ A later “Achish” (Akhayus) is attested on the recently discovered Ekron Inscription (see [comment on 5:10](#)).

David Gathers a Company (22:1–5)

Escaped to the cave of Adullam (22:1). In biblical times, caves often provided refuge for those in distress (cf., e.g., 13:6). Adullam has long been identified with Khirbet esh-Sheikh Madhkur,⁴⁰⁵ which lies near Socoh and Keilah in the Shephelah, roughly nine miles southeast of Gath, seven miles south of Beth Shemesh, and sixteen miles southwest of Jerusalem.⁴⁰⁶ The king of Adullam was among the thirty-one Canaanite kings defeated by Joshua (see Josh. 12:15), and the town is listed among Judah’s holdings in the western foothills (15:35).⁴⁰⁷ As a border town, Adullam was doubtless contested from time to time by the Philistines. Adullam may have been the “stronghold” mentioned in 22:4 (see [comment](#)), but this is not the only possibility.



Region of David’s movements

Those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around

him (22:2). Shifting alliances were characteristic of the ancient Near East, as is illustrated by the behaviors of the marginalized Habiru in the second millennium (see [sidebar on “Hebrew/Habiru”](#) at 4:6). The judge Jephthah, during his own period of marginalization, was joined by a band of “adventurers” (Judg. 11:3 NIV; NRSV has “outlaws”; JPS has “men of low character”). To David comes a “motley band of marginal people,” who are suffering in various ways; perhaps some are “smarting under the oppression of tyranny,” some are “victims of the neglect of laws forbidding usury,” and some are “in despair at the way the country was being run.”⁴⁰⁸ The “discontented” are (lit.) those “bitter in spirit” (i.e., have suffered some great loss, are economically deprived, are homeless, etc.) and as a result are eager for change.⁴⁰⁹ David’s attraction to these disenfranchised people is far more than a partisan attraction to southerners against northerners.

David went to Mizpah in Moab (22:3). Several sites named Mizpah, which means something like “lookout point” or “watchtower,” are mentioned in the Bible (see [comment on 7:5](#)). Moabite Mizpah is mentioned only here and its specific location is unknown, though the Jordanian sites of Kerak and Rujm el-Meshrefeh lying southwest of Madaba in Jordan have been suggested.⁴¹⁰ David’s reception by the Moabite king may be related generally to the “practice of providing sanctuary for adversaries of enemies”⁴¹¹ and, more specifically, to David’s Moabite ancestry through Ruth (Ruth 4:13–17).

The Bible offers several examples of individuals seeking refuge in foreign territories (e.g., Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Absalom). An interesting ancient Near Eastern example is the story of Idrimi, King of Aleppo, who was forced to flee his native land, found refuge among his mother’s kin, and eventually took up with the Habiru in northern Canaan for seven years, before returning to become king of Alalakh in northwestern Syria⁴¹² (see [sidebar on “Future King on the Run”](#)).

Future King on the Run

The following is excerpted from The Story of Idrimi, King of Alalakh: “I am Idrimi. . . . An evil deed happened in Halab, the seat of my family, and we fled to the people of Emar, brothers of my mother, and we lived (then) in Emar.”^{A-86} Aspiring to better his standing, Idrimi leaves Emar and begins to attract followers.

In Canaan, a band including some of his own countrymen gathers around

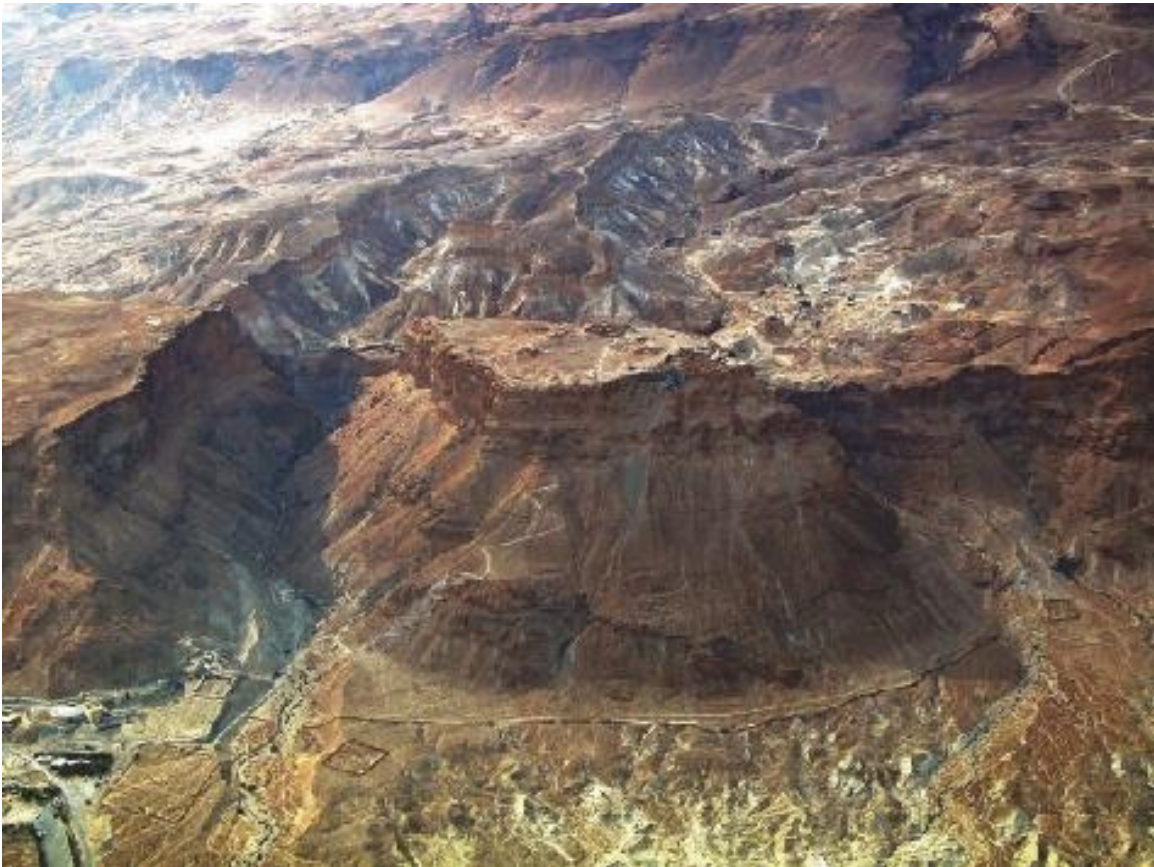
him. “They discovered that I was the son of their overlord and gathered around me. There I grew up and stayed a long time. For seven years I lived among the Hapiru-people.” When oracular signs (i.e., the entrails of sheep and the flight direction of released birds) prove favorable, Idrimi returns to his native territory and begins to establish his rule.



This statue of King Idrimi of Alalakh was inscribed with 104 lines in the mid-fifteenth century. It apparently stood in the sanctuary at Alalakh, but was discovered carefully buried nearby, probably in an effort to prevent its destruction by invaders.

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

David was in the stronghold (22:4). While David’s “stronghold” may have been at Adullam (see [comment on 22:1](#)),⁴¹³ other possibilities include an unspecified site somewhere in Moabite territory—note Gad’s injunction to David “not [to] stay in the stronghold” but to “go into the land of Judah” (22:5)—or perhaps the natural fortress of Masada. On the latter possibility, Aharoni has observed that the best route between Judah and Moab involved crossing the Jordan at a ford opposite Masada, thus making Masada a candidate for the “fortress used by David as his base in the wilderness.”⁴¹⁴ The discovery of Iron Age potsherds at Masada confirms that the site was used during the Israelite period,⁴¹⁵ but the route itself has “not [yet] been confirmed archaeologically either side of the Dead Sea.”⁴¹⁶



Masada

David left and went to the forest of Hereth (22:5). Mentioned only here in the Bible, this forest's specific location is unknown, the problem of identification being exacerbated by uncertainties regarding the location of the "stronghold" David is to leave. At a minimum, the forest must have been west of the Dead Sea in the tribal territory of Judah. McCarter notes that a modern village called "Kharas" (cf. Hereth?) lies near "Khirbet Qîlā, which preserves the name of ancient Keilah";⁴¹⁷ this places the forest in the vicinity of Adullam (see [comment on 22:1](#)).

Saul Massacres the Priests at Nob (22:6–23)

Saul, spear in hand, was seated under the tamarisk tree . . . at Gibeah (22:6). On the location of Gibeah, see [comment on 10:26](#). Saul’s position seated under a (tamarisk) tree recalls many such scenes involving ancient Near Eastern rulers. Often cited is the Ugaritic ’Aqhatu Legend, in which the hero Dan’el is found

ting before the gate,

neath a mighty tree on the threshing floor, Judging the cause of the widow,

ljudicating the case of the fatherless.⁴¹⁸

The rendering “mighty tree” is uncertain, however, and a more recent translation by Pardee reads “among the leaders.”⁴¹⁹ One is reminded also of Deborah holding court beneath the “Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel” (Judg. 4:5).

In the present context, Saul sits beneath a tamarisk (*Tamarix*), a smallish tree which had several varieties in Palestine and which was typically found in drier regions. In Mesopotamian incantations, the tamarisk was a holy tree with purifying qualities. Images were made from its wood, and it was at times connected with cosmic stability. With its roots toward the underworld and its branches toward the sky, the tamarisk symbolized mediation “between the temporal world and the divine domains.”⁴²⁰ Whether this tree held such significance in Saul’s day is uncertain, but Saul’s overriding concern seems to be to scold his troops for their supposed disloyalty.



Tamarisk tree

Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

Will the son of Jesse give all of you fields and vineyards? (22:7). The practice of both rewarding and encouraging loyalty to the king by royal grants of land, houses, vineyards, wells, and the like was widespread in the ancient Near East. Royal rewards and incentives are evidenced in Babylonian, Assyrian, Hittite, and Ugaritic documents.⁴²¹ As Saggs explains in a discussion of the Early Dynastic period (ca. 2900–2400 B.C.), “Once kingship had developed, there also came to be royal estates. . . . The king would normally reward those who served him with a grant of land; legally the ownership of such land remained with the king, but it could become de facto an hereditary holding if the grantee had a son able to succeed to his duties.”⁴²²



Tablet granting restoration of land by King Nabu-apla-iddina, ninth century B.C.
Michael Greenhalgh/ArtServe, courtesy of the British Museum

Even a foreigner such as the Edomite Doeg could become the beneficiary of royal largesse. The following thirteenth-century Ugaritic text provides an example of an Egyptian receiving a royal grant:

From this day Ammistamri, son of Niqmepa, king of Ugarit, has given to Pa'ahi the Egyptian the house of Abdi-ba'al [*sic?*] son-in-law of Kunabilu, and the field of Sahteya and three iku [just over 2 1/2 acres] of field from the field of Ilimmasiru. And no one shall take it from the hand of Pa'ahi or from the hand of his son or the son of his sons. This gift is given for ever.⁴²³

Although the primary motives for awarding land grants are not often spelled out in the extant documents, they “were presumably reward for service, encouragement of the careful fulfillment of duties, and the desire to tie the recipients closely to the monarchy.”⁴²⁴

Ahimelech inquired of the LORD for him (22:10). In the ancient Near East, one of the duties of (at least certain classes of) priests was to inquire of the deity on behalf of the king and others. In Mesopotamia, for instance, priests were trained in the omen texts and in the art of reading omens from animal entrails (e.g., sheep livers), from oils, from birds, and so on.⁴²⁵ In Israel, too, priests were often involved in divine inquiry, although using the Urim and Thummim rather than the means just listed (see [comments on 14:3; 14:18–19](#)).

Whether Ahimelech had in fact inquired of the Lord for David is unclear. The statement in this verse to the effect that Ahimelech had done so comes from Doeg the Edomite, and so it is not necessarily to be trusted. The NIV's rendering of 22:15 ("Was that day the first time I inquired of God for him? Of course not!") seems to suggest that Ahimelech himself admits to making inquiry for David. But the verse may also be rendered, "Did I begin now to inquire of God for him? Far be it from me!"⁴²⁶

Put to the sword Nob, the town of the priests (22:19). The massacre of the inhabitants of the priestly town of Nob—"men and women, its children and infants, and its cattle, donkeys and sheep"—strikes the modern reader as an illegal outrage. A recent study considering the present episode in the light of Hittite literature, however, maintains that priests in Israel were "obliged by oaths of loyalty to the royal authority," just as were Hittite priests.⁴²⁷ A text from Mari entitled *The Protocol of the Diviner* illustrates what such an oath of loyalty might look like. A relevant excerpt in which the diviner swears loyalty to Zimri-Lim, the king, reads as follows:

id the one who makes an evil rebellion [against the life]

Zimri-Lim, [my] lord,

io speaks to me about taking oracles,

who speaks to a diviner, my colleague,

id I he]a[r] or I see in the oracles

rformed by the h]and of a diviner, my colleague, [I swear I will not] conceal it. In that very day I will surely tell [Zim]ri-Lim, my lord.⁴²⁸



Enemy being slaughtered at the battle of Til-Tuba Werner Forman Archive/The British Museum

The penalty for disloyalty could be extreme. In the Hittite Instructions to Priests and Temple Officials, for example, offenses against human superiors or a god are punished severely, potentially including the “total annihilation of the ‘sinner’ and his house.”⁴²⁹ A section using the slave/master relationship to illustrate the kinds of punishments an offender could expect concludes with the threat that “if he ever dies, he does not die alone, but his family (is) included with him.” The next section spells out the fate of one who offends a god:

If then, on the other hand, anyone vexes the feelings of a god, does the god punish him alone for it? Does he not punish his wife, his children, his descendants, his family, his slaves male (and) female, his cattle, his sheep, (and) his harvest for it, and remove him utterly?⁴³⁰

On the basis of such comparisons, one might argue that Saul’s annihilation of the inhabitants of Nob is neither illegal nor outrageous. For Taggar-Cohen, “the act was expected of Saul: this is the way to punish treacherous and disloyal servants.” Yet features of the biblical text, especially the unwillingness of Saul’s courtiers to stretch out their hands against the priests, suggest a “tension between the religious feelings of the courtiers and the king’s law.”⁴³¹

What must not be forgotten in this discussion is that Saul is no longer rightful king from the perspective of the author, having been rejected by Yahweh in [15:28](#); thus, he has no right either to expect loyalty or to punish those who lack

it. In the end, Saul's actions remain an outrageous sacrilege on a number of counts, and their heinousness is only underscored by the fact that the list of those whom he destroys at Nob matches almost verbatim the list of those he failed to destroy, by his own disobedience, in his battle against the Amalekites (see [15:3](#)). The irony of this comparison highlights the extent of Saul's depravity and his lack of seriousness in dealing with Yahweh (see also ch. [28](#)).

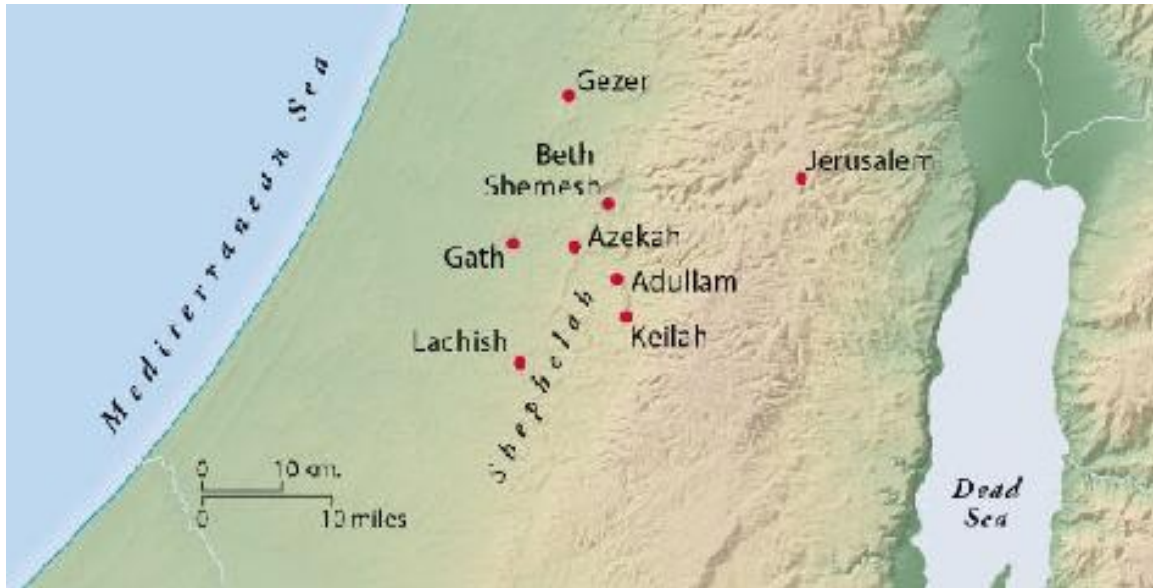
David Saves the Citizens of Keilah (23:1–6)

Philistines are fighting against Keilah (23:1). On the Philistines as Israel's adversary to the southwest, see [comment on 4:1](#). Keilah has been identified with Khirbet Qila, some eight miles northwest of Hebron and at the eastern extremity of the foothills (Shephelah) separating the coastal plain to the west from the central hills to the east (see [comment on 22:5](#)). One of a string of border towns often contested by the Philistines, the site of Keilah has not yet been excavated. While the comment of David's men in verse 3, distinguishing Keilah from Judahite territory, expresses the tenuous status of Keilah as a border town between vying forces, David's saving of the people of Keilah out of the hand of the Philistines (v. 5) attests their Judahite connection (as does their allocation to Judah in Josh. 15:44).



Keilah

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com



Keilah and its region

Looting the threshing floors (23:1). In the agricultural societies of the ancient Near East, grain was a highly valued commodity. Grain that reached the threshing floor was at the end of a lengthy process of labor-intensive cultivation and harvesting; thus, the looting of the threshing floors was a particularly effective means of weakening an adversary. The story of Gideon offers a parallel example of agricultural looting and destruction (Judg. 6:3–6, 11).



Egyptian tomb of Menna showing oxen threshing grain

The Changing Fate of Border Town Keilah

As a border town, Keilah appears to have been fortified (see Saul's reference to "gates and bars" in [23:7](#)). Several of the fourteenth-century Amarna letters mention Qiltu (or Qi'iltu), which is probably to be identified with the later biblical site of Keilah:

- EA 279: Šuwardata, the ruler of the city, speaks of having to "go fo[rt]h to Qiltu [again]st the t[raitors]."
- EA 280: Šuwardata reports having successfully waged war against Qiltu, with the result that "my city is restored to me."
- EA 289: the city of Qiltu is accused by 'Abdi-Ḥeba, governor of Jerusalem, of having engaged in a conspiracy to isolate Jerusalem.
- EA 290: 'Abdi-Ḥeba names Qiltu, Gazru (biblical Gezer), and Gimtu (biblical Gath) as towns making trouble in the area. He urges the Pharaoh to send archers, lest the "land of the king . . . desert to the Ḥapiru."

Such references attest to the frequently changing status of Keilah and other border towns.

He inquired of the LORD (23:2). As in Israel it was understood that human destinies were in God's hands, so also throughout the ancient Near East the gods were regarded as controlling human affairs. Thus before any major undertaking, it was customary to consult the deity or deities. Before launching a military campaign, the king of the Hittites, for instance, consulted "his superiors, the gods," asking questions such as the following:

"Do you, O god, approve a campaign this year for His Majesty on the Durmatta front?" or "Do you, O god, approve a campaign this year by His Majesty on the Nerik front?" The king might inquire about his control of land while on campaign: "If while My Majesty is returning from a campaign (in the east) against Assyria, will these (northern) borderlands not defect and no harm come to the holy city of Nerik?" Or the king might ask the very outcome of a campaign: "Will you give me the gods of the king of Assyria and will I defeat him in battle?"⁴³²

Formally, David's inquiry of Yahweh is along the same lines, though from the biblical perspective, David's God is the one true God, as distinct from the pagan gods regarded in the Bible as "nothings." David was diligent in consulting Yahweh before making any important moves (e.g., [30:7](#); [2 Sam. 2:1](#); [5:19](#)),

although not without some failures (see [comment on 1 Sam. 27:2](#)). By contrast, Saul's commitment to gaining direction from Yahweh was marginal from the beginning and declined over time (see [14:18–19, 36–42](#); [28:3–25](#)). On some of the accepted modes of divine inquiry in Israel, see [comment on 28:6](#).

Saul Pursues David but Is Thwarted by the Philistines (23:7–29)

Bring the ephod (23:9). On the use of the ephod as an oracular device, see [comment on 2:18](#).

David stayed in the desert strongholds and in the hills of the Desert of Ziph (23:14). The town of Ziph (associated with Tell Zif, some five miles southeast of Hebron and thirteen miles southeast of Keilah) occupied a high vantage point overlooking the wilderness of Judah. Archaeologically, Ziph is attested several times on stamped jar handles from the late eighth century (the time of King Hezekiah).⁴³³ These are of the *lmlk*—“belonging to the king”—variety, over eight hundred of which have been recovered from some twenty Judean sites.



LMLK seals from Lachish with “Ziph” inscribed Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

In addition to those with Ziph, others attest the names Sucoh, Hebron, and *mmst*.⁴³⁴ It has been postulated that these four sites were “the chief towns of four administrative districts where Hezekiah of Judah built stores which could be drawn upon in the event of an Assyrian invasion.”⁴³⁵ Ziph may also be mentioned in Arad ostrakon 17, though the reading is uncertain.⁴³⁶



Desert of Ziph

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

Horesh in the Desert of Ziph (23:15). While *ḥōreš* can mean a “forest” or “wooded area,” such a meaning seems unlikely in a desert region; thus, Horesh is probably a place name, perhaps to be associated with modern Khirbet Khoreisa, some two miles south of Ziph.⁴³⁷

Hill of Hakilah, south of Jeshimon (23:19). Mentioned only here and in 26:1, 3, the Hill of Hakilah has not been identified. Jeshimon is used in two senses: as a general designation for a desert or wasteland, and as specific name for certain such places. Here Jeshimon may designate a particularly “desolate and dangerous region” of the Judean wilderness,⁴³⁸ whose foreboding features tended to draw desperate people on the run—note Saul’s concern to gather intelligence about “all the hiding places [David] uses” (v. 23).

The Ziphites’ betrayal of David’s whereabouts to Saul does not appear to have been driven by an “instinct for self-preservation,” as was the case with the citizens of Keilah, but by “outright antipathy.”⁴³⁹ The Amarna letters give ample evidence of how troublesome to settled populations roving bands such as the Habiru could be, and the Ziphites may well “not have welcomed the idea of such a large contingent of freebooters in their neighbourhood.”⁴⁴⁰

Desert of Maon, in the Arabah south of Jeshimon (23:24). Continuing his flight southward, David reached Maon, a site some five miles south of Ziph that has been identified with modern Khirbet el-Ma‘in. A mile or so north of Maon lay Carmel (not to be confused with Mount Carmel on the north coast), and it was in this region that David came into conflict with the wealthy livestock owner Nabal (25:2–3). Baly describes the countryside around Maon and Carmel as consisting largely of “broad open hills with wide, open valleys” and grading off into desert on the south and east.⁴⁴¹

Maon, which means something like “den, haunt, refuge, dwelling,”⁴⁴² may reflect either the ruggedness and remoteness of the area bordering it to the south and east or, more likely, the characteristic dwellings of the herdsmen who occupied the site.⁴⁴³ As Aharoni has noted, many biblical sites “are named after particular buildings characterizing the settlement in its earlier stages or after the general form of its dwellings.”⁴⁴⁴ Archaeologically, Maon is attested on at least one ostrakon.⁴⁴⁵

Saul and his forces were closing in on David (23:26). The Hebrew word rendered “closing in” means to “surround, encircle,” suggesting that Saul may have been seeking to catch David in a pincer movement by sending troops around the “crag” in two directions.⁴⁴⁶

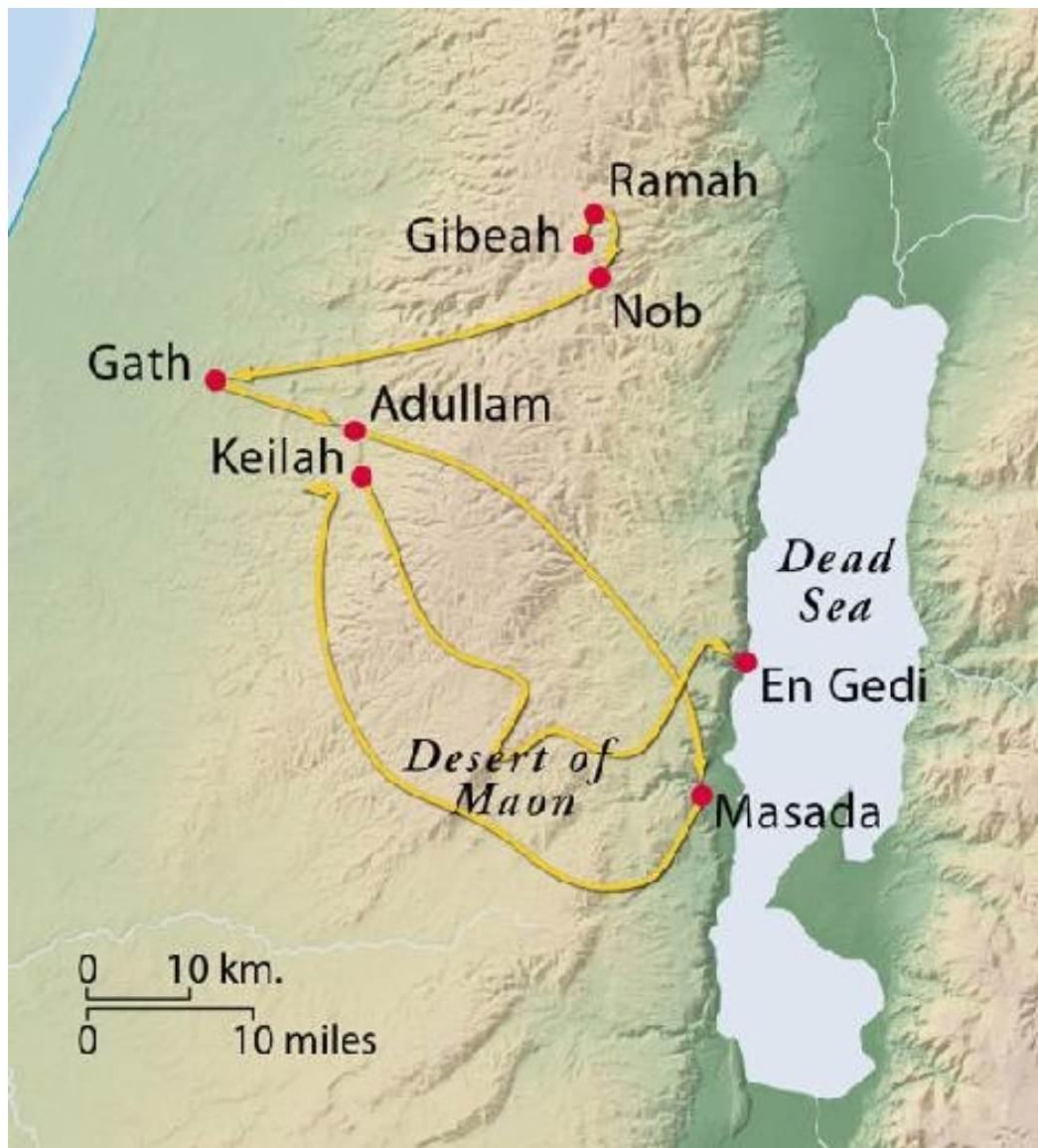
Strongholds of En Gedi (23:29). The name En Gedi means “spring of the young goat” and aptly designates an oasis on the western side of the Dead Sea some thirty-five miles south of Jerusalem and fifteen miles or more east of Ziph and Maon. The main spring of En Gedi (there are others in the area) issues from a height along the shore of the Dead Sea, emerging more than six hundred feet above the level of the sea. Both the presence of water in this arid region and the rugged terrain made En Gedi an ideal haunt for wild goats (see [comment on 24:1–2](#)) and for David on the run, offering him and his men both provision and protection.



En Gedi

Kim Walton

Not surprisingly, the oasis of En Gedi has a long settlement history, beginning as early as the fourth millennium B.C.—a temple from that period has been discovered⁴⁴⁷—and continuing throughout the biblical period.⁴⁴⁸ Excavations have yielded ample evidence of the cultic, military, and commercial significance of the En Gedi region.⁴⁴⁹ According to excavator B. Mazar, the “strongholds of En Gedi” may refer to “walled camps at the top of the mountains,”⁴⁵⁰ but the cavernous terrain itself may have provided refuge; in the next chapter, David will be found hiding in a cave at En Gedi.



David's flight from Saul

David Spares Saul’s Life in the Cave (24:1–22)

Desert of En Gedi . . . Craggs of the Wild Goats (24:1–2). En Gedi means “spring of the young goat” (see [comment on 23:29](#)). That a region within the Desert of En Gedi bore the name “Craggs of the Wild Goats” is further indication of the kind of wildlife that inhabited the area in biblical times, and even today. The Hebrew word rendered “wild goat” (*yā ‘ ēl*) actually identifies an ibex (*capra ibex nubiana*), which typically inhabits craggy terrain in desert regions and is noted for its agility and cliff-climbing ability (the Heb. name may be related to the verb *‘lh*, “to go up”).⁴⁵¹ It is reported that locals can even today identify the ibex cliffs at En Gedi and that herds of ibexes still thrive in the region.



Ibex from En Gedi area

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A cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself (24:3). While caves certainly are in the area, attempts to identify the specific cave in question have not succeeded.⁴⁵² The literal meaning of the Hebrew expression translated “relieve oneself” is to “cover one’s feet.” Its occurrence in Judges 3:24 (in the story of Ehud and Eglon) confirms its use as a euphemism. The logic of the expression is not certain, but it may relate to “the Israelite practice of disposing of human excrement in a sanitary manner through covering it over with dirt (cf. Deut. 23:13).”⁴⁵³ That Saul enters alone into the very cave where David and his men are hiding is an unmistakably providential irony.

David . . . cut off a corner of Saul’s robe . . . was conscience-stricken (24:4–5). For the significance of robes and hems and their removal see [comment on](#)

15:27, which notes that grasping or removing the hem of a garment can mean different things in different contexts. Moreover, in the discussion of Jonathan's transfer of his robe to David in 18:3–4, we noted that in the ancient Near East a “special robe or mantel could serve as a symbol of a person's identity and status, so that to transfer it to another signified a transfer of status.” In the present episode, David displays the severed hem of Saul's robe as evidence that he had been close enough to Saul to kill him but had refrained to do so, despite the encouragement of his men (24:10–11).

But the fact that no sooner had David “cut off the corner of Saul's robe” than his conscience began to strike him (24:5) suggests that his motive may not have been first or foremost to demonstrate his innocence to Saul but, rather, to divest Saul symbolically of his rule.

The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD's anointed (24:6). On the significance of Saul as “the LORD's anointed,” see [comments on 2:10](#). In brief, the king's anointing expressed his vassal relationship to the Great King, from whom his authority was derived, under whose protection he stood, and to whom he was beholden. Not only in the Bible but generally in the ancient Near East, “royal authority was seen to have a heavenly origin and destiny; where authority was at issue, the gods were believed to be nearby.”⁴⁵⁴



Pharaoh in the presence of four deities conveying the gods' sponsorship of the king
Brian J. McMorrow

To cite but a few examples, Eannatum, ruler of Lagash in its Early Dynastic period (early third millennium), speaks of himself as one “whose name was called by Enlil; endowed with strength by Ningirsu; envisaged by Nanshe in (her) heart; truly and rightly suckled by Ninhursaga; named by Inanna.” Gudea (near the end of the third millennium), also of Lagash, betrays a similarly polytheistic orientation in describing himself as the “Shepherd envisaged by Ningirsu in (his) heart . . . endowed with dignity and sublime scepter by Ig-alima . . . he whom Ningiszida his god has made to appear in the assembly with (proudly) raised head.” The famous Hammurabi (early second millennium) alludes to his divine election when he speaks of a time when “Shamash . . . with radiant face had joyfully looked upon me—me, his favourite shepherd, Hammurabi.”⁴⁵⁵

Nearer the time of David, an inscription of the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser I (1114–1076 B.C.) credits the king's rule to divine appointment:

Great gods, managers of heaven (and) underworld, whose attack means conflict and strife, who make great the sovereignty of Tiglath-pileser, beloved prince, your select one, attentive shepherd, whom you chose in the steadfastness of your hearts; upon him you set the exalted crown, you grandly established him for sovereignty over the land of the god Enlil, to him you granted leadership, supremacy, (and) valour, you pronounced forever his destiny of dominion as powerful and (the destiny) of his priestly progeny for service to Ehursagkurkurra.⁴⁵⁶

Such was the consistent tenor of royal inscriptions in the ancient Near East; all these (and many more) give the flavor of ancient Near Eastern thinking with respect to the link between royal authority and divine authorization. As a worshiper of the one true God, David is rightly respectful of the status of Yahweh's anointed (cf. 26:9) and, despite the fact that Saul is clearly out to kill him, regrets having lifted his hand, even symbolically, against Saul.

David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground (24:8). Bowing facedown on the ground was a common way in the ancient Near East of showing submission, reverence, and sometimes fear. A notable instance in the archaeological record is found on the so-called Black Obelisk, which shows King Jehu of Israel doing obeisance before the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (see photo).



Obeisance before the king

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In the El Amarna correspondence, local rulers in Canaan often begin their letters to their Egyptian superior with a standard greeting including the phrase, “I fall at the feet of the king.” A typical example, which mentions the troublesome ‘*apiru*, reads: “Say to the king, my lord, my god, my Sun: Message of Milkilu, your servant, the dirt at your feet. I fall at the feet of the king, my lord, 7 times and 7 times. May the king, my lord, know that the war against me and against Šuwardata is severe. So may the king, my lord, save his land from the power of the ‘Apiru.”⁴⁵⁷ Many of the letters clarify what “7 times and 7 times” may signify, saying something like the following: “I fall at the feet of the king, my lord, 7 times and 7 times, both on the stomach and on the back.”⁴⁵⁸ Ugaritic letters to the king or queen employ similar greetings. One letter varies the standard phrase to read “two times seven times,” suggesting that the essential element is repetition, not necessarily front and back.⁴⁵⁹

A dead dog? A flea? (24:14). Since the dog was not considered “man’s best friend” in the ancient Near East but was regarded with some disdain, “dog” was a favorite term both in insults and in expressions of self-abasement. To be a “dead dog” was worse still (see also [2 Sam. 9:8](#); [16:9](#), the only other occurrences in the Bible). David’s self-deprecation before Saul is meant to assure Saul that his pursuit of him is neither necessary nor worthy.

Reference to oneself as a “dog” was a stereotypical way of showing deference to one in a superior position, as is evidenced in the Lachish and Amarna

letters.⁴⁶⁰ If to be a (dead) dog was to be insignificant, then to be a “single flea” (so the Hebrew reads) was to be almost nothing at all. This usage of “single” to connote something like “mere” is paralleled in several Amarna letters that refer to a “single dog” (e.g., “Who am I, a *mere* dog, that I should not go?”).⁴⁶¹

Abigail Saves David from Blood-Guilt (25:1–44)

David moved down into the Desert of Maon (25:1). See [comment on 23:24](#).

Carmel (25:2). Not to be confused with Mount Carmel, a mountain range along the coast to the northwest of Samaria, the town of Carmel with which Nabal is identified lay about a mile north of Maon and eight miles southeast of Hebron. Although this site (probably to be identified with modern Khirbet el-Kirmil) is today rather unimpressive from an agricultural perspective, it was well suited for grazing livestock in David’s day.⁴⁶²

Moreover, Carmel was both politically and economically important in the biblical period. Its political importance derived from its strategic position as “part of the defense system of the Judean desert,” and its economic importance was based on its suitability to animal breeding.⁴⁶³ In the aftermath of his battle against the Amalekites, Saul had raised a monument to himself at Carmel (see [comment on 15:12](#)). In so doing, he laid claim to sovereignty over the area. This fact, perhaps with some sense of indebtedness to Saul for expelling the Amalekites, may have contributed to Nabal’s utter disregard for David.⁴⁶⁴

His name was Nabal and his wife’s name was Abigail (25:3). On naming and the various significances of names among the ancient Hebrews, see [comment on 1:20](#). The name Abigail sounds something like “(my) father rejoices,” and the description of Abigail in the present verse as “an intelligent and beautiful woman” is certainly commensurate with such a meaning. The name of her husband, Nabal, sounds like a Hebrew adjective meaning “churlish, foolish,” and again his portrayal throughout the chapter confirms the appropriateness of the name (explicitly confirmed by Abigail in v. 25: “his name is Fool, and folly goes with him).

It seems hardly likely, however, that Nabal’s parents would have saddled him with a name of such negative connotation, nor is it likely that the name arose as a nickname by those who knew Nabal—nicknames do not typically focus on character deficiencies. Rather, the meaning(s) associated with “Nabal” in the minds of his parents were probably favorable. On various linguistic grounds, J. Barr offers four suggestions: (1) fire/flame/arrow; (2) one sent; (3) noble/noble-minded/generous; (4) skilled/clever.⁴⁶⁵ Barr prefers the second option, but whatever one’s preference Barr is almost certainly correct that there was some positive connotation in the mind of Nabal’s parents when they named their son.

Abigail herself probably heard the name as expressing something positive or at least neutral at the time of her marriage. But, as Barr remarks, “years of

marriage to this miserly and cantankerous man made her think about his name in another way, and made her realize how close he came to expressing the quality which the Israelites normally designated as *nabal*.”⁴⁶⁶

Calebite (25:3). Since the time of Israel’s conquest and settlement of the Negev, Hebron was associated with the hero Caleb (Josh. 14:13–15; Judg. 1:20), who like Joshua had brought back a faithful report to Moses after the initial sending of twelve spies into the land of Canaan (Num. 13–14). Possibly (cf. the genealogical information in 1 Chron. 2:18–55, which links the settlement of Bethlehem with the descendants of Caleb; see esp. vv. 19, 50–51, 54) Nabal the Calebite was a distant kinsman of David,⁴⁶⁷ making David’s request of him all the more reasonable. The name Caleb resonates with the Hebrew word for “dog,” leading some ancient versions as well as modern commentators to detect a disparaging pun in Nabal’s epithet, yielding something like “Nabal, that dog!”⁴⁶⁸ (cf. [comment on 24:14](#)).

He heard that Nabal was shearing sheep (25:4). King and Stager boldly state, “The economies of the biblical world were, to a large extent, based on wool.”⁴⁶⁹ Shearing time (in the spring)⁴⁷⁰ was a time of abundance and gladness and, one would hope, of generosity. If, as early second-millennium texts from the Babylonian city of Larsa indicate, one sheep produced over two pounds of wool at shearing time,⁴⁷¹ Nabal’s three thousand sheep (25:2) would have produced over three tons of wool. Further evidence of Nabal’s wealth is the quantity of the goods that Abigail brings to David in [25:18](#).



Flocks captured by invaders demonstrate the need for protection.

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

Night and day they were a wall around us (25:16). With these words, one of Nabal’s servants explicitly confirms to Abigail that David’s claim in verses 7 and 15 to have safeguarded Nabal’s flocks is true. For this service, Nabal’s servants have as much reason to be grateful to David as Nabal himself. In the ancient Near East, sheep owners often contracted with shepherds to tend their flocks (who in turn might contract out the actual care of the sheep to shepherd boys; see [sidebar on “Shepherding in the Ancient World”](#)).

Shepherding in the Ancient World

Subcontracting the tasks of shepherding is well illustrated in an Old Babylonian text first published by Finkelstein.^{A-87} After a brief listing of the numbers of sheep and goats of various types, genders, or stages of development, the text (as adapted by Postgate) reads as follows:

Total 158 sheep, 64 goats, which Sin-šamuh has entrusted to Dada the shepherd. He takes liability for them, and will replace any lost animal. If Nidnatum his shepherd-boy makes off, he shall be responsible for the loss. Dada will pay (the boy) 5 gur [1,500 l] of grain. (3 witnesses. 18th day of 4th month, Samsu-iluna Year 1).

As Postgate observes, “the terms of the contract reflect the inescapable fact that the shepherd is beyond the control of the owner.”^{A-88} At certain times of the year, it may have been possible for the flocks to graze near the home of their owner, returning each evening, but in the dry summer months shepherds often had to travel considerable distances to find suitable pasturage for the flocks and be gone for long stretches of time. As a reward for fulfilling their duties, the shepherds could expect a certain amount of wool per adult sheep, as well as milk while in the field, meat at slaughter time, and so forth.

For their part, shepherds assumed liability for the welfare of the sheep and were responsible to return the correct total at shearing time (calculated on the basis of normal rates of birth and natural attrition, and with agreed-upon means of proving loss by disease or animal attack). This proof typically involved some animal part (skin, ears, tendons, or the like) that demonstrated that the animal had in fact perished and had not simply been sold or negligently lost.^{A-89} Should the shepherds come up short, they would have to make up the lack.^{A-90}

Abigail lost no time. She took two hundred loaves of bread (25:18). These gifts are in keeping with a time of festival and are suggestive of hospitality, not simply of repayment. In ancient societies, gift-giving, as distinct from the simple exchange of goods (which constituted commerce), played an important and complex role. Among the dynamics of gift-giving summarized by Stansell in a recent study, the following seem pertinent to the present situation: “Gifts are bound up in the honor/shame system and establish or deny rank; gifts establish intimate ties between persons or groups . . . gifts amend or appease.”⁴⁷²



Supplies brought for a banquet

Kim Walton, courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum

Abigail’s immediate concern, of course, is to make amends for her foolish husband’s actions and to appease the affronted David. David is affronted not simply by Nabal’s unwillingness to compensate for services rendered (even if they were technically unsolicited), but also by the dishonor/shame that Nabal’s refusal to recognize him as more than a runaway slave heaped on David. Though not its original intent, Abigail’s gift, which both honors David and repays him for his services, also smooths the way for David, after Nabal’s death, to woo and to wed Abigail. On his part, David would have given gifts as part of the courtship process and, in due course, also gave Abigail children (2 Sam. 3:3).⁴⁷³

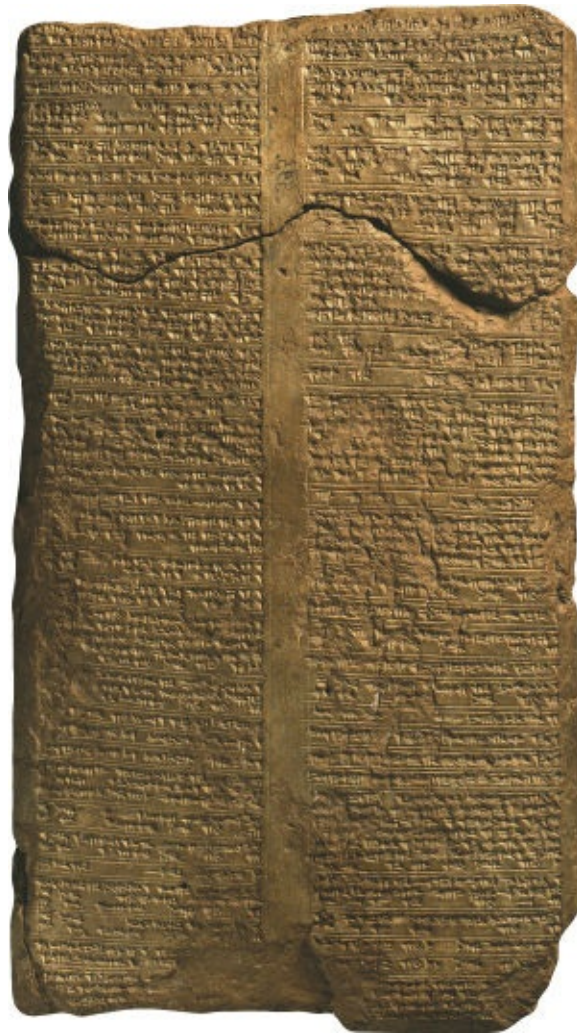
Bound securely as in the bundle of the living . . . hurl away as from the pocket of a sling (25:29). Abigail engages in two brilliant metaphorical wordplays. The first, “bound . . . bundle” (root *šrr*), is evident in English translation, while the second in Hebrew is something like “sling . . . [from a] sling” (root *ql ʿ*).

Two main theories have been proposed to elucidate the “bundle of the living.” One is that it is a document that has been bound or tied up—thus, “Document of the Living.” McCarter understands this to be equivalent to the “Book of the Living,” that is, “the heavenly book in which all living people are recorded;

exclusion from which means death.”⁴⁷⁴ The concept of a heavenly ledger is present in the ancient Near East from earliest times. As S. M. Paul remarks, “Divine bookkeeping also began in Sumer.”⁴⁷⁵ In Mesopotamia, destinies were determined by the gods, and their decisions were inscribed on “tablets of destiny.”⁴⁷⁶ Thus, prayers included petitions such as the following by Nebuchadrezzar: “On your [Nabu’s] unchangeable tablet, which establishes the boundaries of heaven and earth, proclaim length of days for me, inscribe long life.”⁴⁷⁷

A second theory is that shepherds kept a tally of their sheep by carrying a bag of small stones, each of which represented one of the sheep. When a sheep was bought or sold, a stone was added or removed.⁴⁷⁸

David sent word to Abigail, asking her to become his wife (25:39). While modern, Western readers might read these lines as a tale of romance, in the ancient Near East marriage and politics were often intertwined. In the colorful words of S. N. Kramer, marriage in the ancient Near East was typically “a practical arrangement in which the carefully weighed shekel counted more than love’s hot desire.”⁴⁷⁹



Amarna letter from Tushratta, king of Mitanni, lists gifts associated with the diplomatic marriage of his daughter to the Egyptian pharaoh.

bpk/Vorderasiatisches Museum, SMB/Olaf M. Teßmer

In third millennium Ebla, for instance, political alliances were often solidified by establishing blood ties through giving princesses in marriage to foreign rulers.⁴⁸⁰ Similarly, the Neo-Sumerian King of Ur, Shulgi (2046–1998 B.C.), sought to expand his influence and control through diplomatic marriages; some one hundred princes or princesses of the Third Dynasty of Ur are on record, many filling official state positions.⁴⁸¹ Hittite texts also attest political marriages, as evidenced by the web of relations established by the thirteenth-century king Ḫattušiliš III, who having reinstalled a certain Benteshima on the throne of Amurru gave him one of his daughters, Gasshulawiya, in marriage. A son born of this union later married another of Ḫattušiliš's daughters, with the result that the son's wife was also his aunt.⁴⁸²

Among the Assyrians, rulers such as Assur-uballit I (ca. 1364–1329 B.C.) and Shalmaneser III (858–824 B.C.) married daughters to Babylonian puppet kings in an attempt to manipulate the Babylonians.⁴⁸³ Predictably, arranged diplomatic marriages were not always the happiest. The Mari letters include several from Kirum, a daughter of King Zimri-Lim of Mari, who along with her older sister had been given in marriage to a vassal ruler named Haya-Sumu. So unhappy was Kirum in her marriage with Haya-Sumu, who according to one of Zimri-Lim’s servants “could not care less about her,” that she wrote, “If my lord [her father] does not conduct me to Mari, I will not hesitate to throw myself from the roof.”⁴⁸⁴

Whatever may have been David’s personal feelings for Abigail—“an intelligent and beautiful woman” (v. 3)—he undoubtedly benefited politically from this, as well as other, marriages.⁴⁸⁵ David’s earlier marriage to Saul’s daughter Michal (18:27) brought him into the royal family; his marriages to Ahinoam of Jezreel (25:43, see [next comment](#)) and to Abigail would have strengthened his ties to the southern region around Hebron. On polygamy in antiquity, see [comment on 1:2](#).

David had also married Ahinoam of Jezreel (25:43). While first mentioned here, David’s marriage to Ahinoam of Jezreel apparently preceded his marriage to Abigail, bringing the sum of David’s wives, including Saul’s daughter Michal, to three so far. Ahinoam has piqued the curiosity of scholars. Combining the fact that the Old Testament mentions only one other Ahinoam (the wife of Saul listed in 14:50) with Nathan’s statement to David in [2 Samuel 12:8](#) that the Lord had given “your master’s wives into your arms,” one scholar has suggested that David’s Ahinoam may have once been Saul’s wife.⁴⁸⁶ As D. Edelman has remarked, however, “such a presumption would require David to have run off with the queen mother while Saul was still on the throne, which seems unlikely.”⁴⁸⁷

More likely, Nathan’s comment refers in a formulaic fashion to David’s inheritance of all that belonged to Saul, once David became king over both Judah and Israel (see [2 Sam. 5:1–5](#)). The Jezreel from which David’s Ahinoam came was almost certainly not the Jezreel Valley but a town in the hill country of Judah somewhere in the vicinity of Maon, Carmel, and Ziph (see Josh. 15:55–56). The precise location of this town is uncertain.



Carmel

Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

Saul had given his daughter Michal, David’s wife, to Paltiel son of Laish, who was from Gallim (25:44). The location of Gallim is unknown, but based on Isaiah 10:30, which mentions Gallim in parallel to Anathoth (a town three miles northeast of Jerusalem), the town of Gallim probably lay in that general region. Isaiah 10:30 also mentions a town called Laishah in the area, which recalls Paltiel’s father Laish. Saul’s giving of Michal to Paltiel must have been, in part at least, politically motivated, effectively distancing David from the royal family—a situation that David will be quick to rectify at the earliest opportunity (2 Sam. 3:14).

David Spares Saul's Life in the Camp (26:1–25)

Ziphites . . . Hakilah . . . Jeshimon (26:1). On the Ziphites and on David's location in the Judean wilderness, see [comments on 23:14, 19](#). It is understandable that the citizens of Ziph, which lay only a few miles north of Carmel (the setting of the preceding chapter), would keep tabs on David's whereabouts and report these to Saul (cf. their similar action in [23:19](#)).

Ahimelech the Hittite and Abishai son of Zeruiah (26:6). That Ahimelech is described as a “Hittite” raises the question whether he is to be associated with the Hittites who founded an empire in the eighteenth century B.C. and dominated Anatolia in the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries, or was simply a member of a Canaanite people group who happened also to be called Hittites. The latter Hittites were counted among the Canaanite peoples whom Israel was to displace (e.g., Gen. 10:20; 15:18–21). Ahimelech's name is Semitic, which suggests Canaanite origin, although other explanations are possible.⁴⁸⁸

The vexed question of the relationship between Anatolian Hittites and the Canaanite enclave of the same name has not been resolved.⁴⁸⁹ At the very least, most references in the Old Testament to Hittites appear to refer to “a local people of Palestine, settled in the area around Hebron before Abraham's arrival.”⁴⁹⁰ Ahimelech, then, is a Canaanite recruit. Abishai, however, was a kinsman—specifically, a nephew through David's sister Zeruiah (see family tree at [2 Sam. 16:10–11](#)).

Who can lay a hand on the LORD's anointed (26:9). As in his earlier close encounter with an unsuspecting Saul (ch. 24), David is again urged to kill his pursuer. David's reaction is the same as before—the anointed of Yahweh is sacrosanct (see [comment on 24:6](#)). Furthermore, having seen Yahweh deal with Nabal ([25:38](#)), David is more confident than ever that Saul's “time [lit., ‘day’] will come and he will die” ([26:10](#)). The expression “his day will come,” followed by its rather grave interpretation, is neatly paralleled in a prophetic text from Mari.⁴⁹¹ This expression seems to relate to death not caused by obvious injury, as David distinguishes it from death by the sword in battle; in either case, Yahweh is seen as doing the striking. The same distinction is made in the Apology of Hattušiliš III.⁴⁹²

Get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let's go (26:11). Again Saul is found with his spear at his side or, in this instance, “stuck in the ground near his head” (v. 7) while he sleeps. The regular association of Saul with his spear (see [22:6](#); [2 Sam. 1:6](#)) suggests that it may have served as a kind

of royal emblem, but it also recalls his earlier acts of violence against others and adumbrates his final act of violence against himself (1 Sam. 31:4). The loss of spear and water jug in the Judean desert could be life-threatening, and David uses the items effectively to demonstrate that even though Saul has again fallen into his hands, David has refused to lay a hand on him. That David does not intend to harm Saul, even indirectly, is evidenced by his return of the spear in 26:22.⁴⁹³



Royal spear head

Marie-Lan Nguyen/Wikimedia Commons, courtesy of the Louvre



Pilgrim flask

Joshua Walton, courtesy of the Joseph P. Free Collection and Wheaton College

Go, serve other gods (26:19). While peoples of the ancient Near East often associated their deities with particular territories and even particular holy places, Yahweh, according to mainstream Old Testament thinking, is not so limited.⁴⁹⁴ In their recent history, Israel had seen Yahweh lay his heavy hand on the Philistines and the Ammonites (chs. 6; 11), to say nothing of David’s encounter with the Philistine Goliath (ch. 17). The sense of David’s complaint that he is being forced to serve other gods and is being driven from the presence of Yahweh should not be understood in any absolute sense but in the purely practical sense that, as a fugitive, he is being driven from the familiar places where Yahweh is worshiped.⁴⁹⁵

A flea . . . a partridge in the mountains (26:20). On “flea,” see [comment on 24:14](#). Here David’s self-description may suggest not only humility but also the difficulty of Saul’s accomplishing his goal, “looking for a flea.” Then, having begun his exchange with Saul by “calling out” to Abner from atop a distant hill (v. 13), David now likens himself to “a partridge in the mountains.” This second metaphor is apt on several grounds. (1) The word for “partridge” in Hebrew is (lit.) “caller”; just as a hunter might pursue a single partridge (“caller”) in the mountains with little hope of success, so Saul is in futile pursuit of David, himself a caller in the mountains (cf. v. 14). (2) The type of partridge found in

this part of the Judean desert is probably the sand partridge (*Ammoperdix heyi*), which is “a great runner and speeds along the ground when it is chased, until it becomes exhausted and can be knocked down by the hunter’s stick.”⁴⁹⁶ As adroit as David’s movements are, Saul’s relentless chasing after him must have been exhausting.



Barren region in the Judean wilderness where David hid away from Saul Kim Walton

David Flees to the Philistines (27:1–12)

David . . . went over to Achish son of Maach king of Gath (27:2). As a fugitive seeking refuge in foreign territory and perhaps employment as a mercenary, David is following a widely attested practice in the ancient Near East. The landless or disenfranchised, such as the Habiru (with whom David and his men have been compared),⁴⁹⁷ sometimes hired themselves out as fighters in order to obtain favors such as land (see also [sidebar on “Hebrews/Habiru”](#) at 4:6). In response to David’s request for “one of the country towns,” Achish gives him Ziklag (27:5–6), but his motivation is hardly generosity. As Postgate remarks, “it has always proved political for a state to secure the continued attachment of its fighting men by finding plots of land for them.”⁴⁹⁸

In addition to the desire to better their own circumstances, mercenaries were also sometimes motivated by their grievances toward a former ruler. At the famous battle of Marathon, for instance, the Persian army benefited from the defection of Greek tyrants who, having been expelled from their positions, joined the ultimately unsuccessful Persians in fighting against the Greeks.⁴⁹⁹ David’s departure to the Philistines (though not a full defection, as subsequent events demonstrate) is largely prompted by his grievous treatment at the hands of Saul. Later, after David becomes king, he too uses mercenaries, the Kerethites and Pelethites (i.e., Cretans and Philistines), who serve as his personal bodyguard (2 Sam. 8:18; cf. 23:22–23).

Although David’s sojourn among the Philistines has rightly been characterized as “one of the most disreputable in David’s career,”⁵⁰⁰ from a pragmatic standpoint it accomplishes several things: It places him out of Saul’s reach; it allows him to learn Philistine ways, including their technologies and military practices; it puts him in a position surreptitiously to destroy some of Israel’s longtime foes, while benefiting from their wealth and using some of it to curry favor with leaders in Judah, who will one day be his subjects.⁵⁰¹ (For more on Achish, see [comments on 5:10; 21:10](#). On Gath, see [comment on 5:8](#).)

Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail of Carmel (27:3). See [comments on 25:39, 43](#).

Achish gave him Ziklag (27:6). To say that the precise location of biblical Ziklag is uncertain is an understatement. See [sidebar on “The Identity of Ziklag.”](#)

THE IDENTITY OF ZIKLAG

J. D. Currid chooses the quest for the geographic location of Ziklag as his prime example of the difficulties of site identification.^{A-91} J. D. Seger began an earlier quest for the site with the observation that “after almost a full century of intensive archaeological exploration and study, no firm consensus has yet emerged.”^{A-92} He argued in favor of Tell Halif (Tell Khuweilifeh), but his case was weakened by the “minimal amount of Iron I remains at the mound.”^{A-93}



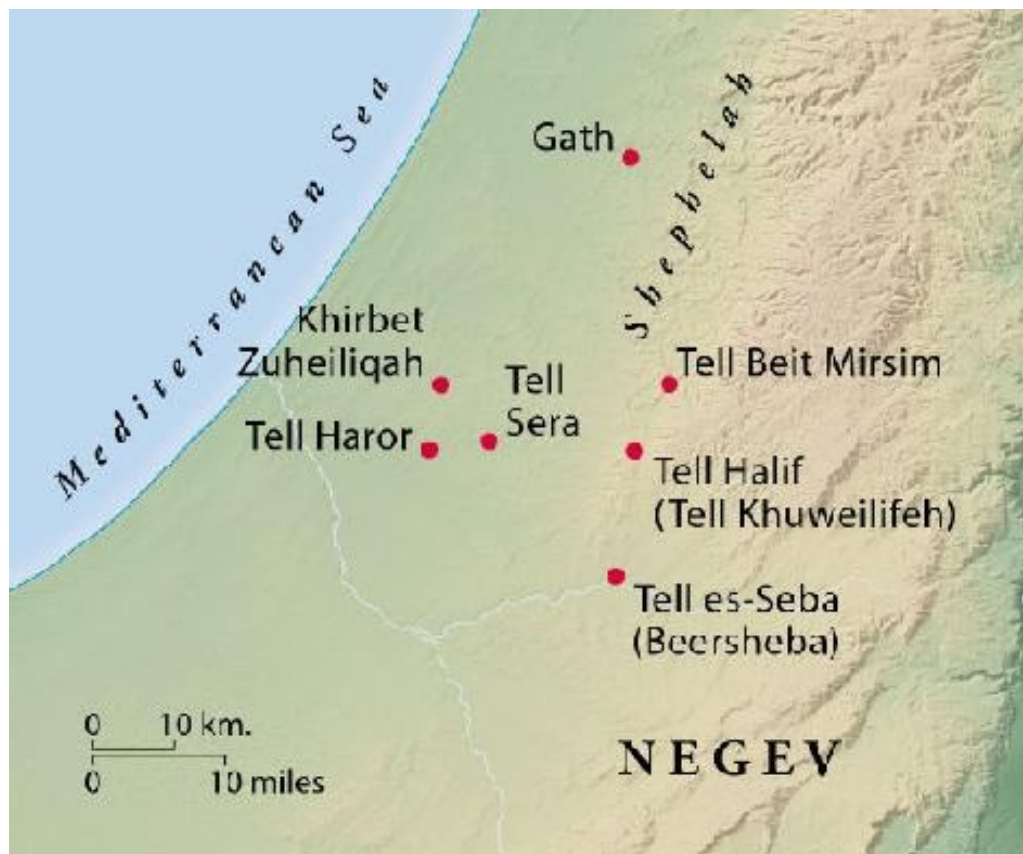
Ziklag (Tell Sera)

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

Subsequently, Oren sought to identify Tel Sera' (Tell esh-Shari'a) as Ziklag and has been followed in this judgment by many scholars.^{A-94} This site lies almost twenty-five miles south-southwest of Gath, in the transition zone between the southern foothills (Shephelah) and the northern Negev. Such a location is appropriate to the biblical evidence, which suggests that Ziklag is in a border zone between Philistine and Israelite territory—assigned to the tribe of Simeon in Joshua 19:5, later counted as part of Judah (Judg. 15:31), and perhaps still later brought under the control of Gath as a result of Philistine expansion in the period just prior to David's time. The biblical evidence also suggests that Ziklag must have been sufficiently far from Gath

for David's military exploits (about which he lied to Achish) to have escaped scrutiny. Tell esh-Shari'a meets these criteria.

The problem, however, is that no evidence of a tenth-century destruction of the site has been uncovered, contrary to what one expects from 30:3, 14.^{A-95} Conclusions based on what has *not* been found archaeologically are to be drawn with caution, however, and the conquests of cities, even where burning is involved, do not always leave recoverable evidence.^{A-96} The general area offers other potential sites, such as "Tell Haror, Khirbet Zuheiliqah, and even Tell Beith Mirsim," mentioned by Currid.^{A-97}



Possible sites of Ziklag

Fritz has argued that Tell es-Seba', normally identified as Beersheba, is possibly Ziklag and that biblical Beersheba lies buried beneath the modern city of Beersheba, some four miles west of Tell es-Seba'.^{A-98} Fritz makes an interesting case, noting in particular that the Iron Age village on the site "was replaced in the early 10th century by a fortified town—just at the beginning of the monarchy," a change that would be in keeping with David's interest in the site. But for now, we remain as we began, uncertain as to the precise location

of Ziklag.^{A-99}

David lived in Philistine territory a year and four months (27:7). During this period Saul dies, and following it David becomes king in Hebron at the age of thirty (2 Sam. 5:4). Thus, David is about twenty-eight years old when he flees to Philistine territory.

Geshurites (27:8). Not to be confused with Geshur in Transjordan (see, e.g., Josh. 12:5), the Geshurites here are neighbors of the Philistines (note their association in Josh. 13:2). Absalom, David's third son, is born to Maacah, daughter of Talmai king of Geshur in Transjordan, and it is to that Geshur, not this region in southwest Canaan, that he flees after killing Amnon (2 Sam. 13:37–38; 15:8 [“Geshur in Aram”]).

Girzites (27:8). The identification of the Girzites, mentioned only here in biblical or extrabiblical sources, has baffled scholars. Some have suggested reversing two letters to read “Gizrites” (inhabitants of Gezer), but the town of Gezer lay some twelve miles north of Gath and thus over thirty-five miles north of Ziklag (if it is Tell esh-Shari'a, more if Tell es-Seba'; see [comment on 27:6](#)), well north of the likely area of David's raiding activities (and perhaps too close to Gath to escape Achish's notice). One of the chief witnesses of the LXX (i.e., LXX^B) includes only two, not three, peoples against whom David conducts his raids: the Amalekites and (probably) the Geshurites. The reading “Girzites” in the Hebrew text may thus be a corruption, having arisen by a conflation of variants.⁵⁰²

Amalekites (27:8). See [comment on 15:2](#).

The land extending to Shur and Egypt (27:8). See [comment on 15:2](#).

Negev of Jerahmeel (27:10). Jerahmeel is named in 1 Chronicles 2:9–15 as a descendant of Judah and a brother of David's ancestor Ram. The Negev of Jerahmeel may have been south of Beersheba, but this is not known with certainty. McCarter notes that the “arid *negeb* or ‘Southland’ of Palestine was traditionally divided into districts by population,” with the Negev of Judah likely centered around Beersheba, and the Negev of the Jerahmeelites further south,⁵⁰³ or possibly east.⁵⁰⁴ David's response to Achish's query regarding what he has been up to is entirely false, claiming to have been attacking Judahites and their friends, while in fact he is annihilating foes of Israel and leaving neither man nor woman alive to report him to Achish.

Negev of the Kenites (27:10). On the Kenites, see [comment on 15:6](#).⁵⁰⁵ That

David mentions the Negev of the Kenites in a list including the Negev of Judah, along with the later notice that David sends gifts to the Kenites (30:29), confirms that they remain on friendly terms with Israel, as they were since the time of Israel's wandering in the wilderness.



Region of David's raids

Saul Inquires of the Medium of Endor (28:1–25)

I will make you my bodyguard for life (28:2). David’s deception of Achish is supremely successful, so much so that Achish instates David as his bodyguard for life. The word Achish uses for “bodyguard” is not the word used elsewhere in Samuel (22:14; 2 Sam. 23:23). The phrase literally reads “keeper/guard of my head” and perhaps carries a sense similar to the colloquial expression in English, “You’ve got my back.” The irony of this choice of words—given the fact that David has already collected the head of Goliath, another citizen of Gath—is heightened by the complaint of the Philistine commanders in 29:4 that David may turn in battle and “regain his master’s favor . . . by taking the heads of our own men”!

Saul had expelled the mediums and spiritists (28:3). Cultures throughout the ancient Near East desired to make contact with the spirit world, and a complex array of rites and practitioners arose in an effort to satisfy this desire. For Israel, however, participation in these kinds of rites was condemned in the strongest possible terms, both in Deuteronomy (see Deut. 18:9–13) and the priestly legislation of Leviticus (Lev. 19:31; 20:27). The basis of proscribing occult practices may in part have had to do with the distinction between magic and religion—that is, between the occult magical arts, which seek to harness knowledge and power for selfish ends, and religious observance, which seeks to bring the worshiper into communion with God.

But the distinction between magic and religion is not always easy to maintain,⁵⁰⁶ and the Old Testament itself reports without censure certain acts that may be considered magic (a staff becoming a snake, the casting of lots, causing an axehead to float, etc.).⁵⁰⁷ The more fundamental reason for banning occult practices in Israel is that they involved engaging false gods or demonic powers rather than the one true God, Yahweh.

In any case, Saul’s expulsion of mediums and spiritists is fully in accord with Mosaic law and, as Gordon observes, “could have been inspired by zeal for the Yahwistic religion.” But, as Gordon also allows, other motivations may have been behind Saul’s action.⁵⁰⁸ Commentators often cite Gudea, king of the Sumerian city of Lagash, as an example of a (non-Yahwistic) king who, for his own reasons, expelled “sorcerers and witches” from his domain. The relevant lines in the Gudea Cylinder (cyl. A, col. xiii, lines 14–15) are notoriously difficult to translate, however, and today few Sumerologists believe that they refer to occult practitioners.⁵⁰⁹ So this example offers no help in assessing Saul’s

action.

About all that can be said at present is that purging the land of occult specialists may have been motivated by a variety of reasons, but whatever Saul's initial motivation, he loses no time in seeking out a medium when the accepted methods of divine inquiry fail him, nor does he show any doubt that a medium can easily be found despite his purge.⁵¹⁰

Shunem . . . Gilboa (28:4). Having first assembled their troops at Aphek (see also [comments on 29:1](#)), the Philistines move north and set up camp at Shunem. Meanwhile Saul brings his troops to (Mount) Gilboa. Shunem has been identified with modern Solem, a site lying on the southwestern slope of the Hill of Moreh toward the eastern end of the rich Valley of Jezreel. The valley is bordered on the north by Mount Tabor and some twelve miles to the south by Mount Gilboa, with the Hill of Moreh midway between, dividing the valley into two passes running east toward the Jordan.



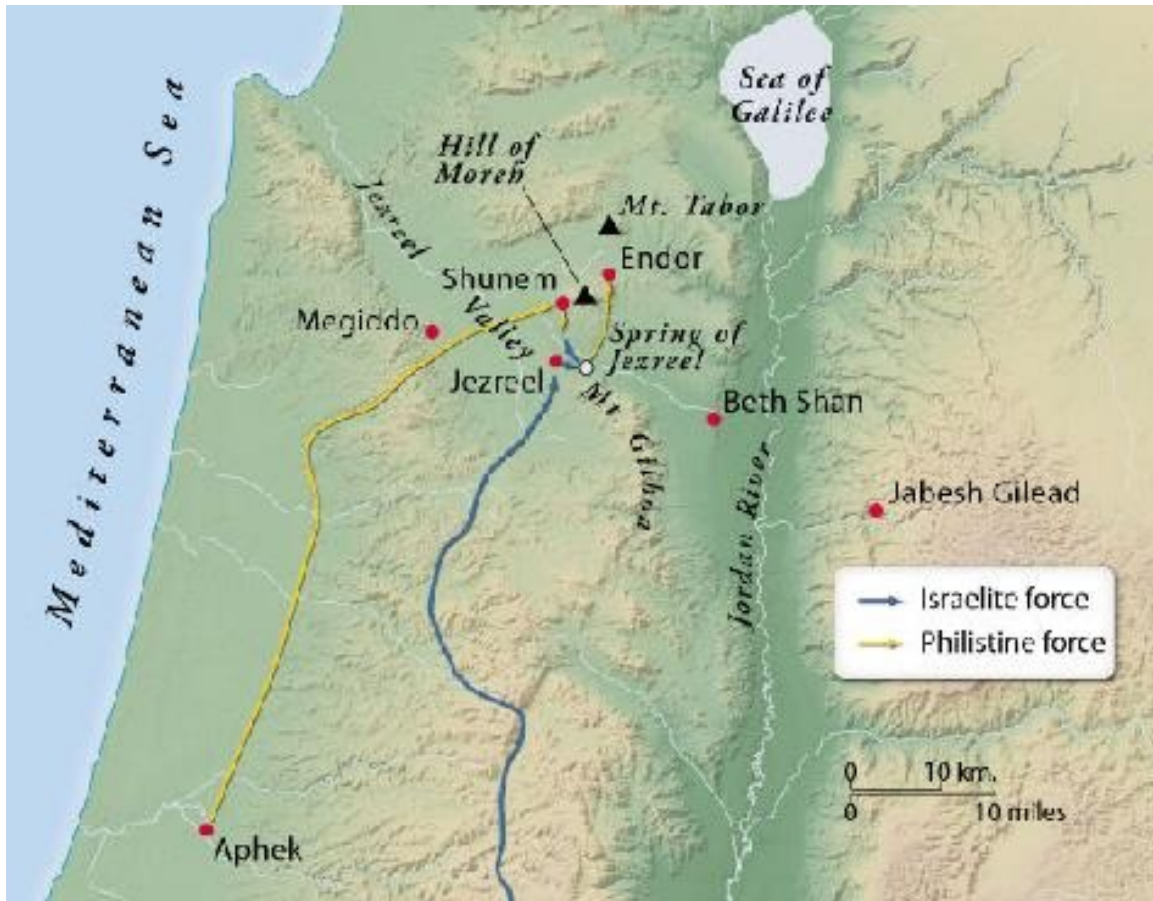
Shunem

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

The village of Shunem figures in several well-known biblical accounts⁵¹¹ and is attested also in ancient Near Eastern texts from as early as the Late Bronze period.⁵¹² From Mount Gilboa Saul's troops move to encamp at the spring of Jezreel (see [comment on 29:1](#)), less than five miles south of their Philistine foes at Shunem. Throughout history the Jezreel Valley has been a strategic crossroads for travelers seeking passage from the coastal plain through the Carmel range and on to the east and north. A question that the current episode raises is how the Philistines manage to travel unmolested by Israelite troops through the passes in

the Carmel range and into the Jezreel Valley. Herzog and Gichon, both with extensive military experience in the British and Israeli armies, reason as follows:

After their many unsuccessful attempts to penetrate the central mountain massif from the west, the Philistines planned a major enveloping movement by marching northwards along the Plain of Sharon (the coastal plain) and then through one of the passes of the Carmel range into the Jezreel Valley, so as to enter the central mountain massif at Ir-ganim (present-day Jenin) and move southwards along the plateau.



Saul's last stand

Herzog and Gichon speculate that the Philistines may have hoped for some support from Canaanite cities in the Jezreel Valley that the Israelites had failed to conquer. They continue:

Saul had the advantage of the interior lines. Accordingly, he waited to see in what direction the Philistines would move. After he was sure of their intentions, he moved his forces parallel to theirs on the plateau and then took up a blocking position that flanked the ascent to Ir-ganim in the lower foothills of the Gilboa range.

Why was no attempt made to block the Philistine passage through the difficult Carmel defiles? The answer can be inferred from the choice of Aphek as the assembly point for the Philistine host. By convening on Aphek, the Philistines posed a direct threat to the Judean mountains, which must have caused Saul to detach at least some of his observation forces to guard the western approaches.

Herzog and Gichon, as military strategists, suggest that this would have been an ideal situation for the Philistines to use some kind of diversionary tactic, but no such plan is mentioned. But the forced return of David and his troops from Aphek to Ziklag (1 Sam. 29) may well have (unintentionally) served as such a diversionary movement, as David would pass by several “obvious invasion routes into Judah” (e.g., the Elah Valley and the Sorek Valley), “which must have kept Saul’s men on their guard.” Only when they were sure that “no stab in his back was intended could Saul rush to meet the northern threat, which gave the Philistine host the time necessary to effect an unmolested passage through the Carmel range.”⁵¹³

The LORD did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets (28:6). These three means of inquiry were all acceptable options in ancient Israel, as well as elsewhere in the ancient Near East. A remarkable parallel is found in the Second Plague Prayer of Muršili II, a fourteenth-century Hittite king, son of Šuppiluliuma I. Both Muršili’s father and his brother had died from a devastating and ongoing plague that ravaged the Hittite population for years. In his prayers to the gods of Hatti, Muršili confesses both corporate and personal sins and pleads that the plague be lifted. And should it be that the “people are dying for some other reason” than those confessed, Muršili begs, “either let me see it in a dream, or let it be found out by an oracle, or let a prophet declare it, or let the priests find out by incubation whatever I suggest to them.”⁵¹⁴

Saul’s attempt to gain a word from the Lord is prompted more by anxiety (v. 5) than by piety (especially judging from his behavior before and after this event). His failure to receive any answer must be read in the light of the warnings uttered by Samuel in 8:18 (“the LORD will not answer you in that day”) and 12:15, 25 and against the backdrop of his rejection in 15:28 (cf. 16:1). On dreams as a means of divine guidance see [comment on 3:3](#); on Urim (and Thummim) see [comment on 2:18](#); 14:3, 18–19; on prophets see [comment on 3:1](#); 10:5.

Find me a woman who is a medium (28:7). The term “medium” is most often paired with “spiritist” in biblical references (e.g., vv. 3, 9); the chief function of such practitioners was evidently to communicate with the spirit world, particularly with the dead. In the present instance, the Hebrew for

“medium” reads literally “ghostwife” or perhaps “ghostmistress.”⁵¹⁵ The “ghost” (Heb. *’ôb*; on which see [comment on 28:8](#)) was understood as the spirit of the dead, and the function of the medium was to call up the spirit through necromancy, in order that it might speak.



In Egypt the cult of the dead included offerings to the dead. Offering tables such as this one were often placed by a false door in the tomb that allowed the spirit to come out and receive sustenance.

Guillaume Blanchard/Wikimedia Commons, courtesy of the Louvre

Necromancy was practiced throughout the ancient Near East.⁵¹⁶ In Mesopotamia, the necromancer rubbed salve on his or her face in an effort to contact or perhaps embody the spirit of the dead, or used “skulls or figurines as temporary houses for the spirit which was being summoned.”⁵¹⁷ Although evidence of specifics is sparse, similar practices took place in Hittite Anatolia, where a distinguishing feature was the prominent role played by “old women.”⁵¹⁸

In Egypt necromancy is first attested in the first half of the first millennium B.C., but there is evidence, such as in the Letters to the Dead, that necromancy may have been practiced much earlier. Egyptian necromancy sometimes used cadavers or scrying (gazing) cups.⁵¹⁹ From Ugarit, the so-called Protocol of a Necromancy offers direct evidence of the practice, and there is indirect evidence as well.⁵²⁰ The only direct evidence of necromancy being practiced in Israel is

the present encounter between Saul and the medium at Endor, and in this context the practice is evaluated negatively.

Endor (28:7). The precise location of Endor remains a matter of some dispute. Its former identification with present-day Indur (which clearly reflects the name) has been rejected since archaeological survey work at the site has failed to turn up ancient artifacts. Currently favored, rather, is Khirbet Şafşâfeh, a site near Indur and northeast of the Hill of Moreh. If this identification is correct, Saul’s nocturnal visit to the medium would have taken him behind enemy lines and landed him only about four miles from the Philistine camp at Shunem.



Area of Moreh and Endor

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

Such a scenario is not impossible, as Saul is traveling in disguise, and he could have passed along the eastern side of the Hill of Moreh, while the Philistines were encamped on its western slopes.⁵²¹ There may be other grounds for seeking Endor on the south side, rather than the north side, of the Jezreel Valley, and several alternative identifications have been suggested.⁵²²

Consult a spirit for me (28:8). The word for “spirit” is ’ôb (see first [comment on v. 7](#)). The etymological origin of this term is much debated,⁵²³ but

one attractive proposal in the light of the present context (note, e.g., the spirit coming up “out of the ground,” v. 13) is that the word derives from a non-Semitic loanword meaning “sacrificial pit.” Proposed by Hoffner first on the basis of the occurrence of a cognate word meaning “pit” in Hittite religious texts,⁵²⁴ he finds additional cognates in Sumerian, Akkadian, Hurrian, and Ugaritic.⁵²⁵ He argues that the Hebrew term, like its Hittite cognate, is to be understood as designating

a pit dug in the ground, which served as a means of access between infernal spirits of gods or deceased persons and the upper world. Among the Hittites, rituals were carried out which involved the opening up of such pits in places selected by oracle, the lowering of offerings into the pits, and the luring up of spirits out of the pit to eat the sacrifices and drink the blood libations and show their favour and superior knowledge to the sacrificers.⁵²⁶

Among the offerings lowered in the pit were foodstuffs, often including a black sacrificial animal (a hog or a dog), silver objects such as a model of a human ear (symbolizing the practitioner’s desire to hear from the underworld), and a ladder or staircase (to encourage the spirit to ascend).⁵²⁷ Sumerian and Akkadian versions of the Gilgamesh Epic also attest the use of pits or holes in the ground as portals through which the dead could ascend from the underworld; Gilgamesh used such a pit to summon his departed companion Enkidu.⁵²⁸ In the Old Testament, the Hebrew term *’ôb* is extended to connote not only the “ghost” that comes out of the pit but also the necromancer who calls forth the spirit.

As regards Saul’s night visit to the necromancer at Endor, opinion is divided over whether the real Samuel appeared or a mere apparition. The startled reaction of the woman in verse 12, her immediate realization that she has been deceived (she is not dealing with her “familiar” spirits), and the narrator’s unqualified statement that the woman “saw Samuel” all suggest that Samuel really appears. That in this instance Yahweh should deign to return Samuel from the grave—to the surprise of the woman and the dismay of Saul—in no way represents a validation either of the efficacy or the acceptability of necromancy.

A spirit coming up out of the ground (28:13). See [comment on 28:8](#).

An old man wearing a robe (28:14). We have frequently encountered the use of robes or special garments to signify particular roles or offices in 1 Samuel (e.g., 2:19; 15:27; 18:3–4; 19:24; 24:4–5). For discussion of ancient Near Eastern instances of this general custom, see [comment on 18:3–4](#). Saul’s recognition that the “spirit coming up out of the ground” (v. 13) is Samuel seems to be triggered by his robe (with which Saul has had prior, bitter experience,

15:27–28). The medium’s description of the spirit as an “old man” may also suggest the prophet Samuel, if Malamat is correct in his assertion that in Akkadian texts from Mari, the epithet “old man” was occasionally used to designate a “diviner-prophet.”⁵²⁹

David's Help Is Refused by the Philistines (29:1–11)

Aphek . . . spring in Jezreel (29:1). Of the several towns named Aphek mentioned in the Bible,⁵³⁰ the one in view here, identified with Ras el-ʿAin, is located in the plain of Sharon in the vicinity of Philistine territory (see also [comments on 4:1](#)). After their general muster at Aphek, the Philistines would have traveled some thirty miles (as the crow flies) north-northeast to encamp at Shunem (28:4). Meanwhile, Saul's troops encamp "by the spring in Jezreel," probably En-Harod, about two miles east of Jezreel and less than five miles south of Shunem. See [sidebar on "Jezreel."](#)

Jezreel

Jezreel is not mentioned outside the Bible, but it has been identified archaeologically with Tel Jezreel, excavated in six seasons (1990 to 1996) by D. Ussihkin and J. Woodhead. Iron I pottery at the site gives evidence of its occupation during the united monarchy period. The most impressive architectural feature of the site is a grand-scale royal enclosure probably dating to the period of the ninth-century Omride Dynasty. The maximal outer dimensions of the enclosure are approximately 350 by 200 yards, and the area enclosed is about eleven acres, with a rock-cut moat surrounding three sides.^{A-100}

The site occupies a commanding position some hundred yards above the valley floor and undoubtedly controlled the important "ancient Megiddo and Beth Shean road that linked Egypt to Syria and Mesopotamia and runs east-west along the valley floor to the north of the site."^{A-101} It also controlled the road running north-south from Shunem to the Dothan Valley.^{A-102}

Thus, Saul's troops may have intended to block any Philistine attempt to move southward into the Israelite hill country. Similarly, the position of the Philistines at Shunem would have "threatened to cut Saul off from the Israelite tribes further north," and this, as Gordon opines, "perhaps explains why he was induced to join battle in an area where the Philistines' chariots and cavalry (cf. [2 Sam. 1:6](#)) gave them a decisive advantage."^{A-103}



Harod Valley from Jezreel

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

What about these Hebrews? (29:3). As we have already observed (see [sidebar on “Hebrews/Habiru”](#) at 4:4), the Israelites are often referred to by the Philistines (probably pejoratively) as “Hebrews.” This may be because in their eyes, the Hebrews were indistinguishable from the troublesome Habiru, landless free-booters known throughout the ancient Near East, especially in the second millennium.

Taking the heads of our own men (29:4). See [comment on 28:2](#).

David Pursues the Amalekites and Rescues His People (30:1–31)

The Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag (30:1). On the Amalekites, see [comment on 15:2](#); on Ziklag and the Negev, see [comments on 27:6, 10](#).

Reached Ziklag on the third day (30:1). The distance from Aphek to Ziklag was around fifty or sixty miles (depending on which of the likeliest locations for Ziklag is assumed: Tell esh-Shari‘a or Tell es-Seba‘). The average marching rate for armies in the ancient Near East has been estimated at about fifteen to twenty miles per day.⁵³¹ The arrival in Ziklag of David and his troops “on the third day” comports well with these figures and suggests, further, that David must have wasted no time along the way. Perhaps it was with some uneasiness that he had left his town of Ziklag unprotected in order to follow Achish. After all, Ziklag had been David’s “base of operations against the Amalekites (27:8), the archetypal bandits of biblical tradition,”⁵³² and David may have feared that his aggressions would not go unrequited.

David said to Abiathar the priest . . . “Bring me the ephod” (30:7). On Abiathar, see [comment on 22:20](#); on the ephod as an oracular instrument, see [comment on 2:18](#). Compare also Saul’s instructions to Ahijah in [14:18](#).

Besor Ravine (30:9). The Besor Ravine is generally identified as the Wadi Ghazzeah that runs northwestward some twelve to fifteen miles south of Ziklag (if Tell esh-Shari‘a) to empty into the Mediterranean Sea south of Gaza. Several wadis (seasonal rivers) flow from the vicinity of Tell esh-Shari‘a to join the Wadi Ghazzeah (Nahal Besor on some maps). From Tell es-Seba‘ (another candidate for Ziklag) flows the Wadi Bir es-Seba‘ (Nahal Beer Sheva), eventually becoming the Wadi Ghazzeah.



Nahal Besor

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

If we assume the Amalekites traveled an established route after ravaging Ziklag, several possibilities present themselves. An apparently major route ran south-southwest by Tell esh-Shari'a to cross the Besor Ravine in the vicinity of Tell el Far'a.⁵³³ Along this route the distance from Ziklag to the Besor Ravine is about fourteen miles. A second route followed the Wadi esh-Shari'a (Nahal Gerar) due west out of Ziklag to reach the ravine near Tell Jemma, again about fourteen miles away.⁵³⁴ The fact that the other main candidate as Ziklag, Tell es-Seba', is essentially at the ravine and would have required little further travel may be a strike against this identification, though it remains a possibility.

Of David's six hundred men, two hundred are too exhausted to continue by the time they reach the Besor Ravine, so they stay behind. Having covered some fifty to sixty miles in three days from Aphek to Ziklag, David and his men probably remain in Ziklag only long enough to inquire of Yahweh whether they should pursue the Amalekites (vv. 7–8). Without rest, then, it is not surprising that some of the men are too exhausted to continue the pursuit.

Negev of the Kerethites . . . Negev of Caleb (30:14). The Negev, or arid southland, designated an expansive region beginning on about the latitude of Beersheba in Judah and stretching southward, bounded on the west by the Mediterranean and on the east by Edom. In biblical times the Negev was inhabited by various people groups, many of whom, like the Amalekites, ranged widely, but were nevertheless associated with particular regions within the Negev (see [comment on 27:10](#)).

The Kerethites (or Cherethites) were an ethnic people, probably from Crete, often mentioned alongside the Philistines (e.g., in Ezek. 25:16; Zeph. 2:6; and in many other places if “Pelethites” is a linguistic variation of “Philistines”; see [2 Sam. 8:18](#)). The “Kerethites and Pelethites” served under the command of Benaiah son of Jehoiada as professional troops loyal to David ([2 Sam. 8:18; 15:18; 20:7, 23](#)) and, for a short time at least, to Solomon (1 Kings 1:44). Their particular function seems to have been as the king’s bodyguard (see [2 Sam. 23:20, 23](#)).

The Calebites were descended from Caleb, son of Jephunneh, first mentioned in Numbers 13:6 as one of the spies chosen to scout out the land of Canaan. He is commended in Numbers 14:24 as one who followed the Lord “wholeheartedly” and who, therefore, was to have an inheritance in the Promised Land. His inheritance included Hebron and its environs (Josh. 14:13–14; Judg. 1:20). Nabal’s designation as a Calebite ([25:3](#)) and his association with Carmel and Maon ([25:2](#)), seven and eight miles south of Hebron, respectively, suggest that these, and possibly other, cities in the vicinity of Hebron were included in Calebite territory (see [comment on 30:27](#)).

Rode off on camels (30:17). On the possession of camels by the Amalekites see [15:3](#). Of the six living species of camels, only two appear to have inhabited the world of the ancient Near East—the one-humped dromedary (*Camelus dromedarius*) and the two-humped bactrian (*Camelus bactrianus*). The term for camel used in the Bible is generic, like its English equivalent, and does not clearly identify the species of camel in view (though the one-humped, or Arabian, camel is most likely in this range).⁵³⁵ Biblical references to domesticated camels in the patriarchal period continue to be challenged as anachronistic by some scholars, but other scholars point out that pentateuchal references to *riding* camels are quite limited, and there is some evidence for the domestication of camels as early as 3000 B.C.⁵³⁶



Stone relief from the palace of Ashurbanipal showing raiders riding camels
Werner Forman Archive/The British Museum

More pertinent to the time period of the text before us, both extrabiblical textual evidence and material archaeological evidence (e.g., camel bones) leave little doubt that “domesticated camels were in use in the northwestern portion of the Arabian peninsula sometime in the mid-second millennium B.C. among pastoral people with whom the Israelites had some acquaintance.”⁵³⁷ This evidence converges nicely with the biblical texts, in which cameleering is associated mainly with peoples such as the Amalekites and Midianites (Judg. 6:5; 7:12; 8:21, 26), who lived in the arid regions to the south and east of Judah. Because of their ability to go several days without drinking and their speed, camels made effective mounts for travel and for battle. In the present episode, they also prove invaluable for the escape of four hundred Amalekites.

All will share alike (30:24). While the taking of plunder in battle is subjected to ethical questioning nowadays, in antiquity it was regarded as a legitimate aspect of warfare.⁵³⁸ See [sidebar on “The Spoils of War.”](#)

The Spoils of War

In the thought world of the ancient Near East, both victory in battle and the spoils of battle were regarded as gifts of the gods. Furthermore, soldiers who were not mercenaries were often not paid directly for their services but,

rather, “lost property during the war, abandoned their work, and endangered their lives.” Logically, therefore, the taking of plunder could be viewed as “fair compensation for the damages they suffered.”^{A-104}

In the Old Testament, Yahweh was regarded as the Divine Warrior (see [comment on 14:6](#)), who led his people into battle, gave them victory, and along with victory, the spoils. According to the biblical ethic, however, the taking of spoils was not to be the primary motivation for going to war (but see [comment on 2 Sam. 3:22](#)).

A similar attitude prevailed among Israel’s neighbors, though with marked exceptions. The Assyrian king Adad-nirari II (912–889), for example, boasts: “At the time by the edict of the great gods, my sovereignty (and) dominion were decreed (and) they named me *to plunder the possessions of the lands*.”^{A-105} Apparently the Assyrian king saw the plundering of other nations as central to his job description. For the most part, however, plundering the vanquished foe was regarded as a legitimate *aspect* of warfare, not in itself a legitimate *ground* for initiating a conflict. The quantity of spoils captured, whether measured in human captives, livestock, or material goods, served as a measure of the magnitude of the victory and bolstered the prestige of the triumphant army, especially its leader, and was often celebrated in inscriptions and reliefs.

Usually the spoils of war were collected and carefully distributed in the aftermath of a battle, according to guidelines established either before or after the battle.^{A-106} As a general rule, significant quantities of spoils went to the temple and the temple service. Any allies involved in the conflict or in certain covenantal relationships also received a share—one may think in this regard of David’s “sending some of the plunder to the elders of Judah” (v. 26), among whom he found refuge for a time during his fugitive period. The king or leader, of course, received a significant share, and the soldiers along with auxiliary personnel also received distributions.^{A-107}

Among such auxiliary personnel in the present episode might be counted the two hundred soldiers who remained behind at the Wadi Besor (vv. 9–10; cf. the two hundred who “stayed with the supplies” as David and four hundred others went up against Nabal in [25:13](#)). Thus, David’s insistence that those who stayed behind were not to be denied a share was in keeping with wider practices in the ancient Near East and in the Bible (e.g., Num. 31; Josh. 22). The specific rationale David gave, however, was deeply theological: Yahweh “has protected us and handed over to us the forces that came against us” (v. 23). Both victory in battle and the spoils of battle ultimately belonged to

Yahweh, and so, irrespective of the specific role one had played in the battle, “all will share alike” (v. 24).



Booty and tribute being presented to Ashurbanipal after the capture of Babylon

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

David . . . sent some of the plunder to the elders of Judah (30:26). The message that David sends with the plunder—“Here is a present for you from the plunder of the LORD’s enemies”—underscores the theological significance of David’s conflict with the Amalekites. The Amalekites are viewed not simply as a marauding people group in the Negev but, more fundamentally, as the enemies of Yahweh (see [comment on 15:2](#)). David confronts them and defeats them not simply as a Judahite chieftain, but as Yahweh’s anointed/messiah.⁵³⁹

Though described as a “present” (lit., “blessing”), David’s presentation of plunder to the elders of Judah may have followed the ancient Near Eastern custom, practiced for instance by the Hittites, of restoring to its original owner booty taken in a conflict with a third party.⁵⁴⁰ According to the logic whereby spoils were seen as a legitimate by-product of warfare that therefore became the rightful possession of the conquerors, David had a right to keep what he had taken from the Amalekites. But knowing that the Amalekites had plundered not only Ziklag but also “the Negev of the Kerethites and the territory belonging to Judah and the Negev of Caleb” (as reported by the Egyptian slave in v. 14),

David chooses to return some of the plunder to its original owners.

Interestingly, no mention is made of any “present” being sent to the Kerethites, though David recovered much plunder that had been taken not only from Judah but from “the land of the Philistines” (v. 16; on the Philistine associations of the Kerethites, see [comment on v. 14](#)). This may reflect the distinction in David’s mind between “members of God’s covenant community”⁵⁴¹ and peoples opposed to that community (cf. David’s actions and words in [27:8–11](#)). The specific recipients of David’s largesse are named in [30:27–31](#).

He sent . . . to those in all the other places where David and his men had roamed ([30:27–31](#)). While the geographic locations of a few of the specific sites mentioned have not been positively identified, verse 31 makes clear that they lay in the general areas frequented by David while on the run from Saul (see [comments on 27:2, 7](#)), namely, the southern hill country of Judah and the northern Negev.⁵⁴²



Revenge on the Amalekites

“Bethel” (the first site mentioned) is not the well-known Ephraimite Bethel, north of Jerusalem, but is perhaps a different Bethel—possibly the “Bethuel” of 1 Chronicles 4:30 (cf. “Bethul” in Josh. 19:4).⁵⁴³ Its precise location has not been determined, but Joshua 19:4 appropriately lists it with Ziklag and Hormah.⁵⁴⁴ Alternatively, perhaps we should read (with LXX^B) “Beth-zur,” which as McCarter notes would be “quite at home in this list.”⁵⁴⁵ Beth-zur is identified as Khirbet et-Tubeiqah, three or four miles north of Hebron, near the ancient road between Hebron and Jerusalem. Judging from biblical and archaeological evidence, Beth-zur would have been occupied by Calebites (see [comments on 25:3](#) and [30:14](#)) in David’s day.⁵⁴⁶

For the location of other sites in the list, so far as these are known, see the accompanying map.⁵⁴⁷ David’s ability to distribute “presents” to different geographic regions would have increased his prestige and popularity in the area around Hebron, where he is first made king (see [comment on 2 Sam. 2:4](#)). Distribution of spoils to various geographic regions is attested also, for example, among the Assyrians.⁵⁴⁸

Saul Is Wounded on Mount Gilboa and Takes His Own Life (31:1–13)

Mount Gilboa (31:1). The Gilboa range runs north to border the Jezreel Valley on the southeast side. For information on the deployment of Philistine troops at Shunem and Israelite troops near Gilboa at the spring of Jezreel, see [comment on 28:4](#). The military superiority that chariots afforded the Philistines in the relatively flat battleground of the Jezreel Valley led to a rapid Philistine victory. Many Israelites were slain on Mount Gilboa, perhaps as they sought to gain the advantage of high ground or rougher terrain where chariots would be less effective, or simply because they were overmatched and had been routed. In antiquity, chariots often served as mobile firing platforms.



Mount Gilboa and environs

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Saul said to his armor-bearer, “Draw your sword and run me through” (31:4). In view of the kind of treatment ancient Near Eastern prisoners of war in general, and defeated kings in particular, could expect, Saul’s fear of being abused by the Philistines was well founded. From Assyrian inscriptions around

the time of David and later, we gain “an impression of unremitting cruelty” to prisoners of war: “Most were slaughtered or blinded, some hung on stakes or fortifications around city walls, as a warning to others. Heads, hands, or lower lips were cut off to facilitate counting.”⁵⁴⁹ One particularly gruesome relief from the reign of Sargon II shows the vanquished king of Hamath literally being flayed alive in public.⁵⁵⁰

Although Saul managed to end his life before falling into the hands of the Philistines, their treatment of his corpse confirms the cruelty that Saul feared (see vv. 8–10). Some commentators praise Saul’s suicide as a courageous act, worthy of a tragic hero seeking to gain mastery of his own fate, even in death. But the tenor of 1-2 Samuel, and indeed the Bible as a whole, points in another direction.⁵⁵¹ The truly courageous are, rather, those who like David in times of distress find strength in God (23:16; 30:6) and who, like Jonathan, yield fully to his will (18:4; 23:17). Saul’s attempt to have his armor-bearer run him through finds its closest analogy in the death scene of the less-than-admirable Abimelech of Judges 9 (see v. 54). Outside the Bible, Assyrian texts also attest a king asking his armor-bearer to finish him off.⁵⁵² For more on attitudes towards suicide in ancient Egypt and Mesopotamia, see [comment on 2 Samuel 17:23](#).



Heads hung on the city wall from the Balawat Gate Werner Forman Archive/The British Museum

Uncircumcised fellows (31:4). See [comments on 14:6](#) and [17:26](#). Saul’s fear of the Philistines stands in marked contrast to the bold confidence of Jonathan (14:6) and David (17:26), anchored by their faith in Yahweh.

They cut off his head (31:9). In the ancient Near East, “a king’s head was a prized trophy.”⁵⁵³ See [comment on 5:3–4](#).



Cutting the head off the enemy

Edward Silver, University of Chicago, courtesy of the British Museum

They put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths (31:10). On depositing armor and weapons in temples, note the placement of Goliath’s sword behind the ephod in the sanctuary at Nob (21:9). Note also the general practice of deporting enemy gods/idols and depositing them in one’s own sanctuary (see [sidebar on “Treatment of Defeated Deities”](#) at 5:2). On the “temple of the Ashtoreths,” see [comments on 7:4](#) and next note.

Fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan (31:10). Beth Shan is one of the oldest continuously occupied sites in Canaan. Identified with Tell el-Ḥuṣn, Beth Shan guarded the eastern end of the Valley of Jezreel, at the intersection of two main trade routes. Dominated by Egypt from as early as the fifteenth century, Beth Shan later came under Philistine and ultimately Israelite control. Archaeological excavation of the site has been extensive. The eleventh century, the period of Saul, is well attested, and particularly noteworthy is the discovery of a pair of public buildings that the excavators have identified as “twin temples,” tentatively identified as “the House of Ashtoreth” (1 Sam. 31:10) and “the House of Dagon” (1 Chron. 10:10).⁵⁵⁴



Beth Shan

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

Positive identifications are, of course, difficult, so it is best to remain cautious. What one can say is that there appear to have been temples at Beth Shan at the time of Saul's death into which his armor, and presumably his head, could have been deposited. The bodies of Saul (sans head) and his sons were reserved for public display on the wall of the city. On the exposure of enemy dead, see [comments on 21:6, 10](#).



Remains of one of the temples on the tell of Beth Shan Kim Walton

Jabesh Gilead . . . journeyed through the night (31:11–12). On the likely location of Jabesh Gilead, see [comment on 11:1](#). The distance between Jabesh Gilead and Beth Shan was about thirteen miles.

They took down the bodies . . . burned them (31:12). Cremation was not a common burial practice in most parts of the ancient Near East, though it is attested especially among the Hurrian-influenced Hittites of Anatolia.⁵⁵⁵ There is some evidence of cremation burials in Judah from as early as the second half of the eleventh century, though this meager evidence may be a result of accidental causes, such as tomb fires.⁵⁵⁶ In the Old Testament, “burning in/with the fire” is associated mostly with purification (Lev. 13:57), with the punishment of capital offenders (Lev. 20:14; 21:9), or both (Josh. 7:25).

Cremation as a burial custom per se is unknown in the Old Testament, unless the present episode in which the mutilated bodies of Saul and his sons are burned provides an exception. As Matthews notes, however, the burning may have been made necessary simply because of the “dismemberment and advanced state of decay of the bodies.”⁵⁵⁷ On burial customs in general, see [comment on 2 Samuel](#)

2:32.

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Chapter Notes

Main Text Notes

1. At the outset of this study, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my two exceptionally gifted research assistants, Andrew Krause and Matt Lynch, who by their endeavors have not only speeded my progress but also enriched the work in many ways. I would also like to thank general editor John Walton for his helpful suggestions at many points.

2. Strictly speaking, 1 and 2 Samuel are not “literary” in a merely (or even primarily) aesthetic sense but, rather, in a “rhetorical” sense—designed to be persuasive; cf. M. Z. Brettler, “Biblical Literature as Politics: The Case of Samuel,” in *Religion and Politics in the Ancient Near East*, ed. A. Berlin (Bethesda, Md.: Univ. Press of Maryland, 1996), 71–92.

3. K. A. Kitchen, "The Controlling Role of External Evidence in Assessing the Historical Status of the Israelite United Monarchy," in *Windows into Old Testament History: Evidence, Argument, and the Crisis of "Biblical Israel,"* ed. V. P. Long, G. J. Wenham, and D. W. Baker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 120. This essay covers a concise, yet detailed survey of the political state of affairs in Canaan at the time of David and Solomon. Cf. also E. H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 154.
4. Kitchen, "Controlling Role," 112, observes that from the time of Ramesses III (whom Kitchen dates to ca. 1184–1153 B.C.) until the invasions of Siamun (ca. 970) and Shoshenq I (biblical "Shishak," ca. 925 B.C.), no pharaoh of Egypt was engaged militarily in Canaan. Cf. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 156.

5. K. A. Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 89.

6. Kitchen, “Controlling Role,” esp. 113–25; cf. also idem, *Reliability*, 98–104.

7. For a brief treatment of the rise of kingship, see H. W. F. Saggs, *Civilization before Greece and Rome* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1991), 35–38.

8. The following is but a sampling of pertinent treatments of the topic: M. B. Dick, "The 'History of David's Rise to Power' and the Neo-Babylonian Succession Apologies," in *David and Zion: Biblical Studies in Honor of J. J. M. Roberts*, ed. B. F. Batto and K. L. Roberts (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2004), 3–19; H. A. Hoffner Jr., "Propoganda and Political Justification in Hittite Historiography," in *Unity and Diversity: Essays in the History, Literature, and Religion of the Ancient Near East*, ed. H. Goedicke and J. J. M. Roberts (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1975), 49–62; T. Ishida, "The Succession Narrative and Esarhaddon's Apology: A Comparison," in *Ah, Assyria: Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor*, ed. M. Cogan and I. Eph'al (ScrHier 33; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991), 166–73; P. K. McCarter Jr., "The Apology of David," *JBL* 99 (1980): 489–504; S. L. McKenzie, *King David: A Biography* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2000), 25–46; H. Tadmor, "Autobiographical Apology in the Royal Assyrian Literature," in *History, Historiography and Interpretation*, ed. H. Tadmor and M. Weinfeld (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1984), 36–57.

9. On the issue, for instance, of how accurately David is portrayed in the books of Samuel, see I. Provan, V. P. Long, and T. Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox, 2003), 217–21.

10. Cf. the similar introductions in Josh. 1:1; Judg. 1:1; 13:2; [1 Sam. 9:1](#).

11. Cf. R. Youngblood, "Elkanah," *ABD*, 2:475–76.

12. For Samuel's association with Ramah, see, e.g., [1 Sam. 7:17](#); [8:4](#); [15:34](#); [16:13](#); [19:18](#); [25:1](#).

13. So, e.g., P. M. Arnold, "Ramah," *ABD*, 5:613–14. An alternative theory associates Ramathaim with Arimathea of New Testament times (see Matt. 27:57; John 19:38), noting that a "Ramathaim" in the territory of Samaria (thus Ephraim) is mentioned in 1 Macc. 11:34 and identified as Arimathea by Eusebius's *Onomasticon*. On this and other attempts to solve the Ramathaim puzzle, see Arnold, "Ramah," 613.

14. So Youngblood, "Elkanah," 2:475.

15. For further factors encouraging the practice of polygamy, see *IVPBBC-OT*, at [1 Sam. 1:2](#).

16. See, e.g., Hammurabi's Code, sections 128–84 (*ANET*, 171–74) and the Middle Assyrian Laws, sections 25–39 (*ANET*, 182–83). For a concise summary of polygynous practices in ancient Mesopotamia, see S. Greengus, "Legal and Social Institutions of Ancient Mesopotamia," *CANE*, 478–79. For a similar treatment of Egyptian practices, see G. Pinch, "Private Life in Ancient Egypt," *CANE*, 373–75. A list of polygamy contracts is presented in R. Westbrook, *Old Babylonian Marriage Law* (AfOB 23; Horn: Berger, 1988), 103–8. For an excursus on the whole issue, see H. J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East* (OtSt 69; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 122–40.

17. Further, see V. P. Hamilton, "Marriage," *ABD*, 4:559–69 (esp. 565).

18. As evidenced by the prevalence of female fertility figurines discovered by archaeologists throughout the Levant. In the Phoenician Karatepe inscriptions, Azitawada, vizier of Baal, invokes the blessing of Baal on him and his people, requesting that the latter may “give birth to many (children) and by virtue of the many . . . be powerful” (W. Beyerlin, ed., *Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament* [OTL; London: SCM, 1978], 242).

19. See, e.g., the Hittite Ritual against Impotence, *ANET*, 349–50.

20. See K. A. Kitchen, *The Bible in Its World: The Bible and Archaeology Today* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1977), 86.

21. Cross has argued that the title makes grammatical sense in Hebrew only if the first element “carries verbal force and takes an object,” thus yielding the sense “He who creates the (heavenly) armies.” This he compares to epithets for the Canaanite god El such as “Father of the gods,” “creator of creatures”; F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973), 69–70.

22. See T. Fretheim, “Yahweh,” *NIDOTTE*, 4:1295–300 (esp. 1297–98).

23. I. Finkelstein, "Seilun, Khirbet," *ABD*, 5:1069–72, on 1072. See also idem, *Shiloh: The Archaeology of a Biblical Site* (Tel Aviv: Institute of Archaeology, 1993); reviewed by W. G. Dever in *BAR* 21/6 (1995): 6–10.

24. So R. Youngblood, "Eli," *ABD*, 2:456.

25. “The ’Aqhatu Legend,” trans. D. Pardee (*COS*, 1:103:344 [section i 27–34]).

26. See, e.g., F. Deist, “*APPAYIM* [1 Sam I 5] אַפִּים,” *VT* 27 (1977): 205–9.

27. Cf. *IVPBBC-OT*, at 1 [Sam. 1:8](#).

28. On this point, see R. E. Friedman, "Tabernacle," *ABD*, 6:292–300 (esp. 298–99).

29. For an interesting, if speculative discussion, see A. S. Kaufman, "Fixing the Site of the Tabernacle at Shiloh," *BAR* 14/6 (1988): 46–52.

30. Friedman, "Tabernacle," 294–95; cf. C. H. Gordon and G. A. Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (New York: Norton, 1997), 166.

31. See K. A. Kitchen, “The Tabernacle: A Bronze Age Artifact,” *ErIsr* 24 (1993): 119–29.

32. See A. Millard, *Treasures from Bible Times* (Tring, Belleville, Sydney: Lion, 1985), 73; Kitchen, *Bible in Its World*, 85–86.

33. See T. W. Cartledge, "Vow," *ISBE*², 4: 998–99; cf. also idem, *Vows in the Hebrew Bible and the Ancient Near East* (JSOTSup 147; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992).

34. On this point and on Nazirites in general, see R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 2 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 2:466–67.

35. For the view that “the shaving rite occurs as one component of the series of aggregation rites which move the votary out of a state of separation back into the common life of Israel,” see S. M. Olyan, “What Do Shaving Rites Accomplish and What Do They Signal In Biblical Ritual Contexts?” *JBL* 117 (1998): 611–22.

36. Trans. M. Lichtheim (*COS*, 1.46:111 [section 4.1ff.]).

37. De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 1:43. For a thorough rebuttal of the notion that for the ancient Hebrews a name possessed power and virtually determined the character of the one given the name, see J. Barr, "The Symbolism of Names in the Old Testament," *BJRL* 52 (1969–70): 11–29.

38. M. Garsiel, "Puns upon Names as a Literary Device in 1 Kings 1–2," *Bib* 72 (1991): 379–86 (on 386); cf. idem, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns*, trans. Phyllis Hackett (Ramat Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University, 1991). See also D. Stuart, "Names, Proper," *ISBE*², 3:483–88.

39. *COS*, 1.46:113 (section 7.15ff.); cf. *ANET*, 420d.

40. P. J. King and L. E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, ed. D. A. Knight (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 41.

41. See P. K. McCarter, *I Samuel* (AB; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1980), 56–57; cf. also R. P. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 78.

42. G. J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus* (NICOT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979), 79 n.12. Other defenders of the Masoretic text's reading include R. Ratner, "Three Bulls or One? A Reappraisal of 1 Samuel 1, 24," *Bib* 68 (1987): 98–102; followed by R. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 73. Among modern translations, JPS also follows "three bulls."

43. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 71–72.

44. Cf. 1 Chron. 25:5 (where “exalt” renders “lift the horn”); Ps. 132:17; see also McCarter, *I Samuel*, 72; M. L. Brown, “קָרָן” *NIDOTTE*, 3:991.

45. On the topic generally, see M. L. Siring, *The Horn-Motif in the Hebrew Bible and Related Ancient Near Eastern Literature and Iconography* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews Univ. Press, 1982). More briefly, see *DBI*, 400.

46. On the presence of the words meaning “mountain” and “rock” in Aramaic and Hebrew names, see J. D. Fowler, *Theophoric Personal Names in Ancient Hebrew: A Comparative Study* (JSOTSup 49; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1987), 221; cf. also H. B. Huffmon, *Amorite Personal Names in the Mari Texts: A Structural and Lexical Study* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1965), 258.

47. For discussion, see “Rock,” *DBI*, 732–33.

48. *ANET*, 66a.

49. W. Beyerlin, *Near Eastern Religious Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (OTL; London: SCM, 1978), 61.

50. Ibid., 93, 95.

51. Ibid., 163.

52. Ibid., 209, 211.

53. For the view that in Ps. 29 “elements of the ancient Near Eastern veneration of the god of thunderstorms . . . [are] taken up and transferred to Yahweh,” see H.-J. Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, trans. Hilton C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1988), 347. Cf. also Y. Avishur, *Studies in Hebrew and Ugaritic Psalms* (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1994), 88; A. R. W. Green, *The Storm-God in the Ancient Near East* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003).

54. See Saggs, *Civilization*, 25–26, 35–38.

55. See de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 1:104 and Saggs, *Civilization*, 179; for more thorough treatments, see R. de Vaux, "The King of Israel, Vassal of Yahweh," in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972), 152–66; T. N. D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of Israelite Kings* (ConBot 8; Lund: Gleerup, 1976).

56. See, e.g., G. E. Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, rev. ed. (Trowbridge and Esher, UK: Duckworth, 1962), 143.

57. For a concise discussion of sacrifice in Israel and among its neighbors, see King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 357–63. For more detail, see B. A. Levine, “Ritual as Symbol: Modes of Sacrifice in Israelite Religion,” in *Sacred Time, Sacred Place: Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, ed. B. M. Gittlen (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 125–35.

58. B. J. Collins, "Establishing a New Temple for the Goddess of the Night," *COS*, 1.70:176 §32.

59. On all this, see J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16* (AB 3a; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 205–6.

60. For a brief discussion and a listing of further literature, see P. Jenson, “אפוד,” *NIDOTTE*, 1:476–77.

61. C. Meyers, "Ephod," *ABD*, 2:550, citing *CAD*, 4:183; cf. *AHW*, 1:222a; cited in Jenson, "אֶפֹּד," 1:476.

62. See A. Tomasino, “אֶקֶל,” *NIDOTTE*, 1:301; R. E. Friedman, “Tabernacle,” *ABD*, 6:294; Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 72.

63. It is missing in the Qumran text 4QSam^a and in some recensions of the LXX (specifically LXX^B). For further discussion of the textual difficulties, see McCarter, *I Samuel*, 81.

64. K. van der Toorn, "Cultic Prostitution," *ABD*, 5:510; see *ibid.*, 510–13 for full discussion.

65. De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 2:383–84.

66. See, e.g., I. Singer, *Hittite Prayers* (SBLWAW 11; Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2002), 58 (§2; though the phrase “man of god” is restored).

67. So H. B. Huffmon, "Prophecy (ANE)," *ABD*, 5:477–82, on 481. See *ibid.* for a concise description of titles and functions, with appropriate primary source references. For a fuller summary treatment, see the section on "Divination and Prophecy," in *Religions in the Ancient World*, ed. S. I. Johnston (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of the Harvard Univ. Press, 2004), 370–82. Cf. also the important study by R. R. Wilson, *Prophecy and Society in Ancient Israel* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1980), esp. the section on "Prophecy in the Ancient Near East," 89–134.

68. Huffmon, "Prophecy (ANE)," 5:477.

69. “The Inscription of Zakkur, King of Hamath,” trans. A. Millard (*COS*, 2.35:155).

70. On Samuel's experience as a "dream theophany," see R. K. Gnuse, "A Reconsideration of the Form-Critical Structure in 1 Samuel 3: An Ancient Near Eastern Dream Theophany," *ZAW* 94 (1982): 379–90; idem, *The Dream Theophany of Samuel: Its Structure in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Dreams and Its Theological Significance* (Lanham, Md.: Univ. Press of America, 1984). For an evaluative review of the latter, see V. P. Long, "Review of R. K. Gnuse, *The Dream Theophany of Samuel: Its Structure in Relation to Ancient Near Eastern Dreams and Its Theological Significance*," *JETS* 28 (1985): 230–31. For more recent treatments, see S. A. L. Butler, *Mesopotamian Conceptions of Dreams and Dream Rituals* (AOAT 258; Munster: Ugarit Verlag, 1998); J.-M. Husser, *Dreams and Dream Narratives in the Biblical World* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

71. J. F. Borghouts, "Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination in Ancient Egypt," *CANE*, 1783. For the oldest surviving example of such a manual, see the Chester Beatty "Dream Book," trans. R. K. Ritner (*COS*, 1.33:52–54); this Egyptian text is attested in a thirteenth-century B.C. copy, but it may stem from a much earlier original from as early as the first half of the second millennium B.C.

72. G. McMahon, "Theology, Priests, and Worship in Hittite Anatolia," *CANE*, 1991, 1994.

73. K. van der Toorn, "Theology, Priests, and Worship in Canaan and Ancient Israel," *CANE*, 2055.

74. R. E. Averbeck, "The Cylinders of Gudea," *COS*, 2.155:419 n.7.

75. Ibid.

76. *ANET*, 449b.

77. See D. Pardee, *COS*, 1.102 and 103, respectively.

78. Cf. Husser, *Dreams*, 56–58.

79. *ANET*, 562c.

80. On the tabernacle of Moses and the ark's place within it, see *OEANE*, 1:324–30.

81. On these convergences between text and archaeology, see I. Finkelstein, *NEAEHL*, 652–53.

82. So *ibid.*

83. For photo, drawing, and brief description of the ostrakon, see M. Kochavi, *NEAEHL*, 654.

84. For discussion of this point, see R. S. Hess, “Literacy in Iron Age Israel,” in *Windows into Old Testament History: Evidence, Argument, and the Crisis of “Biblical Israel,”* ed. V. P. Long, G. J. Wenham, and D. W. Baker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 86. See also A. Demsky, “A Proto-Canaanite Abecedary Dating from the Period of the Judges and Its Implications for the History of the Alphabet,” *Tel Aviv* 4 (1977): 14–27. For further description of the ostrakon itself, see McCarter, *Ancient Inscriptions*, 77–78; note his interesting, if highly speculative suggestion regarding line 4: “It is possible that the first eight signs in line 4 of the ‘Izbet Şarṭah ostrakon preserve the name of the scribe, *ʾrp bn nḥm*, ‘Oreph son of Nahuym.’ If this is correct, it is interesting to note that the name of this 12th-century scribe is the masculine equivalent of biblical Orpah, the name of Ruth’s sister-in-law, who, according to biblical tradition, lived ‘in the days when the judges judged’ (Ruth 1:1)—that is, in the 11th or 12th century B.C.E., the time period from which the ostrakon also derives” (ibid., 78).

85. For a summary essay by excavation director M. Kochavi, see *OEANE*, 1:147–51.

86. More or less midway between Gaza in the south and Megiddo in the north on the Great Trunk Road; see Beitzel, *Atlas*, 68.

87. See *ANET*, 329 n.8: “the Ruler of Aphek, Yanki-ilu”; cf. also D. B. Redford, “Execration and Execration Texts,” *ABD*, 2:682; for other execration texts, see “Execration Texts,” trans. R. K. Ritner (*COS*, 1.32:50–52); and on the nature of execration texts generally, see McCarter, *Ancient Inscriptions*, 42–43.

88. Cf. *ANET*, 242–43.

89. “The Memphis and Karnak Stelae of Amenhotep II,” trans. J. K. Hoffmeier (*COS*, 2.3:21; cf. *ANET*, 246).

90. E.g., a report of the Assyrian king Esarhaddon's seventh-century march towards Egypt mentions "the town of Apku which is in the region of Samaria" (*ANET*, 292c). Other later references to Aphek outside the Bible are noted in R. Frankel, "Aphek," *ABD*, 1:276.

91. *NEAEHL*, 68–69.

92. See W. W. Hallo's introduction to "The Letter of Takuhlina" (*COS*, 3.94:243).

93. C. Meyers, "Cherubim," *ABD*, 1:900.

94. Some have suggested that the phrase should be read together as a title, “LORD of Hosts Enthroned on the Cherubim” (so JPS).

95. See, e.g., T. N. D. Mettinger, *The Dethronement of Sabaoth: Studies in the Shem and Kabod Theologies* (ConBOT 18; Lund: Gleerup, 1982), 19–37; idem, “YHWH SABAOTH—The Heavenly King on the Cherubim Throne,” in *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays: Papers Read at the International Symposium for Biblical Studies, Tokyo, 5–7 December, 1979*, ed. T. Ishida (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1982), 109–38.

96. L. E. Stager, "Forging an Identity: The Emergence of Ancient Israel," in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World*, ed. Michael D. Coogan (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1998), 123–75 (on 153–54). See also idem, "The Impact of the Sea Peoples in Canaan (1185–1050 B.C.E.)," in *The Archaeology of Society in the Holy Land*, ed. T. E. Levy (London: Leicester Univ. Press, 1997), 332–48, 583–85.

97. On which, see W. G. Dever, *What Did Biblical Writers Know, and When Did They Know It? What Archaeology Can Tell Us about the Reality of Ancient Israel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 126–27.

98. Such *biblical* evidence contrary to the assumption of an Israel numbering in the millions can easily be multiplied. For a succinct summary of evidence, see C. J. Humphreys, *The Miracles of Exodus: A Scientist's Discovery of Extraordinary Natural Causes of the Biblical Stories* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 2003), 104–5.

99. A selection of important studies includes the following: D. M. Fouts, "A Defense of the Hyperbolic Interpretation of Large Numbers in the Old Testament," *JETS* 40 (1997): 377–87; C. J. Humphreys, "The Number of People in the Exodus from Egypt: Decoding Mathematically the Very Large Numbers in Numbers I and XXVI," *VT* 48 (1998): 196–213; idem, *Miracles of Exodus*, 103–10; A. R. Millard, "Large Numbers in the Assyrian Royal Inscriptions," in *Ah, Assyria: Studies in Assyrian History and Ancient Near Eastern Historiography Presented to Hayim Tadmor*, ed. M. Cogan and I. Eph'al (ScrHier 33; Jerusalem: Magnes, 1991), 213–22; J. W. Wenham, "The Large Numbers in the Old Testament," *TynBul* 18 (1967): 19–53. For brief discussion and further bibliography, see D. Howard, *Joshua* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 189 n. 76; Provan, Long, and Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 130–31, n. 95.

100. So R. B. Allen, "Numbers," *EBC*, 686–91 ("The Large Numbers—Toward a Solution").

101. [DBI](#), 574; King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 372–73.

102. E. F. de Ward, "Mourning Customs in 1, 2 Samuel," *JJS* 23 (1972): 1–27 (on p. 8). For more recent, thorough treatments of the subject, see S. M. Olyan, *Biblical Mourning: Ritual and Social Dimensions* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2004); X. H. T. Pham, *Mourning in the Ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup 302; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

103. See de Ward, "Mourning Customs," 8–10.

104. S. B. Parker, ed., *Ugaritic Narrative Poetry* (SBLWAW 9; Atlanta: Scholars, 1997), 149. For another translation, see “The Ba’lu Myth,” trans. D. Pardee (*COS*, 1.86:267–68). Earlier translations of these lines by S. R. Driver and J. C. L. Gibson differ slightly, reading, e.g., “straw” instead of “dirt” in the phrase describing what the mourner pours on his head; see *CML*¹, Baal I*.vi.12–24 and *CML*², “Baal and Mot,” 5.vi.12–24, respectively.

105. W. G. Dever, *OEANE*, 1:219.

106. M. Dothan, *NEAEHL*, 93d.

107. Ibid., 93b.

108. *OEANE*, 1:219.

109. *NEAEHL*, 98b; cf. *OEANE*, 1:219.

110. *NEAEHL*, 98d.

111. *NEAEHL*, 97a; cf. esp. *CANE*, 1276–77.

112. For fuller description, see *CANE*, 1277.

113. *NEAEHL*, 98b.

114. For other examples and discussion, see A. F. Campbell, *The Ark Narrative (1 Sam. 4–6; 2 Sam. 6): A Form-Critical and Traditio-Historical Study* (SBLDS 16; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1975), 179–91; P. D. Miller and J. J. M. Roberts Jr., *The Hand of the Lord: A Reassessment of the 'Ark Narrative' of 1 Samuel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1977), 9–17; P. K. McCarter, *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (AB; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), 178–82.

115. *ARI*, 2.12:7.

116. *ANET*, 340b.

117. On both, see J. Scurlock and B. R. Anderson, *Diagnoses in Assyrian and Babylonian Medicine: Ancient Sources, Translations, and Modern Medicine* (Urbana, Ill.: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2005), 51–52, 73–74.

118. In the case of plague, the bacterium *Yersinia pestis* is introduced by the bites of infected rat fleas (see *ibid.*, 73).

119. For a convenient review of the plague debate, see McCarter, *I Samuel*, 123.

120. For the state of the question, see E. Stern, *NEAEHL*, 1522. Cf. also J. D. Seger, "Gath," *ABD*, 2:908–9.

121. A. M. Maeir and C. S. Ehrlich, "Excavating Philistine Gath: Have We Found Goliath's Hometown?"
BAR 27/6 (2001): 22–31.

122. For additional evidence of the Philistines' empirical spirit, see [6:9](#).

123. Namely, Tell esh-Shalaf. On all this, see T. Dothan and S. Gitin, *NEAEHL*, 1051–52.

124. “The Ekron Inscription of Akhayus,” trans. K. L. Younger Jr. (*COS*, 2.42:164). On internal grounds, the inscription should be dated ca. 680–665 B.C. (so *ibid.*).

125. For the initial publication of the Ekron Inscription, describing the circumstances of its discovery and aspects of its translation and significance, see S. Gitin, T. Dothan, and J. Naveh, "A Royal Dedicatory Inscription from Ekron," *IEJ* 47 (1997): 1–16. For a discussion of how the name (actually an appellation) of the Ekronite king "may be of great importance to the discussion of the origin of the Philistines," see J. Naveh, "Achish-Ikausu in the Light of the Ekron Dedication," *BASOR* 310 (1998): 35–37. Naveh links "Akhayus" to "Achaean," meaning "Greek" (*ibid.*, 35). Further support for the Greek connection may exist if A. Demsky is correct in reading the name of the goddess in the inscription not as PTGYH but as PTNYH, vocalized "Potnia," "meaning 'mistress' or 'lady,' the formal title used for various goddesses in archaic Greek and Minoan and Mycenaean writings dating back to the Late Bronze Age. The root *pot* means 'lord' or 'master,' as in *despot*. Potnia is simply the feminine form, which sometimes accompanies the name of a particular goddess" ("Discovering a Goddess: A New Look at the Ekron Inscription Identifies a Mysterious Deity," *BAR* 24/5 [1998]: 53–58 [on 57]).

126. “Sennacherib’s Siege of Jerusalem,” trans. M. Cogan (*COS*, 2.119B:303).

127. Ibid. Padi is mentioned also in another Ekronite inscription, which reads, “for Ba‘al and for Padi” (see V. Sasson, “The Inscription of Achish, Governor of Ekron, and Philistine Dialect, Cult and Culture,” *UF* 29 [1997]: 627–39 [on 632]) and in a docket from 699 B.C. recording the contribution of one “Pidi of Anqaruna” = Padi of Ekron (see Gitin, Dothan, Naveh, “A Royal Dedicatory Inscription from Ekron,” 9).

128. Ibid. For text, see *ANET*, 291b.

129. A. F. Rainey, "Syntax, Hermeneutics and History," *IEJ* 48 (1998): 239–51 (on 242).

130. “Uḥḥamūwa’s Ritual against Plague,” trans. B. J. Collins (*COS*, 1.63:162).

131. "Pulisa's Ritual against Plague," trans. B. J. Collins (*COS*, 1.62:161).

132. D. T. Tsumura, "List and Narrative in 1 Samuel 6, 17–18a in the Light of Ugaritic Economic Texts," *ZAW* 113 (2001): 353–69 (on 365).

133. On the nature of apotropaic rituals, see O. R. Gurney, "Babylonian Prophylactic Figures and Their Rituals," *AAA* (1935), 21–96; A. R. Green, "Neo-Assyrian Apotropaic Figures," *Iraq* 45 (1983): 87–96; and the brief comments by A. R. Millard, "Keeping Evil at Bay [Queries and Comments]," *BAR* 27/1 (2001): 10.

134. Tsumura, "List and Narrative in 1 Samuel 6, 17–18a," 366–67.

135. D. P. Wright, "The Gesture of Hand Placement in the Hebrew Bible and in Hittite Literature," *JAOS* 106 (1986): 446.

136. Tsumura, "List and Narrative in 1 Samuel 6, 17–18a," 367.

137. *OEANE*, 1:311.

138. For photographs, see *NEAEHL*, 250.

139. *OEANE*, 1:311.

140. For fuller discussion of the site and its excavation, see F. Brandfon, "Beth Shemesh," *ABD*, 1:696–98; S. Bunimovitz and Z. Lederman, *NEAEHL*, 249–53; W. G. Dever, *OEANE*, 1:311–12.

141. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 137; cf. Y. Aharoni, *Land of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 255 (“Tell Deir el-’Azar in Abu Gosh”).

142. See J. M. Hamilton, "Kiriath Jearim," *ABD*, 4:85; Boling, *Joshua*, 267, 369.

143. J. Day, "Baal," *ABD*, 1:545–49. On divine thunder and lightning, see [comment on 2:10](#).

144. For discussion of extrabiblical allusions to Astarte, see J. Day, "Ashtoreth," *ABD*, 1:492–94, who notes, among other things, that "precursors of the Canaanite goddess Astarte are to be found in the Mesopotamian Ishtar and the Eblaite Ashtar" (492); cf. idem, *Yahweh and the Gods and Goddesses of Canaan* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 128ff. See also N. Wyatt, "Astarte," *DDD*², 110–12.

145. Day, "Ashtoreth," *ABD*, 1:492; G. C. Heider, "Molech," *DDD*², 581; but note also the latter's discussion of alternative construals of Molech (582–83). For a brief summary of debates regarding biblical references to Molech, see *CANE*, 2054, under "Human Sacrifice."

146. Day, "Baal," *ABD*, 1:547.

147. So Day, "Ashtoreth," *ABD*, 1:492, who compares the Akkadian use of *ilāni u ištarāti* to signify simply "gods and goddesses."

148. For a succinct and admittedly “oversimplified” discussion of the nature of Canaanite idolatry, see Merrill, *Kingdom*, 159–61. For a more thorough treatment of Canaanite religion, see M. S. Smith, “Myth and Mythmaking in Canaan and Ancient Israel,” *CANE*, 2031–41, and van der Toorn, “Theology, Priests, and Worship,” 2043–58.

149. On the various Mizpahs or Mizpehs, see P. M. Arnold, "Mizpah," *ABD*, 4:879–81.

150. Some earlier scholars assumed Nebi Samwil to be the Mizpah in view here, but scholarly opinion now favors Tell en-Naşbeh; see *ibid.*, 4:880. On the excavation history of Tell en-Naşbeh, see J. R. Zorn, *NEAEHL*, 1098–102; *idem*, *OEANE*, 4:101–3.

151. Arnold, "Mizpah," *ABD*, 4:880.

152. Zorn, *OEANE*, 4:102; cf. *idem*, “Mizpah: Newly Discovered Stratum Reveals Judah’s Other Capital,” *BAR* 23/5 (1997): 28–38, 66.

153. J. N. Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia: Society and Economy at the Dawn of History* (London: Routledge, 1992), 100.

154. See, e.g., Johnston, ed., *Religions*, 331–32.

155. Cf. T. Ishida, “The Leaders of the Tribal Leagues: ‘Israel’ in the Pre-Monarchical Period,” *RB* 80/1 (1973): 514–30 (repub. in idem, *History and Historical Writing in Ancient Israel: Studies in Biblical Historiography* [Leiden: Brill, 1999], 37–56).

156. For further discussion, see Provan, Long, and Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 205–7.

157. E.g., *ANET*, 270, l. 31; 275 §a; 277 §§a,b; 281 §5; 287 §8; cf. 279, 285.

158. E.g., *ANET*, 277, 281, 289.

159. *ARI*, 2.577:138.

160. *SSI*, 1:76 l. 14.

161. *NERT*, 231; *ANET*, 655.

162. *NERT*, 122–28; *ANET*, 623–32. On ancient Near Eastern prophecy outside Israel, see M. Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: Scholars, 2003). More briefly, cf. J. Blenkinsopp, *History of Prophecy in Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1996), 54–58.

163. *NERT*, 222.

164. Cf. Judg. 20:26–28; [1 Sam. 13:8–12](#); 1 Kings 8:44–45. For further discussion and literature, see V. P. Long, *The Reign and Rejection of King Saul: A Case for Literary and Theological Coherence* (SBLDS 118; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 62–63.

165. *NERT*, 222.

166. See, e.g., the discussion of Babylonian *kudurrus* (“boundary stones”) from the Kassite period (late second millennium) in W. Sommerfeld, “The Kassites of Ancient Mesopotamia: Origins, Politics, and Culture,” *CANE*, 920–22. For fuller discussion, see K. E. Slanski, *The Babylonian Entitlement Narûs (kudurrus): A Study of their Form and Function* (ASOR Books 9; Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research, 2003).

167. G. E. Mendenhall, "Amorites," *ABD*, 1:199–202.

168. See A. Negev and S. Gibson, eds., *Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land*, rev. ed. (New York/London: Continuum, 2003), 31–32; more fully, M. Liverani, “The Amorites,” *POTW*, 100–133.

169. As suggested by Liverani, “Amorites,” 125–26.

170. See A. Malamat, *Mari and the Bible*, ed. B. Halpern and M. H. E. Weippert (SHCANE 12; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 102. The letter cited is *ARM* 26/1.88.

171. See the descriptions of and the map locating these sites in W. Heimpel, *Letters to the King of Mari: A New Translation with Historical Introduction, Notes, and Commentary* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), xxii–xxiii.

172. Ibid., 210–11.

173. P. Villard, "Shamshi-Adad and Sons: The Rise and Fall of an Upper Mesopotamian Empire," *CANE*, 877.

174. On the question of identification, see Z. Herzog, *NEAEHL*, 168a; idem, *OEANE*, 1:288; D. W. Manor, "Beersheba," *ABD*, 1:641–42.

175. Manor, "Beersheba," *ABD*, 1:642.

176. A. F. Rainey, "Early Historical Geography of the Negeb," in *Beer-Sheba II: The Early Iron Age Settlements*, ed. Ze'ev Herzog (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv Univ. Institute of Archaeology, 1984), 88–104. The fact that several different sites may have borne the name Beersheba relieves the tension created by the fact that, while Beersheba figures in the lives of the patriarchs (e.g., Gen. 21:33; 46:1), Tell es-Seba⁶ evidences little occupation before the twelfth century B.C.; see H. W. Vos, "Beersheba," *NIDOTTE*, 4:439.

177. See *IVPBBC-OT*, 291c.

178. *OEANE*, 1:288c.

179. *IVPBBC-OT*, 291c.

180. “Instructions to Commanders of Border Garrisons,” trans. G. McMahon (*COS*, 1.84:221–25 [§§1, 36–37]).

181. Saggs, *Civilization*, 36.

182. Holloway, *Aššur is King!* 181–82.

183. “Instructions to the Royal Guard,” trans. G. McMahon (*COS*, 1.85:225–30 [§18]).

184. “The Panamuwa Inscription,” trans. K. L. Younger Jr. (*COS*, 2.37:159 [section 11b–19a]; “The Bar-Rakib Inscription,” trans. *idem* (*COS*, 2.38:161 [section 7b–15]).

185. I. Mendelsohn, "Samuel's Denunciation of the Kingship in the Light of Akkadian Documents from Ugarit," *BASOR* 143 (1956): 17–32. Cf. also S. Talmon, " 'The Rule of the King'—1 Samuel 8:4–22," in *King, Cult and Calendar in Ancient Israel*, ed. S. Talmon (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1986), 53–67.

186. For a full discussion of this issue, see Long, *Reign and Rejection*, 204–5.

187. J. G. Westenholz, *Legends of the Kings of Akkade* (Mesopotamian Civilizations; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997), 119; cf. also the text “Sargon, the Conquering Hero” (ibid., 59–77).

188. B. R. Foster, *Before the Muses: An Anthology of Akkadian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Bethesda, Md.: CDL, 2005), 301.

189. G. Frame, *Rulers of Babylonia: From the Second Dynasty of Isin to the End of Assyrian Domination (1157–612 B.C.)* (RIMB 2; Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1995), 34.

190. *ANET*, 73.

191. See N. Shupak, “The Eloquent Peasant,” *COS*, 1.43:98–104; *ANET*, 407–10.

192. R. S. Hess, "Letter Asking for the Return of Stolen Donkeys," *COS*, 3.91:236.

193. *ARM*, 26/1, 63. For discussion, see Malamat, *Mari and the Bible*, 103.

194. Ibid.

195. But for a studied attempt, see McCarter, *I Samuel*, 174–75.

196. Cf. *IVPBBC-OT*, 293.

197. See S. M. Paul, “1 Samuel 9:7: An Interview Fee,” in *Divrei Shalom: Collected Studies of Shalom M. Paul on the Bible and the Ancient Near East 1967–2005*, ed. S. M. Paul (CHANE 23; Leiden: Brill, 2005), 95–98.

198. For summary and discussion, see Malamut, *Mari and the Bible*, 124–27.

199. For the text in translation, with explanations of items requested, see Heimpel, *Letters*, 252–54 (26.199).

200. See Long, *Reign and Rejection*, 201, n. 26.

201. Youngblood, "1 and 2 Samuel," *EBC*, 620, citing B. Kanael, "Ancient Jewish Coins and Their Historical Importance," *BA* 26 (1963): 39.

202. Cf. King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 194–95.

203. Ibid., 320; see 320–30 for a good discussion of “high places.”

204. For an extrabiblical example of the cultic sense, see Mesha's statement in the Mesha Inscription that he "built this high place for Chemosh" (*SSI*, 1:16.3).

205. E.g., King and Stager (*Life in Biblical Israel*, 320) assume the former, while Zevit at least allows for the latter (*The Religions of Ancient Israel*, 263).

206. Rarely, as in the case of Akrotiri of the island of Thera, volcanic ash may preserve more, even second stories, but such preservation is the exception. For a brief online introduction to Akrotiri, visit www.culture.gr/2/21/211/21121a/e211ua08.html [accessed 17 August 2005].

207. See A. Faust and S. Bunimovitz, “The Four Room House: Embodying Iron Age Israelite Society,” *NEA* 66 (2003): 22–31.

208. For discussion, see King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 280–82. D. V. Edelman (*King Saul in the Historiography of Judah* [Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991], 52) suggests that Samuel’s use of a “vial” rather than a “horn,” as was customary in royal anointings (cf. 16:1, 13), is vaguely unsettling.

209. On this discovery, see J. Patrich, "Hideouts in the Judean Wilderness," *BAR* 15/5 (1989): 32–42 (esp. 35).

210. So Edelman, *King Saul*, 44.

211. T. Ishida, *History and Historical Writing in Ancient Israel* (SHCANE 19; Leiden: Brill, 1999), 67.

212. For further discussion and literature, see McCarter, *I Samuel*, 181.

213. Cross, *Canaanite Myth*, 223.

214. Cf. *CAD*, 2:142.

215. *CAD*, 1/1:134–35.

216. A. M. Kitz, "Prophecy as Divination," *CBQ* 65 (2003): 22–42 (on 31).

217. See Long, *Reign and Rejection*; more briefly, idem, “How Did Saul Become King? Literary Reading and Historical Reconstruction,” in *Faith, Tradition and History*, ed. A. R. Millard, J. K. Hoffmeier, and D. W. Baker (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 271–84. Cf. also Edelman, *King Saul*, whose reading differs from that presented here in some important respects.

218. See *CAD*, 1/1:131–34.

219. See Provan, Long, and Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 58–60.

220. A. R. Millard has made a strong case for literacy in early Israel; see, e.g., “The Question of Israelite Literacy,” *BRev* 3 (1987): 22–31; “Books in the Late Bronze Age in the Levant,” in *Past Links: Studies in the Languages and Cultures of the Ancient Near East*, ed. S. Izre’el, I. Singer, and R. Zadok (Israel Oriental Studies 18; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1998), 171–181. Others arguing for early literacy include Hess, Isserlin, Dever, Hoffmeier, *etc.* (for bibliography, see Provan, Long, and Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 314, n. 20).

221. See Z. Ben-Barak, "The Mizpah Covenant (I Samuel 10 25)—The Source of the Israelite Monarchic Covenant," *ZAW* 91 (1979): 30–43, esp. 35–37.

222. Ibid., 36.

223. Ibid., 37.

224. P. M. Arnold, *Gibeah: The Search for a Biblical City* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1990), 39–54.

225. See, e.g., N. L. Lapp, “Ful, Tell el-,” *OEANE*, 2:346–47. Cf. also idem, “Fûl, Tell el-,” *NEAEHL*, 446–47.

226. E.g., Arnold, *Gibeah*; H. S. Wentz, “The Monarchy of Saul: Antecedents, ‘Deuteronomic’ Interpretations and Ideology” (PhD diss., Univ. of Exeter, 1970/71); J. M. Miller, “Geba/Gibeah of Benjamin,” *VT* 25 (1975): 145–66; V. P. Long, “Gibeah,” *NIDOTTE*, 4:678–81 (from which the above discussion is adapted); Walton, *IVPBBC-OT*, 296.

227. The basic pattern has been further developed in works by D. Edelman and V. P. Long. For discussion and bibliography, see Long, *Reign and Rejection*, 185–90.

228. *ANET*, 282b.

229. [“A Letter Reporting Matters in Kalah,”](#) trans. K. L. Younger Jr. (*COS*, 3.96:245).

230. “Sennacherib’s Siege of Jerusalem,” trans. K. L. Younger Jr. (*COS*, 2.119B; cf. *ANET*, 287c).

231. *ANET*, 294b.

232. See *NEAEHL*, 1247; “The Tell Sīrān Inscription,” trans. W. E. Aufrecht (*COS*, 2.25:139–40); for other brief Ammonite inscriptions, see *COS*, 2.24 and 2.26.

233. See J.-M. de Tarragon, "Ammon," *ABD*, 1:194, and esp. M. Burdajewicz, *NEAEHL*, 1243–49.

234. COS, 2.24:139.

235. See, e.g., Judg. 10:6–8, and discussion of this issue in Provan, Long, and Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 164–65.

236. For more on the Ammonites, see R. W. Younker, “Ammonites,” in *POTW*, 293–316.

237. As argued by D. Edelman, “Jabesh-Gilead,” *ABD*, 3:594–95.

238. K. A. Kitchen, *Ramesside Inscriptions, vol. IV: Merenptah and the Late Nineteenth Dynasty* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), text on 1–2, the Nubian War Stele.

239. “The Inscriptions of Bar-ga’yah and Mati’el from Sefire,” trans. Joseph A. Fitzmyer (*COS*, 2.82:214). Further on the Aramaic inscriptions discovered at Sefire (a village in Syria some 16 miles southeast of Aleppo), see Fitzmyer, *OEANE*, 4:512–13.

240. See Bergen, 1, 2 *Samuel*, 135. Further on the large-scale blinding of prisoners-of-war, see Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia*, 255.

241. See I. Eph'al, "On Warfare and Military Control in the Ancient Near Eastern Empires: A Research Outline," in *History, Historiography and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literature*, ed. H. Tadmor and M. Weinfeld (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983), 88–106 (on 99).

242. For full argumentation, see Long, *Reign and Rejection*, 219–24.

243. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 124.

244. *ARM*, 2.48. The parallel to [1 Sam. 11:7](#) was first proposed by G. Wallis, “Eine Parallele zu Richter 19.29ff. und 1 Sam. 11.5ff aus den Briefarchiv von Mari,” *ZAW* 64 (1952): 57–61.

245. Zertal bases this judgment on the presence of Iron Age pottery at the latter; see A. Zertal, "The Trek of the Tribes as They Settled in Canaan," *BAR* 17/5 (1991): 48–49, 75.

246. *NERT*, 65–66.

247. See *COS*, 3.33:59 §22.

248. H. A. Hoffner Jr., "Crossing the Taurus," *COS*, 1.73:184 §§1–2. Cf. also *COS*, 2.15:80 §14.

249. An interpretation like this was suggested by the medieval Jewish commentator Isaac Abrabanel (see Long, *Reign and Rejection*, 75, n. 30).

250. For these and other examples, see G. Buccelati, "1 Sam 13:1," *BeO* 5 (1963): 29; A. K. Grayson, "1 Sam 13:1," *BeO* 5 (1963): 86, 110. For a recent alternative approach, see S. Kreuzer, "'Saul war noch zwei Jahre König . . . ' Textgeschichtliche, literarische und historische Beobachtungen zu 1 Sam 13, 1," *BZ* 40 (1996): 263–70.

251. For more, including comments on Acts 13:21, see Long, *Reign and Rejection*, 71–75; Provan, Long, and Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 199–201.

252. The *šôpār* was also used in cultic contexts to “summon people together . . . signal an announcement . . . mark the beginning of cultic events and times . . . acclaim a king . . . introduce a theophany,” *etc.* (D. P. Wright, “Music and Dance in 2 Samuel 6,” *JBL* 121 [2002]: 201–25 [on 210]).

253. K. S. Gilbert et al., ed., *Treasures of Tutankhamun* (New York: Ballantine, 1976), 103 and color plate 8.

254. So Wright, "Music and Dance," 210–11, which see for full discussion.

255. Cf. [29:1–2, 11](#), where the Philistines gather their forces in Aphek before advancing to do battle with Israel in Jezreel.

256. In the present context, Beth Aven probably does not represent a disparaging transformation of the name Bethel (as in Hos. 10:5; cf. 1 Kings 12:28–29) but a different site, possibly Burqa, south of Beitîn (Bethel?). The site is mentioned in order to clarify the location not of Micmash, but of the Philistine encampment.

257. For discussion, see Provan, Long, and Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 212–14; more fully, Long, *Reign and Rejection*, 85–96.

258. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 229. Describing a king this way is attested as early as the mid-third millennium in the royal inscriptions of Eanatum, which repeatedly identify him as “chosen in the heart by the goddess Nanshe” (D. Frayne, *Presargonic Inscriptions* [RIME 1; Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 2008], 146, 150, 155, 157).

259. *ABC*, 102.

260. *CAD*, 9:171 (libbu 3b §2'), which see for many other examples of this usage. Similar in concept, though employing different terminology, cf. "the political situation will change, Šamaš will install a king of his own choice for his land" (*CAD*, 15:405 [B §3'b]).

261. M. Garsiel, "The Battle of Michmash: An Historical-Literary Study (1 Sam 13–14)," in *Studies in Bible and Exegesis: Arie Toeg in Memoriam*, ed. M. Goshen-Gottstein and U. Simon (Ramat-Gan: Bar-Ilan Univ. Press, 1980), 15–50 [Hebrew].

262. On the route in question, see D. A. Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel* (ASOR Library of Biblical and Near Eastern Archaeology; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1991), 202.

263. On archaeological evidence for this road marking the northern border of Benjamin, see *ibid.*, 204.

264. So *IVPBBC-OT*, 300.

265. Cf. D. Jobling, "Saul's Fall and Jonathan's Rise: Tradition and Redaction in 1 Sam 14:1–46," *JBL* 95 (1976): 368.

266. Long, *Reign and Rejection*, 107 and n. 28.

267. On the origins and history of the practice of circumcision in the ancient Near East, see J. M. Sasson, "Circumcision in the Ancient Near East," *JBL* 85 (1966): 473–76. Sasson argues that circumcision did not arise first in Egypt but was already "known to the inhabitants of North Syria during the early third millennium B.C." (476).

268. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 137.

269. *ANET*, 326.

270. On the notion of an Egyptian “circumcision festival,” see G. Pinch, “Private Life in Ancient Egypt,” *CANE*, 363–81 (on 378).

271. *ANET*, 326, n.2.

272. A second possibility is that these statements refer simply to the general good conduct of those undergoing the rite, but this interpretation seems less likely (see *ANET*, 326, n.2).

273. In some periods at least, such as the New Kingdom period, some adult males remained uncircumcised (see Pinch, "Private Life in Egypt," *CANE*, 378). There is little to suggest that female circumcision was practiced in Egypt (*ibid.*, 378–79).

274. So J. F. Quack, "Religious Personnel (Egypt)," in *Religions of the Ancient World: A Guide*, ed. S. I. Johnston (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of the Harvard Univ. Press, 2004), 289–92. Quack notes further that when at a much later period, "the emperor Hadrian prohibited circumcision in the Roman Empire, Egyptian priests were among the few groups who could, by application and proof of priestly descent, obtain permission to continue the practice" (291).

275. For a discussion of this and other biblical evidence, see King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 43–45. Cf. also P. J. King, “Circumcision—Who Did It, Who Didn’t and Why,” *BAR* 32/4 (2006): 48–55.

276. On the topic generally, see P. D. Miller Jr., *The Divine Warrior in Early Israel* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1973); T. Longman III and D. G. Reid, *God Is a Warrior* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995).

277. *ANET*, 135a.

278. M. Weinfeld, "Divine Intervention in War in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East," in *History, Historiography and Interpretation: Studies in Biblical and Cuneiform Literature*, ed. H. Tadmor and M. Weinfeld (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1983), 121–47.

279. See *ibid.*, 121–22, for further citations and bibliography.

280. A. M. Kitz argues on the basis of lexical and comparative evidence that “lots” (Urim and Thummim?) were likely held in a container that was shaken until one lot was cast out and fell to the ground. The meaning assigned to that lot was understood to be the decision of the deity (“The Hebrew Terminology of Lot Casting and Its Ancient Near Eastern Context,” *CBQ* 62 [2000]: 207–14).

281. See de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 2:351.

282. W. Horowitz and V. Hurowitz, "Urim and Thummim in Light of a Psephomancy Ritual from Assur (LKA 137)," *JANESCU* 21 (1992): 95–115. Horowitz and Hurowitz suggest that any religious aspects of psephomancy were minimal and secondary, in contrast to other forms of ancient Near Eastern divination, making this form of divination acceptable to ancient Yahwists, while other, more religiously laden forms were abhorrent (114–15).

283. For an instance of confusion of ארון and אפוד outside the Old Testament, see 2 Bar. 6:7 (cf. the note on this verse in *APOT*). For further discussion, see Long, *Reign and Rejection*, 112.

284. Cf. A. F. Kirkpatrick, *The First Book of Samuel* (CB; Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1981), 133; K. A. D. Smelik, *Saul, de voorstelling van Israels eerste Konig in de Masoretische tekst van het Oude Testament* (Amsterdam: Drukkerij en Uitgeverij P. E. T., 1977), 125; Stoebe, *Das erste Buch Samuels*, 264; McCarter, *I Samuel*, 240.

285. E.g., McCarter, *I Samuel*, 246.

286. J. L. Peterson, "Aijalon," *ABD*, 1:131.

[287](#). See EA 273, 287; *ANET*, 242.

288. B. Keder-Kopfstein, “דם,” *TDOT*, 3:237–38. For speculation regarding a possible distinction in the perception of blood’s significance between Israel and Mesopotamia more generally, see T. Abusch, “Blood in Israel and Mesopotamia,” in *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov*, ed. S. M. Paul (VTSup 94; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 675–84.

289. See G. L. Mattingly, "Amalek," *ABD*, 1:171.

290. Ibid., 1:170.

291. P. D. Stern, *The Biblical ḤEREM: A Window on Israel's Religious Experience* (BJS 211; Atlanta: Scholars, 1991), 173–74.

292. *SSI*, 1:16.14–17.

293. A. Malamat, *Mari and the Early Israelite Experience* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), 70; see also 70–75 for Malamat’s discussion of how the term *asakkum* was used at Mari “to designate consecrated property belonging exclusively to a divinity or to royalty” (72).

294. See *HALOT*, sub קָרַח II.

295. So Negev and Gibson, *Archaeological Encyclopedia*, 281.

296. On Kenites in the vicinity of Arad, see Y. Aharoni, "The Negeb," in *Archaeology and Old Testament Study*, ed. D. W. Thomas (Oxford: Clarendon, 1967), 390, 401 and map on 384; idem, *Land of the Bible*, 201.

297. I.e., Tell Arad Ostracon 24; see Y. Aharoni, *Arad Inscriptions* (JDS; Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1981), 46–47.

298. For full text in transliteration, see G. I. Davies, *Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions* [Volume 1]: *Corpus and Concordance* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1991), 19–20 (2.024); for translation as well, see S. L. Gogel, *A Grammar of Epigraphic Hebrew* (SBLRBS 23; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 392–93.

299. *ARI*, 2.546:123.

300. *ARI*, 2.547:125. Further references could easily be cited; see, e.g., *ARI*, 2.222–23:49; 2.550:126–27.

301. See Long, *Reign and Rejection*, 157–58.

302. E.g., *ARM*, 6.45; 10.7.23ff.; 10.8.20ff.; 10.50.29ff.; 10.81.16ff.; 13.112. English translations of several of these texts are conveniently available in *NERT*, 122–28. See also Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*.

303. So D. Conrad, "Samuel und die Mari-'Propheten': Bemerkungen zu I Sam. 15:27," *ZDMG* Sup. 1 (1969): 273–80.

304. *ARM*, 10.81.

305. See *ARM*, 6.26.3'f., 8'f.; 8.148.8; and perhaps the following from Ashurnasirpal's hymn to Ishtar: "I, Ashurnasirpal, the frightened, who fear you, who seize the fringe of your divinity, who pray to you as mistress" (*NERT*, 115).

306. *SSI*, 2:14.11 (= *KAI*, 215.11): “Then did he grasp the skirt of his lord, the [great] king of Assyria.”

307. So R. A. Brauner, “‘To Grasp the Hem’ and 1 Samuel 15:27,” *JANES* 6 (1974): 35–38.

308. *CML*², 6.ii.9b–11a. On these lines, see E. L. Greenstein, “‘To Grasp the Hem’ in Ugaritic Literature,” *VT* 32 (1982): 217–18.

309. *CML*², 6.ii.30b–31a.

310. Greenstein, “ ‘To Grasp the Hem,’ ” 218.

[311](#). See also the discussion of David's action in 24:4.

312. For a similarly “neutral” (that is, not “religious or magical”) use of the phrase in a different context, see Greenfield’s discussion of a proverb of Aḥiqar that begins, “if the wicked man takes hold of the corners of your garment, leave it in his hand . . .”; J. C. Greenfield, “Two Proverbs of Aḥiqar,” in *Lingering Over Words: Studies in Ancient Near Eastern Literature in Honor of William L. Moran*, ed. T. Abusch, J. Heuhnergard, and P. Steinkeller (Atlanta: Scholars, 1990), 195–201.

313. For a more thorough discussion, see Long, *Reign and Rejection*, 157–64.

314. *ARI*, 2.536:119.

315. RIMA, 2/1:194 (A.0.101.1 line 7).

316. *AHw*, 221a (sub *enû* III, “umwenden, ändern”). On the sense of changing a judicial verdict, see sec. G, 2.b. of the entry cited.

[317](#). RIMA, 2/1:193–94 (A.0.101.1 lines 3–4, 8).

318. Lines 139–42 in T. Jacobsen, *The Harps That Once . . . : Sumerian Poetry in Translation* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1987), 109.

319. W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, trans. J. A. Baker, 2 vols. (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1975), 1:216. For further discussion, see Long, *Reign and Rejection*, 163–64.

320. See King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 280–82. Ex. 30:22–25 prescribes the makeup of the aromatic oil that was to be used to anoint, and thus consecrate, the tabernacle, its furnishings, and the ark.

321. See also the brief descriptions in *IVPBBC-OT*, 304–5; *DBI*, 33; and the more thorough treatment in Mettinger, *King and Messiah*, 185–232.

322. O. Keel, *Symbolism of the Biblical World* (New York: Seabury, 1978), 258.

323. Cf. J. A. Motyer, “Anointing, Anointed,” *IBD*, 1:68–69.

324. “The King and the Queen-Mother in the Matter of the Amurrite Princess,” trans. D. Pardee (*COS*, 3.45D:91).

325. So T. P. J. van den Hout, commenting on the Hittite king Ḫattušiliš III's request, in anticipation of his daughter's marriage to the Egyptian Pharaoh Ramesses, that (in van den Hout's words) "sweet-scented oil be brought from the groom's country to anoint the bride-to-be" ("Khattushili III, King of the Hittites," *CANE*, 1116).

326. Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 333–34 (EA 290).

327. See D. W. Manor, "Bethlehem," *OEANE*, 1:302; M. Avi-Yonah, "Bethlehem," *NEAEHL*, 204; the cautionary remarks of G. C. Heider, "Lahmu," *DDD*², 502; and the alternative suggestion by H. Cazelles, "Bethlehem," *ABD*, 1:712.

328. H.-J. Fabry, “לב,” *TDOT*, 7:401–3.

329. See, e.g., *CAD*, 9:170b (where Shamash is said to see “into the heart of man”); Jacobsen, *Harp That Once . . .*, 474, lines 430–34.

330. H. Vanstiphout, *Epics of Sumerian Kings* (SBLWAW 20; Atlanta: SBL, 2003), 107–9.

331. In addition to the notes on [2:10](#) and [8:7](#), see, e.g., D. Launderville, *Piety and Politics: The Dynamics of Royal Authority in Homeric Greece, Biblical Israel, and Old Babylonian Mesopotamia* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

332. So *CAD*, 10:9–10 (sub *melammu*, §1). A. Green (“Ancient Mesopotamian Religious Iconography,” *CANE*, 1842) notes that “living gods and other supernatural beings are said, in literary accounts, to ‘wear,’ and sometimes to ‘take off,’ a radiant light called MELÁM or *melammu*.” Cf. also M. Weinfeld, “כבוד,” *TDOT*, 7:29–30.

333. D. W. Baker, “רעע,” *NIDOTTE*, 3:1154.

334. M. V. Van Pelt, W. C. Kaiser Jr., D. I. Block, “רוּקָה,” *NIDOTTE*, 3:1073.

335. HALOT, sub רוּהַ, §7.

336. Cf. other uses of “spirit” that may be suggestive of a state of mind or even a physical condition: Judg. 9:23; 1 Kings 22:22; Isa. 19:14; 29:10.

337. *ANET*, 179a; cf. *COS*, 2.131:352.

338. See *CAD*, 15:257 (sub *šědu A*, §1); 10/2:185 (sub *mukīl rěši*, §3).

339. See, e.g., the following summary essays and their bibliographies: R. Anderson, "Music and Dance in Pharaonic Egypt," *CANE*, 2555–68; A. D. Kilmer, "Music and Dance in Ancient Western Asia," *CANE*, 2601–13; S. de Martino, "Music, Dance, and Processions in Hittite Anatolia," *CANE*, 2661–69.

340. For a thorough and enlightening study, see B. Lawergren, "Distinctions among Canaanite, Philistine, and Israelite Lyres, and Their Global Lyrical Contexts," *BASOR* 309 (1998): 41–68. For a well-illustrated brief treatment, see K. A. Kitchen, "Music and Musical Instruments," *IBD*, 2:1031–40.

341. See Youngblood, "1 and 2 Samuel," 625.

342. For discussion, see King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 291–94.

343. Ibid., 291.

344. For a convenient summary of all these, see King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 292–94.

345. See Dorsey, *Roads and Highways*, 189–91 and map on 182.

346. H. D. Lance, "Socoh," *ABD*, 6:99.

347. Ibid.

348. Cited in J. D. Seger, "Azekah," *OEANE*, 1:243.

349. R. de Vaux, "Single Combat in the Old Testament," in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972), 122–35.

350. H. A. Hoffner Jr., "A Hittite Analogue to the David and Goliath Contest of Champions," *CBQ* 30 (1968): 220–25 (on 222).

351. Ibid., 224.

352. Ibid., 225.

353. For a fascinating survey, see D. Kellermann, "Die Geschichte von David und Goliath im Lichte der Endokrinologie," *ZAW* 102 (1990): 344–57.

354. So R. S. Hess, *Joshua: An Introduction and Commentary* (TOTC; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 218, n. 3 (citing E. Wente, *Letters from Ancient Egypt* [SBLWAW; Atlanta: Scholars, 1990], 108).

355. G. L. Mattingly, "Anak," *ABD*, 1:222. For concise discussions of the giant peoples in the Bible, see R. S. Hess, "Nephilim," *ABD*, 4:1072–73; M. S. Smith, "Rephaim," *ABD*, 5:674–76.

356. *HALOT* (sub verb.) cites Judg. 12:5; [1 Sam. 1:1](#); 1 Kings 11:26 as examples.

357. Other key instances of this usage include Gen. 35:19; 48:7; Ruth 1:2; 4:11; 1 Chron. 4:4; Mic. 5:2.

358. Youngblood, "1 and 2 Samuel," 696.

359. See R. H. Beal, "Hittite Military Organization," *CANE*, 545–54, esp. 550–52. On the topic generally, and for more examples, see *IVPBBC-OT*, 307.

360. See R. Wakely, “ערב,” *NIDOTTE*, 3:517.

361. Cf. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 1:171.

362. *IVPBBC-OT*, 307d. Bergen (*1, 2 Samuel*, 191–92) speculates that the token may have constituted “a sort of promissory note redeemable for a certain portion of plunder that might be taken from the Philistines in the event of an Israelite victory.”

363. Bergen (*1, 2 Samuel*, 192) calls him the “supply officer.”

364. So de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 1:88, who disagrees with these attempts.

365. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 304.

366. Ibid., which see for fuller discussion and bibliography.

367. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 156, referring to N. P. Lemche, “הפשי in 1 Sam. XVII 25,” *VT* 24 (1974): 373–74.

368. E. Firmage, "Zoology (Fauna)," *ABD*, 6:1109–67 (on 1109).

369. It is debated whether this deforestation may have preceded the emergence of Israel in Canaan, but the biblical texts themselves attest to plant and animal life different in significant regard from what one encounters in Palestine today. For discussion by one who holds that deforestation took place during the Old Testament period, see J. Rogerson, *Atlas of the Bible* (New York: Facts on File, 1985), esp. 58–62. Throughout his atlas, Rogerson attempts to infer from topographical and climatological factors where forests may have existed in the biblical period.

370. For a broad survey of the plants and animals of the ancient Near East in antiquity, see A. S. Gilbert, "The Flora and Fauna of the Ancient Near East," *CANE*, 153–74. On animals specifically mentioned in the Bible, see G. S. Cansdale, "Animals of the Bible," *IBD*, 1:52–68; Firmage, "Zoology."

371. Cansdale, "Animals of the Bible," 58.

372. On all this, see *ibid.*, 59–60.

373. L. Martin, "The Faunal Remains from Tell es-Sa'idiyeh," *Levant* 20 (1988): 83–84 (Martin's brief report is Appendix D of J. N. Tubb, "Tell es-Sa'idiyeh: Preliminary Report of Renewed Excavations," *Levant* 20 [1988]: 23–88); cited by Firmage ("Zoology," 1143), who also mentions the discovery in the southeastern Negev of several ingenious leopard traps. The recovery of lion and bear bones in an archaeological dig is rare, as Martin notes. Only three such bones were reported by Martin: "a proximal radial and a tarso-scaphoid of bear (*Ursus* sp.), and the medial phalanx of a lion (*Panthera leo*)." Martin remarks that the "presence of these two wild animals on the site suggests that hunting was still practised, even though it may not have played an important part in the economy" (Martin, "Faunal Remains," 83). The animals may also have been killed in defense of the village, in which case their remains would likely have been retained as trophies or for ritual purposes.

374. Launderville, *Piety and Politics*, 61; citing the fuller treatment of “flyting” in R. P. Martin, *The Language of Heroes: Speech and Performance in the Iliad* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1989), 68, 80.

375. So M. R. Eaton, "Some Instances of Flyting in the Hebrew Bible," *JSOT* 61 (1994): 3–14 (on 3, quoting P. Bawcutt and W. Parks respectively).

376. Ibid.

377. Ibid., 7.

378. On the latter, see G. A. Rendsburg, "The Mock of Baal in 1 Kgs 18.27," *CBQ* 50 (1988): 414–17.

379. So Kellermann, "Die Geschichte von David und Goliath im Lichte der Endokrinologie," 354–55.

380. For depictions of typical Philistine (feathered?) headgear, see *ANEP*², figs. 7, 57, 341, 813; Dothan, *The Philistines*, figs. 4–7.

381. According to *HALOT*, *mēṣāḥ* means “brow,” and its grammatically feminine counterpart *miṣḥâ* means “front-side>shin,” and so perhaps, by extension, greave (that which covers the shin).

382. A. Deem, “ ‘ . . . And the Stone Sank into His Forehead.’ A Note on 1 Samuel XVII 49,” *VT* 28 (1978): 349–51.

383. *ANET*, 20c; cf. *COS*, 1.38:79.

384. See Å. Viberg, *Symbols of Law: A Contextual Analysis of Legal Symbolic Acts in the Old Testament* (ConBOT 34; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1992), 129–30.

385. Ibid., 131.

386. RS, 8.145 and *Ugaritica V*, 83; both cited in *ibid.*, 132.

387. *PRU IV*, 17.159; cited in *ibid.*, 132. For a convenient, brief summary, see S. Rummel, “Clothes Make the Man—An Insight from Ancient Ugarit,” *BAR* 2/2 (1976): 6–8.

388. A. Mazar, "Ritual Dancing in the Iron Age," *NEA* 66 (2003): 126–32.

389. For discussion, see *ibid.*, 126; King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 298–300.

390. The inscription is translated in K. A. Kitchen, *Ramesseide Inscriptions, vol. IV: Merenptah and the Late Nineteenth Dynasty* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), quotes from pages 6–7.

391. So, e.g., M. Heltzer, “New Light from Emar on Genesis 31: The Theft of the Teraphim,” in *Und Mose schrieb dieses Lied auf*, ed. M. Dietrich and O. Loretz (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1998), 357–67.

392. K. van der Toorn, "The Nature of the Biblical Teraphim in the Light of the Cuneiform Evidence," *CBQ* 52 (1990): 203–22. See also idem, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life*, ed. B. Halpern and M. H. E. Weippert (SHANE; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 218–25; G. A. Bruce and K. van der Toorn, "From Holy Mountains to the New Earth: The Nature of the Biblical Teraphim in the Light of the Cuneiform Evidence," *Theologia Evangelica* 23 (1990): 27–34.

393. For a nuanced, recent discussion of teraphim as figurines possibly representing gods or people, see Zevit, *Religions of Ancient Israel*, 267–76.

394. See McCarter, *II Samuel*, 328–29.

395. Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia*, 123. Van der Toorn (*Family Religion*, 211–18) argues that the Israelite New Moon (*ḥodeš*) festival may be best understood as corresponding to the Babylonian *bubbulum*, celebrated not at the new moon but in the “interlunium,” the period at the end of the month just before the new moon. He further theorizes that the biblical reference may contain a hint of an erstwhile ancestor cult.

396. Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia*, 265.

397. For a book-length treatment of ancient calendrical systems, see M. E. Cohen, *The Cultic Calendars of the Ancient Near East* (Bethesda, Md.: CDL, 1993).

398. On notions of sin, pollution, and purity across the ancient world, see Johnston, ed., *Religions*, 496–513.

399. *ANET*, 79a.

400. Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia*, 265.

401. See, e.g., A. L. Oppenheim, "The Golden Garments of the Gods," *JNES* 8 (1949): 172–93; cited by C. Meyers, "Ephod," *ABD*, 2:550.

402. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 350; citing also Gideon's ephod in Judg. 8.

403. *IVPBBC-OT*, 312b.

404. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 356.

405. W. F. Albright, "Researches of the School in Western Judaea," *BASOR* 15 (1924): 2–11.

406. On these sites, see comments at the following references: Socoh ([17:1-2](#)); Keilah and the Shephelah ([23:1](#)); Gath ([5:8](#)); Beth Shemesh ([6:9](#)); Jerusalem ([2 Sam. 5:6](#)).

407. See further Negev and Gibson, *Archaeological Encyclopedia*, 17.

408. So R. Wakely, “**נשי**,” *NIDOTTE*, 3:177.

409. Ibid.; cf. also R. Klein, *1 Samuel* (WBC; Waco, Tex.: Word, 1983), 223.

410. P. M. Arnold, "Mizpah," *ABD*, 4:880.

411. So Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 225, citing as further examples [1 Sam. 27:4–5](#); 1 Kings 11:17–18; 12:2; 2 Kings 25:26.

412. On this site, see D. L. Stein, “Alalakh,” *OEANE*, 1:55–59; and on the texts discovered there, see E. L. Greenstein, “Alalakh Texts,” *OEANE*, 1:59–61.

413. Wellhausen (cited approvingly by McCarter, *I Samuel*, 355) even suggested emending “cave [Heb. *mʿrt*] of Adullam” in 22:1 to “stronghold [Heb. *mšdt*] of Adullam,” thus identifying Adullam with the “stronghold” mentioned in 22:4–5. The relevant letters might be easily confused in the Hebrew square script (only two of them so easily in Paleo-Hebrew). Given the use of caves as natural strongholds (see [comment on 22:1](#)), however, and the fact that David enters the “stronghold” *after* his journey to Moab, there is no necessity of linking the stronghold of 22:4–5 to Adullam.

414. Aharoni, *Land of the Bible*, 290.

415. Ibid., 318, n.9.

416. Dorsey, *Roads and Highways*, 148.

417. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 357. Kharas lies to the northwest of Hebron. A second site, Khirbet Khoreisa, which lies southeast of Hebron, has also been suggested (*IVPBBC-OT*, 313).

418. *ANET*, 151a.

419. COS, 1.103:346.

420. See G. Cunningham, *“Deliver Me From Evil”*: *Mesopotamian Incantations 2500–1500 B.C.* (Studia Pohl: Series Maior 17; Rome: Pontificio Insituto Biblico, 1997), 27–28.

421. So A. Taggar-Cohen, "Political Loyalty in the Biblical Account of 1 Samuel XX–XXII in the Light of Hittite Texts," *VT* 55 (2005): 251–68.

422. [Saggs](#), *Civilization*, 39.

423. Ibid., 192 (citing *Le palais royal d'Ugarit III*, 142, no. 16.136).

424. So W. Sommerfeld, “The Kassites of Ancient Mesopotamia: Origins, Politics, and Culture,” *CANE*, 922. On the topic of “land grants and ‘feudalism’ ” in ancient Mesopotamia, see *ibid.*, 920–25.

425. See Johnston, ed., *Religions*, 295.

426. So Taggar-Cohen, "Political Loyalty," 262, which see for further discussion.

427. Ibid., 267.

428. For full text, translation, and discussion of the relevance of this text to the account of Saul's slaughter of the priests at Nob, see J. Roberts, "The Legal Basis for Saul's Slaughter of the Priests of Nob (1 Samuel 21–22)," *JNSL* 25 (1999): 21–29. A different translation of the text is available in Heimpel, *Letters*, 174 (26.1).

429. Ibid., 264.

430. E. H. Sturtevant and G. Bechtel, *A Hittite Chrestomathy* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1935), 149. See also G. McMahon, *COS*, 1.83:217–18, for a similar, more recent translation.

431. Taggar-Cohen, "Political Loyalty," 264–65.

432. Beal, "Hittite Military Organization," *CANE*, 545–54 (on 550).

433. See Davies, *Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions*, 246–48 (105.006–105.010); for discussion, see A. Lemaire, “Classification des Estampilles Royales Judéennes,” *ErIsr* 15 (1981): 54–60; see also the article on this by Y. Garfinkel in *BASOR* 271 (1988): 70.

434. See Negev and Gibson, *Archaeological Encyclopedia*, 453.

435. Ibid.

436. See Aharoni, *Arad Inscriptions*, 32; cf. Davies, *Ancient Hebrew Inscriptions*, 17; Gogel, *Grammar*, 390.

437. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 177.

438. So D. Baly, *The Geography of the Bible: A Study in Historical Geography* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1957); cited by L. F. DeVries, "Jeshimon," *ABD*, 3:769.

439. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 177.

440. Ibid.

441. Baly, *Geography*, 164. Baly notes an obvious division in the area between the eastern and the western slopes: “To the east . . . lies the barren wilderness, and to the west are the cultivated lands.”

442. So K. N. Schoville, “קעור,” *NIDOTTE*, 2:1013.

443. On the latter, cf. L. B. DeVries, "Maon," *ABD*, 4:512–13.

444. Aharoni, *Land of the Bible*, 109.

445. Arad 25; for this brief text listing quantities of barley, see Gogel, *Grammar*, 393.

446. On this tactic, see McCarter, *I Samuel*, 378–79.

447. D. Ussishkin, "The Ghassulian Shrine at En-Gedi," *Tel Aviv* 7 (1980): 1–44.

448. For a brief summary of occupations, see E. Stern, “‘Ein-Gedi,” *OEANE*, 2:222–23.

449. For more detail, see J. M. Hamilton, "En-Gedi," *ABD*, 2:502–3; and esp. B. Mazar, "En-Gedi," *NEAEHL*, 399–409.

450. Mazar, "En-Gedi," 399.

451. See A. Danin, “ ‘Do You Know When the Ibexes Give Birth?’ ” *BAR* 5/6 (1979): 50–51. On the derivation, see M. S. Moore and M. L. Brown, “נַעֲלָה / נַעֲלָה,” *NIDOTTE*, 2:488.

452. See “The Ark That Wasn’t There,” *BAR* 9/4 (1983): 58–61.

453. Bergen, 1, 2 *Samuel*, 238.

454. [Launderville](#), *Piety and Politics*, 47.

455. For these and many more examples, see H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods: A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978), 238–40. For information on the rulers and gods mentioned, see, e.g., W. von Soden, *The Ancient Orient: An Introduction to the Study of the Ancient Near East*, trans. Donald G. Schley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994 [German orig. 1985]).

456. *ARI*, 2:5–6.

457. EA 271; Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 317. For further examples, see *ibid.*, *passim*; *COS*, 3:237–42.

458. EA 282; *ibid.*, 323; also 322 (EA 281), 324 (EA 284), 340 (EA 298, 299), 343 (EA 305), 344 (EA 306), *etc.*

459. [COS, 3.45V:105](#); cf. also *COS*, 3.45T–U:104; 3.45Y:106.

460. For examples from Lachish, see *COS*, 1.3.42A:79; *COS*, 1.3.42E:80; *ANET*, 322 (3x); and from Amarna see, among many others, EA 129, 134, 201, 319, 320, 322. For further discussion, see G. W. Coats, "Self-Abasement and Insult Formulas," *JBL* 89 (1970): 14–26 (esp. 16–17); McCarter, *I Samuel*, 384–85.

461. See Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 277–78 (EA 201 [and n.2], 202).

462. King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 148.

463. L. F. DeVries, "Carmel (Place)," *ABD*, 1:873.

464. Cf. *IVPBBC-OT*, 315d.

465. J. Barr, "The Symbolism of Names in the Old Testament," *BJRL* 52 (1969–70): 11–29 (on 25–27).

466. Ibid., 27. For further discussion, see Garsiel, *Biblical Names*, 246–48.

467. Cf. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 245–46.

468. The LXX translates the Heb. as “dog-like”; on modern commentators, see Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 182.

469. King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 147. See Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia*, 158–63, for a fuller discussion.

470. King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 113.

471. Ibid., 147. Cf. Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia*, 161.

472. G. Stansell, "The Gift in Ancient Israel," *Semeia* 87 (1999): 65–90 (see 86 for the complete summary). Stansell begins the essay with a succinct summary of anthropological research on gift-giving.

473. Ibid., 82.

474. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 399, citing esp. Ps. 69:28 (Heb. 69:29) and Ex. 32:32–33. This theory draws on the work of N. H. Tur-Sinai (*The Book of Job: A New Commentary* [rev. ed.; Jerusalem: Kiryath Sepher, 1967], 240–41), who argues that Job 14:17’s “bag” in most English translations actually refers to a “tied document.”

475. S. M. Paul, "Heavenly Tablets and the Book of Life," in *Divrei Shalom: Collected Studies of Shalom M. Paul on the Bible and the Ancient Near East 1967–2005*, ed. S. M. Paul (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 59–70 (on 59).

476. Ibid., 60.

477. Ibid. Paul cites further examples, as does W. W. Hallo in an appendix to Paul's essay.

478. See A. L. Oppenheim, "On an Operational Device in Mesopotamian Bureaucracy," *JNES* 18 (1959): 121–28. Beginning with a description of an egg-shaped, inscribed clay container discovered at Nuzi, Oppenheim presents a detailed discussion of the use of stones as counters and of how counter-stones would have been deposited in specific containers in a central accounting office. On both theories, see Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 185–86. V. Hurowitz ("Queries and Comments," *BAR* 23/5 [1997]: 12) cites the traditional "wish for the dead . . . often engraved on Jewish tombstones" as harking back to this biblical reference and speculates that the custom of visitors to a gravesite leaving a stone may originally have symbolized the soul of the departed who is bound up in God's pouch/bundle.

479. S. N. Kramer, *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture, and Character* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1963), 250. Kramer does go on to admit that there is evidence also that “there was no little wooing and cooing before marriage.” In other words, it should not be denied that “ancient Mesopotamians fell deeply in love” (so K. R. Nemet-Nejat, *Daily Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* [Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002], 132).

480. L. Milano, "Ebal: A Third-Millennium City-State in Ancient Syria," *CANE*, 1219–30 (on 1224).

481. J. Klein, "Shulgi of Ur: King of a Neo-Sumerian Empire," *CANE*, 843–57 (on 844).

482. T. P. J. Van den Hout, "Khattushili III, King of the Hittites," *CANE*, 1107–20 (on 1117, which see for further examples of political marriage alliances).

483. A. K. Grayson, "Assyrian Rule of Conquered Territory in Ancient Western Asia," *CANE*, 959–68 (on 965).

484. ARM, 26.304; 10.33. For a succinct discussion of Kirum's unhappy marriage, see Heimpel, *Letters*, 80–81. For fuller discussions of the marriages of Kirum and her sister, see J.-M. Durand, "Trois études sur Mari," *MARI* 3 (1984): 127–80; N. Ziegler, *Le Harem de Zimrî-Lîm* (Mémoires de N.A.B.U. 5: FM 4; Paris: SEPOA, 1999), 64.

485. See, e.g., J. D. Levenson and B. Halpern, "The Political Import of David's Marriages," *JBL* 99 (1980): 507–18; J. Kessler, "Sexuality and Politics: The Motif of the Displaced Husband in the Books of Samuel," *CBQ* 62 (2000): 409–23.

486. J. Levenson, "1 Samuel 25 as Literature and History," *CBQ* 40 (1978): 11–28; cf. also J. D. Levenson and B. Halpern, "The Political Import of David's Marriages," *JBL* 99 (1980): 507–18.

487. D. Edelman, "Ahinoam," *ABD*, 1:118.

488. E.g., Bergen (*1, 2 Samuel*, 256) infers from Ahimelech's Semitic name that "his family had adopted Israelite cultural and religious practices, including the worship of Yahweh." This may well have been the case, though it would still not necessitate the assumption that Ahimelech was a Hittite of the Anatolian variety.

489. See H. A. Hoffner, "The Hittites and Hurrians," in *POTT* 197–228; more recently, idem, "Hittites," in *POTW*, 127–55 (esp. the nuanced discussion on 152–54); cf. also G. McMahon, "Hittites in the Old Testament," *ABD*, 3:231–33.

490. McMahon, "Hittites in the Old Testament," *ABD*, 3:233.

491. See J.-G. Heintz, “Aux origines d’une expression biblique: *ūmūšū qerbū*, in A.R.M., X/6, 8?,” VT 21 (1971): 528–40.

492. COS, 1.77:203 [§12a].

493. The lack of mention of Saul's water jug is curious, though it may simply have been assumed to accompany the spear, or it may not have been returned, or it may have been recognized as unusable by Saul once it had been in David's hands; cf. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 190.

494. See *ibid.*, 189.

495. On the “local nature of the cult of the personal god” in the ancient Near East, see van der Toorn, *Family Religion*, 83–85.

496. *Fauna and Flora of the Bible* (London: United Bible Societies, 1972), 64; cited by Youngblood, “1 and 2 Samuel,” 771. Cf. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 408.

497. E.g., N. P. Lemche, "David's Rise," *JSOT* 10 (1978): 2–25 (on 12–14).

498. Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia*, 87. As regards David's motivation, Wiseman ("Alalakh," in *AOTS*, 125) suggests, on the basis of a practice in ancient Syria whereby an individual would "dwell in the house of the king" as a slave in exchange for a loan or other favor, that David may have been anxious *not* to "dwell with Achish" lest it be assumed that he stood in a similar slave-relationship to Achish.

499. *IVPBBC-OT*, 317.

500. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 191.

501. Cf. *IVPBBC-OT*, 317.

502. See McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 413.

503. Ibid., 415.

504. See Y. Aharoni, "The Negeb," in *AOTS*, 401 and map on 384.

505. Textual evidence for reading “Kennizites” instead of “Kenites” here and in [30:29](#) is considerable (LXX^B and 4QSam^a; see McCarter, *1 Samuel*, 434), but whatever the reading, the same general area is involved and the gist of the passage remains the same: David is duping Achish regarding the true objects of his aggression.

506. See S. I. Johnston, "Magic," in Johnston, ed., *Religions*, 141.

507. Cf. J. K. Kueemmerlin-McClean, "Magic (OT)," *ABD*, 4:469.

508. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 193.

509. As Sumerologist R. Averbeck explains in a personal correspondence received July 9, 2005, only partial renderings are attempted by most recent authorities, but there is a general agreement that the issue is ritual uncleanness in the city, not occultism. Taking a cue from a parallel in Gudea Statue B (iii 15–iv 2), Averbeck in his dissertation proposes a reading such as the following: “The impure man, the one terrifying to look at, (and) the man inflamed (with venereal disease) he drove out from the city.” (I wish thank Dr. Averbeck for providing counsel on this issue.)

510. For description of the full range of forbidden practices, see J. K. Kuemmerlin-McLean, "Magic (OT)," *ABD*, 4:468–69; J. G. McConville, *Deuteronomy* (Apollos Old Testament Commentary 5; Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 299–302; E. H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 270–72.

511. E.g., David's attendant Abishag of 1 Kings 1:3 was from Shunem, and the prophet Elisha often visited a well-to-do couple there, both predicting the birth of and raising back to life their only son (2 Kings 4:8-37).

512. In the itineraries of the fifteenth-century Egyptian Thutmose III and the tenth-century Shoshenq I (see *ANET*, 243) and in the fourteenth-century Amarna letters (*ANET*, 485).

513. C. Herzog and M. Gichon, *Battles of the Bible*, 2nd ed. (New York: Random, 1997), 93–94.

514. *ANET*, 396; cf. *NERT*, 174; *COS*, 1.60:159 (note that the translation by G. Beckman in *COS* begins a new sentence with the final clause, which he renders as an indicative—“Or the priests will sleep . . .”—not an injunctive; the result is that the triad attested in [1 Sam. 28:6](#) is preserved, but the parallel would hold in any case).

515. McCarter (*1 Samuel*, 418, 420) assumes a conflation of both readings in the Hebrew of [28:7](#).

516. As well as in the Greco-Roman world: “Greek and Latin literature contains a whole series of necromancies, starting from the Homeric *Nekyia* . . . and Aeschylus’s rite of *The Persians* down to the fictions in the late novels and the parodies of Lucian” (F. Graf, *Magic in the Ancient World*, trans. Franklin Philip [Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1997], 194).

517. J. A. Scurlock, "Magic (ANE)," *ABD*, 4:465, which see for literature, esp. I. Finkel, "Necromancy in Ancient Mesopotamia," *AfO* 29/30 (1983–84): 1–17.

518. Scurlock, “Magic (ANE),” *ABD*, 4:465–66. See, e.g., the “Old Woman” practitioner of Hittite rituals presented in *ANET*, 347, 350–51.

519. Ibid., 466; cf. C. L. Nihan, “1 Samuel 28 and the Condemnation of Necromancy in Persian Yehud,” in *Magic in the Biblical World: From the Rod of Aaron to the Ring of Solomon*, ed. T. E. Klutz (London: T. & T. Clark, 2003), 23–54 (see 28, n. 13). Nihan offers a succinct and well-documented discussion of necromancy in the ancient Near East and the Hebrew Bible (esp. 24–32).

520. *KTU*, 1:124, mentioned by Nihan, “1 Samuel 28,” 28, n. 13, referring to the critical edition of the text by M. Dietrich and O. Loretz, *Mantik in Ugarit: Keilalphabetische Texte der Opferschau, Ommensammlungen, Nekromantie* (Abhandlungen zur Literatur Alt-Syrien-Palästinas 3; Munich: Ugarit-Verlag, 1990).

521. See *IVPBBC-OT*, 318.

522. On the whole question, see D. V. Edelman, "En-Dor," *ABD*, 2:499–501.

523. The chief theories variously connect the word to an Arabic verb meaning “to return” (thus, the spirit is “one who returns”); to a Hittite term meaning “pit”; to the Heb. word “father, ancestor” (thus relating the practice to ancestor worship). For discussion by one who prefers the latter, see Nihan, “1 Samuel 28,” 30–32.

524. Hoffner, "Hittites and Hurrians," *POTW*, 216; cf. idem, "Second Millennium Antecedents to the Hebrew 'ôb," *JBL* 86 (1967): 386–401.

525. H. A. Hoffner, “אֹב,” *TDOT*, 1:131.

526. Hoffner, "Hittites and Hurrians," 216.

527. So Hoffner, “אוב,” 1:132.

528. Ibid., 1:131.

529. Mamat, *Mari and the Bible*, 103–4.

530. R. Frankel ("Aphek," *ABD*, 1:275–77) names five sites: Aphek in Asher, in Aram, in Lebanon, in Sharon, and Aphekah in Judah.

531. Eph'al, "On Warfare and Military Control in the Ancient Near Eastern Empires," 99.

532. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 434.

533. See Dorsey, *Roads and Highways*, 68–69 and map on 58.

534. Ibid., 199 and map on 194. See also maps in G. A. Smith, *The Historical Geography of the Holy Land*, 25th ed. (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1931), 195; J. Monson, ed., *Student Map Manual: Historical Geography of the Bible Lands* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, n.d.), regional map 1–3.

535. On a possible linguistic distinction in Assyrian between the one-humped camel (*gammalu*) and the two-humped bactrian camel (*udru*), see T. C. Mitchell, *The Bible in the British Museum: Interpreting the Evidence*, new ed. (Matwah, N.J.: Paulist, 2004), 54.

536. See K. A. Kitchen, "Camel," *IBD*, 1:228–30. Further on the early domestication of the camel—e.g., by 2300 B.C. in the Indus Valley—see J. Zarins, "Camel," *ABD*, 1:824–26.

537. So Zarins, "Camel," *ABD*, 1:825, which see for specific descriptions of the evidence.

538. For a nuanced and thorough study of the subject, see D. Elgavish, “The Division of the Spoils of War in the Bible and in the Ancient Near East,” *ZABR* 8 (2002): 242–73.

539. For further reflections, see Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 280–81.

540. On the Hittite practice, see V. Korošec, “The Warfare of the Hittites from the Legal Point of View,” *Iraq* 25 (1963): 159–66 (on 162); and the succinct discussion, comparing Abraham’s restoration of property to the king of Sodom, in Elgavish, “Division of the Spoils,” 271–73.

541. So Bergen, 1, 2 *Samuel*, 280.

542. The NIV's "other places" might seem to distinguish these places from the sites just listed, but it is probably better to read the final clause as a generalizing summary of the sites listed (so, e.g., NRSV, JPS).

543. H. Brodsky, "Bethel (Place)," *ABD*, 1:711.

544. For more on Bethuel, see G. Herion, "Bethuel (Place)," *ABD*, 1:715.

545. McCarter, *I Samuel*, 434.

546. See W. I. Toews, "Beth-zur (Place)," *ABD*, 1:701–2.

547. For brief discussion, see also Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 201.

548. See Elgavish, "Division of Spoils," 261.

549. S. Dalley, "Ancient Mesopotamian Military Organization," *CANE*, 419.

550. Ibid., 420.

551. Bergen (*1, 2 Samuel*, 282, n.163), after listing the six suicides or assisted suicides mentioned in the Bible, comments that the Bible views these as desperate acts by deeply troubled individuals: “None of the individuals who resorted to this action is portrayed as a role model for the pious.”

552. *ARAB*, II:312 §815.

553. Dalley, "Ancient Mesopotamian Military Organization," 420.

554. Negev and Gibson, *Archaeological Encyclopedia*, 84.

555. See V. Haas, "Death and the Afterlife in Hittite Thought," *CANE*, 2021–30, esp. 2023.

556. For a cataloguing and evaluation of extant evidence, see E. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* (JSOTSup 123; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 52–55.

557. V. H. Matthews, *Manners and Customs of the Bible* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1988), 128.

Sidebar and Chart Notes

A-1. COS, 152–53.

A-2. On Iron-Age Philistine religious practice, as evidenced in the archaeological record at Tel Mique-
Ekron, see S. Gitin, "Israelite and Philistine cult and the Archaeological Record in Iron Age II: The
'Smoking Gun' Phenomenon," in *Symbiosis, Symbolism, and the Power of the Past: Canaan, Ancient
Israel, and Their Neighbors from the Late Bronze Age through Roman Palaestina*, ed. W. G. Dever and
S. Gitin (Centennial Symposium, W. F. Albright Institute of Archaeological Research and American
Schools of Oriental Research, Jerusalem, May 29–31, 2000; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003),
279–95.

A-3. On circumcision in the ancient Near East, see [comment on 1 Sam. 14:6](#).

A-4. J. P. Louw and E.A. Nida, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: UBS, 1988), 11.43. Prior to the book of Judges (i.e., in Genesis, Exodus, and Joshua), the LXX simply transliterates the Heb. term *p^elištîm* (“Philistines”) as *phylistiim*. Another term used by some Greek sources is *pelasgoi* (“sea peoples”; see J. Olivier, “פְּלִשְׁתִּי,” *NIDOTTE*, 3:631).

A-5. *ANET*, 262c; see also *ibid.*, 263a.

A-6. Ibid., 262c.

A-7. Ibid., 262c.

A-8. “Calah Orthostat Slab,” trans. K. Lawson Younger Jr. (*COS*, 2.114G:276; cf. *ANET*, 281; see also *ANET*, 282).

A-9. See *ANET*, 282–84. On the further reduction of Philistine sovereignty under subsequent Assyrian and Egyptian monarchs, see H. J. Katzenstein, “Philistines (History),” *ABD*, 5:326–38. For convenient summaries of ancient Near Eastern texts mentioning the Philistines, see T. Dothan, “Philistines (Archaeology),” *ABD*, 5:328–29; Olivier, “פְּלִשְׁתִּי,” 3:633.

A-10. See, e.g., T. Dothan, *The Philistines and Their Material Culture* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1982), 21–23. For a popular summary, see idem, “What We Know about the Philistines,” *BAR* 8/4 (1982): 20–44.

[A-11](#). D. M. Howard Jr., "Philistines," *POTW*, 232.

A-12. Ibid., 232; see his discussion of the identification of biblical Caphtor with Crete and of the biblical Cherethites (Cretans) with the Philistines.

A-13. Ibid. Such complex origins might shed light on the appearance of “Philistines” in Canaan during the ancestral period (e.g., Gen. 21:32, 34; 26:1; Ex. 13:17), unless references to Philistines are simply instances of updating names.

A-14. See C. H. Gordon, *Evidence for the Minoan Language* (Ventnor, N.J.: Ventnor, 1966); for brief treatments, see C. H. Gordon and G. A. Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (New York: Norton, 1997), 22–23; G. A. Rendsburg, “ ‘Someone Will Succeed in Deciphering Minoan’: Cyrus H. Gordon and Minoan Linear A,” *BA* 59 (1996): 36–43; idem, “Is Linear A Semitic?” *BAR* 26/6 (2000): 60–61; H. Shanks, “Against the Tide: An Interview with Maverick Scholar Cyrus Gordon,” *BAR* 26/6 (2000): 52–63, 71.

A-15. Gordon's thesis would also help explain the apparent cross-influence of the Semitic and Greek worlds from early on.

A-16. For recent book-length treatments, see N. Bierling, *Giving Goliath His Due: New Archaeological Light on the Philistines* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992); C. S. Ehrlich, *The Philistines In Transition: A History from ca. 1000–730 B.C.E.* (Leiden: Brill, 1996).

A-17. The earliest known references to the SA.GAZ (Habiru) are found in Sumerian texts from the middle of the third millennium B.C. and the latest in Mesopotamian texts from near the end of the second millennium; so E. Yamauchi, "Habiru," *NIDBA*, 223–24, which contains a convenient summary and assessment of the evidence. For fuller discussion, see also Provan, Long, and Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 170–72, from which the following is adapted.

A-18. For the history of the discovery, see N. Na'aman, "Amarna Letters," *ABD*, 1:174–81. The best English edition of the letters is W. L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1992). A selection of letters is also available in *ANET*, 483–90.

A-19. Na'aman, "Amarna Letters," 1:174.

A-20. See EA (=El-Amarna) 243, 246, 254, 271, 273–74, 286–290, 298–99, 305, 318, and AO 7096 (for a convenient listing and summary of contents, see Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 105).

A-21. Ibid., 100.

A-22. N. Na'aman, "*Habiru* and Hebrews: The Transfer of a Social Term to the Literary Sphere," *JNES* 45 (1986): 271–88.

A-23. Ibid., 271. For the history of this attempted equation, see M. Greenberg, *The Ḥab/piru* (New Haven, Conn.: American Oriental Society, 1955), 3–12.

A-24. N. P. Lemche, “Habiru, Ḫapiru,” *ABD*, 3:7. For a convenient listing of attestations, see John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 4th ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 94–95. Bright concludes that the Habiru were “a people found all over western Asia from the end of the third millennium to about the eleventh century” (95).

A-25. Na'aman, "*Habiru* and Hebrews," 272. So also A. Kuhrt, *The Ancient Near East, c. 3000–330 BC* (London: Routledge, 1995), 1:320: "It is unlikely that they were a culturally and linguistically coherent group. Intensive studies of contexts in which the term appears suggest that it was applied to a range of people: runaway slaves, political exiles, brigands and landless peasants, *i.e.* people on the margins of society."

A-26. Na'aman, "*Habiru* and Hebrews," 275.

A-27. D. Fleming, “Refining the etymology for ‘Hebrew’: Mari’s *‘IBRUM,’*” paper delivered at the SBL Annual Meeting in Denver, November 2001, and currently being prepared for publication. We here express appreciation to Fleming for making his paper available to us.

A-28. Ibid., 8–9. Fleming’s theory would support the notion that Israel’s background was indeed tribal and pastoralist, as the Bible suggests.

A-29. For the view that neither etymology nor social status and activities offer any grounds for linking the *ʿapîru* and the *ʿibrî*, see A. F. Rainey, “Unruly Elements in Late Bronze Canaanite Society,” in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish, and Near Eastern Ritual, Law, and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom*, ed. D. P. Wright, D. N. Freedman, and A. Hurvitz (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 481–96.

A-30. Na'aman, "*Habiru* and Hebrews," 285.

[A-31](#). For discussion, see Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, 101.

A-32. J. F. Healey, "Dagon," *DDD*², 216.

A-33. So *CANE*, 2047, apparently reflecting the translation of the text in *ANET*, 662d.

A-34. “The Sarcophagus Inscription of ʿEshmunʿazor, King of Sidon,” trans. P. K. McCarter (*COS*, 2.57:183 [sec. 13–20]).

A-35. L. K. Handy, "Dagon," *ABD*, 2:2.

A-36. Healy, "Dagon," 217.

A-37. *CANE*, 1846.

A-38. On these three prominent theories, see Handy, “Dagon,” *ABD*, 2:2; Healy, “Dagon,” 216–18.

A-39. “The *Zukru* Festival,” trans. D. Fleming (*COS*, 1.123:431–36).

A-40. For a recent book-length treatment, see L. Feliu, *The God Dagan in Bronze Age Syria* (CHANE 19; Leiden: Brill, 2003).

A-41. S. W. Holloway, *Aššur is King! Aššur is King! Religion in the Exercise of Power in the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (CHANE 10; Leiden: Brill, 2002), 144–51. See also M. Cogan, *Imperialism and Religion: Assyria, Judah, and Israel in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C.E.* (SBLMS 19; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1974), 22–41; Z. Bahrani, “Assault and Abduction: The Fate of the Royal Image in the Ancient Near East,” *ArtH* 18 (1995): 363–82.

A-42. *ARI*, 2.28:11–12.

A-43. ABC, 91.

A-44. Ibid., 88.

A-45. *CANE*, 2053–54, citing *Die keilalphabetischen Texte aus Ugarit*, 1.101:1–4.

[A-46](#). For discussion, see Long, *Reign and Rejection*, 44, n. 9.

A-47. *ARI*, 1.128:21.

A-48. *ARI*, 1.158:26. For other references to the stationing of garrisons and/or governors, see *ARI*, 2.641:162; 2.651:166; 2.729:187; 2.766:195; 2.867:209.

A-49. M. Roaf, "Palaces and Temples in Ancient Mesopotamia," *CANE*, 438.

[A-50](#). See G. W. Ahlström, “Administration of the State in Canaan and Ancient Israel,” *CANE*, 602.

A-51. Youngblood, "1 and 2 Samuel," 624.

A-52. King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 287.

A-53. See the cautious treatment of the subject by Abraham Malamat in “Prophetic Revelations in Mari and the Bible: Complementary Considerations” (in *Mari and the Bible*, 83–101). After noting sporadic evidence of “ecstatic prophecy” in “the western cultural sphere extending across Palestine, Syria and as far as Asia Minor,” Malamat remarks: “Yet without attempting to divest Mari or Israelite prophecy of any ecstatic features, primacy must be given here to the sense of mission” (85). Of the two Akkadian terms used to designate diviners at Mari, *muhhûm* and *âpilum*, the former seems to be “derived from a root meaning ‘to rave, to become frenzied’ ” (86) and appears to refer to diviners who worked alone. By contrast, the latter term, which may possibly be related to the Akkadian word meaning “he who responds, respondent” (88), occurs in at least one text in the plural, indicating, according to Malamat, “that these diviners acted in groups as well, similar to the prophetic band or coterie known from the Bible” (87). Further on the issue of terminology, see M. Nissinen, “The Socioreligious Role of the Neo-Assyrian Prophets,” in *Prophecy in Its Ancient Near Eastern Context: Mesopotamian, Biblical and Arabian Perspectives*, ed. M. Nissinen (SBLSymS 13; Atlanta: SBL, 2000), 89–114; idem, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East*, 5–8.

A-54. So King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 287. For further descriptions, drawings, and photos, see Dothan, *Philistines*, 249–51; Keel and Uehlinger, *Gods, Goddesses, and Images*, 123–24.

A-55. So King and Stager (*Life in Biblical Israel*, 297–98), who mention also an Arabic instrument of similar name that “consists of goatskin stretched over a frame of wood, about twenty-five centimeters in diameter and five centimeters deep” (about ten inches by two inches).

A-56. C. L. Meyers, "A Terracotta at the Harvard Semitic Museum and Disc-holding Female Figures Reconsidered," *IEJ* 37 (1987): 116–22; idem, "Of Drums and Damsels: Women's Performance in Ancient Israel," *BA* 54 (1991): 21–22.

A-57. For a full treatment of music and musical instruments in ancient Israel, see J. Braun, *Music in Ancient Israel/Palestine: Archaeological, Written, and Comparative Sources*, trans. D. W. Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002).

A-58. *ARI*, 2.477:104–5.

A-59. Cf. J. Wiesner, *Fahren und Reiten in Alteuropa und im alten Orient* (Leipzig: Hinrichs, 1939), 44–90; W. F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1946), 135–36, n. 25; Y. Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands in Light of Archaeological Study* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 5, and the reliefs on 403.

A-60. Yadin, *Art of Warfare*, 249–50.

A-61. Cf. *ibid.*, 250; N. K. Sandars, *The Sea Peoples: Warriors of the Ancient Mediterranean, 1250–1150 B.C.* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1978), 120 and illustrations on 28–29, 30–31.

A-62. For the view that the Hebrew word in question consistently in the Old Testament refers to chariot horses, not horsemen, see W. R. Arnold, "The Word פָּרָשׁ in the Old Testament," *JBL* 24 (1905): 43–53; J. A. Montgomery and H. S. Gehman, *The Book of Kings* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1951), 82–83; and the comprehensive treatment by S. Mowinckel, "Drive and/or Ride in O.T.," *VT* 12 (1962): 289–95.

[A-63](#). K. Galling, *Biblisches Reallexikon* (HAT 1; Tübingen: Mohr, 1937), 1:424.

A-64. Sandars, *Sea Peoples*, 188–89.

A-65. H. P. Smith, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Books of Samuel* (ICC; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1899), 95; K. D. Budde, *Die Bücher Samuel* (KHC 8; Tübingen: Mohr, 1902), 85; H. J. Stoebe, *Das erste Buch Samuels* (KAT 8.1; Gütersloh: Gerd Mohn, 1973), 244.

A-66. Cf. Wiesner, *Fahren und Reiten*, 71; H. W. Hertzberg, *I & II Samuel* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1964), 105; C. E. Hauer, "The Shape of Saulide Strategy," *CBQ* 31 (1969): 153–67 (on 155, n. 8). Cf. also Sandars' comments (*Sea Peoples*, 72) regarding the importance of Mycenaean chariotry as "symbol." For discussion of various other deployments of chariotry, *e.g.* in protecting advancing infantry, in pursuing an enemy in flight, or in providing a mobile firing platform, see A. Malamat, "How Inferior Israelite Forces Conquered Fortified Canaanite Cities," *BAR* 8/2 (1982): 24–35 (on 28); Yadin, *Art of Warfare*, 4–5. On the latter deployment, cf. perhaps the references to Philistine archers (31:3) and chariots (2 Sam 1:6) in the accounts of Saul's last battle.

A-67. *ARI*, 2.13:7; cf. also *ARI*, 2.216:48 (Ashur-bel-kala), 2.430:90 (Adad-nirari II), 2.544:122, 2.565:132, 2.635:160 (Ashurnasir-apli II).

A-68. E.g., in the same inscription from Tiglath-pileser I we read: “Riding in my chariot when the way was smooth and going by foot when the way was rough, I passed through the rough terrain of mighty mountains. In Mount Aruma, a difficult area which was impassable for my chariots, I abandoned my chariotry” (*ARI*, 2.16:8). Cf. also *ARI*, 2.222:49 (Ashur-bel-kala), 2.468:100 (Tukulti-ninurta II).

A-69. *ARI*, 2.21:10.

A-70. For an informative survey, see Saggs, *Civilization*, 202–10.

A-71. Ibid., 203.

A-72. For an interesting discussion of the topic, see J. D. Muhly, "How Iron Technology Changed the World and Gave the Philistines an Edge," *BAR* 8/6 (1982): 40–54. On Philistine iron-working, see also Dothan, *The Philistines*, 91. For more thorough treatments, see P. M. McNutt, *The Forging of Israel: Iron Technology, Symbolism, and Tradition in Ancient Society* (SWBA 8; Sheffield: Almond, 1990); P. R. S. Moorey, *Ancient Mesopotamian Materials and Industries: The Archaeological Evidence* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994), esp. 278–91.

A-73. Saggs, *Civilization*, 205.

A-74. So G. F. Hasel, "Iron," *ISBE*, 2:880–82; cf. McNutt, *Forging of Israel*, 108.

A-75. Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia*, 214.

A-76. As trans. by R. Fagles (New York: Penguin, 1996).

A-77. E.g., I. Finkelstein (“The Philistines in the Bible: A Late-Monarchic Perspective,” *JSOT* 27 [2002]: 131–67) likens Goliath’s armor to that of “the Greek hoplites [armored infantry soldiers] of the seventh to the fifth centuries B.C.E.” (143). In a more detailed study, A. Yadin (“Goliath’s Armor and Israelite Collective Memory,” *VT* 54 [2004]: 373–95) argues that “the literary representation of Goliath and the contest of champions is thoroughly Homeric” (389).

A-78. So, e.g., K. Galling, "Goliath und seine Rüstung," *VT* 15 (1966): 150–69. Cf. A. Yadin, "Goliath's Armor," 375–76.

A-79. Yadin, *Art of Warfare*, 265.

A-80. Finkelstein cites A. M. Snodgrass, *Early Greek Armour and Weapons from the End of the Bronze Age to 600 B.C.* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh Univ. Press, 1964), and idem, *Arms and Armour of the Greeks* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1967).

A-81. Finkelstein, "Philistines in the Bible," 143.

A-82. Yadin, "Goliath's Armor," 380. Yadin also cites the "contest of champions" in which Goliath and David engage as "a form of battle known almost exclusively from the Greek epic tradition" (379), but Hoffner's Hittite analogue suggests otherwise (see [comment on 17:4](#)).

A-83. G. Philip, "Weapons and Warfare in Ancient Syria-Palestine," in *Near Eastern Archaeology: A Reader*, ed. S. Richard (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 184–92 (on 187–88).

A-84. On Philistine origins, see [comment on 4:1](#); for an authoritative survey see T. Dothan, “The ‘Sea Peoples’ and the Philistines of Ancient Palestine,” *CANE*, 1267–79.

A-85. For a convenient description of the technical aspects of some of Goliath's gear, see *IVPBBC-OT*, 307a.

A-86. *ANET*, 557.

A-87. J. J. Finkelstein, "An Old Babylonian Herding Contract and Genesis 31:38f," *JAOS* 88 (1968): 30–36.

[A-88](#). Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia*, 160.

[A-89](#). For discussion, see Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia*, 160; *HANEL*, 1:409–10.

A-90. That a careful distinction was made between losses because of negligence and those because of events beyond the shepherd's control is well illustrated in the Code of Hammurabi (Laws 261–67); see *ANET*, 177.

A-91. J. D. Currid, *Doing Archaeology in the Land of the Bible: A Basic Guide* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 62–65.

A-92. So J. D. Seger, "The Location of Biblical Ziklag," *BA* 47/1 (1984): 47–53 (on 47); cited by Currid, *Doing Archaeology*, 63.

A-93. Currid, *Doing Archaeology*, 64.

A-94. E.g., Press, Mazar, Aharoni, Kallai, Rainey, Na'aman, and perhaps Seger himself by 1988, identified Tell esh-Shari'a as Ziklag; so E. D. Oren, "Ziklag," *ABD*, 6:1090. For a report on Oren's excavation of the site from 1972 to 1979, see E. D. Oren, "Sera', Tel," *NEAEHL*, 1329–35. See also J. D. Seger, "Ḥalif, Tel," *NEAEHL*, 553–59; esp. 554, where Seger moves away from his earlier identification of Tel Halif as Ziklag.

[A-95](#). See Currid, *Doing Archaeology*, 64.

A-96. On this general point, see B. S. Isserlin, "The Israelite Conquest of Canaan," *PEQ* 115 (1983): 85–94; cf. Provan, Long, and Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 140–41 and n.15.

A-97. Currid, *Doing Archaeology*, 64.

[A-98](#). V. Fritz, “Where Is David’s Ziklag?” *BAR* 19/3 (1993): 58–61, 76.

[A-99](#). See also comment on 8:2.

[A-100](#). For a summary of excavation results at Tel Jezreel, see D. Ussishkin, "Jezreel, Tel," *OEANE*, 3:246–47.

[A-101](#). Negev and Gibson, *Archaeological Encyclopedia*, 270. For specifics, see Dorsey, *Roads and Highways*, 110–12 and map on 104.

[A-102](#). For specifics on the “Dothan Valley–Jezreel–Shunem Road,” see Dorsey, *Roads and Highways*,” 98–100 and map on 94.

A-103. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 194.

A-104. Ibid., 266.

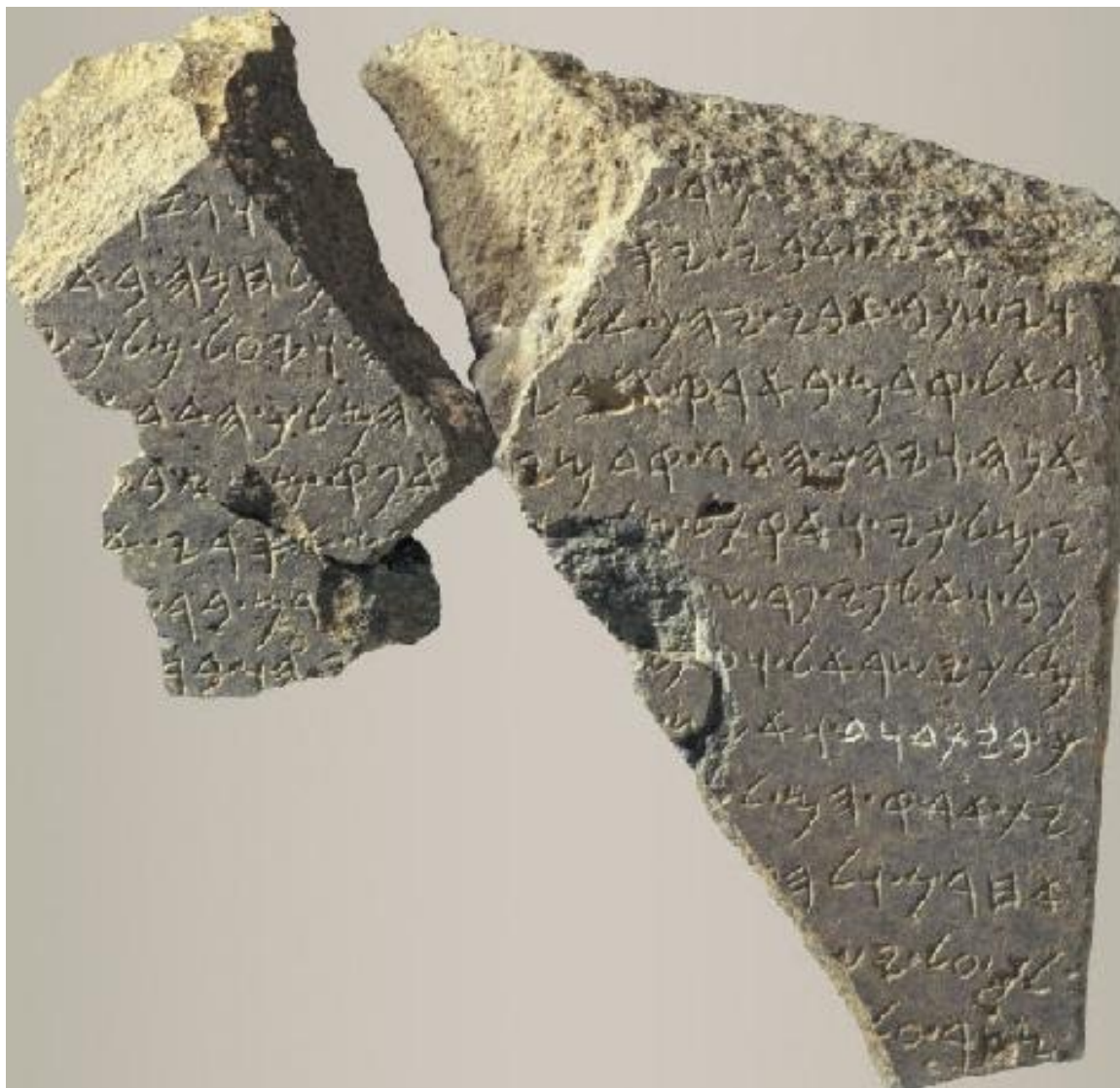
A-105. Ibid., 267 (italics added).

A-106. For details, see *ibid.*, 246–49. See also Malamat’s discussion of the distribution of the spoils of war at Mari (A. Malamat, *Mari and the Early Israelite Experience* [The Schweich Lectures of the British Academy 1984; Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989], 75–79).

A-107. On these distributions, see Elgavish, "Division of the Spoils," 255–57 (to allies), 257–60 (to temples), 260–61 (to king or leader), 261–62 (to soldiers), 257, 262–65 (to auxiliary personnel).

2 Samuel

by V. Philips Long



“House of David” inscription from Tel Dan

Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

Introduction

See the [introduction of 1 Samuel](#).

David Learns of Saul's Death (1:1–16)

Amalekites (1:1). See [comment on 1 Samuel 15:2](#).

Ziklag (1:1). See [comment on 1 Samuel 27:6](#).

With his clothes torn and with dust on his head (1:2). On these and other signs of distress and mourning, see [comment on 1 Samuel 4:12](#).

He fell to the ground to pay him honor (1:2). As noted in [1 Samuel 24:8](#), bowing facedown on the ground was a common way in the ancient world of showing submission, reverence, and sometimes fear. In this situation, the messenger doubtless expresses all three.

Leaning on his spear (1:6). Bronze or iron spearheads (along with arrowheads, etc.) are regularly uncovered in archaeological excavations in Palestine. The spear was primarily a stabbing or thrusting weapon and was typically heavier than the javelin, which was hurled at the enemy.¹



Bronze figurine with gold is a warrior leaning on a spear. The figurine is from the temple of Baalat-Gebal, Byblos, Lebanon, second millenium B.C.

Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY, courtesy of the Louvre

Chariots and riders almost upon him (1:6). On Philistine chariots, see [comment on 1 Samuel 13:5](#). In the light of the late introduction of cavalry to Syria-Palestine, the “riders” (lit., “horse-masters” or “master horsemen”), a phrase that occurs only here in the Hebrew Bible, are probably “charioteers.” While chariots are not mentioned in the account of Saul’s death in [1 Samuel 31](#) (where Saul’s injuries are inflicted by archers, [31:3](#)), there is no necessary discrepancy here, as chariots often served as mobile firing platforms for archers.

Crown that was on his head and the band on his arm (1:10). From

evidence of reliefs, it is apparent that crowns of many shapes and sizes were worn by gods, kings, and other important individuals throughout the ancient Near East from earliest times (see [illustrations](#)). The specific character of Saul's crown and armband is unknown, but given the fact that Saul was able to wear them into battle, it is fair to assume that they were of lightweight construction.

Further support for this assumption comes from the fact that the Hebrew word *nēzer* ("crown") more properly connotes something like a "diadem" (i.e., a circular, ornamental headdress sometimes bearing precious stones).² The related Hebrew word *nāzar* means "to dedicate," and so the diadem worn by Israel's kings and priests was a symbol not only of their exalted position but of their dedication to God.³

Diadems could be added to the turbans frequently worn by ancient Near Eastern kings, priests, and others. Israel's high priest wore not only a fine linen turban but a diadem as well, from the front of which hung a gold plate engraved with the words "holy to the LORD" (Ex. 28:36–38).⁴ Saul's crown may have been a similar diadem with royal insignia attached. The nature of his armband is also uncertain; there is only one other mention of such an "armlet" in the Bible (Num. 31:50), but this band must have also served to symbolize Saul's royal status.

David and all the men with him took hold of their clothes and tore them (1:11). The origin of tearing one's clothes is uncertain (see [comment on 1 Sam. 4:12](#)). De Ward has speculated that it may signify self-abasement, an attempt to disguise oneself in the face of woe, or a milder form of self-mutilation.⁵ Whatever its origin, it is clear in the present context that tearing one's clothes is a way of expressing grief and sorrow. The practice is widely attested in the ancient Near East. For instance, crown prince Esarhaddon (681–669), upon hearing of the "sorry happenings" related to his brothers' violent attempts to take over the kingship, reports: "I cried 'Woe!' rent my princely robe and began to lament loudly."⁶

Mourned and wept and fasted till evening (1:12). On this occasion of mourning and weeping, David also proclaimed a fast. Fasting, "the deliberate, temporary abstention from food,"⁷ is not widely attested in the ancient Near East, and where fasting is attested, it is associated with mourning.⁸ In the Bible, fasting was connected either with religious rites (being prescribed, e.g., on the Day of Atonement) or with "rites of mourning, personal penance, or the reinforcement of supplicatory prayer."⁹



Mourners

Michael Greenhalgh/ArtServe, courtesy of the British Museum

David's Elegy (1:17–27)

David took up this lament (1:17). Among the various lamentations and elegies known from the ancient Near East,¹⁰ the best known is Gilgamesh's lament for his dead friend Enkidu. A portion of his elegy reads as follows:

hear me, O young men, hear [me!]
hear me, O elders [of teeming Uruk,] hear me!
I shall weep for Enkidu, my friend,
and as a hired mourner-woman I shall bitterly wail.
The battle-axe at my side, in which my arm trusted, the dirk at my belt, the shield at my face, my festive garment,
my girdle of delight:
The wicked wind rose up and robbed me.
My friend, wild ass on the run, donkey of the uplands, panther of the wild, my friend Enkidu, wild ass on
the run, donkey of the uplands, panther of the wild!
Having joined forces we climbed the [mountains,]
We slew and [slew] the Bull of Heaven,
We destroyed Humbaba, who [dwelt in the] Forest [of Cedar.]
Now what is this sleep that has seized [you?]
You've become unconscious, you do not [hear me!]
But he, he lifted not [his head.]
He felt his heart, but it beat no longer.¹¹



Fragment of the Gilgamesh Epic found at Megiddo Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

David's lament over Saul and Jonathan exhibits a number of general

similarities—for example, a broad public is addressed (v. 19); martial imagery is prevalent and deeds of valor are celebrated (vv. 21–22); physical prowess is highlighted (v. 23); deep affection and grief are expressed (v. 26); and there is a recurring refrain (vv. 19, 25, 27).

Lament of the bow (1:18). The sense of this title has puzzled commentators and sparked several explanations.¹² The word “lament” is not explicitly stated in the Hebrew text, and the LXX omits the word “bow” as well. The sense then is that David is ordering that the following lament should be taught to the children of Israel. If the word “bow” is retained, however, it may refer to Jonathan (whose bow is mentioned in v. 22) and serve as a title for the lament. Referring to Jonathan or Saul by the weapon(s) they wield seems apparent in the closing line (v. 27), where “weapons of war” probably stands for Saul and Jonathan. The later designation of Elijah and Elisha as “the chariots and horsemen of Israel” (2 Kings 13:14) offers an analogy.

Book of Jashar (1:18). This book appears to have been a book of early Israelite poetry, now lost (see also Josh. 10:12–13, Joshua’s exceptional day in defense of the Gibeonites). The name is generally assumed to derive from the Hebrew word meaning “upright, just, righteous,” suggesting that the Book of Jashar may have celebrated the exploits of heroic individuals in Israel or of the Israelites as a whole, as the Lord’s “upright” people. Alternatively, the name may reflect the Hebrew word for “song,” yielding simply the “Book of Song.”¹³

Tell it not in Gath . . . Ashkelon (1:20). Gath and Ashkelon were—along with Ashdod, Gaza, and Ekron—member cities of the Philistine Pentapolis. On Gath, see [comment on 1 Samuel 5:8](#). Ashkelon occupied a favorable coastal site, amply supplied with fresh water from an aquifer that coursed some twenty meters below the surface of the ground. Located on the coast some thirty-nine miles south of Tel Aviv and ten miles north of Gaza, Ashkelon was settled as early as the Neolithic and Chalcolithic periods. The city was taken over by the Philistines sometime around 1175 B.C. and remained in their hands until its destruction by Nebuchadnezzar in 604 B.C.



Conquest of Ashkelon at Karnak
Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

Ashkelon was a thriving commercial seaport in the Philistine period, a role aptly reflected not only in its name, which appears to derive from a Canaanite word meaning “to weigh” (from which the word *shekel* also derives),¹⁴ but also in David’s reference to the “streets” of Ashkelon, which should probably be read as “bazaars” or “marketplace.”¹⁵ Like its sister cities Ashdod and Ekron (see [comments at 1 Sam. 5:1, 10](#)), Ashkelon was a major city with heavy fortifications. It is frequently mentioned in extrabiblical texts, beginning with the nineteenth- and eighteenth-century B.C. Execration Texts from Egypt.

In the fourteenth-century el-Amarna correspondence, at least nine letters involve Ashkelon (*ašqaluna*) or its ruler Yidya/Idiya: some assuring the pharaoh of Yidya’s care in guarding “the place of the king, my lord, and the city of the king, my lord, [w]here I am”; others promising to supply “food, strong drink, oil, grain, oxen, sheep and goats” to the king’s troops; one from ‘Abdi-Ḥeba of Jerusalem accusing the ruler of Ashkelon of supplying provisions for the feared ‘Apiru; and one from the pharaoh to Yidya (spelled Idiya), directing him to “guard the place of the king where you are.”¹⁶

Ashkelon finds further mention—along with Gezer, Yanoam, and the Israelites—in the famous Merneptah Stele (ca. 1207). An Egyptian siege of Ashkelon is depicted visually on a relief at Karnak. As David begins his elegy for Saul and Jonathan, he cannot bear the thought that their defeat should be celebrated among Israel’s archenemies, the Philistines.

Uncircumcised (1:20). On “uncircumcised” as a derogatory term for the Philistines, see [comments on 1 Samuel 4:1; 14:6](#).

Gilboa, may you have neither dew nor rain (1:21). David curses the mountains of Gilboa, the place where Saul and Jonathan’s blood was spilled, almost as if “the mountain range itself had been responsible for the disaster.”¹⁷ Drought, crop failure, and other natural disasters were often connected with (illicit) spilling of blood upon the ground. After Cain’s murder of Abel, for instance, the latter’s blood cries out to Yahweh from the ground (Gen. 4:10), and Yahweh announces to Cain, “When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you” (4:12).

Outside the Bible, a similar pattern of nature responding to the (illicit) shedding of blood is attested. In the Legend of ’Aqhat, for example, the murder of the youth ’Aqhat causes the “[fr]uits of summer” to wither, “the ear [in] its husk.” There is “No dew, No rain; No welling-up of the deep, No sweetness of Baal’s voice.”¹⁸ In the Bible, natural events, whether favorable or unfavorable, are understood to be a part of Yahweh’s ongoing conversation with his people.¹⁹

Shield of Saul—no longer rubbed with oil (1:21). Ancient Near Eastern shields came in a variety of shapes and sizes. One of the most prevalent constructions involved a wooden shield covered with leather.²⁰ Fifteenth-century wall paintings from the tomb of the Egyptian Rekhmire illustrate the various steps in the construction of such shields. To preserve and condition leather shields, oil was periodically rubbed into them (cf. Isa. 21:5). An Old Babylonian text from Tell Asmar records “one sila of oil to rub the shield(s).”²¹



Funerary model from the Twelfth Dynasty tomb of Mesehti shows soldiers carrying shields covered with leather.

Giraudon/Art Resource, NY, courtesy of the Egyptian Museum, Cairo

I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother . . . your love . . . more wonderful than that of women (1:26). Some modern readers, unaware or neglectful of the biblical and ancient Near Eastern background to such expressions of love, have tried to read a homosexual nuance into David’s words. But not only is such a reading unwarranted and inadmissible in terms of the broader biblical context (cf., e.g., Lev. 18:22; 20:13) and ancient Near Eastern attitudes toward homosexual practice generally, so far as the minimal evidence allows us to determine,²² it also flies in the face of the fact that “love language” was often used to express loyalty in legal contexts. For example, the Hittite Bronze Tablet from the thirteenth century B.C., which records a treaty between the Hittite king Tudḫaliya IV and his cousin Kurunta, who ruled over a vassal kingdom, contains the following lines:

Tudḫaliya, the Great King, before I became king, the god had already earlier brought me and Kurunta together in friendship And already we were dear and beloved to each other.

And we had an oath between us (saying): “one shall be loyal to the other.”²³

The legal (and not sexual) connotations of words such as “dear” and “beloved” is evident. The same is true of the Hebrew word “love” (*’hb*) in many

contexts.²⁴ Commentators have perhaps been led astray by David's extolling of Jonathan's love as "more wonderful than the love of women," but David's intent may simply have been to underscore the remarkably selfless character of Jonathan's loyalty to David and willingness to defer to him with regard to the kingship (see [comment on 1 Sam. 18:3–4](#)).

David Becomes King over Judah (2:1–7)

David inquired of the LORD (2:1). The likely method of David’s inquiry is through the use of the Urim and Thummim kept in the ephod, first brought to David by the sole survivor of the priests of Nob, Abiathar (see comment on 1 Sam. 23:6). On the function of the ephod as an oracular device, see [comments on 1 Samuel 2:18; 14:3, 18–19](#).

Hebron (2:1). The ancient name of Hebron, Kiriath Arba (Gen. 23:2), may originally have meant something like “tetrapolis,”²⁵ a name commensurate with the fact that “there are several archaeological sites in the vicinity of the ancient nucleus of Hebron.”²⁶ We may note also that verse 3 reports that David and his men “settled in Hebron and its towns.” See [sidebar on “Hebron.”](#)

Hebron

Situated along the major route running between Beersheba and Jerusalem (some twenty-four miles north of the former and nineteen miles south of the latter), Hebron occupied “the most important crossroads in southern Judea”^{A-1} and enjoyed one of the highest elevations of any city in Israel. Prominently and strategically located, and well supplied with water by some twenty-five springs, Hebron was an important city throughout its history.

Hebron was a Canaanite royal city when Israel arrived in Canaan (cf. Josh. 10:3), and its links with God’s people extended back to the patriarchs (e.g., Gen. 13:18; 23:2, 19; 35:27). The Arabic name for Hebron (El-Khalil) means “the friend” and may reflect the biblical commendation of Abraham (who sojourned in Hebron) as the “friend” of God.^{A-2} Given its importance and its safe distance from Philistine-controlled territory, Hebron was an ideal location for David to launch his rule over Judah. (The importance of the site is further reflected in the fact that Absalom’s later rebellion was also launched from Hebron; [2 Sam. 15:10](#).)

Major excavations of Tel Hebron were conducted first from 1964–1966 under the direction of P. C. Hammond and again in 1984 under the direction of A. Ofer.^{A-3} There is archaeological evidence that the site was occupied continuously from the Early Bronze Age to the time of David and beyond, with the city reaching its “zenith . . . between the eleventh century and the end of the tenth century.” Ofer attributes this “golden age at Hebron” to “the city’s position as a tribal and religious center for the people of the Judean Hills and

the first royal capital of King David.”^{A-4} Significant individual finds include a seventeenth-to sixteenth-century Akkadian cuneiform tablet containing a list of animals and royal *lmlk* jar handles with the name Hebron.



Hebron area

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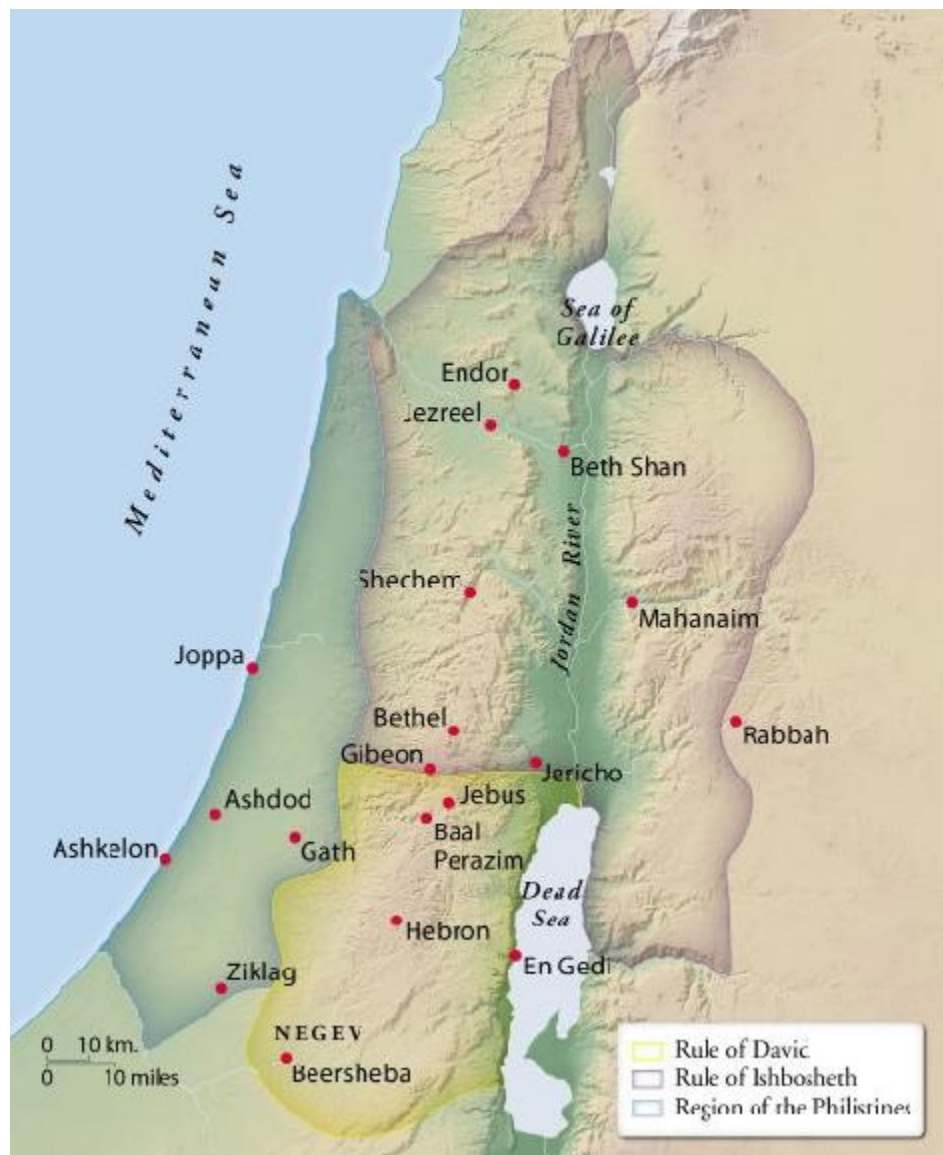
Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail . . . of Carmel (2:2). On these two wives of David, see [comments on 1 Samuel 25:39](#).

The men of Judah . . . anointed David king (2:4). On anointing, see [comment on 1 Samuel 2:10](#). Several factors converge to make the anointing of David as king by the major southern tribe of Judah understandable. (1) The recent successes of the Philistines in the battle of Gilboa may have limited the ability of more northerly tribes to participate, even had they wanted to. (2) The death of most of Saul’s house created uncertainty regarding the succession, even for those unaware of or unwilling to accept the fact that Saul’s house had been rejected. (3) Government by city-kings was well known in Canaan, and a previous attempt to establish a king had been initiated by a tribe (Judg. 9).²⁷

Men of Jabesh Gilead who had buried Saul (2:4). See [comments on 1 Samuel 11:1; 31:11](#), 13.

Hostilities between the Houses of David and Saul (2:8–3:5)

Abner . . . had taken Ish-Bosheth son of Saul . . . to Mahanaim (2:8). In the aftermath of Israel's defeat by the Philistines at the battle of Gilboa, Abner had little choice but to seek to establish a rump kingdom in Transjordan. The former heart of the kingdom of Saul west of the Jordan was too vulnerable to repeated Philistine attack.



Areas of control of David, Ishbosheth, and the Philistines

Mahanaim is identified, with varying degrees of confidence, with Telul ed-Dhahab el-Garbi, on the northern bank of the Jabbok River, near a natural ford. “The site’s strategic location as a gateway to the iron resources of the adjacent Ajlun probably led to its establishment as the administrative seat for Gilead in the early monarchy.”²⁸ The site has not been excavated, but surface surveys have yielded ample quantities of Iron I and II pottery to square with the biblical testimony.



Mahanaim

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

Located on the border between the tribes of Gad and Manasseh (Josh. 13:26, 30), Mahanaim’s centrality and importance in the premonarchical period is reflected in the fact that it served as a Levitical city and a city of refuge (Josh. 21:38). This city is mentioned along with many others in the Karnak relief of Shoshenq I (945–924; biblical Shishak?).²⁹

He made him king over . . . all Israel (2:9). Both the specific sites over which Ish-Bosheth is to have been made king as well as the summary of his domain as “all Israel” probably represent merely “the territories to which Ish-

Bosheth laid claim, irrespective of whether he actually exercised control over them.”³⁰ The scenario of a “military strongman” (i.e., Abner) propping up a “weak heir to the throne” is not without precedent in the ancient Near East.³¹

Ish-Bosheth . . . forty years old when he became king over Israel (2:10). See [comment on 1 Samuel 13:1](#).

Left Mahanaim and went to Gibeon (2:12). The town of Gibeon played an important role in Israel’s history, beginning with the covenant Joshua made with the Gibeonites in Joshua 9:15. Along with its associated Hivite cities, Gibeon is described in Joshua 11:19 as the only city that made peace with the Israelites at the time of the conquest of Canaan. In addition to being the site of the current episode—the remarkable contest between the house of Saul under Abner and the house of David under Joab—Gibeon was designated a Levitical city (Josh. 21:17), was the place where Joab murdered Amasa (2 Sam. 20:8–10), and was the place where God first appeared to Solomon and granted him wisdom (1 Kings 3:4–12).

Gibeon was first identified with present-day el-Jib (ca. six miles north of Jerusalem) by Edward Robinson in 1833, on the basis of the similarity of the names. Robinson’s identification was confirmed by four seasons of excavation (1956–1962) under the direction of J. B. Pritchard, who unearthed thirty-one jar handles bearing the name Gibeon in Paleo-Hebrew script.³² The importance of Gibeon in the premonarchical period is indicated in a campaign report of Amenhotep (Amenophis) II (1447–1400), which mentions the defeat of “36,300 Kharu, or Horites, the very term used in Joshua 9:7, according to the Greek version, for the Gibeonites,”³³ as well as in Thutmose III’s (1479–1425) record of an encounter with Hurrians (“Hurru”) in a coalition gathered by Megiddo.³⁴ Gibeon appears to have been an important producer of wine. On the pool at Gibeon, see [comment on 2:13](#).

Joab son of Zeruiah (2:13). Joab, who serves as commander of David’s forces (8:16), is mentioned here for the first time in the Bible. He is a nephew of David, being one of three sons of David’s sister Zeruiah (2:18; 1 Chron. 2:13–16). Ardently supportive of David, Joab nevertheless at times proves uncontrollable (2 Sam. 3:39). He is not averse to acting independently and in his own self-interest (3:26–27), and he even defies David’s direct orders in the matter of Absalom’s life (18:5, 9–14). At times, though, he is a savvy advisor in matters political (12:26–29; 19:7) and even religious (24:1–3).

Pool of Gibeon (2:13). At the time of his identification of el-Jib as Gibeon (see [comment on 2:12](#)), Robinson drew attention to a rectangular pool he

thought must have been the “pool of Gibeon.” Pritchard subsequently determined that the pool was of far too late a date to qualify, but his own excavations discovered two further pools, one of which probably was the pool mentioned here.³⁵ This pool was created by carving a cylinder some thirty-nine feet in diameter and thirty-five feet deep into limestone bedrock, removing some 3,000 tons of limestone in the process. A five-foot-wide staircase spirals down the side of the cylinder, providing access to the flat floor of the large cylinder. The stairs do not end here, however, but continue in a narrower shaft some forty-five feet further down, until they reach the water table.



Pool at Gibeon

Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

The purpose of this two-part construction is somewhat mysterious, but Cole suggests that the large cylinder may have been a first phase, intended to serve as a cistern. (Given the dry summer season, larger settlements in Canaan found it necessary to find ways to capture and preserve water.) The narrower shaft may have been dug when it was determined that the spring feeding the other water system at Gibeon must lie somewhere below the large cylinder.³⁶

Let’s have some of the young men get up and fight hand to hand in front of us (2:14). The Hebrew terminology used here has led some interpreters to assume that the event involved some kind of sport or exhibition that became overly serious and turned out badly. The word rendered “young men” can mean “youths,” and the word rendered “fight” often means “play” or “sport”; thus,

Abner’s suggestion may be that youths from the opposing sides arise and make sport (perhaps engage in mock fighting) for the entertainment of the others. More likely, however, what we have in this passage is an example of representative combat by a team of select warriors to decide the fates of the opposing armies (see [sidebar on “Representative Combat”](#)).³⁷

Representative Combat

The concept of representative combat was encountered in the contest between David and Goliath, where David gained a decisive victory, killing Goliath and putting the Philistine army to flight (see [comment on 1 Sam. 17:4](#)). With respect to the term “play” or “sport,” Hoffner suggests that Abner “employed a euphemistic *terminus technicus* for such a contest.”^{A-5} As de Vaux noted earlier, the term “young men refers here, as in other military contexts, to professional soldiers.”^{A-6}

The line between mock fighting or a contest of champions should perhaps not be too sharply drawn—one need only think of medieval jousting to understand that the line between sport and battle may be thin. In antiquity, battles were sometimes perceived as festivals of sorts. Early in the text Sargon, the Conquering Hero, for example, we encounter the following lines:

Now (?), the champion speaks,

“Restore to your body your jewelry, your festive garb!

“Certainly, you are endowed with tēmu, your attacker is the enemy of . . .

“Let your mouth command your mind,

“and let your mind command your legs!”

Tomorrow, Akkade will commence battle.

A festival of men at arms will be celebrated.^{A-7}

The purpose of “single combat” or “representative combat,” whether by individuals or, as here, by a group of elite soldiers, was to decide victory without the necessity of wider bloodshed. The outcome in the present context was decidedly inconclusive, however—“each man grabbed his opponent by the head and thrust his dagger into his opponent’s side, and they fell down together” (2:16)—with the result that “the battle that day was very fierce” (2:17). [Second Samuel 3:1](#) records that “the war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time.”



Hand-to-hand combat from Medinet Habu
Manfred Näder, Gabana Studios, Germany

Helkath Hazzurim (2:16). The spot in Gibeon where the twenty-four fell was called in Hebrew “Helkath Hazzurim” (the precise sense of which is debated, suggestions ranging from “field of flint [knives/daggers]” to “field of hostilities” to, with slight textual emendation, “field of sides”).³⁸ A remarkably telling, if poorly carved, pre-ninth-century relief from the Aramaean site of Gozan (Tell Halaf) on the banks of the Khabur River in northeastern Syria depicts two men in precisely the position described here, “each man grabb[ing] his opponent by the head and thrust[ing] his dagger into his opponent’s side.”³⁹

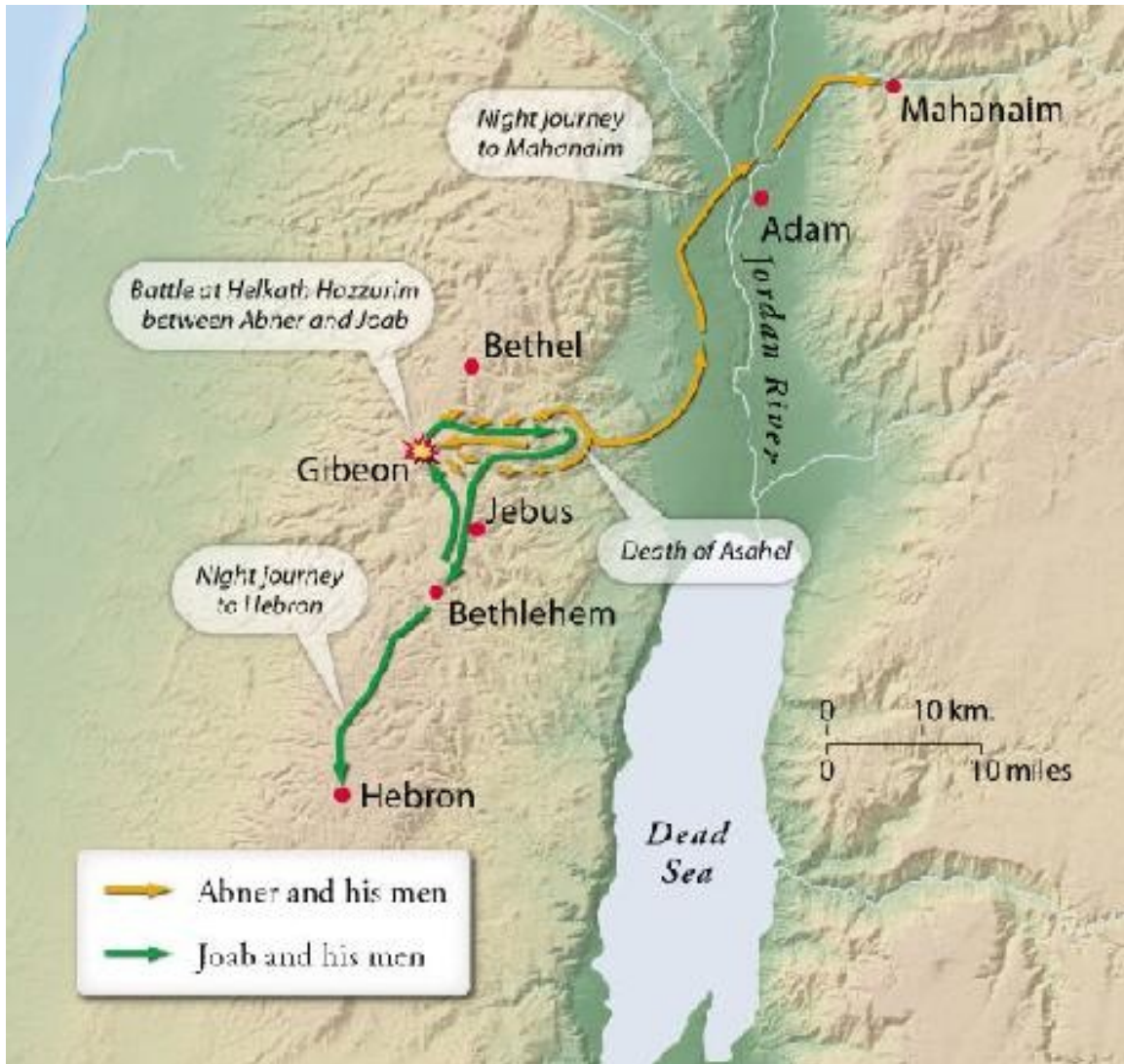
Abner thrust the butt of his spear into Asahel’s stomach (2:23). Unless the text should read “with a backward thrust,”⁴⁰ Abner’s ability to kill a man with the butt of his spear reflects both his own physical prowess and the fact that the butt end of spears would have typically been fitted out with a metal casing useful for prodding and for sticking the spear in the ground (without damaging the spearhead itself); recall the statement in [1 Samuel 26:7](#) that Saul’s spear was “stuck in the ground near his head.” Archaeological excavations have uncovered numerous such end casings, and they can be seen also in wall paintings.⁴¹



Spear butt

Kim Walton, courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum

Hill of Ammah, near Giah (2:24). The specific locations have not yet been identified,⁴² but the general direction of troop movements during and after the battle can be surmised (see [map](#)).



Meeting at Gibeon

Joab blew the trumpet (2:28). For the trumpet (*šôpār*) as a signaling device, see [comment on 1 Samuel 13:3](#).

Arabah . . . Bithron . . . Mahanaim (2:29). The Arabah is the rift valley running north-south from the Sea of Galilee, called the Jordan Valley north of the Dead Sea and the Wadi el ‘Arabah between the Dead Sea and the Gulf of Aqabah. The word “Bithron,” from a root meaning “to divide,” may be a proper place name, or it may be a common noun meaning either a “ravine” (perhaps the ravine of the Jabbok River along which Mahanaim is situated) or “half a day” (i.e., “all morning”). If the latter meaning is correct, the sense is that Abner’s troops traveled all night northward along the Jordan Valley and then, after crossing the Jordan, all morning before reaching Mahanaim (on which see [comment on 2:8](#)).

Buried him in his father’s tomb at Bethlehem (2:32). In the ancient Near East generally, “tombs took on a number of different forms that reflected the nature of building materials, topography, social status, ethnic or tribal affiliations, and spiritual beliefs.”⁴³ In Israel’s monarchy period it was common for important families to bury succeeding generations of their dead in cave or rock-cut tombs or tomb complexes—thus, perhaps, the expression “to be gathered to one’s fathers.” The bones of earlier burials would be either collected in a “charnel pit” or simply pushed to the periphery of the tomb, while the most recently deceased would be placed on a bench shelf, often surrounded by personal items.⁴⁴



Rock shelves for bodies in the Iron Age tomb at St. Etienne’s, Jerusalem Christie J. Goullart

Sons were born to David in Hebron (3:2). The numeric growth of David’s family attests to the growing strength of his house, in contrast to the house of Saul (v. 1). David has six sons with four additional wives (or concubines),⁴⁵ and after David’s arrival in Jerusalem (5:13–16), he obtains more wives/concubines and conceives eleven more children (cf. 1 Chron. 3:1–9). It was common practice among powerful kings in the ancient Near East to multiply wives and children; the biblical narrator withholds judgment for the time being on David’s “royal” behavior. But in the light of the instruction in Deuteronomy 17 to future kings of Israel—that they “must not take many wives” (17:7)—David’s family planning at least raises an eyebrow.⁴⁶

Abner Defects to David and Is Murdered by Joab (3:6–21)

Why did you sleep with my father’s concubine? (3:7). In the ancient Near East, a household often included a primary wife and one or more subordinate wives or concubines, the latter being defined as women by whom a man might father children but who brought no dowry into the relationship and thus did not enjoy the status of full wife.⁴⁷ While monogamy may have been the (flexible) norm among common folk in the ancient Near East,⁴⁸ polygamy was common among the powerful, especially kings (on polygamy in the ancient Near East generally, see [comments on 1 Sam. 1:2](#); for the beginnings of David’s harem, see [comment on 25:39](#)).

A king’s wives and concubines reflected his power and position, often involving political alliances through marriage. Thus for an outsider to sleep with one of these women was, among other things, a direct assault on the king’s status and position.⁴⁹ In the Bible, to sleep with a royal wife or concubine was tantamount to usurping the throne ([2 Sam. 16:21–22](#)), and merely to ask to marry a concubine of a deceased king was considered treason (see esp. [1 Kings 2:22](#)). In the present episode, the narrator does not state explicitly whether Abner had slept with Saul’s concubine Rizpah, but he does state that “Abner had been strengthening his own position in the house of Saul” ([3:6](#)), perhaps aggravating Ish-Bosheth’s suspicions. Abner’s incensed response in [3:8](#) to Ish-Bosheth’s charge—unless he is simply feigning indignation—suggests that he is innocent of the specific charge.⁵⁰

Dog’s head (3:8). This expression is found nowhere else in biblical or ancient Near Eastern literature, and so its significance can only be surmised.⁵¹ Dogs were not highly regarded in the ancient Near East (see [comment on 1 Sam. 24:14](#)). To be a “dog” was at best to be insignificant, a “dead dog” less significant still, and a “dog’s head” perhaps worst of all (particularly if “head” is being used euphemistically for the opposing end of the dog!).⁵² In the Old Testament specifically, dogs were considered unclean ([Lev. 11:26–28](#)), aggressive scavengers ([2 Kings 9:35–36](#)), and disgusting ([Prov. 26:11](#) speaks of their returning to their own vomit);⁵³ thus, Abner’s choice of image aptly captures his sense of outrage at Ish-Bosheth’s accusation.

Bring Michal daughter of Saul when you come (3:13). Several ancient Near Eastern law codes stipulate what should be done when a husband was either voluntarily or involuntarily absent from his wife for a long period. The

Mesopotamian Law Code of Eshnunna, for instance, states that if a man is taken prisoner by an invading force and carried away to a foreign country, he shall receive his wife back upon his return, even if she has been taken by another man; but if a man “repudiates his city and his master and then flees,” he shall have no right to reclaim his wife upon his return.⁵⁴



Laws of Eshnunna

Scala/Art Resource, NY, courtesy of the Iraq Museum

The Law Code of Hammurabi addresses the issue similarly, adding that a woman incurs no blame by entering the house of another man, but only if “there are not sufficient provisions in [her absent husband’s] house.”⁵⁵ If the husband has voluntarily deserted his city and his wife and she “enters another’s house,” then upon his return “because he repudiated his city and fled, the wife of the deserter will not return to her husband.”⁵⁶

Middle Assyrian laws run along similar lines, but qualify the code in further

respects. To give one example, even if a woman was voluntarily deserted by her husband and was left without “oil or wool or clothing or provisions or anything else,” she was still required to “remain (the exclusive object of rights) for her husband for five years” before considering other options.⁵⁷

In the light of ancient Near Eastern legal tradition, David is within his rights to demand the return of his wife Michal—his absence from her has been involuntary, necessitated by Saul’s attempts to kill him—and Saul should probably be faulted for giving her to another man (1 Sam. 25:44).⁵⁸ Saul’s treatment of Michal was almost certainly motivated more by political considerations than by concern for her best interests, and the same can probably be said of David’s motivation in demanding her back.⁵⁹ Michal is David’s tie to the former royal house of Benjamin, and her return to his own house will serve his own royal ambitions. Further, the text’s poignant picture of Paltiel “weeping behind her all the way” (v. 16) seems intended to contrast Paltiel’s affection with David’s political maneuvering.⁶⁰

Well of Sirah (3:26). Judging from the context, the well of Sirah must have lain somewhere in the vicinity of Hebron, probably to the north, as Abner reaches it while presumably traveling northward toward Mahanaim. Driver suggests identifying Sirah with “an *ʿAin Sārah*, about a mile north of Hebron, on the road to Jerusalem.”⁶¹ McCarter, citing Josephus (*Ant.* 7.34), posits an oasis about 2.5 miles north of Hebron, perhaps in the vicinity of modern *Şîret el-Bellaʿ*.⁶² In either case, Abner has not traveled far before being brought back by Joab’s messengers to meet his untimely end at the hands of Joab (v. 27).

Joab took him aside into the gateway (3:27). City gateways in ancient Israel were not simple entrances to a city but complex affairs often involving several chambers, where elders sat and business was transacted. Joab’s action of taking Abner aside would probably not have aroused the latter’s suspicion. Given the prominence of the city of Hebron in David’s day (see [comment on 2:1](#)), it likely had a sizeable gate complex in which Joab could catch Abner unawares. (For more on Iron Age gate complexes, see [comments on 18:24ff.](#))



Chambers in the city gate at Megiddo

Kim Walton

May Joab’s house never be without someone who . . . (3:29). In distancing himself from Joab’s egregious murder of Abner, David curses Joab using formulaic language familiar in the ancient Near East. First, he calls down on Joab’s house the worst of chronic and socially ostracizing diseases. Leprosy (more accurately “scale disease”) led to “the banishment of their carriers from the community.”⁶³ This disease in particular was regarded as resulting from divine displeasure, and the threat of scale disease was often a prominent component of the curse formulae that accompanied treaty documents or law codes.

Appended to the Code of Hammurabi, for instance, is a curse threatening any potential offender with divine action that would “inflict upon him in his body a grievous malady, an evil disease, a serious wound that never heals, whose nature no physician knows, which he cannot allay with bandages, which like a deadly bite cannot be rooted out.”⁶⁴ David concludes his curse by invoking death (“falls by the sword”) and poverty (“lacks food”) on Joab’s house.

Less certain in its interpretation is the middle element in which David expresses his desire that the house of Joab never be without someone “who leans on a crutch” (NIV). While this rendering is traditional, it seems less likely than two other possibilities. One is that David is condemning Joab’s male

descendants to “turn out effeminate, i.e., unfit for the manly business of warfare.”⁶⁵ This reading is based on the fact that the Hebrew word rendered “crutch” is, in view of Semitic cognates and its rendering in Proverbs 3:29, more likely to mean “spindle” or “distaff,” a weaving tool associated in the ancient Near East with female activities. The Hittite so-called Soldier’s Oath offers an example of the curse of effeminacy on disloyal soldiers:

Let them [the oaths] change his [disloyal] troops into women, let them dress them in the fashion of women and cover their heads with a length of cloth! Let them break their bows, arrows (and) clubs in their hands and [let them put] in their hands distaff and mirror.⁶⁶

Holloway, though recognizing that the effeminacy interpretation is “both philologically and culturally possible”⁶⁷ and certainly more likely than the “crutch” interpretation, nevertheless offers a further possibility. Taking the key word to mean “work-duty” or “tax in the form of conscripted labor,” as suggested by A. Demsky for the same word in Nehemiah 3:9, 12, 14, 15, 16, 17 (2x), 18, Holloway proposes that David’s curse may have been that Joab’s house will never be without someone working on a “chain gang.” Since corvée labor was usually performed by captive foes, it “represented not the bottom of idealized Israelite society, but something beneath it.” Joab’s military ambitions would have involved not just destruction of enemy forces but “the creation of captive populations from whom corvée battalions could be assembled with impunity.” So David’s malediction that the house of Joab “never be without corvée-worker” constitutes, as Holloway maintains, an “excellent irony.”⁶⁸



Assyrians at hard labor

Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

Ish-Bosheth Assassinated (4:1–12)

From the tribe of Benjamin (4:2). By stressing the Benjamite origin of the two men who will soon assassinate Ish-Bosheth, the narrator underscores the fact that even members of Saul’s own tribe have become disillusioned with the house of Saul, confirming the judgment of 3:1 that “the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker.”

The people of Beeroth fled to Gittaim (4:3). One of the four major cities of the Gibeonite enclave (Josh. 9:17), Beeroth (tentatively identified with el-Burj, two miles south of Gibeon) was undoubtedly included in the treaty that Israel made with the Gibeonites in Joshua 9. In Joshua 18:25, however, Beeroth is allotted to the tribe of Benjamin. King Saul apparently attempted to annihilate the Gibeonites during his reign (cf. 2 Sam. 21:1–2), and it may well have been in response to that aggression that the people of Beeroth fled to Gittaim.

Gittaim is a dual form of Gath, which means winepress—thus “Twin-Gath” or “Twin-Winepresses.” Its location is uncertain, as numerous places bore the name Gath or equivalents. One suggestion is Tell Ras Abu-Hamid.⁶⁹ If correct, the original Beerothites’ flight and relocation placed them some eighteen miles west of Beeroth. In any case, the city of Beeroth remained in the possession of the Benjamites. Whether Ish-Bosheth’s assassins were from the original Beerothites or the Benjamite settlers remains unclear.

Son who was lame in both feet (4:4). That Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth (called Merib-Baal in Chronicles; on intentional name distortions, see [comment on 1 Sam. 7:4](#)) is described as lame in both feet may suggest a spinal cord injury. It is also possible that he received (compound) fractures that either were not or could not be set properly.



Funerary stele shows the priest Remi with his wife and child. Remi is depicted with a shorter and thinner right leg, apparently the result of poliomyelitis. Priests with physical defects could not serve in Israel.

Ole Haupt, courtesy Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek, Copenhagen

Medicine designed to treat illness and injury was practiced in the ancient Near East from early times. An Egyptian medical papyrus copied by scribes from older texts (ca. 1700 B.C.), for example, provides systematic instructions for the diagnosis and treatment of a host of injuries, beginning with the head and moving downward (the text is discontinued and reaches no further than the upper arm and ribs). One section describes a serious spinal cord injury:

If you examine a man having a dislocation in a vertebra of his neck, if you find him paralysed in both arms and both legs because of it . . . you shall say concerning him . . . an ailment which I will not treat.

A later section describes “a man having a fracture in his collarbone . . . an ailment which I will treat.” There follows, then, a careful and rational description of how the patient is to be splinted. Broken limbs were also splinted and wrapped with linen. Archaeologists have even recovered from Egyptian graves examples of splints designed to deal with long-bone fractures.⁷⁰ Medicine

was also practiced in Mesopotamia, though not without some admixture of irrational superstition. One could predict, for instance, whether a patient would recover by what he saw while hallucinating: “If, when he was suffering from a long illness, he saw a dog, his illness will return to him; he will die. . . . If he saw a gazelle, that patient will recover.”⁷¹

They went into the inner part of the house as if to get some wheat (4:6). There is wide agreement among commentators that a textual variant represented by the LXX should be preferred here. Thus, while in-house storage facilities were common enough in the ancient Near East, the text should actually read along the lines of McCarter’s suggestion: “The portress (female porter) of the house had been gathering wheat; she had nodded and fallen asleep.”⁷²

They cut off their hands and feet and hung the bodies by the pool (4:12). On the dismemberment of enemy dead or, as here, the executed, see [comment 1 Samuel 31:4](#) (cf. [5:3–4](#)). Though mutilation of this sort was not uncommon in the ancient Near East, there may be a special significance here, that is, the removal of the offending members—hands that committed the murder and feet that brought the news.



Mutilated enemy shown on the Balawat Gate
Werner Forman Archive/The British Museum

David's Kingdom Established (5:1–25)

When all the elders of Israel had come (5:3). “The elders constituted a leadership institution within societies in the ancient Near East, in all the countries and during all periods.”⁷³ As a tribal and patriarchal society, ancient Israel looked to the collective leadership of “elders,” drawn from “the fathers of the basic family units” called fathers’, or ancestral, houses.⁷⁴ Mothers also participated in some judicial proceedings, as in those involving children (e.g., Deut. 21:18–20; 22:15),⁷⁵ and occasionally assumed leadership on an ad hoc basis in times of crisis (e.g., 2 Sam. 20:16), but in general the elders comprised the male heads of the household.⁷⁶

In short, “the elders were the governing body of the clan by virtue of being its leading householders.”⁷⁷ As military and judicial leaders in village society, the elders were viewed as the accepted representatives of their respective families, clans, and tribes; thus David’s acceptance as king by the northern tribes of Israel is dependent on his endorsement by the “elders of Israel.”

The king made a compact with them (5:3). Elsewhere this Hebrew terminology (cf. 3:21) is rendered “to make a covenant.” The compact/covenant David makes with the elders of the northern tribes probably contains regulations for the kingship (see [comment on 1 Sam. 10:25](#)), including the duties and responsibilities of the respective parties to one another and to the Lord (cf. 2 Kings 11:17, where Jehoida makes a three-way covenant between Yahweh, the king, and the people). Even under the new arrangement, old divisions—particularly the one between the tribes in the north and those in the south—persist, as evidenced by the short-term success of Sheba’s revolt (2 Sam. 20:1) and the eventual division of the kingdom during the reign of Solomon’s son Rehoboam (1 Kings 12:16).

They anointed David king over Israel (5:3). See [comments on 2:4; 1 Samuel 2:10](#).

David was thirty years old when he became king (5:4). Regnal formulae such as this one, which give a monarch’s age at the time of his accession and the length of his reign, are common in the books of Samuel and Kings (e.g., 1 Sam. 13:1; 2 Sam. 2:10; 1 Kings 14:21; 22:42). The placement of David’s regnal formula here, though it includes his seven-and-a-half-year reign, appropriately marks the inauguration of his reign over all Israel.

The king and his men marched to Jerusalem (5:6). David’s interest in Jerusalem (where he eventually established his royal capital) likely stemmed

from its strategic location and relatively independent status. Occupied already in the third millennium B.C. (and even earlier), Jerusalem in David's time lay within the territorial allotment of the small tribe of Benjamin, close to the northern border of Judah, but it never came under full Israelite control. The city had been conquered by Judah in the period of the judges (Judg. 1:8), but neither Judah nor Benjamin had been successful in occupying the city or in driving out its Jebusite inhabitants (Josh. 15:63; Judg. 1:21). Thus, David probably viewed Jerusalem as an ideal candidate for a national capital—centrally located between the northern and southern tribes within one of the smaller tribes that would be unlikely to evoke jealousy from the others, and not yet conquered.

Jerusalem in Literary Sources and Archaeology

Given its importance in biblical history, Jerusalem has enjoyed the attention of archaeologists from the middle of the nineteenth century down to the present.^{A-8} Some have even described Jerusalem as the most excavated city in Israel. The archaeological results, however, particularly as they relate to the city at the time of David, have been mixed—or at least they have given rise to a heated debate over whether tenth-century B.C. Jerusalem was a city worthy of David's attention or a mere “cow-town.”^{A-9}

Whatever questions arise from the material remains, extrabiblical literary evidence leaves little room for doubting Jerusalem's prominence even in the controversial Late Bronze and Iron Age I periods, for which sparse material remains have been recovered. Jerusalem is mentioned already in the nineteenth- and eighteenth-century Egyptian Execration texts (where it is called “Urushalimum”),^{A-10} in the fourteenth-century Amarna letters (similarly called “Urusalim”),^{A-11} and in later Assyrian texts (where the name is “Urusalimmu”).^{A-12} In the fourteenth-century Amarna period, Jerusalem seems to have been particularly prominent, vying with Shechem for control of the central hill country. This literary evidence of an important Late Bronze Age city of Jerusalem prior to the Israelite settlement in Canaan is significant not only in its own right but also for its bearing on the question of whether there was (as the biblical text asserts) an Iron Age I city at Jerusalem for David to conquer. As noted, archaeological excavations in and around the modern city of Jerusalem have not yielded much that proves *either* the Late-Bronze *or* Iron-Age-I prominence of the settlement, but the literary evidence, whether from Amarna or the biblical text, is unequivocal.^{A-13}

The basic contours of the archaeological debate are summarized in a number of places and need not be repeated here.^{A-14} But a few cautionary remarks are in order.

1. One must be cautious in drawing conclusions from what archaeology has *not* found—“absence of evidence is not evidence of absence.”
2. Because Jerusalem has been continuously occupied throughout the age of archaeological exploration of Palestine, many sections are unavailable for excavation or sounding.
3. The archaeologists who have conducted major excavations in accessible areas in and around the city (e.g., K. Kenyon and Y. Shiloh) seem never to have questioned the importance of the city in the time of David; this to some degree undercuts more recent arguments that archaeological results indicate the city to have been of little importance in David’s day.
4. Because Jerusalem is situated in a defensible, well-watered location near arable land and along major ancient trade routes (east-west and north-south),^{A-15} the notion that it would have lacked significant occupation in any ancient period seems unlikely.

In short, as B. Halpern has remarked, one must be cautious in drawing conclusions “from the vagaries of material survival and recovery alone,” especially “in a site such as Jerusalem, where monumental construction especially in the Persian through Herodian periods was repeatedly carried down to bedrock, and where the overburden of modern settlement and political constraints prohibit extensive soundings.”^{A-16}



Aerial of the City of David extending south from the current city wall.

Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

It is no surprise, therefore, that material and architectural evidence from

some periods may be minimal. This is not to say that nothing remains from Davidic Jerusalem. For instance, the Jebusite city captured by David was surrounded by a ten-foot-thick wall that had been constructed in Middle Bronze II (eighteenth-century B.C.), and which continued in use throughout the united and divided monarchies, with some additions along the way.

Notable also is the much-discussed “stepped-stone structure” on the northeast side of the city, overlooking the Kidron Valley. This structure is believed to have been built in the Jebusite period prior to David and augmented by David himself. Comprising a terraced fill involving dressed and undressed stones, stamped soil, and rubble, and still preserved to a height of some fifty-five feet, the stepped-stone structure is the largest Iron I structure to have been excavated in Israel. It apparently supported an important civic structure, perhaps the “fortress of Zion” mentioned in [5:7](#).

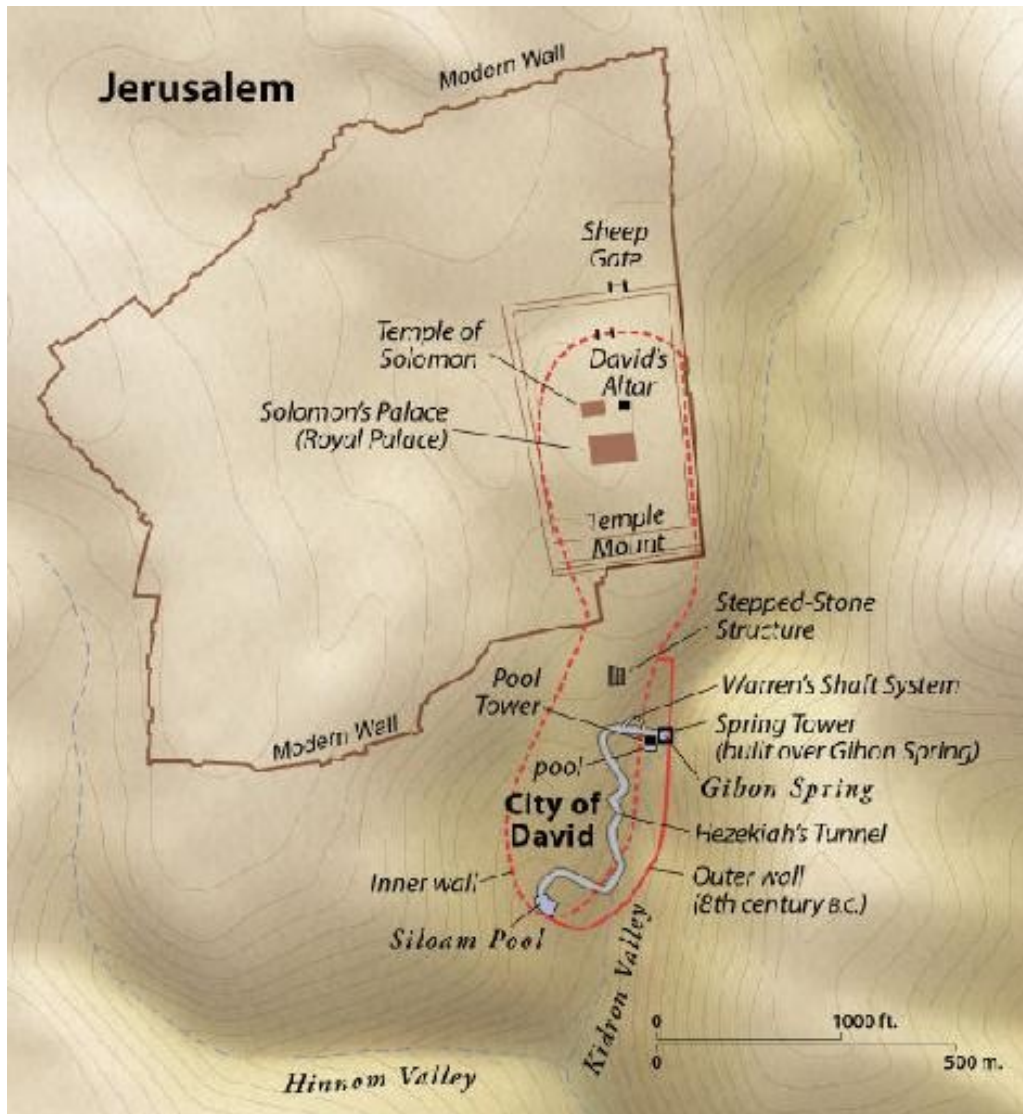
Having captured the fortress of Zion and taken up residence in it, David “built up the area around it, from the supporting terraces inward” ([5:9](#)). Not until the time of David’s son Solomon was the city’s administrative center moved north to Temple Mount.^{A-17} Ancient Jerusalem can be divided into three regions: (1) the formerly Jebusite City of David; 2) the so-called Ophel, a narrow ridge jutting north from the hill of David and joining (3) the Temple Mount area. The actual size of the original “City of David,” as it was renamed ([5:9](#)), was modest, occupying only about ten acres along the ridge running southward from the present-day walled city, but it likely controlled other towns and outlying areas.



Close-up of the excavations on the eastern flank

Kim Walton

No discussion of the archaeology of Jerusalem is complete without mention of Eilat Mazar's excavation of a "large-stone structure" located between the Temple Mount and the stepped-stone structure, in about the place that—according to Mazar's interpretation of verses such as [5:17](#) (see [comment](#))—David's palace may have been located.^{A-18} At the time of this writing, it is too early for definitive interpretations of these material remains, but initial indications are that the earliest level may stem from the tenth century, the early monarchy period.



With the walls of the Old City visible at the top, the eastern flank of the City of David features the stepped-stone structure near the top right, the entrance to the Warren's Shaft (center, left of the steps), and the spring house at the entry to Hezekiah's Tunnel at the bottom in the center.

To attack the Jebusites (5:6). Jebusites are first mentioned in Genesis 10:16, in the Table of Nations, where they are listed between Hittites and Amorites as descendants of Canaan. Beyond this general association with Canaan, little is known with certainty regarding their ethnic origins. B. Mazar has suggested that Ezekiel 16:3 may offer a hint: "This is what the sovereign LORD says to Jerusalem: Your ancestry and birth were in the land of the Canaanites; your father was an Amorite, and your mother a Hittite."



Fragment of a cult object perhaps portraying a Jebusite
Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

In support of the notion that the Jebusites may have had Hittite roots, Mazar draws attention to two prominent individuals who figure in the story of David: Uriah and Araunah. With respect to the latter, he observes that “Araunah (or *the* Araunah, as the Hebrew has it in [24:16](#)) seems not to have been a personal name but rather the Hurrian word *ewrine* (lord), found in Hittite (and as a personal name in Ugaritic).”⁷⁸ Thus, the Jebusites should perhaps be associated with Hurrians or Hittites. Whatever the case, most authorities at least believe the Jebusites to have been of non-Semitic origin and to have retained control of Jerusalem (glossed as the city of Jebus) throughout the settlement period until the time of David—despite temporary setbacks (such as the Judahite raid and burning of the city recounted in Judg. 1:8).⁷⁹

Even the blind and the lame can ward you off (5:6). An exchange of taunts or insults prior to a battle (referred to as “flyting”) was common in the ancient Near East (see [comment on 1 Sam. 17:43](#)). The meaning of the Jebusites’ taunt

has elicited considerable discussion and numerous suggestions, but no interpretation has achieved a consensus. Perhaps it is suggestive of overconfidence (“even our handicapped can keep you at bay”) or simply of a determination to fight to the last man (“even be he blind or lame”). Or perhaps this expression involves some kind of hex, or it harks back to a prior treaty between David and the Jebusites in which the blind or lame were invoked in the ratification ceremony.⁸⁰ It has even been suggested that the sense of the taunt is that “only someone capable of curing the blind and the lame could breach [the city’s] defenses”⁸¹ (though this seems difficult to square with the grammar of the Hebrew).

Perhaps the precise meaning of the taunt is beyond recovery (apart from the basic biblical explanation that by it the Jebusites mean “David cannot get in here” [v. 6]). In any case, the taunt fits a pattern of ongoing hostility between the Jebusites and their Bethlehemite neighbor David (cf. v. 8, where David’s enmity with the Jebusites is mentioned; also [1 Sam. 17:54](#)).

Fortress of Zion (5:7). The etymology of “Zion,” which occurs here for the first time in the Bible, has not been firmly established; suggestions include “castle,” “bare place,” “bare hill,” and so on.⁸² The fortress of Zion probably referred originally to a stronghold atop the stepped-stone structure (see [sidebar on “Jerusalem in Literary Sources and Archaeology”](#) at 5:6). The name eventually was extended to designate Jerusalem itself (e.g., 2 Kings 19:21; Isa. 2:3) or even the entire nation of Israel (e.g., Ps. 149:2; Isa. 46:3). In Israel’s poetical and prophetic literature, “Zion” is often presented as the locus of God’s mighty acts of salvation and judgment (cf. Ps. 14:7; Isa. 4:4; Lam. 4:11).

Water shaft (5:8). Since Charles Warren’s discovery in 1867 of an approximately fifty-foot vertical shaft not too far from the Gihon Spring but within the walls of the ancient City of David (see [map](#)), many scholars have assumed that David’s instructions to “use the water shaft to reach those ‘lame and blind’ who are David’s enemies” must relate to what came to be called “Warren’s shaft.” This view was never universally accepted, however, and has recently been rejected by many scholars.



Warren's Shaft

Kim Walton

One problem has to do with the rare Hebrew word translated “water shaft” (*šinnôr*). Elsewhere in the Bible, *šinnôr* occurs only in Psalm 42:7: “Deep calls to deep in the roar of your *waterfalls* [plural of *šinnôr*; NRSV and JPS render *cataracts*]; all your waves and breakers have swept over me.” A meaning along the lines of “water shaft” works here,⁸³ but lack of certainty has nevertheless spawned a number of alternative theories, based largely on cognate Arabic and Aramaic words and yielding meanings ranging from “grappling-hook” to “throat.”⁸⁴



Bel-harran-bel-usur stele commemorating a city and temple that he built, which was granted freedom from taxation (in grain, water, and straw)

Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

Recent work by T. Kleven, however, has sought to strengthen the case for reading *šinnôr* as “water shaft” or something similar. He cites in particular a cognate word (*šnr*) found in a Ugaritic text (early second millennium B.C.) describing the guilds involved in building houses. Kleven follows C. Gordon in reading the Ugaritic word *šnr* as designating a guild of “pipe” makers, who were responsible for water systems related to the new construction.⁸⁵ Not only does this Ugaritic evidence lend support to the traditional reading of Hebrew *šinnôr* as perhaps “water shaft,” but it also suggests that water works were utilized in Canaan already in the second millennium, well before the time of David.

This leads us to the second major objection to the traditional understanding. Y. Shiloh, convinced that water works such as Warren’s shaft should be dated no earlier than Iron II (tenth–ninth century) and perhaps influenced by philological theories that rejected the meaning “water shaft” for *šinnôr*, doubted that Warren’s shaft could have been known in David’s day.⁸⁶ The most recent archaeological explorations of Jerusalem’s water systems (by R. Reich and E. Shukron)⁸⁷ have come to a very different conclusion regarding the initial construction of Jerusalem’s water system(s), which they believe to have taken

place in the Middle Bronze II period (ca. 1700–1550), but they too doubt that “the natural vertical cavity” known as Warren’s shaft could have been Joab’s point of entry; in their view, the shaft “was not visible or accessible to the local people until the eighth century B.C.E.”⁸⁸

In the end, it is difficult to retrace with any confidence Joab’s daring entry into the Jebusite city. Certainly, the general notion that he entered through some kind of water shaft or water tunnel system seems reasonable enough, especially given the new support for the traditional reading of *šinnôr*. If Reich and Shukron are correct that the shaft discovered by Warren would have been unknown to inhabitants of Jerusalem until the eighth century, then “the shaft proper could not have taken part in the biblical story.” Their own suggestion, rather, is that “the rock-cut ‘Pool’ [near the spring house (see diagram)] and the tunnels connected to it (in its first phase of use) might well qualify” as the venue for Joab’s exploit.⁸⁹



Entry to Gihon Spring
Peter White

Called it the City of David (5:9). The practice of renaming a captured (or purchased) city and making it one’s capital and principal residence is attested elsewhere in the ancient Near East. McCarter mentions as examples the

establishment by the Assyrian Sargon II (721–705) of a “new capital at modern Khorsabad, which he called *dūr šarru-kīn*, ‘Sargons-burg,’ ” and the founding of “Tukulti-ninurta City” by the thirteenth-century Assyrian king Tukulti-ninurta I.⁹⁰

Such cities, which were often considered part of the ruler’s personal estate, not only enjoyed the most ambitious building projects but also, as far as the administrative personnel were concerned (typically relatives of the king), enjoyed such privileges as exemption from taxation, military duty, or corvée labor.⁹¹ These latter privileges stemmed not least from the fact that from Mesopotamia to Egypt such cities were typically “temple cities,” which were to be “free of oppression and of obligations toward the government, since it was to be governed by the god alone,” places where justice and righteousness prevailed.⁹²

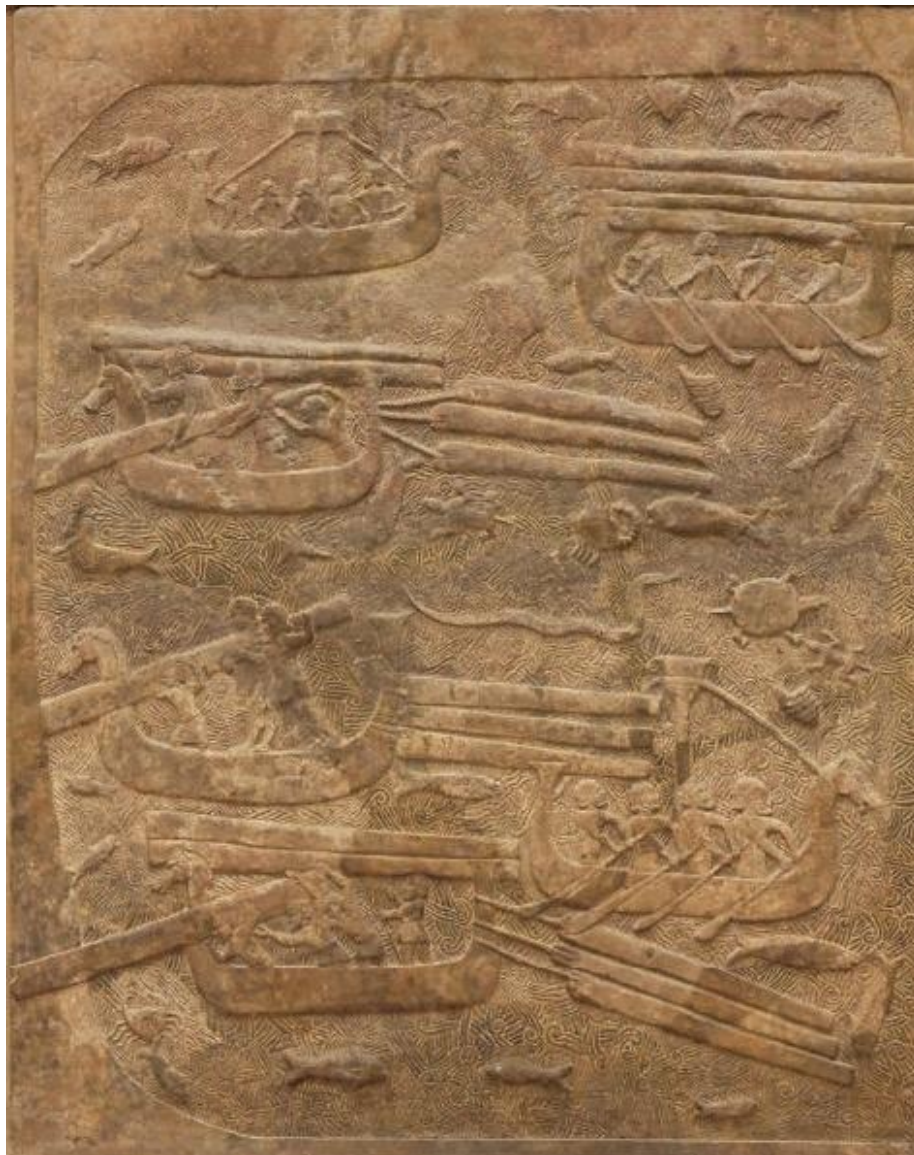
Supporting terraces (5:9). See discussion of the “stepped-stone structure” in the [sidebar on “Jerusalem in Literary Sources and Archaeology”](#) at 5:6.

Hiram king of Tyre (5:11). Tyre was a major Phoenician seaport city situated on an island off the Mediterranean coast some thirty miles north of Mount Carmel and twenty-five miles south of Sidon. Only about a hundred miles north of Jerusalem, Tyre’s commercial and cultural influence was felt throughout the ancient world and throughout the duration of Israel’s history. Eventually rising to the position of “ruler of the sea,” Tyre had commercial relations with most places in the known world.⁹³

Not surprisingly, Tyre is often mentioned in texts from the ancient Near East, including the Ebla texts (third millennium), the Egyptian Execration texts (nineteenth–eighteenth centuries), and the Amarna letters (fourteenth century), down to classical sources.⁹⁴ In the time of David, Tyre under King Hiram I experienced its first golden age. Hiram’s generosity to David is a testimony to the impressiveness of David’s own accomplishments, but it was likely also motivated by self-interest; Hiram may well have been concerned that David not deny him access to inland trade routes and necessary agricultural produce (cf. the goods supplied to Sidon and Tyre in Ezra 3:7).

Hiram’s friendship with Israel continued well into Solomon’s reign (1 Kings 5:1–12; 9:11). Hiram I is not mentioned in ancient Near Eastern texts outside the Bible, but the much later Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser III (745–727) includes a different Hiram of Tyre in a list of those from whom he received tribute.⁹⁵ A third Hiram is attested in the early tenth-century sarcophagus inscription of ‘Ahirom (Hiram), king of Byblos.⁹⁶

Hiram . . . sent cedar logs (5:11). The cedars of Lebanon (*Cedrus libani*), which could grow to heights of 130 feet and live as long as three thousand years, were much admired in the ancient Near East, and their timbers were much coveted for the construction of temples and palaces. The beauty, aroma, and durability of the wood were unsurpassed, and the kings of Mesopotamia and Egypt imported cedar timbers from the Lebanese region as early as the fourth millennium.⁹⁷ About a century before David’s reign, the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser I (1115–1076 B.C.) included the following in a report of an expedition to Lebanon and the Mediterranean: “I went to Lebanon (*Lab-na-a-ni*). I cut (there) timber cedars for the temple of Anu and Adad, the great gods, my lords, and carried (them to Ashur).”⁹⁸



Cedars of Lebanon floating down river

Marie-Lan Nguyen/Wikimedia Commons, courtesy of the Louvre

Exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel (5:12). On the chief responsibility of the king in the ancient Near East to establish justice and equity for the people, see [comments on 8:15; 15:4](#); cf. [12:1–4](#); also see [1 Samuel 12:3](#).

David took more concubines and wives (5:13). On the topic of diplomatic marriage, see [comment on 1 Samuel 25:39](#). On the implications of David’s growing harem, see [comment on 2 Samuel 3:2](#).

The Philistines . . . went up in full force . . . David . . . went down to the stronghold (5:17). David’s rule over Judah from Hebron was not contested by the Philistines, but the extension of his domain to include the northern tribes pose a threat to their interests that they could not ignore. The identity of the “stronghold” to which David “went down” is debated. In the present context, one naturally thinks of the “fortress [same Heb. word] of Zion” captured by David in verse [7](#) and occupied by him in verse [9](#). But some regard the expression “to go down” as inappropriate in reference to Jerusalem and suggest that David returns to a stronghold of prior acquaintance, perhaps at Adullam⁹⁹ (see [comment on 1 Sam. 22:4](#)).

In view of the other geographical reference points in the context, the newly acquired fortress of Zion remains a favored option.¹⁰⁰ Recent excavation led by Eilat Mazar in the area just north of the stepped-stone structure has uncovered evidence of an impressive Iron-Age “large-stone structure” that some suggest may represent David’s palace¹⁰¹—an association that must, of necessity, remain suppositional pending further discovery and dating. If correct, however, then from his palace David would indeed have gone “down” to the fortress of Zion.

Valley of Rephaim (5:18). Generally identified with the Wadi el-Ward, the Valley of Rephaim ran essentially east-west about a mile south of the present-day Old City of Jerusalem. The deployment of Philistines in this valley makes good strategic sense, as it would hinder Judahite reinforcements from joining David in Jerusalem.¹⁰²

David inquired of the LORD (5:19). See [comments on 1 Samuel 22:10; 23:2; 28:6](#).

Baal Perazim (5:20). The location of Baal Perazim is uncertain; suggestions include a site somewhere on the southern or western border of the Valley of Rephaim (if the stronghold to which David descends in v. [17](#) is the stronghold of Adullam) or a site nearer to Jerusalem (if the stronghold is the fortress of

Zion).¹⁰³

Philistines abandoned their idols (5:21). On ancient Near Eastern conceptions of the involvement of the god(s) in warfare and on the common practice of carrying off defeated deities, see [comments on 1 Samuel 5:2](#) and the [sidebar, “The Treatment of Defeated Deities.”](#) While the captured gods of defeated foes were often placed in the temples of the more powerful, victorious deities, the biblical text here gives no indication that David follows this practice. The parallel account in Chronicles completes the picture: “The Philistines had abandoned their gods there, and David gave orders to burn them in the fire” (1 Chron. 14:12; cf. the instructions of Deut. 7:5, 25).

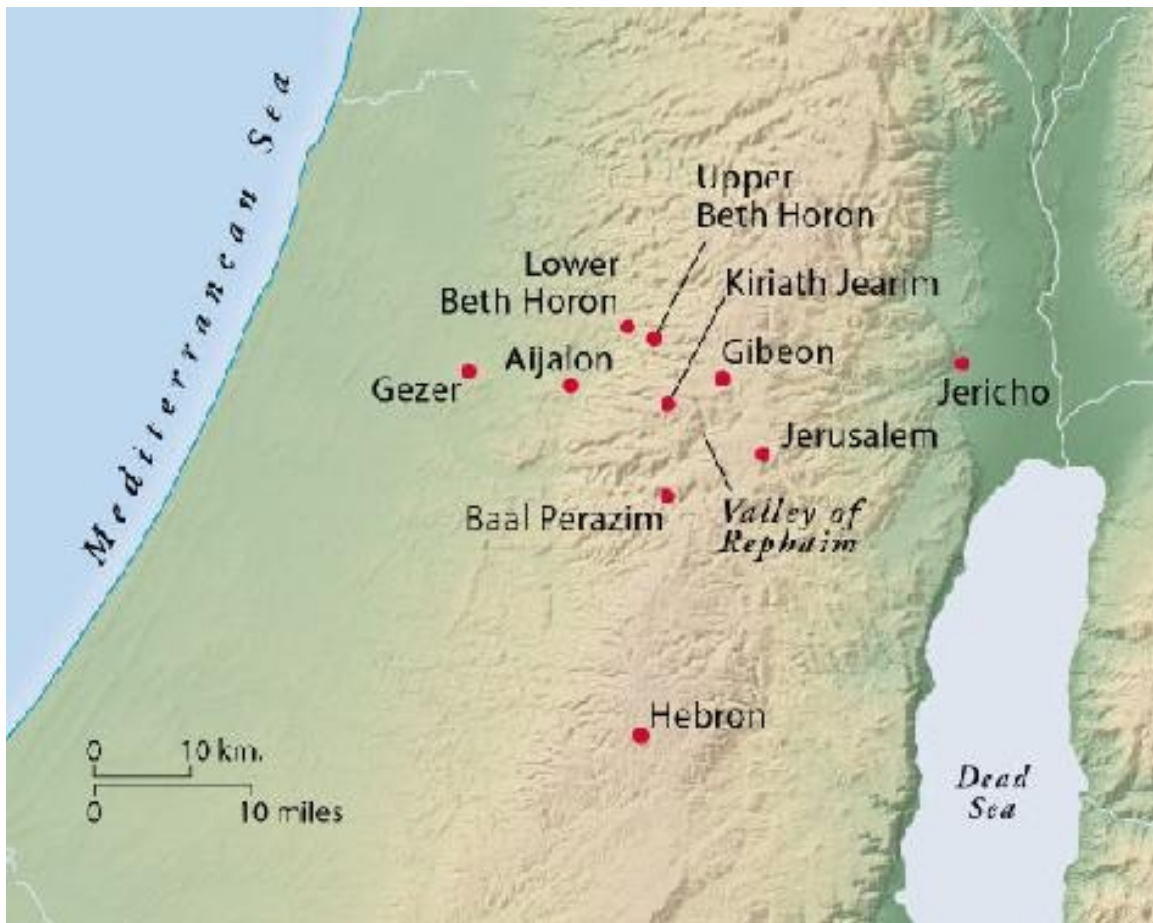
While less common than subordinating (or simply adding) captured gods to the existing pantheon, the practice of denigrating the power of and even destroying captured gods is known in the ancient Near East. Assurbanipal, for instance, exemplifies the former practice with his remark regarding the gods of the Elamites: “I counted their gods and goddesses as powerless ghosts.” In another place, he writes about the Elamite gods: “I smashed their gods and thereby soothed the heart of the lord of lords.”¹⁰⁴

Circle around behind them . . . sound of marching in the balsam trees (5:23–24). Though there are uncertainties of interpretation in these verses—e.g., are we to read “balsam trees” or, perhaps, a place name?¹⁰⁵—two typical aspects of Israelite warfare are evident: clever strategies capitalizing on deception and surprise,¹⁰⁶ and divine assistance through the orchestration of natural or supernatural events (cf. 2 Kings 7:6, where Yahweh caused “the Arameans to hear the sound of chariots and horses and a great army”).

The LORD has gone out in front of you (5:24). The concept of the Divine Warrior was not unique to Israel (see [comment on 1 Sam. 14:6](#)). A major tenet of Divine Warrior theology was that God or the gods went before the troops to enable victory by demoralizing, confusing, or terrifying the enemy. At times the deity would “thunder” against the enemy (see [1 Sam. 2:10](#)), cause the earth to shake (see [14:15](#)), or in other ways befuddle, trick, and dispirit the enemy. David’s “song of praise” combines many images associated with the awesome character of Yahweh as Divine Warrior and rescuer ([2 Sam. 22:8–16](#)). If Israel’s belief in a Divine Warrior was not unique conceptually, it was ontologically, as Israel worshiped the only true God, Yahweh.

From Gibeon to Gezer (5:25). David’s rout of the Philistines was more extensive and far more decisive than Jonathan’s in [1 Samuel 14:31](#). Whereas Jonathan drove the Philistines as far as Aijalon, David drove them all the way to

Gezer—seven miles further west and, significantly, right out of the hill country.¹⁰⁷ David's defeat of the Philistines was of great moment, because these archenemies of Israel were central to the commissions of both Saul and David (cf. [1 Sam. 9:16](#); [2 Sam. 3:18](#)). David succeeded (cf. [2 Sam. 8:1](#)) where Saul failed, and the weight of David's achievement was not lost on the people or on the later Chronicler (1 Chron. 14:17).



Battle and pursuit to Gezer

The Ark Established in Jerusalem (6:1–23)

Baalah of Judah (6:2). This is another name for Kiriath Jearim (see [comment on 1 Sam. 6:21](#)). If the site has been correctly identified, the journey from Baalah to Jerusalem was seven or eight miles.

To bring up from there the ark of God (6:2). On the ark of God, see [comment on 1 Samuel 3:3](#). Various studies have compared the present episode to ancient Near Eastern accounts of ceremonies accompanying the return of a deity to its temple.¹⁰⁸ While aspects of these studies are illuminating, McCarter is correct in pointing out that the more pertinent analogues to David’s bringing the ark up to Jerusalem are “ancient Near Eastern accounts of the introduction of a national god to a new royal city.” As examples, he cites inscriptions of the Assyrian kings Sargon II (721–705 B.C.), Sennacherib (704–681), and Esarhaddon (680–669), each of which recounts the arrival or restoration of a deity in a (new) royal city. The basic pattern of each account comprises the following elements: “ceremonial invitation of the national god into a royal city, the presentation of sacrifices, and the preparation of a feast for the people of the land.”¹⁰⁹ Most lavish of all is the account of Assurbanipal II’s inauguration of the palace in Calah. First, “he invited into it Ashur, the great lord and the gods of his entire country,” to whom he next offered sacrifices of extraordinary quantity and variety; third, he “treated for ten days with food and drink 47,074 persons, men and women,” along with other guests, bringing the total to 69,574.¹¹⁰ David’s actions in [2 Samuel 6](#) follow a similar pattern: Yahweh, as represented by the ark of God, is brought into the new royal city of David, sacrifices are offered, and the people are treated to a banquet.

Enthroned between the cherubim (6:2). See [comment on 1 Samuel 4:4](#).

New cart (6:3). While the choice of a “new” cart is doubtless motivated by a desire for ritual purity, it was still an inappropriate choice. Recalling Philistine precedent set in [1 Samuel 6:7](#), this mode of transporting the ark entirely neglects the divine directive that the ark, equipped with rings and poles (e.g., Ex. 25:12–14; 37:5), is to be carried, not carted (see Num. 4:15, 19; 7:9; Deut. 10:8; Josh. 3:8; etc.).

House of Abinadab (6:3). See [comment on 1 Samuel 7:1](#).

Harps, lyres, tambourines, sistrams and cymbals (6:5). The musical instruments mentioned are for the most part well known both in the Bible and in the ancient Near East generally (see [comments on 1 Sam. 10:5](#); [16:16](#)). The “sistrum” occurs only here in the Bible, and so is more difficult to describe with

certainty. A sistrum was a metallic instrument known particularly among the ancient Egyptians. The handle of what may have been an Egyptian sistrum from around the fifteenth century B.C. was discovered at Beitin. To the handle was attached an oval hoop made of metal. Several wires were attached to the hoop in such a way that shaking the instrument produced a jingling sound.



Procession with musical instruments, including sistrum
Lisa Jean Winbolt

The etymology of the Hebrew word used here suggests that the key aspect of the instrument was that of a “shaker” of some sort.¹¹¹ This has led to the alternative suggestion that the instrument may have been a “(pottery) rattle.”¹¹² Dozens of pottery rattles, averaging about four inches in height, have been discovered in ancient Palestine. Used from as early as the second millennium until they were generally replaced by metal bells in the ninth century, these rattles consisted of enclosed hollow pottery vessels containing one or more small pellets.¹¹³



Procession of musicians

Michael Greenhalgh ArtServe, courtesy of The Istanbul Museum

Threshing floor of Nacon (6:6). On the nature of threshing floors, see [comments on 24:18, 22](#). The precise location of this threshing floor is unknown, though it was probably near Jerusalem. The name “Nacon,” which sounds like a Hebrew term denoting that which is stable, steadfast, or sure, may have been mentioned to underscore the dramatic irony of the oxen stumbling just at that spot.

Six steps (6:13). The nature of the ritual procedure described in this verse has been described in two distinct ways. The first, reflected in the NIV, is that after those carrying the ark took their first six steps without incident, a sacrifice was performed in thanksgiving for the apparent divine approval of David’s second attempt to transport the ark to Jerusalem.

The second, likelier interpretation is that a sacrifice was offered each time the bearers of the ark had taken six steps. While the number of sacrificial animals would have been considerable and the ritual procession slow moving, Assyrian sources offer a possible analogue to such a procession. An inscription of King

Esarhaddon (681–669) describes a procession by which divine images were brought to their restored sanctuaries in Babylon: “From Assur to the quay of Babylon, brushwood piles were lit every third of a mile, and every double mile they slaughtered fat bulls.” Esarhaddon died, in fact, “before he could carry out the festive procession described in his inscriptions,” so it fell to his son Assurbanipal (669–633) to do so.¹¹⁴

The following is excerpted from Assurbanipal’s fuller inscription:

In my first year of reign, when Marduk, king of the universe, *put into* my hands the rule of Assyria . . . I besought my creator in the matter of his godhead’s going (back to Babylon).

Having apparently received a favorable reply, Assurbanipal describes the procession:

From the quay of Assur to the quay of Babylon, where they were taking him, lambs were slaughtered, bulls sacrificed (cut down), sweet-smelling (herbs) scattered about . . . all that one could mention was brought [lit., they brought] to the morning and evening meal. . . . Brushwood was kindled, torches lighted. Every *bêru* [“double-hour’s journey”], a beacon was set up. All of my troops kept going round it, like a rainbow, making music day and night.¹¹⁵

While the idea that David’s procession halted every six paces to offer a sacrifice may stretch credulity, McCarter insists that “one can hardly object that the number of sacrificial animals seems excessive here in view of the statistics given for the ceremony accompanying Solomon’s installation of the ark in the temple in 1 Kings 8:5, 63—twenty-two thousand victims from the herds and one hundred twenty thousand from the flocks!”¹¹⁶

David, wearing a linen ephod, danced (6:14). For the three senses of the word “ephod” in the Bible, see [comment on 1 Samuel 2:18](#); David apparently lays aside his royal insignia and clothes himself in a priestly garment (or perhaps the attire of a dancer) in order to participate in the cultic procession. Scrutiny of the words used to describe David’s dancing suggests that it is an exuberant, energetic leaping and whirling about.¹¹⁷



Hittite mythological scene from Megiddo with dancers celebrating before deities
Kim Walton, courtesy of the Oriental Institute Museum

While ancient Near Eastern literature provides no other examples of kings dancing in such processions, instances of the queen joining in a ritual dance, followed by other dignitaries, are known from Hittite sources.¹¹⁸ Depictions of dancers in a broad range of ancient Near Eastern pictorial sources give some sense of what this dancing may have been like. Dancing was done either in groups or singly and was often quite acrobatic.¹¹⁹ Dancing took place in a variety of settings and for a variety of reasons, as it has in most cultures up to the present time. It could be a spontaneous expression of joy and playfulness; on occasion it could verge into eroticism; and it was often a component of cultic ceremonies.

Dancing was not always evaluated positively. An Akkadian letter from the first half of the second millennium criticizes a woman who had “greatly aggravated the matter.” The letter explains: “In addition to dancing about every day, she has slighted us by consistently behaving thoughtlessly.”¹²⁰ Mostly, though, dancing was deemed a reflex of joy and well-being. A letter to the Assyrian king Assurbanipal lauds his reign as a golden age:

A good reign, righteous days, years of justice, plentiful rains, enormous floods, a good market price! The gods are appeased, there is much reverence of god, the temples abound; the great gods

of heaven and earth have been exalted in the time of the king, my lord! The old men dance, the young men sing, the women and the girls are merry and happy; women are married and provided with rings, boys and girls are brought forth, the births thrive!¹²¹

David's whirling dance apparently combines personal exuberance with cultic performance. For more on dancing in ancient Israel, see [comment on 1 Samuel 18:6](#).

Shouts and the sound of trumpets (6:15). As in 2:28 and 1 Samuel 13:3 (see [comments](#)), the kind of "trumpet" in this context is the *šôpār*, a horn made usually from a ram's horn. Because its piercing sound could be heard from a great distance or above the din of other noises, the *šôpār* was often used as a signaling device in military contexts. For the same reasons, the *šôpār* was also used, as here, in celebratory ritual contexts; its rather limited musical range meant that its contribution to the music was more dramatic than melodic.¹²²

Bread . . . dates and . . . raisins to each person (6:19). On the provision of a royal feast for the people as part of the ceremony accompanying the "introduction of a national god to a new royal city," see [comment on 6:2](#).¹²³

How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today (6:20). Michal's criticism of David shows a fundamental misunderstanding of the requirements of Israelite kingship and effectively seals the fate of the house of Saul (6:23). David's humbling himself before Yahweh not only comports nicely with the consistent emphasis in 1-2 Samuel on the honor of Yahweh, but it also finds at least general analogy in Mesopotamian ritual texts. A ritual text from the reign of late thirteenth-to early twelfth-century Assyrian king Tukulti-Ninurta I, for instance, describes the king's divestment of royal insignia and humble appearance as supplicant before the god Assur. Following his humiliation, the king is "reinvested with the symbols of office, is crowned, and is extolled with praises and wishes for a long reign."¹²⁴

David Promised an Enduring Kingdom (7:1–29)

The LORD had given him rest (7:1). The biblical emphasis on Yahweh’s giving his people rest is unusual in the ancient Near Eastern context, where it was generally deemed the responsibility of the people to provide a place of rest for the deity—a temple, in other words. In ancient Mesopotamia, the chief purpose of the state was to provide shelter and food for the gods; to fail to do so was high treason. Such provision was made through the cult, and the center of the cult was the temple, the house of the gods (or the main god). The building and repair of the temple was the responsibility of the ruler.¹²⁵

All these activities were aimed at appeasing the gods and keeping them at rest. The Assyrian king Sennacherib, for instance, in an account of his building a “Temple of the New Year’s Feast,” speaks of his desire to “quiet the heart of Assur, my lord.”¹²⁶ Other aspects of his temple building parallel David’s. He writes: “My heart moved me, the command of Shamash and Adad I sought by oracle, a favorable reply they gave me, and commanded (me) to build.”¹²⁷

David too desires to build a house for Yahweh, and he too seeks and receives approval (later reversed) from the person responsible for oracular inquiry, the prophet Nathan. The striking distinctive of the biblical account is, as just noted, the fact that, rather than the king building a house and providing rest for the god(s), Yahweh provides rest and builds a house for Israel’s king, David (see [next comment](#)).

He said to Nathan the prophet (7:2). Nathan is mentioned here for the first time. He will play a significant role also in [2 Samuel 12](#) and in [1 Kings 1](#). That David should approach a prophet to seek (oracular) approval for his intent to build a temple is in keeping with general ancient Near Eastern practice.¹²⁸ From the late third millennium, we have the example of Gudea of Lagash, who set out to build a temple for his god, but not without first receiving divine approval:

. . . in order to build the temple of Ningirsu—Gudea brought (these materials) together in his town Girsu. . . . After the god Ninzagga had given him a (pertinent) order, they brought copper for Gudea, the temple-builder . . . after the god Ninsikila had given him a (pertinent) order, they brought great willow-logs . . . to the ensi, the temple-builder.¹²⁹



Gudea Temple Cylinder B

Rama/Wikimedia Commons, courtesy of the Louvre

Examples of kings seeking divine sanction for temple building can be multiplied, and there are also instances of divine sanction being withheld.¹³⁰ The biblical accounts are unique in the ancient Near East, however, in offering an explanation as to “why the deity responded negatively to the request of a king who is otherwise viewed in a positive light.”¹³¹ Building a temple in a capital city and thus bringing together the religious and political would ostensibly strengthen David’s hand. But Yahweh rejects David’s plan to build a temple and chooses, rather, a more radical method of affirming his support of David. First comes the divine election of David as a man of Yahweh’s own choosing, a man for whom Yahweh will build a house (dynasty). Only later are the political aspects—the merger of political and cultic centers in Jerusalem—brought into effect.

Living in a palace of cedar (7:2). The mention of cedar is suggestive of the refinement and luxury of David's palace (see [comment on 5:11](#)). David evidently views his palace as in some sense symbolic of his now-established rule (cf. [5:11–12](#)) and thinks it only appropriate that God's rulership be similarly symbolized by a permanent dwelling for the ark. In wishing to build a temple for the God who has given him victory, David is not unlike other ancient Near Eastern monarchs, who liked to crown their achievements with temples to their patron deities.¹³² David's focus on the ark links the present chapter with the immediately preceding one, which recounted David's bringing of the ark to Jerusalem.



Transport of cedar

Marie-Lan Nguyen/Wikimedia Commons, courtesy of the Louvre

I will make your name great (7:9). Attempts to liken the great name promised David to the Egyptian term “great name” (*ren wer*) are now regarded as misguided, inasmuch as David's great name seems to have to do with renown,

while the Egyptian term functions as a titulary.¹³³ Similarly, attempts to liken the prophecy of [2 Samuel 7](#) to Egyptian *Königsnovellen* (royal tales) have also been refuted.¹³⁴

Much more enlightening are proposed Mari parallels to the dynastic oracle. Malamat has drawn attention to a prophecy from Mari that exhibits a number of features of a “dynastic oracle.”¹³⁵ These features include divine installation of the king, father-son imagery, reference to a tent-shrine (?), reference to a sanctuary as a house, house as a palace/dynasty, mention of throne, land/kingdom, and extent of rule. However, the Mari and the biblical dynastic oracles also differ markedly in some respects; chiefly, the Mari oracles are “obligatory” (i.e., conditional), placing the king under obligation, while the Davidic oracle is promissory and thus unconditional. Furthermore, while Yahweh rejects David’s desire to build him a temple, the deity of the Mari oracles (Adad) is adamant that the king, Zimri-Lim, should build him a temple.

I will be his father, and he will be my son (7:14). The father/son terminology that Yahweh uses to describe his relationship to David’s royal descendant is in keeping with the bond of intimacy that God feels toward David. Unlike in Egypt, where the pharaoh was considered divine, the king in ancient Israel was “not truly a god but one who metaphorically [partook] of a familial relationship” with God.¹³⁶ Sometimes termed “sacral kingship,” this concept was transformed into a far deeper reality with the incarnation of Jesus.



Gods giving the pharaoh life

Frederick J. Mabie

While the ancient Near East offers no true parallels to the profundity of the full biblical picture, familial father/son language was sometimes used to describe the relationship of a patron deity to an earthly monarch. In the Late Bronze Age Ugaritic epic of King Kirta, for example, Kirta is referred to as “the ‘lad’ and the ‘son’ of El, the high god of the Ugaritic pantheon,” and in one passage is even called a “god.”¹³⁷ A claim to divine sonship is apparent even in some of the throne names of Aramean kings (e.g., Barhadad [Ben-Hadad in the Bible] means “son of [the god] Hadad”).¹³⁸ Instances of royal claims to divine heritage are evident in most places and periods of the ancient Near East.¹³⁹

My love will never be taken away from him (7:15). “Love” language is often used in ancient Near Eastern contexts to express “covenant loyalty” (see the “love” of Israel and Judah for David in [1 Sam. 18:16](#) and of David’s praise of Jonathan’s love in [2 Sam. 1:26](#); cf. also [2 Sam. 19:6](#)). Biblical expressions of God’s love for his people or his king certainly do not exclude notions of emotional attachment and affection, but such expressions should be understood, first and foremost, in covenantal terms. Similar to the way that “love” in the

Amarna letters connotes loyalty and service,¹⁴⁰ Deuteronomy, for instance, sees love “defined by and pledged in the covenant—a covenantal love.”¹⁴¹

Treaty between King Hattušiliš III and Ulmi-Teshshup

I, My majesty, will [not depose] your son. [I will accept] neither your brother nor anyone else. Later your son and grandson will hold [the land] which I have given [to you]. It may not be taken away from him. If any son or grandson of yours commits an offense, then the King of Hatti shall question him. And if an offense is proven against him, then the King of Hatti shall treat him as he pleases. If he is deserving of death he shall perish, but his household and land shall not be taken from him and given to the progeny of another.^{A-19}

Covenantal use of love language is well illustrated in a later biblical passage describing the relationship of Hiram, king of Tyre, to David: “When Hiram king of Tyre heard that Solomon had been anointed king to succeed his father David, he sent his envoys to Solomon, because he had always been on friendly terms with [lit., had been one loving, or a lover of] David” (1 Kings 5:1 [Heb. 5:15]). The point in [2 Samuel 7](#) is that while Yahweh, as father, may find it necessary to discipline David’s royal son when he does wrong ([7:14](#)), he will never remove his covenantal love from the Davidic line. Though the punishment be severe, extending even to the loss of land and temple (1 Kings 9:6–9), God’s promise to establish forever the throne of David will not fail.



When a dynastic line fell out of power, the new regime made every attempt to expunge memory of those kings and even reliefs of them were often effaced.

Hansjoerg Klein

Over time this promise came to be understood in messianic terms (cf. Isa. 9:7; 11:1–5; Jer. 33:14–26; Mic. 5:1–5). A noteworthy conceptual parallel to this passage, though involving a covenant agreement between two human rulers, is found in the Hittite Bronze Tablet (see [comment on 1:26](#)).¹⁴² The “Great King” Tudhaliya IV promises the vassal Kurunta that the treaty between them will remain in force and will apply even to Kurunta’s descendants. Even should a son or grandson of Kurunta commit treason, the covenant will remain inalienable: “I . . . will not throw out your son.” The offender, if proven guilty, will be punished, to be sure; “they shall do to him whatever the king of the land of Ḫatti

decides. But they may not take from him his ‘house’ [i.e. dynasty] and land.”¹⁴³ Similar with respect to succession is a section of a treaty between the Hittite king Hattušiliš III and Ulmi-Teshshup (see [sidebar](#)).¹⁴⁴

There is no one like you (7:22). Awed by what Yahweh has said to him, David utters what many have rightly understood as an explicit monotheistic confession: “There is no God like you” (cf. Hannah’s confession in [1 Sam. 2:2](#)).¹⁴⁵ Other important reminders of Israel’s monotheistic faith include the first commandment (“You shall have no other gods before me,” Ex. 20:3; Deut. 5:7) and the Shema (“Hear [Heb. *šema*’], O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one,” Deut. 6:4). The belief that there is but one true God is evidenced also in Israel’s attitude toward idols, which are regarded as worthless nothings, burdensome blocks of wood, stone, or metal that have eyes but cannot see, ears but cannot hear, and so forth (cf. Ps. 115:1–8; Isa. 45:15–17; 46:1–7; Jer. 2:11; see [sidebar on “Israel’s Monotheism and Ancient Theisms”](#)).

Israel’s Monotheism and Ancient Theisms

Israel’s ancient Near Eastern neighbors were almost entirely polytheistic, occasionally perhaps bordering on henotheism (the worship of one god while granting the existence of others). For instance, the Neo-Babylonian king Nabonidus (555–539 B.C.) extolled the moon god Sin as “the king of the gods, the lord of lords who dwells in heaven, whose name surpasses that of (all) the (other) gods in heaven, (i.e.) of Shamash, who is *installed* by him, Nusku, Ishtar, Adad (and) Nergal who have (only) executed the command of the Divine Crescent, who surpasses them (all).”^{A-20}

The best-known, if short-lived, exception to the polytheistic rule is the experiment with monotheism that took place during the reign of the Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV, 1352–1336). Akhenaten’s hymn to the sun god Aten refers to Aten as “sole God beside whom there is none.”^{A-21} An intriguing question is whether there may have been some connection between Akhenaten, the Egyptian monotheist, and the assumed monotheism of Israelites in Egypt. The question is often posed in terms of a possible connection between Akhenaten and Moses (whether the latter is believed to have lived in the fifteenth century or the thirteenth). On present evidence, however, influence cannot be established in either direction.



Akhenaten

Richard Beck, courtesy of the Alexandrian Museum

While monotheistic experiments such as Akhenaten's were extremely rare, more common was the tendency to collapse together deities from various locations who had similar functions but different names. As Saggs explains,

within any region, the original local pantheons had arisen from very similar backgrounds, and therefore in many cases the supernatural powers worshipped (the numen behind the storm, the corn, the sun, etc.) differed in little more than name. It was thus easy in later periods to recognize the identity of such deities, and we find in Egypt and Mesopotamia, texts which explicitly state that deity A of one city is deity B of another. [A-22](#)

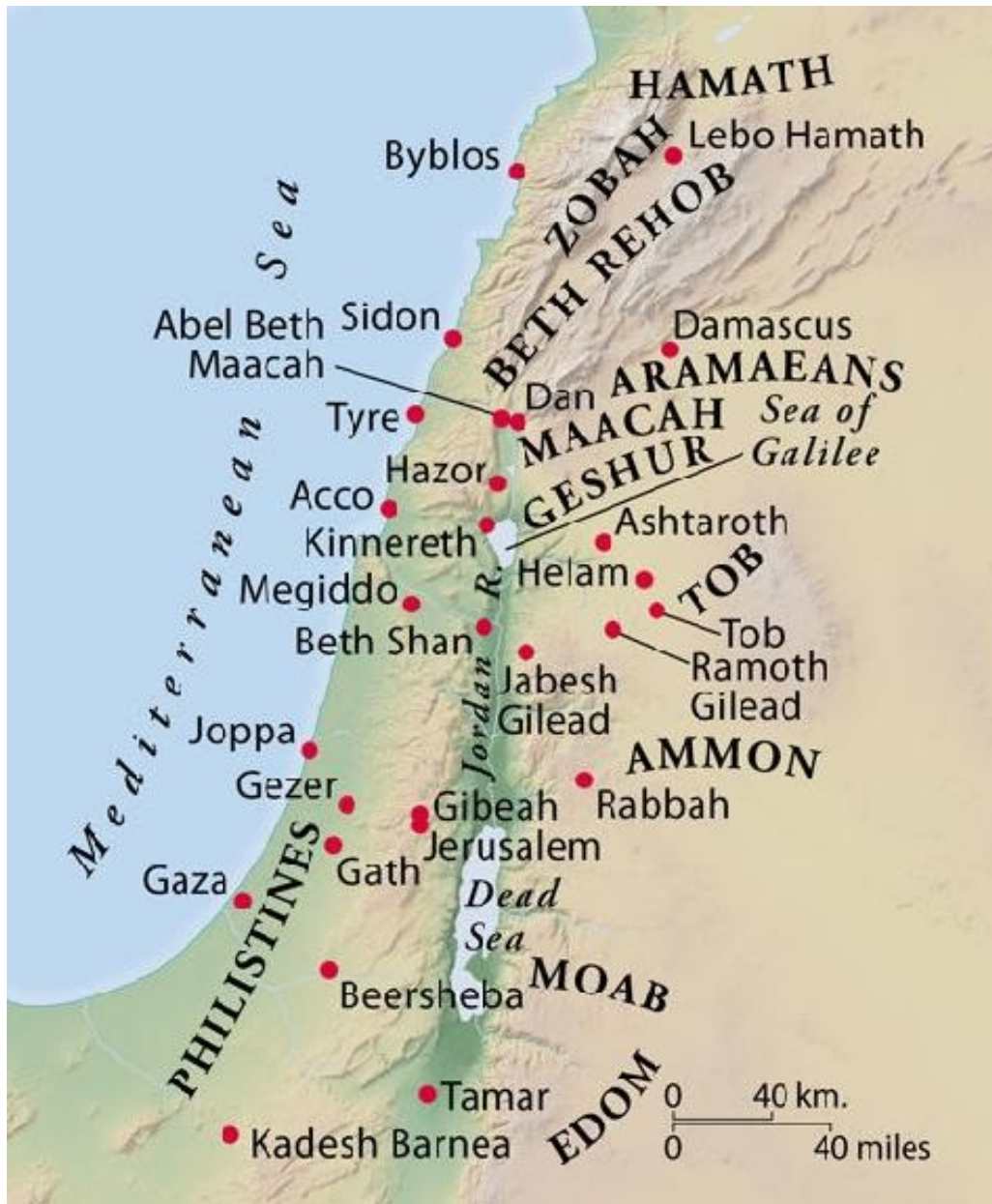
The effect of such equations was to reduce the actual number of deities assumed to exist. This reduction could be viewed as contributing a nascent monotheistic tendency, but in the end Israel's exclusive commitment to one God remains unique in the ancient Near East.

David's Growing Empire (8:1–18)

The “Empire” of David

To call the kingdom ruled by David (and later Solomon) an “empire” can be misleading, if one’s points of comparison are the massive empires of the ancient Egyptians, Assyrians, Persians, or Romans. The Bible does not describe such an empire for David but, rather, what has been termed a “mini-empire” of limited expanse and duration.^{A-23} The summary of David’s victories in [2 Samuel 8](#) speaks of David’s “subduing” (lit., “humbling”; Hiphil of *knʿ*) the Philistines (v. 1), of his fighting and conquering the Moabites (v. 2), Zobahites (vv. 3–4), and Arameans (vv. 5–8), and of his receiving congratulatory greetings from Tou, the king of Hamath, who sends gifts by the agency of his son Joram (vv. 9–10). In [8:11–12](#) the Edomites, Ammonites, and Amalekites are added to the list of peoples “subdued” (Piel of *kbš*) by David.^{A-24}

The summary in [2 Samuel 8](#) of David’s kingdom suggests various distinctions. While the Philistines were “humbled,” there is no mention of their becoming “servants” of David or of their sending tribute. By contrast Moab and Aram are explicitly reduced to tributary status, as are also, apparently, Edom and Ammon. Hamath welcomes David’s defeat of Aram and allies itself to David without the necessity of conquest. Taken together, these data present a multitiered Davidic “empire” comprising *heartland* (Judah and Israel, but not Philistia), *conquered territories* (Edom, Moab, Ammon, and Aram), and *subject-allies* (Hamath).^{A-25}



David's "Mini-Empire"

Over these constituent parts of his empire, David gains political control by various means and exercises dominion in different ways. The general concept of a multitiered empire is appropriate to David's time and place in the southern Levant. Three other "mini-empires" in the Late Bronze Age Levant have been inferred from biblical and extrabiblical evidence (especially Hittite hieroglyphic and Mesopotamian cuneiform texts): Aram (with Hadadezer as king), Carchemish, and Tabal. ^{A-26}

David defeated the Philistines and subdued them (8:1). Given the prominence of the Philistines as Israel’s archenemy from the time of the judges, David’s success in subduing them is notable (contrast Saul’s failure, [1 Sam. 14:52](#)). F. M. Cross draws attention to a seventh-century ostrakon excavated at Ashkelon, which may shed light on the little-known Philistine language and script. Surprisingly, the ostrakon shows greater affinities to Hebrew script and orthography than to Phoenician, as might have been expected. Cross remarks that this “points to a period of strong Israelite cultural influence on—and most likely political domination of—the Philistines.” He cites the “era of the United Monarchy of David and Solomon” (i.e., “the period when, according to Biblical accounts, Israel exercised hegemony over the Philistine city-states”) as providing the likeliest context.¹⁴⁶



Subdued enemies lined up on ground; Ramesses II, Karnak
Vanni/Art Resource, NY

He took Metheg Ammah from the control of the Philistines (8:1). Whether Metheg Ammah is to be understood as a place name or as two simple common nouns is unclear. If the former, the site is attested only here (but cf. “hill of Ammah” in [2:24](#)) and its location remains unknown. If it is a combination of two common nouns, various readings are possible. One can read the words as “the

reins of the forearm,” an idiomatic usage suggesting control or supremacy, in this instance over the Philistines. Or, with slight emendation, one can read “the common lands,” yielding the sense that David took control of the outlying (nonurban) lands from the Philistines. The parallel phrase in 1 Chronicles 18:1 reads “Gath and its villages [lit., daughters].” Gath was viewed by early rabbinical scholars as the foremost of Philistine cities, so that supremacy over Gath constituted effective supremacy over the Philistines.¹⁴⁷

Every two lengths of them were put to death (8:2). Unparalleled in biblical and extrabiblical literature, David’s method of casting lots¹⁴⁸ to reduce the soldiers of Moab by two-thirds strikes modern readers as cruel and arbitrary, especially in view of the fact that David had earlier trusted the Moabites (1 Sam. 22:3). A case can be made, however, that, in an ancient Near Eastern context in which combatants were often either all sold into slavery or all executed, the sparing of one third of the enemy soldiers to return to their homes is not without mercy.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, even where defeated combatants were retained as slaves, they were often mutilated (e.g., blinded) to keep them under control (see [comment on 1 Sam. 11:2](#)); long-term imprisonment of large numbers of prisoners was not an option, though brief internment was sometimes practiced when repatriation or political negotiations were anticipated.¹⁵⁰

The Moabites became subject to David and brought tribute (8:2). In the ancient Near East, subjugated territories were expected to send various kinds of tribute (e.g., precious metals and other goods, agricultural produce, livestock, even labor forces). In addition to the symbolic and, indeed, economic value of the conqueror’s receiving tribute, this system had the effect of depressing the economy of the conquered land and helping to assure its continued submission, much in the same way that deportation (or, as in the present instance, execution) depleted the workforce and defense forces of the conquered land.



Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III, collecting tribute from Patina
Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

From as early as Sumerian times, references to tribute can be found in the extant literature. Among Egyptian records, the annals of Thutmose III (1479–1425 B.C.) recount not only that the conquered chieftains of Megiddo brought tribute but that they carried it along with the Egyptian army as it continued southward: “Now [all] the chieftains, [ca]rried off by the awe of his majesty, bore their tribute of silver, gold, lapis lazuli and copper, bearing grain, wine, cattle and flocks for the army of his majesty; one company of them carried tribute on the journey south.”¹⁵¹

Assyrian sources contain numerous references to Israel’s paying tribute. The most famous instance—that of Jehu bringing tribute and bowing before Shalmaneser III (858–824)—is depicted on the well-known Black Obelisk. Other explicit references to Assyria’s exacting tribute from Israel can be found in the records of Adad-nirari III (810–782 B.C.), Tiglath-pileser III (745–727), Sargon II (722–705), Sennacherib (705–681), Esarhaddon (681–669), and Ashurbanipal (668–627).¹⁵²

Hadadezer, son of Rehob, king of Zobah (8:3). Hadadezer (sometimes written Hadarezer) was the name of at least two kings of the Arameans who occupied territory to the north of the Israelite heartland (on the Arameans, see comment on v. 5). The name Hadadezer sounds like “(the god) Hadad is (my) helper.” Hadadezer II is mentioned in Assyrian sources as an ally of Ahab, the

ninth-century king of Israel, at the battle of Qarqar,¹⁵³ while the present Hadadezer, son of Rehob, is mentioned only in the Bible.¹⁵⁴

The name Rehob, in addition to designating the father (or ancestor) of Hadadezer I, sometimes appears to designate a city central to the Aramaean kingdom of Zobah (cf. 10:6). Its precise location has not been determined, though some assume on the basis of Judges 18:28 (which mentions Dan/Laish in the vicinity of Beth Rehob) that it must have been situated near the source of the Jordan River. The kingdom of Zobah occupied the northern Beqa' Valley between the Lebanon Mountains on the west and the Anti-Lebanon Mountains on the east.¹⁵⁵

He went to restore his control along the Euphrates River (8:3). Ambiguity regarding the antecedent of “he” has caused scholars to debate whether David or Hadadezer went to “restore control” (or possibly “set up a monument”).¹⁵⁶ On the one hand, it can be argued that, because David would have passed through the territory of Hadadezer en route to the Euphrates River (probably in the vicinity of Emar) and would otherwise not likely have encountered Hadadezer so far north, David went to “restore his control.” On the other hand, however, if it was Hadadezer who had to restore order in his northern territories, David may have seized the opportunity of Hadadezer’s preoccupation with the north to attack him from the south.¹⁵⁷



David's success and influence was such that he was recognized as the founder of the long-lasting dynastic line both in the Bible and in ancient Near Eastern records such as this Aramaic inscription from a century and a half after his time. This inscription contains the clearest reference to David yet found in extrabiblical documents from the Iron Age.

Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

He hamstrung all but a hundred of the chariot horses (8:4). For the general character and uses of chariots in the time of David, see [comment on 1 Samuel 13:5](#). Hamstringing a horse involved cutting the tendon equivalent to the Achilles tendon in humans. By this means David disabled the horses so that they could no longer pull chariots, though they may still have been capable of minor tasks.

The motivation behind David's action is debated. Some have argued that David's military apparatus already had a chariot force and that it was either so well-supplied with horses or so small that he could use only a hundred of the captured horses; the rest, then, were incapacitated, lest they fall again into enemy hands.¹⁵⁸ Alternatively, David's hamstringing of the majority of the horses may have followed historical and theological precedent. According to the so-called

“law of the king” in Deuteronomy 17:16, Israel’s kings were not to “acquire great numbers of horses.” Yahweh had instructed Joshua to hamstring the horses and burn the chariots of the northern coalition of kings, which he did (Josh. 11:6, 9). David’s action is thus largely in keeping with these precedents, though retaining a hundred of the chariot horses is perhaps disconcerting, as it may suggest an early stage in a growing reliance on military might (see [comment on 24:1](#)).

Two sons of David, Absalom and Adonijah, later dramatize their bids for the throne by preparing chariots and horses and having fifty men run before them (15:1; 1 Kings 1:5; cf. Samuel’s warning in [1 Sam 8:11](#)). A third son, Solomon, will become particularly well known for his chariot forces (1 Kings 4:26–28; 9:22; 10:26–29) as well as for the accumulation of wives and wealth, also forbidden by Deuteronomy 17’s “law of the king.”

He put garrisons in the Aramean kingdom of Damascus (8:6). On the placing of garrisons in conquered territories, see [comment on verse 14](#). The Arameans occupied a broad swath of Mesopotamian territory from the second millennium on. They are frequently mentioned in ancient Near Eastern sources, including texts from Mari and Ugarit, and a city named Aram located in the region of the upper Tigris River is attested already at the beginning of the second millennium. The Bible names Aram among the descendants of Shem (Gen. 10:22–23).¹⁵⁹

At the beginning of David’s reign, various Aramean tribes occupied areas to the north and east of the Israelite heartland. These tribes were distinguished and designated according to the territory they occupied—thus, Aram-Zobah, Aram-Damascus, and so forth.¹⁶⁰ As was the case with many important cities in the ancient Near East, Damascus was located in a favorable spot—an oasis at the crossroads of the two main international highways.¹⁶¹ At least in part owing to its favored location, Damascus has been continuously occupied up to the present, making serious excavation impracticable and archaeological finds rare and generally late.

Gold shields . . . to Jerusalem (8:7). “Gold shields” should probably read “bow (and arrow) cases,” a judgment based on Aramaic technical terminology and supportive Semitic cognates.¹⁶²



Bow (and arrow) case depicted in a Persian relief

Brian J. McMorrow

Tebah and Berothai, towns that belonged to Hadadezer (8:8). As towns of Hadadezer, Tebah and Berothai lay within the territory of Zobah (v. 3).¹⁶³

Tou king of Hamath (8:9). Hamath was a city situated 130 miles north of Damascus along the Orontes River that served as the capital of a Neo-Hittite state stretching from Zobah on the south to the Euphrates River on the northeast. King Tou appears to be of Hurrian (as opposed to Aramean) origin. News of David's defeat of Hadadezer prompts Tou to seek a more amicable, if nevertheless subordinate, relationship with David. On the multitiered character of David's empire, see [comment on verse 11](#).

Sent his son Joram (8:10). That the king of Hamath's son should bear the name Joram ("Yahweh is exalted") seems surprising, and indeed his original name may have been Hadoram ("[the god] Haddu/Hadad is exalted," as in 1 Chron. 18:10).¹⁶⁴ Perhaps the name Joram was adopted or imposed in keeping with Israel's growing dominance under David. The adoption of a second name is a practice "well attested in royal circles throughout the Near East."¹⁶⁵

King David dedicated these articles to the LORD (8:11). Not only in Israel but in the ancient Near East generally, the "dominant worldview" was that "the

gods [or in Israel's case the true God, Yahweh] went before the army, fought the enemy, and awarded the victor his success and the spoils that fell into his hands."¹⁶⁶ Such thinking is clearly implied here by the refrain, Yahweh "gave David victory wherever he went" (vv. 6, 14). In keeping with the belief that God or the gods gave victory, it was appropriate and expected that a valuable portion of the spoils of victory would be dedicated to the deity.

While no battle was fought against Hamath to gain the gifts brought by Joram—"articles of silver and gold and bronze" (v. 10)—it was David's victory over Hadadezer that prompted the king of Hamath to subordinate himself voluntarily to David (see [comment on v. 9](#)). While in some instances that which was dedicated to God was killed or destroyed, precious metals were typically placed in the sacred precinct, under the administration of the priests and for the maintenance of the sanctuary (cf. 1 Chron. 26:26–28).¹⁶⁷

All the nations he had subdued (8:11). See [sidebar on "The 'Empire' of David."](#)

David became famous (8:13). The Hebrew reads literally "David made a name," which may recall Yahweh's promise to David in 7:9 that he would make David's "name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth." Alternatively, "name" may connote a victory monument of some sort.¹⁶⁸ The effect, in either case, is much the same. The Old Assyrian king Shamshi-Adad I (1813–1781 B.C.), for example, boasts: "I established my great name and my steles in the land of Lebanon on the shore of the Great Sea."¹⁶⁹

Valley of Salt (8:13). Though not positively identified, the Valley of Salt probably lay somewhere to the south or southwest of the Dead Sea (Salt Sea). Credit for striking down 18,000 Edomites in this valley is given to Abishai in 1 Chronicles 18:12 and, if the same encounter is in view in the superscription to Psalm 60, to Joab as well. That kings and their generals should respectively receive credit for victories is not without precedent (perhaps cf. [1 Sam. 13:3–4](#)).

He put garrisons throughout Edom (8:14). It was common practice in the ancient Near East to establish garrisons in subject territories in order to assure communication and control, storage of supplies, monitoring of trade routes, collection of tribute or taxes, and rapid military response to any untoward activities. The placing of garrisons is mentioned frequently in ancient Near Eastern sources. For example, in a fragmentary inscription from the time of Shamshi-Adad I (see first [comment on v. 13](#)), the king describes his treatment of territories he had presumably conquered and "reorganized": "I installed my governors everywhere," and "I captured all the fortified cities of the land of

Arbela. I established my garrisons everywhere.”¹⁷⁰

Some four centuries later, ‘Abdi-Heba of Jerusalem pleads with his Egyptian overlord to station a garrison in Jerusalem: “May the king, my lord, know (that) no garrison of the king is with me. . . . And so may the king send 50 men as a garrison to protect the land. The entire land of the king has deser[ted].”¹⁷¹

Doing what was just and right for all his people (8:15). To modern ears, the phrase “what was just and right” suggests that which is fair and equitable, as expressed in the proper execution of justice. And, indeed, making correct judicial decisions was certainly part of King David’s mandate. But as Weinfeld has demonstrated, at its core the phrase does not refer merely to “the proper execution of justice, but rather expresses, in a general sense, social justice and equity, which is bound up with kindness and mercy.”¹⁷² Similar phrases are used in the Hebrew prophets to refer not primarily (if at all) to “the correct execution of justice in court, but rather to the establishment of social justice, and the restoration of equilibrium to the society by aiding the needy: the stranger, widow and orphan.”¹⁷³ Emphasis on social justice is attested also in ancient Near Eastern texts, as in the following passage from a Neo-Babylonian work:

He did not neglect the justice of *kitti u mišari* (truth and equity), judgment and decision, acceptable to Marduk the Great Lord, and established for the good of all men and the settlement of the land of Akkad, he wrote with counsel and wisdom. He enacted the laws of the city for good. He established the laws of the kingdom for all generations.¹⁷⁴

Having demonstrated that a primary responsibility of kings, both in the Bible and in the wider ancient Near East, was the establishment of just societies, Weinfeld concludes in respect to the passage before us that it “refers to acts of liberation performed by David upon his ascent to the throne, and it reflects a practice known to us from Mesopotamia: the establishment of *mišarum* upon coronation.”¹⁷⁵ The Akkadian term *mišarum* connotes “equity” in society, similar to the connotation of *mišpaṭ* (“justice”) in the Old Testament.¹⁷⁶

Over the army . . . recorder . . . priests . . . secretary (8:16–17). See the similar, if fuller listing at 20:23–26. See [sidebar on “Officials in David’s Government.”](#)

Officials in David’s Government

Each of these titles in 8:16–17 designates a high-ranking official in David’s

government. Israel's ancient Near Eastern neighbors attest to similar "cabinets" of high-ranking officials.^{A-27} For instance, the Neo-Assyrian cabinet included a treasurer, palace herald (commander of the northeastern army?), chief cupbearer (commander of the northern army), chief eunuch (commander of the royal army), chief judge, grand vizier, and commander-in-chief.^{A-28}



Relief from Persepolis shows dignitaries among the Medes and Persians that made up the Persian court.
Brian J. McMorrow

The fact that in the list of David's officers the chief military commander, Joab (see [comment on 2:13](#)), is named first is typical of ancient Near Eastern governments, where the military leader ranked second only to the king himself. Jehoshaphat holds the title of "recorder," an office mentioned here for the first time in the Old Testament. This title has led some to assume that this official's primary responsibilities must have included keeping the state records, but the Hebrew word may better (if inelegantly) be rendered "remembrancer," or herald.^{A-29}

In a thorough study of state officials in the Israelite united monarchy, Mettinger concluded on the basis of Mesopotamian and especially Egyptian officials that the "recorder," like the Egyptian "herald," probably had two chief functions: "(a) the task of handling the communications between the king and the country, and (b) the care of the ceremonial at the royal audiences."^{A-30} Thus, Jehoshaphat as "recorder" may be compared to both a modern press secretary and a chief of protocol. Jehoshaphat continues his service in this capacity during the administration of Solomon (1 Kings 4:3).

David's court also included two priests: Zadok, mentioned here for the first time in the Old Testament, and Abiathar (1 Sam. 22:20).^{A-31} While Zadok and

Abiathar both functioned as priests during David's reign, the latter was removed from office by Solomon (1 Kings 1:7–8), thus fulfilling the judgment pronounced on the house of Eli in [1 Samuel 2:31](#).

The name of David's "secretary," Seraiah, is spelled in several different ways elsewhere in the Old Testament (see [2 Sam. 20:25](#); 1 Chron. 18:16; possibly 1 Kings 4:3), which may suggest a non-Israelite origin—perhaps Egyptian, in which land the scribal and administrative traditions were well established. The "secretary" was among the highest ranking civil servants (cf. 2 Kings 12:10; 25:19), his duties likely including presiding over the secretariat, where "official documents were written" and where "the State records were kept."^{A-32}

Benaiah . . . over the Kerethites and Pelethites (8:18). A man of outstanding military credentials ([23:20–22](#)), Benaiah son of Jehoiada was over the Kerethites and Pelethites, professional troops who served apparently as David's personal army. On the Cretan origin of the Kerethites and the linking of the Pelethites to the Philistines, see [comments on 1 Samuel 30:14, 26](#). Benaiah was intensely loyal to David and later to Solomon (1 Kings 1:8, 36–37) and eventually, after carrying out Solomon's order to execute Joab, became commander-in-chief over Solomon's army (1 Kings 2:34–35; 4:4).



Mercenary bodyguards

Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

David's sons were royal advisers (8:18). The Hebrew text reads “priests,” which is thought to be problematic in view of the biblical investiture of the tribe of Levi with the priesthood. As Armerding has argued, however, the Old Testament actually gives “evidence for several ‘orders’ of priesthood operative in early Israel, possibly connected with the status of the individual priest (Levite, royal figure, prophetic figure) and possibly relating to particular shrines (Gilgal, Shiloh, Gibeon, Nob, Jerusalem).”¹⁷⁷ David’s (and perhaps his sons’) was a royal priesthood, partaking of a priest-king tradition in Jerusalem, modeled after that of Mechizedek, who was both “king of Salem” and “priest of God Most High” (Gen. 14:18; cf. Ps. 110:4).

Many of the ancient versions do not call David’s sons priests but, rather, “great men” or the like. Moreover, in the parallel Chronicles passage, David’s sons are called “chief officials at the king’s side” (1 Chron. 18:17). Taking such evidence into account, Wenham has suggested emending Hebrew “priests” (*kōh^enîm*) to “administrators (of the royal estates)” (*sōkenîm*), citing as support cognate official titles in Ugaritic and Neo-Assyrian.¹⁷⁸ The Chronicler’s reading is not necessarily supportive of the change to “administrators,” however, as “chief officials” could just as easily refer to priests,¹⁷⁹ and it is difficult to imagine that “the surprising designation of David’s sons as priests” would have “arisen by corruption from an uncontroversial text.”¹⁸⁰ In the end, given the multiplicity of priestly roles attested both in the Bible and in the ancient Near East (where royal and familial priests were not uncommon), the notion that David’s sons served a (royal) priestly role is less problematic than is sometimes supposed.

David's Custody of Mephibosheth (9:1–13)

Anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake? (9:1). Given the harsh treatment often meted out to former or potential rivals, David's actions are gracious. Note the cruel treatment that the much later Assyrian king Assurbanipal (669–633) gave to those who “had plotted against me”: “I fed their corpses, cut into small pieces, to dogs, pigs, *zibu*-birds, vultures, the birds of the sky and (also) to the fish of the ocean.”¹⁸¹

The Bible itself describes instances of rough justice (e.g., Judg. 1:6–7) and even the massacre of rival royal families (1 Kings 15:29). In view of such practices, David's sparing of Mephibosheth is indeed gracious. At the same time, bringing Mephibosheth into the royal court and to the king's table probably also serves David's own interests, as it places Mephibosheth under immediate surveillance (though the text gives no indication that self-interest is among David's motivations). From his own experience, David must recognize the potential dangers of allowing a rival into the royal court (note Ziba's comment in 16:3). Granted, Mephibosheth's crippled condition makes him an unlikely candidate for the throne, but he does have a young son named Mica (9:12).

Crippled in both feet (9:3). See [comment on 4:4](#).

House of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar (9:4). Lo Debar may tentatively be located in Gilead, ten miles north of Mahanaim (see [comment on 2:8](#)).¹⁸² Makir son of Ammiel comes to David's aid in 17:27, and his associations suggest that he must have been a man of means, well able to play host to a descendant of Saul's first king. A different Makir (son of Manasseh) is mentioned in Joshua 17:1 as the ancestor of the Gileadites.

I will restore to you the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul (9:7). The practice of making land grants was the prerogative of the king in the ancient Near East, and the early monarchy of David is no exception.¹⁸³ See also [comment on 19:42](#).

Dead dog like me (9:8). On this expression of self-deprecation, see [comments on 1 Samuel 17:43; 24:14; 2 Samuel 3:8](#).

David's War with the Ammonite Coalition (10:1–19)

Show kindness to Hanun son of Nahash (10:2). The phrase “show kindness” suggests that a treaty or covenant relationship existed between David and Hanun’s father, Nahash, even though it was the latter’s aggression toward Israel that had in part contributed to Saul’s rise to power (see [1 Sam. 11:1–11; 12:12](#)). David’s fugitive period, when he was on the run from Saul, would have been a logical time for him to enter into some kind of agreement with Nahash, and it probably was something akin to a “parity treaty” (between more or less equal partners), as distinguished from a “suzerain-vassal treaty” (between a greater and a lesser power).

Both kinds of treaties are well attested in the ancient Near East.¹⁸⁴ In a parity treaty between the Hittite king Ḫattušiliš III and the Egyptian pharaoh Ramesses II, the two kings agree to mutual nonaggression, mutual defense, extradition of fugitives, and even assistance in cases of contested royal accession. All was designed to “establish good peace (and) good brotherhood be[tween us] forever.”¹⁸⁵ That Hanun should dishonor David’s emissaries is, in essence, to renounce the treaty of peace and wittingly or unwittingly to invite retaliation by David.

Shaved off half of each man’s beard (10:4). “In cylinder seals; Assyrian bas-reliefs; ivory plaques from Samaria, Hazor, and Beth-zur; and drawings on pottery vessels from Ein Gedi, Ramat Rahel, and Kuntillet Ajrud, Israelite men are shown with full beards and long hair tied back with a linen band.”¹⁸⁶ Beards were sometimes shaved off to express mourning (cf. Isa. 15:2; Jer. 41:5; 48:37), and it may be that Hanun is suspicious of David and decides to make a mockery of his stated intent “to express his sympathy to Hanun concerning his father” ([2 Sam. 10:2](#)).



Bearded Israelites in Assyrian relief of the siege of Lachish

Caryn Reeder, courtesy of the British Museum

Beards also were considered a sign of manliness. For example, in one of the Mari letters, the Assyrian king Shamshi-Adad challenges his son: “Are you not an adult? Is there no beard on your chin?”¹⁸⁷ Thus, to shave off half the beards of David’s envoys was to rob them symbolically of their manhood. As if that were not enough, Hanun also “cut off their garments in the middle at the buttocks.” McCarter remarks that the combination of shaving the beard and exposing the buttocks “suggests symbolic castration.”¹⁸⁸ In the ancient Near East, such acts of disdain, defiance, or disloyalty typically elicited strong responses from the affronted party or power, and David’s response to Hanun’s affront was to be expected.

Beth Rehob and Zobah . . . Maacah . . . Tob (10:6). Fearing David’s retaliation, Hanun loses no time in hiring additional troops from his neighbors to the north. Such coalitions, whether based on payment or concern with a common enemy, were common in the ancient Near East and are frequently described in the Bible. Hanun seeks help from his closest neighbors to the north of Ammonite territory. On the location of Beth Rehob and Zobah in relation to Ammon and the heartland of David’s kingdom, see [comment on 8:3, 6](#) and accompanying maps. Maacah lay to the south of Aram-Zobah, in the Golan, northeast of the

Sea of Galilee and south of Mount Hermon. Tob (usually identified with present-day eṭ-Ṭaiyibeh) lay some twelve miles southeast of the Sea of Galilee.



Aramean and Ammonite Coalition

Battle lines in front of him and behind him (10:9). As Herzog and Gichon point out, “any soldier with combat experience will agree that repulsing an enemy while being attacked in both front and rear is in itself no mean achievement.”¹⁸⁹ How Joab finds himself caught between the Aramean and the Ammonite forces is a matter of conjecture. Yadin suggests that Joab makes a tactical mistake by marching directly to Rabbah (the probable Ammonite city of v. 8; modern Amman) via Jericho or Heshbon (see [map](#) of possible routes),

rather than crossing the Jordan at Adam (Tell ed-Dâmiyeh) and intercepting the Aramean forces in the region of Helam (a considerable distance north of Rabbah), as David apparently does in verse 17.¹⁹⁰

Whether Joab arrives in his initial predicament by strategic error or simply because it cannot be avoided, his decision to divide his troops and fight on two fronts is, though risky, ultimately successful, at least to the point of a draw. No enemy casualties are mentioned in the text, however, only the enemy's flight, with the Ammonites escaping to the safety of their city, after which Joab returns to Jerusalem. It remains for David, in a second encounter, to soundly defeat the Arameans (vv. 15–19).

Hadadezer (10:16). See [comment on 8:3](#). The Arameans, perhaps embarrassed by their hasty retreat, do not take long to regroup (10:15). Hadadezer, as one of the foremost Aramean leaders, musters reinforcements even from beyond the Euphrates and redeploys in the region of Helam. There they suffer a crushing defeat at the hands of David (vv. 17–18), eventuating in significant political realignments. Hadadezer's former vassals desert to make peace with David and become subject to him (v. 19).

Shifting political allegiances in accordance with the fortunes of war were commonplace in the ancient Near East. A clear example is provided by the ninth-century Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II, who reports the results of a campaign to Carchemish and the Lebanon as follows: "I took over the chariot (-corps), the cavalry (and) the infantry of Carchemish. The kings of all (surrounding) countries came to me, embraced my feet and I took hostages from them and they marched (with me) towards the Lebanon (*Lab-na-na*) forming my vanguard."¹⁹¹ David's relationships to the different tiers of his kingdom—heartland, conquests (as here), and subject allies—likely varied in scope and character (see [sidebar on "The 'Empire' of David"](#) at 8:1).

Helam (10:16). See [comment on 10:9](#).

Made peace with the Israelites and became subject to them (10:19). See [comment on 10:16](#).

So the Arameans were afraid to help the Ammonites anymore (10:19). This notice prepares the reader for the second assault on the Ammonite capital at Rabbah (modern Amman), recounted in chapter 11.

David, Bathsheba, and Uriah (11:1–27)

In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war (11:1). As straightforward as this notice seems in English translation, it is not without complications in the Hebrew text, which reads literally “return of the year” in place of “spring” and “messengers” instead of “kings”—that is, “at the return of the year, at the time of the messengers’ going forth.” This has led to the suggestion that the campaign described in this chapter is launched on the one-year anniversary of David’s first sending of a delegation to Hanun, the new king of the Ammonites (10:2). The first delegation was treated shamefully by Hanun (see [comment on 10:4](#)), and the timing of the present delegation leaves no doubt of its retaliatory purpose.¹⁹²

The more traditional reading (reflected in the NIV) is not without defense, however; for example, the Hebrew words “king” and “messenger” sound and are spelled much alike (differing only by one “silent” consonant), making confusion in transmission a possibility. Further, the Hebrew verb meaning “go forth” is often used for “going forth (to battle/war).” In any case, the spring of the year was a typical time for military campaigning in the ancient Near East; the winter rains have stopped and the labor-intensive harvest time has not yet arrived; thus, able-bodied men are available for military exploits.

Assyrian and Babylonian annals, which often mention the month in which a military campaign was launched, typically name the first month of the year (Nisanu) or the second (Aiaru), the new year beginning in the springtime.¹⁹³ Other events occurring in various months are, of course, mentioned, but the beginnings of military operations are typically linked to the spring months. A typical entry, from the annals of the Neo-Babylonian king Nabopolassar (625–605 B.C.), reads: “Sixteenth year: In the month of Aiaru, the king of Akkad called up his army and marched against Assyria.”¹⁹⁴

Besieged Rabbah (11:1). See [comment on 10:9](#).

Got up from his bed and walked around on the roof (11:2). On the architecture of houses in this period, which typically had flat roofs, see [comment on 1 Samuel 9:25](#).



Wall of what is believed by some archaeologists to be the palace of David in Jerusalem
Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

He saw a woman bathing (11:2). As 11:4 indicates, Bathsheba's bathing was likely the purification rite prescribed in Leviticus 15:19–24 that followed menstruation. The reason for Bathsheba's bathing in a place where she could be seen is not explored by the narrator, whose only concern at this point is with the irresponsible actions of the king.



Clay figurine of a woman bathing found at Achzib; Iron Age I

The daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite (11:3). On the character and origin of the Hittites in Canaan, see [comments on 1 Samuel 26:6; 2 Samuel 5:6](#). As with other people groups living among the Israelites, the Hittites may have served as mercenaries for David or as part of his personal troops, as did the Kerethites and Pelethites (see [comments on 1 Sam. 27:2; 30:14](#)). Uriah the Hittite is listed as the last of David's "mighty men" ([2 Sam. 23:29](#)).

Given the typically economic style of biblical narratives, the explicit naming of Bathsheba's father invites explanation. If he was the same Eliam as is mentioned in [23:34](#), "Eliam son of Ahithophel," then the fact the Ahithophel was Bathsheba's grandfather may help to explain Ahithophel's later betrayal of David in favor of Absalom's conspiracy ([15:12; 16:15](#)). Absalom was aggrieved over David's failure to execute justice ([15:4, 6](#)), and Ahithophel would certainly have nursed a similar grievance; note especially Ahithophel's counsel in [16:20–21](#) that Absalom should "lie with" his father's concubines, an action carried out on the roof of the palace where David first espied Bathsheba!

She had purified herself from her uncleanness (11:4). This notice eliminates any possibility that Bathsheba could have been pregnant by her husband, thus complicating David's attempt to cover up his misdeed.

Go down to your house and wash your feet (11:8). Whether the suggestion that "wash your feet" was a euphemism for sexual intercourse is true or not, Uriah certainly understood what David was getting at (v. 11). If sexual abstinence was a requirement for soldiers on active duty, as may be inferred from [1 Samuel 21:5](#) (cf. also Deut. 23:10), David may have been seeking to entrap Uriah in a ritual infraction and thereby to find legal grounds for eliminating him. In any case, David's hope was that Uriah would sleep with Bathsheba and thus cloud the paternity issue. Uriah's refusal to indulge himself while the armies of Israel were in the field must have been a stinging rebuke to David, whether Uriah intended it to be so or not (we are left in the dark about what Uriah did or did not know of David's affair).

David wrote a letter to Joab (11:14). On literacy in Israel at the time of David, see [comments on 1 Samuel 4:1; 10:25](#). While there is no other instance in the Bible of someone carrying a letter sealing his own doom, a parallel of sorts can be found in Homer's *Iliad* in Glaukos's description of his descent from the noble Bellerophon (note also similarities to the account of Joseph and the wife of Potiphar in Gen. 39).¹⁹⁵

Didn't a woman throw an upper millstone on him? (11:21). The allusion is to Judges 9:50–53. An upper millstone, not to be confused with the much larger upper stone of a wheel mill, probably weighed less than ten pounds.¹⁹⁶



Millstone

Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

She mourned for him (11:26). For discussion of typical ancient Near Eastern and biblical mourning rites, see [comment on 1 Samuel 4:12](#). The biblical text offers no indication of Bathsheba's feelings for Uriah, except to observe that she mourned for him for seven days, which may have been a customary period (cf. Gen. 50:10; [1 Sam. 31:13](#)). National leaders were sometimes mourned for longer periods; Aaron and Moses were each mourned for thirty days (Num. 20:29; Deut. 34:8), and the Egyptians mourned for Jacob a full seventy days (Gen. 50:3). A chronicle from the reign of the Neo-Babylonian king Nabonidus (556–539 B.C.) states that when the wife of the king died, she was mourned “from the 27th day of Arahshamnu till the 3rd day of Nisanu”—over four months!¹⁹⁷

Nathan Rebukes David (12:1–14)

The LORD sent Nathan to David (12:1). While Nathan’s parable does not speak of adultery and murder per se, Nathan’s “rich man” does resemble David in two respects: first, he ignored the many sheep he had and took the one precious lamb of the poor man (a lamb that was like a “daughter” to him; Heb. *bat* [“daughter”] is the first syllable of the name Bathsheba); second, he followed his first offense with an act of audacious hypocrisy (i.e., his apparent show of hospitality in v. 4). Fundamentally, the rich man’s crime involved an abuse of power, as did David’s. In the ancient Near East, the king was to protect the socially weak; he was the executor of “justice in the land” at the behest of the gods who installed him. Hammurabi was not the only one who saw his primary task as guaranteeing “that the strong does no injustice to the weak.”¹⁹⁸



Man carrying small lamb

Erich Lessing/Art Resource, NY, National Museum, Aleppo, Syria

Like a daughter to him (12:3). See [preceding comment](#).

He must pay for that lamb four times over (12:6). While David’s emotional response is that the offender should die (v. 5), he restrains himself to remain within the law. Fourfold restitution for sheep theft is mandated in Exodus 22:1. While some commentators detect here a hint of David’s subsequent loss of four sons—the first son of Bathsheba (vv. 14, 18), Amnon (13:28–29), Absalom (18:14–15), and Adonijah (1 Kings 2:24–25)—the LXX, perhaps in the interest of a further reminder of Bathsheba, reads “sevenfold” (instead of fourfold); the number “seven” (Heb. *šeba’*) corresponds to the second element in the name Bathsheba.

The Law Code of Hammurabi required thirty-fold restitution for theft of livestock from church or state and tenfold for theft from private citizen; should the offender be unable to make restitution, he was to die.¹⁹⁹

I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms (12:8). This statement (indeed all of ch. 12) should be read in the context of power—its use and abuse—and not as a comment on the (im)propriety of polygamy (on the latter issue, see [comment on 1 Sam. 1:2](#)). In the ancient Near East, the royal harem of a former monarch became the responsibility of a new king, if only to honor diplomatic relationships established through royal marriages. Indeed, “one way royal legitimacy was acquired was by the appropriation of the previous king’s harem, both in Israel and in the rest of the ancient Near East.”²⁰⁰ In the present context, the point is that David has been given all that was Saul’s and more, even “the house of Israel and Judah.” And had that been too little, Yahweh would have given even more. How dare David, then, defraud a subordinate first of his wife and then of his life!

He will lie with your wives in broad daylight (12:11). This pronouncement is fulfilled in [16:21–22](#) by David’s son Absalom. In addition to its gross immorality, such an act constituted a usurpation of David’s power and throne (see [comment on 3:7](#)). As a loose analogy, one may compare the curse invoked in one of Esarhaddon’s vassal treaties: “May Venus, the brightest among the stars, let your wives lie in the embrace of your enemy before your very eyes, may your sons not have authority over your house, may a foreign enemy divide your possessions.”²⁰¹

The son born to you will die (12:14). A prophecy predicting the death of a royal infant is found also in the Mari letters. Malamat offers a reconstruction of the fairly damaged Mari text and discusses its comparisons and contrasts with this episode in the life of David.²⁰² Beyond the basic similarities (e.g., the “concern for the public behavior of the king in time of misery and grief”), Nathan’s oracle differs from its Mari counterpart by its “blatantly moral

impetus”—the child’s death is the result of David’s adultery with Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriah. As Malamat notes, “such an ethical motive and the idea of retribution usually set the Bible apart when compared with the prosaic, pragmatic reports known from Mari.”²⁰³

The Child of David and Bathsheba Dies (12:15–25)

He fasted and went into his house and spent the nights lying on the ground (12:16). Having fasted *after* the deaths of Saul and Jonathan (see [comment on 2 Sam. 1:12](#)) and Abner (3:35), David fasts *prior to* the death of the child born of his illicit relationship with Bathsheba, but not after. Some suggest that the baby’s death serves as a kind of atonement for David’s sin of adultery, thus rendering “normal mourning customs . . . inapplicable.”²⁰⁴ More to the point, however, is the statement with which verse 16 begins: “David pleaded with God for the child.”

David knows (as others do not) that the child’s life has been pronounced forfeit because of David’s own sin (v. 14). His nights spent lying on the ground may well have been in the “house” of Yahweh (cf. v. 20) rather than his own house (the Heb. text does not specify, but reads only “he entered”; on Yahweh’s “house,” see [comment on 1 Sam. 1:9](#)). He also fasts (on fasting rites in general, see [comments on 1 Sam. 7:6](#); [2 Sam. 1:12](#)). The ancient Near East attests many prayers of petition to the various gods. A Neo-Babylonian prayer to the goddess Ishtar, for example, pleads: “Faithfully look upon me and hear my supplication. . . . Pity! For my afflicted house.”²⁰⁵

Solomon . . . Jedidiah (12:24–25). In the ancient Near East, naming meant more than assigning a label for purposes of identification. Rather, a name was to capture something of the essence of an individual. Thus, names were not usually decided in advance of birth but were usually triggered by something that happened or was said in connection with the birth (cf. the naming of Samuel [[1 Sam. 1:20](#)] and of Ichabod [[4:21](#)]).

The Sumerian mother goddess, for example, describes herself as the “good midwife of the gods” who says “only that which is wise at the time of birth.”²⁰⁶ The name “Solomon” sounds something like the Hebrew word for “peace” (cf. [1 Chron. 22:9](#)) as well as the word “replacement” (i.e., for the first child of Bathsheba, which died). The name Jedidiah sounds like “beloved of Yah(weh)” and must have signaled hope for the future of the Davidic house, a hope in keeping with the remarkable promises made in [7:14–15](#).²⁰⁷

David Captures Rabbah (12:26–31)

Rabbah of the Ammonites (12:26). See [comment on 10:9](#).

Royal citadel . . . water supply (12:26–27). Joab’s notice that both the royal citadel and water supply have been taken is sufficient to indicate that Rabbah cannot withstand Israelite pressure much longer. In the ancient Near East, particularly in the semiarid regions east and west of the Jordan, cities could not hold out under siege once their water supply was cut off. Conversely, elaborate water works were often constructed to secure access to springs and other water supplies.

He took the crown (12:30). This crown is quite different from Saul’s lightweight crown, or diadem, that was handed over to David in [1:10](#). Not only is it described with a different Hebrew word, but its weight of almost seventy-five pounds would make it difficult to wear for any length of time, much less to wear into battle. The NIV retains the traditional reading “their king” (Heb. *malkām*), but it is far more likely (as in the NIV text note) that the crown sat atop a statue representing the Ammonites’ god Milkom (Heb. *milkōm*), or Molech (according to the bastardization of the word in the Bible; on the vocalization of objectionable words to resonate with the word for “shame,” see [comment on 1 Sam. 7:4](#)).



Ammonite deity wearing ceremonial crown
Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

As for what is placed on David's head, either it is the crown itself, if only for a short period, or perhaps, as McCarter has suggested, the "precious stone" (singular in Heb.) that was set in the crown.²⁰⁸ Ammonite statues showing individuals (gods or kings) wearing large crowns have survived to the present day.

Amnon and Tamar (13:1–22)

He raped her (13:14). Did Amnon’s crime involve rape only, or did it also contravene prohibitions against incest? Tamar was Amnon’s half-sister; both were children of King David but by different mothers. Incestuous relationships were condemned not just in Israel (e.g., Lev. 18:9, 11; 20:17; Deut. 27:22) but to a greater or lesser degree in the ancient Near East generally. See [sidebar on “Brother-Sister Marriages in the Ancient World”](#) for more on this issue.

Brother-Sister Marriages in the Ancient World

Although classical writers tended to “stress the prevalence of incest” among the ancient Egyptians, the fact is, as G. Pinch notes, that “except in the royal family, brother-sister marriages seem to have been very rare in Egypt before Roman times.”^{A-33} Among the Elamites of second-millennium Iran, royal incest appears to have been practiced, the son of a union between a king and his royal sister having greater legitimacy than a son born of a king and a woman who did not belong to his family; a son born of a union between the king and his daughter had higher legitimacy still.^{A-34} In Hittite law, “incest was considered a serious offense, an execrable action . . . and thus worthy of death.”^{A-35}

While some have argued that the prohibition of incest may not have yet been in force in David’s day, this seems unlikely. The citation of Abraham’s marriage to his half-sister Sarah (Gen. 20:12) proves nothing, as Abraham and Sarah preceded by some centuries the Mosaic legislation condemning consanguinous sexual relations. Nor can one deduce much from the present episode. In seeking to fend off Amnon’s unwanted advance, Tamar asserts that if only Amnon would request to marry her, David the king “will not keep me from being married to you” (v. 13). But given the extremity of her situation, her assertion should not be taken at face value, as some commentators have done.

Gordon and Rendsburg, for example, assume that a marriage between Amnon and his half-sister “would have been permissible as the biblical text informs us.”^{A-36} This would make Amnon guilty of rape but not incest. Almost certainly, however, Amnon is guilty of both. His frustration “to the point of illness” over the impossibility of his “do[ing] anything to her” (v. 2), makes best sense against the backdrop of a ban on incest. Furthermore, as McCarter

notes, “while our sources are very candid about, for example, foreign marriages made by the royal family in the time of the early monarchy, no sibling marriage is mentioned, and it seems probable that some kind of prohibition was in effect.”^{A-37}

Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornamented robe she was wearing (13:19). Robes signifying particular standing or offices figure prominently in 1-2 Samuel, as indeed throughout much of the ancient Near East (see [comments on 1 Sam. 2:19; 18:3–4](#)). The ornamented robe Tamar wore (v. 18) would likely have marked her as a virgin daughter of the king. Her tearing of this robe not only demonstrates her anguish, it also dramatically underscores her changed status. Putting dust or ashes on the head was a gesture of mourning and distress throughout the ancient Near East (see [comment on 1 Sam. 4:12](#)).



A mourning woman puts dust on her head.

The Yorck Project/Wikimedia Commons

Absalom's Revenge (13:23–39)

Absalom's sheepshearers were at Baal Hazor (13:23). Baal Hazor is generally identified with Jebel 'Aşûr, some two miles northwest of Ophrah (see [comment on 1 Sam. 13:17](#)) and almost fourteen miles north of Jerusalem.²⁰⁹ Sheepshearing (see [comment on 1 Sam. 25:4, 16](#)) was an occasion of celebration, abundance, and generosity. Thus an invitation to join the shearing party would normally be most welcome. The fourteen-mile distance between Jerusalem and Absalom's sheepshearers is short enough to make an invitation to David and his sons plausible, but long enough to mask Absalom's true intent. Given the wrong that Amnon committed against Absalom's sister Tamar, David's granting of Absalom's request that Amnon, specifically, come to the shearing (vv. 26–27) is mystifying to say the least.

The king stood up, tore his clothes and lay down on the ground (13:31). On these actions as signs of deep distress and foreboding, see [comments on 1 Samuel 4:12; 28:20; 2 Samuel 1:11](#). As David tears his clothes in anguished response to the violence committed by his son Absalom, so Esarhaddon, crown prince of Assyria, later rent his garments in anguished response to the violence of his brothers.²¹⁰

Talmi son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur (13:37). Talmi was Absalom's maternal grandfather (cf. 3:3). Several places were named Geshur in the Old Testament (see [comment on 1 Sam. 27:8](#)). The Geshur in view here lay in Transjordan, in the southern part of the Golan Heights. Outside the Bible, Geshur may be mentioned in the Egyptian Execration texts and the Amarna letters.²¹¹ Absalom's flight takes him more than fifty miles farther north and across the Jordan River, where he remains in exile for three years.



Geshur

Joab Engineers Absalom's Return to Jerusalem (14:1–33)

Tekoa (14:2). Most famous as the birthplace of the eighth-century prophet Amos, Tekoa has been identified with Khirbet Teqû , a village situated some ten miles south of Jerusalem. By bringing a woman from outside Jerusalem, Joab probably hopes to improve the chances that she can fool David.

Wise woman (14:2). While the designation “wise woman” has not yet been discovered outside the Bible, women in the ancient Near East did sometimes fulfill priestly, prophetic, or other religious or civic functions. The Old Testament also cites women as fulfilling prophetic (though not priestly) and other roles. In the books of Samuel, two women are specifically called “wise”—the one here and another at 20:16, where a “wise woman” intervenes decisively to save the city of Abel. Abigail should probably be included as well, though she is not explicitly called a “wise woman” (see 1 Sam. 25).

The “wisdom” in view seems to connote skill in speech capable of persuading someone to follow a certain course of action (cf. the “wisdom” of Jonadab in 13:3 [NIV “very shrewd”]). That such wisdom was highly prized in the ancient Near East is illustrated, for example, in the so-called Protests of the Eloquent Peasant,²¹² in which a wronged peasant is retained at court simply to regale the courtiers with his eloquent and persuasive speeches.²¹³

Joab put the words in her mouth (14:3). By prompting the wise woman of Tekoa to raise issues of blood revenge (see comment on v. 11) and the survival of her family line on its ancestral property, Joab covertly forces David to render a verdict on the very issues he is facing, namely, his duty to avenge the blood of Amnon but his desire that Absalom not be cut off. The dynamic of the present episode recalls an earlier occasion in which David was drawn by a fictional story into indicting himself (2 Sam. 12). An analogue to the present scenario of disguise, deception, and self-indictment is found in the Egyptian Myth of Horus and Seth, in which Isis, the mother of Horus, disguises herself as a maiden and tricks Seth into pronouncing a verdict against himself and in favor of Horus.²¹⁴



Horus stands on the back of Seth, portrayed as a hippopotamus, in the visualization of the myth of the battle between Horus and Seth in the temple at Esna.

Angeline Law and Michael Szeto

Get rid of the heir . . . put out the only burning coal I have left (14:7). The paralleling of “heir” and “burning coal” is in keeping with the virtually universal use of the hearthfire to symbolize family life. Not only in the Bible does light/lamp symbolize life and hope (e.g., [2 Sam. 21:17](#); Job 18:5–6) but in the ancient Near East as well. Mesopotamian texts speak of family misfortune metaphorically as the oven or hearthfire being extinguished.²¹⁵ In Sumerian, the word “heir” may connote “one who keeps the oil (lamp) burning.”²¹⁶

Absalom's Conspiracy (15:1–12)

Chariot and horses and with fifty men to run ahead (15:1). For this “royal” behavior, see [comment on 1 Samuel 8:11–17](#) (cf. also Adonijah in 1 Kings 1:5).

If only I were appointed judge (15:4). Absalom does not directly challenge his father’s right to be king, but by questioning the administration of justice under David he effectively plants seeds of discontent. First and foremost among the responsibilities of the ancient Near Eastern king was the administration of justice (see [comment on 8:15](#); cf. 5:12; 12:1–4; 1 Sam. 12:3). In the prologue to his law code, Hammurabi writes: “When Marduk commissioned me to guide the people aright, to direct the land, I established law and justice in the language of the land, thereby promoting the welfare of the people.”²¹⁷ Similarly, Ur-Nammu, king of Ur, established “equity in the land” and “he banished malediction, violence and strife.”²¹⁸

In Israel, too, as Weinfeld succinctly puts it, “the establishment of a just society is the responsibility of the king.”²¹⁹ The Ugaritic Kirta (Keret) Epic closes with a striking parallel example of a son challenging his royal father over the issue of justice:

You do not judge the cause of the widow, you do not try the case of the importunate. You do not banish extortioners of the poor, you do not feed the orphan before your face (nor) the widow behind your back . . . come down from the (throne of your) kingdom (that) I may be king, from (the seat of) your dominion (that) even I may sit (on it).²²⁰

Ahithophel the Gilonite (15:12). See [comment on 11:3](#).

David's Flight (15:13–37)



Movements of David and Absalom

Kerethites and Pelethites (15:18). See [comment on 1 Samuel 30:14, 26](#).

Six hundred Gittites (15:18). These troops (mercenaries) from Gath were probably drawn to David during his stay in the territory of Achish, ruler of Gath (1 Sam. 27ff.).

Ittai the Gittite (15:19). The etymology of Ittai is unclear. One of the more intriguing suggestions, given Ittai's Philistine connections, likens the name to that of a governor of the Philistine city of Ashkelon, known from the Amarna

letters. The governor, who lived some four centuries before David, was called Yidya or Idiya or, perhaps, Itiya or Witiya.²²¹ The loyalty of Ittai is striking and his introduction in the narrative at just this point is appropriate, as his status as a foreigner exiled from his home not only recalls the days of David's youth but mirrors David's current situation as well.²²²

Zadok . . . Abiathar (15:24). See [comment on 8:16–17](#).

Aren't you a seer? (15:27). David's words suggest a plausible excuse for Zadok to return, but they also cleverly suggest the helpful role he can play as a spy. On "seer," see [comments on 1 Samuel 3:1; 9:9](#).

I will wait at the fords in the desert (15:28). As [17:16](#) indicates, the fords in question are at the Jordan River, almost twenty miles east of Jerusalem. David and his followers are undoubtedly exhausted after covering that distance, and overnighting on the west side of the Jordan serves the symbolic purpose of not abandoning the land entirely.

His head was covered and he was barefoot (15:30). Both are signs of sorrow and distress (cf. Est. 6:12; Isa. 20:2–4; Jer. 14:3–4; Mic. 1:8).

The summit, where people used to worship God (15:32). The identity and location of this place of worship has not been determined. One suggestion is the priestly town of Nob, which lay within a couple of miles of Jerusalem (see [comment on 1 Sam. 21:1](#)) and whose priests were massacred by Saul ([22:19](#)), thus perhaps the present notice that "people used to worship" there.

David's Encounter with Shimei (16:1–14)

David approached Bahurim . . . Shimei son of Gera . . . cursed (16:5). Shimei, as a kinsman of Saul, may hold David responsible for the deaths of Abner and Ish-Bosheth, and he probably resents David's permitting the execution of seven of Saul's descendants by the Gibeonites (see 21:1–14). Furthermore, as a resident of Bahurim, Shimei may have witnessed David's treatment of Michal, Saul's daughter, since it was at Bahurim that Paltiel, Michal's second husband, was ordered to cease following after his wife as she was being forcibly returned to David (3:16). The underlying grievance, of course, is that the kingdom once held by Saul, the Benjamite, has been forfeited to David.

Absalom's Counselors: Hushai and Ahithophel (16:15–17:14)

Hushai the Arkite, David's friend (16:16). The word “friend” (*rē 'eh*) is not the usual Hebrew word for “friend” (*rēa'*), though it looks much like it, and it may actually represent a borrowing from the “Egyptian honoric *rh nsw*, ‘acquaintance of the king.’” In other words, “friend of David” may have been an official court title held by Hushai in David's government, a sort of “privy counselor.”²²³

This theory, argued earlier by de Vaux,²²⁴ finds support from the fact that “Egyptian titles were used at David's court” and the fact that an Amarna letter from fourteenth-century Jerusalem seems to attest a similar title (*ru-ḥi šarri*).²²⁵ In this light, Absalom's questions to Hushai in verse 17, twice using the normal Hebrew word for “friend,” must be seen as involving an ironic wordplay something like this, “Is this how you show friendship to the one you serve as Friend?”

Lie with your father's concubines (16:21). In the ancient Near East a king's wives and concubines were regarded as indicative of his power and position (see [comment on 3:7](#)). Their acquisition often involved diplomacy or conquest. For an outsider to sleep with a member of the royal harem, therefore, was a direct affront to the monarch and tantamount to usurpation. The Assyrian king Sennacherib boasts of divesting King Hezekiah of his “daughters, concubines,” and much else besides;²²⁶ he did much the same to Merodach-Baladan of Babylon, entering his palace, taking charge of “the property and goods (laid up) therein,” including “his wife, his harem,” and so forth.²²⁷ Ahithophel knows whereof he speaks when he says that Absalom's lying with his father's concubines will make him “a stench in your father's nostrils.”

I would choose twelve thousand men and set out tonight (17:1). As discussed at [1 Samuel 4:10](#), the word “thousand” in Hebrew may in some contexts mean “unit” or even “clan.” Thus, while 12,000 men is certainly a possible number, Ahithophel may not have been suggesting such a large force but, rather, a select force of crack troops (perhaps even one “unit” from each of the twelve tribes). The gist of his suggestion is that Absalom should exploit David's exhaustion and disorientation by a swift strike.

Ahithophel's military strategy is in fact good, as initially acknowledged by Absalom and the elders of Israel (v. 4) as well as by the biblical narrator himself (v. 14). But it was never tested, because Yahweh “had determined to frustrate the

good advice of Ahithophel” (v. 14).

All Israel, from Dan to Beersheba (17:11). Hushai’s counsel is the opposite of Ahithophel’s. Not swift action but overwhelming force is the key. It is far better, he argues, for Absalom to gather “all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba” and to march into battle at the head of a force as “numerous as the sand on the seashore.” Such a force can easily defeat David as certainly and effortlessly as “dew [that] settles on the ground” (v. 12).



Qumran War Scroll

Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

Such a scenario may have appealed to Absalom’s pride (cf. 14:26; 18:18). Though not found elsewhere in the Bible, the use of “dew” (or “light rain”) as a military metaphor is attested in the War Scroll from Qumran: “The war hero is in our congregation; the army of his spirits, with our infantry and our cavalry. They are like clouds and dew to cover the earth, like torrential rain which pours justice on all that grows” (1QM 12:9–10a).²²⁸

All Israel will bring ropes to that city, and we will drag it down to the valley (17:13). The reference to “ropes” and to dragging the city down to the valley may imply the use of grappling hooks attached to ropes as a means of surmounting walls and destroying them. Reliefs from the ancient Near East

depict various means of breaching and surmounting city walls, including the use of battering rams, siege towers, scaling ladders, and so forth. In addition, as Saggs explains, “sappers” sometimes “mined tunnels to bring about the collapse of sections of walls.”²²⁹ That the Hebrew root *hbl*, used by Hushai for “ropes,” can also mean “destruction” and, in a verbal form, “to pull down,” may have influenced the narrator’s choice of words.

David's Escape (17:15–29)

Jonathan and Ahimaaz were staying at En Rogel (17:17). Jonathan and Ahimaaz are introduced as sons of the priests Abiathar and Zadok, respectively (15:27). All four (cf. 17:15) play a strategic role in David's information gathering. En Rogel was a spring outside the walls of Jerusalem south of the Gihon Spring in the Kidron Valley. It has been identified with Bîr Ayyûb ("Job's Well"). Because springs and wells were visited many times a day by people porting water back into the city, they served as good spots for gathering information without attracting notice. But on this occasion, Jonathan and Ahimaaz are noticed, necessitating their flight to Bahurim, two miles northeast, where they hide in a well until danger passes (vv. 18–19).

Went to the house of a man in Bahurim (17:18). Bahurim was the site of Shimei's cursing (16:5). That Jonathan and Ahimaaz are able to find an ally there indicates that David is not without supporters even in this Saulide village.

Took a covering and spread it out over the opening of the well (17:19). Because of the semiarid climate of the land of Palestine, wells were both numerous and important. King and Stager report that the Philistine city of Ashkelon evidences more than a hundred wells "dating from the Philistine period to the present."²³⁰ Wells were constructed by digging a vertical shaft down to the water table. The top opening of wells was typically five to six and a half feet in diameter, and the depth varied depending on the water table—one well discovered at Lachish was about 140 feet deep! To prevent collapse, the shafts of wells were often lined with field stones, and to prevent contamination of the water or danger to unwary people or animals, the opening was covered in some way (e.g., with a stone slab).²³¹ Flat covers could be disguised so as to prevent discovery of the well, as appears to have been done in the present episode.



Lachish well

Dr. Tim Bulkeley, www.eBibleTools.com

He put his house in order and then hanged himself (17:23). Wise enough to recognize that Absalom’s failure to follow his advice will lead to a victory and a return to power for David, Ahithophel understands that his life will end because of his treason. In taking his own life, he probably feels that he is only hastening the inevitable (after having put his house in order).

The Hebrew Bible does not contain any explicit evaluation of suicide, but of the six reported incidents, Abimelech and Saul are hardly to be read as heroic in their actions (see [comment on 1 Sam. 31:4](#)), Saul’s armor-bearer is a lesser character who simply demonstrates loyalty to his deceased master, Samson gave his life not so much as an act of suicide but in order to rain down a crushing defeat on the Philistines, and the erstwhile Israelite king Zimri (like Ahithophel) understood that his failed power play left him with little hope of survival (1 Kings 16:18). Given the overall understanding that life is in the hands of a sovereign God who gives life and takes it away, suicide is hardly viewed as an honorable option.

In ancient Mesopotamian thought, suicide was apparently “not an act of defiance against the gods or even of vengeance on those who are thought to have wronged a person but a means of retrieving honor.”²³² In ancient Egypt, “suicide was not an approved way to escape harsh realities and to begin a glorified existence in the afterlife,” though in the New Kingdom, “suicide was an option allowed to the highest-ranking individuals who had been found guilty of capital crimes.”²³³

David went to Mahanaim (17:24). On Mahanaim, see [comment on 2 Samuel 2:8](#).

Absalom's Death (18:1–18)

Commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds (18:1). These appear to be standard designations for military officers (cf. 1 Sam. 22:7).

A third under the command of Joab, a third under Joab's brother Abishai son of Zeruiah, and a third under Ittai the Gittite (18:2). On the three commanders, see [comments on 1 Samuel 26:6](#); [2 Samuel 2:13](#); [15:19](#). With David having been convinced to remain behind (18:3–4), Joab was probably first among the three commanders.

Forest of Ephraim (18:6). That the forest in which the battle took place is called the Forest of Ephraim is puzzling at first glance. The tribe of Ephraim lived west of the Jordan, and yet the present context suggests that the battle likely took place near Mahanaim east of the Jordan—Absalom was pursuing David, not the reverse. Perhaps Judges 12:4, which refers to Gileadites as “renegades” or “fugitives” from Ephraim, suggests a solution. The presence of such Ephraimites east of the Jordan may account for the forest of Ephraim. Regarding the forest's specific location, Noth observed that “a well-wooded mountain country that had hardly been opened up at all” existed on both sides of the Jabbok River, where Mahanaim was located²³⁴ (see [comment on 2:8](#)). This is a likely location for the forest of Ephraim.

The forest claimed more lives that day than the sword (18:8). Whether through actual casualties (the forest apparently posed various natural dangers; cf. vv. 9, 17), through temptation to desertion (which would have been facilitated by the thick cover), or through the advantages that savvy fighters can exploit in terrain where troop movements are impeded, the forest contributed to David's success. Out-numbered but well-trained troops often fare best in difficult terrain.²³⁵

Absalom's head got caught in the tree (18:9). Absalom's vanity regarding his hair (see [14:25–26](#)) tempts the reader to see a fine irony in his head getting caught in a tree, although the text does not specifically mention his hair. It is possible that Absalom was suddenly caught up and suspended in midair when the disturbance of his passage released branches previously pinned in a flexed position by other branches. Whatever the case, to be hung on a tree signifies God's curse (cf. Deut. 21:23).

Ten shekels of silver and a warrior's belt (18:11). Ten shekels of silver (about four ounces) is no mean sum. In the period of the Judges, Micah offered a young Levite clothing, sustenance, and ten shekels a year to become his priest

(Judg. 17:10).

Three javelins (18:14). The standard translations of verses 14–15 have raised questions: If three javelins were driven into Absalom’s heart, how could it possibly be necessary for Joab’s men subsequently to strike and kill him (v. 15)? McCarter suggests that a better understanding of the Hebrew text may be that Joab took three stout sticks in his hands and struck “against Abishalom’s chest . . . in order to dislodge him from the tree,” after which Joab’s men swarmed and killed him. The result was that no one person, least of all Joab, could be held directly responsible for Absalom’s death.²³⁶

Joab sounded the trumpet (18:16). On Joab’s use of the trumpet (*šôpār*) as a signaling device, see [comment on 2:28](#). In a pretechnological age, communication was effected by sound, messengers, or visual signals. Regarding the latter, Mari texts attest the use of “fire signals.”²³⁷

Piled up a large heap of rocks over him (18:17). This is a form of burial often reserved for criminals or defeated enemies (e.g., Josh. 7:26; 8:26).

A pillar . . . in the King’s Valley . . . called Absalom’s Monument to this day (18:18). This retrospective comment offers a fine irony in its current placement. Absalom, over whose corpse has just been “raised” a pile of stones (v. 17), had earlier in life “raised” a stone monument to himself, an act that recalls Saul’s raising of a monument to himself (1 Sam. 15:12). Building on earlier work by Cross, T. J. Lewis cautiously suggests that “Absalom’s monument may reflect a cult of the dead in ancient Israel,” though he allows for other interpretations.²³⁸



Hellenistic monument known as Absalom's Tomb

Kevin A. Wong

The so-called "Tomb of Absalom" still found in the Kidron Valley dates from the Hellenistic period and should not be confused with the present passage. The location of the "King's Valley" is not known with certainty, but one viable possibility is the area south of the City of David, where the Kidron and Hinnom valleys meet.

David's Lament over Absalom (18:19–19:8)

Then Ahimaaz ran by way of the plain and outran the Cushite (18:23). As noted in the [comment on 18:16](#), messengers were a chief means of communication in the ancient Near East, including battle situations. Messengers were of various sorts and delivered different kinds of messages. For instance, Mari attests regular messengers, letter carriers, fast couriers, express messengers, mounted messengers, and so forth.²³⁹ Of particular interest are the *mubassirū* messengers, whose task, it seems, was to deliver the “good news of a military victory.”²⁴⁰

In the present context, verse 27 suggests a correlation between the messenger chosen and the content of the message—whether good, bad, or mixed. Thus, Joab's disinclination to send Ahimaaz may have been prompted not simply by concern for Ahimaaz's safety, given David's likely reaction to the news, but also by a desire not to appear as himself taking too much pleasure in Absalom's demise (cf. v. 22). In the end, Joab allows Ahimaaz to run, but only after releasing an earlier messenger. Ahimaaz, however, takes a faster route by way of the plain—as distinct from a perhaps shorter but more treacherous route through the forest—and arrives first.²⁴¹

The inner and outer gates (18:24). Because city gates served a dual function in the ancient Near East, military and civic, their design reflected a compromise between these two competing aims. For civic and commercial purposes, the gates needed to be open and accessible, but for military purposes, they had to be narrow, difficult to navigate by chariots or large numbers of troops, and defensible. See [sidebar on “City Gates.”](#)

City Gates

Different types of gates are attested in ancient cities, some flanked by guard towers and some in which the towers became virtual small forts into which city leaders could retreat in times of danger. Many had several chambers or rooms as part of the gate complex, and many had both inner and outer gates. Often a sharp turn was required when moving from the outer to the inner gates, the purpose again being to prevent easy passage of attacking chariots or troops.

Important city gates in the time of David probably involved some combination of the above features—multiple chambers (four being the most

common number in Canaan before the time of Solomon),^{A-38} guard towers, inner and outer gates, and so forth. All of these features, along with a generally stepped approach way to the gate (which would hinder chariots), made gateways more defensible, while leaving them wide enough to accommodate commercial traffic and civic activity.^{A-39}

Excavations at Tel Dan have uncovered structures that illustrate the outer and inner gates, with a (presumably canopied) seat/throne for the city ruler between them. Perhaps on such a throne “David was sitting between the inner and outer gates” (18:24).



Gate at Tel Dan with sharp turn
Todd Bolen/www.BiblePlaces.com

The watchman went up to the roof of the gateway by the wall (18:24). The multistoried guard towers that flanked the gate served as lookout posts (see [next comment](#)).

The king . . . went to the room over the gateway and wept (18:33). City gates had numerous rooms where commercial, civic, or military affairs could be conducted. David’s retreat to one of the rooms afforded him a place where he could weep in relative privacy. His withdrawal from his position sitting in the gate to one of the rooms of the gate tower reflects the fact that he is “shaken” by

news of Absalom's death, as his anguished fivefold repetition of "my son" and threefold repetition of "Absalom" aptly capture.



Reconstruction of city gate showing windows above Alva Steffler/Susanna Vagt

You love those who hate you and hate those who love you (19:6). As Moran noted many years ago, "love" language is used in the ancient Near East and in the Bible to connote political loyalty.²⁴² This is clear in the Amarna letters. In one, Akizzi writes: "My lord, just as I love the king, my lord, so too the king of [. . .]; all of these kings are my lord's servants."²⁴³ An even closer parallel to Joab's words is found in the following complaint by 'Abdi-Heba of Jerusalem: "Why do you love the 'Apiru but hate the mayors?"²⁴⁴

The king got up and took his seat in the gateway (19:8). This action signals David's resumption of his kingly duties, as gateways were frequently the place where official duties were performed. The Ugaritic 'Aqhatu Legend describes the ruler Dan'el taking a seat at the city gate, in the company of the leaders, and judging cases of widows and orphans.²⁴⁵ The nature of David's duties here includes the encouragement of his victorious troops (v. 7) and perhaps the beginning of a process of reconciliation with those who sided with Absalom (cf. vv. 9–14).



Partially reconstructed ruler's seat at the gate of Dan Jack Hazut

David's Return to Jerusalem (19:9–43)

Gilgal (19:15). For location and significance, see [comment on 1 Samuel 10:7–8](#).

Should anyone be put to death in Israel today? (19:22). In the ancient Near East, victors sometimes inflicted terrible punishment on the vanquished (see [comment on 9:1](#)). But in many instances, especially where the political situation remained delicate, they showed clemency toward those who sought to harm them. The Hittite kings Telepinu (seventeenth century) and Ḫattušiliš III (thirteenth century), for example, left behind records of such clemency: “They did me harm, yet I will not do them harm”; “Why should they die? Let them rather hide their faces.”

Preference for imprisonment of rivals rather than execution appears to have been motivated by the political need to win over as many former supporters as possible.²⁴⁶ Even where accession was not challenged, a new king might, at his accession and periodically thereafter, choose to proclaim a general amnesty, particularly relating to debts owed.²⁴⁷

I order you and Ziba to divide the fields (19:29). A Hittite text recounts a case in which an individual guilty of “unprovoked attacks on Ḫattušiliš” is required by the crown to relinquish half of his estate for damages.²⁴⁸ Having earlier awarded all of Mephibosheth’s property to his servant Ziba, David here adjusts this to a fifty-fifty split. This compromise arrangement suggests either that David is uncertain of the veracity of Mephibosheth’s version of events or is simply unwilling to call Ziba to account, lest he jeopardize support from that quarter.

Have we eaten any of the king’s provisions? (19:42). In the ancient Near East, those who were afforded the privilege of eating at the king’s table were expected to respond with loyalty to their royal benefactor. In Mari, for instance, many tablets recording daily provisions for the king’s table have been recovered.²⁴⁹ The Judahites’ protest to the northern tribes is that their loyalty to David has not been bought by privileges extended and enjoyed but by kinship: “We did this because the king is closely related to us.”

Sheba's Revolt (20:1–26)

Troublemaker . . . Sheba son of Bicri (20:1). If Bright is correct in linking “Bicri” to “Becorath” of the genealogy of Saul (1 Sam. 9:1),²⁵⁰ then Sheba may have been not only a Benjamite but a relative of Saul. This may have contributed to his apparent eagerness to precipitate a general withdrawal of support from David.

The ten concubines . . . [David] provided for them (20:3). This refers to the concubines left in Jerusalem in 15:16 to care for the palace during David's flight from Absalom; they were violated by Absalom in 16:22 (see [comment on 16:21](#)). Unable or unwilling to reinstate them in his harem, David provides for them as if they were widows. In ancient Near Eastern legal codes, provisions were often made for the care of unmarried kinswomen or widows.²⁵¹ One of Hammurabi's laws states that a wife who becomes unfit to perform her wifely duty may be replaced, but her husband “shall continue to support her as long as she lives.”²⁵²

Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him (20:9). In the ancient Near East a kiss connoted many things, such as obeisance, reconciliation, friendship, and affection. In 1-2 Samuel, Saul's anointing is accompanied by a kiss of honor by Samuel (1 Sam. 10:1; cf. Barzillai's kiss of David in 2 Sam. 19:39), Jonathan and David kiss one another in affection and sorrow (see [comment on 1 Sam. 20:41](#)), and David uses a kiss to effect a (partial?) reconciliation with Absalom (2 Sam. 14:33), only to have Absalom subsequently steal the peoples' affection and loyalty with a kiss (15:5–6).



Grasping an opponent by the beard for execution
Francesca Smith-Archiapatti, courtesy of the British Museum

In this episode, Joab's kiss feigns honor or reconciliation but facilitates treachery. The purpose of the unusually detailed description of his grasping the beard with his right hand is to enable the reader to visualize how Amasa is caught off guard.

Abel Beth Maacah (20:14). Worthy of attention from the Aramean king Ben-Hadad (1 Kings 15:20) and the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser (2 Kings 15:29), Abel Beth Maacah has been tentatively identified with Tell Abil el-Qamh, located some twelve miles north of Lake Hulah and four miles west of Dan. On the kingdom of Maacah, see [comment on 10:6](#). Abel Beth Maacah also appears to be listed among Pharaoh Thutmose III's Asiatic conquests.²⁵³

Siege ramp . . . they were battering the wall (20:15). See [comment on 17:13](#).



Siege ramp and battering ram from relief of the assault on Lachish by Sennacherib
Z. Radovan/www.BibleLandPictures.com

Wise woman (20:16). See [comment on 14:2](#).

A city that is a mother in Israel (20:19). This curious expression suggests several possible interpretations. In Hebrew it reads literally “a city and a mother in Israel.” One possibility is that the “wise woman” (v. 16) is referring not only to her city but also to herself, a mother in Israel (cf. Deborah’s self-description as “a mother in Israel” in Judg. 5:7).

A second interpretation takes the phrase as a hendiadys (a single concept expressed with two words), reads it in the light of the general Hebrew perception of cities and regions as, figuratively speaking, the mothers of their inhabitants,

and understands it to mean “a mother city,” that is, a major city (cf. the Heb. phrase “a city and its daughters” [i.e., towns or villages]).

A third possible interpretation, and perhaps the most likely, relates the Hebrew term “mother” to cognates from Old Babylonian (Mari), Ugaritic, Phoenician, and the like that mean something like “mother unit” or “clan.” The wise women’s charge in the present passage, then, is: “You are trying to destroy a city and family [i.e., clan] in Israel.”²⁵⁴

Joab was over Israel’s entire army; Benaiah . . . (20:23–26). Despite David’s attempt to diminish Joab’s power (19:13), Joab has managed to murder (20:8) his way back to the position of commander over “the entire army.” Thus Joab again heads the list of David’s chief officials, as he did in the shorter register of officers in 8:16–18 (see [sidebar there on “Officials in David’s Government”](#)). Additions to the present list include Adoniram, who is in charge of “forced labor,” Zadok and Abiathar the priests, and Ira the Jairite as “David’s priest” (perhaps replacing his sons; see [comment on 8:18](#)).

The addition of an officer over the “forced labor,” probably comprising war captives and non-Israelite Canaanites (cf. Josh. 16:10; Judg. 1:28), is suggestive of David’s growing power and desire to develop the infrastructure of the kingdom: roads, fortresses, civic administrative buildings, and so forth. The title of officer “over the forced labor” is used in the Bible only in the administrations of David, Solomon, and Rehoboam; outside the Bible it is attested also in a seventh-century Hebrew seal.²⁵⁵

The ancient Near East attests “an abundance of titles for officers of all types, from minister and governor down to the lowliest overseer,” though it is often difficult “to define with exactitude the corresponding administrative jurisdictions.”²⁵⁶ The reign of Nebuchadnezzar II has a lengthy roster of court officials.²⁵⁷ The placement of David’s list of court officials at the end of [2 Samuel 20](#) is logical. First, just as the section recounting the full establishment of David’s kingdom ended with a summary of his officers (8:16–18), so the section recounting his reestablishment of control after the rebellions of Absalom and Sheba ends with such a summary; second, the “official summary” draws the narrative to a fitting close before the epilogue (chs. 21–24) that follows.

David Avenges the Gibeonites (21:1–14)

During the reign of David, there was a famine for three successive years (21:1). The four-chapter “epilogue” that completes the books of Samuel is introduced with an account of prolonged national catastrophe, specifically, a famine. It ends with a similar account, a story of plague (ch. 24). The first period of national distress was caused by Saul’s misdeeds, the second by David’s. In the ancient Near East generally, the king was regarded as representing the people, and his behavior could bring blessing or curse on those under his rule.

The three-year famine is placed generally “during the reign of David,” and it most likely occurred earlier rather than later in his reign. Shimei’s outraged reference in 16:8 to “all the blood you shed in the household of Saul” may allude to the actions David takes in the present chapter to end the famine. Famines were common occurrences in Canaan and the ancient Near East, and they were typically viewed as manifestations of divine displeasure. The first step, then, in seeking to avert further disaster was to “seek the face” of (i.e., seek an audience with) the deity, just as David “sought the face” of Yahweh (v. 1).

As has often been noted,²⁵⁸ the plague prayers of the fourteenth-century Hittite king Muršili II²⁵⁹ offer a number of comparisons to the present episode. In both, the cause of divine displeasure lies not with the current king but with a predecessor: “It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house” (v.1) / “the offense . . . was committed in the days of my father.”²⁶⁰ In both, the specific offense has to do with a breach of covenant: Saul put Gibeonites to death in breach of the covenant Israel made with them in Joshua 9, and Muršili II’s predecessor broke an “oath of the gods” sworn with respect to the Egyptians.²⁶¹ In both, the treaty violation led to national catastrophe. The ancient Near East is replete with other instances of sacral desecration bringing national catastrophe and requiring sacral remedy.²⁶²

Saul in his zeal for Israel and Judah had tried to annihilate them (21:2). Political pragmatism, not religious zeal, appears to have motivated Saul’s decimation of the Gibeonites. Not only was there an ancestral connection for Saul with Gibeon (see 1 Chron. 8:29–33), but the Gibeonites’ strategic position within the centrally located tribe of Benjamin also posed a serious danger to the political unity of north and south, especially if the Gibeonites were to form an alliance with the Philistines to their west.²⁶³

Let seven of his male descendants be given to us to be killed and exposed (21:6). The number seven signifies “completeness,” suggesting full restitution—

not the number of Gibeonites slain by Saul, which was probably much higher. While some uncertainty surrounds the correct understanding of the term “exposed,”²⁶⁴ the bodies of the seven executed sons of Saul were in fact exposed to the elements (v. 10). The withholding of proper burial and the exposure of the bodies of the slain is a practice attested elsewhere in the ancient Near East in contexts of treaty violations.²⁶⁵



Impalement as punishment at Lachish
Caryn Reeder, courtesy of the British Museum

She did not let the birds of the air touch them (21:10). As in the ancient Near East generally, in Israel also it was considered a disgrace when the bodies of the slain were allowed to become carrion for birds and beasts, with no one to frighten them away (e.g., Deut. 28:26; 1 Sam. 17:44, 46). Threatened exposure of corpses to the elements was a frequent feature of curse formulations, as the following excerpt from a vassal treaty of Esarhaddon illustrates: “May Ninurta, leader of the gods, fell you with his fierce arrow, and fill the plain with your corpses, give your flesh to eagles and vultures to feed upon.”²⁶⁶



Birds devouring carcasses of the slain at Til-Tuba

Werner Forman Archive/The British Museum

It was precisely to drive away the “birds of the air” that Rizpah sets a vigil by the bodies of her sons “from the beginning of the harvest till the rain poured.” The harvest in question is the barley harvest (v. 9), which begins in April. Thus, the “rain” should presumably be understood as an unseasonal downpour that ends the famine rather than the beginning of “winter rains,” which will not commence until late October.

Exploits of David’s Mighty Men against the Philistines (21:15–22)

Descendants of Rapha (21:16). “Rapha” has occasioned much discussion.²⁶⁷ While certainty is not possible, it is probably best understood not as the name of a deity in Gath but as a collective noun to be associated with the Rephaites—pre-Israelite inhabitants of Canaan (Gen. 14:5; 15:20; Deut. 2:20; Josh. 17:15). The Rephaites were noted for their gigantic proportions (see [comment on 1 Sam. 17:4](#)).²⁶⁸ Among the Rephaites were sometimes counted such peoples as the Emites, Zamzummites, and Anakites (Deut. 2:10–11, 20–21), all peoples distinguished for their strength and stature. According to Joshua 11:21–22, the Anakites were driven from the hill country of Israel and Judah by Joshua but were able to survive in Gaza, Gath, and Ashdod—thus in the general area in view in the present context.

Lamp of Israel (21:17). On the metaphorical use of “lamp,” see [comments on 1 Samuel 3:3; 2 Samuel 14:7](#). Kings in the ancient Near East were often associated with light, in the sense of that which brings hope, justice, and well-being. In the prologue to his Code, Hammurabi speaks of his rising “like the sun . . . to light up the land” and refers to himself as “the powerful king, the sun of Babylon, who causes light to go forth over the lands of Sumer and Akkad.”²⁶⁹ In one of the Amarna letters, the writer, after addressing the king as “my lord, my god, my Sun,” goes on, “I looked this way, and I looked that way, and there was no light. Then I looked towards the king, my lord, and there was light.”²⁷⁰ For more on the righteous king as “like the light of morning at sunrise,” see [comment on 23:4](#).

Elhanan son of Jaare-Oregim the Bethlehemite killed Goliath the Gittite (21:19). The apparent contradiction between [1 Samuel 17](#) and this verse on who was responsible for Goliath’s demise is a major *crux interpretum* in Samuel. See sidebar on “Who Killed Goliath?”

Who Killed Goliath?

Various solutions have been attempted for the apparent contradiction between [1 Samuel 17](#) and [2 Samuel 21:19](#) on the killer of Goliath:

- “Elhanan” was David’s personal name and “David” a throne name.
- An act originally accomplished by Elhanan was subsequently transferred to the

more famous David.

- There was more than one individual named Goliath.



Reconstruction of Egyptian relief from Medinet Habu shows a dead Philistine.

Kim Walton, courtesy of the Yigal Alon Museum

The parallel reading in 1 Chronicles 20:5 suggests a different solution, which asserts that Elhanan killed “Lahmi the brother of Goliath.” While many commentators assume this reading is nothing more than an obvious attempt by the Chronicler to harmonize conflicting traditions, several points in favor of its superiority over the Samuel parallel can be made:

- There is clear evidence that the Samuel text, in some respects at least, is corrupt (e.g., “Oregim” appears to be an inadvertent duplication of the same word, translated “weaver’s,” at the end of [21:19](#)).
- In Hebrew “Bethlehemite” and “Lahmi” (in combination with the Heb. sign of the direct object) look and sound much alike and could be confused by a copyist.
- The only other Elhanan in 1-2 Samuel is “Elhanan son of Dodo from *Bethlehem*” ([23:24](#)), making it conceivable that a scribe writing “Elhanan” could have misread the rare “Lahmi” (Heb. *’t lhmy*) as the more expected “Bethlehemite” (Heb. *byt lhmy*).
- The consequent loss of “Lahmi” as the one slain by Elhanan would have necessitated another victim, perhaps prompting the misreading of “the brother of Goliath” (Heb. *’hy glyt*) to the similar “Goliath” (Heb. *’t glyt*).

In sum, if the Chronicler has preserved the superior reading (as many older commentators maintained), the problem is resolved: David killed Goliath, and Elhanan killed a brother of Goliath.^{A-40}

Six fingers . . . six toes (21:20). Polydactylism (extra digits on hands or feet) was, like other physical abnormalities, a subject of considerable interest in antiquity.²⁷¹ In Mesopotamia, priests and diviners were consulted regarding the significance of physical abnormalities. A seventh-century Assyrian text runs through various possible cases of polydactylism and interprets them. “If a woman gives birth, and [the child] has six fingers on the right hand—poverty will seize the house of the man. If . . . on the left hand—[the mother] is endowed with prosperity; [the man’s] adversary will die.” The list continues, describing all the possible configurations, and concludes: “If a woman gives birth, and [the child] has six fingers [and toes] on each of its right and left hands and right and left feet—the land will live undisturbed.”²⁷²

The prevalence of this genetic abnormality, particularly common in inbred societies, is masked in the modern Western world by cosmetic surgical intervention at birth.

David Sings of His Deliverance (22:1–51)

God is my rock . . . the horn of my salvation (22:3). For discussion of the metaphors “rock” and “horn,” which connote refuge and strength, see [comments on 1 Samuel 2:1 and 2](#), respectively.

The waves of death . . . the torrents of destruction (22:5). Water imagery in the Old Testament can mean “both life and death, blessing and affliction, order and chaos.”²⁷³ In the ancient Near Eastern mindset, the power of water was such that only God or the gods could control it. Uncontrolled, it brought death and destruction. In the present context, David’s being overwhelmed by “waves” and “torrents” leads to a cry for help (v. 7), which God, who alone is capable of rescue, answers with an awesome display of power (vv. 8–20). In Hebrew, the concept of distress is expressed in terms of being in a narrow or tightly confined space, and it is from just such a “tight spot” that Yahweh brings David “into a spacious place” (v. 20).

The cords of the grave . . . the snares of death (22:6). Cords and snares were used to capture and hold their victims. Adding to the water imagery of verse 5, David uses imagery of entrapment by death and the grave (Sheol) to express the extremity of his situation, had Yahweh not rescued him. The Old Testament concept of existence in Sheol is not described in any detail, but it seems to have assumed a shadowy existence in which, while the fate of the righteous was certainly preferable to that of the wicked, there was nothing approaching the New Testament understanding of heaven.



Defeated soldiers captured in net
Jill Walton, courtesy of the Louvre

Ancient Near Eastern understandings of the grave were in some senses comparable. An Akkadian myth, for example, recounts the descent of the goddess Ishtar to the netherworld, in which the inhabitants were “bereft of light,” feeding on “dust” and “clay,” “clothed like birds, with wings for garments,” and bolted in by a gatekeeper. This netherworld was the “Land of No Return.”²⁷⁴ David, with the “cords of the grave coiled” around him, was on the brink of the land of no return, had Yahweh not heard his cry and rescued him.

Cord imagery is used elsewhere in the Old Testament, usually of negative entanglements—e.g., “cords of affliction” (Job 36:8); “cords of death” (Ps. 18:4; 116:3); “cords of his sin” (Prov. 5:22); “cords of deceit” (Isa. 5:18)—but not invariably: “I led them with cords of human kindness, with ties of love” (Hos.

11:4).

The earth trembled and quaked. . . . He parted the heavens and came down (22:8–10). A Ugaritic passage describing a triumphant campaign by Baal, the storm god, employs similar imagery: He “opened a rift in the clouds. Baal sounded his holy voice, Baal repeated it from his lips; he uttered his holy voice and the earth quaked.”²⁷⁵

The LORD thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High resounded (22:14). On the imagery of “thunder” as the divine “voice,” both in the ancient Near East and the Bible, see [comment on 1 Samuel 2:10](#). There the focus was on Yahweh’s “thundering” in judgment against evildoers. In the present context, Yahweh “thunders from heaven” in defense of David, who in his distress has called to Yahweh, and his “voice” has been heard.²⁷⁶

David Celebrates His Dynasty (23:1–7)

Light of morning at sunrise . . . brightness after rain that brings the grass from the earth (23:4). The benefits of righteous rule, possible for the king who “fears God,” are enlightenment, refreshment, and fruitfulness (cf. Ps. 72). In the ancient Near East, kings were often described as lamps, lights, or even the sun, giving light to the land (see [comment on 2 Sam. 21:17](#)). The fourteenth-century Hittite king Suppiluliumas, for example, introduces himself this way in a treaty: “I, the Sun Suppiluliumas, the great king, the king of the Hatti land, the valiant, the favorite of the Storm-god, went to war.”²⁷⁷ In an early second millennium Egyptian hymn to the god Amon-Re, the “goodly ruler” is described as “the lord of rays, who makes brilliance, to whom the gods give thanksgiving, who extends his arms to him whom he loves, (but) his enemy is consumed by a flame.”²⁷⁸

David's Mighty Men (23:8–39)



King's guards

Edward Silver, University of Chicago, courtesy of the Vorderasiatisches Museum

These are the names of David's mighty men (23:8). The section is packed with information and has been the subject of considerable discussion and debate among historians of the Davidic monarchy (see detailed discussions by Gordon, McCarter, and others).²⁷⁹ A few brief comments will suffice here, focusing on the significance of the titles “the Three” and “the Thirty,” and on the listing’s principle(s) of arrangement.

Both titles seem to connote elite troops, distinguished from David’s regular army. As the descriptions of some of the exploits of the Three suggest, these were probably high-ranking retainers who were closest to David (note, e.g., the statement regarding Eleazar in v. 9: “As one of the three mighty men, he was with David when they taunted the Philistines”). Following the presentation of exemplary exploits by the Three, two other champions are listed, Abishai and Benaiah, both as famous as the Three but not counted among them.

Next come the Thirty. Regarding the arrangement of the list of the Thirty, some have argued that it is structured geographically, beginning in Judah and expanding outward. As McCarter argues, however, the data do not conform to this scheme precisely, and more likely the arrangement is according to rank. In the section as a whole, the Three rank highest, next come Abishai and Benaiah, and then the Thirty, so perhaps the list of the Thirty is also in descending order of rank. Naturally, a loose pattern of geographical expansion is evident as well: “We would expect soldiers from towns close to Bethlehem to rank high in seniority and influence. Those from more remote areas stand farther down the list. Non-Israelites naturally fall at the end of the hierarchy.”²⁸⁰

The LORD brought about a great victory that day (23:10). Such statements reaffirm the Divine Warrior theme and underscore the view that whatever heroic qualities human agents may bring to the task, the battle ultimately is in Yahweh’s hands (see [comment on 1 Sam. 14:6](#); cf. [14:15](#), [23:19:5](#); [2 Sam. 8:6, 14](#)).

Field full of lentils (23:11). The inclusion of this unusual detail may suggest the common tactic of debilitating foes by destroying their crops (cf. [Judg. 6:3–6, 11](#)).

David at the cave of Adullam . . . Philistines . . . in the Valley of Rephaim (23:13). See [comments on 1 Samuel 22:1](#) and [2 Samuel 5:18](#), respectively. Adullam was twelve or thirteen miles west of Bethlehem, which itself was in the vicinity of the Valley of Rephaim and garrisoned by the Philistines.

Benaiah son of Jehoiada . . . in charge of his bodyguard (23:20–23). On Benaiah, see [comment on 8:18](#). David’s bodyguard presumably included the Kerethites and Pelethites (cf. [1 Sam. 30:14](#)). David himself was at one time captain of Saul’s bodyguard ([1 Sam. 22:14](#)).

Down into a pit on a snowy day and killed a lion (23:20). On lions in Palestine during the biblical period, see [comment on 1 Samuel 17:37](#). The lion hunt is a regular motif in royal reliefs, the ferocity of the “king of beasts” serving to prove the mettle of the one able to conquer him. In a legend extolling his hunting prowess, the fifteenth-century Pharaoh Thutmose III is credited with killing “seven lions by shooting in the completion of a moment.”²⁸¹ In the present account, the added detail that it was “on a snowy day,” with the slippery footing that this suggests, further dramatizes Benaiah’s valorous feat.



Heroes are often portrayed fighting lions
Caryn Reeder, courtesy of the British Museum

Eliam son of Ahithophel (23:34). See [comment on 11:3](#).
Beerothite (23:37). See [comment on 4:3](#).

David Averts a Plague (24:1–25)

Take a census (24:1). Census-taking (of a limited sort, focused on current needs) was a regular feature of the ancient Near East. Evidence from as early as the third millennium in Mesopotamia and on into the first millennium exists.²⁸² From mid-second millennium Alalakh and Ugarit, for instance, we have “numerous registers of male individuals according to their village of origin and to their social grouping.”²⁸³

Unlike modern censuses designed to study long-term trends, ancient censuses were directed to specific, contemporary needs. As Gordon observes, a census was taken for the purpose of assessing taxes, allocating land, determining “the strength of the national militia,” and so forth.²⁸⁴ Given these purposes, we may imagine the local populations did not always welcome the arrival of census takers, and this may have given rise to popular associations of censuses with misfortune or even divine displeasure.²⁸⁵

In the Old Testament, taking a census is not regarded as wrong per se (cf. Num. 1:1–2; 4:1–2; 26:1–4), although Exodus 30:11–12 does raise the possibility of a plague accompanying it. If merely taking a census was not wrong, then in the case before us the fact that David’s census triggers a plague may have something to do with David’s motive. The text provides no explicit commentary on motive, but David’s order that the “fighting men” be numbered may suggest a desire to take pride or find security in the extent of his kingdom, or perhaps even to extend his borders beyond those granted him by Yahweh.²⁸⁶

Nine months and twenty days (24:8). Given that the distances involved in the itinerary described could have been covered in a matter of weeks, the vast majority of the time must have been spent in the census-taking itself. On average travel speeds, see [comment on 1 Samuel 11:4](#).

Joab reported the number (24:9). On large numbers and population estimates, see [comment on 1 Samuel 4:10](#).

Famine . . . enemies . . . plague (24:13). Death by starvation, by the sword, or by illness—this triad of woes constitutes the chief threats to life in the ancient Near East and figures prominently in descriptions of the consequences of covenant-breaking (Lev. 26:23–26; Deut. 28:21–26; etc.).

An altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite (24:18). On the Jebusites as inhabitants of Jerusalem prior to and during David’s reign and on the possibility that “Araunah” is a title rather than a proper name, see [comments on 5:6](#) and the [sidebar “Jerusalem in Literary Sources and](#)

Archaeology.” In the agrarian societies of the ancient Near East, large, flat outcroppings of bedrock, frequently “elevated to catch the breeze needed for winnowing,” were often used as threshing floors.²⁸⁷ Their prominence and spaciousness lent to their use as public gathering places.

The harvest activity conducted at threshing floors was often accompanied by religious celebration; thus, they were sometimes vested with cultic significance. In this light, it is plausible that the threshing floor of Araunah may have had some cultic associations prior to its purchase by David. It is at this very site that the temple of Yahweh is one day built (2 Chron. 3:1).

Threshing sledges (24:22). Threshing sledges were typically constructed of wooden planks bound together, into which were embedded “teeth” of flint, basalt, and the like. The sledge was dragged by oxen or donkeys across the stalks of grain deposited on the threshing floor, in order to loosen the kernels from the stalks and chaff. Winnowing (tossing the threshed grain into the air) allowed the chaff to be carried away by the breeze and the heavier kernels of grain to be retained.



Threshing floor with sledge

Bibliography

See also [Annotated Bibliography of 1 Samuel](#) for other commentaries and studies.

Commentaries

McCarter, P. Kyle. *II Samuel: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*. AB. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984. As with the *I Samuel* volume, McCarter's commentary is expansive in scope, particularly strong in text-critical matters, but attentive also to ancient Near Eastern background issues.

Special Studies

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Ishida, Tomoo. *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel: A Study on the Formation and Development of Royal-Dynastic Ideology*. Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977. An important exploration of the rise of kingship and especially the dynastic principle in Israel, against the backdrop of similar developments in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Anatolia, and Syria-Palestine.

Mettinger, Tryggve N. D. *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of Israelite Kings*. CB 8. Lund: Gleerup, 1976. Particularly strong on the ancient Near Eastern background to rites (such as anointing) relating to sacral kingship.

_____. *Solomonic State Officials: A Study of the Civil Government Officials of the Israelite Monarchy*. ConBOT 5. Lund: Gleerup, 1971. Effectively contextualizes biblical references to court officials on the basis of lists of state officials in Egypt, Mesopotamia, and so forth.

Chapter Notes

Main Text Notes

1. P. J. King and L. E. Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, ed. D. A. Knight (Library of Ancient Israel; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 225–26.

2. A royal diadem, or tiara, may be mentioned in a Sumerian myth about the flood, in which, following the lowering of “kingship” from heaven, the “exalted [*tiara*] (and) the throne of the kingship” are also lowered (*ANET*, 43c).

3. R. J. Way, “נִדוֹטָה,” *NIDOTTE*, 3:74–76.
4. D. R. Edwards, “Dress and Ornamentation,” *ABD*, 2:232–38 (on 234).

5. See E. F. de Ward, "Mourning Customs in 1, 2 Samuel," *JJS* 23 (1972): 8–10.

6. *ANET*, 289c.

7. J. Muddiman, "Fast, Fasting," *ABD*, 2:773.

8. J. A. Scurlock, "Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Mesopotamian Thought," *CANE*, 1886.

9. Muddiman, "Fast, Fasting," 2:774.

10. See W. W. Hallo, "Lamentations and Prayers in Sumer and Akkad," *CANE*, 1871–81. Hallo discusses individual elegies on page 1875. For examples, see *COS*, 1.118:419–20; 1.119:420–21.

11. *The Epic of Gilgamesh: A New Translation*, trans. Andrew George (London: Penguin, 1999), 64–65. Cf. *ANET*, 87d. In a later recounting of his loss, Gilgamesh describes his unwillingness to accept the death of his friend “whom I still love so very much.” “For days and nights did I weep over him, / And would not let them bury him, *As if my friend might rise at my cries* —for seven days and seven nights—/ Until a maggot dropped from his nose.” The translation is found on p. 2329 in W. L. Moran, “The Gilgamesh Epic: A Masterpiece from Ancient Mesopotamia,” *CANE*, 2327–36, which see for a succinct summary of the epic. For a different translation, see *ANET*, 89–90.

12. See the summary of theories in P. K. McCarter, *II Samuel* (AB; Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1984), 56–57.

13. On all this and more, see D. L. Christensen, “Jashar, Book of,” *ABD*, 3:646–47.

14. On these and other matters, see the summary essay by Ashkelon's excavation director L. E. Stager ("Ashkelon," *NEAEHL*, 103–112). A briefer treatment is provided by D. Schloen, "Ashkelon," *OEANE*, 1:220–23. Both of these essays summarize the history and findings of archaeological investigation of the site. For authoritative, popular treatments of the ongoing excavations, see *BAR*, esp. the 1991 and 1996 volumes.

15. So Stager, "Ashkelon," *NEAEHL*, 104.

16. See, in order, EA 325; cf. 320–323, 326; EA 324; cf. 325; EA 287; EA 370. For translations, notes, and bibliography on all these, see W. L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1992), 327–30, 350–54, 367.

17. R. P. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 211.

18. *ANET*, 153.

19. See H. W. Wolff, “The Understanding of History in the Old Testament Prophets,” in *Israel’s Past in Present Research: Essays on Ancient Israelite Historiography*, ed. V. P. Long (Sources for Biblical and Theological Study 7; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1999), 535–51, esp. 536–39.

20. See, e.g., Y. Yadin, *The Art of Warfare in Biblical Lands in Light of Archaeological Study* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1963), 83–84.

21. See A. R. Millard, "Saul's Shield Not Anointed with Oil," *BASOR* 230 (1978): 70; cf. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 212.

22. As is noted by H. A. Hoffner Jr. (“Incest, Sodomy, and Bestiality in the Ancient Near East,” in *Orient and Occident: Essays Presented to Cyrus H. Gordon on the Occasion of His Sixty-fifth Birthday*, ed. H. A. Hoffner Jr. [Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1973], 81–90), “there are few laws regarding homosexuality in Mesopotamian legal corpora” (82), though Middle Assyrian law does apparently punish such behavior severely: “If a seignior lay with his neighbor, when they have prosecuted him (and) convicted him, they shall lie with him (and) turn him into a eunuch” (*ANET*, 181 §20). Hittite law apparently does not explicitly outlaw homosexuality but focuses more on offenses involving incest (Hoffner, “Incest,” 85 and *passim*). In ancient Israel, homosexual practice was viewed along with bestiality as a “dishonorable and unnatural passion” (*ibid.*, 90).

23. Adapted from a longer selection in A. Taggar-Cohen, “Political Loyalty in the Biblical Account of 1 Samuel XX–XXII in the Light of Hittite Texts,” *VT* 55 (2005): 256; italics are Taggar-Cohen’s and highlight significant terms; I have omitted transliterated Hittite words that Taggar-Cohen includes in parentheses by some of these terms. For the full text in translation, see H. A. Hoffner, *COS*, 2.18:100–106 (cited above is a portion of §13).

24. For a listing of relevant literature, see Taggar-Cohen, "Political Loyalty," 258, n.24. Cf. also W. L. Moran, "The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy," *CBQ* 25 (1963): 77–87.

25. So Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 213. An alternate (biblical) theory links the name to Arba, an important man among the Anakim (Josh. 14:15; 15:13–14).

26. A. Ofer, "Hebron," *NEAEHL*, 607, which see for description of each.

27. Cf. *IVPBBC-OT*, 323–24.

28. D. V. Edelman, "Mahanaim," *ABD*, 4:473.

29. *ANET*, 243.

30. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 214, which see for specific identifications and for comment on the vexed question of who the “Ashuri” were (Asherites? Geshurites?); cf. also McCarter, *II Samuel*, 82–83, 87–88.

31. *IVPBBC-OT*, 324. Cf. perhaps the manner in which the vizier (and later pharaoh) Ay directed the young Egyptian pharaoh Tutankhamun, who reigned for only nine years, dying at age nineteen; for details see N. Grimal, *A History of Ancient Egypt*, trans. Ian Shaw (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1993), 241–44.

32. On the excavation of el-Jib, see J. B. Pritchard, *Gibeon, Where the Sun Stood Still: The Discovery of a Biblical City* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1962), esp. p. 73 for photographs and drawings of Gibeonite jar handles. For further discussion of the archaeology of the site and debates surrounding it, see I. Provan, V. P. Long, and T. Longman III, *A Biblical History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2003); and more thoroughly, J. B. Pritchard, "Gibeon," *NEAEHL*, 511–14.

33. Pritchard, *Gibeon*, 156. For text, see *ANET*, 247.

34. *ANET*, 235.

35. For descriptions of the three water systems at Gibeon, see D. P. Cole, "How Water Tunnels Worked," *BAR* 6/2 (1980): 8–29 (on 22); M. D. Coogan, "10 Great Finds," *BAR* 21/3 (1995): 26–47 (on 43).

36. On this speculation, see Cole, “How Water Tunnels Worked,” caption to photograph of large cylinder.

37. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 95; Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 215. For the early stages in the development of this understanding, see F. C. Fensham, "The Battle between the Men of Joab and Abner as a Possible Ordeal by Battle?" *VT* 20 (1970): 356–57, and the literature there listed.

38. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 16; McCarter, *II Samuel*, 93; R. F. Youngblood, "1 and 2 Samuel," *EBC*, 825.

39. On the history of the Aramaeans of Tell Halaf (Gozan, Bit-Bakhiani), see Paul E. Dion, "Aramaean Tribes and Nations of First-Millennium Western Asia," *CANE*, 1281–94. For further photographs of the Tell Halaf reliefs, see C. Herzog and M. Gichon, *Battles of the Bible*, 2nd ed. (New York: Random, 1997), 136–40; and esp. Yadin, *Art of Warfare*, 360–65.

40. So NEB, cited by Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 216.

41. See, e.g., Yadin, *The Art of Warfare*, 352; J. Spanuth, *Die Philister, das unbekannte Volk: Lehrmeister und Widersacher der Israeliten* (Osnabrück: Otto Zeller, 1980), 50.

42. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 97.

43. D. Ilan, "Tombs," *OEANE*, 5:218–21 (on 218).

44. For a basic description, see, e.g., V. H. Matthews, *Manners and Customs of the Bible* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 1988), 128–30. For a thorough treatment, see E. Bloch-Smith, *Judahite Burial Practices and Beliefs about the Dead* (JSOTSup 123; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), who describes eight different kinds of burials performed in Judah: simple, cist, jar, anthropoid coffin, bathtub coffin, cave and bench tomb burial, and cremation (summary on 133–51). For an attempt to draw out the sociological implications of burial practices, see A. Faust, “‘Mortuary Practices, Society and Ideology’: The Lack of Iron Age I Burials in the Highlands Context,” *IEJ* 54 (2004): 174–90.

45. It is perhaps noteworthy that the daughter of Saul bears no child; so the house of Saul is not even strengthened in an indirect way.

46. For discussion of the social position of royal wives and concubines in both the ancient Near East and the Bible, see H. J. Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel: Their Social and Religious Position in the Context of the Ancient Near East* (SOTS 69; Leiden: Brill, 2003), 371–81. Cf. also J. D. Levenson and B. Halpern, “The Political Import of David’s Marriages,” *JBL* 99 (1980): 507–18; S. A. Meier, “Diplomacy and International Marriages,” in *Amarna Diplomacy: The Beginnings of International Relations*, ed. R. Cohen and R. Westbrook (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 2000), 165–73; A. R. Schulman, “Diplomatic Marriage in the Egyptian View,” *JNES* 38 (1979): 177–93; M. Tsevat, “Marriage and Monarchical Legitimacy in Ugarit and Israel,” *JSS* 3 (1958): 227–43.

47. On the possibility of elevating a concubine to the status of wife, according to Middle Assyrian law for example, see K. R. Nemet-Nejat, *Daily Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2002), 136. Cf. also J. N. Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia: Society and Economy at the Dawn of History* (London: Routledge, 1992), 149, on concubines of “intermediate status” at Mari.

48. Nemet-Nejat, *Daily Life*, 132.

49. For specific examples of and details regarding royal harems in the ancient Near East and in the Bible, see Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*, 371–81; cf. R. de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 2 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 1:115–17.

50. Cf. R. Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 307–8.

51. Complicating matters further are textual uncertainties which, depending on how they are resolved, could yield a reading as in the NIV or, alternatively, the reading “Am I a chief of Caleb, which belongs to Judah?” See McCarter, *II Samuel*, 106.

52. See McCarter, *II Samuel*, 113, which see for further possibilities; cf. also D. Winton Thomas, “*Kelebh* ‘Dog’: Its Origin and Some Usages of It in the Old Testament,” *VT* 10 (1960): 410–27.

53. Cf. Bergen, 1, 2 *Samuel*, 308, n.16.

54. M. T. Roth, ed., *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*, 2nd ed. (SBLWAW; Atlanta: Scholars, 1997), 63 §§29–30. Cf. *ANET*, 162 §§29–30.

55. Roth, *Law Collections*, §134; cf. *ANET*, 171 §§133–35.

56. Roth, *Law Collections*, §136; cf. *ANET*, 171 §136.

57. Roth, *Law Collections*, §A36; cf. *ANET*, 183 §36.

58. The prohibition in Deut. 24:1–4 against remarrying a wife whom one has divorced and who has married another does not apply to David’s situation; he has not divorced Michal, and his absence is involuntary.

59. As J. Kessler (“Sexuality and Politics: The Motif of the Displaced Husband in the Books of Samuel,” *CBQ* 62 [2000]: 414, n.27) observes, David’s “stated reason” for demanding Michal’s return “does not relate to his love for her but to his payment of her bride price, at great personal risk. Royal prerogative is clearly implied in David’s demand.”

60. Despite the fact that [2 Sam. 1–8](#) is largely positive toward David, the narrator “is beginning to move the audience toward a critical appraisal of David’s actions” (Kessler, “Sexuality and Politics,” 418).

61. S. R. Driver, *Notes on the Hebrew Text and the Topography of the Books of Samuel*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960), 250; cf. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 220.

62. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 117.

63. J. Milgrom, *Leviticus 1–16* (AB; New York: Doubleday, 1991), 820.

64. Cited in *ibid.*; see also his other examples. Cf. *ANET*, 179–80 §§50–60.

65. S. W. Holloway, "Distaff, Crutch or Chain Gang: The Curse of the House of Joab in 2 Samuel III 29," *VT* 37 (1987): 370–75 (on 370). Holloway offers a brief but well-supported discussion of the three main attempts to deal with this crux in [3:29](#).

66. Holloway, "Distaff," 370.

67. Ibid.

68. Holloway, "Distaff," 373.

69. Negev and Gibson, *Archaeological Encyclopedia*, 204.

70. See H. W. F. Saggs, *Civilization before Greece and Rome* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1991), 240–66. For the Edwin Smith Papyrus cited, see 250–53.

71. Ibid., 260–61. For examples of less fanciful prognoses respecting spinal cord trauma, see J. Scurlock and B. R. Anderson, *Diagnoses in Assyrian and Babylonian Medicine: Ancient Sources, Translations, and Modern Medicine* (Urbana, Ill.: Univ. of Illinois Press, 2005), 309–10.

72. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 123, 125–26.

73. So H. Reviv, *The Elders in Ancient Israel: A Study of a Biblical Institution*, trans. L. Plitmann (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1989), 187.

74. Ibid., 187.

75. See H. Avalos, "Legal and Social Institutions in Canaan and Ancient Israel," *CANE*, 615–31, esp. 622–23.

76. For a concise description of ancient Israelite social structure based on family and kinship, see King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 36–39.

77. J. D. Schloen, *House of the Father as Fact and Symbol: Patrimonialism in Ugarit and the ANE*, ed. L. E. Stager and M. D. Coogan (Studies in the Archaeology and History of the Levant; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2001), 159.

78. Mazar, "Jerusalem," 699. For a listing of other possibilities, see S. A. Reed, "Jebus," *ABD*, 3:652–53. On the vexed question of the relationship between Anatolian and Canaanite "Hittites," see [comment on 1 Sam. 26:6](#).

79. Whether Jerusalem and the city of Jebus are to be strictly equated has been questioned, e.g., by J. M. Miller (“Jebus and Jerusalem: A Case of Mistaken Identity,” *ZDPV* 90 [1974]: 115–27), but even should Jebus and Jerusalem prove to be separate sites, it would remain the case that Jerusalem was under Jebusite control prior to the capture of the city by David.

80. On some of these, see Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 226.

81. Cahill, "Jerusalem in David and Solomon's Time," 26. For yet another creative theory that involves a radical retranslation of [2 Sam. 5:6–8](#), see S. Frolov and V. Orel, "David in Jerusalem," *ZAW* 11 (1999): 609–15.

82. See *HALOT*, sub צִיָּן.

83. Indeed, the context might even suggest a natural, as opposed to engineered, feature, as D. Gill has recently argued with respect to Warren's shaft ("How They Met: Geology Solves Long-Standing Mystery of Hezekiah's Tunnelers," *BAR* 20/4 [1994]: 20–33, 64).

84. On the various theories, see T. Kleven, “The Use of *šNR* in Ugaritic and 2 Samuel V 8: Hebrew Usage and Comparative Philology,” *VT* 44 (1994): 195–204; cf. also his more popular treatment, with chart, in “Up the Waterspout: How David’s General Joab Got inside Jerusalem,” *BAR* 20/4 (1994): 34–35. Cf. also the succinct summary by McCarter (*II Samuel*, 139–40), who opts for “throat” in the sense that David wished no Jebusites to be mutilated (lamed or blinded) but to receive a fatal blow to the throat.

85. Kleven, "The Use of $\$NR$ in Ugaritic and 2 Samuel V 8," 200; idem, "Up the Waterspout," 35.

86. Cf. Y. Shiloh, *Underground Water Systems in Eretz-Israel in the Iron Age*, ed. Leo G. Perdue, Lawrence E. Toombs, and Gary L. Johnson (Archaeology and Biblical Interpretation; Atlanta: John Knox, 1987), 219–20.

87. R. Reich and E. Shukron, "The History of the Gihon Spring in Jerusalem," *Levant* 36 (2004): 211–23.

88. Ibid., 216. For reference to other Middle Bronze II water systems at, e.g., Gezer, Tell Gerisa, Megiddo, see 213.

89. Ibid., 216.

90. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 140–41.

91. See *IVPBBC-OT*, 328, for further details and examples.

92. See M. Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2000), 101; see *ibid.*, 97–131 for full discussion of the privileged status of temple cities, including Jerusalem.

93. Negev and Gibson, *Archaeological Encyclopedia*, 519–21.

94. For these and numerous other references, see H. J. Katzenstein, "Tyre," *ABD*, 6:686–87.

95. *ANET*, 283a.

96. COS, 2.55:181.

97. Cf. A. S. Gilber, "Flora and Fauna," *CANE*, 156.

98. *ANET*, 275a.

99. Cf. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 229.

100. See Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 325, n.35.

101. Mazar, "Did I Find King David's Palace?"

102. On both literary and military considerations, see G. Edelstein, "Rephaim, Valley of," *ABD*, 5:676–77. For a more detailed discussion of the location and course of David's two Philistine battles, see M. Garsiel, "David's Warfare against the Philistines in the Vicinity of Jerusalem (2 Sam 5, 17–25; 1 Chron 14, 8–16)," in *Studies in Historical Geography and Biblical Historiography*, ed. G. Galil and M. Weinfeld (Leiden: Brill, 2000).

103. For the former, see McCarter, *II Samuel*, 154; for the latter, see *IVPBBC-OT*, 329. For a discussion of attempts at more precise identification of Baal Perazim, see Garsiel (“David’s Warfare,” 159–60), who suggests identifying the site with Mount Abu Tor (Givat Hananya).

104. On both texts, see P. D. Miller and J. J. M. Roberts Jr., *The Hand of the Lord: A Reassessment of the "Ark Narrative" of 1 Samuel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1977), 93, nn. 80–81.

105. See McCarter, *II Samuel*, 155–56 for discussion.

106. See A. Malamat, "How Inferior Israelite Forces Conquered Fortified Canaanite Cities," *BAR* 8/2 (1982): 24–35.

107. For a reconstruction of the likely course of the route, see *IVPBBC-OT*, 330.

108. See, e.g., A. F. Campbell, *The Ark Narrative (1 Sam. 4–6; 2 Sam. 6): A Form-Critical and Traditional Historical Study* (SBLDS 16; Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1975), 179–91; Miller and Roberts, *The Hand of the Lord*, 9–17; McCarter, *II Samuel*, 178–82.

109. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 181.

110. *ANET*, 560; see McCarter, *II Samuel*, 181, for further discussion.

111. See McCarter, *II Samuel*, 169. For fuller description of ancient sistra, see J. Braun, *Music in Ancient Israel/Palestine: Archaeological, Written, and Comparative Sources*, trans. D. W. Stott (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 88–90.

112. See R. H. O'Connell, "מְנַעֲנָעִים," *NIDOTTE*, 2:991–92, and literature listed there.

113. B. Bayer, "The Finds That Could Not Be," *BAR* 8/1 (1982): 20–33.

114. Miller and Roberts, *Hand of the Lord*, 15; cf. also *ibid.*, 96, n.57.

115. ARAB, II:988–89. On the apparent discrepancy in the above-cited material—were sacrifices offered every double mile or every double hour?—see von Soden, *Akkadisches Handwörterbuch*, 130, “*bī / ēru* IV,” among the definitions for which are included both “Doppelstunde” (double hour) and “Meile” (mile).

116. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 171. For fuller discussion of the significance of the ritual procession in relation to David and the new royal city, see P. K. McCarter, "The Ritual Dedication of the City of David in 2 Samuel 6," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth*, ed. C. L. Meyers and M. O'Connor (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 273–78.

117. See D. P. Wright, "Music and Dance in 2 Samuel 6," *JBL* 121 (2002): 216–24.

118. See S. de Martino, "Music, Dance, and Procession in Hittite Anatolia," *CANE*, 2666. For summary treatments of music and dance in various parts of the ancient Near East, see also R. Anderson, "Music and Dance in Pharaonic Egypt," *CANE*, 2555–68; A. D. Kilmer, "Music and Dance in Ancient Western Asia," *CANE*, 2601–13. An interesting instance of the king and queen processing in concert with "whirling" dancers, though themselves apparently not dancing, is found in the Hittite Festival of the Warrior-God (*ANET*, 358–61).

119. *NEA* 66 (2003): 96–132 presents a series of well-illustrated studies of dancing in various parts of the ancient Near East: D. Collon, “Dance in Ancient Mesopotamia” (96–102); U. Gabbay, “Dance in Textual Sources from Ancient Mesopotamia” (103–4); A. Mazar, “Ritual Dancing in the Iron Age” (126–32); P. Spencer, “Dance in Ancient Egypt” (111–21); J. N. Tubb, “Phoenician Dance” (122–25).

120. Gabbay, "Dance in Textual Sources," 103.

121. Ibid., 103 (trans. adapted from S. Parpola, *Letters from Assyrian and Babylonian Scholars* [SAA 10; Helsinki: Helsinki Univ. Press, 1993], 178).

122. On the different kinds of horns used in ancient Israel, see O. Keel, *Symbolism of the Biblical World* (New York: Seabury, 1978), 340–43. For full discussion, see Wright, “Music and Dance,” 203–16.

123. For specifics regarding the kinds of foods mentioned here, see McCarter, *II Samuel*, 173; *IVPBBC-OT*, 332.

124. So J. W. Flanagan, "Social Transformation and Ritual in 2 Samuel 6," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of D. N. Freedman in Celebration of His 60th Birthday*, ed. C. L. Meyers and M. O'Connor (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1983), 361–72 (on 368). For the text in view, see K. Müller, *Das assyrische Ritual, Teil 1: Texte zum assyrischen Königsritual* (MVAG 41/3; Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1937), 8–9, i.29 (VAT 9583 [Ass. 6342] = KAR 216).

125. Cf. F. A. M. Wiggermann, "Theologies, Priests, and Worship in Ancient Mesopotamia," *CANE*, 1861.

126. *ARAB*, II:436–39.

127. ARAB, II:436.

128. For useful overviews of the roles of prophets as intermediaries in ancient Near Eastern (court) life, see J. C. Vanderkam, "Prophecy and Apocalyptic in the Ancient Near East," *CANE*, 2083–94; S. I. Johnston, ed., *Religions in the Ancient World* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of the Harvard Univ. Press, 2004), 37–83.

129. *ANET*, 268.

130. See, e.g., V. A. Hurowitz, *I Have Built You an Exalted House* (JSOTSup 115; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), esp. 135–67.

131. Ibid., 165.

132. Cf. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 236.

133. See Kitchen, *Ancient Orient*, 110–11.

134. For proponents and opponents of the theory, see A. Malamat, *Mari and the Bible*, ed. B. Halpern and M. H. E. Weippert (SHCANE 12; Leiden: Brill, 1998), 117–18.

135. Malamat, *Mari and the Bible*, 106–21. The text in question (i.e., A.1121 + A.2731) is available also in M. Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (SBLWAW 12; Atlanta: Scholars, 2003), 17 (#1), and in J. J. M. Roberts, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East: Collected Essays* (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 173–77 (#4).

136. S. Ackerman, in Johnston, ed., *Religions*, 551.

137. Ibid.

138. Outside the Bible, Barhadad king of Aram is attested in a votive stele to the god Melqart (*ANET*, 655).

139. A particularly startling example is found in the so-called Stele of the Vultures, in which the god “Ningirsu implanted the semen for [the king] Eanatum in the womb . . . [his birth is presumably related in a broken space] . . . rejoiced over Eanatum” (Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia*, 269).

140. See, e.g., Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 125 (EA 54) and 326 (EA 286).

141. Moran, "Near Eastern Background," 78.

142. For full text in translation, see H. A. Hoffner, “The Treaty of Tudḫaliya IV with Kurunta of Tarḫuntašša on the Bronze Tablet Found in Ḫattuša,” *COS*, 2.18:100–106.

143. COS, 2.18:103–4 §20; cf. also McCarter, *II Samuel*, 208.

144. On the character of promissory covenants, or grants, and for further ancient Near Eastern examples, see the seminal essay by M. Weinfeld, "The Covenant of Grant in the Old Testament and in the Ancient Near East," *JAOS* 90 (1970): 184–203.

145. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 241.

146. F. M. Cross, "A Philistine Ostrakon from Ashkelon," *BAR* 22/1 (1996): 64–65. For more on late Philistine writing, see J. Naveh, "Writing and Scripts in Seventh-Century BCE Philistia: The New Evidence of Tell Jemmeh," *IEJ* 35 (1985): 8–21.

147. For fuller discussion, see, e.g., McCarter, *II Samuel*, 243, 247; Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 346–47.

148. On this particular method, cf. Mic. 2:5.

149. See Bergen, 1, 2 *Samuel*, 347.

150. On the treatment of “human spoil” in Mesopotamia, see Postgate, *Early Mesopotamia*, 254–58.

151. “The Annals of Thutmose III,” trans. J. K. Hoffmeier (*COS*, 2:2.2A:12).

152. On all these, see A. R. Millard, "Tribute," *IBD*, 3:1595–97.

153. *ANET*, 278–79.

154. For an argument that the Tel Dan stele may allude to the events of [2 Sam. 8:3–12](#) and [10:6–19](#), and thus to Hadadezer I, see S. A. Levine, “The Last Battle of Hadadezer,” *JBL* 124 (2005): 341–47.

155. On the kingdom of Zobah, see Kitchen, “Controlling Role,” 100–101.

156. On the textual issue, see Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 243.

157. For arguments favoring the former view, see McCarter, *II Samuel*, 247–48; for the latter view, see Malamat, “Aspects of the Foreign Policies of David and Solomon,” 3.

158. Cf., e.g., Yadin, *Art of Warfare*, 285.

159. Cf. Negev and Gibson, *Archaeological Encyclopedia*, 44–45. For a fuller treatment and references to sources, see A. R. Millard, “Arameans,” *ABD*, 1:345–50.

160. See Millard, "Arameans," 1:348.

161. See Negev and Gibson, *Archaeological Encyclopedia*, 130.

162. See *HALOT*, sub שקט.

163. For site identifications and literary attestations in ancient Near Eastern sources, see McCarter, *II Samuel*, 250.

164. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 250.

165. Cf. Malamat, “Aspects of the Foreign Policies of David and Solomon,” 6–7.

166. D. Elgavish, "The Division of the Spoils of War in the Bible and in the Ancient Near East," *ZABR* 8 (2002): 257.

167. For fuller discussion and additional biblical and ancient Near Eastern examples of dedication of spoils to the deity, see *ibid.*, 257–60.

168. On the latter theory, see McCarter, *II Samuel*, 251.

169. *ARI*, 1.128:20–21.

170. Ibid., 1.158:26.

171. EA 298. See Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 333; cf. also *COS*, 3.92B; *ANET*, 489.

172. Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 36.

173. Ibid., 43, citing Zech. 7:9–10.

174. W. G. Lambert, "Nebuchadnezzar King of Justice," *Iraq* 27 (1965): 1–2 (lines 22–27); quoted by Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 42–43.

175. Ibid., 47.

176. Cf. *ibid.*, 45–46.

177. C. E. Armerding, "Were David's Sons Really Priests?" in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation: Studies in Honor of Merrill C. Tenney Presented by His Former Students*, ed. G. F. Hawthorne (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 75–86 (on 85).

178. G. J. Wenham, "Were David's Sons Priests?" *ZAW* 87 (1975): 79–82.

179. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 247.

180. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 255.

181. *ANET*, 288d.

182. For more precise attempts at site identification, see *IVPBBC-OT*, 336; McCarter, *II Samuel*, 256.

183. Z. Ben-Barak, "Meribaal and the System of Land Grants in Ancient Israel," *Bib* 62 (1981): 73–91.

184. For concise overview, see M. L. Barré, “Treaties in the ANE,” *ABD*, 6:653–56.

185. *ANET*, 201–3.

186. M. I. Gruber, "Private Life in Canaan and Ancient Israel," *CANE*, 633–48 (on 643).

187. *ARM*, 1.73.43–44: “tu [n’est pas] un homme, il n’y a pas de barbe à ton menton!” English translation is from P. Villard, “Shamshi-Adad and Sons: The Rise and Fall of an Upper Mesopotamian Empire,” *CANE*, 881.

188. [McCarter, II Samuel, 270–71.](#)

189. Gihon and Herzog, *Battles of the Bible*, 107.

190. Y. Yadin, "Some Aspects of the Strategy of Ahab and David," *Bib* 36 (1955): 332–51 (on 347–50, referenced by McCarter, *II Samuel*, 272–73). On the uncertain location of (the region of) Helam, see McCarter, *II Samuel*, 273. In a general discussion of David's military approach, Yadin suggests that David may have established "a second, advanced, strategic base in the Valley of Succoth, east of the Jordan, near the city of Adamah" [= Adam]. The purpose of this strategic base would be to "support onslaughts upon objectives at very distant ranges," as in the present encounters with the Arameans (Yadin, *Art of Warfare*, 270–71).

191. *ANET*, 275d.

192. On this general approach, see Bergen, *1, 2 Samuel*, 363–64; McCarter, *II Samuel*, 284–85.

193. On the Mesopotamian calendar, see J. C. Vanderkam, "Calendars (Ancient Israelite and Early Jewish)," *ABD*, 1:816.

194. *ANET*, 305b; cf. 277b, 303d, 304c; for the month Nisanu, *ANET*, 292c, 302d, 303c. Campaigns launched in the spring sometimes continued for many months.

195. See *Iliad* 6.156, 160–65, 168–70 (*The Iliad of Homer* [Chicago: Univ. of Chicago, 1951], 157).

196. For an amusing account of an empirical experiment involving upper millstones, walls, women, and a watermelon, see D. D. Herr and M. P. Boyd, "A Watermelon Named Abimelech," *BAR* 28/1 (2002): 34–37, 62.

197. *ANET*, 306d.

198. W. von Soden, *The Ancient Orient: An Introduction to the Study of the Ancient Near East*, trans. Donald G. Schley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994 [German orig. 1985]), 66.

199. *ANET*, 166 §8; but see also *ibid.*, n. 45, on the internal inconsistency of the code.

200. T. Ishida, "Adonijah the Son of Haggith and His Supporters: An Inquiry into Problems about History and Historiography," in *The Future of Biblical Studies: The Hebrew Bible*, ed. R. E. Friedman and H. G. M. Williamson (Atlanta: Scholars, 1987), 165–87. For further discussion, see Marsman, *Women in Ugarit and Israel*.

201. *ANET*, 538 §42.

202. See Malamat, *Mari and the Bible*, 122–24. The text in view, as Malamat (122) notes, was “initially published in *ARM X* 106 and newly collated in *ARM XXVI* 1 no.222.” Transliteration and translation of this text are available in Roberts, *Bible and the Ancient Near East*, 236–39. Translation is also available in Heimpel, *Letters*, 263 (26.222).

203. Mamat, *Mari and the Bible*, 124.

204. Hertzberg, cited by J. Muddiman, "Fast, Fasting," *ABD*, 2:774.

205. *ANET*, 384cd.

206. Cited by D. Stuart, "Names, Proper," *ISBE*, 3:485.

207. Further on these two names, see M. Garsiel, *Biblical Names: A Literary Study of Midrashic Derivations and Puns*, trans. Phyllis Hackett (Ramat Gan, Israel: Bar-Ilan University, 1991), 189–92, 204–7.

208. [McCarter, II Samuel](#), 311.

209. On the possibility that “Ephraim” in the NIV should be read “Ophrah,” see McCarter, *II Samuel*, 333.

210. *ANET*, 289c.

211. EA 43 and EA 256 respectively; see Z. U. Ma'oz, "Geshur," *ABD*, 2:996.

212. *ANET*, 407–10.

213. *ANET*, 408–9, lines 75–84.

214. See summary in *ANET*, 15c.

215. Cf. K. van der Toorn, *Family Religion in Babylonia, Syria, and Israel: Continuity and Change in the Forms of Religious Life*, ed. B. Halpern and M. H. E. Weippert (SHANE; Leiden: Brill, 1996), 130.

216. T. H. Gaster, *Myth, Legend, and Custom in the Old Testament* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), 479–80.

217. *ANET*, 165d.

218. *ANET*, 523c.

219. Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 45–56.

220. *CML*², “Keret,” 16.vi.46–54; cf. *COS*, 1.102:342; *ANET*, 149ab.

221. See EA 320–26, 370; Youngblood, “1 and 2 Samuel,” 994; for alternative possibilities, see McCarter, *II Samuel*, 370; M. Delcor, “Les Kéréthim et les Cretois,” *VT* 28 (1978): 409–22.

222. Cf. N. Na'aman, "Ittai the Gittite," *BN* 94 (1998): 22–25; Na'aman's assertion that "Ittai is, no doubt, a literary figure devised by the author" is mystifying.

223. [McCarter, II Samuel](#), 372.

224. De Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 1:122–23; cf. also now *HALOT*, ad loc.

[225](#). See EA 288:11. So McCarter, *II Samuel*, 372, which see for discussion and literature.

226. *ANET*, 288.

227. *ARAB*, I:130–31 §260.

228. Translation of F. G. Martínez, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Translated: The Qumran Texts in English*, trans. W. G. E. Watson, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 106. Cf. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 387.

229. [H. W. F. Saggs](#), *The Might That Was Assyria* (London: Sidgwick & Jackson, 1984), 260.

230. King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 124.

231. For further discussion of wells, see *ibid.*, 123–26.

232. Scurlock, "Death and the Afterlife in Ancient Mesopotamian Thought," *CANE*, 1890.

233. L. H. Lesko, "Death and Afterlife in Ancient Egyptian Thought," *CANE*, 1766.

234. M. Noth, *The History of Israel*, 2nd ed. (London: SCM, 1983), 60–61, 201.

235. On the topic generally, see Malamat, “How Inferior Israelite Forces Conquered Fortified Canaanite Cities,” 24–35.

236. [McCarter](#), *II Samuel*, 406–7.

237. *ANET*, 482b, 483a.

238. T. J. Lewis, *Cults of the Dead in Ancient Israel and Ugarit*, ed. F. M. Cross (HSM 39; Atlanta: Scholars, 1989), 120–22.

239. R. W. Fisher, “The *Mubassirū* Messengers at Mari,” in *Mari in Retrospect*, ed. G. D. Young (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 113–20.

240. Ibid., 116; cf. 119.

241. H. O. Thompson (“Ephraim, Forest of,” *ABD*, 2:557) speculates that the Cushite “ran due N through the forest and over the hills, while the latter [Ahimaaz] ran by way of the Jordan valley (‘the plain,’ v 23).”

242. Moran, "Ancient Near Eastern Background," 77–87.

243. Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 125 (EA 54.40–44).

244. Ibid., 326 (EA 286).

245. COS, 1.103:346; ANET, 151a.

246. On all this, see H. A. Hoffner Jr., “Propoganda and Political Justification in Hittite Historiography,” in *Unity and Diversity: Essays in the History, Literature, and Religion of the Ancient Near East*, ed. H. Goedicke and J. J. M. Roberts (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1975), 49–62 (esp. 54–55).

247. See, e.g., the edict of the Old Babylonian king Ammisadupa, *ANET*, 526–28.

248. Hoffner, "Propaganda," 55.

249. See A. Malamat, *Mari and the Early Israelite Experience* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1989), 20–22.

250. John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 4th ed. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 210; see also Malamat, *Mari and the Bible*, 235.

251. See, e.g., the Code of Hammurabi §178 (*ANET*, 174).

252. *ANET*, 172 §148.

253. Y. Aharoni, *Land of the Bible* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1979), 162.

254. See Malamat, *Mari and the Early Israelite Experience*, 41–43.

255. N. Avigad, "The Chief of the Corvée," *IEJ* 30 (1980): 170–73.

256. Von Soden, *Ancient Orient*, 70; see 69–71 for succinct discussion.

257. *ANET*, 307d–308.

258. See the seminal essay by A. Malamat, "Doctrines of Causality in Hittite and Biblical Historiography: A Parallel," *VT* 5 (1955): 1–12; more recently K. C. Hanson, "When the King Crosses the Line: Royal Deviance and Restitution in Levantine Ideologies," *BTB* 26 (1996): 11–25.

259. *ANET*, 394–96.

260. Ibid., 395c.

261. Ibid., 395a.

262. See, e.g., *ANET*, 311b (Nabonidus); *COS*, 1:468–70 (Weidner Chronicle).

263. For discussion, see Malamat, “Doctrines of Causality,” 10–11.

264. See McCarter, *II Samuel*, 442.

265. F. C. Fensham, "The Treaty between Israel and the Gibeonites," *BA* 27 (1964): 96–100.

266. *ANET*, 538c.

267. Cf. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 449–50.

268. On the topic generally, see M. Smith, "Rephaim," *ABD*, 5:674–76; cf. also R. S. Hess, "Nephilim," *ABD*, 4:1072–73.

269. *ANET*, 164b, 165d.

270. EA 292; see Moran, *Amarna Letters*, 335; *ANET*, 489d.

271. For an interesting survey of the topic, see R. D. Barnett, "Six Fingers and Toes: Polydactylism in the Ancient World," *BAR* 16/3 (1990): 46–51.

272. E. Leichty, *The Omen Series Šumma Izbu* (TCS 6; Locust Valley, N.Y.: Augustin, 1970), 59; cited by Barnett, “Six Fingers,” 49. On omen collections generally, see W. Farber, “Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination in Ancient Mesopotamia,” *CANE*, 1907. For an example Mesopotamian omen text, see *COS*, 1.20:423–26.

273. *DBI*, 929.

274. *ANET*, 107.

275. So J. J. Niehaus, *God at Sinai* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 106; cf. *CML*², “The Palace of Baal,” 4.vii.28–31.

276. Ps. 77:18 uses similar imagery in a celebration of God's deliverance of his people through the waters at the time of the Exodus.

277. *ANET*, 318.

278. Ibid., 365d.

279. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 311–16; McCarter, *II Samuel*, 499–501.

280. [McCarter, II Samuel](#), 501.

281. *ANET*, 243d. Cf. also the thorough study by M. B. Dick, “The Neo-Assyrian Royal Lion Hunt and Yahweh’s Answer to Job,” *JBL* 125 (2006): 243–70.

282. See F. M. Fales, "Census," *ABD*, 1:882–83.

283. Ibid., 882. See further, McCarter, *II Samuel*, 512–14.

284. Gordon, *1 & 2 Samuel*, 316.

285. Cf. *IVPBBC-OT*, 353.

286. See R. Dillard, "David's Census: Perspectives on 2 Samuel 24 and 1 Chronicles 21," in *Through Christ's Word: A Festschrift for Dr. Philip E. Hughes*, ed. W. R. Godfrey and J. L. Boyd (Phillipsburg, N.J.: Presbyterian & Reformed, 1985), 94–107.

[287](#). King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 89.

Sidebar and Chart Notes

A-1. D. A. Dorsey, *The Roads and Highways of Ancient Israel* (ASOR Library of Biblical and Near Eastern Archaeology; Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1991), 121 and map on 118; cf. P. W. Ferris Jr., "Hebron (Place)," *ABD*, 3:107.

A-2. Cf. P. C. Hammond, "Hebron," *OEANE*, 3:13.

A-3. For a summary of excavation results by Hammond, see *ibid.*, 3:13–14, and by Ofer, see “Hebron,” 606–9. A further excavation was conducted on the northern side of the mound by E. Eisenberg in 1999; for results, see A. Negev and S. Gibson, eds., *Archaeological Encyclopedia of the Holy Land*, rev. ed. (New York/London: Continuum, 2003), 224.

A-4. Ofer, "Hebron," 609. For a recent discussion of the archaeology of Hebron, see J. R. Chadwick, "Discovering Hebron: The City of the Patriarchs Slowly Yields Its Secrets," *BAR* 31/5 (2005): 25–33, 70–71. Chadwick (33) contests Ofer's judgment that Hebron was sparsely occupied in the Late Bronze period.

A-5. H. A. Hoffner Jr., “A Hittite Analogue to the David and Goliath Contest of Champions,” *CBQ* 30 (1968): 220–25 (on 221). We might think of the way the phrase “now the game begins” is sometimes used in serious circumstances where the struggle involves anything but a game.

A-6. R. de Vaux, "Single Combat in the Old Testament," in *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972; orig. 1959), 122–35 (on 130). De Vaux cites [1 Sam. 21:3–5](#); [25:5ff.](#); [26:22](#); [2 Sam. 16:2](#); 1 Kings 20:14–19.

A-7. J. G. Westenholz, *Legends of the Kings of Akkade* (Mesopotamian Civilizations; Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1997). On “playing” in the sense of “fighting,” see *CAD*, 10:17 (*mēlulû* b).

A-8. For a succinct survey of Jerusalem's excavation history, see Negev and Gibson, *Archaeological Encyclopedia*, 260.

A-9. For a taste of the debate, see N. Na'aman, "Cow Town or Royal Capital? Evidence for Iron Age Jerusalem," *BAR* 23/4 (1997): 43–47, 67; M. Steiner, "David's Jerusalem, It's Not There: Archaeology Proves a Negative," *BAR* 24/4 (1998): 26–33, 62–63; J. Cahill, "David's Jerusalem, It Is There: The Archaeological Evidence Proves It," *BAR* 24/4 (1998): 34–41, 63.

A-10. See, e.g., *ANET*, 329.

A-11. E.g., EA 287, 289, 290 and more (Moran, *Amarna Letters*; a selection of letters is also available in *ANET*, 483–90).

A-12. E.g., Sennacherib's siege of Jerusalem (*ANET*, 287–88).

A-13. For a contrary view, see H. J. Franken and M. L. Steiner, "Urusalim and Jebus," *ZAW* 104 (1992): 110–11.

A-14. The gist of the opposing positions is briefly presented in Provan, Long, and Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 228–30, which see for additional literature. For thorough, up-to-date treatments of the main issues, see A. G. Vaughn and A. E. Killebrew, eds., *Jerusalem in Bible and Archaeology: The First Temple Period* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003). A series of popular treatments of the subject by major authorities can be found in the pages of *BAR*, one of the most recent being J. Cahill, “Jerusalem in David and Solomon’s Time,” *BAR* 30/6 (2004): 20–31, 62–63. For authoritative general articles on the archaeology of Jerusalem, see D. Bahat, “Jerusalem,” *OEANE*, 3:224–38; B. Mazar et al., “Jerusalem,” *EAEHL*, 698–757, esp. 698–704.

A-15. See Dorsey, *Roads and Highways*, maps 6, 7, 13, 15 and relevant route descriptions.

A-16. B. Halpern, *David's Secret Demons: Messiah, Murderer, Traitor, King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 428.

A-17. Bahat, "Jerusalem," 226.

A-18. E. Mazar, "Excavate King David's Palace!" *BAR* 23/1 (1997): 50–57, 74; idem, "Did I Find King David's Palace?" *BAR* 32/1 (2006): 16–27, 70.

A-19. Beckman, *Hittite Diplomatic Texts*, 109 [No. 18B]; note that the Tudḫaliya IV treaty, *ibid.*, 119 [No. 18C §20], contains almost identical wording.

A-20. *ANET*, 563c.

A-21. “The Great Hymn to the Aten,” trans. M. Lichtheim (*COS*, 1.28:46). For a more paraphrastic, literary rendering of the hymn, see J. L. Foster, “*The Hymn to Aten: Akhenaten Worships the Sole God*,” *CANE*, 1751–61.

A-22. Saggs, *Civilization*, 289.

A-23. See K. A. Kitchen, “The Controlling Role of External Evidence in Assessing the Historical Status of the Israelite United Monarchy,” in *Windows into Old Testament History: Evidence, Argument, and the Crisis of “Biblical Israel,”* ed. V. P. Long, G. J. Wenham, and D. W. Baker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 111–30. The following is adapted from Provan, Long, and Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 230–32, which see for fuller discussion.

A-24. The reference to the Edomites anticipates 8:13–14; the reference to the Ammonites may anticipate chs. 10–12; the reference to the Amalekites recalls 1:1.

A-25. Cf. Kitchen, "Controlling Role," 125. On the general notion of a multitiered kingdom, cf. E. H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests: A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1987), 300–302; and the earlier, thorough study by A. Malamat, "Aspects of the Foreign Policies of David and Solomon," *JNES* 11 (1963): 1–17.

[A-26](#). For descriptions of all these, with accompanying maps, see Kitchen, “Controlling Role,” 116–23.

A-27. See, e.g., S. Parpola, “The Assyrian Cabinet,” in *Vom Alten Orient zum Alten Testament: Festschrift für Wolfram Freiherrn von Soden zum 85. Geburtstag am 19. Juni 1993*, ed. M. Dietrich and O. Lorenz (AOAT 240; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1995), 379–401.

A-28. R. Mattila, *The King's Magnates: A Study of the Highest Officials of the Neo-Assyrian Empire* (SAAS 11; Helsinki: Univ. of Helsinki Press, 2000), see esp. summary on 161–68.

A-29. So McCarter, *II Samuel*, 255.

A-30. T. N. D. Mettinger, *Solomonic State Officials: A Study of the Civil Government Officials of the Israelite Monarchy* (ConBOT 5; Lund: Gleerup, 1971), 61.

A-31. NIV's "Ahimelech son of Abiathar" follows the Hebrew text, but the latter has likely suffered corruption, as the father/son relationship is usually the reverse. F. M. Cross has helped explain how the corruption may have occurred; for summary see McCarter, *II Samuel*, 253–54.

A-32. As argued by Mettinger, *Solomonic State Officials*, 36.

A-33. G. Pinch, "Private Life in Ancient Egypt," *CANE*, 363–81 (on 371–72).

[A-34](#). See F. Vallat, “Susa and Susiana in Second-Millennium Iran,” *CANE*, 1023–1033 (on 1029).

A-35. F. Imparati, "Private Life among the Hittites," *CANE*, 571–86 (on 576).

A-36. C. H. Gordon and G. A. Rendsburg, *The Bible and the Ancient Near East* (New York: Norton, 1997), 199.

A-37. McCarter, *II Samuel*, 324.

A-38. Cf. G. Barkay, "The Iron Age II–III," in *The Archaeology of Ancient Israel*, ed. Amnon Ben-Tor (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1992), 308.

[A-39](#). For further details, see Z. Herzog, “Fortifications: An Overview,” *OEANE*, 2:319–21; King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel*, 234–36.

A-40. For further discussion and literature, see Provan, Long, and Longman, *A Biblical History of Israel*, 224–25.

Picture Index

This is an index to all the pictures used in the fourteen e-book volumes of *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary—Old Testament*. This index lists the approximate location of each picture by Bible book and chapter. Each entry should be easy to locate within a page or two of where the comments on each Bible chapter begin.

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The New International Version

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1 Samuel

1 Samuel 1

The Birth of Samuel

¹There was a certain man from Ramathaim, a Zuphite from the hill country of Ephraim, whose name was Elkanah son of Jeroham, the son of Elihu, the son of Tohu, the son of Zuph, an Ephraimite. ²He had two wives; one was called Hannah and the other Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.

³Year after year this man went up from his town to worship and sacrifice to the LORD Almighty at Shiloh, where Hophni and Phinehas, the two sons of Eli, were priests of the LORD. ⁴Whenever the day came for Elkanah to sacrifice, he would give portions of the meat to his wife Peninnah and to all her sons and daughters. ⁵But to Hannah he gave a double portion because he loved her, and the LORD had closed her womb. ⁶Because the LORD had closed Hannah's womb, her rival kept provoking her in order to irritate her. ⁷This went on year after year. Whenever Hannah went up to the house of the LORD, her rival provoked her till she wept and would not eat. ⁸Her husband Elkanah would say to her, "Hannah, why are you weeping? Why don't you eat? Why are you downhearted? Don't I mean more to you than ten sons?"

⁹Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on his chair by the doorpost of the LORD's house. ¹⁰In her deep anguish Hannah prayed to the LORD, weeping bitterly. ¹¹And she made a vow, saying, "LORD Almighty, if you will only look on your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."

¹²As she kept on praying to the LORD, Eli observed her mouth. ¹³Hannah was praying in her heart, and her lips were moving but her voice was not heard. Eli thought she was drunk ¹⁴and said to her, "How long are you going to stay drunk? Put away your wine."

¹⁵"Not so, my lord," Hannah replied, "I am a woman who is deeply troubled. I have not been drinking wine or beer; I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. ¹⁶Do not take your servant for a wicked woman; I have been praying here out of my great anguish and grief."

¹⁷Eli answered, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant you what you have asked of him."

¹⁸She said, “May your servant find favor in your eyes.” Then she went her way and ate something, and her face was no longer downcast.

¹⁹Early the next morning they arose and worshiped before the LORD and then went back to their home at Ramah. Elkanah made love to his wife Hannah, and the LORD remembered her. ²⁰So in the course of time Hannah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel, saying, “Because I asked the LORD for him.”

Hannah Dedicates Samuel

²¹When her husband Elkanah went up with all his family to offer the annual sacrifice to the LORD and to fulfill his vow, ²²Hannah did not go. She said to her husband, “After the boy is weaned, I will take him and present him before the LORD, and he will live there always.”

²³“Do what seems best to you,” her husband Elkanah told her. “Stay here until you have weaned him; only may the LORD make good his word.” So the woman stayed at home and nursed her son until she had weaned him.

²⁴After he was weaned, she took the boy with her, young as he was, along with a three-year-old bull, an ephah of flour and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD at Shiloh. ²⁵When the bull had been sacrificed, they brought the boy to Eli, ²⁶and she said to him, “Pardon me, my lord. As surely as you live, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD. ²⁷I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him. ²⁸So now I give him to the LORD. For his whole life he will be given over to the LORD.” And he worshiped the LORD there.

1 Samuel 2

Hannah's Prayer

¹Then Hannah prayed and said:

“My heart rejoices in the LORD; in the LORD my horn is lifted high.
My mouth boasts over my enemies,
for I delight in your deliverance.

²“There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you;
there is no Rock like our God.

³“Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such
arrogance, for the LORD is a God who knows, and by him
deeds are weighed.

⁴“The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are
armed with strength.

⁵Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were
hungry are hungry no more.
She who was barren has borne seven children, but she who has had
many sons pines away.

⁶“The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the
grave and raises up.

⁷The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts.

⁸He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap;

he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor.

“For the foundations of the earth are the LORD’s; on them he has set the world.

⁹He will guard the feet of his faithful servants, but the wicked will be silenced in the place of darkness.

“It is not by strength that one prevails; ¹⁰those who oppose the LORD will be broken.

The Most High will thunder from heaven; the LORD will judge the ends of the earth.

“He will give strength to his king
and exalt the horn of his anointed.”

¹¹Then Elkanah went home to Ramah, but the boy ministered before the LORD under Eli the priest.

Eli’s Wicked Sons

¹²Eli’s sons were scoundrels; they had no regard for the LORD. ¹³Now it was the practice of the priests that, whenever any of the people offered a sacrifice, the priest’s servant would come with a three-pronged fork in his hand while the meat was being boiled ¹⁴and would plunge the fork into the pan or kettle or caldron or pot. Whatever the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. This is how they treated all the Israelites who came to Shiloh. ¹⁵But even before the fat was burned, the priest’s servant would come and say to the person who was sacrificing, “Give the priest some meat to roast; he won’t accept boiled meat from you, but only raw.”

¹⁶If the person said to him, “Let the fat be burned first, and then take whatever you want,” the servant would answer, “No, hand it over now; if you don’t, I’ll take it by force.”

¹⁷This sin of the young men was very great in the LORD’s sight, for they were treating the LORD’s offering with contempt.

¹⁸But Samuel was ministering before the LORD—a boy wearing a linen ephod. ¹⁹Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when

she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice. ²⁰Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, saying, “May the LORD give you children by this woman to take the place of the one she prayed for and gave to the LORD.” Then they would go home. ²¹And the LORD was gracious to Hannah; she gave birth to three sons and two daughters. Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew up in the presence of the LORD.

²²Now Eli, who was very old, heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the tent of meeting. ²³So he said to them, “Why do you do such things? I hear from all the people about these wicked deeds of yours. ²⁴No, my sons; the report I hear spreading among the LORD’s people is not good. ²⁵If one person sins against another, God may mediate for the offender; but if anyone sins against the LORD, who will intercede for them?” His sons, however, did not listen to their father’s rebuke, for it was the LORD’s will to put them to death.

²⁶And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the LORD and with people.

Prophecy Against the House of Eli

²⁷Now a man of God came to Eli and said to him, “This is what the LORD says: ‘Did I not clearly reveal myself to your ancestor’s family when they were in Egypt under Pharaoh? ²⁸I chose your ancestor out of all the tribes of Israel to be my priest, to go up to my altar, to burn incense, and to wear an ephod in my presence. I also gave your ancestor’s family all the food offerings presented by the Israelites. ²⁹Why do you scorn my sacrifice and offering that I prescribed for my dwelling? Why do you honor your sons more than me by fattening yourselves on the choice parts of every offering made by my people Israel?’

³⁰“Therefore the LORD, the God of Israel, declares: ‘I promised that members of your family would minister before me forever.’ But now the LORD declares: ‘Far be it from me! Those who honor me I will honor, but those who despise me will be disdained. ³¹The time is coming when I will cut short your strength and the strength of your priestly house, so that no one in it will reach old age, ³²and you will see distress in my dwelling. Although good will be done to Israel, no one in your family line will ever reach old age.

³³Every one of you that I do not cut off from serving at my altar I will spare only to destroy your sight and sap your strength, and all your descendants will die in the prime of life.

³⁴“ ‘And what happens to your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, will be a sign to you—they will both die on the same day. ³⁵I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind. I will firmly establish his priestly house, and they will minister before my anointed one always. ³⁶Then everyone left in your family line will come and bow down before him for a piece of silver and a loaf of bread and plead, “Appoint me to some priestly office so I can have food to eat.” ’ ”

1 Samuel 3

The LORD Calls Samuel

¹The boy Samuel ministered before the LORD under Eli. In those days the word of the LORD was rare; there were not many visions.

²One night Eli, whose eyes were becoming so weak that he could barely see, was lying down in his usual place. ³The lamp of God had not yet gone out, and Samuel was lying down in the house of the LORD, where the ark of God was. ⁴Then the LORD called Samuel.

Samuel answered, “Here I am.” ⁵And he ran to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.”

But Eli said, “I did not call; go back and lie down.” So he went and lay down.

⁶Again the LORD called, “Samuel!” And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.”

“My son,” Eli said, “I did not call; go back and lie down.”

⁷Now Samuel did not yet know the LORD: The word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

⁸A third time the LORD called, “Samuel!” And Samuel got up and went to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.”

Then Eli realized that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹So Eli told Samuel, “Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening.’ ” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

¹⁰The LORD came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!”

Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

¹¹And the LORD said to Samuel: “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle. ¹²At that time I will carry out against Eli everything I spoke against his family—from beginning to end. ¹³For I told him that I would judge his family forever because of the sin he knew about; his sons blasphemed God, and he failed to restrain them. ¹⁴Therefore I swore to the house of Eli, ‘The guilt of Eli’s house will never be atoned for by sacrifice or offering.’ ”

¹⁵Samuel lay down until morning and then opened the doors of the house

of the LORD. He was afraid to tell Eli the vision, ¹⁶but Eli called him and said, “Samuel, my son.”

Samuel answered, “Here I am.”

¹⁷“What was it he said to you?” Eli asked. “Do not hide it from me. May God deal with you, be it ever so severely, if you hide from me anything he told you.” ¹⁸So Samuel told him everything, hiding nothing from him. Then Eli said, “He is the LORD; let him do what is good in his eyes.”

¹⁹The LORD was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel’s words fall to the ground. ²⁰And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the LORD. ²¹The LORD continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word.

1 Samuel 4

¹And Samuel's word came to all Israel.

The Philistines Capture the Ark

Now the Israelites went out to fight against the Philistines. The Israelites camped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines at Aphek. ²The Philistines deployed their forces to meet Israel, and as the battle spread, Israel was defeated by the Philistines, who killed about four thousand of them on the battlefield. ³When the soldiers returned to camp, the elders of Israel asked, “Why did the LORD bring defeat on us today before the Philistines? Let us bring the ark of the LORD’s covenant from Shiloh, so that he may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies.”

⁴So the people sent men to Shiloh, and they brought back the ark of the covenant of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. And Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

⁵When the ark of the LORD’s covenant came into the camp, all Israel raised such a great shout that the ground shook. ⁶Hearing the uproar, the Philistines asked, “What’s all this shouting in the Hebrew camp?”

When they learned that the ark of the LORD had come into the camp, ⁷the Philistines were afraid. “A god has come into the camp,” they said. “Oh no! Nothing like this has happened before. ⁸We’re doomed! Who will deliver us from the hand of these mighty gods? They are the gods who struck the Egyptians with all kinds of plagues in the wilderness. ⁹Be strong, Philistines! Be men, or you will be subject to the Hebrews, as they have been to you. Be men, and fight!”

¹⁰So the Philistines fought, and the Israelites were defeated and every man fled to his tent. The slaughter was very great; Israel lost thirty thousand foot soldiers. ¹¹The ark of God was captured, and Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

Death of Eli

¹²That same day a Benjamite ran from the battle line and went to Shiloh with his clothes torn and dust on his head. ¹³When he arrived, there was Eli sitting on his chair by the side of the road, watching, because his heart feared for the ark of God. When the man entered the town and told what had happened, the whole town sent up a cry.

¹⁴Eli heard the outcry and asked, “What is the meaning of this uproar?”

The man hurried over to Eli, ¹⁵who was ninety-eight years old and whose eyes had failed so that he could not see. ¹⁶He told Eli, “I have just come from the battle line; I fled from it this very day.”

Eli asked, “What happened, my son?”

¹⁷The man who brought the news replied, “Israel fled before the Philistines, and the army has suffered heavy losses. Also your two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured.”

¹⁸When he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell backward off his chair by the side of the gate. His neck was broken and he died, for he was an old man, and he was heavy. He had led Israel forty years.

¹⁹His daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant and near the time of delivery. When she heard the news that the ark of God had been captured and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she went into labor and gave birth, but was overcome by her labor pains. ²⁰As she was dying, the women attending her said, “Don’t despair; you have given birth to a son.” But she did not respond or pay any attention.

²¹She named the boy Ichabod, saying, “The Glory has departed from Israel”—because of the capture of the ark of God and the deaths of her father-in-law and her husband. ²²She said, “The Glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.”

1 Samuel 5

The Ark in Ashdod and Ekron

¹After the Philistines had captured the ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod. ²Then they carried the ark into Dagon's temple and set it beside Dagon. ³When the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! They took Dagon and put him back in his place. ⁴But the following morning when they rose, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! His head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold; only his body remained. ⁵That is why to this day neither the priests of Dagon nor any others who enter Dagon's temple at Ashdod step on the threshold.

⁶The LORD's hand was heavy on the people of Ashdod and its vicinity; he brought devastation on them and afflicted them with tumors. ⁷When the people of Ashdod saw what was happening, they said, "The ark of the god of Israel must not stay here with us, because his hand is heavy on us and on Dagon our god." ⁸So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and asked them, "What shall we do with the ark of the god of Israel?"

They answered, "Have the ark of the god of Israel moved to Gath." So they moved the ark of the God of Israel.

⁹But after they had moved it, the LORD's hand was against that city, throwing it into a great panic. He afflicted the people of the city, both young and old, with an outbreak of tumors. ¹⁰So they sent the ark of God to Ekron.

As the ark of God was entering Ekron, the people of Ekron cried out, "They have brought the ark of the god of Israel around to us to kill us and our people." ¹¹So they called together all the rulers of the Philistines and said, "Send the ark of the god of Israel away; let it go back to its own place, or it will kill us and our people." For death had filled the city with panic; God's hand was very heavy on it. ¹²Those who did not die were afflicted with tumors, and the outcry of the city went up to heaven.

1 Samuel 6

The Ark Returned to Israel

¹When the ark of the LORD had been in Philistine territory seven months, ²the Philistines called for the priests and the diviners and said, “What shall we do with the ark of the LORD? Tell us how we should send it back to its place.”

³They answered, “If you return the ark of the god of Israel, do not send it back to him without a gift; by all means send a guilt offering to him. Then you will be healed, and you will know why his hand has not been lifted from you.”

⁴The Philistines asked, “What guilt offering should we send to him?”

They replied, “Five gold tumors and five gold rats, according to the number of the Philistine rulers, because the same plague has struck both you and your rulers. ⁵Make models of the tumors and of the rats that are destroying the country, and give glory to Israel’s god. Perhaps he will lift his hand from you and your gods and your land. ⁶Why do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh did? When Israel’s god dealt harshly with them, did they not send the Israelites out so they could go on their way?

⁷“Now then, get a new cart ready, with two cows that have calved and have never been yoked. Hitch the cows to the cart, but take their calves away and pen them up. ⁸Take the ark of the LORD and put it on the cart, and in a chest beside it put the gold objects you are sending back to him as a guilt offering. Send it on its way, ⁹but keep watching it. If it goes up to its own territory, toward Beth Shemesh, then the LORD has brought this great disaster on us. But if it does not, then we will know that it was not his hand that struck us but that it happened to us by chance.”

¹⁰So they did this. They took two such cows and hitched them to the cart and penned up their calves. ¹¹They placed the ark of the LORD on the cart and along with it the chest containing the gold rats and the models of the tumors. ¹²Then the cows went straight up toward Beth Shemesh, keeping on the road and lowing all the way; they did not turn to the right or to the left. The rulers of the Philistines followed them as far as the border of Beth Shemesh.

¹³Now the people of Beth Shemesh were harvesting their wheat in the valley, and when they looked up and saw the ark, they rejoiced at the sight.

¹⁴The cart came to the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh, and there it stopped

beside a large rock. The people chopped up the wood of the cart and sacrificed the cows as a burnt offering to the LORD. ¹⁵The Levites took down the ark of the LORD, together with the chest containing the gold objects, and placed them on the large rock. On that day the people of Beth Shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices to the LORD. ¹⁶The five rulers of the Philistines saw all this and then returned that same day to Ekron.

¹⁷These are the gold tumors the Philistines sent as a guilt offering to the LORD—one each for Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath and Ekron. ¹⁸And the number of the gold rats was according to the number of Philistine towns belonging to the five rulers—the fortified towns with their country villages. The large rock on which the Levites set the ark of the LORD is a witness to this day in the field of Joshua of Beth Shemesh.

¹⁹But God struck down some of the inhabitants of Beth Shemesh, putting seventy of them to death because they looked into the ark of the LORD. The people mourned because of the heavy blow the LORD had dealt them. ²⁰And the people of Beth Shemesh asked, “Who can stand in the presence of the LORD, this holy God? To whom will the ark go up from here?”

²¹Then they sent messengers to the people of Kiriath Jearim, saying, “The Philistines have returned the ark of the LORD. Come down and take it up to your town.”

1 Samuel 7

¹So the men of Kiriath Jearim came and took up the ark of the LORD. They brought it to Abinadab's house on the hill and consecrated Eleazar his son to guard the ark of the LORD. ²The ark remained at Kiriath Jearim a long time—twenty years in all.

Samuel Subdues the Philistines at Mizpah

Then all the people of Israel turned back to the LORD. ³So Samuel said to all the Israelites, "If you are returning to the LORD with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." ⁴So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths, and served the LORD only.

⁵Then Samuel said, "Assemble all Israel at Mizpah, and I will intercede with the LORD for you." ⁶When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the LORD. On that day they fasted and there they confessed, "We have sinned against the LORD." Now Samuel was serving as leader of Israel at Mizpah.

⁷When the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them. When the Israelites heard of it, they were afraid because of the Philistines. ⁸They said to Samuel, "Do not stop crying out to the LORD our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines." ⁹Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and sacrificed it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. He cried out to the LORD on Israel's behalf, and the LORD answered him.

¹⁰While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle. But that day the LORD thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites. ¹¹The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth Kar.

¹²Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He

named it Ebenezer, saying, “Thus far the LORD has helped us.”

¹³So the Philistines were subdued and they stopped invading Israel’s territory. Throughout Samuel’s lifetime, the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines. ¹⁴The towns from Ekron to Gath that the Philistines had captured from Israel were restored to Israel, and Israel delivered the neighboring territory from the hands of the Philistines. And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites.

¹⁵Samuel continued as Israel’s leader all the days of his life. ¹⁶From year to year he went on a circuit from Bethel to Gilgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in all those places. ¹⁷But he always went back to Ramah, where his home was, and there he also held court for Israel. And he built an altar there to the LORD.

1 Samuel 8

Israel Asks for a King

¹When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel's leaders. ²The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. ³But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.

⁴So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. ⁵They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."

⁶But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. ⁷And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. ⁸As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you. ⁹Now listen to them; but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights."

¹⁰Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were asking him for a king. ¹¹He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. ¹²Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. ¹³He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. ¹⁴He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. ¹⁵He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. ¹⁶Your male and female servants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. ¹⁷He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. ¹⁸When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, but the LORD will not answer you in that day."

¹⁹But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. ²⁰Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles."

²¹When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the

LORD. ²²The LORD answered, “Listen to them and give them a king.”
Then Samuel said to the Israelites, “Everyone go back to your own town.”

1 Samuel 9

Samuel Anoints Saul

¹There was a Benjamite, a man of standing, whose name was Kish son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Bekorath, the son of Aphiah of Benjamin.

²Kish had a son named Saul, as handsome a young man as could be found anywhere in Israel, and he was a head taller than anyone else.

³Now the donkeys belonging to Saul's father Kish were lost, and Kish said to his son Saul, "Take one of the servants with you and go and look for the donkeys." ⁴So he passed through the hill country of Ephraim and through the area around Shalisha, but they did not find them. They went on into the district of Shaalim, but the donkeys were not there. Then he passed through the territory of Benjamin, but they did not find them.

⁵When they reached the district of Zuph, Saul said to the servant who was with him, "Come, let's go back, or my father will stop thinking about the donkeys and start worrying about us."

⁶But the servant replied, "Look, in this town there is a man of God; he is highly respected, and everything he says comes true. Let's go there now. Perhaps he will tell us what way to take."

⁷Saul said to his servant, "If we go, what can we give the man? The food in our sacks is gone. We have no gift to take to the man of God. What do we have?"

⁸The servant answered him again. "Look," he said, "I have a quarter of a shekel of silver. I will give it to the man of God so that he will tell us what way to take." ⁹(Formerly in Israel, if someone went to inquire of God, they would say, "Come, let us go to the seer," because the prophet of today used to be called a seer.)

¹⁰"Good," Saul said to his servant. "Come, let's go." So they set out for the town where the man of God was.

¹¹As they were going up the hill to the town, they met some young women coming out to draw water, and they asked them, "Is the seer here?"

¹²"He is," they answered. "He's ahead of you. Hurry now; he has just come to our town today, for the people have a sacrifice at the high place.

¹³As soon as you enter the town, you will find him before he goes up to the high place to eat. The people will not begin eating until he comes, because he must bless the sacrifice; afterward, those who are invited will eat. Go up now; you should find him about this time."

¹⁴They went up to the town, and as they were entering it, there was Samuel, coming toward them on his way up to the high place.

¹⁵Now the day before Saul came, the LORD had revealed this to Samuel:
¹⁶“About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him ruler over my people Israel; he will deliver them from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked on my people, for their cry has reached me.”

¹⁷When Samuel caught sight of Saul, the LORD said to him, “This is the man I spoke to you about; he will govern my people.”

¹⁸Saul approached Samuel in the gateway and asked, “Would you please tell me where the seer’s house is?”

¹⁹“I am the seer,” Samuel replied. “Go up ahead of me to the high place, for today you are to eat with me, and in the morning I will send you on your way and will tell you all that is in your heart. ²⁰As for the donkeys you lost three days ago, do not worry about them; they have been found. And to whom is all the desire of Israel turned, if not to you and your whole family line?”

²¹Saul answered, “But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?”

²²Then Samuel brought Saul and his servant into the hall and seated them at the head of those who were invited—about thirty in number. ²³Samuel said to the cook, “Bring the piece of meat I gave you, the one I told you to lay aside.”

²⁴So the cook took up the thigh with what was on it and set it in front of Saul. Samuel said, “Here is what has been kept for you. Eat, because it was set aside for you for this occasion from the time I said, ‘I have invited guests.’ ” And Saul dined with Samuel that day.

²⁵After they came down from the high place to the town, Samuel talked with Saul on the roof of his house. ²⁶They rose about daybreak, and Samuel called to Saul on the roof, “Get ready, and I will send you on your way.” When Saul got ready, he and Samuel went outside together. ²⁷As they were going down to the edge of the town, Samuel said to Saul, “Tell the servant to go on ahead of us”—and the servant did so—“but you stay here for a while, so that I may give you a message from God.”

1 Samuel 10

¹Then Samuel took a flask of olive oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, saying, "Has not the LORD anointed you ruler over his inheritance? ²When you leave me today, you will meet two men near Rachel's tomb, at Zelzah on the border of Benjamin. They will say to you, 'The donkeys you set out to look for have been found. And now your father has stopped thinking about them and is worried about you. He is asking, "What shall I do about my son?"'

³"Then you will go on from there until you reach the great tree of Tabor. Three men going up to worship God at Bethel will meet you there. One will be carrying three young goats, another three loaves of bread, and another a skin of wine. ⁴They will greet you and offer you two loaves of bread, which you will accept from them.

⁵"After that you will go to Gibeah of God, where there is a Philistine outpost. As you approach the town, you will meet a procession of prophets coming down from the high place with lyres, timbrels, pipes and harps being played before them, and they will be prophesying. ⁶The Spirit of the LORD will come powerfully upon you, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person. ⁷Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you.

⁸"Go down ahead of me to Gilgal. I will surely come down to you to sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, but you must wait seven days until I come to you and tell you what you are to do."

Saul Made King

⁹As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day. ¹⁰When he and his servant arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him; the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he joined in their prophesying. ¹¹When all those who had formerly known him saw him prophesying with the prophets, they asked each other, "What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?"

¹²A man who lived there answered, "And who is their father?" So it became a saying: "Is Saul also among the prophets?" ¹³After Saul stopped prophesying, he went to the high place.

¹⁴Now Saul's uncle asked him and his servant, "Where have you been?" "Looking for the donkeys," he said. "But when we saw they were not to be found, we went to Samuel."

¹⁵Saul's uncle said, "Tell me what Samuel said to you."

¹⁶Saul replied, "He assured us that the donkeys had been found." But he did not tell his uncle what Samuel had said about the kingship.

¹⁷Samuel summoned the people of Israel to the LORD at Mizpah ¹⁸and said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'I brought Israel up out of Egypt, and I delivered you from the power of Egypt and all the kingdoms that oppressed you.' ¹⁹But you have now rejected your God, who saves you out of all your disasters and calamities. And you have said, 'No, appoint a king over us.' So now present yourselves before the LORD by your tribes and clans."

²⁰When Samuel had all Israel come forward by tribes, the tribe of Benjamin was taken by lot. ²¹Then he brought forward the tribe of Benjamin, clan by clan, and Matri's clan was taken. Finally Saul son of Kish was taken. But when they looked for him, he was not to be found. ²²So they inquired further of the LORD, "Has the man come here yet?"

And the LORD said, "Yes, he has hidden himself among the supplies."

²³They ran and brought him out, and as he stood among the people he was a head taller than any of the others. ²⁴Samuel said to all the people, "Do you see the man the LORD has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people."

Then the people shouted, “Long live the king!”

²⁵Samuel explained to the people the rights and duties of kingship. He wrote them down on a scroll and deposited it before the LORD. Then Samuel dismissed the people to go to their own homes.

²⁶Saul also went to his home in Gibeah, accompanied by valiant men whose hearts God had touched. ²⁷But some scoundrels said, “How can this fellow save us?” They despised him and brought him no gifts. But Saul kept silent.

1 Samuel 11

Saul Rescues the City of Jabesh

¹Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh Gilead. And all the men of Jabesh said to him, “Make a treaty with us, and we will be subject to you.”

²But Nahash the Ammonite replied, “I will make a treaty with you only on the condition that I gouge out the right eye of every one of you and so bring disgrace on all Israel.”

³The elders of Jabesh said to him, “Give us seven days so we can send messengers throughout Israel; if no one comes to rescue us, we will surrender to you.”

⁴When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and reported these terms to the people, they all wept aloud. ⁵Just then Saul was returning from the fields, behind his oxen, and he asked, “What is wrong with everyone? Why are they weeping?” Then they repeated to him what the men of Jabesh had said.

⁶When Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he burned with anger. ⁷He took a pair of oxen, cut them into pieces, and sent the pieces by messengers throughout Israel, proclaiming, “This is what will be done to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel.” Then the terror of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out together as one. ⁸When Saul mustered them at Bezek, the men of Israel numbered three hundred thousand and those of Judah thirty thousand.

⁹They told the messengers who had come, “Say to the men of Jabesh Gilead, ‘By the time the sun is hot tomorrow, you will be rescued.’ ” When the messengers went and reported this to the men of Jabesh, they were elated.

¹⁰They said to the Ammonites, “Tomorrow we will surrender to you, and you can do to us whatever you like.”

¹¹The next day Saul separated his men into three divisions; during the last watch of the night they broke into the camp of the Ammonites and slaughtered them until the heat of the day. Those who survived were scattered, so that no two of them were left together.

Saul Confirmed as King

¹²The people then said to Samuel, “Who was it that asked, ‘Shall Saul reign over us?’ Turn these men over to us so that we may put them to death.”

¹³But Saul said, “No one will be put to death today, for this day the LORD has rescued Israel.”

¹⁴Then Samuel said to the people, “Come, let us go to Gilgal and there renew the kingship.” ¹⁵So all the people went to Gilgal and made Saul king in the presence of the LORD. There they sacrificed fellowship offerings before the LORD, and Saul and all the Israelites held a great celebration.

1 Samuel 12

Samuel's Farewell Speech

¹Samuel said to all Israel, "I have listened to everything you said to me and have set a king over you. ²Now you have a king as your leader. As for me, I am old and gray, and my sons are here with you. I have been your leader from my youth until this day. ³Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the LORD and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes? If I have done any of these things, I will make it right."

⁴"You have not cheated or oppressed us," they replied. "You have not taken anything from anyone's hand."

⁵Samuel said to them, "The LORD is witness against you, and also his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand."

"He is witness," they said.

⁶Then Samuel said to the people, "It is the LORD who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your ancestors up out of Egypt. ⁷Now then, stand here, because I am going to confront you with evidence before the LORD as to all the righteous acts performed by the LORD for you and your ancestors.

⁸"After Jacob entered Egypt, they cried to the LORD for help, and the LORD sent Moses and Aaron, who brought your ancestors out of Egypt and settled them in this place.

⁹"But they forgot the LORD their God; so he sold them into the hand of Sisera, the commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hands of the Philistines and the king of Moab, who fought against them. ¹⁰They cried out to the LORD and said, 'We have sinned; we have forsaken the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths. But now deliver us from the hands of our enemies, and we will serve you.' ¹¹Then the LORD sent Jerub-Baal, Barak, Jephthah and Samuel, and he delivered you from the hands of your enemies all around you, so that you lived in safety.

¹²"But when you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites was moving against you, you said to me, 'No, we want a king to rule over us'—even though the LORD your God was your king. ¹³Now here is the king you have

chosen, the one you asked for; see, the LORD has set a king over you. ¹⁴If you fear the LORD and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his commands, and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the LORD your God—good! ¹⁵But if you do not obey the LORD, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your ancestors.

¹⁶“Now then, stand still and see this great thing the LORD is about to do before your eyes! ¹⁷Is it not wheat harvest now? I will call on the LORD to send thunder and rain. And you will realize what an evil thing you did in the eyes of the LORD when you asked for a king.”

¹⁸Then Samuel called on the LORD, and that same day the LORD sent thunder and rain. So all the people stood in awe of the LORD and of Samuel.

¹⁹The people all said to Samuel, “Pray to the LORD your God for your servants so that we will not die, for we have added to all our other sins the evil of asking for a king.”

²⁰“Do not be afraid,” Samuel replied. “You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the LORD, but serve the LORD with all your heart. ²¹Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless. ²²For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own. ²³As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right. ²⁴But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you. ²⁵Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will perish.”

1 Samuel 13

Samuel Rebukes Saul

¹Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel forty-two years.

²Saul chose three thousand men from Israel; two thousand were with him at Mikdash and in the hill country of Bethel, and a thousand were with Jonathan at Gibeah in Benjamin. The rest of the men he sent back to their homes.

³Jonathan attacked the Philistine outpost at Geba, and the Philistines heard about it. Then Saul had the trumpet blown throughout the land and said, “Let the Hebrews hear!” ⁴So all Israel heard the news: “Saul has attacked the Philistine outpost, and now Israel has become obnoxious to the Philistines.” And the people were summoned to join Saul at Gilgal.

⁵The Philistines assembled to fight Israel, with three thousand chariots, six thousand charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They went up and camped at Mikdash, east of Beth Aven. ⁶When the Israelites saw that their situation was critical and that their army was hard pressed, they hid in caves and thickets, among the rocks, and in pits and cisterns. ⁷Some Hebrews even crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead.

Saul remained at Gilgal, and all the troops with him were quaking with fear. ⁸He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul’s men began to scatter. ⁹So he said, “Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings.” And Saul offered up the burnt offering. ¹⁰Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him.

¹¹“What have you done?” asked Samuel.

Saul replied, “When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Mikdash, ¹²I thought, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the LORD’s favor.’ So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering.”

¹³“You have done a foolish thing,” Samuel said. “You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. ¹⁴But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and

appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command."

¹⁵Then Samuel left Gilgal and went up to Gibeah in Benjamin, and Saul counted the men who were with him. They numbered about six hundred.

Israel Without Weapons

¹⁶Saul and his son Jonathan and the men with them were staying in Gibeah in Benjamin, while the Philistines camped at Mikdash. ¹⁷Raiding parties went out from the Philistine camp in three detachments. One turned toward Ophrah in the vicinity of Shual, ¹⁸another toward Beth Horon, and the third toward the borderland overlooking the Valley of Zeboyim facing the wilderness.

¹⁹Not a blacksmith could be found in the whole land of Israel, because the Philistines had said, “Otherwise the Hebrews will make swords or spears!” ²⁰So all Israel went down to the Philistines to have their plow points, mattocks, axes and sickles sharpened. ²¹The price was two-thirds of a shekel for sharpening plow points and mattocks, and a third of a shekel for sharpening forks and axes and for repointing goads.

²²So on the day of the battle not a soldier with Saul and Jonathan had a sword or spear in his hand; only Saul and his son Jonathan had them.

Jonathan Attacks the Philistines

²³Now a detachment of Philistines had gone out to the pass at Mikdash.

1 Samuel 14

¹One day Jonathan son of Saul said to his young armor-bearer, “Come, let’s go over to the Philistine outpost on the other side.” But he did not tell his father.

²Saul was staying on the outskirts of Gibeah under a pomegranate tree in Migron. With him were about six hundred men, ³among whom was Ahijah, who was wearing an ephod. He was a son of Ichabod’s brother Ahitub son of Phinehas, the son of Eli, the LORD’s priest in Shiloh. No one was aware that Jonathan had left.

⁴On each side of the pass that Jonathan intended to cross to reach the Philistine outpost was a cliff; one was called Bozez and the other Seneh. ⁵One cliff stood to the north toward Mikmash, the other to the south toward Geba.

⁶Jonathan said to his young armor-bearer, “Come, let’s go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised men. Perhaps the LORD will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the LORD from saving, whether by many or by few.”

⁷“Do all that you have in mind,” his armor-bearer said. “Go ahead; I am with you heart and soul.”

⁸Jonathan said, “Come on, then; we will cross over toward them and let them see us. ⁹If they say to us, ‘Wait there until we come to you,’ we will stay where we are and not go up to them. ¹⁰But if they say, ‘Come up to us,’ we will climb up, because that will be our sign that the LORD has given them into our hands.”

¹¹So both of them showed themselves to the Philistine outpost. “Look!” said the Philistines. “The Hebrews are crawling out of the holes they were hiding in.” ¹²The men of the outpost shouted to Jonathan and his armor-bearer, “Come up to us and we’ll teach you a lesson.”

So Jonathan said to his armor-bearer, “Climb up after me; the LORD has given them into the hand of Israel.”

¹³Jonathan climbed up, using his hands and feet, with his armor-bearer right behind him. The Philistines fell before Jonathan, and his armor-bearer followed and killed behind him. ¹⁴In that first attack Jonathan and his armor-bearer killed some twenty men in an area of about half an acre.

Israel Routs the Philistines

¹⁵Then panic struck the whole army—those in the camp and field, and those in the outposts and raiding parties—and the ground shook. It was a panic sent by God.

¹⁶Saul's lookouts at Gibeah in Benjamin saw the army melting away in all directions. ¹⁷Then Saul said to the men who were with him, "Mustering the forces and see who has left us." When they did, it was Jonathan and his armor-bearer who were not there.

¹⁸Saul said to Ahijah, "Bring the ark of God." (At that time it was with the Israelites.) ¹⁹While Saul was talking to the priest, the tumult in the Philistine camp increased more and more. So Saul said to the priest, "Withdraw your hand."

²⁰Then Saul and all his men assembled and went to the battle. They found the Philistines in total confusion, striking each other with their swords. ²¹Those Hebrews who had previously been with the Philistines and had gone up with them to their camp went over to the Israelites who were with Saul and Jonathan. ²²When all the Israelites who had hidden in the hill country of Ephraim heard that the Philistines were on the run, they joined the battle in hot pursuit. ²³So on that day the LORD saved Israel, and the battle moved on beyond Beth Aven.

Jonathan Eats Honey

²⁴Now the Israelites were in distress that day, because Saul had bound the people under an oath, saying, “Cursed be anyone who eats food before evening comes, before I have avenged myself on my enemies!” So none of the troops tasted food.

²⁵The entire army entered the woods, and there was honey on the ground. ²⁶When they went into the woods, they saw the honey oozing out; yet no one put his hand to his mouth, because they feared the oath. ²⁷But Jonathan had not heard that his father had bound the people with the oath, so he reached out the end of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it into the honeycomb. He raised his hand to his mouth, and his eyes brightened. ²⁸Then one of the soldiers told him, “Your father bound the army under a strict oath, saying, ‘Cursed be anyone who eats food today!’ That is why the men are faint.”

²⁹Jonathan said, “My father has made trouble for the country. See how my eyes brightened when I tasted a little of this honey. ³⁰How much better it would have been if the men had eaten today some of the plunder they took from their enemies. Would not the slaughter of the Philistines have been even greater?”

³¹That day, after the Israelites had struck down the Philistines from Mikmash to Aijalon, they were exhausted. ³²They pounced on the plunder and, taking sheep, cattle and calves, they butchered them on the ground and ate them, together with the blood. ³³Then someone said to Saul, “Look, the men are sinning against the LORD by eating meat that has blood in it.”

“You have broken faith,” he said. “Roll a large stone over here at once.” ³⁴Then he said, “Go out among the men and tell them, ‘Each of you bring me your cattle and sheep, and slaughter them here and eat them. Do not sin against the LORD by eating meat with blood still in it.’ ”

So everyone brought his ox that night and slaughtered it there. ³⁵Then Saul built an altar to the LORD; it was the first time he had done this.

³⁶Saul said, “Let us go down and pursue the Philistines by night and plunder them till dawn, and let us not leave one of them alive.”

“Do whatever seems best to you,” they replied.

But the priest said, “Let us inquire of God here.”

³⁷So Saul asked God, “Shall I go down and pursue the Philistines? Will

you give them into Israel's hand?" But God did not answer him that day.

³⁸Saul therefore said, "Come here, all you who are leaders of the army, and let us find out what sin has been committed today. ³⁹As surely as the LORD who rescues Israel lives, even if the guilt lies with my son Jonathan, he must die." But not one of them said a word.

⁴⁰Saul then said to all the Israelites, "You stand over there; I and Jonathan my son will stand over here."

"Do what seems best to you," they replied.

⁴¹Then Saul prayed to the LORD, the God of Israel, "Why have you not answered your servant today? If the fault is in me or my son Jonathan, respond with Urim, but if the men of Israel are at fault, respond with Thummim." Jonathan and Saul were taken by lot, and the men were cleared.

⁴²Saul said, "Cast the lot between me and Jonathan my son." And Jonathan was taken.

⁴³Then Saul said to Jonathan, "Tell me what you have done."

So Jonathan told him, "I tasted a little honey with the end of my staff. And now I must die!"

⁴⁴Saul said, "May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if you do not die, Jonathan."

⁴⁵But the men said to Saul, "Should Jonathan die—he who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Never! As surely as the LORD lives, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground, for he did this today with God's help." So the men rescued Jonathan, and he was not put to death.

⁴⁶Then Saul stopped pursuing the Philistines, and they withdrew to their own land.

⁴⁷After Saul had assumed rule over Israel, he fought against their enemies on every side: Moab, the Ammonites, Edom, the kings of Zobah, and the Philistines. Wherever he turned, he inflicted punishment on them. ⁴⁸He fought valiantly and defeated the Amalekites, delivering Israel from the hands of those who had plundered them.

Saul's Family

⁴⁹Saul's sons were Jonathan, Ishvi and Malki-Shua. The name of his older daughter was Merab, and that of the younger was Michal. ⁵⁰His wife's name was Ahinoam daughter of Ahimaaz. The name of the commander of Saul's

army was Abner son of Ner, and Ner was Saul's uncle. ⁵¹Saul's father Kish and Abner's father Ner were sons of Abiel.

⁵²All the days of Saul there was bitter war with the Philistines, and whenever Saul saw a mighty or brave man, he took him into his service.

1 Samuel 15

The LORD Rejects Saul as King

¹Samuel said to Saul, “I am the one the LORD sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the LORD. ²This is what the LORD Almighty says: ‘I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. ³Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.’ ”

⁴So Saul summoned the men and mustered them at Telaim—two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand from Judah. ⁵Saul went to the city of Amalek and set an ambush in the ravine. ⁶Then he said to the Kenites, “Go away, leave the Amalekites so that I do not destroy you along with them; for you showed kindness to all the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt.” So the Kenites moved away from the Amalekites.

⁷Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, near the eastern border of Egypt. ⁸He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. ⁹But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed.

¹⁰Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel: ¹¹“I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.” Samuel was angry, and he cried out to the LORD all that night.

¹²Early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, “Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal.”

¹³When Samuel reached him, Saul said, “The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD’s instructions.”

¹⁴But Samuel said, “What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?”

¹⁵Saul answered, “The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they

spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest.”

¹⁶“Enough!” Samuel said to Saul. “Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night.”

“Tell me,” Saul replied.

¹⁷Samuel said, “Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. ¹⁸And he sent you on a mission, saying, ‘Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; wage war against them until you have wiped them out.’ ¹⁹Why did you not obey the LORD? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the LORD?”

²⁰“But I did obey the LORD,” Saul said. “I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. ²¹The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal.”

²²But Samuel replied:

“Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices
as much as in obeying the LORD?
To obey is better than sacrifice,
and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

²³For rebellion is like the sin of divination,
and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,
he has rejected you as king.”

²⁴Then Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned. I violated the LORD’s command and your instructions. I was afraid of the men and so I gave in to them. ²⁵Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD.”

²⁶But Samuel said to him, “I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you as king over Israel!”

²⁷As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. ²⁸Samuel said to him, “The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors—to one better than you. ²⁹He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is

not a human being, that he should change his mind.”

³⁰Saul replied, “I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD your God.” ³¹So Samuel went back with Saul, and Saul worshiped the LORD.

³²Then Samuel said, “Bring me Agag king of the Amalekites.”

Agag came to him in chains. And he thought, “Surely the bitterness of death is past.”

³³But Samuel said,

“As your sword has made women childless,
so will your mother be childless among women.”

And Samuel put Agag to death before the LORD at Gilgal.

³⁴Then Samuel left for Ramah, but Saul went up to his home in Gibeah of Saul. ³⁵Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel.

1 Samuel 16

Samuel Anoints David

¹The LORD said to Samuel, “How long will you mourn for Saul, since I have rejected him as king over Israel? Fill your horn with oil and be on your way; I am sending you to Jesse of Bethlehem. I have chosen one of his sons to be king.”

²But Samuel said, “How can I go? If Saul hears about it, he will kill me.”

The LORD said, “Take a heifer with you and say, ‘I have come to sacrifice to the LORD.’ ³Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what to do. You are to anoint for me the one I indicate.”

⁴Samuel did what the LORD said. When he arrived at Bethlehem, the elders of the town trembled when they met him. They asked, “Do you come in peace?”

⁵Samuel replied, “Yes, in peace; I have come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come to the sacrifice with me.” Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and thought, “Surely the LORD’s anointed stands here before the LORD.”

⁷But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The LORD does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

⁸Then Jesse called Abinadab and had him pass in front of Samuel. But Samuel said, “The LORD has not chosen this one either.” ⁹Jesse then had Shammah pass by, but Samuel said, “Nor has the LORD chosen this one.”

¹⁰Jesse had seven of his sons pass before Samuel, but Samuel said to him, “The LORD has not chosen these.” ¹¹So he asked Jesse, “Are these all the sons you have?”

“There is still the youngest,” Jesse answered. “He is tending the sheep.”

Samuel said, “Send for him; we will not sit down until he arrives.”

¹²So he sent for him and had him brought in. He was glowing with health and had a fine appearance and handsome features.

Then the LORD said, “Rise and anoint him; this is the one.”

¹³So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David. Samuel then went to Ramah.

David in Saul's Service

¹⁴Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him.

¹⁵Saul's attendants said to him, "See, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. ¹⁶Let our lord command his servants here to search for someone who can play the lyre. He will play when the evil spirit from God comes on you, and you will feel better."

¹⁷So Saul said to his attendants, "Find someone who plays well and bring him to me."

¹⁸One of the servants answered, "I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who knows how to play the lyre. He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And the LORD is with him."

¹⁹Then Saul sent messengers to Jesse and said, "Send me your son David, who is with the sheep." ²⁰So Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine and a young goat and sent them with his son David to Saul.

²¹David came to Saul and entered his service. Saul liked him very much, and David became one of his armor-bearers. ²²Then Saul sent word to Jesse, saying, "Allow David to remain in my service, for I am pleased with him."

²³Whenever the spirit from God came on Saul, David would take up his lyre and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.

1 Samuel 17

David and Goliath

¹Now the Philistines gathered their forces for war and assembled at Sokoh in Judah. They pitched camp at Ephes Dammim, between Sokoh and Azekah.

²Saul and the Israelites assembled and camped in the Valley of Elah and drew up their battle line to meet the Philistines. ³The Philistines occupied one hill and the Israelites another, with the valley between them.

⁴A champion named Goliath, who was from Gath, came out of the Philistine camp. His height was six cubits and a span. ⁵He had a bronze helmet on his head and wore a coat of scale armor of bronze weighing five thousand shekels; ⁶on his legs he wore bronze greaves, and a bronze javelin was slung on his back. ⁷His spear shaft was like a weaver's rod, and its iron point weighed six hundred shekels. His shield bearer went ahead of him.

⁸Goliath stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, "Why do you come out and line up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not the servants of Saul? Choose a man and have him come down to me. ⁹If he is able to fight and kill me, we will become your subjects; but if I overcome him and kill him, you will become our subjects and serve us." ¹⁰Then the Philistine said, "This day I defy the armies of Israel! Give me a man and let us fight each other." ¹¹On hearing the Philistine's words, Saul and all the Israelites were dismayed and terrified.

¹²Now David was the son of an Ephrathite named Jesse, who was from Bethlehem in Judah. Jesse had eight sons, and in Saul's time he was very old. ¹³Jesse's three oldest sons had followed Saul to the war: The firstborn was Eliab; the second, Abinadab; and the third, Shammah. ¹⁴David was the youngest. The three oldest followed Saul, ¹⁵but David went back and forth from Saul to tend his father's sheep at Bethlehem.

¹⁶For forty days the Philistine came forward every morning and evening and took his stand.

¹⁷Now Jesse said to his son David, "Take this ephah of roasted grain and these ten loaves of bread for your brothers and hurry to their camp. ¹⁸Take along these ten cheeses to the commander of their unit. See how your brothers are and bring back some assurance from them. ¹⁹They are with Saul and all the men of Israel in the Valley of Elah, fighting against the Philistines."

²⁰Early in the morning David left the flock in the care of a shepherd, loaded up and set out, as Jesse had directed. He reached the camp as the army was going out to its battle positions, shouting the war cry. ²¹Israel and the Philistines were drawing up their lines facing each other. ²²David left his things with the keeper of supplies, ran to the battle lines and asked his brothers how they were. ²³As he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, stepped out from his lines and shouted his usual defiance, and David heard it. ²⁴Whenever the Israelites saw the man, they all fled from him in great fear.

²⁵Now the Israelites had been saying, “Do you see how this man keeps coming out? He comes out to defy Israel. The king will give great wealth to the man who kills him. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his family from taxes in Israel.”

²⁶David asked the men standing near him, “What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?”

²⁷They repeated to him what they had been saying and told him, “This is what will be done for the man who kills him.”

²⁸When Eliab, David’s oldest brother, heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked, “Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the wilderness? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle.”

²⁹“Now what have I done?” said David. “Can’t I even speak?” ³⁰He then turned away to someone else and brought up the same matter, and the men answered him as before. ³¹What David said was overheard and reported to Saul, and Saul sent for him.

³²David said to Saul, “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.”

³³Saul replied, “You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth.”

³⁴But David said to Saul, “Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, ³⁵I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. ³⁶Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of

them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. ³⁷The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.”

Saul said to David, “Go, and the LORD be with you.”

³⁸Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head. ³⁹David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them.

“I cannot go in these,” he said to Saul, “because I am not used to them.” So he took them off. ⁴⁰Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd’s bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.

⁴¹Meanwhile, the Philistine, with his shield bearer in front of him, kept coming closer to David. ⁴²He looked David over and saw that he was little more than a boy, glowing with health and handsome, and he despised him. ⁴³He said to David, “Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods. ⁴⁴“Come here,” he said, “and I’ll give your flesh to the birds and the wild animals!”

⁴⁵David said to the Philistine, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶This day the LORD will deliver you into my hands, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel. ⁴⁷All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves; for the battle is the LORD’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.”

⁴⁸As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him. ⁴⁹Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground.

⁵⁰So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him.

⁵¹David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine’s sword and drew it from the sheath. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword.

When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they turned and ran. ⁵²Then the men of Israel and Judah surged forward with a shout and pursued

the Philistines to the entrance of Gath and to the gates of Ekron. Their dead were strewn along the Shaaraim road to Gath and Ekron. ⁵³When the Israelites returned from chasing the Philistines, they plundered their camp.

⁵⁴David took the Philistine's head and brought it to Jerusalem; he put the Philistine's weapons in his own tent.

⁵⁵As Saul watched David going out to meet the Philistine, he said to Abner, commander of the army, "Abner, whose son is that young man?"

Abner replied, "As surely as you live, Your Majesty, I don't know."

⁵⁶The king said, "Find out whose son this young man is."

⁵⁷As soon as David returned from killing the Philistine, Abner took him and brought him before Saul, with David still holding the Philistine's head.

⁵⁸"Whose son are you, young man?" Saul asked him.

David said, "I am the son of your servant Jesse of Bethlehem."

1 Samuel 18

Saul's Growing Fear of David

¹After David had finished talking with Saul, Jonathan became one in spirit with David, and he loved him as himself. ²From that day Saul kept David with him and did not let him return home to his family. ³And Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. ⁴Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his tunic, and even his sword, his bow and his belt.

⁵Whatever mission Saul sent him on, David was so successful that Saul gave him a high rank in the army. This pleased all the troops, and Saul's officers as well.

⁶When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with timbrels and lyres. ⁷As they danced, they sang:

“Saul has slain his thousands,
and David his tens of thousands.”

⁸Saul was very angry; this refrain displeased him greatly. “They have credited David with tens of thousands,” he thought, “but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?” ⁹And from that time on Saul kept a close eye on David.

¹⁰The next day an evil spirit from God came forcefully on Saul. He was prophesying in his house, while David was playing the lyre, as he usually did. Saul had a spear in his hand ¹¹and he hurled it, saying to himself, “I'll pin David to the wall.” But David eluded him twice.

¹²Saul was afraid of David, because the LORD was with David but had departed from Saul. ¹³So he sent David away from him and gave him command over a thousand men, and David led the troops in their campaigns. ¹⁴In everything he did he had great success, because the LORD was with him. ¹⁵When Saul saw how successful he was, he was afraid of him. ¹⁶But all Israel and Judah loved David, because he led them in their campaigns.

¹⁷Saul said to David, “Here is my older daughter Merab. I will give her to you in marriage; only serve me bravely and fight the battles of the LORD.” For Saul said to himself, “I will not raise a hand against him. Let the Philistines do that!”

¹⁸But David said to Saul, “Who am I, and what is my family or my clan in Israel, that I should become the king’s son-in-law?” ¹⁹So when the time came for Merab, Saul’s daughter, to be given to David, she was given in marriage to Adriel of Meholah.

²⁰Now Saul’s daughter Michal was in love with David, and when they told Saul about it, he was pleased. ²¹“I will give her to him,” he thought, “so that she may be a snare to him and so that the hand of the Philistines may be against him.” So Saul said to David, “Now you have a second opportunity to become my son-in-law.”

²²Then Saul ordered his attendants: “Speak to David privately and say, ‘Look, the king likes you, and his attendants all love you; now become his son-in-law.’ ”

²³They repeated these words to David. But David said, “Do you think it is a small matter to become the king’s son-in-law? I’m only a poor man and little known.”

²⁴When Saul’s servants told him what David had said, ²⁵Saul replied, “Say to David, ‘The king wants no other price for the bride than a hundred Philistine foreskins, to take revenge on his enemies.’ ” Saul’s plan was to have David fall by the hands of the Philistines.

²⁶When the attendants told David these things, he was pleased to become the king’s son-in-law. So before the allotted time elapsed, ²⁷David took his men with him and went out and killed two hundred Philistines and brought back their foreskins. They counted out the full number to the king so that David might become the king’s son-in-law. Then Saul gave him his daughter Michal in marriage.

²⁸When Saul realized that the LORD was with David and that his daughter Michal loved David, ²⁹Saul became still more afraid of him, and he remained his enemy the rest of his days.

³⁰The Philistine commanders continued to go out to battle, and as often as they did, David met with more success than the rest of Saul’s officers, and his name became well known.

1 Samuel 19

Saul Tries to Kill David

¹Saul told his son Jonathan and all the attendants to kill David. But Jonathan had taken a great liking to David ²and warned him, “My father Saul is looking for a chance to kill you. Be on your guard tomorrow morning; go into hiding and stay there. ³I will go out and stand with my father in the field where you are. I’ll speak to him about you and will tell you what I find out.”

⁴Jonathan spoke well of David to Saul his father and said to him, “Let not the king do wrong to his servant David; he has not wronged you, and what he has done has benefited you greatly. ⁵He took his life in his hands when he killed the Philistine. The LORD won a great victory for all Israel, and you saw it and were glad. Why then would you do wrong to an innocent man like David by killing him for no reason?”

⁶Saul listened to Jonathan and took this oath: “As surely as the LORD lives, David will not be put to death.”

⁷So Jonathan called David and told him the whole conversation. He brought him to Saul, and David was with Saul as before.

⁸Once more war broke out, and David went out and fought the Philistines. He struck them with such force that they fled before him.

⁹But an evil spirit from the LORD came on Saul as he was sitting in his house with his spear in his hand. While David was playing the lyre, ¹⁰Saul tried to pin him to the wall with his spear, but David eluded him as Saul drove the spear into the wall. That night David made good his escape.

¹¹Saul sent men to David’s house to watch it and to kill him in the morning. But Michal, David’s wife, warned him, “If you don’t run for your life tonight, tomorrow you’ll be killed.” ¹²So Michal let David down through a window, and he fled and escaped. ¹³Then Michal took an idol and laid it on the bed, covering it with a garment and putting some goats’ hair at the head.

¹⁴When Saul sent the men to capture David, Michal said, “He is ill.”

¹⁵Then Saul sent the men back to see David and told them, “Bring him up to me in his bed so that I may kill him.” ¹⁶But when the men entered, there was the idol in the bed, and at the head was some goats’ hair.

¹⁷Saul said to Michal, “Why did you deceive me like this and send my enemy away so that he escaped?”

Michal told him, “He said to me, ‘Let me get away. Why should I kill

you?’ ”

¹⁸When David had fled and made his escape, he went to Samuel at Ramah and told him all that Saul had done to him. Then he and Samuel went to Naioth and stayed there. ¹⁹Word came to Saul: “David is in Naioth at Ramah”; ²⁰so he sent men to capture him. But when they saw a group of prophets prophesying, with Samuel standing there as their leader, the Spirit of God came on Saul’s men, and they also prophesied. ²¹Saul was told about it, and he sent more men, and they prophesied too. Saul sent men a third time, and they also prophesied. ²²Finally, he himself left for Ramah and went to the great cistern at Seku. And he asked, “Where are Samuel and David?”

“Over in Naioth at Ramah,” they said.

²³So Saul went to Naioth at Ramah. But the Spirit of God came even on him, and he walked along prophesying until he came to Naioth. ²⁴He stripped off his garments, and he too prophesied in Samuel’s presence. He lay naked all that day and all that night. This is why people say, “Is Saul also among the prophets?”

1 Samuel 20

David and Jonathan

¹Then David fled from Naioth at Ramah and went to Jonathan and asked, “What have I done? What is my crime? How have I wronged your father, that he is trying to kill me?”

²“Never!” Jonathan replied. “You are not going to die! Look, my father doesn’t do anything, great or small, without letting me know. Why would he hide this from me? It isn’t so!”

³But David took an oath and said, “Your father knows very well that I have found favor in your eyes, and he has said to himself, ‘Jonathan must not know this or he will be grieved.’ Yet as surely as the LORD lives and as you live, there is only a step between me and death.”

⁴Jonathan said to David, “Whatever you want me to do, I’ll do for you.”

⁵So David said, “Look, tomorrow is the New Moon feast, and I am supposed to dine with the king; but let me go and hide in the field until the evening of the day after tomorrow. ⁶If your father misses me at all, tell him, ‘David earnestly asked my permission to hurry to Bethlehem, his hometown, because an annual sacrifice is being made there for his whole clan.’ ⁷If he says, ‘Very well,’ then your servant is safe. But if he loses his temper, you can be sure that he is determined to harm me. ⁸As for you, show kindness to your servant, for you have brought him into a covenant with you before the LORD. If I am guilty, then kill me yourself! Why hand me over to your father?”

⁹“Never!” Jonathan said. “If I had the least inkling that my father was determined to harm you, wouldn’t I tell you?”

¹⁰David asked, “Who will tell me if your father answers you harshly?”

¹¹“Come,” Jonathan said, “let’s go out into the field.” So they went there together.

¹²Then Jonathan said to David, “I swear by the LORD, the God of Israel, that I will surely sound out my father by this time the day after tomorrow! If he is favorably disposed toward you, will I not send you word and let you know? ¹³But if my father intends to harm you, may the LORD deal with Jonathan, be it ever so severely, if I do not let you know and send you away in peace. May the LORD be with you as he has been with my father. ¹⁴But show me unfailing kindness like the LORD’s kindness as long as I live, so that I may not be killed, ¹⁵and do not ever cut off your kindness from my

family—not even when the LORD has cut off every one of David’s enemies from the face of the earth.”

¹⁶So Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David, saying, “May the LORD call David’s enemies to account.” ¹⁷And Jonathan had David reaffirm his oath out of love for him, because he loved him as he loved himself.

¹⁸Then Jonathan said to David, “Tomorrow is the New Moon feast. You will be missed, because your seat will be empty. ¹⁹The day after tomorrow, toward evening, go to the place where you hid when this trouble began, and wait by the stone Ezel. ²⁰I will shoot three arrows to the side of it, as though I were shooting at a target. ²¹Then I will send a boy and say, ‘Go, find the arrows.’ If I say to him, ‘Look, the arrows are on this side of you; bring them here,’ then come, because, as surely as the LORD lives, you are safe; there is no danger. ²²But if I say to the boy, ‘Look, the arrows are beyond you,’ then you must go, because the LORD has sent you away. ²³And about the matter you and I discussed—remember, the LORD is witness between you and me forever.”

²⁴So David hid in the field, and when the New Moon feast came, the king sat down to eat. ²⁵He sat in his customary place by the wall, opposite Jonathan, and Abner sat next to Saul, but David’s place was empty. ²⁶Saul said nothing that day, for he thought, “Something must have happened to David to make him ceremonially unclean—surely he is unclean.” ²⁷But the next day, the second day of the month, David’s place was empty again. Then Saul said to his son Jonathan, “Why hasn’t the son of Jesse come to the meal, either yesterday or today?”

²⁸Jonathan answered, “David earnestly asked me for permission to go to Bethlehem. ²⁹He said, ‘Let me go, because our family is observing a sacrifice in the town and my brother has ordered me to be there. If I have found favor in your eyes, let me get away to see my brothers.’ That is why he has not come to the king’s table.”

³⁰Saul’s anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, “You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don’t I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you? ³¹As long as the son of Jesse lives on this earth, neither you nor your kingdom will be established. Now send someone to bring him to me, for he must die!”

³²“Why should he be put to death? What has he done?” Jonathan asked his

father. ³³But Saul hurled his spear at him to kill him. Then Jonathan knew that his father intended to kill David.

³⁴Jonathan got up from the table in fierce anger; on that second day of the feast he did not eat, because he was grieved at his father's shameful treatment of David.

³⁵In the morning Jonathan went out to the field for his meeting with David. He had a small boy with him, ³⁶and he said to the boy, "Run and find the arrows I shoot." As the boy ran, he shot an arrow beyond him. ³⁷When the boy came to the place where Jonathan's arrow had fallen, Jonathan called out after him, "Isn't the arrow beyond you?" ³⁸Then he shouted, "Hurry! Go quickly! Don't stop!" The boy picked up the arrow and returned to his master. ³⁹(The boy knew nothing about all this; only Jonathan and David knew.) ⁴⁰Then Jonathan gave his weapons to the boy and said, "Go, carry them back to town."

⁴¹After the boy had gone, David got up from the south side of the stone and bowed down before Jonathan three times, with his face to the ground. Then they kissed each other and wept together—but David wept the most.

⁴²Jonathan said to David, "Go in peace, for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the LORD, saying, 'The LORD is witness between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants forever.' " Then David left, and Jonathan went back to the town.

1 Samuel 21

David at Nob

¹David went to Nob, to Ahimelek the priest. Ahimelek trembled when he met him, and asked, “Why are you alone? Why is no one with you?”

²David answered Ahimelek the priest, “The king sent me on a mission and said to me, ‘No one is to know anything about the mission I am sending you on.’ As for my men, I have told them to meet me at a certain place. ³Now then, what do you have on hand? Give me five loaves of bread, or whatever you can find.”

⁴But the priest answered David, “I don’t have any ordinary bread on hand; however, there is some consecrated bread here—provided the men have kept themselves from women.”

⁵David replied, “Indeed women have been kept from us, as usual whenever I set out. The men’s bodies are holy even on missions that are not holy. How much more so today!” ⁶So the priest gave him the consecrated bread, since there was no bread there except the bread of the Presence that had been removed from before the LORD and replaced by hot bread on the day it was taken away.

⁷Now one of Saul’s servants was there that day, detained before the LORD; he was Doeg the Edomite, Saul’s chief shepherd.

⁸David asked Ahimelek, “Don’t you have a spear or a sword here? I haven’t brought my sword or any other weapon, because the king’s mission was urgent.”

⁹The priest replied, “The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the Valley of Elah, is here; it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod. If you want it, take it; there is no sword here but that one.”

David said, “There is none like it; give it to me.”

David at Gath ¹⁰That day David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath. ¹¹But the servants of Achish said to him, “Isn’t this David, the king of the land? Isn’t he the one they sing about in their dances:

“ ‘Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands?’”

¹²David took these words to heart and was very much afraid of Achish king of Gath. ¹³So he pretended to be insane in their presence; and while he was in their hands he acted like a madman, making marks on the doors of the gate and letting saliva run down his beard.

¹⁴Achish said to his servants, “Look at the man! He is insane! Why bring him to me? ¹⁵Am I so short of madmen that you have to bring this fellow here to carry on like this in front of me? Must this man come into my house?”

1 Samuel 22

David at Adullam and Mizpah

¹David left Gath and escaped to the cave of Adullam. When his brothers and his father's household heard about it, they went down to him there. ²All those who were in distress or in debt or discontented gathered around him, and he became their commander. About four hundred men were with him.

³From there David went to Mizpah in Moab and said to the king of Moab, "Would you let my father and mother come and stay with you until I learn what God will do for me?" ⁴So he left them with the king of Moab, and they stayed with him as long as David was in the stronghold.

⁵But the prophet Gad said to David, "Do not stay in the stronghold. Go into the land of Judah." So David left and went to the forest of Hereth.

Saul Kills the Priests of Nob

⁶Now Saul heard that David and his men had been discovered. And Saul was seated, spear in hand, under the tamarisk tree on the hill at Gibeah, with all his officials standing at his side. ⁷He said to them, "Listen, men of Benjamin! Will the son of Jesse give all of you fields and vineyards? Will he make all of you commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds? ⁸Is that why you have all conspired against me? No one tells me when my son makes a covenant with the son of Jesse. None of you is concerned about me or tells me that my son has incited my servant to lie in wait for me, as he does today."

⁹But Doeg the Edomite, who was standing with Saul's officials, said, "I saw the son of Jesse come to Ahimelek son of Ahitub at Nob. ¹⁰Ahimelek inquired of the LORD for him; he also gave him provisions and the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

¹¹Then the king sent for the priest Ahimelek son of Ahitub and all the men of his family, who were the priests at Nob, and they all came to the king.

¹²Saul said, "Listen now, son of Ahitub."

"Yes, my lord," he answered.

¹³Saul said to him, "Why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, giving him bread and a sword and inquiring of God for him, so that he has rebelled against me and lies in wait for me, as he does today?"

¹⁴Ahimelek answered the king, “Who of all your servants is as loyal as David, the king’s son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard and highly respected in your household? ¹⁵Was that day the first time I inquired of God for him? Of course not! Let not the king accuse your servant or any of his father’s family, for your servant knows nothing at all about this whole affair.”

¹⁶But the king said, “You will surely die, Ahimelek, you and your whole family.”

¹⁷Then the king ordered the guards at his side: “Turn and kill the priests of the LORD, because they too have sided with David. They knew he was fleeing, yet they did not tell me.”

But the king’s officials were unwilling to raise a hand to strike the priests of the LORD.

¹⁸The king then ordered Doeg, “You turn and strike down the priests.” So Doeg the Edomite turned and struck them down. That day he killed eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. ¹⁹He also put to the sword Nob, the town of the priests, with its men and women, its children and infants, and its cattle, donkeys and sheep.

²⁰But one son of Ahimelek son of Ahitub, named Abiathar, escaped and fled to join David. ²¹He told David that Saul had killed the priests of the LORD. ²²Then David said to Abiathar, “That day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, I knew he would be sure to tell Saul. I am responsible for the death of your whole family. ²³Stay with me; don’t be afraid. The man who wants to kill you is trying to kill me too. You will be safe with me.”

1 Samuel 23

David Saves Keilah

¹When David was told, “Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are looting the threshing floors,” ²he inquired of the LORD, saying, “Shall I go and attack these Philistines?”

The LORD answered him, “Go, attack the Philistines and save Keilah.”

³But David’s men said to him, “Here in Judah we are afraid. How much more, then, if we go to Keilah against the Philistine forces!”

⁴Once again David inquired of the LORD, and the LORD answered him, “Go down to Keilah, for I am going to give the Philistines into your hand.”

⁵So David and his men went to Keilah, fought the Philistines and carried off their livestock. He inflicted heavy losses on the Philistines and saved the people of Keilah. ⁶(Now Abiathar son of Ahimelek had brought the ephod down with him when he fled to David at Keilah.)

Saul Pursues David

⁷Saul was told that David had gone to Keilah, and he said, “God has delivered him into my hands, for David has imprisoned himself by entering a town with gates and bars.” ⁸And Saul called up all his forces for battle, to go down to Keilah to besiege David and his men.

⁹When David learned that Saul was plotting against him, he said to Abiathar the priest, “Bring the ephod.” ¹⁰David said, “LORD, God of Israel, your servant has heard definitely that Saul plans to come to Keilah and destroy the town on account of me. ¹¹Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me to him? Will Saul come down, as your servant has heard? LORD, God of Israel, tell your servant.”

And the LORD said, “He will.”

¹²Again David asked, “Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?”

And the LORD said, “They will.”

¹³So David and his men, about six hundred in number, left Keilah and kept moving from place to place. When Saul was told that David had escaped from Keilah, he did not go there.

¹⁴David stayed in the wilderness strongholds and in the hills of the Desert of Ziph. Day after day Saul searched for him, but God did not give David into his hands.

¹⁵While David was at Horesh in the Desert of Ziph, he learned that Saul had come out to take his life. ¹⁶And Saul’s son Jonathan went to David at Horesh and helped him find strength in God. ¹⁷“Don’t be afraid,” he said. “My father Saul will not lay a hand on you. You will be king over Israel, and I will be second to you. Even my father Saul knows this.” ¹⁸The two of them made a covenant before the LORD. Then Jonathan went home, but David remained at Horesh.

¹⁹The Ziphites went up to Saul at Gibeah and said, “Is not David hiding among us in the strongholds at Horesh, on the hill of Hakilah, south of Jeshimon? ²⁰Now, Your Majesty, come down whenever it pleases you to do so, and we will be responsible for giving him into your hands.”

²¹Saul replied, “The LORD bless you for your concern for me. ²²Go and get more information. Find out where David usually goes and who has seen

him there. They tell me he is very crafty. ²³Find out about all the hiding places he uses and come back to me with definite information. Then I will go with you; if he is in the area, I will track him down among all the clans of Judah.”

²⁴So they set out and went to Ziph ahead of Saul. Now David and his men were in the Desert of Maon, in the Arabah south of Jeshimon. ²⁵Saul and his men began the search, and when David was told about it, he went down to the rock and stayed in the Desert of Maon. When Saul heard this, he went into the Desert of Maon in pursuit of David.

²⁶Saul was going along one side of the mountain, and David and his men were on the other side, hurrying to get away from Saul. As Saul and his forces were closing in on David and his men to capture them, ²⁷a messenger came to Saul, saying, “Come quickly! The Philistines are raiding the land.” ²⁸Then Saul broke off his pursuit of David and went to meet the Philistines. That is why they call this place Sela Hammahlekoth. ²⁹And David went up from there and lived in the strongholds of En Gedi.

1 Samuel 24

David Spares Saul's Life

¹After Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, "David is in the Desert of En Gedi." ²So Saul took three thousand able young men from all Israel and set out to look for David and his men near the Crag of the Wild Goats.

³He came to the sheep pens along the way; a cave was there, and Saul went in to relieve himself. David and his men were far back in the cave. ⁴The men said, "This is the day the LORD spoke of when he said to you, 'I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish.'" Then David crept up unnoticed and cut off a corner of Saul's robe.

⁵Afterward, David was conscience-stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe. ⁶He said to his men, "The LORD forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the LORD's anointed, or lay my hand on him; for he is the anointed of the LORD." ⁷With these words David sharply rebuked his men and did not allow them to attack Saul. And Saul left the cave and went his way.

⁸Then David went out of the cave and called out to Saul, "My lord the king!" When Saul looked behind him, David bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. ⁹He said to Saul, "Why do you listen when men say, 'David is bent on harming you'?" ¹⁰This day you have seen with your own eyes how the LORD delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, 'I will not lay my hand on my lord, because he is the LORD's anointed.' ¹¹See, my father, look at this piece of your robe in my hand! I cut off the corner of your robe but did not kill you. See that there is nothing in my hand to indicate that I am guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion. I have not wronged you, but you are hunting me down to take my life. ¹²May the LORD judge between you and me. And may the LORD avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you. ¹³As the old saying goes, 'From evildoers come evil deeds,' so my hand will not touch you.

¹⁴"Against whom has the king of Israel come out? Who are you pursuing? A dead dog? A flea? ¹⁵May the LORD be our judge and decide between us.

May he consider my cause and uphold it; may he vindicate me by delivering me from your hand.”

¹⁶When David finished saying this, Saul asked, “Is that your voice, David my son?” And he wept aloud. ¹⁷“You are more righteous than I,” he said. “You have treated me well, but I have treated you badly. ¹⁸You have just now told me about the good you did to me; the LORD delivered me into your hands, but you did not kill me. ¹⁹When a man finds his enemy, does he let him get away unharmed? May the LORD reward you well for the way you treated me today. ²⁰I know that you will surely be king and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hands. ²¹Now swear to me by the LORD that you will not kill off my descendants or wipe out my name from my father’s family.”

²²So David gave his oath to Saul. Then Saul returned home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

1 Samuel 25

David, Nabal and Abigail

¹Now Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him; and they buried him at his home in Ramah. Then David moved down into the Desert of Paran.

²A certain man in Maon, who had property there at Carmel, was very wealthy. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, which he was shearing in Carmel. ³His name was Nabal and his wife's name was Abigail. She was an intelligent and beautiful woman, but her husband was surly and mean in his dealings—he was a Calebite.

⁴While David was in the wilderness, he heard that Nabal was shearing sheep. ⁵So he sent ten young men and said to them, “Go up to Nabal at Carmel and greet him in my name. ⁶Say to him: ‘Long life to you! Good health to you and your household! And good health to all that is yours!

⁷“ ‘Now I hear that it is sheep-shearing time. When your shepherds were with us, we did not mistreat them, and the whole time they were at Carmel nothing of theirs was missing. ⁸Ask your own servants and they will tell you. Therefore be favorable toward my men, since we come at a festive time. Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them.’ ”

⁹When David's men arrived, they gave Nabal this message in David's name. Then they waited.

¹⁰Nabal answered David's servants, “Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. ¹¹Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?”

¹²David's men turned around and went back. When they arrived, they reported every word. ¹³David said to his men, “Each of you strap on your sword!” So they did, and David strapped his on as well. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies.

¹⁴One of the servants told Abigail, Nabal's wife, “David sent messengers from the wilderness to give our master his greetings, but he hurled insults at them. ¹⁵Yet these men were very good to us. They did not mistreat us, and

the whole time we were out in the fields near them nothing was missing. ¹⁶Night and day they were a wall around us the whole time we were herding our sheep near them. ¹⁷Now think it over and see what you can do, because disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him.”

¹⁸Abigail acted quickly. She took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five seahs of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of raisins and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys. ¹⁹Then she told her servants, “Go on ahead; I’ll follow you.” But she did not tell her husband Nabal.

²⁰As she came riding her donkey into a mountain ravine, there were David and his men descending toward her, and she met them. ²¹David had just said, “It’s been useless—all my watching over this fellow’s property in the wilderness so that nothing of his was missing. He has paid me back evil for good. ²²May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!”

²³When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground. ²⁴She fell at his feet and said: “Pardon your servant, my lord, and let me speak to you; hear what your servant has to say. ²⁵Please pay no attention, my lord, to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name—his name means Fool, and folly goes with him. And as for me, your servant, I did not see the men my lord sent. ²⁶And now, my lord, as surely as the LORD your God lives and as you live, since the LORD has kept you from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands, may your enemies and all who are intent on harming my lord be like Nabal. ²⁷And let this gift, which your servant has brought to my lord, be given to the men who follow you.

²⁸“Please forgive your servant’s presumption. The LORD your God will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my lord, because you fight the LORD’s battles, and no wrongdoing will be found in you as long as you live. ²⁹Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my lord will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the LORD your God, but the lives of your enemies he will hurl away as from the pocket of a sling. ³⁰When the LORD has fulfilled for my lord every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him ruler over Israel, ³¹my lord will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself. And when the LORD your God has brought my lord success,

remember your servant.”

³²David said to Abigail, “Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. ³³May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. ³⁴Otherwise, as surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you, if you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been left alive by daybreak.”

³⁵Then David accepted from her hand what she had brought him and said, “Go home in peace. I have heard your words and granted your request.”

³⁶When Abigail went to Nabal, he was in the house holding a banquet like that of a king. He was in high spirits and very drunk. So she told him nothing at all until daybreak. ³⁷Then in the morning, when Nabal was sober, his wife told him all these things, and his heart failed him and he became like a stone. ³⁸About ten days later, the LORD struck Nabal and he died.

³⁹When David heard that Nabal was dead, he said, “Praise be to the LORD, who has upheld my cause against Nabal for treating me with contempt. He has kept his servant from doing wrong and has brought Nabal’s wrongdoing down on his own head.”

Then David sent word to Abigail, asking her to become his wife. ⁴⁰His servants went to Carmel and said to Abigail, “David has sent us to you to take you to become his wife.”

⁴¹She bowed down with her face to the ground and said, “I am your servant and am ready to serve you and wash the feet of my lord’s servants.” ⁴²Abigail quickly got on a donkey and, attended by her five female servants, went with David’s messengers and became his wife. ⁴³David had also married Ahinoam of Jezreel, and they both were his wives. ⁴⁴But Saul had given his daughter Michal, David’s wife, to Paltiel son of Laish, who was from Gallim.

1 Samuel 26

David Again Spares Saul's Life

¹The Ziphites went to Saul at Gibeah and said, "Is not David hiding on the hill of Hakilah, which faces Jeshimon?"

²So Saul went down to the Desert of Ziph, with his three thousand select Israelite troops, to search there for David. ³Saul made his camp beside the road on the hill of Hakilah facing Jeshimon, but David stayed in the wilderness. When he saw that Saul had followed him there, ⁴he sent out scouts and learned that Saul had definitely arrived.

⁵Then David set out and went to the place where Saul had camped. He saw where Saul and Abner son of Ner, the commander of the army, had lain down. Saul was lying inside the camp, with the army encamped around him.

⁶David then asked Ahimelek the Hittite and Abishai son of Zeruiah, Joab's brother, "Who will go down into the camp with me to Saul?"

"I'll go with you," said Abishai.

⁷So David and Abishai went to the army by night, and there was Saul, lying asleep inside the camp with his spear stuck in the ground near his head. Abner and the soldiers were lying around him.

⁸Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hands. Now let me pin him to the ground with one thrust of the spear; I won't strike him twice."

⁹But David said to Abishai, "Don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the LORD's anointed and be guiltless? ¹⁰As surely as the LORD lives," he said, "the LORD himself will strike him, or his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. ¹¹But the LORD forbid that I should lay a hand on the LORD's anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let's go."

¹²So David took the spear and water jug near Saul's head, and they left. No one saw or knew about it, nor did anyone wake up. They were all sleeping, because the LORD had put them into a deep sleep.

¹³Then David crossed over to the other side and stood on top of the hill some distance away; there was a wide space between them. ¹⁴He called out to the army and to Abner son of Ner, "Aren't you going to answer me, Abner?"

Abner replied, “Who are you who calls to the king?”

¹⁵David said, “You’re a man, aren’t you? And who is like you in Israel? Why didn’t you guard your lord the king? Someone came to destroy your lord the king. ¹⁶What you have done is not good. As surely as the LORD lives, you and your men must die, because you did not guard your master, the LORD’s anointed. Look around you. Where are the king’s spear and water jug that were near his head?”

¹⁷Saul recognized David’s voice and said, “Is that your voice, David my son?”

David replied, “Yes it is, my lord the king.” ¹⁸And he added, “Why is my lord pursuing his servant? What have I done, and what wrong am I guilty of? ¹⁹Now let my lord the king listen to his servant’s words. If the LORD has incited you against me, then may he accept an offering. If, however, people have done it, may they be cursed before the LORD! They have driven me today from my share in the LORD’s inheritance and have said, ‘Go, serve other gods.’ ²⁰Now do not let my blood fall to the ground far from the presence of the LORD. The king of Israel has come out to look for a flea—as one hunts a partridge in the mountains.”

²¹Then Saul said, “I have sinned. Come back, David my son. Because you considered my life precious today, I will not try to harm you again. Surely I have acted like a fool and have been terribly wrong.”

²²“Here is the king’s spear,” David answered. “Let one of your young men come over and get it. ²³The LORD rewards everyone for their righteousness and faithfulness. The LORD delivered you into my hands today, but I would not lay a hand on the LORD’s anointed. ²⁴As surely as I valued your life today, so may the LORD value my life and deliver me from all trouble.”

²⁵Then Saul said to David, “May you be blessed, David my son; you will do great things and surely triumph.”

So David went on his way, and Saul returned home.

1 Samuel 27

David Among the Philistines

¹But David thought to himself, “One of these days I will be destroyed by the hand of Saul. The best thing I can do is to escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will give up searching for me anywhere in Israel, and I will slip out of his hand.”

²So David and the six hundred men with him left and went over to Achish son of Maok king of Gath. ³David and his men settled in Gath with Achish. Each man had his family with him, and David had his two wives: Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail of Carmel, the widow of Nabal. ⁴When Saul was told that David had fled to Gath, he no longer searched for him.

⁵Then David said to Achish, “If I have found favor in your eyes, let a place be assigned to me in one of the country towns, that I may live there. Why should your servant live in the royal city with you?”

⁶So on that day Achish gave him Ziklag, and it has belonged to the kings of Judah ever since. ⁷David lived in Philistine territory a year and four months.

⁸Now David and his men went up and raided the Geshurites, the Girzites and the Amalekites. (From ancient times these peoples had lived in the land extending to Shur and Egypt.) ⁹Whenever David attacked an area, he did not leave a man or woman alive, but took sheep and cattle, donkeys and camels, and clothes. Then he returned to Achish.

¹⁰When Achish asked, “Where did you go raiding today?” David would say, “Against the Negev of Judah” or “Against the Negev of Jerahmeel” or “Against the Negev of the Kenites.” ¹¹He did not leave a man or woman alive to be brought to Gath, for he thought, “They might inform on us and say, ‘This is what David did.’ ” And such was his practice as long as he lived in Philistine territory. ¹²Achish trusted David and said to himself, “He has become so obnoxious to his people, the Israelites, that he will be my servant for life.”

1 Samuel 28

¹In those days the Philistines gathered their forces to fight against Israel. Achish said to David, “You must understand that you and your men will accompany me in the army.”

²David said, “Then you will see for yourself what your servant can do.”

Achish replied, “Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life.”

Saul and the Medium at Endor

³Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in his own town of Ramah. Saul had expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land.

⁴The Philistines assembled and came and set up camp at Shunem, while Saul gathered all Israel and set up camp at Gilboa. ⁵When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart. ⁶He inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets. ⁷Saul then said to his attendants, “Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her.”

“There is one in Endor,” they said.

⁸So Saul disguised himself, putting on other clothes, and at night he and two men went to the woman. “Consult a spirit for me,” he said, “and bring up for me the one I name.”

⁹But the woman said to him, “Surely you know what Saul has done. He has cut off the mediums and spiritists from the land. Why have you set a trap for my life to bring about my death?”

¹⁰Saul swore to her by the LORD, “As surely as the LORD lives, you will not be punished for this.”

¹¹Then the woman asked, “Whom shall I bring up for you?”

“Bring up Samuel,” he said.

¹²When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, “Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!”

¹³The king said to her, “Don’t be afraid. What do you see?”

The woman said, “I see a ghostly figure coming up out of the earth.”

¹⁴“What does he look like?” he asked.

“An old man wearing a robe is coming up,” she said.

Then Saul knew it was Samuel, and he bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground.

¹⁵Samuel said to Saul, “Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?”

“I am in great distress,” Saul said. “The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has departed from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do.”

¹⁶Samuel said, “Why do you consult me, now that the LORD has departed from you and become your enemy? ¹⁷The LORD has done what he predicted through me. The LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors—to David. ¹⁸Because you did not obey the LORD or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the LORD has done this to you today. ¹⁹The LORD will deliver both Israel and you into the hands of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also give the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines.”

²⁰Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, filled with fear because of Samuel’s words. His strength was gone, for he had eaten nothing all that day and all that night.

²¹When the woman came to Saul and saw that he was greatly shaken, she said, “Look, your servant has obeyed you. I took my life in my hands and did what you told me to do. ²²Now please listen to your servant and let me give you some food so you may eat and have the strength to go on your way.”

²³He refused and said, “I will not eat.”

But his men joined the woman in urging him, and he listened to them. He got up from the ground and sat on the couch.

²⁴The woman had a fattened calf at the house, which she butchered at once. She took some flour, kneaded it and baked bread without yeast. ²⁵Then she set it before Saul and his men, and they ate. That same night they got up and left.

1 Samuel 29

Achish Sends David Back to Ziklag

¹The Philistines gathered all their forces at Aphek, and Israel camped by the spring in Jezreel. ²As the Philistine rulers marched with their units of hundreds and thousands, David and his men were marching at the rear with Achish. ³The commanders of the Philistines asked, “What about these Hebrews?”

Achish replied, “Is this not David, who was an officer of Saul king of Israel? He has already been with me for over a year, and from the day he left Saul until now, I have found no fault in him.”

⁴But the Philistine commanders were angry with Achish and said, “Send the man back, that he may return to the place you assigned him. He must not go with us into battle, or he will turn against us during the fighting. How better could he regain his master’s favor than by taking the heads of our own men? ⁵Isn’t this the David they sang about in their dances:

“ ‘Saul has slain his thousands,
and David his tens of thousands’?”

⁶So Achish called David and said to him, “As surely as the LORD lives, you have been reliable, and I would be pleased to have you serve with me in the army. From the day you came to me until today, I have found no fault in you, but the rulers don’t approve of you. ⁷Now turn back and go in peace; do nothing to displease the Philistine rulers.”

⁸“But what have I done?” asked David. “What have you found against your servant from the day I came to you until now? Why can’t I go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?”

⁹Achish answered, “I know that you have been as pleasing in my eyes as an angel of God; nevertheless, the Philistine commanders have said, ‘He must not go up with us into battle.’ ¹⁰Now get up early, along with your master’s servants who have come with you, and leave in the morning as soon as it is light.”

¹¹So David and his men got up early in the morning to go back to the land

of the Philistines, and the Philistines went up to Jezreel.

1 Samuel 30

David Destroys the Amalekites

¹David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day. Now the Amalekites had raided the Negev and Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag and burned it, ²and had taken captive the women and everyone else in it, both young and old. They killed none of them, but carried them off as they went on their way.

³When David and his men reached Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. ⁴So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep. ⁵David's two wives had been captured—Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel. ⁶David was greatly distressed because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. But David found strength in the LORD his God.

⁷Then David said to Abiathar the priest, the son of Ahimelek, “Bring me the ephod.” Abiathar brought it to him, ⁸and David inquired of the LORD, “Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?”

“Pursue them,” he answered. “You will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue.”

⁹David and the six hundred men with him came to the Besor Valley, where some stayed behind. ¹⁰Two hundred of them were too exhausted to cross the valley, but David and the other four hundred continued the pursuit.

¹¹They found an Egyptian in a field and brought him to David. They gave him water to drink and food to eat— ¹²part of a cake of pressed figs and two cakes of raisins. He ate and was revived, for he had not eaten any food or drunk any water for three days and three nights.

¹³David asked him, “Who do you belong to? Where do you come from?”

He said, “I am an Egyptian, the slave of an Amalekite. My master abandoned me when I became ill three days ago. ¹⁴We raided the Negev of the Kerethites, some territory belonging to Judah and the Negev of Caleb. And we burned Ziklag.”

¹⁵David asked him, “Can you lead me down to this raiding party?”

He answered, “Swear to me before God that you will not kill me or hand me over to my master, and I will take you down to them.”

¹⁶He led David down, and there they were, scattered over the countryside, eating, drinking and reveling because of the great amount of plunder they had

taken from the land of the Philistines and from Judah. ¹⁷David fought them from dusk until the evening of the next day, and none of them got away, except four hundred young men who rode off on camels and fled. ¹⁸David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken, including his two wives. ¹⁹Nothing was missing: young or old, boy or girl, plunder or anything else they had taken. David brought everything back. ²⁰He took all the flocks and herds, and his men drove them ahead of the other livestock, saying, “This is David’s plunder.”

²¹Then David came to the two hundred men who had been too exhausted to follow him and who were left behind at the Besor Valley. They came out to meet David and the men with him. As David and his men approached, he asked them how they were. ²²But all the evil men and troublemakers among David’s followers said, “Because they did not go out with us, we will not share with them the plunder we recovered. However, each man may take his wife and children and go.”

²³David replied, “No, my brothers, you must not do that with what the LORD has given us. He has protected us and delivered into our hands the raiding party that came against us. ²⁴Who will listen to what you say? The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike.” ²⁵David made this a statute and ordinance for Israel from that day to this.

²⁶When David reached Ziklag, he sent some of the plunder to the elders of Judah, who were his friends, saying, “Here is a gift for you from the plunder of the LORD’s enemies.”

²⁷David sent it to those who were in Bethel, Ramoth Negev and Jattir; ²⁸to those in Aroer, Siphmoth, Eshtemoa ²⁹and Rakal; to those in the towns of the Jerahmeelites and the Kenites; ³⁰to those in Hormah, Bor Ashan, Athak ³¹and Hebron; and to those in all the other places where he and his men had roamed.

1 Samuel 31

Saul Takes His Life

¹Now the Philistines fought against Israel; the Israelites fled before them, and many fell dead on Mount Gilboa. ²The Philistines were in hot pursuit of Saul and his sons, and they killed his sons Jonathan, Abinadab and Malki-Shua. ³The fighting grew fierce around Saul, and when the archers overtook him, they wounded him critically.

⁴Saul said to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword and run me through, or these uncircumcised fellows will come and run me through and abuse me."

But his armor-bearer was terrified and would not do it; so Saul took his own sword and fell on it. ⁵When the armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he too fell on his sword and died with him. ⁶So Saul and his three sons and his armor-bearer and all his men died together that same day.

⁷When the Israelites along the valley and those across the Jordan saw that the Israelite army had fled and that Saul and his sons had died, they abandoned their towns and fled. And the Philistines came and occupied them.

⁸The next day, when the Philistines came to strip the dead, they found Saul and his three sons fallen on Mount Gilboa. ⁹They cut off his head and stripped off his armor, and they sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines to proclaim the news in the temple of their idols and among their people. ¹⁰They put his armor in the temple of the Ashtoreths and fastened his body to the wall of Beth Shan.

¹¹When the people of Jabesh Gilead heard what the Philistines had done to Saul, ¹²all their valiant men marched through the night to Beth Shan. They took down the bodies of Saul and his sons from the wall of Beth Shan and went to Jabesh, where they burned them. ¹³Then they took their bones and buried them under a tamarisk tree at Jabesh, and they fasted seven days.

2 Samuel

2 Samuel 1

David Hears of Saul's Death

¹After the death of Saul, David returned from striking down the Amalekites and stayed in Ziklag two days. ²On the third day a man arrived from Saul's camp with his clothes torn and dust on his head. When he came to David, he fell to the ground to pay him honor.

³"Where have you come from?" David asked him.

He answered, "I have escaped from the Israelite camp."

⁴"What happened?" David asked. "Tell me."

"The men fled from the battle," he replied. "Many of them fell and died. And Saul and his son Jonathan are dead."

⁵Then David said to the young man who brought him the report, "How do you know that Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?"

⁶"I happened to be on Mount Gilboa," the young man said, "and there was Saul, leaning on his spear, with the chariots and their drivers in hot pursuit.

⁷When he turned around and saw me, he called out to me, and I said, 'What can I do?'

⁸"He asked me, 'Who are you?'

" 'An Amalekite,' I answered.

⁹"Then he said to me, 'Stand here by me and kill me! I'm in the throes of death, but I'm still alive.'

¹⁰"So I stood beside him and killed him, because I knew that after he had fallen he could not survive. And I took the crown that was on his head and the band on his arm and have brought them here to my lord."

¹¹Then David and all the men with him took hold of their clothes and tore them. ¹²They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the LORD and for the nation of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.

¹³David said to the young man who brought him the report, "Where are you from?"

"I am the son of a foreigner, an Amalekite," he answered.

¹⁴David asked him, “Why weren’t you afraid to lift your hand to destroy the LORD’s anointed?”

¹⁵Then David called one of his men and said, “Go, strike him down!” So he struck him down, and he died. ¹⁶For David had said to him, “Your blood be on your own head. Your own mouth testified against you when you said, ‘I killed the LORD’s anointed.’ ”

David’s Lament for Saul and Jonathan

¹⁷David took up this lament concerning Saul and his son Jonathan, ¹⁸and he ordered that the people of Judah be taught this lament of the bow (it is written in the Book of Jashar):

¹⁹“A gazelle lies slain on your heights, Israel.
How the mighty have fallen!

²⁰“Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon,
lest the daughters of the Philistines be glad, lest the daughters of the
uncircumcised rejoice.

²¹“Mountains of Gilboa, may you have neither dew nor rain,
may no showers fall on your terraced fields.
For there the shield of the mighty was despised, the shield of Saul—
no longer rubbed with oil.

²²“From the blood of the slain, from the flesh of the mighty,
the bow of Jonathan did not turn back,
the sword of Saul did not return unsatisfied.

²³Saul and Jonathan— in life they were loved and admired,
and in death they were not parted.
They were swifter than eagles,
they were stronger than lions.

²⁴“Daughters of Israel, weep for Saul,
who clothed you in scarlet and finery,
who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold.

²⁵“How the mighty have fallen in battle!
Jonathan lies slain on your heights.

²⁶I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me.
Your love for me was wonderful,
more wonderful than that of women.

²⁷“How the mighty have fallen!
The weapons of war have perished!”

2 Samuel 2

David Anointed King Over Judah

¹In the course of time, David inquired of the LORD. “Shall I go up to one of the towns of Judah?” he asked.

The LORD said, “Go up.”

David asked, “Where shall I go?”

“To Hebron,” the LORD answered.

²So David went up there with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel. ³David also took the men who were with him, each with his family, and they settled in Hebron and its towns. ⁴Then the men of Judah came to Hebron, and there they anointed David king over the tribe of Judah.

When David was told that it was the men from Jabesh Gilead who had buried Saul, ⁵he sent messengers to them to say to them, “The LORD bless you for showing this kindness to Saul your master by burying him. ⁶May the LORD now show you kindness and faithfulness, and I too will show you the same favor because you have done this. ⁷Now then, be strong and brave, for Saul your master is dead, and the people of Judah have anointed me king over them.”

War Between the Houses of David and Saul

⁸Meanwhile, Abner son of Ner, the commander of Saul’s army, had taken Ish-Bosheth son of Saul and brought him over to Mahanaim. ⁹He made him king over Gilead, Ashuri and Jezreel, and also over Ephraim, Benjamin and all Israel.

¹⁰Ish-Bosheth son of Saul was forty years old when he became king over Israel, and he reigned two years. The tribe of Judah, however, remained loyal to David. ¹¹The length of time David was king in Hebron over Judah was seven years and six months.

¹²Abner son of Ner, together with the men of Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, left Mahanaim and went to Gibeon. ¹³Joab son of Zeruiah and David’s men went out and met them at the pool of Gibeon. One group sat down on one side of the pool and one group on the other side.

¹⁴Then Abner said to Joab, “Let’s have some of the young men get up and

fight hand to hand in front of us.”

“All right, let them do it,” Joab said.

¹⁵So they stood up and were counted off—twelve men for Benjamin and Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, and twelve for David. ¹⁶Then each man grabbed his opponent by the head and thrust his dagger into his opponent’s side, and they fell down together. So that place in Gibeon was called Helkath Hazzurim.

¹⁷The battle that day was very fierce, and Abner and the Israelites were defeated by David’s men.

¹⁸The three sons of Zeruiah were there: Joab, Abishai and Asahel. Now Asahel was as fleet-footed as a wild gazelle. ¹⁹He chased Abner, turning neither to the right nor to the left as he pursued him. ²⁰Abner looked behind him and asked, “Is that you, Asahel?”

“It is,” he answered.

²¹Then Abner said to him, “Turn aside to the right or to the left; take on one of the young men and strip him of his weapons.” But Asahel would not stop chasing him.

²²Again Abner warned Asahel, “Stop chasing me! Why should I strike you down? How could I look your brother Joab in the face?”

²³But Asahel refused to give up the pursuit; so Abner thrust the butt of his spear into Asahel’s stomach, and the spear came out through his back. He fell there and died on the spot. And every man stopped when he came to the place where Asahel had fallen and died.

²⁴But Joab and Abishai pursued Abner, and as the sun was setting, they came to the hill of Ammah, near Giah on the way to the wasteland of Gibeon. ²⁵Then the men of Benjamin rallied behind Abner. They formed themselves into a group and took their stand on top of a hill.

²⁶Abner called out to Joab, “Must the sword devour forever? Don’t you realize that this will end in bitterness? How long before you order your men to stop pursuing their fellow Israelites?”

²⁷Joab answered, “As surely as God lives, if you had not spoken, the men would have continued pursuing them until morning.”

²⁸So Joab blew the trumpet, and all the troops came to a halt; they no longer pursued Israel, nor did they fight anymore.

²⁹All that night Abner and his men marched through the Arabah. They crossed the Jordan, continued through the morning hours and came to Mahanaim.

³⁰Then Joab stopped pursuing Abner and assembled the whole army.

Besides Asahel, nineteen of David's men were found missing. ³¹But David's men had killed three hundred and sixty Benjamites who were with Abner. ³²They took Asahel and buried him in his father's tomb at Bethlehem. Then Joab and his men marched all night and arrived at Hebron by daybreak.

2 Samuel 3

¹The war between the house of Saul and the house of David lasted a long time. David grew stronger and stronger, while the house of Saul grew weaker and weaker.

²Sons were born to David in Hebron: His firstborn was Amnon the son of Ahinoam of Jezreel; ³his second, Kileab the son of Abigail the widow of Nabal of Carmel; the third, Absalom the son of Maakah daughter of Talmai king of Geshur; ⁴the fourth, Adonijah the son of Haggith; the fifth, Shephatiah the son of Abital;

⁵and the sixth, Ithream the son of David's wife Eglah.
These were born to David in Hebron.

Abner Goes Over to David

⁶During the war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner had been strengthening his own position in the house of Saul. ⁷Now Saul had had a concubine named Rizpah daughter of Aiah. And Ish-Bosheth said to Abner, “Why did you sleep with my father’s concubine?”

⁸Abner was very angry because of what Ish-Bosheth said. So he answered, “Am I a dog’s head—on Judah’s side? This very day I am loyal to the house of your father Saul and to his family and friends. I haven’t handed you over to David. Yet now you accuse me of an offense involving this woman! ⁹May God deal with Abner, be it ever so severely, if I do not do for David what the LORD promised him on oath ¹⁰and transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and establish David’s throne over Israel and Judah from Dan to Beersheba.” ¹¹Ish-Bosheth did not dare to say another word to Abner, because he was afraid of him.

¹²Then Abner sent messengers on his behalf to say to David, “Whose land is it? Make an agreement with me, and I will help you bring all Israel over to you.”

¹³“Good,” said David. “I will make an agreement with you. But I demand one thing of you: Do not come into my presence unless you bring Michal daughter of Saul when you come to see me.” ¹⁴Then David sent messengers to Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, demanding, “Give me my wife Michal, whom I betrothed to myself for the price of a hundred Philistine foreskins.”

¹⁵So Ish-Bosheth gave orders and had her taken away from her husband Paltiel son of Laish. ¹⁶Her husband, however, went with her, weeping behind her all the way to Bahurim. Then Abner said to him, “Go back home!” So he went back.

¹⁷Abner conferred with the elders of Israel and said, “For some time you have wanted to make David your king. ¹⁸Now do it! For the LORD promised David, ‘By my servant David I will rescue my people Israel from the hand of the Philistines and from the hand of all their enemies.’ ”

¹⁹Abner also spoke to the Benjamites in person. Then he went to Hebron to tell David everything that Israel and the whole tribe of Benjamin wanted to do. ²⁰When Abner, who had twenty men with him, came to David at Hebron, David prepared a feast for him and his men. ²¹Then Abner said to David,

“Let me go at once and assemble all Israel for my lord the king, so that they may make a covenant with you, and that you may rule over all that your heart desires.” So David sent Abner away, and he went in peace.

Joab Murders Abner

²²Just then David's men and Joab returned from a raid and brought with them a great deal of plunder. But Abner was no longer with David in Hebron, because David had sent him away, and he had gone in peace. ²³When Joab and all the soldiers with him arrived, he was told that Abner son of Ner had come to the king and that the king had sent him away and that he had gone in peace.

²⁴So Joab went to the king and said, "What have you done? Look, Abner came to you. Why did you let him go? Now he is gone! ²⁵You know Abner son of Ner; he came to deceive you and observe your movements and find out everything you are doing."

²⁶Joab then left David and sent messengers after Abner, and they brought him back from the cistern at Sirah. But David did not know it. ²⁷Now when Abner returned to Hebron, Joab took him aside into an inner chamber, as if to speak with him privately. And there, to avenge the blood of his brother Asahel, Joab stabbed him in the stomach, and he died.

²⁸Later, when David heard about this, he said, "I and my kingdom are forever innocent before the LORD concerning the blood of Abner son of Ner. ²⁹May his blood fall on the head of Joab and on his whole family! May Joab's family never be without someone who has a running sore or leprosy or who leans on a crutch or who falls by the sword or who lacks food."

³⁰(Joab and his brother Abishai murdered Abner because he had killed their brother Asahel in the battle at Gibeon.)

³¹Then David said to Joab and all the people with him, "Tear your clothes and put on sackcloth and walk in mourning in front of Abner." King David himself walked behind the bier. ³²They buried Abner in Hebron, and the king wept aloud at Abner's tomb. All the people wept also.

³³The king sang this lament for Abner:

"Should Abner have died as the lawless die?

³⁴Your hands were not bound,
your feet were not fettered.

You fell as one falls before the wicked."

And all the people wept over him again.

³⁵Then they all came and urged David to eat something while it was still day; but David took an oath, saying, “May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if I taste bread or anything else before the sun sets!”

³⁶All the people took note and were pleased; indeed, everything the king did pleased them. ³⁷So on that day all the people there and all Israel knew that the king had no part in the murder of Abner son of Ner.

³⁸Then the king said to his men, “Do you not realize that a commander and a great man has fallen in Israel this day? ³⁹And today, though I am the anointed king, I am weak, and these sons of Zeruiah are too strong for me. May the LORD repay the evildoer according to his evil deeds!”

2 Samuel 4

Ish-Bosheth Murdered

¹When Ish-Bosheth son of Saul heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he lost courage, and all Israel became alarmed. ²Now Saul's son had two men who were leaders of raiding bands. One was named Baanah and the other Rekab; they were sons of Rimmon the Beerothite from the tribe of Benjamin—Beeroth is considered part of Benjamin, ³because the people of Beeroth fled to Gittaim and have resided there as foreigners to this day.

⁴(Jonathan son of Saul had a son who was lame in both feet. He was five years old when the news about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel. His nurse picked him up and fled, but as she hurried to leave, he fell and became disabled. His name was Mephibosheth.)

⁵Now Rekab and Baanah, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, set out for the house of Ish-Bosheth, and they arrived there in the heat of the day while he was taking his noonday rest. ⁶They went into the inner part of the house as if to get some wheat, and they stabbed him in the stomach. Then Rekab and his brother Baanah slipped away.

⁷They had gone into the house while he was lying on the bed in his bedroom. After they stabbed and killed him, they cut off his head. Taking it with them, they traveled all night by way of the Arabah. ⁸They brought the head of Ish-Bosheth to David at Hebron and said to the king, "Here is the head of Ish-Bosheth son of Saul, your enemy, who tried to kill you. This day the LORD has avenged my lord the king against Saul and his offspring."

⁹David answered Rekab and his brother Baanah, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, "As surely as the LORD lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble, ¹⁰when someone told me, 'Saul is dead,' and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and put him to death in Ziklag. That was the reward I gave him for his news! ¹¹How much more—when wicked men have killed an innocent man in his own house and on his own bed—should I not now demand his blood from your hand and rid the earth of you!"

¹²So David gave an order to his men, and they killed them. They cut off their hands and feet and hung the bodies by the pool in Hebron. But they took the head of Ish-Bosheth and buried it in Abner's tomb at Hebron.

2 Samuel 5

David Becomes King Over Israel

¹All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, “We are your own flesh and blood. ²In the past, while Saul was king over us, you were the one who led Israel on their military campaigns. And the LORD said to you, ‘You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will become their ruler.’ ”

³When all the elders of Israel had come to King David at Hebron, the king made a covenant with them at Hebron before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel.

⁴David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years. ⁵In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years.

David Conquers Jerusalem

⁶The king and his men marched to Jerusalem to attack the Jebusites, who lived there. The Jebusites said to David, “You will not get in here; even the blind and the lame can ward you off.” They thought, “David cannot get in here.” ⁷Nevertheless, David captured the fortress of Zion—which is the City of David.

⁸On that day David had said, “Anyone who conquers the Jebusites will have to use the water shaft to reach those ‘lame and blind’ who are David’s enemies.” That is why they say, “The ‘blind and lame’ will not enter the palace.”

⁹David then took up residence in the fortress and called it the City of David. He built up the area around it, from the terraces inward. ¹⁰And he became more and more powerful, because the LORD God Almighty was with him.

¹¹Now Hiram king of Tyre sent envoys to David, along with cedar logs and carpenters and stonemasons, and they built a palace for David. ¹²Then David knew that the LORD had established him as king over Israel and had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel.

¹³After he left Hebron, David took more concubines and wives in Jerusalem, and more sons and daughters were born to him. ¹⁴These are the names of the children born to him there: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, ¹⁵Ibhar, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, ¹⁶Elishama, Eliada and Eliphelet.

David Defeats the Philistines

¹⁷When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, they went up in full force to search for him, but David heard about it and went down to the stronghold. ¹⁸Now the Philistines had come and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim; ¹⁹so David inquired of the LORD, “Shall I go and attack the Philistines? Will you deliver them into my hands?”

The LORD answered him, “Go, for I will surely deliver the Philistines into your hands.”

²⁰So David went to Baal Perazim, and there he defeated them. He said, “As waters break out, the LORD has broken out against my enemies before me.” So that place was called Baal Perazim. ²¹The Philistines abandoned their idols there, and David and his men carried them off.

²²Once more the Philistines came up and spread out in the Valley of Rephaim; ²³so David inquired of the LORD, and he answered, “Do not go straight up, but circle around behind them and attack them in front of the poplar trees. ²⁴As soon as you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the poplar trees, move quickly, because that will mean the LORD has gone out in front of you to strike the Philistine army.” ²⁵So David did as the LORD commanded him, and he struck down the Philistines all the way from Gibeon to Gezer.

2 Samuel 6

The Ark Brought to Jerusalem

¹David again brought together all the able young men of Israel—thirty thousand. ²He and all his men went to Baalah in Judah to bring up from there the ark of God, which is called by the Name, the name of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim on the ark. ³They set the ark of God on a new cart and brought it from the house of Abinadab, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, were guiding the new cart ⁴with the ark of God on it, and Ahio was walking in front of it. ⁵David and all Israel were celebrating with all their might before the LORD, with castanets, harps, lyres, timbrels, sistrums and cymbals.

⁶When they came to the threshing floor of Nakon, Uzzah reached out and took hold of the ark of God, because the oxen stumbled. ⁷The LORD's anger burned against Uzzah because of his irreverent act; therefore God struck him down, and he died there beside the ark of God.

⁸Then David was angry because the LORD's wrath had broken out against Uzzah, and to this day that place is called Perez Uzzah.

⁹David was afraid of the LORD that day and said, "How can the ark of the LORD ever come to me?" ¹⁰He was not willing to take the ark of the LORD to be with him in the City of David. Instead, he took it to the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite. ¹¹The ark of the LORD remained in the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite for three months, and the LORD blessed him and his entire household.

¹²Now King David was told, "The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-Edom and everything he has, because of the ark of God." So David went to bring up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with rejoicing. ¹³When those who were carrying the ark of the LORD had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. ¹⁴Wearing a linen ephod, David was dancing before the LORD with all his might, ¹⁵while he and all Israel were bringing up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets.

¹⁶As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart.

¹⁷They brought the ark of the LORD and set it in its place inside the tent

that David had pitched for it, and David sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the LORD. ¹⁸After he had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD Almighty. ¹⁹Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each person in the whole crowd of Israelites, both men and women. And all the people went to their homes.

²⁰When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, “How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, going around half-naked in full view of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!”

²¹David said to Michal, “It was before the LORD, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the LORD’s people Israel—I will celebrate before the LORD. ²²I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor.”

²³And Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death.

2 Samuel 7

God's Promise to David

¹After the king was settled in his palace and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies around him, ²he said to Nathan the prophet, "Here I am, living in a house of cedar, while the ark of God remains in a tent."

³Nathan replied to the king, "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the LORD is with you."

⁴But that night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, saying:

⁵"Go and tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD says: Are you the one to build me a house to dwell in? ⁶I have not dwelt in a house from the day I brought the Israelites up out of Egypt to this day. I have been moving from place to place with a tent as my dwelling. ⁷Wherever I have moved with all the Israelites, did I ever say to any of their rulers whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"'

⁸"Now then, tell my servant David, 'This is what the LORD Almighty says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, and appointed you ruler over my people Israel. ⁹I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies from before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. ¹⁰And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people will not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning ¹¹and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.

" 'The LORD declares to you that the LORD himself will establish a house for you: ¹²When your days are over and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, your own flesh and blood, and I will establish

his kingdom. ¹³He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. ¹⁴I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him with a rod wielded by men, with floggings inflicted by human hands. ¹⁵But my love will never be taken away from him, as I took it away from Saul, whom I removed from before you. ¹⁶Your house and your kingdom will endure forever before me; your throne will be established forever.’ ”

¹⁷Nathan reported to David all the words of this entire revelation.

David's Prayer

¹⁸Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and he said:

“Who am I, Sovereign LORD, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far? ¹⁹And as if this were not enough in your sight, Sovereign LORD, you have also spoken about the future of the house of your servant—and this decree, Sovereign LORD, is for a mere human!

²⁰“What more can David say to you? For you know your servant, Sovereign LORD. ²¹For the sake of your word and according to your will, you have done this great thing and made it known to your servant.

²²“How great you are, Sovereign LORD! There is no one like you, and there is no God but you, as we have heard with our own ears. ²³And who is like your people Israel—the one nation on earth that God went out to redeem as a people for himself, and to make a name for himself, and to perform great and awesome wonders by driving out nations and their gods from before your people, whom you redeemed from Egypt? ²⁴You have established your people Israel as your very own forever, and you, LORD, have become their God.

²⁵“And now, LORD God, keep forever the promise you have made concerning your servant and his house. Do as you

promised, ²⁶so that your name will be great forever. Then people will say, ‘The LORD Almighty is God over Israel!’ And the house of your servant David will be established in your sight.

²⁷“LORD Almighty, God of Israel, you have revealed this to your servant, saying, ‘I will build a house for you.’ So your servant has found courage to pray this prayer to you. ²⁸Sovereign LORD, you are God! Your covenant is trustworthy, and you have promised these good things to your servant. ²⁹Now be pleased to bless the house of your servant, that it may continue forever in your sight; for you, Sovereign LORD, have spoken, and with your blessing the house of your servant will be blessed forever.”

2 Samuel 8

David's Victories

¹In the course of time, David defeated the Philistines and subdued them, and he took Metheg Ammah from the control of the Philistines.

²David also defeated the Moabites. He made them lie down on the ground and measured them off with a length of cord. Every two lengths of them were put to death, and the third length was allowed to live. So the Moabites became subject to David and brought him tribute.

³Moreover, David defeated Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah, when he went to restore his monument at the Euphrates River. ⁴David captured a thousand of his chariots, seven thousand charioteers and twenty thousand foot soldiers. He hamstringed all but a hundred of the chariot horses.

⁵When the Arameans of Damascus came to help Hadadezer king of Zobah, David struck down twenty-two thousand of them. ⁶He put garrisons in the Aramean kingdom of Damascus, and the Arameans became subject to him and brought tribute. The LORD gave David victory wherever he went.

⁷David took the gold shields that belonged to the officers of Hadadezer and brought them to Jerusalem. ⁸From Tebah and Berothai, towns that belonged to Hadadezer, King David took a great quantity of bronze.

⁹When Tou king of Hamath heard that David had defeated the entire army of Hadadezer, ¹⁰he sent his son Joram to King David to greet him and congratulate him on his victory in battle over Hadadezer, who had been at war with Tou. Joram brought with him articles of silver, of gold and of bronze.

¹¹King David dedicated these articles to the LORD, as he had done with the silver and gold from all the nations he had subdued: ¹²Edom and Moab, the Ammonites and the Philistines, and Amalek. He also dedicated the plunder taken from Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah.

¹³And David became famous after he returned from striking down eighteen thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt.

¹⁴He put garrisons throughout Edom, and all the Edomites became subject to David. The LORD gave David victory wherever he went.

David's Officials

¹⁵David reigned over all Israel, doing what was just and right for all his people. ¹⁶Joab son of Zeruah was over the army; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was recorder; ¹⁷Zadok son of Ahitub and Ahimelek son of Abiathar were priests; Seraiah was secretary; ¹⁸Benaiah son of Jehoiada was over the Kerethites and Pelethites; and David's sons were priests.

2 Samuel 9

David and Mephibosheth

¹David asked, “Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan’s sake?”

²Now there was a servant of Saul’s household named Ziba. They summoned him to appear before David, and the king said to him, “Are you Ziba?”

“At your service,” he replied.

³The king asked, “Is there no one still alive from the house of Saul to whom I can show God’s kindness?”

Ziba answered the king, “There is still a son of Jonathan; he is lame in both feet.”

⁴“Where is he?” the king asked.

Ziba answered, “He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar.”

⁵So King David had him brought from Lo Debar, from the house of Makir son of Ammiel.

⁶When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor.

David said, “Mephibosheth!”

“At your service,” he replied.

⁷“Don’t be afraid,” David said to him, “for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table.”

⁸Mephibosheth bowed down and said, “What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?”

⁹Then the king summoned Ziba, Saul’s steward, and said to him, “I have given your master’s grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. ¹⁰You and your sons and your servants are to farm the land for him and bring in the crops, so that your master’s grandson may be provided for. And Mephibosheth, grandson of your master, will always eat at my table.” (Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.)

¹¹Then Ziba said to the king, “Your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands his servant to do.” So Mephibosheth ate at David’s table like one of the king’s sons.

¹²Mephibosheth had a young son named Mika, and all the members of Ziba’s household were servants of Mephibosheth. ¹³And Mephibosheth lived

in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king's table; he was lame in both feet.

2 Samuel 10

David Defeats the Ammonites

¹In the course of time, the king of the Ammonites died, and his son Hanun succeeded him as king. ²David thought, “I will show kindness to Hanun son of Nahash, just as his father showed kindness to me.” So David sent a delegation to express his sympathy to Hanun concerning his father.

When David’s men came to the land of the Ammonites, ³the Ammonite commanders said to Hanun their lord, “Do you think David is honoring your father by sending envoys to you to express sympathy? Hasn’t David sent them to you only to explore the city and spy it out and overthrow it?” ⁴So Hanun seized David’s envoys, shaved off half of each man’s beard, cut off their garments at the buttocks, and sent them away.

⁵When David was told about this, he sent messengers to meet the men, for they were greatly humiliated. The king said, “Stay at Jericho till your beards have grown, and then come back.”

⁶When the Ammonites realized that they had become obnoxious to David, they hired twenty thousand Aramean foot soldiers from Beth Rehob and Zobah, as well as the king of Maakah with a thousand men, and also twelve thousand men from Tob.

⁷On hearing this, David sent Joab out with the entire army of fighting men. ⁸The Ammonites came out and drew up in battle formation at the entrance of their city gate, while the Arameans of Zobah and Rehob and the men of Tob and Maakah were by themselves in the open country.

⁹Joab saw that there were battle lines in front of him and behind him; so he selected some of the best troops in Israel and deployed them against the Arameans. ¹⁰He put the rest of the men under the command of Abishai his brother and deployed them against the Ammonites. ¹¹Joab said, “If the Arameans are too strong for me, then you are to come to my rescue; but if the Ammonites are too strong for you, then I will come to rescue you. ¹²Be strong, and let us fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The LORD will do what is good in his sight.”

¹³Then Joab and the troops with him advanced to fight the Arameans, and they fled before him. ¹⁴When the Ammonites realized that the Arameans were fleeing, they fled before Abishai and went inside the city. So Joab returned from fighting the Ammonites and came to Jerusalem.

¹⁵After the Arameans saw that they had been routed by Israel, they

regrouped. ¹⁶Hadadezer had Arameans brought from beyond the Euphrates River; they went to Helam, with Shobak the commander of Hadadezer's army leading them.

¹⁷When David was told of this, he gathered all Israel, crossed the Jordan and went to Helam. The Arameans formed their battle lines to meet David and fought against him. ¹⁸But they fled before Israel, and David killed seven hundred of their charioteers and forty thousand of their foot soldiers. He also struck down Shobak the commander of their army, and he died there. ¹⁹When all the kings who were vassals of Hadadezer saw that they had been routed by Israel, they made peace with the Israelites and became subject to them.

So the Arameans were afraid to help the Ammonites anymore.

2 Samuel 11

David and Bathsheba

¹In the spring, at the time when kings go off to war, David sent Joab out with the king's men and the whole Israelite army. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah. But David remained in Jerusalem.

²One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, ³and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite." ⁴Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.) Then she went back home. ⁵The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying, "I am pregnant."

⁶So David sent this word to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hittite." And Joab sent him to David. ⁷When Uriah came to him, David asked him how Joab was, how the soldiers were and how the war was going. ⁸Then David said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king was sent after him. ⁹But Uriah slept at the entrance to the palace with all his master's servants and did not go down to his house.

¹⁰David was told, "Uriah did not go home." So he asked Uriah, "Haven't you just come from a military campaign? Why didn't you go home?"

¹¹Uriah said to David, "The ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my commander Joab and my lord's men are camped in the open country. How could I go to my house to eat and drink and make love to my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing!"

¹²Then David said to him, "Stay here one more day, and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah remained in Jerusalem that day and the next. ¹³At David's invitation, he ate and drank with him, and David made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to sleep on his mat among his master's servants; he did not go home.

¹⁴In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. ¹⁵In it he wrote, "Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die."

¹⁶So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were. ¹⁷When the men of the city came out and

fought against Joab, some of the men in David's army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died.

¹⁸Joab sent David a full account of the battle. ¹⁹He instructed the messenger: "When you have finished giving the king this account of the battle, ²⁰the king's anger may flare up, and he may ask you, 'Why did you get so close to the city to fight? Didn't you know they would shoot arrows from the wall? ²¹Who killed Abimelek son of Jerub-Besheth? Didn't a woman drop an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died in Thebez? Why did you get so close to the wall?' If he asks you this, then say to him, 'Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead.' "

²²The messenger set out, and when he arrived he told David everything Joab had sent him to say. ²³The messenger said to David, "The men overpowered us and came out against us in the open, but we drove them back to the entrance of the city gate. ²⁴Then the archers shot arrows at your servants from the wall, and some of the king's men died. Moreover, your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead."

²⁵David told the messenger, "Say this to Joab: 'Don't let this upset you; the sword devours one as well as another. Press the attack against the city and destroy it.' Say this to encourage Joab."

²⁶When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him. ²⁷After the time of mourning was over, David had her brought to his house, and she became his wife and bore him a son. But the thing David had done displeased the LORD.

2 Samuel 12

Nathan Rebukes David

¹The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, “There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. ²The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, ³but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.

⁴“Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man refrained from taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man and prepared it for the one who had come to him.”

⁵David burned with anger against the man and said to Nathan, “As surely as the LORD lives, the man who did this must die! ⁶He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity.”

⁷Then Nathan said to David, “You are the man! This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you from the hand of Saul. ⁸I gave your master’s house to you, and your master’s wives into your arms. I gave you all Israel and Judah. And if all this had been too little, I would have given you even more. ⁹Why did you despise the word of the LORD by doing what is evil in his eyes? You struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword and took his wife to be your own. You killed him with the sword of the Ammonites. ¹⁰Now, therefore, the sword will never depart from your house, because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own.’

¹¹“This is what the LORD says: ‘Out of your own household I am going to bring calamity on you. Before your very eyes I will take your wives and give them to one who is close to you, and he will sleep with your wives in broad daylight. ¹²You did it in secret, but I will do this thing in broad daylight before all Israel.’ ”

¹³Then David said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the LORD.”

Nathan replied, “The LORD has taken away your sin. You are not going to die. ¹⁴But because by doing this you have shown utter contempt for the LORD, the son born to you will die.”

¹⁵After Nathan had gone home, the LORD struck the child that Uriah’s

wife had borne to David, and he became ill. ¹⁶David pleaded with God for the child. He fasted and spent the nights lying in sackcloth on the ground. ¹⁷The elders of his household stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he refused, and he would not eat any food with them.

¹⁸On the seventh day the child died. David's attendants were afraid to tell him that the child was dead, for they thought, "While the child was still living, he wouldn't listen to us when we spoke to him. How can we now tell him the child is dead? He may do something desperate."

¹⁹David noticed that his attendants were whispering among themselves, and he realized the child was dead. "Is the child dead?" he asked.

"Yes," they replied, "he is dead."

²⁰Then David got up from the ground. After he had washed, put on lotions and changed his clothes, he went into the house of the LORD and worshiped. Then he went to his own house, and at his request they served him food, and he ate.

²¹His attendants asked him, "Why are you acting this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept, but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!"

²²He answered, "While the child was still alive, I fasted and wept. I thought, 'Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let the child live.' ²³But now that he is dead, why should I go on fasting? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me."

²⁴Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and he went to her and made love to her. She gave birth to a son, and they named him Solomon. The LORD loved him; ²⁵and because the LORD loved him, he sent word through Nathan the prophet to name him Jedidiah.

²⁶Meanwhile Joab fought against Rabbah of the Ammonites and captured the royal citadel. ²⁷Joab then sent messengers to David, saying, "I have fought against Rabbah and taken its water supply. ²⁸Now muster the rest of the troops and besiege the city and capture it. Otherwise I will take the city, and it will be named after me."

²⁹So David mustered the entire army and went to Rabbah, and attacked and captured it. ³⁰David took the crown from their king's head, and it was placed on his own head. It weighed a talent of gold, and it was set with precious stones. David took a great quantity of plunder from the city ³¹and brought out the people who were there, consigning them to labor with saws and with iron picks and axes, and he made them work at brickmaking. David did this to all

the Ammonite towns. Then he and his entire army returned to Jerusalem.

2 Samuel 13

Amnon and Tamar

¹In the course of time, Amnon son of David fell in love with Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom son of David.

²Amnon became so obsessed with his sister Tamar that he made himself ill. She was a virgin, and it seemed impossible for him to do anything to her.

³Now Amnon had an adviser named Jonadab son of Shimeah, David's brother. Jonadab was a very shrewd man. ⁴He asked Amnon, "Why do you, the king's son, look so haggard morning after morning? Won't you tell me?"

Amnon said to him, "I'm in love with Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister."

⁵"Go to bed and pretend to be ill," Jonadab said. "When your father comes to see you, say to him, 'I would like my sister Tamar to come and give me something to eat. Let her prepare the food in my sight so I may watch her and then eat it from her hand.'"

⁶So Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill. When the king came to see him, Amnon said to him, "I would like my sister Tamar to come and make some special bread in my sight, so I may eat from her hand."

⁷David sent word to Tamar at the palace: "Go to the house of your brother Amnon and prepare some food for him." ⁸So Tamar went to the house of her brother Amnon, who was lying down. She took some dough, kneaded it, made the bread in his sight and baked it. ⁹Then she took the pan and served him the bread, but he refused to eat.

"Send everyone out of here," Amnon said. So everyone left him. ¹⁰Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food here into my bedroom so I may eat from your hand." And Tamar took the bread she had prepared and brought it to her brother Amnon in his bedroom. ¹¹But when she took it to him to eat, he grabbed her and said, "Come to bed with me, my sister."

¹²"No, my brother!" she said to him. "Don't force me! Such a thing should not be done in Israel! Don't do this wicked thing. ¹³What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you? You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel. Please speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you." ¹⁴But he refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her.

¹⁵Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. Amnon said to her, "Get up and get out!"

¹⁶“No!” she said to him. “Sending me away would be a greater wrong than what you have already done to me.”

But he refused to listen to her. ¹⁷He called his personal servant and said, “Get this woman out of my sight and bolt the door after her.” ¹⁸So his servant put her out and bolted the door after her. She was wearing an ornate robe, for this was the kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore. ¹⁹Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornate robe she was wearing. She put her hands on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went.

²⁰Her brother Absalom said to her, “Has that Amnon, your brother, been with you? Be quiet for now, my sister; he is your brother. Don’t take this thing to heart.” And Tamar lived in her brother Absalom’s house, a desolate woman.

²¹When King David heard all this, he was furious. ²²And Absalom never said a word to Amnon, either good or bad; he hated Amnon because he had disgraced his sister Tamar.

Absalom Kills Amnon

²³Two years later, when Absalom's sheepshearers were at Baal Hazor near the border of Ephraim, he invited all the king's sons to come there. ²⁴Absalom went to the king and said, "Your servant has had shearers come. Will the king and his attendants please join me?"

²⁵"No, my son," the king replied. "All of us should not go; we would only be a burden to you." Although Absalom urged him, he still refused to go but gave him his blessing.

²⁶Then Absalom said, "If not, please let my brother Amnon come with us."

The king asked him, "Why should he go with you?" ²⁷But Absalom urged him, so he sent with him Amnon and the rest of the king's sons.

²⁸Absalom ordered his men, "Listen! When Amnon is in high spirits from drinking wine and I say to you, 'Strike Amnon down,' then kill him. Don't be afraid. Haven't I given you this order? Be strong and brave." ²⁹So Absalom's men did to Amnon what Absalom had ordered. Then all the king's sons got up, mounted their mules and fled.

³⁰While they were on their way, the report came to David: "Absalom has struck down all the king's sons; not one of them is left." ³¹The king stood up, tore his clothes and lay down on the ground; and all his attendants stood by with their clothes torn.

³²But Jonadab son of Shimeah, David's brother, said, "My lord should not think that they killed all the princes; only Amnon is dead. This has been Absalom's express intention ever since the day Amnon raped his sister Tamar. ³³My lord the king should not be concerned about the report that all the king's sons are dead. Only Amnon is dead."

³⁴Meanwhile, Absalom had fled.

Now the man standing watch looked up and saw many people on the road west of him, coming down the side of the hill. The watchman went and told the king, "I see men in the direction of Horonaim, on the side of the hill."

³⁵Jonadab said to the king, "See, the king's sons have come; it has happened just as your servant said."

³⁶As he finished speaking, the king's sons came in, wailing loudly. The king, too, and all his attendants wept very bitterly.

³⁷Absalom fled and went to Talmai son of Ammihud, the king of Geshur.

But King David mourned many days for his son.

³⁸After Absalom fled and went to Geshur, he stayed there three years.
³⁹And King David longed to go to Absalom, for he was consoled concerning Amnon's death.

2 Samuel 14

Absalom Returns to Jerusalem

¹Joab son of Zeruiah knew that the king's heart longed for Absalom. ²So Joab sent someone to Tekoa and had a wise woman brought from there. He said to her, "Pretend you are in mourning. Dress in mourning clothes, and don't use any cosmetic lotions. Act like a woman who has spent many days grieving for the dead. ³Then go to the king and speak these words to him." And Joab put the words in her mouth.

⁴When the woman from Tekoa went to the king, she fell with her face to the ground to pay him honor, and she said, "Help me, Your Majesty!"

⁵The king asked her, "What is troubling you?"

She said, "I am a widow; my husband is dead. ⁶I your servant had two sons. They got into a fight with each other in the field, and no one was there to separate them. One struck the other and killed him. ⁷Now the whole clan has risen up against your servant; they say, 'Hand over the one who struck his brother down, so that we may put him to death for the life of his brother whom he killed; then we will get rid of the heir as well.' They would put out the only burning coal I have left, leaving my husband neither name nor descendant on the face of the earth."

⁸The king said to the woman, "Go home, and I will issue an order in your behalf."

⁹But the woman from Tekoa said to him, "Let my lord the king pardon me and my family, and let the king and his throne be without guilt."

¹⁰The king replied, "If anyone says anything to you, bring them to me, and they will not bother you again."

¹¹She said, "Then let the king invoke the LORD his God to prevent the avenger of blood from adding to the destruction, so that my son will not be destroyed."

"As surely as the LORD lives," he said, "not one hair of your son's head will fall to the ground."

¹²Then the woman said, "Let your servant speak a word to my lord the king."

"Speak," he replied.

¹³The woman said, "Why then have you devised a thing like this against the people of God? When the king says this, does he not convict himself, for the king has not brought back his banished son? ¹⁴Like water spilled on the

ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die. But that is not what God desires; rather, he devises ways so that a banished person does not remain banished from him.

¹⁵“And now I have come to say this to my lord the king because the people have made me afraid. Your servant thought, ‘I will speak to the king; perhaps he will grant his servant’s request. ¹⁶Perhaps the king will agree to deliver his servant from the hand of the man who is trying to cut off both me and my son from God’s inheritance.’”

¹⁷“And now your servant says, ‘May the word of my lord the king secure my inheritance, for my lord the king is like an angel of God in discerning good and evil. May the LORD your God be with you.’”

¹⁸Then the king said to the woman, “Don’t keep from me the answer to what I am going to ask you.”

“Let my lord the king speak,” the woman said.

¹⁹The king asked, “Isn’t the hand of Joab with you in all this?”

The woman answered, “As surely as you live, my lord the king, no one can turn to the right or to the left from anything my lord the king says. Yes, it was your servant Joab who instructed me to do this and who put all these words into the mouth of your servant. ²⁰Your servant Joab did this to change the present situation. My lord has wisdom like that of an angel of God—he knows everything that happens in the land.”

²¹The king said to Joab, “Very well, I will do it. Go, bring back the young man Absalom.”

²²Joab fell with his face to the ground to pay him honor, and he blessed the king. Joab said, “Today your servant knows that he has found favor in your eyes, my lord the king, because the king has granted his servant’s request.”

²³Then Joab went to Geshur and brought Absalom back to Jerusalem. ²⁴But the king said, “He must go to his own house; he must not see my face.” So Absalom went to his own house and did not see the face of the king.

²⁵In all Israel there was not a man so highly praised for his handsome appearance as Absalom. From the top of his head to the sole of his foot there was no blemish in him. ²⁶Whenever he cut the hair of his head—he used to cut his hair once a year because it became too heavy for him—he would weigh it, and its weight was two hundred shekels by the royal standard.

²⁷Three sons and a daughter were born to Absalom. His daughter’s name was Tamar, and she became a beautiful woman.

²⁸Absalom lived two years in Jerusalem without seeing the king’s face.

²⁹Then Absalom sent for Joab in order to send him to the king, but Joab refused to come to him. So he sent a second time, but he refused to come.

³⁰Then he said to his servants, “Look, Joab’s field is next to mine, and he has barley there. Go and set it on fire.” So Absalom’s servants set the field on fire.

³¹Then Joab did go to Absalom’s house, and he said to him, “Why have your servants set my field on fire?”

³²Absalom said to Joab, “Look, I sent word to you and said, ‘Come here so I can send you to the king to ask, “Why have I come from Geshur? It would be better for me if I were still there!” ’ Now then, I want to see the king’s face, and if I am guilty of anything, let him put me to death.”

³³So Joab went to the king and told him this. Then the king summoned Absalom, and he came in and bowed down with his face to the ground before the king. And the king kissed Absalom.

2 Samuel 15

Absalom's Conspiracy

¹In the course of time, Absalom provided himself with a chariot and horses and with fifty men to run ahead of him. ²He would get up early and stand by the side of the road leading to the city gate. Whenever anyone came with a complaint to be placed before the king for a decision, Absalom would call out to him, "What town are you from?" He would answer, "Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel." ³Then Absalom would say to him, "Look, your claims are valid and proper, but there is no representative of the king to hear you." ⁴And Absalom would add, "If only I were appointed judge in the land! Then everyone who has a complaint or case could come to me and I would see that they receive justice."

⁵Also, whenever anyone approached him to bow down before him, Absalom would reach out his hand, take hold of him and kiss him. ⁶Absalom behaved in this way toward all the Israelites who came to the king asking for justice, and so he stole the hearts of the people of Israel.

⁷At the end of four years, Absalom said to the king, "Let me go to Hebron and fulfill a vow I made to the LORD. ⁸While your servant was living at Geshur in Aram, I made this vow: 'If the LORD takes me back to Jerusalem, I will worship the LORD in Hebron.' "

⁹The king said to him, "Go in peace." So he went to Hebron.

¹⁰Then Absalom sent secret messengers throughout the tribes of Israel to say, "As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpets, then say, 'Absalom is king in Hebron.' " ¹¹Two hundred men from Jerusalem had accompanied Absalom. They had been invited as guests and went quite innocently, knowing nothing about the matter. ¹²While Absalom was offering sacrifices, he also sent for Ahithophel the Gilonite, David's counselor, to come from Giloh, his hometown. And so the conspiracy gained strength, and Absalom's following kept on increasing.

David Flees

¹³A messenger came and told David, “The hearts of the people of Israel are with Absalom.”

¹⁴Then David said to all his officials who were with him in Jerusalem, “Come! We must flee, or none of us will escape from Absalom. We must leave immediately, or he will move quickly to overtake us and bring ruin on us and put the city to the sword.”

¹⁵The king’s officials answered him, “Your servants are ready to do whatever our lord the king chooses.”

¹⁶The king set out, with his entire household following him; but he left ten concubines to take care of the palace. ¹⁷So the king set out, with all the people following him, and they halted at the edge of the city. ¹⁸All his men marched past him, along with all the Kerethites and Pelethites; and all the six hundred Gittites who had accompanied him from Gath marched before the king.

¹⁹The king said to Ittai the Gittite, “Why should you come along with us? Go back and stay with King Absalom. You are a foreigner, an exile from your homeland. ²⁰You came only yesterday. And today shall I make you wander about with us, when I do not know where I am going? Go back, and take your people with you. May the LORD show you kindness and faithfulness.”

²¹But Ittai replied to the king, “As surely as the LORD lives, and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king may be, whether it means life or death, there will your servant be.”

²²David said to Ittai, “Go ahead, march on.” So Ittai the Gittite marched on with all his men and the families that were with him.

²³The whole countryside wept aloud as all the people passed by. The king also crossed the Kidron Valley, and all the people moved on toward the wilderness.

²⁴Zadok was there, too, and all the Levites who were with him were carrying the ark of the covenant of God. They set down the ark of God, and Abiathar offered sacrifices until all the people had finished leaving the city.

²⁵Then the king said to Zadok, “Take the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the LORD’s eyes, he will bring me back and let me see it and

his dwelling place again. ²⁶But if he says, ‘I am not pleased with you,’ then I am ready; let him do to me whatever seems good to him.”

²⁷The king also said to Zadok the priest, “Do you understand? Go back to the city with my blessing. Take your son Ahimaaz with you, and also Abiathar’s son Jonathan. You and Abiathar return with your two sons. ²⁸I will wait at the fords in the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me.” ²⁹So Zadok and Abiathar took the ark of God back to Jerusalem and stayed there.

³⁰But David continued up the Mount of Olives, weeping as he went; his head was covered and he was barefoot. All the people with him covered their heads too and were weeping as they went up. ³¹Now David had been told, “Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.” So David prayed, “LORD, turn Ahithophel’s counsel into foolishness.”

³²When David arrived at the summit, where people used to worship God, Hushai the Arkite was there to meet him, his robe torn and dust on his head. ³³David said to him, “If you go with me, you will be a burden to me. ³⁴But if you return to the city and say to Absalom, ‘Your Majesty, I will be your servant; I was your father’s servant in the past, but now I will be your servant,’ then you can help me by frustrating Ahithophel’s advice. ³⁵Won’t the priests Zadok and Abiathar be there with you? Tell them anything you hear in the king’s palace. ³⁶Their two sons, Ahimaaz son of Zadok and Jonathan son of Abiathar, are there with them. Send them to me with anything you hear.”

³⁷So Hushai, David’s confidant, arrived at Jerusalem as Absalom was entering the city.

2 Samuel 16

David and Ziba

¹When David had gone a short distance beyond the summit, there was Ziba, the steward of Mephibosheth, waiting to meet him. He had a string of donkeys saddled and loaded with two hundred loaves of bread, a hundred cakes of raisins, a hundred cakes of figs and a skin of wine.

²The king asked Ziba, “Why have you brought these?”

Ziba answered, “The donkeys are for the king’s household to ride on, the bread and fruit are for the men to eat, and the wine is to refresh those who become exhausted in the wilderness.”

³The king then asked, “Where is your master’s grandson?”

Ziba said to him, “He is staying in Jerusalem, because he thinks, ‘Today the Israelites will restore to me my grandfather’s kingdom.’ ”

⁴Then the king said to Ziba, “All that belonged to Mephibosheth is now yours.”

“I humbly bow,” Ziba said. “May I find favor in your eyes, my lord the king.”

Shimei Curses David

⁵As King David approached Bahurim, a man from the same clan as Saul's family came out from there. His name was Shimei son of Gera, and he cursed as he came out. ⁶He pelted David and all the king's officials with stones, though all the troops and the special guard were on David's right and left. ⁷As he cursed, Shimei said, "Get out, get out, you murderer, you scoundrel! ⁸The LORD has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The LORD has given the kingdom into the hands of your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a murderer!"

⁹Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and cut off his head."

¹⁰But the king said, "What does this have to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the LORD said to him, 'Curse David,' who can ask, 'Why do you do this?' "

¹¹David then said to Abishai and all his officials, "My son, my own flesh and blood, is trying to kill me. How much more, then, this Benjamite! Leave him alone; let him curse, for the LORD has told him to. ¹²It may be that the LORD will look upon my misery and restore to me his covenant blessing instead of his curse today."

¹³So David and his men continued along the road while Shimei was going along the hillside opposite him, cursing as he went and throwing stones at him and showering him with dirt. ¹⁴The king and all the people with him arrived at their destination exhausted. And there he refreshed himself.

The Advice of Ahithophel and Hushai

¹⁵Meanwhile, Absalom and all the men of Israel came to Jerusalem, and Ahithophel was with him. ¹⁶Then Hushai the Arkite, David's confidant, went to Absalom and said to him, "Long live the king! Long live the king!"

¹⁷Absalom said to Hushai, "So this is the love you show your friend? If he's your friend, why didn't you go with him?"

¹⁸Hushai said to Absalom, "No, the one chosen by the LORD, by these

people, and by all the men of Israel—his I will be, and I will remain with him. ¹⁹Furthermore, whom should I serve? Should I not serve the son? Just as I served your father, so I will serve you.”

²⁰Absalom said to Ahithophel, “Give us your advice. What should we do?”

²¹Ahithophel answered, “Sleep with your father’s concubines whom he left to take care of the palace. Then all Israel will hear that you have made yourself obnoxious to your father, and the hands of everyone with you will be more resolute.” ²²So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof, and he slept with his father’s concubines in the sight of all Israel.

²³Now in those days the advice Ahithophel gave was like that of one who inquires of God. That was how both David and Absalom regarded all of Ahithophel’s advice.

2 Samuel 17

¹Ahithophel said to Absalom, “I would choose twelve thousand men and set out tonight in pursuit of David. ²I would attack him while he is weary and weak. I would strike him with terror, and then all the people with him will flee. I would strike down only the king ³and bring all the people back to you. The death of the man you seek will mean the return of all; all the people will be unharmed.” ⁴This plan seemed good to Absalom and to all the elders of Israel.

⁵But Absalom said, “Summon also Hushai the Arkite, so we can hear what he has to say as well.” ⁶When Hushai came to him, Absalom said, “Ahithophel has given this advice. Should we do what he says? If not, give us your opinion.”

⁷Hushai replied to Absalom, “The advice Ahithophel has given is not good this time. ⁸You know your father and his men; they are fighters, and as fierce as a wild bear robbed of her cubs. Besides, your father is an experienced fighter; he will not spend the night with the troops. ⁹Even now, he is hidden in a cave or some other place. If he should attack your troops first, whoever hears about it will say, ‘There has been a slaughter among the troops who follow Absalom.’ ¹⁰Then even the bravest soldier, whose heart is like the heart of a lion, will melt with fear, for all Israel knows that your father is a fighter and that those with him are brave.

¹¹“So I advise you: Let all Israel, from Dan to Beersheba—as numerous as the sand on the seashore—be gathered to you, with you yourself leading them into battle. ¹²Then we will attack him wherever he may be found, and we will fall on him as dew settles on the ground. Neither he nor any of his men will be left alive. ¹³If he withdraws into a city, then all Israel will bring ropes to that city, and we will drag it down to the valley until not so much as a pebble is left.”

¹⁴Absalom and all the men of Israel said, “The advice of Hushai the Arkite is better than that of Ahithophel.” For the LORD had determined to frustrate the good advice of Ahithophel in order to bring disaster on Absalom.

¹⁵Hushai told Zadok and Abiathar, the priests, “Ahithophel has advised Absalom and the elders of Israel to do such and such, but I have advised them

to do so and so. ¹⁶Now send a message at once and tell David, ‘Do not spend the night at the fords in the wilderness; cross over without fail, or the king and all the people with him will be swallowed up.’ ”

¹⁷Jonathan and Ahimaaz were staying at En Rogel. A female servant was to go and inform them, and they were to go and tell King David, for they could not risk being seen entering the city. ¹⁸But a young man saw them and told Absalom. So the two of them left at once and went to the house of a man in Bahurim. He had a well in his courtyard, and they climbed down into it. ¹⁹His wife took a covering and spread it out over the opening of the well and scattered grain over it. No one knew anything about it.

²⁰When Absalom’s men came to the woman at the house, they asked, “Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?”

The woman answered them, “They crossed over the brook.” The men searched but found no one, so they returned to Jerusalem.

²¹After they had gone, the two climbed out of the well and went to inform King David. They said to him, “Set out and cross the river at once; Ahithophel has advised such and such against you.” ²²So David and all the people with him set out and crossed the Jordan. By daybreak, no one was left who had not crossed the Jordan.

²³When Ahithophel saw that his advice had not been followed, he saddled his donkey and set out for his house in his hometown. He put his house in order and then hanged himself. So he died and was buried in his father’s tomb.

Absalom’s Death

²⁴David went to Mahanaim, and Absalom crossed the Jordan with all the men of Israel. ²⁵Absalom had appointed Amasa over the army in place of Joab. Amasa was the son of Jether, an Ishmaelite who had married Abigail, the daughter of Nahash and sister of Zeruah the mother of Joab. ²⁶The Israelites and Absalom camped in the land of Gilead.

²⁷When David came to Mahanaim, Shobi son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites, and Makir son of Ammiel from Lo Debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim ²⁸brought bedding and bowls and articles of pottery. They also brought wheat and barley, flour and roasted grain, beans and lentils, ²⁹honey and curds, sheep, and cheese from cows’ milk for David and

his people to eat. For they said, “The people have become exhausted and hungry and thirsty in the wilderness.”

2 Samuel 18

¹David mustered the men who were with him and appointed over them commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds. ²David sent out his troops, a third under the command of Joab, a third under Joab's brother Abishai son of Zeruiah, and a third under Ittai the Gittite. The king told the troops, "I myself will surely march out with you."

³But the men said, "You must not go out; if we are forced to flee, they won't care about us. Even if half of us die, they won't care; but you are worth ten thousand of us. It would be better now for you to give us support from the city."

⁴The king answered, "I will do whatever seems best to you."

So the king stood beside the gate while all his men marched out in units of hundreds and of thousands. ⁵The king commanded Joab, Abishai and Ittai, "Be gentle with the young man Absalom for my sake." And all the troops heard the king giving orders concerning Absalom to each of the commanders.

⁶David's army marched out of the city to fight Israel, and the battle took place in the forest of Ephraim. ⁷There Israel's troops were routed by David's men, and the casualties that day were great—twenty thousand men. ⁸The battle spread out over the whole countryside, and the forest swallowed up more men that day than the sword.

⁹Now Absalom happened to meet David's men. He was riding his mule, and as the mule went under the thick branches of a large oak, Absalom's hair got caught in the tree. He was left hanging in midair, while the mule he was riding kept on going.

¹⁰When one of the men saw what had happened, he told Joab, "I just saw Absalom hanging in an oak tree."

¹¹Joab said to the man who had told him this, "What! You saw him? Why didn't you strike him to the ground right there? Then I would have had to give you ten shekels of silver and a warrior's belt."

¹²But the man replied, "Even if a thousand shekels were weighed out into my hands, I would not lay a hand on the king's son. In our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, 'Protect the young man Absalom for my sake.' ¹³And if I had put my life in jeopardy—and nothing is hidden from the king—you would have kept your distance from me."

¹⁴Joab said, “I’m not going to wait like this for you.” So he took three javelins in his hand and plunged them into Absalom’s heart while Absalom was still alive in the oak tree. ¹⁵And ten of Joab’s armor-bearers surrounded Absalom, struck him and killed him.

¹⁶Then Joab sounded the trumpet, and the troops stopped pursuing Israel, for Joab halted them. ¹⁷They took Absalom, threw him into a big pit in the forest and piled up a large heap of rocks over him. Meanwhile, all the Israelites fled to their homes.

¹⁸During his lifetime Absalom had taken a pillar and erected it in the King’s Valley as a monument to himself, for he thought, “I have no son to carry on the memory of my name.” He named the pillar after himself, and it is called Absalom’s Monument to this day.

David Mourns

¹⁹Now Ahimaaz son of Zadok said, “Let me run and take the news to the king that the LORD has vindicated him by delivering him from the hand of his enemies.”

²⁰“You are not the one to take the news today,” Joab told him. “You may take the news another time, but you must not do so today, because the king’s son is dead.”

²¹Then Joab said to a Cushite, “Go, tell the king what you have seen.” The Cushite bowed down before Joab and ran off.

²²Ahimaaz son of Zadok again said to Joab, “Come what may, please let me run behind the Cushite.”

But Joab replied, “My son, why do you want to go? You don’t have any news that will bring you a reward.”

²³He said, “Come what may, I want to run.”

So Joab said, “Run!” Then Ahimaaz ran by way of the plain and outran the Cushite.

²⁴While David was sitting between the inner and outer gates, the watchman went up to the roof of the gateway by the wall. As he looked out, he saw a man running alone. ²⁵The watchman called out to the king and reported it.

The king said, “If he is alone, he must have good news.” And the runner came closer and closer.

²⁶Then the watchman saw another runner, and he called down to the gatekeeper, “Look, another man running alone!”

The king said, “He must be bringing good news, too.”

²⁷The watchman said, “It seems to me that the first one runs like Ahimaaz son of Zadok.”

“He’s a good man,” the king said. “He comes with good news.”

²⁸Then Ahimaaz called out to the king, “All is well!” He bowed down before the king with his face to the ground and said, “Praise be to the LORD your God! He has delivered up those who lifted their hands against my lord the king.”

²⁹The king asked, “Is the young man Absalom safe?”

Ahimaaz answered, “I saw great confusion just as Joab was about to send the king’s servant and me, your servant, but I don’t know what it was.”

³⁰The king said, “Stand aside and wait here.” So he stepped aside and stood there.

³¹Then the Cushite arrived and said, “My lord the king, hear the good news! The LORD has vindicated you today by delivering you from the hand of all who rose up against you.”

³²The king asked the Cushite, “Is the young man Absalom safe?”

The Cushite replied, “May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up to harm you be like that young man.”

³³The king was shaken. He went up to the room over the gateway and wept. As he went, he said: “O my son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you—O Absalom, my son, my son!”

2 Samuel 19

¹Joab was told, “The king is weeping and mourning for Absalom.” ²And for the whole army the victory that day was turned into mourning, because on that day the troops heard it said, “The king is grieving for his son.” ³The men stole into the city that day as men steal in who are ashamed when they flee from battle. ⁴The king covered his face and cried aloud, “O my son Absalom! O Absalom, my son, my son!”

⁵Then Joab went into the house to the king and said, “Today you have humiliated all your men, who have just saved your life and the lives of your sons and daughters and the lives of your wives and concubines. ⁶You love those who hate you and hate those who love you. You have made it clear today that the commanders and their men mean nothing to you. I see that you would be pleased if Absalom were alive today and all of us were dead. ⁷Now go out and encourage your men. I swear by the LORD that if you don’t go out, not a man will be left with you by nightfall. This will be worse for you than all the calamities that have come on you from your youth till now.”

⁸So the king got up and took his seat in the gateway. When the men were told, “The king is sitting in the gateway,” they all came before him.

Meanwhile, the Israelites had fled to their homes.

David Returns to Jerusalem

⁹Throughout the tribes of Israel, all the people were arguing among themselves, saying, “The king delivered us from the hand of our enemies; he is the one who rescued us from the hand of the Philistines. But now he has fled the country to escape from Absalom; ¹⁰and Absalom, whom we anointed to rule over us, has died in battle. So why do you say nothing about bringing the king back?”

¹¹King David sent this message to Zadok and Abiathar, the priests: “Ask the elders of Judah, ‘Why should you be the last to bring the king back to his palace, since what is being said throughout Israel has reached the king at his quarters? ¹²You are my relatives, my own flesh and blood. So why should you be the last to bring back the king?’ ¹³And say to Amasa, ‘Are you not my own flesh and blood? May God deal with me, be it ever so severely, if you are not the commander of my army for life in place of Joab.’ ”

¹⁴He won over the hearts of the men of Judah so that they were all of one mind. They sent word to the king, “Return, you and all your men.” ¹⁵Then the king returned and went as far as the Jordan.

Now the men of Judah had come to Gilgal to go out and meet the king and bring him across the Jordan. ¹⁶Shimei son of Gera, the Benjamite from Bahurim, hurried down with the men of Judah to meet King David. ¹⁷With him were a thousand Benjamites, along with Ziba, the steward of Saul’s household, and his fifteen sons and twenty servants. They rushed to the Jordan, where the king was. ¹⁸They crossed at the ford to take the king’s household over and to do whatever he wished.

When Shimei son of Gera crossed the Jordan, he fell prostrate before the king ¹⁹and said to him, “May my lord not hold me guilty. Do not remember how your servant did wrong on the day my lord the king left Jerusalem. May the king put it out of his mind. ²⁰For I your servant know that I have sinned, but today I have come here as the first from the tribes of Joseph to come down and meet my lord the king.”

²¹Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said, “Shouldn’t Shimei be put to death for this? He cursed the LORD’s anointed.”

²²David replied, “What does this have to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? What right do you have to interfere? Should anyone be put to death

in Israel today? Don't I know that today I am king over Israel?" ²³So the king said to Shimei, "You shall not die." And the king promised him on oath.

²⁴Mephibosheth, Saul's grandson, also went down to meet the king. He had not taken care of his feet or trimmed his mustache or washed his clothes from the day the king left until the day he returned safely. ²⁵When he came from Jerusalem to meet the king, the king asked him, "Why didn't you go with me, Mephibosheth?"

²⁶He said, "My lord the king, since I your servant am lame, I said, 'I will have my donkey saddled and will ride on it, so I can go with the king.' But Ziba my servant betrayed me. ²⁷And he has slandered your servant to my lord the king. My lord the king is like an angel of God; so do whatever you wish. ²⁸All my grandfather's descendants deserved nothing but death from my lord the king, but you gave your servant a place among those who eat at your table. So what right do I have to make any more appeals to the king?"

²⁹The king said to him, "Why say more? I order you and Ziba to divide the land."

³⁰Mephibosheth said to the king, "Let him take everything, now that my lord the king has returned home safely."

³¹Barzillai the Gileadite also came down from Rogelim to cross the Jordan with the king and to send him on his way from there. ³²Now Barzillai was very old, eighty years of age. He had provided for the king during his stay in Mahanaim, for he was a very wealthy man. ³³The king said to Barzillai, "Cross over with me and stay with me in Jerusalem, and I will provide for you."

³⁴But Barzillai answered the king, "How many more years will I live, that I should go up to Jerusalem with the king? ³⁵I am now eighty years old. Can I tell the difference between what is enjoyable and what is not? Can your servant taste what he eats and drinks? Can I still hear the voices of male and female singers? Why should your servant be an added burden to my lord the king? ³⁶Your servant will cross over the Jordan with the king for a short distance, but why should the king reward me in this way? ³⁷Let your servant return, that I may die in my own town near the tomb of my father and mother. But here is your servant Kimham. Let him cross over with my lord the king. Do for him whatever you wish."

³⁸The king said, "Kimham shall cross over with me, and I will do for him whatever you wish. And anything you desire from me I will do for you."

³⁹So all the people crossed the Jordan, and then the king crossed over. The king kissed Barzillai and bid him farewell, and Barzillai returned to his home.

⁴⁰When the king crossed over to Gilgal, Kimham crossed with him. All the troops of Judah and half the troops of Israel had taken the king over.

⁴¹Soon all the men of Israel were coming to the king and saying to him, “Why did our brothers, the men of Judah, steal the king away and bring him and his household across the Jordan, together with all his men?”

⁴²All the men of Judah answered the men of Israel, “We did this because the king is closely related to us. Why are you angry about it? Have we eaten any of the king’s provisions? Have we taken anything for ourselves?”

⁴³Then the men of Israel answered the men of Judah, “We have ten shares in the king; so we have a greater claim on David than you have. Why then do you treat us with contempt? Weren’t we the first to speak of bringing back our king?”

But the men of Judah pressed their claims even more forcefully than the men of Israel.

2 Samuel 20

Sheba Rebels Against David

¹Now a troublemaker named Sheba son of Bikri, a Benjamite, happened to be there. He sounded the trumpet and shouted,

“We have no share in David,
no part in Jesse’s son!
Every man to his tent, Israel!”

²So all the men of Israel deserted David to follow Sheba son of Bikri. But the men of Judah stayed by their king all the way from the Jordan to Jerusalem.

³When David returned to his palace in Jerusalem, he took the ten concubines he had left to take care of the palace and put them in a house under guard. He provided for them but had no sexual relations with them. They were kept in confinement till the day of their death, living as widows.

⁴Then the king said to Amasa, “Summon the men of Judah to come to me within three days, and be here yourself.” ⁵But when Amasa went to summon Judah, he took longer than the time the king had set for him.

⁶David said to Abishai, “Now Sheba son of Bikri will do us more harm than Absalom did. Take your master’s men and pursue him, or he will find fortified cities and escape from us.” ⁷So Joab’s men and the Kerethites and Pelethites and all the mighty warriors went out under the command of Abishai. They marched out from Jerusalem to pursue Sheba son of Bikri.

⁸While they were at the great rock in Gibeon, Amasa came to meet them. Joab was wearing his military tunic, and strapped over it at his waist was a belt with a dagger in its sheath. As he stepped forward, it dropped out of its sheath.

⁹Joab said to Amasa, “How are you, my brother?” Then Joab took Amasa by the beard with his right hand to kiss him. ¹⁰Amasa was not on his guard against the dagger in Joab’s hand, and Joab plunged it into his belly, and his intestines spilled out on the ground. Without being stabbed again, Amasa died. Then Joab and his brother Abishai pursued Sheba son of Bikri.

¹¹One of Joab’s men stood beside Amasa and said, “Whoever favors Joab, and whoever is for David, let him follow Joab!” ¹²Amasa lay wallowing in his blood in the middle of the road, and the man saw that all the troops came

to a halt there. When he realized that everyone who came up to Amasa stopped, he dragged him from the road into a field and threw a garment over him. ¹³After Amasa had been removed from the road, everyone went on with Joab to pursue Sheba son of Bikri.

¹⁴Sheba passed through all the tribes of Israel to Abel Beth Maakah and through the entire region of the Bikrites, who gathered together and followed him. ¹⁵All the troops with Joab came and besieged Sheba in Abel Beth Maakah. They built a siege ramp up to the city, and it stood against the outer fortifications. While they were battering the wall to bring it down, ¹⁶a wise woman called from the city, “Listen! Listen! Tell Joab to come here so I can speak to him.” ¹⁷He went toward her, and she asked, “Are you Joab?”

“I am,” he answered.

She said, “Listen to what your servant has to say.”

“I’m listening,” he said.

¹⁸She continued, “Long ago they used to say, ‘Get your answer at Abel,’ and that settled it. ¹⁹We are the peaceful and faithful in Israel. You are trying to destroy a city that is a mother in Israel. Why do you want to swallow up the LORD’s inheritance?”

²⁰“Far be it from me!” Joab replied, “Far be it from me to swallow up or destroy! ²¹That is not the case. A man named Sheba son of Bikri, from the hill country of Ephraim, has lifted up his hand against the king, against David. Hand over this one man, and I’ll withdraw from the city.”

The woman said to Joab, “His head will be thrown to you from the wall.”

²²Then the woman went to all the people with her wise advice, and they cut off the head of Sheba son of Bikri and threw it to Joab. So he sounded the trumpet, and his men dispersed from the city, each returning to his home. And Joab went back to the king in Jerusalem.

David’s Officials

²³Joab was over Israel’s entire army; Benaiah son of Jehoiada was over the Kerethites and Pelethites; ²⁴Adoniram was in charge of forced labor; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was recorder; ²⁵Sheva was secretary; Zadok and Abiathar were priests; ²⁶and Ira the Jairite was David’s priest.

2 Samuel 21

The Gibeonites Avenged

¹During the reign of David, there was a famine for three successive years; so David sought the face of the LORD. The LORD said, “It is on account of Saul and his blood-stained house; it is because he put the Gibeonites to death.”

²The king summoned the Gibeonites and spoke to them. (Now the Gibeonites were not a part of Israel but were survivors of the Amorites; the Israelites had sworn to spare them, but Saul in his zeal for Israel and Judah had tried to annihilate them.) ³David asked the Gibeonites, “What shall I do for you? How shall I make atonement so that you will bless the LORD’s inheritance?”

⁴The Gibeonites answered him, “We have no right to demand silver or gold from Saul or his family, nor do we have the right to put anyone in Israel to death.”

“What do you want me to do for you?” David asked.

⁵They answered the king, “As for the man who destroyed us and plotted against us so that we have been decimated and have no place anywhere in Israel, ⁶let seven of his male descendants be given to us to be killed and their bodies exposed before the LORD at Gibeah of Saul—the LORD’s chosen one.”

So the king said, “I will give them to you.”

⁷The king spared Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, because of the oath before the LORD between David and Jonathan son of Saul. ⁸But the king took Armoni and Mephibosheth, the two sons of Aiah’s daughter Rizpah, whom she had borne to Saul, together with the five sons of Saul’s daughter Merab, whom she had borne to Adriel son of Barzillai the Meholathite. ⁹He handed them over to the Gibeonites, who killed them and exposed their bodies on a hill before the LORD. All seven of them fell together; they were put to death during the first days of the harvest, just as the barley harvest was beginning.

¹⁰Rizpah daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it out for herself on a rock. From the beginning of the harvest till the rain poured down from the heavens on the bodies, she did not let the birds touch them by day or the wild animals by night. ¹¹When David was told what Aiah’s daughter Rizpah, Saul’s concubine, had done, ¹²he went and took the bones of Saul and his son

Jonathan from the citizens of Jabesh Gilead. (They had stolen their bodies from the public square at Beth Shan, where the Philistines had hung them after they struck Saul down on Gilboa.) ¹³David brought the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from there, and the bones of those who had been killed and exposed were gathered up.

¹⁴They buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the tomb of Saul's father Kish, at Zela in Benjamin, and did everything the king commanded. After that, God answered prayer in behalf of the land.

Wars Against the Philistines

¹⁵Once again there was a battle between the Philistines and Israel. David went down with his men to fight against the Philistines, and he became exhausted. ¹⁶And Ishbi-Benob, one of the descendants of Rapha, whose bronze spearhead weighed three hundred shekels and who was armed with a new sword, said he would kill David. ¹⁷But Abishai son of Zeruiah came to David's rescue; he struck the Philistine down and killed him. Then David's men swore to him, saying, "Never again will you go out with us to battle, so that the lamp of Israel will not be extinguished."

¹⁸In the course of time, there was another battle with the Philistines, at Gob. At that time Sibbekai the Hushathite killed Saph, one of the descendants of Rapha.

¹⁹In another battle with the Philistines at Gob, Elhanan son of Jair the Bethlehemite killed the brother of Goliath the Gittite, who had a spear with a shaft like a weaver's rod.

²⁰In still another battle, which took place at Gath, there was a huge man with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot—twenty-four in all. He also was descended from Rapha. ²¹When he taunted Israel, Jonathan son of Shimeah, David's brother, killed him.

²²These four were descendants of Rapha in Gath, and they fell at the hands of David and his men.

2 Samuel 22

David's Song of Praise

¹David sang to the LORD the words of this song when the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. ²He said:

“The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; ³my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation.

He is my stronghold, my refuge and my savior—
from violent people you save me.

⁴“I called to the LORD, who is worthy of praise, and have been saved from my enemies.

⁵The waves of death swirled about me; the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.

⁶The cords of the grave coiled around me; the snares of death confronted me.

⁷“In my distress I called to the LORD; I called out to my God.
From his temple he heard my voice;
my cry came to his ears.

⁸The earth trembled and quaked, the foundations of the heavens shook;
they trembled because he was angry.

⁹Smoke rose from his nostrils; consuming fire came from his mouth,
burning coals blazed out of it.

¹⁰He parted the heavens and came down; dark clouds were under his feet.

¹¹He mounted the cherubim and flew; he soared on the wings of the wind.

¹²He made darkness his canopy around him— the dark rain clouds of the sky.

¹³Out of the brightness of his presence bolts of lightning blazed forth.

¹⁴The LORD thundered from heaven; the voice of the Most High

resounded.

¹⁵He shot his arrows and scattered the enemy, with great bolts of lightning he routed them.

¹⁶The valleys of the sea were exposed and the foundations of the earth laid bare
at the rebuke of the LORD,
at the blast of breath from his nostrils.

¹⁷“He reached down from on high and took hold of me; he drew me out of deep waters.

¹⁸He rescued me from my powerful enemy, from my foes, who were too strong for me.

¹⁹They confronted me in the day of my disaster, but the LORD was my support.

²⁰He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me.

²¹“The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness; according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me.

²²For I have kept the ways of the LORD; I am not guilty of turning from my God.

²³All his laws are before me; I have not turned away from his decrees.

²⁴I have been blameless before him and have kept myself from sin.

²⁵The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness, according to my cleanness in his sight.

²⁶“To the faithful you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless,

²⁷to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the devious you show yourself shrewd.

²⁸You save the humble, but your eyes are on the haughty to bring them low.

²⁹You, LORD, are my lamp; the LORD turns my darkness into light.

³⁰With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall.

³¹“As for God, his way is perfect: The LORD’s word is flawless;

he shields all who take refuge in him.

³²For who is God besides the LORD?

And who is the Rock except our God?

³³It is God who arms me with strength and keeps my way secure.

³⁴He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he causes me to stand on the heights.

³⁵He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze.

³⁶You make your saving help my shield; your help has made me great.

³⁷You provide a broad path for my feet, so that my ankles do not give way.

³⁸“I pursued my enemies and crushed them; I did not turn back till they were destroyed.

³⁹I crushed them completely, and they could not rise; they fell beneath my feet.

⁴⁰You armed me with strength for battle; you humbled my adversaries before me.

⁴¹You made my enemies turn their backs in flight, and I destroyed my foes.

⁴²They cried for help, but there was no one to save them— to the LORD, but he did not answer.

⁴³I beat them as fine as the dust of the earth; I pounded and trampled them like mud in the streets.

⁴⁴“You have delivered me from the attacks of the peoples; you have preserved me as the head of nations.

People I did not know now serve me,

⁴⁵foreigners cower before me; as soon as they hear of me, they obey me.

⁴⁶They all lose heart; they come trembling from their strongholds.

⁴⁷“The LORD lives! Praise be to my Rock!

Exalted be my God, the Rock, my Savior!

⁴⁸He is the God who avenges me, who puts the nations under me,

⁴⁹who sets me free from my enemies.

You exalted me above my foes;

from a violent man you rescued me.

⁵⁰Therefore I will praise you, LORD, among the nations; I will sing the praises of your name.

⁵¹“He gives his king great victories; he shows unfailing kindness to his anointed,
to David and his descendants forever.”

2 Samuel 23

David's Last Words

¹These are the last words of David:

“The inspired utterance of David son of Jesse, the utterance of the man exalted by the Most High, the man anointed by the God of Jacob, the hero of Israel's songs:

²“The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me; his word was on my tongue.

³The God of Israel spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me:

‘When one rules over people in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God, ⁴he is like the light of morning at sunrise on a cloudless morning,

like the brightness after rain that brings grass from the earth.’

⁵“If my house were not right with God, surely he would not have made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part; surely he would not bring to fruition my salvation and grant me my every desire.

⁶But evil men are all to be cast aside like thorns, which are not gathered with the hand.

⁷Whoever touches thorns uses a tool of iron or the shaft of a spear; they are burned up where they lie.”

David’s Mighty Warriors

⁸These are the names of David’s mighty warriors: Josheb-Basshebeth, a Tahkemonite, was chief of the Three; he raised his spear against eight hundred men, whom he killed in one encounter.

⁹Next to him was Eleazar son of Dodai the Ahohite. As one of the three mighty warriors, he was with David when they taunted the Philistines gathered at Pas Dammim for battle. Then the Israelites retreated, ¹⁰but Eleazar stood his ground and struck down the Philistines till his hand grew tired and froze to the sword. The LORD brought about a great victory that day. The troops returned to Eleazar, but only to strip the dead.

¹¹Next to him was Shammah son of Agee the Hararite. When the Philistines banded together at a place where there was a field full of lentils, Israel’s troops fled from them. ¹²But Shammah took his stand in the middle of the field. He defended it and struck the Philistines down, and the LORD brought about a great victory.

¹³During harvest time, three of the thirty chief warriors came down to David at the cave of Adullam, while a band of Philistines was encamped in the Valley of Rephaim. ¹⁴At that time David was in the stronghold, and the Philistine garrison was at Bethlehem. ¹⁵David longed for water and said, “Oh, that someone would get me a drink of water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem!” ¹⁶So the three mighty warriors broke through the Philistine lines, drew water from the well near the gate of Bethlehem and carried it back

to David. But he refused to drink it; instead, he poured it out before the LORD. ¹⁷“Far be it from me, LORD, to do this!” he said. “Is it not the blood of men who went at the risk of their lives?” And David would not drink it.

Such were the exploits of the three mighty warriors.

¹⁸Abishai the brother of Joab son of Zeruah was chief of the Three. He raised his spear against three hundred men, whom he killed, and so he became as famous as the Three. ¹⁹Was he not held in greater honor than the Three? He became their commander, even though he was not included among them.

²⁰Benaiah son of Jehoiada, a valiant fighter from Kabzeel, performed great exploits. He struck down Moab’s two mightiest warriors. He also went down into a pit on a snowy day and killed a lion. ²¹And he struck down a huge Egyptian. Although the Egyptian had a spear in his hand, Benaiah went against him with a club. He snatched the spear from the Egyptian’s hand and killed him with his own spear. ²²Such were the exploits of Benaiah son of Jehoiada; he too was as famous as the three mighty warriors. ²³He was held in greater honor than any of the Thirty, but he was not included among the Three. And David put him in charge of his bodyguard.

²⁴Among the Thirty were: Asahel the brother of Joab,
Elhanan son of Dodo from Bethlehem, ²⁵Shammah the Harodite,
Elika the Harodite,
²⁶Helez the Paltite, Ira son of Ikkesh from Tekoa,
²⁷Abiezer from Anathoth, Sibbekai the Hushathite,
²⁸Zalmon the Ahohite, Maharai the Netophathite,
²⁹Heled son of Baanah the Netophathite, Ithai son of Ribai from
Gibeah in Benjamin, ³⁰Benaiah the Pirathonite, Hiddai from the
ravines of Gaash,
³¹Abi-Albon the Arbathite, Azmaveth the Barhumite,
³²Eliabba the Shaalbonite, the sons of Jashen,
Jonathan ³³son of Shammah the Hararite, Ahiam son of Sharar the
Hararite,
³⁴Eliphelet son of Ahasbai the Maakathite, Eliam son of
Ahithophel the Gilonite, ³⁵Hezro the Carmelite, Paarai the Arbite,
³⁶Igal son of Nathan from Zobah, the son of Hagri,
³⁷Zelek the Ammonite, Naharai the Beerothite, the armor-bearer of

Joab son of Zeruiah, ³⁸Ira the Ithrite,

Gareb the Ithrite
³⁹and Uriah the Hittite.
There were thirty-seven in all.

2 Samuel 24

David Enrolls the Fighting Men

¹Again the anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and he incited David against them, saying, “Go and take a census of Israel and Judah.”

²So the king said to Joab and the army commanders with him, “Go throughout the tribes of Israel from Dan to Beersheba and enroll the fighting men, so that I may know how many there are.”

³But Joab replied to the king, “May the LORD your God multiply the troops a hundred times over, and may the eyes of my lord the king see it. But why does my lord the king want to do such a thing?”

⁴The king’s word, however, overruled Joab and the army commanders; so they left the presence of the king to enroll the fighting men of Israel.

⁵After crossing the Jordan, they camped near Aroer, south of the town in the gorge, and then went through Gad and on to Jazer. ⁶They went to Gilead and the region of Tahtim Hodshi, and on to Dan Jaan and around toward Sidon. ⁷Then they went toward the fortress of Tyre and all the towns of the Hivites and Canaanites. Finally, they went on to Beersheba in the Negev of Judah.

⁸After they had gone through the entire land, they came back to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days.

⁹Joab reported the number of the fighting men to the king: In Israel there were eight hundred thousand able-bodied men who could handle a sword, and in Judah five hundred thousand.

¹⁰David was conscience-stricken after he had counted the fighting men, and he said to the LORD, “I have sinned greatly in what I have done. Now, LORD, I beg you, take away the guilt of your servant. I have done a very foolish thing.”

¹¹Before David got up the next morning, the word of the LORD had come to Gad the prophet, David’s seer: ¹²“Go and tell David, ‘This is what the LORD says: I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you.’ ”

¹³So Gad went to David and said to him, “Shall there come on you three years of famine in your land? Or three months of fleeing from your enemies while they pursue you? Or three days of plague in your land? Now then, think it over and decide how I should answer the one who sent me.”

¹⁴David said to Gad, “I am in deep distress. Let us fall into the hands of the

LORD, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into human hands.”

¹⁵So the LORD sent a plague on Israel from that morning until the end of the time designated, and seventy thousand of the people from Dan to Beersheba died. ¹⁶When the angel stretched out his hand to destroy Jerusalem, the LORD relented concerning the disaster and said to the angel who was afflicting the people, “Enough! Withdraw your hand.” The angel of the LORD was then at the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

¹⁷When David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the LORD, “I have sinned; I, the shepherd, have done wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? Let your hand fall on me and my family.”

David Builds an Altar

¹⁸On that day Gad went to David and said to him, “Go up and build an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite.” ¹⁹So David went up, as the LORD had commanded through Gad. ²⁰When Araunah looked and saw the king and his officials coming toward him, he went out and bowed down before the king with his face to the ground.

²¹Araunah said, “Why has my lord the king come to his servant?”

“To buy your threshing floor,” David answered, “so I can build an altar to the LORD, that the plague on the people may be stopped.”

²²Araunah said to David, “Let my lord the king take whatever he wishes and offer it up. Here are oxen for the burnt offering, and here are threshing sledges and ox yokes for the wood. ²³Your Majesty, Araunah gives all this to the king.” Araunah also said to him, “May the LORD your God accept you.”

²⁴But the king replied to Araunah, “No, I insist on paying you for it. I will not sacrifice to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing.”

So David bought the threshing floor and the oxen and paid fifty shekels of silver for them. ²⁵David built an altar to the LORD there and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then the LORD answered his prayer in behalf of the land, and the plague on Israel was stopped.