

**OLD TESTAMENT HISTORICAL BOOKS**

Joshua through Esther

An Outline

by

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Hesed Publications  
112 Longwood Lane  
Easley SC 29642

2021

**Other Works by the Author**

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Joshua.....	5
Judges.....	49
Ruth .....	139
First Samuel .....	153
Second Samuel .....	205
First Kings .....	241
Second Kings .....	281
First and Second Chronicles .....	321
Ezra and Nehemiah .....	333
Esther .....	378
Works Cited in Text .....	387

Cover: Beit Shean where Saul and Jonathan’s bodies were hung.  
Photo courtesy of Joanne Heater

## **Preface**

The Old Testament historical books (Joshua to Esther) represent the development of the people of Israel from their entrance to Canaan to their exile to Babylon. They are essential for understanding the history and faith of God's people.

It has been my pleasure and delight to serve the Lord both as pastor and professor for over 60 years. Most of those years have been spent in the classroom. These outline notes are the product of that labor and, even though they are designed for everyone, some linguistic aspects are more usable by seminary graduates.

Most of my time at Capital Bible Seminary was invested in Hebrew grammar and exegesis. My years at Dallas were primarily in the Bible Exposition Department where I taught Historical Books for eight years.

We live in strange days. W. F. Albright, almost single handedly, in the middle of the last century, moved the Old Testament theological needle from radical liberal to moderately conservative. He believed there was an Abraham, that Moses was monotheistic, that there was an exodus, and that archaeology and Bible study went hand in hand. He had such towering scholarship that many became his followers, and few were his critics.

Now, however, that needle has swung back. The so-called minimalists believe in very little biblical history. There was virtually nothing in the David/Solomon era, and, of course, no patriarchal history, no exodus, and no conquering of the land.

These notes represent an attempt to interact with the critical issues and still maintain a conservative view of Scripture. My prayer is that they will be helpful to those who use them

Suggestions and corrections are always welcome.

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## JOSHUA

### I. Introductory matters.

#### A. The man Joshua.

With Joshua, we begin what the Hebrew sages called the “Former Prophets.” This section in the Hebrew Bible goes from Joshua through Second Kings. Joshua, like Moses, was considered a prophet. “The designation indicates a rabbinic concern with the special character of these ‘histories’ which put them together in a special group immediately following the Torah”<sup>1</sup>

Joshua served with Moses as his attendant from his youth (Num 11:28). He led the attack on the Amalekites (Exodus 17) and climbed the “mount of God” with Moses when God revealed Himself (Exodus 24). He was one of the twelve men who went in to reconnoiter the land, and with Caleb, the only one to insist on taking the land in spite of the dangers (Numbers 13). For this act, he and Caleb were accorded the privilege of living through the 40 years of wanderings and to enter the land.

Num 27:18-23 relates the choice of Joshua as Moses’ successor.<sup>2</sup> This is the strongest language possible to indicate that Joshua was anointed by

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<sup>1</sup>Wright, “Introduction,” p. 40.

<sup>2</sup>So, the LORD said to Moses, “Take Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him; <sup>19</sup> and have him stand before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation; and commission him in their sight. <sup>20</sup> “And you shall put some of your authority on him, in order that all the congregation of the sons of Israel may obey *him*. <sup>21</sup> “Moreover, he shall stand before Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire for him by the judgment of the Urim before the LORD. At his command they shall go

God to hold the same position of leadership as Moses. He is therefore also considered a prophet as was Moses (though not with his stature—Deut 34:10). Deuteronomy 3 indicates that Joshua, not Moses will lead the people into the land. And, finally, Joshua is recommissioned in Deut 31:14-23. The last chapter of Deuteronomy closes Moses' life and prepares the reader for the Book of Joshua and the feats of Joshua: "Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses" (Deut 34:9).

B. The study of Joshua today.

1. The date of the Exodus and entry into the land.

The date of the Exodus is set out in 1 Kings 6:1. The building of the temple of Solomon was begun in the 480<sup>th</sup> year of the Exodus from Egypt. This means that the Exodus took place in 1441 (some variance must be allowed for the chronology of the kings of Israel), and the entrance to the land would have been around 1400. There was a time when this was the consensus view of Bible students.

In modern times, under W. F. Albright and his students in particular, there was an argument for a "late date" of the Exodus. This was usually placed somewhere in the 13<sup>th</sup> century (1250, 1225) based on such things as the name of Rameses (presumed to be the II who had a long reign in the 13<sup>th</sup> century) in Exod 1:11.<sup>3</sup> Now critical scholarship does not believe there was anything like the biblical account.

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out and at his command they shall come in, *both* he and the sons of Israel with him, even all the congregation." <sup>22</sup> And Moses did just as the LORD commanded him; and he took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest, and before all the congregation. <sup>23</sup> Then he laid his hands on him and commissioned him, just as the LORD had spoken through Moses."

<sup>3</sup>See Woudstra, *The Book of Joshua*, p. 22-26, for a discussion of the issues.

## 2. The minimalist/maximalist debate.

There is an ongoing debate today among Old Testament scholars tagged “between the minimalists and the maximalists.” Minimalists are those who argue for little or no historicity of the Bible before the exilic period, while maximalists argue for general historicity. Bearing in mind that even the maximalists do not believe the Bible represents true history. In light of this ongoing discussion, I am reproducing here an article from the Biblical Archaeology Society called the Rise of Ancient Israel. It does not represent the Bible believing conservatives, but it does set forth the issues. The article is written by Herschel Shanks, editor, who is also Jewish.

“Bryant Wood has recently reexamined the archaeological evidence relating to the destruction of Jericho.<sup>4</sup> There was a destruction at Jericho. All archaeologists agree on this. But when did it occur? The most recent and most famous excavator of Jericho, the British archaeologist Kathleen Kenyon, dated this destruction to the Middle Bronze Age—after which the site was abandoned. Thus, she said, there was no city here for Joshua to conquer at the end of the Late Bronze Age. This view has been widely accepted and has posed a major problem for the conquest model. In his careful reexamination of the archaeological data, not only from Kenyon’s excavations but also from earlier excavations, Wood has shown that this destruction at Jericho occurred in uncanny detail just as the Bible describes it. There was a strong wall there, just as the Bible says. And the wall even came tumbling down, according to the archaeological evidence. Actually, there were two walls around the city—the main city wall at the top of the tell and a revetment wall lower down. Outside this revetment wall, Kenyon found piles of red mud bricks that had fallen from the city wall at the top of the tell and then tumbled down the slope, piling up at the base of the revetment wall. (Or the bricks could have been on top of the revetment wall and tumbled down from there; the difference is insignificant. The fact is they came together in a heap outside the revetment wall). The

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<sup>4</sup>See Bryant Wood, “Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho? A New Look at the Archaeological Evidence,” *BAR* 16:2 (1990): 44-47, 49-54, 56-57.

amount of bricks piled up there was enough for a wall 6.5 feet wide and 12 feet high.

“These collapsed bricks then formed a kind of ramp that an invading army could have used to go up into the city. And sure enough, the Bible tells us that the Israelites who encircled the city ‘went up into the city, every man straight before him’ (Joshua 6:20).

“Moreover, the wall could have tumbled as a result of an earthquake. Earthquake activity is well known in this area: Jericho sits right in the Great Rift on the edge of a tectonic plate.

“Kenyon found that the city was destroyed in a fiery conflagration: the walls and floors were blackened or reddened by fire. But, she adds, ‘the collapse of the walls of the eastern rooms seems to have taken place before they were affected by the fire.’ This was the sequence of events in the biblical account of Jericho’s conquest: The walls fell down and then the Israelites put the city to the torch.

“The archaeologists also found heaps of burnt grain in the houses—more grain than has ever been found in any excavation in what was ancient Israel. This indicates two things: First, the victory of the invaders must have been a swift one, rather than the customary siege that would attempt to starve out the inhabitants (the biblical victory was of course swift). Second, the presence of so much grain indicates that the city must have been destroyed in the spring, shortly after the harvest. That is when the Bible says the attack occurred. There is another strange thing about the presence of so much grain. A successful invading army could be expected to plunder the grain before setting the city on fire. But the army that conquered Jericho inexplicably did not do this. The Bible tells us that the Lord commanded that everything from Jericho was to be destroyed; they were to take no plunder.

“One last item, the Bible tells us that the attacking Israelites were able to ford the Jordan easily because the river stopped flowing for them; the water above Jericho stood up in a heap (Joshua 3:16). This has actually happened on several occasions in modern times. At this point the Jordan is not a mighty stream. It has been stopped up by



mud slides and by material that fell into it in connection with earthquakes. The water actually ceased flowing for between 16 hours and two days, as recorded in 1927, 1906, 1834 and on three even earlier occasions.

“So what do we make of all this?”

“One way to deal with it is to say that the Israelites somehow had a memory of this early destruction of Jericho and incorporated it into their own theologically oriented history, even though it was not actually the Israelites that did the conquering.

“Another way is to attribute the destruction of Jericho to the Israelites. This requires either that you move the Israelite conquest back to the Middle Bronze Age or that you reinterpret the archaeological evidence so that you attribute the destruction to the Late Bronze Age instead of to the Middle Bronze Age. Both of these things have been attempted, although most scholars reject these efforts to attribute Jericho’s destruction to the Israelites.

“This brings me to the question of dating, about which I will say only a few words. Most archaeologists are agreed that if there is archaeological evidence for the emergence of Israel in Canaan, it must be at the beginning of the Iron Age, about 1200 B.C.E.

“Yet there is also evidence that there was an important people called Israel living in Canaan as early as the late 13th century B.C.E. I’m referring to the famous Merenptah Stele found in Thebes at the end of the last century. The Merenptah Stele is a black granite slab over 7.5 feet high, covered with hieroglyphic writing. Mainly it recounts the exploits of Pharaoh Merenptah during his Libyan campaign, but at the end he also recalls his earlier victories in a military campaign in Canaan.

“Now there are two universally agreed facts about this stele. One is that it dates to 1207 B.C.E. Second, it mentions Israel in connection with this earlier campaign in Canaan. There in hieroglyphic writing is the earliest extra-biblical mention of Israel. This is what it says:

‘Canaan has been plundered into every sort of woe;  
Ashkelon has been overcome;  
Gezer has been captured.  
Yanoam was made nonexistent;  
Israel is laid waste; his seed is not.’

“Now there are a couple of things I want to say about this mention of Israel.

“This is not just a mention in a deed or a contract that may have reference to a small village or even less. This reference to Israel shows that the most powerful man in the world, the pharaoh of Egypt, was aware of Israel. Not only was he aware of Israel—he boasts that one of the most important achievements of his reign was to defeat Israel. Of course, he exaggerates when he says that Israel’s seed is not. We know that even today, 3,200 years later, that seed is still growing and thriving. But that is beside the point. The fact is that in 1212 B.C.E. (the campaign was five years before the inscription), Israel must already have been a military force to be reckoned with. And this is right in that transition period between the Late Bronze Age and Iron I.

“The next point I want to make about the Merenptah Stele, which is sometimes also called the Israel Stele, requires us to talk a little about hieroglyphics. In hieroglyphic writing there are some signs that are not pronounced; they indicate the kind of word to which they are attached. The unpronounced signs are called determinatives. So, in the quotation I read to you from the Merenptah Stele, where the pharaoh was victorious over four entities in Canaan, each entity, in addition to the signs indicating how the word is pronounced, also has attached to it a determinative that tells us what kind of word it is. Attached to three of the four entities—Ashkelon, Gezer and Yanoam—is a determinative that tells us that they are cities. The determinative attached to Canaan, which introduces the set of four, is the determinative for a foreign land. The determinative attached to Israel, however, is for a people. In other words, in 1207 B.C.E. Israel was a people in Canaan important enough not only to be known to pharaoh, but important enough for him to boast that he defeated them militarily.

“The Merenptah Stele is obviously a very important piece of evidence in connection with the current debate about the rise of Israel.

“If Israel was already such a force in Canaan in 1212 B.C.E., then Israel must have been established there for some time. Those who would like to push back the date for Israel’s entry into Canaan, stress this aspect of the Merenptah Stele.

“On the other hand, those who say that Israel’s existence only begins with the monarchy have to deal with this troubling bit of evidence. I often wonder what would happen if we didn’t have this fortuitously preserved find. I’m almost certain that those scholars who insist that Israel didn’t exist before the monarchy and who tell us that there is no premonarchical history to be gleaned from the premonarchical accounts in the Bible would carry the day. The biblical tales we would convincingly be told are mere *bobbe-mysehs*, grandmothers’ tales. How do these scholars deal with the Merenptah Stele, since it indubitably does exist? They say that Israel refers to something else. What that something else is, is not clear. I certainly can understand that the numbers in the Bible are exaggerated. And there is evidence even in the Bible that there were not always 12 tribes in a league together. But the Merenptah Stele does date from the time when the nation and people that became Israel were aborning, were in the early stages of their development.

“A final point about the Merenptah Stele and its significance. Very recently, some reliefs on a temple at Karnak have been identified as illustrations of this famous passage from the Merenptah Stele.<sup>5</sup> One panel of reliefs represents Ashkelon; other panels appear to represent the other Canaanite cities mentioned in the Merenptah Stele. Unfortunately, there is still a dispute as to which panel or panels pictures the Israelites. In one panel that is a contender, the Israelites have long togas or skirts, just like the other Canaanites. So it is argued that this supports the contention that Israel emerged out

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<sup>5</sup>Frank J. Yurco, “3,200-Year-Old Picture of Israelites Found in Egypt,” *BAR* 16:5 (1990): 20-223, 24-28, 32-34, 36-37.

of Canaanite society. In another panel which supposedly represents the Israelites, they have short skirts, quite unlike the Canaanites, so this supports the argument that the Israelites entered Canaan from outside the land.<sup>6</sup>

“If they did come from outside the land, then this raises the question of where they came from. In short, was there really an Exodus? For the Exodus, we don’t have a Merenptah Stele; we don’t have any evidence that the Israelites as such were in Egypt.

“What we do have is evidence of Canaanite pottery in Egypt, and we also have evidence that Canaanite traders would come down to Egypt just like Jacob and his sons. A very famous picture from a tomb at Beni Hasan in Egypt pictures some merchants from Asia coming down to Egypt to do business. This tomb is beautifully preserved in cliffs overlooking the Nile about halfway between Cairo and Luxor.

“Finally, there is evidence concerning a strange people known as the Hyksos. That’s the name by which we know them, but that’s not what they called themselves. The Hyksos were a people from Asia—Canaan—who came down to Egypt and ultimately became the rulers of Egypt for two Egyptian dynasties. Ultimately, they were expelled by the Egyptians, who chased them back into Canaan. Obviously, the rise of the Hyksos in Egypt seems to have echoes in the biblical story of Joseph. The expulsion of the Hyksos seems to be some kind of Exodus in reverse. Instead of fleeing, they were kicked out. Whether there is any connection between the Hyksos and the biblical accounts I will leave to my good friend Baruch Halpern. In the meantime, you can ask me a few questions, but not too many because what I have tried to do is simply give you a little background, some of the framework and parameters of the extraordinarily vigorous debates that are going on in the academy. From the other speakers, we are going to go out into the jungle. These are the people who are exploring beyond the point where I

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<sup>6</sup>See also “Rainey’s Challenge,” *BAR* 17:1 (1991): 56-60, 93, 96.

have taken you, developing the lines of thought that will dominate the discussion in the years to come.

“The Bible is historically true in the details, whether we would accept it as historically accurate by modern historians’ standards, by modern historiography. That is not to denigrate the richness of the biblical text. I think many people who do not accept the literal reading of the Bible find it a very enriching and inspiring and even Godly document, without the necessity of it being literally true in every detail. This whole discussion proceeds on the basis that we will examine the Bible in this way. What I have tried to do is to summarize some of the problems in the biblical text and to describe some of the ways scholars have dealt with them.”<sup>7</sup>

### 3. The issue of conflicting statements in Joshua and Judges.

Josh 11:23 states that Joshua took the whole land according to all that the Lord had spoken to Moses. In 11:15-22 it is clearly stated that all the land was conquered and conquered completely. Yet, Judges 1-2 indicate that many people were not conquered. How can these be reconciled? First the Book of Joshua itself indicates that not everyone was routed (Josh 13:1-7). As to the broad generalizations, Kitchen’s remarks are apropos.

“Thus, to sum up, the book of Joshua in reality simply records the Hebrew entry into Canaan, their base camp at Gilgal by the Jordan, their initial raids (without occupation!) against local rulers and subjects in south and north Canaan, followed by localized occupation (a) north from Gilgal as far as Shechem and Tirzah and (b) south to Hebron/Debir, and very little more. This is *not* the sweeping, instant conquest-with-occupation that some hasty scholars would foist upon the text of Joshua, without any factual justification. Insofar as only Jericho, Ai, and Hazor were explicitly allowed to have been burned into nonoccupation, it is also pointless going looking for extensive conflagration level as at any other Late Bronze sites (of any phase) to identify them with any Israelite

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<sup>7</sup>Shanks, ed. *The Rise of Ancient Israel*. Biblical Archaeology Society, 2004.

impact. Onto this initial picture Judges follows directly and easily, with no inherent contradiction: it contradicts only the bogus and superficial construction that some modern commentators have willfully thrust upon the biblical text of Joshua without adequate reason. The fact is that biblical scholars have allowed themselves to be swept away by the upbeat, rhetorical element present in Joshua, a persistent feature of most war reports in ancient Near Eastern sources that they are not accustomed to understand and properly handle.<sup>8</sup>

“The sweeping statements in Joshua (‘he subdued the whole region,’ or ‘wholly destroyed all who breathed’) are rhetorical summations, practiced by all the ancients. In 10:20 we learn that Joshua and his forces massively slew their foes ‘until they were finished off’ (*ad-tummam*), but in the same breath the text states that ‘the remnant that survived got away into their defended towns.’ Thus the absolute wording is immediately qualified by exceptions.”<sup>9</sup>

## II. Entering the Land (1:1—5:15)

### A. Covenant Reaffirmation (1:1-18)

1. We learn from Deut 34:9 that Joshua was filled with the spirit of wisdom and that Moses had “laid his hands on him” and the people responded accordingly. Thus, the Book of Joshua opens with a charge to this man who held the awesome responsibility of succeeding Moses and leading the people into the land (1:1).
2. God’s charge to Joshua gives him his instruction and the extent of the land God was promising to Israel. These boundaries are quite extensive (1:2-4).
3. God then provides Joshua a promise. “No man will be able to stand before you all the days of your life.” This promise obviously has

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<sup>8</sup>Kitchen, *On the Reliability of the Old Testament*, p. 163.

<sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 173-174.

conditions. When Israel sinned, they were unable to defeat the people of Ai. So, obviously, the exceptions must be understood (1:5-6).

4. God then admonishes Joshua to be strong, and to do all the law of Moses. Verse 8 is a wonderful verse that all believers should memorize and practice (1:7-9).
5. Joshua then acts decisively and orders his various officers to prepare the people to move in three days to cross the Jordan and possess the land (1:10-12).
6. The Reubenites and Gadites will always be an exception to be dealt with. We learn early that the people of Israel had both a centrifugal and a centripetal force. The force that tended to fling them apart was the tribal structure. The force that tended to keep them together was the central sanctuary and the worship of Yahweh. Thus, Joshua makes sure that they will not peel off from the rest of Israel and form their own community. They must come and fight with their brethren (1:12-18).

#### **Excursus on the Destruction of the Canaanites**

Albright gives an apologetic for the destruction of the Canaanites. This is quite a strong contrast to a prominent Methodist bishop of a several years ago who referred to the God of the Old Testament as a Bully. Albright argues first that contemporary “civilizations” have little right to sit in judgment on others with regard to total warfare. Secondly, he says, “It was fortunate for the future of monotheism that the Israelites of the Conquest were a wild folk, endowed with primitive energy and ruthless will to exist, since the resulting decimation of the Canaanites prevented the complete fusion of the two kindred folk which would almost inevitably have depressed Yahwistic standards to a point where recovery was impossible.”<sup>10</sup>

G. Ernest Wright also says, “War is a miserable business in a world of men who live in rebellion against the conditions of their creation. Yet God as Suzerain is

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<sup>10</sup>Albright, *From Stone Age to Christianity*, pp. 280ff.

not defeated. He uses people as they are, to further his own, often mysterious ends. Hence by implication, we must say that God's use of Israel and her early institution of Holy War does not invest either war or Israel with sanctity or righteousness. On the contrary both are evil; yet God used Israel as she was for his own purposes. And among the results was the creation of the seedbed for Judaism, Jesus Christ, and the Christian movement."<sup>11</sup>

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## B. Spies Sent Out (2:1-24)

### 1. The need to reconnoiter the land (2:1-7).

Just as Moses had sent out twelve spies prior to entering the land, so Joshua sends out two men to check out Jericho.

They go to Rahab's house. The Scriptures refer to her consistently as a harlot, and we should not cavil at that. People are also concerned about her "lie," but why should we expect otherwise? She is a Canaanite woman in need of redemption.

The reference to a "king" in Jericho is the common referent to leaders of city states in Canaan as borne out by the Amarna Tablets.<sup>12</sup>

Rahab is held up as a woman of faith in Hebrews 11:31 and she is included in the genealogy of Matthew. She certainly demonstrated faith that others did not share, for she believed that God had given the land to the Israelites.

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<sup>11</sup>Wright, "Introduction," p. 30. His whole discussion on the "Divine Warrior" is an important read (pp. 27-37).

<sup>12</sup>These are clay tablets discovered at Tel el Amarna Egypt. They come from the 14<sup>th</sup> century B.C., are written in Cuneiform script, in the Akkadian language, and represent correspondence between the Pharaoh of Egypt and the various petty "kings" in Canaan. See William L. Moran, *The Amarna Letters*



2. Rahab's faith and courageous action (2:8-14).

The writer of Joshua wants us to understand God's work on behalf of His people. Consequently, he includes this speech of the woman in which she acknowledges: a) The fear of the Israelites is on everyone, b) all those who have met the Israelites have "melted" before them, c) the Lord opened the Red Sea, and d) the defeat of the two Amorite kings. This leads to the peak of her testimony: "Yahweh your God, He is God in heaven above and on earth beneath." In light of all this, she begs them to preserve her life. The men agree to do so and remind us again that the time will come "when Yahweh gives us the land" a major theme in this book.

3. The oath of the spies (2:15-21).

The men promise her that if she will follow their instructions, she and her family will be delivered.<sup>13</sup> She must hang a scarlet cord from her window, indicating which house is hers; none of her family may make themselves vulnerable by going outside the confines of her house; and she must not tell anything she knows to the authorities.

4. The conclusion of their activities (2:22-24).

The spies return home and recount their experiences. They also provide the testimony of the theme of the book, "Surely the Lord has given all the land into our hands, and all the inhabitants of the land, moreover, have melted away before us." This reconnoitering of the land was unnecessary in light of later instructions about how the city would be divinely destroyed, but Joshua did not know that yet.

C. Crossing the Jordan (3:1-17)

1. The Importance of the ark (3:1-4).

The ark was ever the symbol of God's holy presence. Here God is indicating that He alone will lead his people to victory. The people

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<sup>13</sup>Woudstra, loc. cit., p. 74 "Rahab thinks in terms of family and clan. This is in keeping with the thought patterns of the ancient Near East."

are to keep a respectful distance lest they violate the holy presence. This is much like God's revelation from Mt. Sinai.

2. The importance of ritual (3:5-6).

Consecrating oneself involved abstaining from certain activities (such as sexual intercourse), as a sign that they had set themselves completely apart to God.

3. The validation of Joshua's ministry (3:7-13).

It was important that the people recognize and submit to the authority of Joshua as God's consecrated leader. This action also validated the promise that God would dispossess the people from the land. Twelve men are selected (one from each tribe, indicating the whole house of Israel). Their task will be taken up in chapter 4.

4. The miracle of the stopped waters (3:14-17).

The deliberate identification of Joshua's ministry with that of Moses is carried on in the miracle of the Jordan. This is compared to the miracle of the Red Sea crossing by Moses (4:23). Further validation of Joshua's ministry and leadership is thus provided.

Garstang explains the miracle in natural terms: "It so happens that the river near this ford is liable to be blocked at intervals by great landslides. Several of these are on record. The earliest occurrence dates from A.D. 1266 when the Sultan Bibars ordered a bridge to be built across the Jordan in the neighbourhood of Damieh. The task was found to be difficult owing to the rise of the waters. But in the night preceding the 8<sup>th</sup> December, 1267, a lofty mound, which overlooked the river on the west, fell into it and dammed it up, so that the water of the river ceased to flow and none remained in its bed. The waters spread over the valley above the dam, and none flowed down the bed for some sixteen hours."<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Garstang, *Joshua, Judges*, pp. 136-37.

## D. The Memorial Stones from the Jordan (4:1-24)

1. The Lord directs Joshua to get the stones (4:1-3).

This passage is anticipated by 3:12. There is a three-step process: the Lord commands Joshua, Joshua commands the men, and the men carry out the act.

2. Joshua passes on the command to twelve men (4:4-7).

The Old Testament is replete with the concept of remembering the great acts of Yahweh. These stones become part of that catena of reminders.

3. The twelve men carry out their duty and the crossing is completed (4:8-18).

The men took up (*wayis<sup>e</sup>'u* וַיִּשְׂאוּ) the stones, carried them out, and deposited them at their encampment (N.B. it does not say they set up a memorial. That will come later at Gilgal). The real problem comes at verse 9. This is universally understood as a second memorial set up by Joshua (without divine orders to do so) in the midst of the Jordan. Some argue that the place they were set up was where the priests stood, i.e., at the edge of the waters. So, they would not have been washed away easily.

I wonder if verse 9 should not be understood differently. First of all, the rest of the sequence (verses 1, 3, 4, 5, 8) are all narrative tenses (we call these preterites). Verse 9 uses a construction that interrupts the chain, and in this case, provides a conclusion to the entire sequence. It would be unusual to have this conclusion include a new altar in the midst of the Jordan.

Verse 3 says the stones are to come *from* the midst of the Jordan (*mitok hayarden* מִתּוֹךְ הַיַּרְדֵּן). Verse 5 says the men are to cross to the midst of the Jordan (*el tok hayarden* אֶל תּוֹךְ הַיַּרְדֵּן). Verse 8 says the men took up the stones from the midst of the Jordan (*mitok*

*hayarden* הַיַּרְדֵּן הַזֶּה). The concluding verse 9 says that Joshua raised up these stones (this could mean simply that he took them up,<sup>15</sup> but it probably means that he erected them [as a memorial]). I wonder if this verse does not refer to what Joshua did later at Gilgal (same use of the hiphil). The only problem with this idea is that the Hebrew says clearly that he erected the stones *in* the midst of the Jordan. However, the Hebrew labials “m” and “b” are often confused. With the “m” here, it would mean the stones which were from the Jordan. The translation would then read, “So Joshua erected the twelve stones [which had come] from the midst of the Jordan, the place of the standing of the feet of the priests.” This would anticipate 4:20 just as 3:12 anticipates all of chapter 4.

The priests remained standing in the Jordan until the crossing was completed.<sup>16</sup> The author wants us to understand that all God’s good word had been carried out (4:10). Furthermore, the tribes who had chosen to settle on the eastern side of the Jordan crossed over—the Reubenites, Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh. Finally, the Lord exalted Joshua as he had promised in the eyes of the people, i.e., the miraculous crossing demonstrated that the Lord was with Joshua as He had been with Moses.

The priests then (at the Lord’s command) walked on across the Jordan and the waters returned to their place (4:15-18).

4. The great testimonial (4:19-24).

The Israelites came out of the water on the tenth day of Nisan (the first of the Hebrew religious months). This date will be very important

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<sup>15</sup>The hiphil of “*qum*” several times means simply to lift up (Deut 22:4; 1 Sam 2:8; 2 Sam 12:17).

<sup>16</sup>NIV captures my argument with, “Joshua set up the twelve stones that had been in the middle of the Jordan at the spot where the priests who carried the ark of the covenant had stood.” Adam Clarke (Commentary and Critical Notes, Vol. 12, Loc. cit. refers to Dr. Kennicut, who makes the same argument I do, but Clarke rejects it for lack of textual support.

in the next chapter. Now we have the official erection of the twelve stones as a cairn of remembrance (anticipated in 4:9). Joshua set up the cairn in Gilgal, a place that will hold great importance for Israel in the days to come. Here Joshua repeats the litany of God’s provision for His people in bringing them out of Egypt and now into the promised land. Again, we are reminded that it is not Joshua or the people who are at the center of history, but Yahweh God.

#### E. A New Beginning (5:1-15)

The chapter begins with the note that the inhabitants of the land had heard about the miraculous crossing of the Jordan river, and, as a result, their hearts “melted.” The Israelites, under God’s direction are about to embark on a new enterprise. This requires a reevaluation of where they are spiritually and preparation to make this new move. The first reevaluation concerns circumcision.

##### 1. New Circumcision (5:1-9).

Circumcision, of course, is the sign of the covenant God made with Abraham. It was therefore a necessary ritual to keep reminding the people of who they were under God’s covenant, made with Abraham and renewed at Sinai. Consequently, prior to entering the land, all those who had been born in the wilderness had to be circumcised.<sup>17</sup> The place name Gibath-ha<sup>a</sup>raloth (גִּבְעַת הָעֵרְלוֹת) may be a geographical location, or a reference to the circumcision itself. It means literally “hill” or “heap” of the “foreskins.” Verse nine has a play on the name Gilgal. Hebrew words with “gil” or “gal” as a component have something to do with round: a wheel (Gilgal), a lake (Galilee), a region (Gilead), or a head (Golgotha), for instance. The verb also means to go around in circles or to dance. The Hebrew verb “to roll away” comes from “*gallothi*.” Since it has a similar sound to Gilgal, the Lord relates the two. The site of Gilgal is to remind them that Yahweh has rolled away the reproach of Egypt (the embarrassment and shame of their enslavement). Now they are ready to partake of the Passover.

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<sup>17</sup>Woudstra, *Joshua*, p. 99, reminds us of the necessity of the circumcision of Moses’ sons before he could lead the people from bondage.

2. New Passover (5:10).

This important ritual feast originated in God's deliverance of His people from the bondage of Egypt. Now the combination of circumcision and Passover indicate that Joshua is truly leading God's people into their rest (Heb 4:8). Unfortunately, the people did not wholly follow the Lord and so did not actually enter the rest God had designed for them. So, a new rest in Christ will come about.

3. New Food (5:11-12).

God's miraculous provision of food in the wilderness must also cease. The wilderness wanderings are over, and a new food is in the offing. Consequently, the people eat of the produce of the land on that day and the Manna ceased. Now they are ready to go, and divine direction is about to take place.<sup>18</sup>

4. New Revelation of Joshua (5:13-15).

One of the most intriguing passages in the Book of Joshua occurs here. The mysterious person called the prince or leader of Yahweh's army puts in an appearance to Joshua personally to give him courage and direction for the taking of Jericho. Just as God appeared to Moses in the burning bush, so He now appears to Joshua.

The person appears in a military form. His sword is drawn in a stance of hostility. Joshua walks up to him and asks boldly whether he is for Israel or the Canaanites. The man answers with the word "no" a surprising answer. No wonder some Hebrew MSS have "to him" (the Hebrew word "no" and "to him" are pronounced the same way. This often leads to mistakes in copying). The reading would then be, "and he said to him, I have come as prince . . ." But it is more likely that the harder reading is the correct one ("no.") The man asserts that he is no one's employ except that of the Lord of Host. Joshua recognizes

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<sup>18</sup>See *Ibid.*, p. 103 for a discussion of the apparent discrepancies between the Passover, Unleavened bread, and the eating of the produce of the land.

a very special being before him and falls on his face to do obeisance (this word does not require that the recipient be divine). He then asks, “What does my Lord require of me.”<sup>19</sup>

The first thing the man requires is that Joshua remove his sandals. This obviously relates this revelation to that of Moses in Exodus 3. It also indicates a divine presence. There is little question that this “man” is really a theophany, i.e., God has appeared to Joshua.

One might expect further instruction from the theophany, but none is given here. It is quite likely that the instruction found in 6:2-5 is given by the Prince of Yahweh’s host. Verse one would be inserted by the author to indicate the need for the instruction.

### III. Conquering the Land (6:1—12:24)

#### A. Defeat of Jericho (6:1-27)

1. Before discussing the text, it is important to look at the general discussion of the ruins of Jericho and the implications of archaeology for the historicity of the fall of Jericho under Joshua.

This is a key city in which to look for archaeological help on the biblical data. Garstang (*Digging up Jericho*) in his excavations from 1930-36 identified a set of burned walls as belonging to the late bronze age or the time of Joshua. K. Kenyon (“Jericho,” *Archaeology and Old Testament Study*) says that “This was . . . a completely erroneous identification, for the defenses in question belonged to the Early Bronze Age” (3000-2300 by her reckoning). Archer, in a series on biblical archaeology in *Bib Sac* (1970), quotes Garstang (in 1948) as saying his position has not been refuted. Archer argues that this is a case in point where the prejudgment of one’s position (in this case a late date for the Exodus) controls the interpretation of the data. However, Miss Kenyon argues that “. . . it

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<sup>19</sup>Woudstra, *Joshua*, p. 105, says that the phrase “my lord” does not require that the person be deity because it is “*adoni*” and not “*adonai*.” However, in the first person, the singular/plural vowel with “*adon*” is the choice of the Masoretes, so, it could be Adonai.

is impossible to associate the destruction of Jericho with such a date [late date]. The town may have been destroyed by one of the other Hebrew groups, the history of whose infiltrations is, as generally recognized, complex. Alternatively, the placing at Jericho of a dramatic siege and capture may be an aetiological explanation of a ruined city.<sup>20</sup> Archaeology cannot provide the answer.”<sup>21</sup> Bryant Wood takes an opposing view.<sup>22</sup> In view of this conflict, it appears to me that it would be better not to call on archaeology for help in illuminating the siege of Jericho, but to accept the biblical account including the date of 1 Kings 6:1, which is not disproved by archaeology, and wait for further developments.<sup>23</sup>

## 2. The Strange Instructions (6:1-5).

This first battle initiating Israel to God’s deliverance and holiness must take place in a miraculous way. Only God’s priests carrying God’s ark of the covenant and blowing the shophar horns will bring victory. We learn further in 17-19 that the city and all its contents, people and things are under the “ban.” The word “ban” is from the Hebrew “*herem*” which means devoted exclusively to God.<sup>24</sup> This awful decree is indicated because Jericho was the first of the cities to be defeated by the Israelites. It was thus a sort of “first fruits” to the Lord. Like the new circumcision, new Passover, and new food, this first city must be dedicated completely to the Lord.

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<sup>20</sup>Wright, in “Is Glueck’s aim to Prove that the Bible is True?” *Biblical Archaeologist*, XXII, December 1959, *denies* the etiological explanation.

<sup>21</sup>K. Kenyon, “Jericho,” p. 273.

<sup>22</sup>Bryant Wood (See “Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho? A New Look at the Archaeological Evidence,” *BAR* 16:02) has taken up the issue again and argued that Kenyon misinterpreted some of the data.

<sup>23</sup>See further, Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, pp. 79, 80, Wood in *New Perspectives on Old Testament Studies*, and Waltke, *Bib Sac*, J-M, 1972).

<sup>24</sup>The Arabic word “*harem*” is related, meaning a group of women dedicated exclusively to the Sultan.



3. The mysterious, eerie march (6:6-11).

The army and the priests, carrying the ark, marched around the city six different days. What must the inhabitants of Jericho have thought as they peered over the wall and waited for the attack? They no doubt thought the walls of Jericho were impregnable, but they failed to reckon with the might of God.

4. The fall of the city (6:12-21).

On the seventh day, they marched around the city seven times. The number seven, of course, is a prominent number in the Old Testament. It shows perfection or completeness. On the seventh circuit, Joshua told the people to shout. This they did, and the walls fell flat totally exposing the city. The soldiers then poured into the city and wreaked havoc on the city, destroying all living beings.

The speech about placing the city under the ban sounds as though it is being made in the heat of the battle. Obviously, that is impossible, and we need to understand the Old Testament narrative style in which a speech made earlier to the people is inserted at the point where it has the most application.

5. The fulfillment of the vow to Rahab (6:22-25).

In spite of all that must have been on his mind, Joshua reminded the two spies to go to the harlot's house and fulfill their vow to her. Thus, were Rahab and all her family saved from the destruction that enveloped the city. She became part of the family of faith, an ancestress of David and of Jesus the Messiah (Matt 1:5). All the precious metals were turned over to the priests to be deposited in the "house of the Lord" or tabernacle.

6. The terrible oath about Jericho (6:26-27).

Joshua declared that the man who rebuilt Jericho would be under a curse. His oldest and youngest sons would die in the process. This was fulfilled in 1 Kings 16:34.

B. Sin of Achan—Defeat at Ai (7:1-26)

1. The archaeological issues at Ai.

“And Joshua sent men from Jericho to Ai, which is beside Bethaven, on the east side of Beth-el . . . they are but few.” (Josh 7:2-3). Ha’ai means “the heap” (see *BASOR*, #198, April 1970).

According to Wright, Ai’s excavation indicates a small, flourishing town, heavily fortified, between the 33rd and 24th centuries B.C. The chief structure within was a fine temple, beautifully built and the huge walls were its protection.<sup>25</sup>

The city is said to have been destroyed about 2400 B.C. and not reoccupied until c. 1000 B.C. Attempts to answer this are:

- a. Etiological explanation.
- b. People from Bethel temporarily occupying the city.
- c. Albright: Story in Joshua concerns Bethel but later it was identified with Ai.

Excavation shows a violent destruction of Bethel in the 13th century (Albright and Kelso—1934, 1955-60). It is more probable that this is the destruction of Bethel referred to in Judges 1 at a later date.

Since the biblical account is quite explicit, we can only assume:

- a. The occupation was so light as to leave no trace.
- b. The mound excavated (et Tell) is not Ai.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, p. 80.

<sup>26</sup>See Livingston, *Westminster Theological Journal*, 33, Nov. 1970, p. 20f. He argues that Bethel is really modern Bira and Ai an unnamed mound nearby.

2. The first foray against Ai (7:1-5).

The chapter begins by informing us that the Israelites had acted unfaithfully against the Lord regarding the ban. The reason was that one of their people, Achan, had defiled the people by taking some of the stuff that had been dedicated to the Lord. The corporate aspect of God's dealing with His people is on display here. "A little leaven leavens the whole lump" (1 Cor 5:6). This will cause the anger of the Lord to "burn against them" and they will lose the next battle. Again, the initiatory acts of the people must be accompanied by holiness. When God begins a new thing, he is very firm with His children.<sup>27</sup>

The spies concluded that Ai was lightly occupied and would be easily defeated. So, Joshua sent only 3,000, but they were defeated and lost 36 men. The result was psychologically devastating to the Israelites.

3. Joshua's spiritual defeat (7:6-9).

Joshua assumes the mode of mourning. A catastrophe has taken place and God's promises seem to mean nothing. Joshua is concerned that all the people of the lands will now defeat them and mock the name of the Lord.

4. God's response to the sin problem (7:10-15).

Yahweh is not patient with Joshua. A disaster such as this should have alerted him to the probability of some act of disobedience on the part of Israel. So, God demands that Joshua rise up, stop feeling sorry for himself, and deal with the sin of Israel. Israel has lost the battle, says Yahweh, because of sin. They have violated the covenant. The demand is that Israel rise up and consecrate themselves (as they had done prior to crossing the Jordan). He then tells Joshua the procedure by which the sin will be determined.

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<sup>27</sup>Note the death of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5 as the church was beginning.

5. The sin revealed (7:16-21).

The procedure set out by Yahweh was followed, and Achan was finally exposed as the sinner. He explains what he did, a rather innocent thing he thought, but God views sin differently.

6. The sin punished (7:22-26).

The stolen material was found in Achan's tent. They then took him, his family, and all his possessions to the valley of Achor and stoned them to death. This seems like harsh punishment, but sin unchecked will destroy God's people. A memorial cairn was raised over Achan to remind the people of the danger of rebelling against God.

C. Defeat of Ai (8:1-35).

1. Divine instructions (8:1-2).

There is no mention of divine instruction at the first attack on Ai. It is not necessarily the case that Joshua cannot initiate action on his own, but in this case, at least, God's intervention was necessary. In this instance God tells him to take all the people of war (not just a few as in chapter 7). The instructions include an ambushade.

2. The plan of attack (8:3-9).

Joshua selected 30,000 to leave early and set up an ambush behind the city of Ai.<sup>28</sup> Joshua and the main force will feint an attack on the

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<sup>28</sup>Excursus on the problem of the numbers 30,000 in v. 3 for the ambushade and 5,000 in v. 12. Conservatives tend to argue for two ambushades, but their location to the west of the city seems to argue against this. Critical commentaries see two different accounts that have been redacted into one but containing contradictions. Greek (B) has smoothed it out by omitting the second number and saying simply, αἱ πᾶς ὁ λαὸς ὁ πολεμιστῆς μετ' αὐτοῦ ἀνέβησαν καὶ πορευόμενοι ἦλθον ἐξ ἐναντίας τῆς πόλεως ἀπ' ἀνατολῶν καὶ τὰ ἔνεδρα τῆς πόλεως ἀπὸ θαλάσσης "All the people of war with him went up and came before the city from the east. And the ambushade of the city was from the west." Keil and Delitzsch (*Joshua and Judges*, p. 86) argue that an error in the transmission of the first number must have occurred. Thus the 30,000 should be 5,000

city gates and then fall back as previously. As soon as this happens, and the men in the city are drawn out into the open, the ambushade will attack and burn the city.

3. The attack (8:10-23).

The strategy set out by Yahweh is simple but ingenious. A group of soldiers will sneak in by night and set up an ambush from the rear. The main body will confront the city from the front and draw them away from the city by feigning defeat. Then the ambushade will rise up, attack the city from the rear, and burn it. They will then come out and form a pincers movement with the main body, trapping the inhabitants of Ai between them (8:10-13).

The plan was put into motion and worked as Yahweh had said it would. Bethel is mentioned as being part of the Ai contingent in v. 17. Apparently, they had decided to join forces with those of Ai and thus became vulnerable to the same consequence (8:14-17).

When Joshua gave the signal (raised dagger) the flight stopped and the ambushade came out and set the city on fire, leaving the people of Ai completely dispirited and afraid. Then the slaughter began, and the King of Ai was kept alive for future treatment (8:18-23).

4. The aftermath (8:24-29).

About 12,000 residents of Ai died that day. The *herem* war of Jericho is followed here with one exception: the loot taken from the city may be kept by the soldiers. The city was burned and turned into a heap and the king was hanged.

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and the second account is simply restating the first one. Something like that must have happened. It would be tempting to follow the LXX here, but they are probably smoothing out the problem their own way. Boling (*Joshua*, p. 239) refers to the 5,000 as five contingents, “another way of referring to the 30,000.”

D. The Altar in Mount Ebal and the law of God written and recited (8:30-35).<sup>29</sup>

The defeat of Ai (and Bethel?) opened up the way into the hill country and access to the area of Shechem (modern day Nablus).<sup>30</sup> There surrounding the city are two mountains. Joshua built an altar on Mount Ebal and offered sacrifices on it.<sup>31</sup> The law (ten commandments) was inscribed on the stones, and then the whole law was read (Deuteronomy?) with the blessings and the curses. All this was in fulfillment of Moses' command in Deut 11:26-32.

E. Treaty with the Gibeonites (9:1-27)

1. The archaeological issues at Gibeon.

The Gibeonites made a league with Joshua (chapter 9) and became “hewers of wood” and “drawers of water.”

Gibeon was excavated by Pritchard from 1956-1962 (It is not all finished). The most outstanding thing there is the huge water cistern 37 feet in diameter and 82 feet deep.<sup>32</sup> In addition there was a winery with a capacity of 25,000 gallons.<sup>33</sup> There is evidence of continuous habitation without destruction in accord with the biblical account.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>29</sup>See Machlin, *Joshua's Altar*, for a popular presentation of Adam Zertal's altar.

<sup>30</sup>The easy access to central Canaanite territory raises the question of why. Boling (*Joshua*, p. 63) says, “The etiological saga about the occupation of Ai (chap. 8) and of Gibeon and related cities (chap. 9) indicate that the Samarian middle of the country was also captured by the Israelite tribes.”

<sup>31</sup>See Adam Zertal, “Has Joshua's Altar Been Found on Mt. Ebal?” *BAR*, 11.1 (1985): 26–35, 38–41, 43.

<sup>32</sup>Pritchard, *ANEP*, #810, 876, 878, 879.

<sup>33</sup>Pritchard, *Gibeon, Where the Sun Stood Still*.

<sup>34</sup>See Reed, “Gibeon” in *Archaeology and Old Testament Study*, pp. 231-243.

2. The coalition of Canaanite kings (9:1-2).

These petty kings were usually fighting against one another as the Amarna tablets indicate. Now with an overwhelming threat facing them, they decide to form an alliance for mutual protection.

3. The response of the Gibeonites (9:3-15).

The locus of the story in chapters 9 and 10 is Gilgal. Apparently, Joshua had returned there after the ritual activities at Shechem. The Gibeonites, on the other hand, recognized the futility of such action and so decided on a subterfuge as a means of survival (9:3-8).

They pretended to come from a distant country. The author again wants us to hear the rehearsal of God's acts, so he records the testimony of the Gibeonites regarding God's deliverance of Israel from Egypt and from Sihon and Og (9:9-13).

Joshua and the people, without consulting Yahweh, made a covenant treaty with the Gibeonites to allow them to live in their midst. This was a violation of what God had told them to do, but they were deceived by the ruse of the Gibeonites (9:14-15).

The ruse was revealed, and the Israelites learned that the Gibeonites were local and lived in four different cities. The army massed against the cities, but the elders warned against an attack because they had made a treaty with them. They furthermore offered a compromise: the Gibeonites would become slaves to the central sanctuary (9:16-21).<sup>35</sup>

Joshua confronted the Gibeonites and confirms the Elders' decision to make them "hewers of wood and drawers of water." The author again records their speech as a testimony to God's activities among his people. He has promised them the land and the defeat of all its occupants. Therefore, the Gibeonites are content to be slaves rather than die (9:22-27).

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<sup>35</sup>Note the religious activity at Gibeon in the pre-Davidic period: 2 Sam 2:12ff?; 1 Kings 3:4; 1 Chron 16:39; 21:29; 2 Chron 1:3, 13.

F. The Central Campaign (10:1-43)

1. The archaeological issues.

The defeat of these outpost cities was necessary to open up the hill country. When Sennacherib and Nebuchadnezzar invaded Judah centuries later, they followed the same strategy. All the cities mentioned in Joshua can today be located with a high degree of probability except Makkedah.<sup>36</sup>

*Lachish.*

Lachish was excavated by Starkey beginning in 1933. It was finished in 1957.

A jar was found with hieratic script of a receipt dated in the year of some Pharaoh. Which one? There is no real way of knowing, but Ramases II or Merenptah is usually chosen for obvious reasons (see chronology). It is the stele of Merenptah (c. 1220 B.C.) which contains the only mention of Israel and refers to them as a people in Palestine (*ANEP* p. 115, fig. 342).

Lachish letters are broken pieces of pot (*ostraka*) with writing on them. These come from Jeremiah's time in the seventh century.<sup>37</sup>

*Debir—Kiriath-sepher—Modern tell Beit Mirsim.*

Albright's own discussion of the archaeological data in *Archaeology and Old Testament Study* does not sound as conclusive as Wright indicates in *Biblical Archaeology*. One phase of the city was destroyed about the middle of the 14th century although an earlier or later date is possible.

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<sup>36</sup>Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, p. 81.

<sup>37</sup>Pritchard, *ANEP*, #808.



The destruction of another level “must have been quite late in the 13th century B.C.”

I do not believe that Albright’s discussion is dogmatic enough to warrant a 1250 date for Israel to have defeated Debir.<sup>38</sup>

2. An alliance against Gibeon (10:1-5).

Adonizedek (the Lord is righteous), king of Jerusalem, appears to be the ringleader. Gibeon’s defection from a united front against Israel spelled danger to the other city states.<sup>39</sup> So he sent to the kings of Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon asking them to join him for a punitive raid against Gibeon.<sup>40</sup> So they laid siege to the city.

3. The victory against the alliance (10:6-11).

Joshua received word from the Gibeonites who demanded that Israel fulfill her treaty obligations to them. After an encouraging word from the Lord, Joshua quick marched all night (as General Patton) to Gibeon and engaged the enemy.

The Scripture indicates that God directly intervened on behalf of Israel and against her enemies. It does not say how the Lord “confounded” the enemy, but it often refers to confusion in the ranks so that in a period of semi-darkness, the men turn on one another.

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<sup>38</sup>See J. Hoffman, “What is the Biblical Date for the Exodus? A Response to Bryant Wood,” *JETS* 50/2 (June 2007) 225–47.

<sup>39</sup>Note the repeated statements of the fear generated in the Canaanites by the awesome acts of God on behalf of His people (2:10-11; 5:1; 9:1-2, 24).

<sup>40</sup>Garstang, *Joshua, Judges*, p. 177, says, “We have already realized that the composition of the league assembled by Adonizedek could hardly be explained merely as the banding together of neighbouring cities for their mutual protection; and it now becomes fairly obvious that this combine represents a political organization, the rally under a responsible head of cities still faithful to the Pharaoh, in a punitive expedition against the chieftains who had entered into alliance with the Hebrews, one of the disturbing elements of the day.”

Further, as the alliance fled, God rained hail stones on them large enough to kill them.

4. Joshua's long day (10:12-15).

This account is probably one of the most famous in the Old Testament. There are two or three things we should note about it. 1) the statement is in poetic structure, and 2) the story was taken from the Book of Jashar, an otherwise unknown book which contained accounts of Israel's victories.<sup>41</sup> From an astronomy point of view, there is no way to explain this phenomenon. God was working miraculously to provide Israel with more daylight.<sup>42</sup>

5. The final end of the kings involved in the alliance (10:16-27).

The kings fled the battlefield and hid in a cave. Joshua told the people to wall them in and continue with the battle. After the utter defeat of the men in the alliance, Joshua had the men come forth, and had the Israelites put their feet on their necks as a symbol of God's domination of the Canaanites through Israel. Then the five kings were hanged. As was Joshua's custom, their bodies were removed at sunset in accordance with Deut 21:22-23.

6. The remaining central/southern campaign (10:28-39).

Joshua then followed up on his victory in the field by attacking and destroying cities: Makkedah, Libnah, Lachish, King of Gezer, Eglon, Hebron, and Debir (see the maps at the end of the Joshua notes).

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<sup>41</sup>This book is also referred to in 2 Sam 1:18 as the source of David's lament over Jonathan. Woudstra, *Joshua*, p. 176, says, "The work appears to have been a collection of odes in praise of certain heroes of the theocracy, interwoven with historical notices of their achievements."

<sup>42</sup>An "urban legend" has been circulating for several years that the NASA scientists found a gap of one day in history and determined it to be Joshua's long day. There is nothing to the account (I have checked with NASA people) and yet it keeps circulating.

7. Summary of the battles (10:40-43).

The summation of the battles is set forth in sweeping, hyperbolic terms. We know from other places that Joshua, while making a slicing attack against the Canaanites, did not defeat all of them, for many were left in the land. This is typical victory language used in the ancient middle east and must be understood as such.<sup>43</sup>

G. The Northern Campaign (11:1-23)

1. The archaeological issues.

“And Joshua at that time turned back, and took Hazor, and smote the king thereof with the sword: for Hazor beforetime was the head of all those kingdoms.” Josh 11:10. See map on p. 46.

See *Biblical Archaeologist* XXII, 1959, and Yadin<sup>44</sup> for a discussion. Hazor is mentioned in the execration texts and the Mari tablets. There was caravan travel between Hazor and Babylon. It was a huge city of 40,000 people.

Hazor was destroyed in the middle of the 13th century B.C. L. Wood says Hazor was burned but the evidence of destruction in the 13th century is not burning. But Stratum XVI (3) dated by Yadin in 16th-15th centuries was burned. This may be the one Joshua burned, and it was rebuilt and strong during the time of Deborah.<sup>45</sup>

*Conclusion about archaeological issues*

We conclude our study of the conquest as we began. Archaeology is not as conclusive for a late date theory as is often presented, but neither does it give evidence for an earlier date. We will simply have

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<sup>43</sup>See the discussion of Kitchen on page 13.

<sup>44</sup>Yadin, *Archaeology and Old Testament Study*, pp. 245-263.

<sup>45</sup>See Wood, *New Perspectives on the Old Testament*, p. 66ff.

to wait (perhaps in vain) for further interpretation and correlation which will help. The evidence does show violent disruption of many of the cities in the general period of the Exodus of Israel from Egypt. In the meantime, we should hold to the biblical chronology as given in 1 Kings 6:1.

2. Another coalition forms against Israel (11:1-5).

The movement is now to the north. Joshua has conquered the central and southern portions of the land. This time the big man is Jabin king of Hazor.<sup>46</sup> He threw his net widely and encompassed three kings near him as well as several to the east and west. They joined forces at the waters of Merom in the Huleh valley north of the Sea of Galilee.<sup>47</sup>

3. Joshua has another great victory (11:6-15).

This unit begins with the customary hortatory word from Yahweh. Then Joshua's sudden attack caught the enemy by surprise, and they were completely routed.<sup>48</sup> Their war machine was destroyed as Joshua cut the tendons of the horses and burned the chariots. Chariots are an Egyptian innovation. In the hands of the Philistines, they will discomfit the Israelites in Saul's day. Joshua then burned the city of Hazor (the only one in the northern campaign) and killed the residents. They treated them as *herem* again except that, as with Ai, they were allowed to keep the booty. This unqualified language

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<sup>46</sup>There is a man with the same name in Deborah and Barak's battle with Hazor in Judges 4-5. This is no doubt a dynastic title borne by successive kings. Boling, *Joshua*, p. 304, says, "This is the shortened form of a sentence name, 'the god N has created/built.' It is a Hazor dynastic name, as known from an unpublished Mari text, which also yields the name of the patron deity, when it mentions 'Ibni-Adad, king of Hazor.'"

<sup>47</sup>For an excellent discussion of the geographical references, see Boling, *Joshua*, pp. 304-06.

<sup>48</sup>Boling, *Ibid.*, p. 311, suggests that the hamstringing of the horses took place prior to the raid, and thus the soldiers had no horses for their chariots.

of destruction we have become accustomed to hearing and understand that it is the ancient near eastern way of describing victory without necessarily being taken literally in the details. Verse 15 again reminds us that Joshua was fulfilling the word of the Lord commanded to Moses.

#### 4. Summary of Joshua's conquests (11:16-23).

This is a theological statement. We know that a large number of tribal groups were never conquered. However, the blitzkrieg approach Joshua followed was successful. He was able to defeat all those who came against him from the north at the foot of Mt. Hermon to the Negeb in the south.<sup>49</sup> The statement to Abraham in Gen 15:12-21 in which Abraham's descendants are promised these very lands is now fulfilled. The judgment upon the Canaanites came through the Israelites. God gave them 400 years while the Israelites were in Egypt, but they did not repent, so God hardened their sinful hearts so that they would fight and die.

The reference to the Anakim (21-22) is appropriately placed here to counterbalance the account of the spies who were afraid to enter the land because of the Anakim (Num 13:33).

#### H. Summary of the War (12:1-24)

1. The victories on the east side of the Jordan under Moses (12:1-6).
2. This chapter is a summary of the conquest to this point. The territory on the east side of the Jordan had been allocated to Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh after the defeat of the Amorite kings under Moses.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup>Woudstra, *Joshua*, p. 194, says, "The author now comes to a provisional conclusion to his narrative of the Conquest. Though at late points (e.g., 13:1; 15:63; 16:10) he will point to the incompleteness of the Conquest, at this stage he emphasizes that, from a certain viewpoint, one could say that the whole land was taken."

<sup>50</sup>Again, for a good summary of the geographical data, see Boling, *Joshua*, pp. 323-29.

3. The victories on the west side of the Jordan under Joshua (12:7-24).

The extent of the land that was conquered by the Israelites is listed from north to south and east to west. Then a list of the ethnic groups is provided: Hittite, Amorite, Canaanite, Perizzite, Hivite, and Jebusite. It is clear from the book of Joshua itself that all this land was not controlled by Israel; they had merely established supremacy over it. There is much yet to be taken. The chapter concluded with the listing of 31 kings who were defeated.

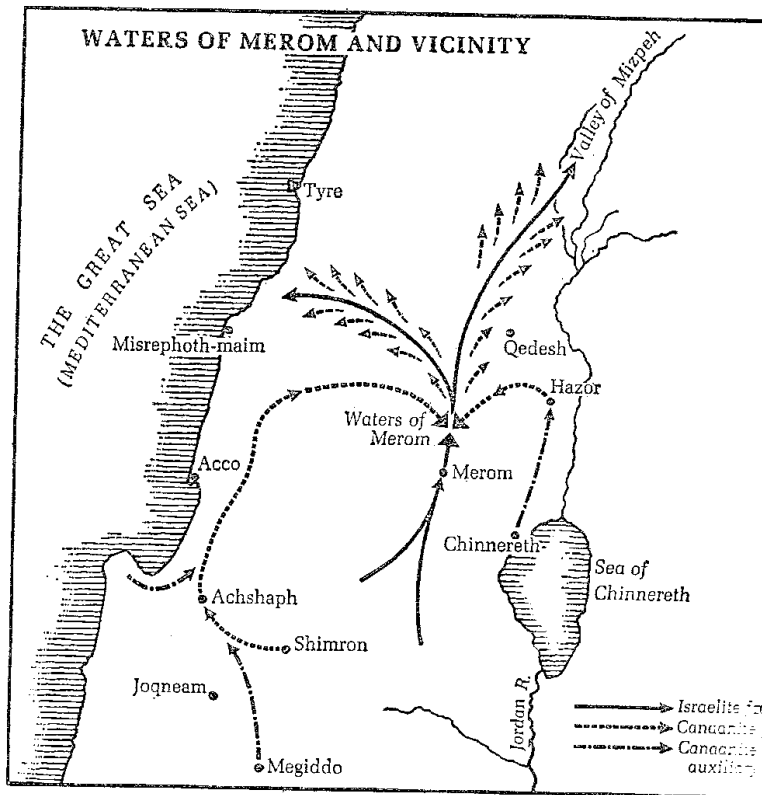
IV. Dividing the Land (13:1—21:45)

A. The problem of unconquered land (13:1-7).

This section, above all, should make it clear that the language of conquest is ancient near eastern hyperbole. Joshua and Israel established supremacy in many ways, but the control of the land was yet to be accomplished. It is obvious from Yahweh's description of Joshua's age, that considerable time has passed. The best estimate for all the military activities is about seven years. The Lord tells Joshua that it is time for him to use his authority and position to carry out the complex task of allocating the land to the people of Israel.

B. Settlement on the east side of the Jordan (13:1-33).

1. Reuben's inheritance on the east side (13:8-23).
2. Gad's inheritance on the east side (13:24-28).
3. Half of the tribe of Manasseh on the east side (13:29-31).
4. Summary statement including the exclusion of Levi in the allotment (13:32-33).



Map from Boling, *Joshua*

C. Settlement on the west side of the Jordan (14:1—19:51).

1. Joseph's inheritance (Ephraim and Manasseh) (14:1-5).
2. Judah's inheritance (14:6—15:63).

The inheritance of Joseph is interrupted with the story of Caleb's brave testimony and action against the Anakim. The second part of the story is found in 14:13-18, partially repeated in Judges 1:11-15. The prominent role of Judah in the future is represented in the details given to her allotment.

3. The house of Joseph's inheritance, continued (16:1—17:18).

The reminder is there (as it was in 15:63) that only partial dominance had been achieved and much was left to be done (16:10).

The implementation of Moses' instruction about female inheritance takes place (17:3-4).

Allotment of Manasseh's land (17:5-13).

Joshua chides the house of Joseph when they complain that their allotment is too small. He tells them they are big enough to carve out their own territory and to take on the armies of chariots. This is further indication of the incomplete task of conquering the land (17:14-18).

4. Final allotment at Shiloh (18:1-10).

Shiloh is now the official site of the tabernacle. Here Joshua gathers the tribes together and chides them for not having completed their task of taking control of the land. He tells them to choose three men from each tribe and check out the land and take notes on it so that he can cast lots to proportion the land. Again, the Levites are mentioned as not being a part of the allotment. They will be cared for separately. The men checked out the land, brought back their survey, and Joshua cast lots for the remaining tribes.

5. The lot of Benjamin (18:11-28).

Benjamin will later be almost swallowed up in Judah. Particularly after the civil war in Judges 19-20, when they were decimated.

6. The lot of Simeon (19:1-9).

Simeon, even more than Benjamin, became swallowed up in Judah, because their inheritance was in the middle of Judah. Does this fulfill Jacob's prophecy "I will disperse them [Simeon and Levi] in Israel and scatter them in Jacob"? (Gen 49:7).

7. The lot of Zebulun (19:10-16).



8. The lot of Issachar (19:17-23).
9. The lot of Asher (19:24-31).
10. The lot of Naphtali (19:32-39).
11. The lot of Dan (19:40-48).

The story of the Danite migration is told in more detail in Judges 17-18. This indicates that this portion of Joshua was not recorded until that time. This is the second account found in both Joshua and Judges.

12. The inheritance of Joshua in Ephraim (19:49-50).
  13. The concluding and summarizing statement of the allotment at Shiloh (19:51).
- C. The cities of refuge (20:1-9).

This interesting juridical practice was set in motion by Moses in Deut 4:41-43; 19:2ff. These asylum cities were to protect only those who had killed someone accidentally. If the death was premeditated, the asylum was not to protect them. There were three cities on each side of the river and located to accommodate all the tribes.

- D. The Levitical allotment of cities (20:10-42).

The Levites were allowed to have cities with surrounding pasturage. There were 48 cities in all.

- E. Final theological statement about God's provision of the land (21:43-45).

V. Settling the Land (22:1—24:33)

- A. Joshua's charge (22:1-6).

It has been a long and arduous struggle to conquer the land. Now the time has come to dismiss the two- and one-half tribes whose homes are on the east side. Joshua dismisses them with the charge "to observe the com-

mandment and law which Moses gave them: to love the Lord your God and walk in all His ways and keep His commandments and hold fast to him and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul.”

- B. The return of the two- and one-half tribes to the east side (22:7-9).
- C. The two- and one-half tribes build an altar (22:10-12).

From the beginning of her existence, Israel was threatened with dissolution. The centripetal force that drew them together was the central sanctuary. At this time, it was at Shiloh. This brought the tribes together with all their differences around Yahweh their God. (The “easterners” fear was that they would be shut out of that relationship.) The centrifugal force that tended to drive them apart was tribalism. Each tribe tended to seek its own welfare and to go its own way. This force eventually triumphed with the separation of the nation into north and south. This altar was viewed by the main Israel camp as pagan and therefore a departure from the Lord. They met at Shiloh (note the emphasis on the new cult center where the tabernacle was located) and prepared for civil war.

- D. The peace mission (22:13-20).

The people of Israel wisely sent a peace mission prior to attacking. They charge the “easterners” with committing an unfaithful act against the Lord. The word *ma'al* (מַעַל) is the same word use in 7:1. The noun is only used with reference to an act of perfidy against God. The peace mission links this with the activity of Balaam against Israel that resulted in a plague (Num 25:1-9). Furthermore, they are concerned that the acts of the “easterners” will bring God’s judgment on all Israel as happened when Achan sinned. This leads them to refer to the sin of Achan which caused Israel to lose the battle at Ai. These are very serious charges.

- E. The “easterners” defense (22:21-29).

The two- and one-half tribes say to the representatives who have chided them, “if we have done what you suggest, i.e., committed an unfaithful act against the Lord, or if we have built an altar for the holocaust offering or the grain offering, then may the Lord himself deal with us.” They

almost swear an oath by saying, “The Mighty One, God, the Lord, the Mighty One, God the Lord” (22:21-23).

However, they say, we have not done that. This altar is not for burnt and grain offerings. It is merely a memorial so that the “westerners” will not forget that we belong to the Lord also. So, this altar is a “witness” between us.<sup>51</sup> The memorial altar is a “copy” of the real one at Shiloh (22:24-29).

F. The happy conclusion (22:30-34).

The representatives are well pleased with this response by the “easterners.” Phinehas commends them for their answer and indicates full acceptance of the sentiment they have expressed through the altar. When they report back to the main body at Shiloh, they likewise are well pleased, and so the matter was resolved that could have led to a bloody civil war. The “easterners” call the altar “witness” because it was a witness between them and the “westerners” that Yahweh alone is God.

G. Joshua calls another solemn assembly (23:1-16).

The language of 23:1-2 is similar to 13:1. A significant amount of time has passed, and Joshua feels compelled to bring his people together to admonish them. The Lord has given rest to Israel, i.e., the military combat beginning with Jericho is over (23:1-3).

We are reminded again (v. 4) that there remains a lot to be done. Joshua says he has divided all the land by lots, but much of it is yet unclaimed. So, he encourages them to trust the Lord, be firm and keep the law of Moses. They are to avoid mixing with the nations who are left, because they will be tempted to join them in worship of false gods. If they fail to follow Joshua’s admonitions, the Lord will abandon them to their enemies, and they in turn will be “snares, traps, thorns, and whips” to Israel (23:4-13).

Finally, Joshua says he is near death, and as such, he must give them a dying man’s statement. Though they have seen all the good that Yahweh has done on their behalf, all that will be reversed if they disobey and

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<sup>51</sup>Compare the “heap of witness” between Jacob and Laban (Gen 31:44-49).

follow false gods. The curses of the covenant (read from Mt. Ebal) will come upon them and destroy them. This prediction came about fully in succeeding ages (23:14-16).

H. Joshua's farewell address (24:1-28).

Joshua assembled the people to Shechem (not Shiloh this time). He first of all recites the great acts of God: Call of Abraham, Jacob and Esau, Egyptian bondage and deliverance, wandering in the wilderness, victory on the east bank, defeat of Balak (and Balaam), defeat of Jericho, inheritance of a land that was not theirs. The hornet in 24:12 is thought by Garstang to be a representation of Egypt (as seen in the cartouches). Hence, he believes it refers to the debilitating influence of Egypt on the Canaanite cities<sup>52</sup> (24:1-13).

This brings a concluding statement (in Hebrew, "and now"). In light of all God's faithfulness to them, he admonishes them to serve Yahweh in sincerity and truth and put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the river and in Egypt and serve the Lord. Does this mean that some were still worshipping false gods? Today, he says they must make a choice. He and his house have made theirs: they will serve the Lord (24:14-15).

The people respond in the strongest language that they will not abandon the Lord (24:16-18).

Joshua reminds them that God is a demanding God. He will hold them accountable for their disobedience. The people respond strongly again, saying that they will serve the Lord. Joshua then sets up a stone as a witness that they have promised to serve the Lord. He also wrote the words in the book of the law of God. The words to which the people have just agreed, are treated as the Law of God, and so written in a book. The stone is erected to remind all passers-by of the covenant Joshua and the people entered into with God. Joshua then dismissed the assembly (24:19-28).

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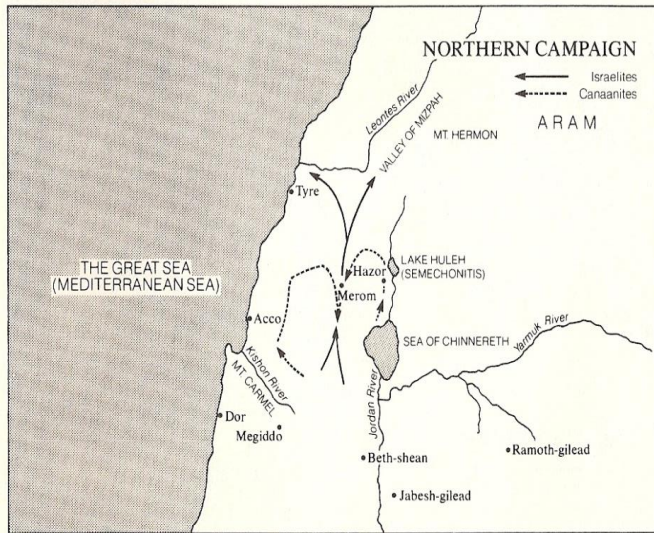
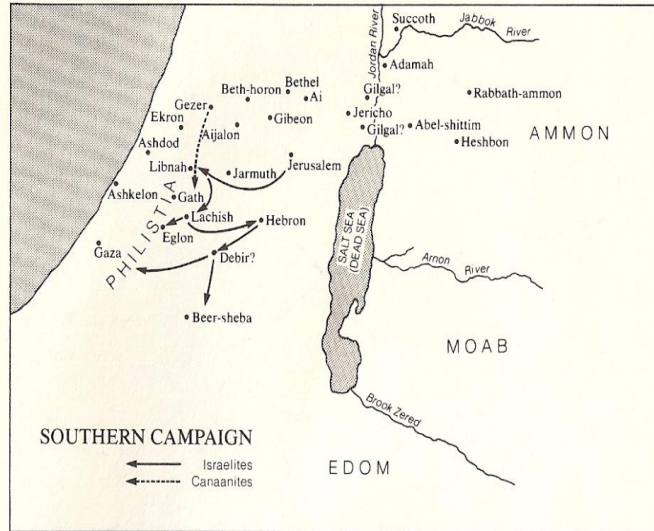
<sup>52</sup>Garstang, *Joshua, Judges*, pp. 258-60.

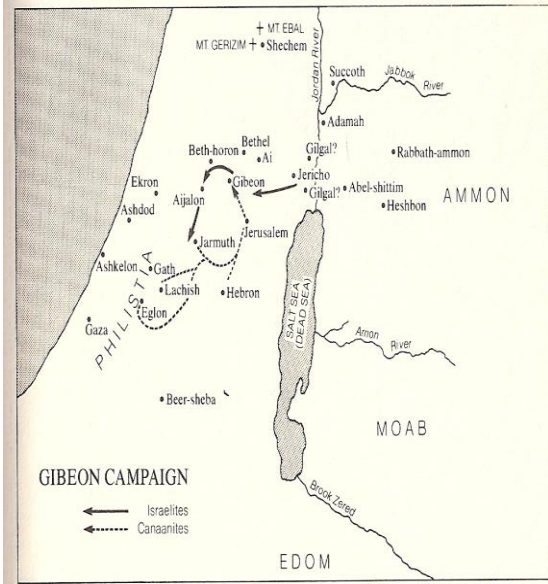
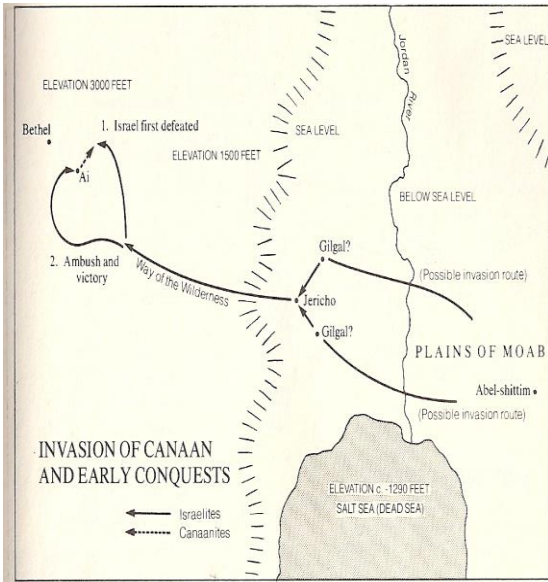
I. Coda on the death of Joshua, Joseph, and Eleazar (24:29-33).

Joshua was buried in his own territory in Ephraim. The people remained faithful to the Lord during Joshua's lifetime and that of the elders who had witnessed God's triumphs. The implication is that they will cease doing so upon the death of all these. That will be their condition when the Book of Judges begins. The bones of Joseph brought out at the time of the Exodus were buried. This is another sign of the fulfillment of all God's promises, and of Joseph's faith that the Land of Canaan was where his body belonged (Gen 50:24-26). Finally, Eleazar died and was buried.

Thus ends the great book of the conquest. It has been a mixed story. On the one hand, all God's promises to Israel have been fulfilled in a general sense (triumph over all the enemies, land given to Israel), but on the other hand Israel was confined primarily to the hill country and significant numbers of Canaanites were left. Israel will do battle with them all the way through the time of Saul and David. It will be in David and Solomon's time that complete control of the land will be in Israel's hand.

Maps from Woudstra, *Joshua, Word Biblical Commentary*









## JUDGES

### I. Introductory matters.

- A. The story that began with Joshua's invasion of the land of Canaan continues with the settlement of a rough, primitive people in that land. The first word in Hebrew is a grammatical construction that shows a connection with the previous story: *way<sup>e</sup>hi* (וַיְהִי). The same word began Joshua and Ruth. So, these are all connected stories by the writers who are introduced to us in 1 Chron 29:29 and 2 Chron 9:29. Samuel, the seer (*harō'eh* הַרְאֵה), Nathan the prophet (*hannabi'* הַנְּבִיא), and Gad the seer (*haḥozeh* הַחֹזֶה). These three notables are said to be the transcribers of the words/acts of David. In like manner, Nathan the prophet, the prophecies of Ahijah the Shilonite, and the visions of Iddo the seer, are preserving the words/deeds of Solomon and that of Jeroboam ben Nebat. In other words, there is a clear statement that these special men recorded and developed the stories prophetically. Therefore, as they shaped and organized the contents of their sources, we should expect a harmony between Joshua and Judges and not opposing stories, as the critics would have it.

The Book of Judges is a puzzling book. It tells of a people whom God chose as his own special people, whom he brought from Egypt and gave them the land of Canaan as an inheritance. However, there is little to commend these people—even their leaders. One man offers his only daughter as a sacrifice to Yahweh (whatever the sacrifice means), the two appendices are especially dark. The Danites rob Micah of his idol and his priest as they move into new territory where they will burn and pillage. These are acts of paganism. The men of Benjamin rape a woman all night whose “husband” freely gave her to them and callously demanded that she rise and go with him even though she was dead. This resulted in a civil war that decimated the tribe of Benjamin. The acquisition of wives for the 600 men left is itself cruel and pernicious.

Then, what can we say of Sampson who consorts with three different women, one of whom is a prostitute. All this while the spirit seizes him and uses him to carry out the divine will.

The only light in all this darkness is the little book of Ruth. It is full of love and sacrifice. Furthermore, it points to David, a godly young man who refuses to move against his king and sings songs of praise to his maker.

Perhaps, after all, it is the story of Yahweh's grace in redeeming a people so lost and perverse. So, we will attempt to draw this together from God's perspective (and that of the prophets) to help us see that God's *hesed* (kindness/grace) available to his rebellious people is still available today.

#### B. The era of the judges.

Once upon a time, scholars argued about whether the date of the Exodus was early (c. 1441 B.C.) or late (c. 1275, 1220 B.C.) The early date was based on 1 Kings 6:1. That passage was treated as a literary number (12 x 4) and thus ignored for the late date. Now, of course, the critics argue about whether there was any kind of Exodus at all. They see gradual infiltration or internal revolt or any number of possibilities to account for the presence of a people called Israel in the thirteenth century B.C.

Without apology, I will be working from a date of 1400 for the conquest of the land, although most scholars today of all perspectives tend to argue for a late date, in spite of Bryant Woods revision of the excavations of Jericho.<sup>53</sup> Much of the discussion concerns the thirteenth century.

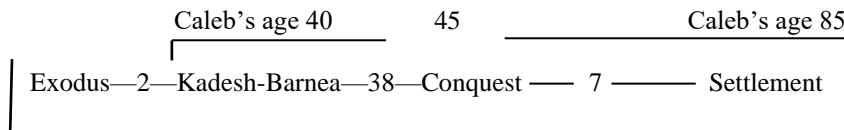
This section presents one of the most difficult aspects of Old Testament Chronology. The first point of contact must be the 480 years between the Exodus and the fourth year of Solomon (1 Kgs. 6:1). The problem

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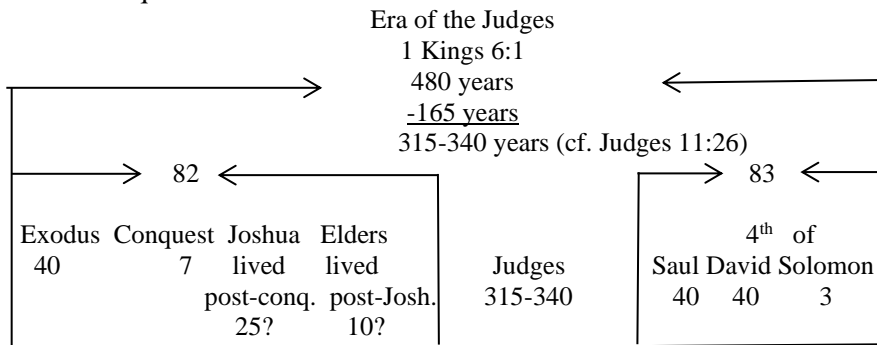
<sup>53</sup>Bryant Wood, "Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho? A New Look at the Archaeological Evidence," BAR, 16:2, March/April 1990, pp. 44–47, 49–54, 56–57.

comes with the 450-year total of the data in Judges from the first oppression to Eli. If these years be taken consecutively, there are too many. Josephus, whose handling of biblical chronology leaves much to be desired, takes them consecutively and comes up with 592 years for the same period covered by 1 Kings 6:1 (by adding 111 years of servitude). The 450 years in Acts 13:19-20 is placed during the judges by some MSS and during the Egyptian period by others. Some people drop the periods of servitude to reduce the years in Judges, but the best solution is probably to assume that the years are not intended to be sequential, i.e., the various judgeships overlap since none of them is intended to indicate control over the entire 12 tribes.<sup>54</sup>

The chronology of the Judges

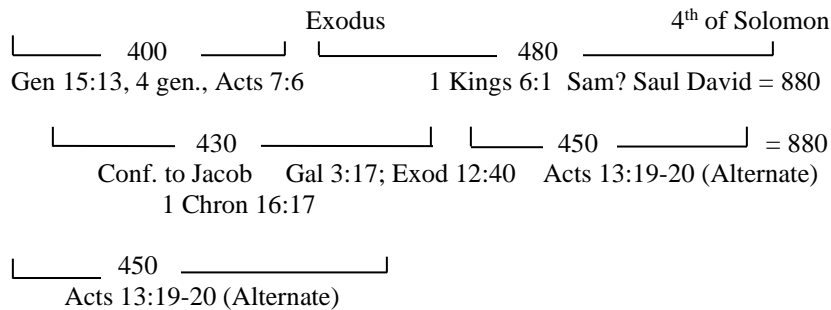


The clue to the period is Caleb's age. At Kadesh-Barnea, he is 40. At the end of the settlement, he is 85. This gives 45 years from Kadesh-Barnea to the settlement. We already have 38 years as the period of wandering. Thus 7 years is left for the period of the conquest.



<sup>54</sup>Cf. Thiele, "Chronology," *Zondervan's Pictorial Bible Dictionary*. See also L. Wood, "The Date of the Exodus," pp. 66-87.

## Chronological notes in the Bible



## C. The historical situation.

There was a period of dormancy in Egypt during the 13th century. Ramases III was restoring it to power, but the invasions from the west (Libya) and the sea people called Tjeker, revealed in the story of Wen Amon,<sup>55</sup> damaged Egypt. The Hittite empire in the north was also under pressure.

The sea people were repulsed by the Egyptians and settled along the coast—Ugarit, Sidon, Tyre. The Pelast seized territory from Joppa to Gaza (Gaza, Ashkelon, Ashdod, Ekron and Gath). Many Canaanites moved and established their capital at Tyre and are called Phoenicians from that time on.<sup>56</sup>

The Merenptah stela gives us a date of 1210 for an Egyptian invasion that encountered a group called Israel. The period from 1210 to 1042 (almost 170 years) would be the period of the judges. “The latest setting of the book of Joshua (if granted even minimal credence) would then in principle lie immediately in the decade or so before 1210, along with any Israelite entry into Canaan from the outside.”<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup>ANET, p. 25-29.

<sup>56</sup>See Eric Cline, “1177 BC: The Year Civilization Collapsed (Eric Cline)—YouTube” for an excellent lecture on the subject of the sea people.

<sup>57</sup>Kitchen, *OROT*, p. 159.

Excavations suggest a time of anarchy. Bethel had four destructions by fire in two centuries. Megiddo had repeated troubles between its rebuilding and Solomon.

The surrounding nations were well organized, but Israel had no central government. Noth developed the idea of an amphictyonic organization on the order of some of the Greek states where a central sanctuary formed the focal point of the whole group.<sup>58</sup>

The tabernacle was set up at Shiloh. Josh 18:1; 1 Sam 1:3; 3:12; 4:3, Judges 18:31 (cf. 1 Sam 6:1 on the ark). The Tabernacle was also at Nob, 1 Samuel 21; at Gibeon, 1 Chron 16:39 (see Jer 7:12ff, 26:6ff for the destruction of Shiloh). The ark was at Bethel (Judges 20:27).

During the 12th century eastern Syria was inundated by Arameans. The capital was later at Damascus.<sup>59</sup>

The iron industry was controlled by the Philistines (1 Sam 13:19-22). The Hittites held the secret of Iron, and it may have been brought to Palestine by the sea people. Hence, the Philistines controlled it. The Iron Age begins at this time. Iron, as indicated, is of Anatolian origin (Heb.: *Berzel* = Latin: *Ferrous*; the “I” is intensive as in Carm-el, rich vineyard). Israel must have had a low profile during this time.

The first oppression is from Chushan-rishathaim of Syria (Heb.: Aram). Chushan is a place name in the second millennium. It appears on a list of Ramases III (13-12 centuries B.C.)

#### D. The Joshua/Judges conundrum.

Critics argue that Joshua depicts a complete destruction of the people of Canaan, while Judges shows a more accurate picture of a long fight for control of the area. Kitchen responds, “Thus, to sum up, the book of

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<sup>58</sup>Noth, *Old Testament World*, and *Das System der Zwölf Stämme Israels* (1930) but this has largely been repudiated.

<sup>59</sup>Cf. Unger, *Israel and the Aramaens of Damascus*.

Joshua in reality simply records the Hebrew entry into Canaan, their base camp at Gilgal by the Jordan, their initial raids (without occupation!) against local rulers and subjects in south and north Canaan, followed by localized occupation (a) north from Gilgal as far as Shechem and Tirzah and (b) south to Hebron/Debir, and very little more. This is *not* the sweeping, instant conquest-with-occupation that some hasty scholars would foist upon the text of Joshua, without any factual justification.”

Kitchen goes on to say, “Insofar as only Jericho, Ai, and Hazor were explicitly allowed to have been burned into nonoccupation, it is also pointless going looking for extensive conflagration level as at any other Late Bronze sites (of any phase) to identify them with any Israelite impact. Onto this initial picture Judges follows directly and easily, with no inherent contradiction: it contradicts only the bogus and superficial construction that some modern commentators have willfully thrust upon the biblical text of Joshua without adequate reason. The fact is that biblical scholars have allowed themselves to be swept away by the upbeat, rhetorical element present in Joshua, a persistent feature of most war reports in ancient Near Eastern sources that they are not accustomed to understand and properly handle.”<sup>60</sup>

E. *The Judges.*

Oppression under Chushan-Rishathaim	3:8	8 years
Othniel, rest	3:11	40
Oppression under Eglon of Moab	3:14	18
Ehud, rest	3:30	80
Oppression, Jabin of Hazor	4:3	20
Deborah, rest	5:31	40
Oppression, Midian	6:1	7
Gideon, rest	8:28	40
Abimelech’s reign	9:22	3
Tola	10:2	23
Oppression of Gilead by Ammon	10:8	18
Jair	10:3	<u>22</u>

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<sup>60</sup>Kitchen, *OROT*, p. 163. See also Provan, et al., *A Biblical History of Israel*, pp. 166-67.

Judges 11:26 Israel had land 300 years:		319
Jephthah	12:7	6
Ibzan	12:9	7
Elon	12:11	10
Abdon	12:14	8
Oppression of Philistines	13:1	40
Samson	15:20, 16:31	20
Eli	1 Sam 4:18	<u>40</u>
		450 years
Samuel		?
Saul (mentioned only in Acts 13)		40
David		40
Solomon	1 Kings 11:42	40

There are thirteen names listed as judges. One has to evaluate the number in light of the biblical penchant to use the number twelve as special. An examination of the use of the divine, covenant name Yahweh is instructive in this connection.

Every chapter (story) of Judges contains at least one reference to Yahweh except for chapter 9 which has none. The least number of occurrences falls in the chapters that are the least resonant with the covenant-keeping God. Chapter 12 (one occurrence) is Jephthah's war with fellow Israelites; Chapters 17-18 (one occurrence) give us the account of the idolatrous practices in the pre-Jeroboam era in the kings; Chapter 19 (one occurrence) is the gruesome account of the Levite's concubine. Chapter 21, though it contains six references to Yahweh, is in conjunction with the combined tribal actions in acquiring wives for the 600 Benjamite men left after the civil war (viewed as good by the editor(s)).

The fact that Yahweh's name is missing from the narrative of Abimelech may point to the editor's<sup>61</sup> deliberate statement that Abimelech was illegitimate (not just physically, but metaphorically). This would mean that there were only twelve judges considered by the editor to be

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<sup>61</sup>Since the "Deuteronomist" has fallen into disfavor, we are back to Samuel, Gad, and Nathan as potential editors of the historical books.

legitimate. Is it also possible that his name, “my father is king” and the fact that he calls himself king (Gideon had refused to rule over them) a premonition that the future kings will not always do or be what they should be? Abimelech is the only one of the thirteen names who demanded and received the position of king. Each of the six “minor judges” (Shamgar, Tola, Jair, Ibsan, Elon, Abdon) has neutral language: “after him came,” “arose to save Israel,” “he judged Israel after him.” Each of the other six has divine intervention to make them judges.

F. The purpose of the Judges.

The declension of Israel into idolatry, immorality, and violence which accelerates in the appendix on the Levite’s concubine, is indicated with the recurring phrase, “The Israelites did (or again did) evil in the eyes of Yahweh.” The solution to this is suggested in the other recurring phrase, “There was no king in Israel in those days.” The chaos and depravity seem to multiply when there was no successor to Joshua.

That this king should not ultimately come from Saul or his line is hinted at in the depravity of the Benjamites and thus Saul, who may have been a descendant of the Jabesh-gileadites.<sup>62</sup> That the king should really be David may be intimated with the name Jerusalem in chapters 1-2 even though later it is referred to as Jebus and we are told that it was not defeated until the time of David. (Judah occupies 60% of the narrative in Chapter 1). The third appendix, Ruth, makes this clear with the genealogy of David through Ruth.

G. Kitchen on the settlement of the land.<sup>63</sup>

In speaking of Judges, he talks of the “deuteronomistic” theology as wrongly dated in 621. He shows that the same theme of Judges, sin, judgment, prayer, deliverance is found in 13<sup>th</sup> c. Egypt in more than one document.

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<sup>62</sup>Saul’s first battle was on behalf of the Jabesh-gileadites, and the latter travelled all night to remove his body from Beth Shean. See Merrill, *A Kingdom of Priests*, p. 181.

<sup>63</sup>Kitchen, *OROT*, p. 217.



“In the last quarter-century current knowledge of the processes of settlement, de-settlement, and resettlement in the Middle Bronze to Iron Age Canaan has been transformed, both by excavations at individual sites and by far-reaching and (at times) very thorough surface surveys. The gain in practical data is considerable. But given the differing intellectual starting points of the variety of scholars interested—both on the field and off it—much disagreement on the conclusions to be drawn has arisen and continues, not least on two issues: interaction with the biblical data and questions of ethnicity (Israelite or other).” (p. 222).

“Middle Bronze II was prosperous and numerous (1900-1550).

“In 16<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> BC, New Kingdom pharaohs incorporated Canaan and drained it. Population and number of settlements visibly declined.

“From 1230 onward Sea People ended up in Canaan (coastal and Jezreel). Edom and Moab and Ammonites appear. Arameans become prominent in the north. And Israel shows up on the Merenptah stela.

“With all this the text and archaeology agree.

“These and other surveys have shown a dramatic rise in the intensity of settlement in the hill country, especially north from Jerusalem, from around 1299 onward through Iron I. Thus, the Ephraim-Samaria survey registered just 9 sites for Late Bronze I-II (with another 3, LB/Iron I), a dozen at most. Then for Iron Age phase I, they were able to list not fewer than 131 sites (plus another 94 of Iron I-II), a huge increase. Next door in West Manasseh, Zertal noted some 39 sites for Late Bronze but over 200 for Iron I, again a huge increase. This great rash of farmsteads, hamlets, and small villages represents a wholly new development, as is universally admitted. In Manasseh at least, two-thirds of these sites were founded entirely new; one-third were both founded and abandoned during Iron I, while two-thirds continued to be used and developed in Iron II (monarchy period).”<sup>64</sup> He argues that this growth is too rapid to

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<sup>64</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 225.

sustain a “revolting peasant” and “early Hebrews indigenous to the highlands” theories.<sup>65</sup>

## II. *Outline of Judges.*

### A. The details of taking the land (1:1-36).

1. The battles of Judah (1:1-21).
2. The battles of Joseph (1:22-26).
3. The battles of Manasseh (1:27-28).
4. The battles of Ephraim (1:29).
5. The battles of Zebulun (1:30).
6. The battles of Asher (1:31-32).
7. The battles of Naphtali (1:33).
8. The battles of Dan (1:34-36).

Some observations.

1. Almost 60% of the chapter is devoted to Judah. When we add in the appendix of Ruth, that means the emphasis is on David and his tribe.
2. Issachar, Reuben and Gad are not mentioned because they are on the east side of the Jordan.
3. Judges 1:10-15 is a virtual duplicate of Josh 15:11-19.
4. Josh 10:1ff indicates that Adoni-Zedek, king of Jerusalem, joined forces with others to fight Joshua. Josh 12:10 refers to the defeat of the king of Jerusalem. Judges 1:8 says that Jerusalem was captured,

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<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 227.

struck with the sword, and set on fire. But Judges 1:21 says that the Benjamites could not drive out the Jebusites and the latter have lived with the Jebusites up to the time of the writing of Judges. 1 Chron 11:4 and 2 Sam 5:6-10 recount the capture and defeat of the Jebusites under David.

A. Details of taking the land (1:1-36).<sup>66</sup>

1. The death of Joshua is a demarcation line in the history of Israel. This strong, confident, man of God who clearly was a successor to Moses had no subsequent equal.<sup>67</sup> No doubt, they met at Shiloh to consult Yahweh regarding the next action. The answer came back that Judah would open the attack on the Canaanites (1:1-2).
2. Judah and Simeon join forces (1:3-21).

Jacob displaced Reuben and Simeon with Joseph's two sons Ephraim and Manasseh (after reversing their birth order) (Genesis 48). Of Simeon and Levi, Jacob says, "cursed is their anger because it is strong and their wrath because it is harsh. I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel" (Gen. 49:7).

The tribe of Levi was scattered by becoming associates to the priests. They received no large allotments. Simeon, on the other hand, was integrated with Judah, and so lost its separate identity. Now, Judah calls on Simeon to join him in claiming their land (1:3).

In the successive battle at Bezek, Judah struck 10,000 men (1:4). The king of the Bezek was called simply "the Lord." Judah and Simeon defeated him. When he fled, they pursued him, caught him, and cut off his thumbs and his big toes. Adoni-Bezek confessed to

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<sup>66</sup>Garstang, *Joshua, Judges*, pp. 24-48, provides an interleaving of both accounts.

<sup>67</sup>Butler, *Judges*, p. lvii, "The opening refers to the death of Joshua, and the closing refers to the lack of a king. The first thus obviously, refers back to the book of Joshua, a reference made even more clearly in Judges 2:6-12. One can naturally assume that the final verse points forward to the story of at least one king who would lead the people, not one who would simply do right in his own eyes and lead the people to do the same."

the justice of this act since he had done the same thing to 70 Kings. They brought him to Jerusalem where he died (1:5-7).

They then captured Jerusalem, struck it with the edge of the sword, and set fire to the city. As others have noted, this was more of a raid than destruction of the city (1:8).

Judah next fought against those in the hill country, the Shephelah and the Negeb. Hebron is an ancient town also known as Kiriath-arba (the village of four). The Caleb and his daughter story includes Othniel, the first of the judges. See p. 39 for the same account in Joshua (1:9-15).

The Kenites with whom Caleb is related, have a history with Israel going back to Moses. The word has the same root as Cain. Jael, who killed Sisera, was a member of the Kenite clan.<sup>68</sup> These came up from the city of palms (usually an expression referring to Jericho). They joined with Judah and lived with the people south of Arad (in the Negeb) (1:16).

The city of Zephath, otherwise unknown, is mentioned next. It is probably somewhere in the Negeb. They renamed it Hormah, which means destroyed, or devoted to destruction (1:17).

The statement that Judah took three cities of the Philistines is puzzling, because we know that the pentapolis (Ashkelon, Gaza, Ashdod, Gath, and Ekron) all maintained their independence throughout the Old Testament. Perhaps, as with many other such events, it was part of a blitzkrieg that could not be maintained (1:18).

Judah chose to cling to the mountain area rather than the plains in a show of cowardice, because of the presence of chariots reinforced with iron (1:19).

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<sup>68</sup>For a thorough discussion of this complex group, see the *ABD*, vol. 4, *loc cit*. See also Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, p. 127.

The historian now turns to Hebron with the reiteration of the promise of the village to Caleb by Moses. This concludes the section on Judah with a reminder of the promises made by Moses and thus Joshua (1:20).

The reference to Benjamin raises some issues. Why is the town referred to as Jerusalem in 1:8 whereas the emphasis is on the Jebusites in 1:21, and why is it captured and burned in 1:8 whereas the Benjamites are not able to drive the Jebusites out in 1:21? There are, no doubt ways to harmonize the two accounts, but they are not evident in the story. Is it possible that Benjamin's inability to drive out the Jebusites a precursor to Saul's ineffective rule as opposed to David's (Jerusalem) successful one?

3. The battles of the house of Joseph (1:22-26).

This paragraph is dealt with as a unit, as the "inclusio created by vv 22 and 35 shows under the name of 'house of Joseph.'"<sup>69</sup>

The house of Joseph went up to Bethel, and Yahweh was with them. Bethel, of course, was an ancient cult center going back to the time of Abraham. Dan and Bethel became the northern and southern boundaries of the Northern kingdom. Thus, we have contrasted the southern kingdom of Judah (1:1-21) and the northern kingdom of Israel.

4. The battles of Manasseh (1:27-28).

Manasseh was assigned the Jezreel valley, but they were unable to defeat the Canaanites in the towns of Beth-shean (east), Taanach, Dor (west), Ibleam, and Megiddo. Garstang refers to this as a "row of fortresses . . . reached from the River Jordan to the sea . . ."<sup>70</sup>

The failure of the future northern kingdom is revealed in the repetitious statement, "They could not drive out . . ." The only

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<sup>69</sup>Butler, *Judges*, p. 26.

<sup>70</sup>Garstang, *Joshua, Judges*, p. 232.

mitigating factor is that when they became strong, they brought the Canaanites into forced labor.

5. The battles of Ephraim (1:29).

It is interesting that only Gezer is mentioned as resisting Ephraimite control. Gezer was an ancient, important, fortified city. It was refortified by Solomon with the famous and controversial Solomonic gates.

The ominous statement, “the Canaanites lived among them” is a portent of things to come. The impact of the Canaanite social customs and religious practice was profound on the Israelites, especially the northern kingdom. The requirement to appear before the Lord three times annually was no doubt ignored by the north, especially the remote tribes.

6. The battles of Zebulun (1:30).

Nahalol probably lies toward the sea, and Kitron is not known at all. Both were beyond the reach of Zebulun, but the Canaanite lived among them and eventually became forced labor.

7. The battles of Asher (1:31-32).

The Asherites were assigned territory all along the coast as far north as Tyre. Seven towns are listed as having resisted Israelite dominance, and so were confined to living among them. There is no mention of forced labor.

8. The battles of Naphtali (1:33).

For some reason Issachar is omitted. Naphtali supported Barak (Judges 4:6, 10) and later Gideon (6:35; 7:23).<sup>71</sup> Beth Shemesh (not the one in Judah) and Beth Anath sound like cult centers: the Temple

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<sup>71</sup>Butler, *Judges*, p. 30.

of the Sun and the temple of the goddess Anath. They also lived among them and became forced labor.

9. The battles of Dan (1:34-36).

The Amorites are late comers. Their name apparently means westerners. Eventually, their name will dominate the other Canaanite names (see Gen 15:16, 21).<sup>72</sup> These verses prepare us for the Danite migration to the northern-most point in Israel in the first appendix (Judges 18).

Butler nicely ties together this discussion of Dan with the future of the northern kingdom.<sup>73</sup> Dan becomes the northern-most town and a cult center for the golden calves and Bethel the southern town (Amos 3:14).

B. The first appearance of the Angel of Yahweh who rebukes the people (2:1-5).

1. The Angel of Yahweh is an important person in the book of Judges. He is no doubt the commander of Yahweh's army in Joshua 5:13-15. There is something superhuman about him, for Joshua falls on his face and worships him. Joshua was then told to remove his sandals because the ground on which was standing was holy (see also Exod 3:1-6). He is also prominent in chapter 5:23, chapter 6, and 13. Chapter 13 especially links his description to Joshua five and Exodus 3.<sup>74</sup>
2. Gilgal was a worship center for Israel (Josh 4:15-24). See also 1 Sam 7:16). The "gil" element indicates something round, so it may refer to a circle of stones. This was probably an ancient cult center

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<sup>72</sup>See *Ibid.*, for a discussion.

<sup>73</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 32.

<sup>74</sup>See Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, pp. 127-28 and Butler, *Judges*, pp. 39-40.

adopted and adapted by Israel to a place of Yahweh worship (Hos 4:15; 9:15; 12:11; Amos 4:4).

3. The Angel reminds them, ritualistically, that Yahweh is the one who brought them up from Egypt and his promise that he would not break his covenant with them (2:1).
4. In spite of this glorious heritage, Israel violated his orders to destroy the religion and culture of the Canaanites (2:2).<sup>75</sup>
5. As a result of their disobedience, Yahweh said that he would not drive out the Canaanites before them. Rather, they would be left to torment the Israelites as snares, and their gods would be attractive to them. This is the first justification of the Israelites not being able to defeat their enemies (3:4).<sup>76</sup>
6. There seems to have been a form of repentance at the altar of Yahweh since the people weep and sacrifice to Yahweh. There is, however, no indication of a change of conduct. They change the name of the area to Bochim or “weeping.” The identification of Bochim in 2:1 is anachronistic. A later name is used for the older site.

### III. Joshua again (2:6-10).

- A. Chapter 1 has set the stage for the rest of the book of Judges. The emphasis is on Judah and Joshua (Ephraim/Manasseh). They failed to carry out the admonition of Joshua, and there was no one following him who could rally the people as he. Now, we are ready for the recurring

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<sup>75</sup>See my chapter, “The Ancient Middle East Culture and the Bible” in *Bible History and Archaeology*, pp. 51-63 and Albright, *From Stone Age to Christianity*, pp. 280-81. See p. 15 for Albright’s discussion of the extermination of the Canaanites.

<sup>76</sup>Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, p. 137, says, “Israel’s failure to conquer the land completely was not really due to the Canaanites’ iron chariots or obstinance (cf. 1:19, 27). Instead, their partial success could be attributed to their willingness to compromise with the native population and tolerate their pagan religion.”



cycle of disobedience, punishment, cries from the oppression, and Yahweh's deliverance.

B. Summary of Joshua's ministry and death.

1. Joshua dismissed the people to go to their inheritance and begin their work of conquest (2:6). See Joshua 23 for a detailed discussion of their task and their warning.
2. Joshua and the elders, who had seen the miraculous works of Yahweh, were able to keep the people on track in obedience to Yahweh (2:7).
3. Joshua, the servant of Yahweh,<sup>77</sup> died, and this became a historical dividing line for Israel. He was a ripe age of 110. He was buried in the tribal allotment of Ephraim in *Timnath-heres*, north of Mount Gaash (2:8-9). Josh 24:30 gives *Timnath-serah* which is an inversion of the letters of *heres* which means the sun and presumably is parallel to the Hebrew word *Shemesh*, the sun, and thus may intimate some idolatrous practice in this city before Joshua was buried there. By inverting the letters, that possible reference to idolatrous practice is avoided.<sup>78</sup>
4. Finally, all the Israelites who had been born in the wilderness, who had seen the miracles of the Jordan River, the lengthening of the day, and other miraculous deeds of Yahweh, died. There were no more eyewitnesses of what Yahweh had done for Israel, now, the table is set for the cycle of disobedience.

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<sup>77</sup>See Boling, *Judges*, pp. 71-72 for a discussion of "servant."

<sup>78</sup>BDB *sub* תמנת הרס *Timnath heres*.

IV. The first cycle of disobedience (2:11—3:11).

- A. The historian now discusses the religious apostasy of Israel after Joshua and the elders' death. (2:11-13).<sup>79</sup> The primary deity of the Canaanites which Israel worshiped was Baal (plural in Hebrew). Since the word Baal means “Lord” or “Master” in Semitic, it is easily construed as a variety of deities including Yahweh.<sup>80</sup> Because Baal was the God of fertility (rain, crops, pregnancy), his worship was very tempting to Israel. The goddesses Ashtaroth (2:13), and Asheroth (3:7) were female deities associated with Baal.

The act of turning to Baals had its opposite action of turning away from the God of their fathers, noted for bringing Israel up from Egypt. Since Yahweh is a jealous God, this obviously provoked him to anger. Thus, in summary, they abandoned Yahweh and served (worshipped) Baal and Ashtaroth.

- B. The resultant punishment (2:14-15).

Yahweh gave them into the hands of marauding bands (cf. Judges 6) who plundered them. They were even traded as slaves (cf. Amos 1-2). Consequently, Israel could not resist their enemies. As a matter of fact, everywhere they turned, the hand of God brought calamity (not evil) on them. He had warned them of this previously. As a result, they were in great distress.<sup>81</sup>

- C. Yahweh's grace in delivering his people (2:16-18).

This section is a recapitulation of what he begins to set out in detail, beginning with 3:7. Even though Yahweh graciously delivered his people from the marauding bands, they turned away quickly and played

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<sup>79</sup>See Albright, *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel*, and *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*.

<sup>80</sup>See names such as Ishbaal (man of the Lord).

<sup>81</sup>LXX says that Yahweh greatly distressed them (καὶ ἐξέθλιψεν αὐτοὺς σφόδρα).

the harlot with other deities and worshipped them. It is a felicitous thing that the English word adultery sounds so much like idolatry, since the Old Testament uses these concepts almost interchangeably. To go after other gods (idolatry) is to commit adultery against their husband Yahweh.<sup>82</sup>

D. God's discipline of his people (2:19—3:6).

1. None of the judges we know anything about provided the leadership, spirituality, or organizational skills that Joshua and Samuel brought. Still, to the extent that they tried to lead the people, their influence died with them. Consequently, as soon as they died, the people went back to their apostate ways (2:19).
2. This, in turn, brought down Yahweh's anger, because they violated the covenant made with their fathers. This could refer to the Abraham covenant or the Sinaitic which incorporated the others (2:20).
3. The result was that Yahweh would not drive out those who were left in the land. Now a second reason is given for Israel's failure to drive out the Canaanites. The purpose now is to test their loyalty to Yahweh. This should not be construed as a contradiction to the Joshua narrative. As circumstances change, Yahweh can use them to effect his will. Certainly, the inhabitants of the land were a temptation to Israel, and they yielded to that temptation (2:21-23).
4. The people among whom the Israelites live (3:1-6).<sup>83</sup>

This is probably a third reason for allowing the Canaanites to live in the land. The Israelites were inexperienced in war and needed to learn to fight, so, those Yahweh left in the land would give them plenty of practice.

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<sup>82</sup>See Butler, *Judges*, p. 47 for a discussion.

<sup>83</sup>*Ibid.*, believes that Chapter 3 sets up the testing conditions and then provides three examples of how the tests were met by Othniel, Ehud, and Shamgar.

The Philistines are considered a Pentapolis. The five *sarans* or rulers seem to have some sort of pact. They are descendants of the Sea Peoples and seemed to have brought the secret of iron production. Saul is raised up specifically to defeat them, but it is left to David to subdue and subordinate them.

Canaanites is an older generic name for the majority of those living in the land.<sup>84</sup> Verse five will give a further breakdown of the larger group. The Sidonians and Hivites are groups living in the Lebanese mountains from Hermon to the Neo-Hittite city of Hamath (3:1-3).

Since the testing of Israel was caused by the inhabitants of the land, we are now told that Israel settled in among the people with little resistance: they intermarried and inner-worshiped to a devastating end (3:4-6).

V. The second cycle of disobedience (Othniel) (3:7-11).

A. Having set the stage of an overview, as it were, of Israel's disobedience, the narrator now gives the first specific example. The Israelites served Baals and Asherahs.<sup>85</sup>

B. Yahweh's response (3:8).

The second step of the cycle is Yahweh's anger. He "sells" them into the hands of Cushan-rishathaim, king of Aram-Nahara. Butler reads his name as "Cushan the doubly wicked."<sup>86</sup> Aram-Nahara means Aram (Syria) of the two rivers or Mesopotamia. Garstang points out that the

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<sup>84</sup>See *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>85</sup>Asherah is usually singular and refers either to the goddess or some wooden representation of her. She is, no doubt, a part of the fertility cult. In Ugaritic literature, she is the wife of El, and so some argue that the inscription from Kuntillet 'Ajrul indicates that syncretistic Israel has related Asherah to Yahweh. See John Day, "Asherah" in *ABD*, I 483-487.

<sup>86</sup>Butler, *Judges*, p. 64.

Hittites were dominating the upper Euphrates area at this time, and so Cushan may have been subordinate to them.<sup>87</sup> The precise number of eight years indicates an actual figure, since it departs from the normal 20, 40, 80 numbers.<sup>88</sup>

C. Yahweh’s deliverance (3:9-10).

The first step takes place when the sons of Israel cry out to Yahweh for help.<sup>89</sup> Yahweh graciously raises up a deliverer (*mošia* מוֹשִׁיעַ). This word is used rather than judge, and so indicates the primary purpose of the leaders.

Othniel is another Kennizite and the younger brother of Caleb. The statement that the spirit “came upon him” indicates that he was divinely chosen for this task. As a result, he became a Shophet or a judge. This indicates more than our concept of a judge. Except for Deborah, we do not see these leaders acting as judges (in our sense).

Othniel went to war against Cushan-Rishathaim, Yahweh gave them into Othniel’s hand, and he conquered this “doubly wicked Cushan.”

D. The resultant rest (3:11).

The number 40 appear some 91 times in the Old Testament. Six of them appear in judges. Thus, it may be a typical or rounded number. The land had rest for 40 years. Othniel, as the younger brother of Caleb, ties the story back to Joshua.

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<sup>87</sup>Garstang, *Joshua and Judges*, pp. 263-64.

<sup>88</sup>Butler, *Joshua*, p. 65.

<sup>89</sup>Chisholm points to 1 Sam 12:10 which seems to indicate that their cry was accompanied by repentance, *Judges and Ruth*, pp. 170-71.

VI. The third cycle of disobedience (Ehud) (3:12-31).

A. The scene now moves to the trans-Jordan with Eglon, King of Moab, accompanied by Ammonites (north of Moab) and Amalekites (nomadic peoples) to attack Israel.<sup>90</sup> This came about because Israel again did evil in Yahweh's eyes. This is the rubric for abandoning the true worship of Yahweh and taking up the Canaanite religion practice again. They not only defeated Israel, but they repossessed the city of Palm trees, another phrase for Jericho. This is a very fertile oasis (even today). It was a much-desired place years later, in the Greek and Roman period.<sup>91</sup> The Israelite bondage lasted 18 years, and apparently included an annual tribute, usually gathered from the crops and animals of the subdued peoples (3:12-14).

B. The cry for help, and Yahweh's response (3:23).

1. The pressure becomes so great that the Israelites cry out to Yahweh for help. Yahweh raised up (this is equivalent to "the spirit of Yahweh came up on") a deliverer named Ehud. The meaning of his name is not obvious. It may be akin to Ichabod, אִי-כָבוֹד "where is the glory," (1 Sam 4:21), and so "where is the beauty/honor." He is the son of Gera and a Benjamite. So, Saul's tribe shows up early. Like his 700 compatriots in Judges 20:16 who were left-handed slingers (there must have been a lot of inbreeding), Ehud is left-handed. Left-handedness has always been viewed negatively.<sup>92</sup> So, the Hebrew says that he was

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<sup>90</sup>Bryant Wood, "Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho," *BAR* 16:2, 1990, 44-47, 499-54, 56-57, "The site is strategically located. From Jericho one has access to the heartland of Canaan. Any military force attempting to penetrate the central hill country from the east would, by necessity, first have to capture Jericho. And that is exactly what the Bible (Joshua 3:16) says the Israelites did."

<sup>91</sup>Josephus says that "Antony gave Jericho with other cities of Judea as a present to Cleopatra ("Ant." xv. 4, §§ 1-2; "B. J." i. 18, § 5), who farmed out to Herod the revenues of the regions about the city ("Ant." xv. 4, § 2). Four years later Herod received from Augustus the whole country (including Jericho) that had been in Cleopatra's possession (*ib.* xv. 7, § 3; "B. J." [*Jewish Wars*] i. 20, § 3)." <https://www.jewish-encyclopedia.com/articles/8597-jericho>.

<sup>92</sup>My mother told me that in the schools of Appalachia, left-handed children were

damaged in his right hand. The Israelites made him their representative to take the annual tribute (gift) to Eglon and Moab.

2. Ehud takes advantage of his “limitation” to find a way to destroy King Eglon. He makes a short sword of bronze or iron and straps it on his right thigh under his garment where the guards would least expect it. It was a *gomed* in length (an unknown word). Thus, he was prepared to present the Israelite tribute borne by a number of servants. The narrator gives an aside that proves important for the rest of the story. Eglon was a very fat man. Some argue that this is not a negative description, but what happened later seems to belie that (3:16-17).
3. The story is shortened. He and the men with him have turned to go home and have reached Gilgal. This was the encampment to which Joshua and his people returned after the battles. It was a cult center with ancient connections. Here, Ehud dismisses the men with him to avoid the appearance of hostility and makes his way back to King Eglon’s house. It is strange to see the word idols (*pesilim* פְּסִילִים) associated with this sanctuary, but with the apostasy of Israel, nothing should surprise us (3:18-19a).<sup>93</sup>

Ehud makes his way to the guards and sends to the king a word: “I have a secret message (*devar-sether* דְּבַר־סֵתֶר) for you, oh, King.” The King is intrigued by this Jew returning with a secret word. What could it be? So, he dismisses his courtiers and invites Ehud alone into his upper room. When Ehud announced that his message was divinely sent (God not Yahweh), Eglon arose to come closer (3:19b-20).

As the king drew near, Ehud reached to his right thigh, pulled out the short sword, and thrust it deep into Eglon’s fat belly. The hilt sank into the fat, and the fat closed over it, so that Ehud could not draw it out, and the feces came out of the belly. Then Ehud quietly left and locked the

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forced to write only with their right hand. The French word for left hand is *gauche*, and the Latin is *sinister*.

<sup>93</sup>See Block, *Judges, Ruth*, pp. 163-65 for a good discussion. He essentially agrees with me.

door behind him. (There was probably an audience room between the private chamber and where the guards and functionaries stood waiting) (3:21-23).

C. The surprise (3:24-25).

The functionaries assumed he was going to the bathroom, since the doors were locked. After a long wait (until they were embarrassed), they took the key<sup>94</sup> to let them in, and he was prostrate, dead.

D. Ehud's escape and call to arms (3:26-30).

The time they waited until embarrassed, allowed Ehud to make his getaway. He escaped, while they tarried, beyond the idols, (associated with Gilgal (3:19)) to Seirah. This name is unknown (3:26).

When he arrived at Seirah, he blew (same word as “thrust” his sword) the shofar in Mount Ephraim. Even though he was a Benjamite, his leadership extended to Ephraim and perhaps beyond (sons of Israel).<sup>95</sup> These came down from the mountain with Ehud at the head (3:27).

His “military speech” was that Yahweh<sup>96</sup> had given their enemies, Moab, into their hand. They took up the race again and captured the fords of the Jordan to Moab and refused crossing to anyone. Thus, they cut off any Moabites on the west side of the Jordan and prohibited any on the east side from coming to their assistance (3:28).<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>94</sup>See Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, p. 188 referencing King and Stager for a discussion of locks.

<sup>95</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 169, thinks Ehud is an Ephraimite, but 3:15 says he is a Benjamite.

<sup>96</sup>Some make much of this singular occurrence of Yahweh in the story, but Elohim is only used once in 3:20 by Ehud addressing a Moabite king.

<sup>97</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 179.



They struck Moab at that time, 10,000 healthy and armed men, and permitted no one to escape The land was quiet 40 years (3:29-30).

E. The first minor judge (Shamgar) (3:31).

Shamgar ben Anath is an interesting name. Shamgar is not Hebrew, and Anath is the name of a female deity. In Ugarit she is the goddess of war. The name is usually considered to be Hittite or Hurrian. The fact that he attacks the Pelests (Sea People), may indicate that he is fighting as a mercenary of the Egyptians. This could account for the fact that the story consists of one verse absent of any of the normal literary markers.

Like Samson (with the jawbone of a donkey killing 1,000 Philistines), Shamgar struck 600 Philistines with an ox goad. The author assumes that Yahweh used Shamgar to deliver Israel, even though Shamgar may have known nothing of Yahweh.

VII. Israel delivered by two women (4:1-24).

A. The fourth cycle of disobedience (Deborah/Barak) (4:1-3).

We are here introduced to two different accounts of the same event: one prose and the other poetry. Block has an excellent comparison of the two types of literature.<sup>98</sup> This allows a rare window into the differences of the two.

1. Ehud died, and the Israelites sinned again. Shamgar is ignored in the sequence (4:1).
2. Yahweh sold them into the hand of Jabin the Canaanite. Thus, he must be the head of a Canaanite coalition. His headquarters is in Hazor, one of the larger towns in ancient Canaan.<sup>99</sup> Since the

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<sup>98</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 176.

<sup>99</sup>“The site of Hazor, located in upper Galilee, consists of a 30-acre upper tell, plus an adjacent plateau at a lower level of over 175 acres. The tell, unlike the plateau, was occupied almost continuously from the 27th century B.C. to the 2nd century B.C. By contrast, the plateau, or lower city, was a part of Hazor only during the Middle and Late

Scriptures say that Joshua burned Hazor, how could Jabin still rule from there in the time of the Judges (Josh 11:11-12)? It must have been partially or fully rebuilt, although Yadin says there was not much there during the time of the judges (4:2).

3. Sisera was the captain of the army of Jabin. Hess has an interesting comment on the ethnic origin of this man. “Which brings us to Sisera; along with Shamgar, it also seems to be a non-Semitic name. Only Sisera, among the people mentioned in the poem, is clearly not an Israelite. Nor is his name Canaanite (or Amorite), for a Semitic name can be Canaanite or Hebrew. And there are no correspondences among the Hurrian sources or any of the other common language families attested in the Levant in the Late Bronze Age or Iron Age I.” (4:2)<sup>100</sup>

Sisera lived in Harosheth-hagoyim. Zertal says, rather tentatively! “If I am right so far, Harosheth ha-Goyim, Sisera’s military base in Canaan (Judges 4:2), should be understood as the city of Harosheth of a particular tribe of the Sea Peoples, namely the Shardana, originally from Sardinia. But where in Canaan was this Harosheth?”<sup>101</sup>

4. The Israelites cried out to Yahweh. Jabin had 900 chariots of iron. He harshly treated Israel for 20 years. Iron appears in Israel in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. See p. 53 for discussion of Berzel (4:3).

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Bronze Ages, from about the time of Abraham to the Israelite conquest. This was the Canaanite period, when Hazor was at its zenith, when, as the Bible tells us, Hazor was ‘the head of all those kingdoms’ (Josh. 11:10), a characterization confirmed by archaeological excavations. In Canaanite times, Hazor was the largest city in the area. Excavations also confirm that this great city was destroyed and burned by Joshua (Josh. 11:11–12),” Y. Yadin, *BAR*, 1:1 (1975), p. 1.

<sup>100</sup>Richard Hess, “The Name Game,” *BAR* 30:6 (2004) p. 41.

<sup>101</sup>Adam Zertal, “Philistine Kin Found in Early Israel,” *BAR* 28:3 2002, p. 60.

5. The word Deborah normally means “bee,” but Hess argues for a divine name.<sup>102</sup> Deborah joins the limited ranks of women prophetesses: Miriam (Exod 15:20), wife of Isaiah (Isa 8:3), Huldah, (2 Kings 22:14), and Noadiah (probably a false prophet, Neh 6:14), Anna (Luke 2:36), and Phillip’s daughters (Acts 21:9). These women were referred to without criticism or limitation, so they must have been readily accepted in the Old Testament culture, although the stress on this passage by feminists ignores the fact that it is Yahweh who leads to victory (4:4).

The mention of Lapidoth, her husband is the only possible indication of limitations placed on her.<sup>103</sup> She was rendering decisions for the people of Israel. Her location is similar to the three-city circuit of Samuel (Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah, 1 Sam 7:16) who was also judging Israel. Block, however, argues rather convincingly, that the Israelites come up for *the* judgment, that is, to gain help from the oppression of Jabin.<sup>104</sup> Deborah’s palm tree reminds us of the oak tree under which Heber was pitching his tent (4:4-5).

6. Deborah’s call to arms (4:6-7).

In response to Israel’s cry for help, she sends for Barak and gives him instructions. “Yahweh has commanded you to draw out from Naphtali and Zebulun 10,000 men to Mt. Tabor, and he will draw out (same word) Sisera with his army and multitude to the wadi Kishon where he will deliver them into your hand.”

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<sup>102</sup>Richard Hess, “The Name Game,” *BAR* 30:6, November/December 2004, p. 29. Deborah may be a shortened form of a name that included the name of a deity, which in the case of “Deborah,” was omitted. Thus, the name may have originally meant “(God) leads.” Such names are common in the ancient Near East and can appear with and without the name of a god or goddess attached.

<sup>103</sup>Boling seems to indicate that Barak was Deborah’s husband. Since Lapidoth means “torch” or “flasher.” *Judges*, p. 95. A bit farfetched.

<sup>104</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, pp. 196-197.

It seems a bit unusual that Deborah knows about Barak when he lives in the northern tribe of Naphtali, and she lives much farther south near Bethel. Perhaps, since his name means “lightening,” he is known as a tribal leader or a warrior. The town of Kedesh is where the Hittites clashed with the Egyptians in the twelfth century.<sup>105</sup> She apparently summoned Barak, since later she returns to Kedesh with him.

7. Barak’s refusal (4:8-9).

Barak’s demurrer may seem strange for a warrior, but the Greek supplies a reason: “I do not know the *day* in which Yahweh will successfully send his angel with me.”<sup>106</sup> This should be compared with 4:14 where Deborah says, “Arise, for this is the *day* which Yahweh has given Sisera into your hand. Will not Yahweh go out before you?” Thus, since the command from the Lord came through Deborah, he wanted her to reveal to him the *day* the Lord wanted him to act, but she could not do so unless she were with him (4:8).

Deborah agrees to go with him but warns him that there will be no glory accrue to him because Sisera will be sold (by God) into the hand of a woman. She then arose and accompanied him to Kedesh (4:9).

8. The Battle (4:10-16).

Barak mustered 10,000 troops from Naphtali and Zebulun to Kedesh. Deborah went with him (4:10).

A side bar in the story tells us that the non-Israelites, Heber and Hobab, the father-in-law of Moses had separated for some reason.

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<sup>105</sup>See Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 203 for reasons for choosing northern Kedesh as the correct site.

<sup>106</sup>ὅτι οὐκ οἶδα τὴν ἡμέραν ἐν ἧ εὐοδοῖ κύριος τὸν ἄγγελον μετ’ ἐμοῦ.

They were both Kenites.<sup>107</sup> Heber had pitched his tent (his nomadic existence was near) toward the oak of Zaananim near Kedesh.<sup>108</sup> Trees are often cult sites. When Abraham came to Shechem it was also to Elon Moreh (Gen 12:6). Elon Moreh means “the teaching oak.” A modern Israeli settlement bears that name (4:11).

Barak moved his troops to Mt. Tabor in the Jezreel Valley. The troop movement was reported to Sisera, and he mustered his troops including his 900 chariots of iron from the barracks at Harosheth-hagoyim to the Kishon River. This is a significant stream that flows from Mt. Gilboa in the east, north-west to the Mediterranean at Haifa and Mt. Carmel (4:12-13).

Deborah calls the army to begin action with the command to rise up, because Yahweh has given Sisera into Barak’s hand and promised to go before him. This is the timing Barak wanted when he asked Deborah to go with him. Barak went down Mt. Tabor with his 10,000 troops with him (4:14).

The narrator tells us that Yahweh “discomfited”<sup>109</sup> Sisera, all his chariots, and all his military group. The additional phrase, “with the edge of the sword” is considered an addition by some, but it probably only means that as Yahweh was creating confusion in the ranks, and Barak’s men were cutting down the enemy. As a result, Sisera jumped from his chariot and fled on foot (4:15).

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<sup>107</sup>See Judges 1:16 on the Kenites, “And the descendants of the Kenite, Moses’ father-in-law, went up with the people of Judah from the city of palms into the wilderness of Judah, which lies in the Negeb near Arad, and they went and settled with the people” (ESV). Arad is a long way from Kedesh, c. 130 miles.

<sup>108</sup>See Josh 19:33 for the Oak of Zaananim as a boundary marker.

<sup>109</sup>Modern versions say “routed.” The Hebrew הַמָּה or הַמָּה *hmh* or *hmm* is a sound (onomatopoetic) like our *hum*. So, it must involve a supernatural noise that frightens the enemy. See Butler, *Judges*, p. 102 for a list of references for this action by God.

Barak pursued the chariots and army all the way to their barracks at Harosheth-hagoyim. They cut down the army until not one was left (10:16).<sup>110</sup>

9. Sisera's ignominious end (4:17-22).

Deborah had promised Barak that the honor of winning would go to a woman, and now the narrator, in a delightful fashion, shows us how it happened.

Because of a truce (perhaps a treaty) between Heber and Jabin, Sisera thought he would be safe in their tribal encampment. Jael goes out to meet Sisera (she is Heber's wife, but we do not know why she takes the side of the Israelites).<sup>111</sup> She urges Sisera to turn aside without fear and come into her tent where she covers him with a blanket.<sup>112</sup> The word "blanket" is a *hapax legomena*, so we do not know precisely what it is (4:17-18).

He is exhausted and thirsty, so he asks for a drink. She brings him a goatskin of milk, gives him a drink, and covers him. He asks her to stand by the tent flap and tell anyone who asks that no man has come by (4:19-20).

Jael then took the tent peg in her left hand and the hammer in her right hand, approached quietly, plunged the tent peg in his skull, and drove it into the ground. Sisera was in deep sleep and exhausted, so, he never knew what happened. She then stood by the tent flap, and when Barak came by searching for Sisera, she called him over and

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<sup>110</sup>This is the kind of hyperbolic statement we are accustomed to in ancient near east reporting and previously in Joshua and Judges.

<sup>111</sup>See Boling, *Judges*, p. 97.

<sup>112</sup>Jael is not the last woman to entice a man to his death. Cf. Delilah, Judith, and the prostitute in Proverbs. Boling, *Judges*, p. 98, says, "She doped him [with milk] and duped him."

introduced him to the dead Sisera with a tent peg in his head (4:21-22).<sup>113</sup>

Thus, the power of Jabin was broken by Yahweh at that time. However, it appears that there was a “mopping up” exercise, as the hand of Israel was increasingly strengthened until they had cut him off completely (4:23-24).

B. The poetic presentation of the same story (5:1-31).

There are differences between the poem and the prose, but there are also similarities. It would be mistaken to try to reconcile the differences; rather we should recognize poetic liberties.

1. Call for the song; and exulting in Yahweh’s mighty past (5:1-5).<sup>114</sup>

Both the protagonists sing this song. Clearly, they both receive honor for the victory over Jabin and Sisera.

This is a very old poem, and many of its words are subject to debate. Such is the case with the first two words. פִּרְעַּי *pera’* usually means something about free action, often of hair. Many suggestions have been made, although the most popular is “leaders.” KJV “avenging.” In NAS “leaders.” In NIV “Princes.” NJB “warriors in Israel unbound their hair.” We must rely on the parallel line for help: “the people volunteered.”<sup>115</sup> Whatever the meaning, it is good news because the narrator praises the Lord. A similar line is found in verse nine (5:2).

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<sup>113</sup>I am astounded at the imagination of commentators who look for esoteric significance in the plainest of actions.

<sup>114</sup>See Block, *Judges, Ruth*, pp. 212-13, for a discussion of the similarity of this song with others.

<sup>115</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 220, “to let go, to abandon everything [for the battle].”

Now the narrator calls on kings and princes to listen, because he is about to sing to Yahweh, the God of Israel. In Hebrew fashion, the first verb is singular, referring to Deborah, the addition of an additional subject (Barak) does not change the number. Perhaps this is why the number is singular in verse three (5:3).

The narrator harkens to the past to speak of Yahweh's greatness. "Going forth from Edom" is a common motif (Isa 63:1-6). Seir is the other name for Edom, the perennial enemy of Israel. When Yahweh marched forth, the earth shook, the heavens dripped,<sup>116</sup> and the clouds dropped water. The mountains flowed away from Yahweh, the God of Israel. "This one of Sinai" seems intrusive, but its appearance in Psa 68:8 and Deut 33:2 in similar contexts, lends credence to its presence here<sup>117</sup> (5:4-5).

2. The current circumstances (5:6-7).

A more immediate time is designated with the mention of Shamgar and Jael. In that time, the caravans ceased. "Those who went forth on their travels, took their way along by-paths" NJB. While precise translation is difficult, the general meaning is that business, trade, and travel have been disrupted because of Jabin's persecution. The next line has a difficult word פִּרְזוֹן *p<sup>l</sup>razon* which probably means something about peasantry.<sup>118</sup> Since peasants are not going to cease, it must be something about their lifestyle. NIV says, "they have refused to fight."

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<sup>116</sup>Because "dropped" does not fit the context, BHS suggests נָמוּגָה (*namogu*) "to melt" or נָמוּטָה (*namotu*) "to move." The Greek seems to support such a reading: ἐταράχθη.

<sup>117</sup>See Block, *Judges, Ruth*, pp. 222-23, for a good discussion.

<sup>118</sup>Boling, *Judges*, argues for the meaning of "warriors," p. 109.



3. The raising up of Deborah (5:7b-8).<sup>119</sup>

In the midst of these dire circumstances, a prophetess arose, named Deborah. As such, she was a mother in Israel, one who succors her people. Most translators treat the next line as “they chose new Gods; then there was war at the gate.” Only NIV has “God chose new leaders.” Deut 32:17 is worth comparing to this verse. The rest of the verse indicates that Israel was unarmed, and, therefore, unable to defend herself.

## 4. The mustering of the people (5:9-11).

The narrator says his heart is on the leaders (lawgivers) of Israel. Those who are responding willingly among the people—bless the Lord. His attention has turned to those who would deliver the people from Jabin and Sisera. These are those who ride on tawny female donkeys (a sign of importance); those who sit on the rich carpets; who are walking on the way— sing (5:9-10).<sup>120</sup>

At the sound of those dividing sheep among the watering places, there they declare<sup>121</sup> the righteous acts of God; the righteous acts to his peasantry in Israel. Then the people of Yahweh went down to the gates (5:11).

## 5. Raising up of Deborah and Barak (5:12).

“Arise, arise, oh, Deborah; arise, arise, declare a song. Stand up, oh, Barak, and restore your captives, son of Abinoam.” This is a call for the leaders to arise and lead the people who will respond to the call.

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<sup>119</sup>Hebrew: שָׁקְמוּתֵי *šaqmoti*. The “š” represents a northern dialect or an older poetic form.

<sup>120</sup>שִׁיחַו *šihu* usually means “to meditate” or to “complain.” Here “sing” is better.

<sup>121</sup>יָתַנּוּ *yʿttanu* “to give,” but see Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 229 for a different rendering.

6. Participants and non-participants (5:13-18)

Who came to the battle? Then a remnant will go down to the mighty ones, the people of Yahweh will go down to me among the military leaders. From Ephraim who are connected to Amalek. Perhaps some Amalekites had already penetrated Ephraim.<sup>122</sup> After you, Benjamin among your people? From Machir leaders went down. Machir in Gen 50:23 and Num 32:39-40 relate Machir to Manasseh. And from Zebulun mustering a leader<sup>123</sup> with a staff. (5:13-14).

The princes of Issachar were with Deborah, and Issachar was sent to the valley at Barak's feet.<sup>124</sup> Now for the first time, we hear of Reuben who lives on the east side of the Jordan. "Stout hearted rulers of the divisions of Reuben" (5:15).

Who did not come? Reuben is accused of sitting between the flocks, listening to the piping of the flocks. Then the same line as v. 15 is repeated except that for "rulers" we have a similar word meaning "searching"<sup>125</sup> (5:16).

Gilead is staying on the other side of the Jordan (does Gilead represent the tribe of Gad?); Dan, why are you lingering by the ships? Asher lives by the coast and dwells on the ports (5:17).

Zebulun, a people reproaching his soul to death (cf. v. 14), and Naphtali is on the heights of the field (5:18).

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<sup>122</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 232.

<sup>123</sup>Treating מַשֵּׂךְ *mašak* as "muster" and סֹפֵר *sopher* as leader.

<sup>124</sup>Greek omits "as with Issachar so was Barak."

<sup>125</sup>חִקְקֵי vs. חִקְרֵי *ḥiqqe* vs. *ḥiqre* .

7. The battle (5:19-22)

Kings came; they fought together. Then the kings of Canaan fought in Taanach by the waters of Megiddo. Boling, quotes Lapp, *BASOR*, 195 (1969) 33-49 as holding that Taanach was destroyed in the 12<sup>th</sup> century and that was caused by Deborah and Barak. They took no plunder of silver. The stars fought from heaven; from their highways, they fought with Sisera (5:19-20).

Verse 21 is difficult. The River Kishon swept them away; the ancient river; the River Kishon. My soul, march on with strength. Flooding in this area was not unknown, so, Sisera's chariots would have become mired in the mud (5:21).

Then they struck the heels of the horse; from the fierce rushings of the mighty ones (5:22).

8. More non-participants (5:23)

Curse Meroz, said the angel of Yahweh. Meroz is unknown as a place or people. It "represents those Israelites who have taken their stand on the side of the Canaanites. Jael is the opposite."<sup>126</sup> She has taken her stand on the side of Israel.

Curse mightily her inhabitants.

Because they did not come to the aid of Yahweh;  
To the aid of Yahweh among the heroes.<sup>127</sup>

9. Blessing of Jael, the Magnificat (5:24-27).

Blessed among women is Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite.  
Blessed among women in the tent.  
He asked for water; she gave him milk.  
In a beautiful bowl, she brought near curds.  
Her *left* hand went to the tent peg,

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<sup>126</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 239.

<sup>127</sup>It seems strange that Judah is not mentioned. Boling, *Judges*, p. 119, says Judah may have gone her own way so as not to be praised or blamed.

Her right hand to the workman's mallet.  
She struck Sisera; she smashed his head.  
And she smashed and pierced his skull.  
Between her knees he bowed—fell, lay down.  
Between her feet he bowed—he fell.  
Where he bowed, there, he fell destroyed.

10. The grief of Sisera's mother (5:28-30).

Through the window, she leans out;  
the mother of Sisera cries shrilly through the lattice.  
“Why does his chariot delay coming?  
Why do the steps (hoof beats?) of his chariots hold back?”  
Her wise<sup>128</sup> princess answers her.  
Then she repeats her words to her:  
“They have, no doubt, found and divided the spoil,  
“A womb<sup>129</sup> or two for each man”  
“Spoil of dyed stuff for Sisera”  
“Dyed work of double embroidery for the neck of the spoiler.”

11. The final word (5:31).

Thus, may all your enemies perish, oh, Yahweh,  
and may all those who love him<sup>130</sup>  
be like the sun going forth in its strength!

So, the land was quiet for forty years.

VIII. The judgeship of Gideon (6:1—8:35).

A. The cycle returns (6:1-10).

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<sup>128</sup>A few MSS have the singular as here.

<sup>129</sup>Perhaps a vulgar term for “girl.”

<sup>130</sup>2 MSS, Syriac, and Vulgate have “those who love you.”

1. The tiresome refrain is given again: the sons of Israel did what was evil in the sight of Yahweh, and he gave them into the hands of Midian seven years (6:1).
2. The unrelenting presence of Midian. These nomads were devastating the Israelites. As result, they resorted to primitive living to get away from them (6:2).<sup>131</sup>
3. In verse three, we learn that Amalek joins forces with Midian in the oppression. To them is added “the sons of the east.” There is now a conglomeration of trans-Jordanian people applying intense pressure on Israel and their livelihood.<sup>132</sup> When Israel sowed (and it ripened), these three groups would come up and pillage the crops and thus leave Israel destitute.<sup>133</sup> These marauders from the east brought their camels and all their livestock to destroy Israel. Consequently, Israel was very poor, and so they cried out to Yahweh (6:3-6).
4. Prophetic response. Yahweh answered their prayer by sending a prophet to reprimand them—not exactly what they asked for. Through him, Yahweh reminds them that he is the one who brought them from Egypt and the house of bondage. He delivered them from the power of Egypt and drove out the Canaanites and gave them the latter’s land. He told them not to become entangled with the gods of those in whose midst they live, but they refused to listen—end of discussion. Why is there no further discussion of Israel’s rebellion, and what would be required for the restoration to Yahweh’s favor? (6:7-10).<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>131</sup>See Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 252, for a positive view of Midian in earlier times.

<sup>132</sup>Note in Gen 37:27-28, Judges 8:24 that the Ishmaelites and Midianites are interchanged.

<sup>133</sup>“Until one comes to Gaza.” The extent of the pillaging was considerable.

<sup>134</sup>See Butler, *Judges*, p. 185 for a discussion of the omission of this paragraph from 4QJudg<sup>a</sup>.

B. The Angel of Yahweh (6:11-24)

1. The commissioning of Gideon (6:11-17).
  - a. The Angel of Yahweh shows up unannounced and sits under the oak tree<sup>135</sup> in Orphrah which belonged to Joash the Abiezrite. We have already spoken to the Israelite usage of trees as part of their religious practice.<sup>136</sup> Gideon was surreptitiously beating out wheat kernels from the chaff so that it could be ground into flour. He was using a part of the wine press to accomplish his task (6:11).
  - b. The Angel shouts out a greeting: “Yahweh is with you, you mighty man of valor.”<sup>137</sup> I take the greeting to be indicative rather than subjunctive. Not, “May Yahweh be with you,” but “he is with you” (Ruth 2:1, 17). Note that the same language is used of Boaz in Ruth 2:1, and that Ruth beats out her barley that she had gleaned during the day as Gideon was doing (6:12).
  - c. Gideon takes issue with the Angel (supposing him to be a man).<sup>138</sup> The first is the statement that Yahweh is with him. If that were true, says Gideon, all this travesty would not have happened to them, for he would have manifested himself in miraculous ways according to the stories the fathers recounted to them. Instead, Yahweh has abandoned them and delivered them into the hand of the Midianites (6:13).

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<sup>135</sup>Cf. Deborah sitting under the palm tree.

<sup>136</sup>See p. 77.

<sup>137</sup>Butler, *Judges*, “apparently this was what God was calling Gideon to become and what God’s presence would make of him,” p. 202. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 260 thinks it might be just a flattering address.

<sup>138</sup>Note the theophany in Genesis 18.

- d. Then Yahweh<sup>139</sup> turns to Gideon<sup>140</sup> and lays a strong charge on him, “Go in this your strength and deliver Israel from the hand of Midian, have I not sent you.” But Gideon gives his second objection, he is from the poorest family group in Manasseh, and he is the youngest in his father’s house. Most calls from God are responded to with protestations of inability (cf. Moses, Jeremiah). This is a normal reaction from a humble person. God often honors this humility by providing a sign (Moses, Gideon). “My command to go is sufficient for your sustenance in the battle to follow” (6:14-16).
- e. Gideon senses that something more than normal is taking place,<sup>141</sup> so he asks him for a sign to prove it. He asks the Angel of Yahweh to stay there until he returns with an offering. He accedes to the request. The word מִנְחָה *minḥah* can be simply a gift, or it may be an offering to God. I suspect Gideon has the latter in view.<sup>142</sup> He then prepares a goat kid and broth and brings them to the Angel of Yahweh. The last word in v. 19 means to bring near. By changing the vowels, it can mean to draw near. The Greek has “he bowed down or worshipped.”<sup>143</sup> The Angel instructed him on how to offer the gift. When Gideon finished, the Angel touched the offering with his staff, a fire burst out and consumed the offering. Furthermore, the Angel of Yahweh went up in the fire and disappeared. Now Gideon knew

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<sup>139</sup>The Masoretic pointing אֲדֹנָי *'donai* (6:15) indicates deity, whereas אֲדֹנִי *'doni* in v. 13 means “sir” or “master.”

<sup>140</sup>The Greek text has Angel of Yahweh, but this is probably an attempt to avoid the idea of God himself talking with a human being.

<sup>141</sup>Since “I will be with you” contains the letters of Ehyeh as in Exod 3:12, Boling, *Judges*, p. 132, believes it is Yahweh’s name in the first person. This, he says, explains Gideon’s change of attitude.

<sup>142</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 263, agrees.

<sup>143</sup>Boling, *Judges*, p. 128, “he divined.”

what he had begun to suspicion: the was the Angel of Yahweh and not a man (6:17-22a).

- f. Gideon responded to the theophany by assuming that he would die since he had seen the Angel of Yahweh (or God) face to face. The same reaction comes from Manoah under similar circumstances (Judges 13:15-23). Yahweh then encourages him by saying that he would not die. Is it a voice from heaven? Gideon then builds an altar which he calls Yahweh Shalom (Yahweh is peace). It is still there in his town when the narrator pens these words (6:22b-24).

C. The challenge to Gideon (6:25-32).

1. The first act of obedience. There is a problem with the sacrifice to be offered. Gideon is told to take a bull (פָּרַ *par*) the bull (הַשֹּׁר *haššor*) belonging to your father. Then he is told to take a second bull seven years old. Some argue that the word “second” may refer to the fact that the first calf is to be devoted to Yahweh, thus only the second one would be left. Others argue for a second meaning for “second” such as “fat” (cf. the Greek). There is no good solution to this issue. That Gideon’s father was syncretistic in his faith is indicated by the fact that he has an altar devoted to Baal and a tree or pole (something that can be cut down) devoted to Asherah. One could argue that Baal refers to Yahweh (which it can, since it means Lord), but there is no getting around Asherah as a Canaanite deity. This indicates that much of early Israel was at best syncretistic.<sup>144</sup> Then Gideon was told to build an altar to Yahweh his God on the top of this stronghold in an orderly fashion. He is then to take the second bull and offer it us as a holocaust offering on the wood of the Asherah. This is the ultimate insult to the Canaanite religion. Gideon then took ten of his father’s servants (indicating that his family was not as poor as he had argued earlier) and did as Yahweh had said.

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<sup>144</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, rightly says, “before he can embark on God’s mission of deliverance Gideon must cut out the mark of apostasy at home,” p. 265.



Because of his fear of his father’s house and the village people, he did it at night (6:25-27).<sup>145</sup>

2. The villagers react as expected when they see the damage done to their worship center, and when they find out it was Gideon, they demand that he be brought out and put to death. Fortunately, Gideon’s father defends him. He argues that anyone who defends Baal should be put to death. Does this mean that Joash has begun to agree with his son? The ambiguity of the situation is indicated by Gideon’s later action in 8:27 where Gideon makes a golden ephod and causes Israel to sin against Yahweh. Joash names Gideon Jerubbaal<sup>146</sup> which indicates something about contending with Baal (6:28-32).

D. Gideon’s second request for proof of God’s presence (6:33-40).

1. The restatement of the Midianite threat and Gideon’s response (6:33-35).

It seems strange to have this paragraph followed by the next where Gideon expresses more doubt and need for more proof. The sequence of events here may not be in order. My guess is that the paragraph on the fleece preceded the Midianite threat, and the mustering of the troops followed the fleece requests.

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<sup>145</sup>Butler, *Judges*, p. 206, “Fear of Yahweh does not control his motivation and activities. Fear of his family and friends does.”

<sup>146</sup>N. Steinmeyer, “Archaeological Evidence for Gideon the Judge?” *Bible History Daily*, July 15, 2021, “The inscription contains the first-ever archaeological occurrence of the name Jerubbaal, known in the Bible as a nickname of the judge Gideon (Judges 6:31–32), and it dates to around 1100 B.C.E.—right about the time that many biblical scholars believe Gideon would have lived. But since the biblical Gideon lived in the Jezreel Valley, nearly a hundred miles away, this inscription likely belonged to another Jerubbaal.” Heater: But Judges 6:4 indicates that the Ammonite despoliation took place as far as (עַד *‘ad*) Gaza, and 8:22 the *men of Israel* said, “Rule over us.” Admittedly, most of the action in this story takes place in the north, but it is still possible for a Jerubbaal inscription (in the south) to refer to Gideon (in the north).

The Midianites, Amalekites, and Easterners have invaded the Jezreel valley and set up camp. One can envision the black goat skin tents as seen still today in Jordan. The phrase, “the Spirit of Yahweh clothed Gideon” does not indicate his spiritually, but that God was about to use him.<sup>147</sup>

He blew the Shophar and his own village followed him, in spite of their recent set-to. He then sent messengers to Manasseh, Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali. These all responded to his call.

2. Gideon’s request for more signs (6:36-40).

Gideon asks God to prove that he wants Gideon to deliver Israel by making the fleece wet but all the ground around it on the threshing floor dry.<sup>148</sup> When that happened, and Gideon squeezed out a pail of water from the fleece, he still was not satisfied. Much like Abraham pleading for Lot in Genesis 18, he begs Yahweh not to be angry with him when he adds to his request.<sup>149</sup> This time, he reverses the process, asking for the fleece to be dry and all the land to be wet. This apparently satisfied him, for he began maneuvers the next day.

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<sup>147</sup>See Butler, *Judges*, p. 208, for a discussion.

<sup>148</sup>God’s will was already revealed. The fleece borders on divination. See Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 273.

<sup>149</sup>Gideon addresses the deity twice but uses the generic Elohim. The narrator uses it once. The name Yahweh is absent, but Gideon refers to him indirectly as “the one who spoke to him.”

## E. Preparation for the battle (7:1-18).

1. The troops gather at Harod, and the Midianites are at Mt. Moreh (7:1).<sup>150</sup>

The narrator makes sure we understand that Jerubbaal is Gideon. Both names could be “nick” names. Gideon means something about cutting or chopping. The Israelites muster on the south side of the Jezreel valley near the Spring Harod. This spring is there today. The Midianites are camped north of him near Mt. Moreh in the Jezreel Valley.

2. The first winnowing (7:2-3).

Yahweh wants to be sure that he receives the glory for the coming victory, so he tells Gideon to dismiss everyone who is afraid. Some 22,000 people swallowed their pride and returned home. The phrase, “Let him return quickly from Mt. Gilead,” is strange. BHS suggests, וַיַּיְשְׁרֵפֶם גִּדְעוֹן *wyiyšrepem Gideon*: “And Gideon refined them.” The phrase “return quickly” is one word and a *hapax legomenon* (once appearing).<sup>151</sup> Block has a better suggestion. Working from the Arabic name of Harod, *Ain Jalud*, he suggests that Gilead is a corruption of that name, since Gilead is on the east side of the Jordan.<sup>152</sup> Now there were only 10,000 left.

3. The second winnowing (7:4-8).

Gideon’s heart must have sunk when Yahweh told him he would need to reduce his ranks further. There is some confusion on the actions. Apparently, everyone bowed on the knees, but one group lapped directly from the water and the 300 lapped from their hand

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<sup>150</sup>For the many battles fought in the Jezreel Valley, see Cline, *The Battles of Megiddo*.

<sup>151</sup>See Butler, *Judges*, p. 188, for a discussion of the word for “return quickly.”

<sup>152</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 276.

as they bowed. Consequently, 9,700 made their way home.<sup>153</sup> That left only 300 men to confront the thousands of enemies, but Yahweh told Gideon that he would deliver the people of Israel with a mere 300.

4. The third confirmation (7:9-15).

During the night Yahweh told Gideon to go attack the Midianite camp. But, he says, if you are afraid, then go down to the camp and listen to what you will hear. Gideon was apparently still fearful about his assignment in spite of all the signs Yahweh had given him. He is to take his servant Purah with him (7:9-11).<sup>154</sup>

Gideon took his servant, and they went to the edge of the armed camp. The enemy were scattered as far as the eye could see. Camels and people were like the sand by the sea. Gideon needed reassurance! There he listened as one of the Midianites shared a dream with his buddy. A barley cake comes bounding into the encampment, knocks over a tent, and turns it upside down. His friend interprets the dream and gives such specific information that it clearly is referring to Gideon. Gideon is impressed by this miracle, bows down to Yahweh, and then goes back to arouse his troops. He tells them to rise up for Yahweh has given the camp of Midian into their hand (7:12-15).

F. The battle (7:16-23).

He divides the 300 men into three groups. Then he gives a shophar to each along with an empty pitcher into which he places a torch. Where did he get this idea? Was it his own, or did Yahweh give it to him? (7:16).

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<sup>153</sup>Butler, *Judges*, p. 213, argues that “tent” was not home, but some kind of military establishment. This would allow them to be used in the future.

<sup>154</sup>Again, I am dismayed at how much commentators read into the text. Some develop entire scenarios regarding Gideon’s motives and attitude which are then developed further as the text proceeds.

He then tells them to imitate him as they surround the Midianite camp at the beginning of the middle watch (12:00-4:00 a.m.).<sup>155</sup> They blow in the shophars, break the pitchers, hold up the torches and shout, “the sword of the Lord and of Gideon.” At that point all three groups blow in their shophars and break the pitchers. As a result, the suddenly awakened Midianites, surrounded by torches and the awful sound of the shophars, break in confusion and flee. The narrator wants us to know that the battle was the Lord’s, as he caused a great tumult, the Midianites fought each other in the dark and fled east as far as Abel Meholah on the east side of the Jordan. Then the men of Israel from the tribes of Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh were mustered to pursue Midian<sup>156</sup> (7:17-23).

Gideon then sends messengers to Mount Ephraim, urging them to come down to the Jordan at Beth Barah (location not known, but it must been a ford in the Jordan) to capture the Midianites as they were crossing. There they capture the two princes of Midian, Oreb and Zeeb,<sup>157</sup> whom they killed. They brought their heads to Gideon on the other side of the Jordan (7:24-25).

G. The internecine struggle (8:1-3).

Ephraim, somewhere along the way, argues fiercely with Gideon. “Why did you go to war without us?” He ameliorates their anger by telling them how much more they have done than he, including the fact that they had captured and executed Oreb and Zeeb.<sup>158</sup>

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<sup>155</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 282, “in the darkest hour of the night.”

<sup>156</sup>*Ibid.*, pp. 283-84, quoting Klein, sees this as an abdication of Gideon’s faith. He should have allowed the 300 to complete the task. I am more inclined to give Gideon the benefit of the doubt and allow him to be practical in the mopping up operations.

<sup>157</sup>“The Raven and the Wolf.” “The Raven and the Eagle” were used to describe Sam Houston and Santa Anna respectively. See the book with that title by James Michener.

<sup>158</sup>Some argue that the dispute is over spoils. Ephraim does not believe she was called early enough to get her share of the spoils. See Butler, *Judges*, p. 217.

H. Gideon's revenge (8:4-21).

1. Gideon and his 300 men have been running all the way to the Jordan, so they are exhausted as they are pursuing.<sup>159</sup> He asks the men of Succoth for a little bread since he is pursuing the kings of Midian. When they refuse this small request for hospitality, he promises that when he returns, he will thresh their flesh with thorns and briars. Some criticize Gideon for this action, but it seems reasonable to me. He gets a similar reception at Penuel, and tells them that when he returns in peace, he will tear down their tower (8:4-9).
2. Zebah and Zalmunna were encamped in Karkor<sup>160</sup> with some 15,000 left of the 120,000 soldiers. They were as exhausted as Gideon and his men. Gideon attacked them by way of the tent-dwellers (caravan route)<sup>161</sup> east of Nobah and Jogbehah because they were resting securely. When the two kings fled, Gideon pursued and caught them. Then the whole camp trembled<sup>162</sup> (8:10-12).
3. Retribution on Succoth and Penuel (8:13-17).

Gideon returned from the battle at the ascent of Heres.<sup>163</sup> Here he encountered a youth who agreed to write down the 77 names of the

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<sup>159</sup>Greek has wearied and hungry. Only one letter change is required for this, but Greek is the only witness for it.

<sup>160</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 291, locates this place 100 miles east of the Dead Sea, approaching Midianite homeland. See Garstang, *Joshua, Judges*, pp. 322-23 for a detailed discussion.

<sup>161</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 291.

<sup>162</sup>BHS suggests הִכְחִיד *hikhhyd* “to destroy” as Josephus seem to take it.

<sup>163</sup>KJV says “at sunup,” a possible meaning.



2. Gideon apostatizes (8:24-27).

Ironically, in the next breath, Gideon asks for all the earrings taken from the Ishmaelites. The people gladly surrendered their earrings, and the weight came to 1700 gold shekels. In addition, they had crescents, pendants, purple garments that the kings wore, as well as the necklaces on the camels. With that gold, Gideon made an ephod and erected it in his city, and all Israel committed spiritual fornication there. Thus, it became a snare to Gideon and his family. How do we account for this abrupt turn around? Did Gideon, not happy with the aniconic worship of Yahweh, make a visible representation of him? Perhaps he was mixing the name Baal (lord or master) with Yahweh. Whatever, it was a very bad decision.

3. Gideon's old age and his son Abimelech (8:28-32).

God had worked a miracle through Gideon, so that the Midianites were completely suppressed before Israel, and there were 40 years of peace in Gideon's days. Gideon went home where he raised 70 sons (because he had many wives). In addition!, he had a concubine in Shechem<sup>168</sup> with whom he had a son. Gideon named him "My father is king." His name is portentous. This could refer to his god as a father or to Gideon even though he refused the kingship.<sup>169</sup> He will be the subject of chapter 9. Gideon died in good old age and was buried in his tomb in his hometown.

4. Israel's return to Baal worship (8:33-35).

After Gideon's death, the people turned away from worship of Yahweh to the Baals. They made the specific Baal of Shechem, Baal Berith (Baal of the covenant) their own deity. This gives me pause as to what Gideon's ephod represented. The people, at his death turned away from Yahweh and to the Baals.<sup>170</sup> Thus, the ephod,

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<sup>168</sup>Shechemites are probably Canaanites.

<sup>169</sup>Boling, *Judges*, p. 163, argues that "my father" can only refer to Yahweh.

<sup>170</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, pp. 304-05, acknowledges that Gideon must have repres-



while a snare to the people, still must have had some connection with Yahweh.<sup>171</sup>

The turn back to Baalism also meant turning away from Gideon and his family as well as from Yahweh their God who had delivered them from their enemies. They no longer felt any obligation to Gideon's many children.

#### IX. The illegitimate judgeship of Abimelech (9:1-57).

If the usage of the covenant name Yahweh is significant to the narrator, the number of usages should also be significant. It is of interest that the Gideon saga has the most occurrence of any judge with 36. This, despite the effort of many commentators to denigrate the spiritual character of Gideon. Second place goes to the Deborah/Barak story with 20, third place goes to Chapters 1-2 with 21, and third to chapter 3 and Othniel with 15.

After that, it is all downhill. The call narrative for Samson has 16 occurrences, but the rest of the story has only a total of seven. The dark epilogues have only three occurrences in chapters 17-19, except for the Benjamite civil war with 14 in chapters 20-21.

All that brings us to chapter 9 where there are no occurrences of Yahweh in the entire episode of Abimelech's ill-fated rule as king. I suggest that this indicates that the narrator considers Abimelech illegitimate and poses a warning to Israel regarding the problem with kings.<sup>172</sup> True, Elohim appears six times (9:7, 9, 13, 23, 56, 57), leading some to argue for the E document.

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ented some restraint on the people vis-à-vis Baalism.

<sup>171</sup>See Carol Meyers, "Ephod" in *ABD*, p. 550: "The ephod was both special garment and a ritual object, and in either or both of these aspects it functioned symbolically to bring a human representative of the Israelite community into contact with the unseen God."

<sup>172</sup>Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, p. 316, quotes Schneider that the use of "ruled as prince" rather than "king" suggests that the text questions the legitimacy of Abimelech's reign.

However, the use of divine names to identify sources has diminished in popularity. I suspect that Elohim has been used to note the religious “foreignness” of this chapter. If we do not count Abimelech, there are 12 judges, a good biblical number. Yahweh is not involved in the selection of Abimelech.

A. The crowning of Abimelech as king (9:1-6).

The narrator now picks up the thread begun in 8:31 with the birth of Abimelech. He goes to his kinsmen of Shechem and talks them into making him king. His argument in favor is twofold: “Is it better to have 70 men rule over you or one,” and “remember that we are kinsmen.” He is closer to the Shechemites through his mother than the Abiezrites. His relatives “tickled the ears” of the Bosses (Baalim) of Shechem and they responded favorably.

They paid him 70 shekels of silver from the temple of Baal Berith.<sup>173</sup> With his new-found wealth, he hired a group of worthless and wanton men. This says something about Abimelech. These are red neck, beer drinking, no account men. So was Abimelech. Yet they had the ability to wreak havoc on the community. He went to Orphrah, to his father’s house and killed 69 (one shekel each) of his brothers.<sup>174</sup> Jotham was hidden by someone, or he hid himself, and escaped his brothers’ fate.<sup>175</sup>

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<sup>173</sup>See Lewis, *Baal Berith*, in *ABD*, I:550-51 for a discussion. Despite complete lack of details, scholars have no end of suggestions as to the identity of this deity and his relationship to Yahweh and his covenant with Israel.

<sup>174</sup>Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, p. 312, says, “Of all the characters who have appeared thus far in the pages of Judges, Abimelech most resembles the Canaanite king Adoni-bezek, who had mutilated and humiliated seventy rival kings.” Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 312, draws a six-point comparison with Jehu’s slaughter of Ahab’s 70 sons (2 Kings 10:8-10).

<sup>175</sup>A similar story to the preservation of Joash in Athaliah’s purge (2 Kings 11:1-3).

Then the Bosses of Shechem and those of Beth-millo<sup>176</sup> brought Abimelech to the oak by the pillar<sup>177</sup> in Shechem and made him king. What a disaster.

B. Jotham's response (9:7-21).<sup>178</sup>

1. Jotham's fable (9:7-15).

When Jotham was told, he went to the top of Mount Gerizim,<sup>179</sup> the southern of the two mountains around Shechem and shouted out a parable. The parable says that the trees went out looking for a king. They were refused in turn by olive tree, fig tree, and the grapevine. Finally, the thorn bush agrees to rule over them and provide them shelter in his shadow but warns them that a fire will come out and devour them if they do not carry out their part.

2. Jotham's application of the parable (9:16-21).

The application is fairly obvious. The Bosses of Shechem have made a bad bargain and will suffer for it. There will be mutual destruction of the Bosses of Shechem, Beth-millo and Abimelech. Then Jotham fled to Beer where he was able to avoid Abimelech's wrath.

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<sup>176</sup>Bolling, *Judges*, p. 175, argues that the Millo-house refers to the temple. "That Millo-house was destroyed long before the Book of Judges was put together means that we are dealing with authentic early tradition at the core of Jotham's speech." See also E. F. Campbell and J. F. Ross, "Excavations of Shechem and Biblical Traditions," p. 289, BA Reader II, Reprint 1964, for a discussion of the archaeology and the text of Judges 9.

<sup>177</sup>Reading *הַמַּשָּׁבָה* *hammaššebah* for *מִשָּׁב* *mušab*.

<sup>178</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 325, says, "In function and content Jotham's speech parallels that of the prophet in 6:7-10."

<sup>179</sup>See Josh 8:30-35.

C. Rejection of the rule by God and the Shechemites (9:22-25).

Abimelech ruled as prince over Israel. How extensive was this rule? It seems circumscribed at first, but perhaps it was extended later. We are not told what his reign was like, but given his apparent narcissism, one can imagine.

The narrator says that it was Elohim who sent a spirit of calamity between the Bosses of Shechem and Abimelech.<sup>180</sup> The purpose of this, as the narrator tells us, is that retribution might come upon Abimelech their brother because of the violence done to the 70 sons of Jerubbaal, because he killed them, but also upon the Bosses of Shechem because they strengthened his hand to kill his brothers. Consequently, they proceeded to interfere with the spoils system Abimelech had established by robbing everyone who came by. Obviously, the word would get to Abimelech.

D. Gaal, a new rival (9:26-29).

A newcomer shows up in Shechem with his brothers. His name was Gaal (“Abhorrent”) the son of Ebed (servant). These are “freebooters” as was Abimelech. He sets up shop in Shechem and the Bosses entrust themselves to him. But he did not know what he was up against.

They went to the field to harvest the grapes, made wine, held a festival, went into their temple, got drunk and cursed Abimelech. The name *Īmor* is probably a deity. Gen 34:1-3 describes the unfortunate encounter of Diana, Jacob’s daughter, with Shechem son of Hamor. This would be like ben Hadad as the name of a Syrian dynasty.

Like a lot of bullies, Gaal brags that he would destroy Abimelech if he would only take a stand (“amass your army and come out”).

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<sup>180</sup>Note that it was “an evil spirit from Elohim that seized Saul” (1 Sam 18:10).

## E. Abimelech's plan to retake power (9:30-33).

Zebul, Abimelech's lieutenant heard Gaal's boast and sent word secretly to Abimelech. He says that Gaal is stirring up the city against him and advises him to set an ambush in the fields so that he can defeat the people as they come out.

## F. Abimelech's defeat of his rival (9:34-41).

The next day Gaal was suffering from a hangover. He thought he saw men coming down the mountain, but Zebul told him it was only a shadow. By the time he was convinced that what he saw was really men, it was too late. Zebul taunted him and told him to fight Abimelech. Gaal and the Bosses of Shechem engage Abimelech but were defeated. Abimelech returned to Arumah,<sup>181</sup> and Zebul drove Gaal out of Shechem.

## G. Abimelech's defeat of Shechem (9:42-49).

When the Shechemites went back to the field to harvest grapes (they could not delay lest the grapes spoil, and they assumed with Abimelech and Gaal's departure, v. 41, the war was over), Abimelech took his people and divided them in three groups. One group stood at the entrance of the city and another group attacked those in the field. He captured the city, killed all who were in it, and sowed it in salt.

The Bosses of Shechem and their families had taken refuge in the tower. Abimelech led the way in cutting down tree branches and putting them in the underground tunnel of the tower.<sup>182</sup> They set the branches on fire and destroy about a thousand people.

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<sup>181</sup>Reading אָרומָה אַבִּימֶלֶךְ וַיָּשָׁב אָרומָה *wayashab Abimelech returned to Arumah*, with G<sup>L</sup>, although Boling, *Judges*, *loc. cit.* stays with the MT and translates “presided at.”

<sup>182</sup>צָרִיחַ *ṣeriah*. Meaning is not certain. Seems to be connected with the temple of El Berith (the Greek has Baal Berith).

H. Abimelech attacks Thebez (9:50-55)

He seems to be expanding his territory. Thebez is north of Tirzah, an early capital of Israel, and north of Shechem.<sup>183</sup> We have already seen him in Arumah which is south of Shechem. Who are the men of Israel? They must have been some Israelites who decided to follow Abimelech and oppose the Shechemites. The Bosses of the city with their families fled to the tower and locked the door. Abimelech tried a repeat of his destruction at Shechem, but a woman threw an upper mill stone and it struck him in the skull (the narrator seems to enjoy having women kill the enemy). He tells his squire who bore his armor to kill him, and he did.

I. The narrator's final judgment (9:56-57).

Divine retribution on both Abimelech and the Bosses of Shechem has come about. The curse of Jotham has been fulfilled. There is nothing said or intimated about Abimelech that is good. Thus, he is illegitimate, and should not be seen as a judge of God's people.

X. Two minor judges (10:1-5).

A. The judgeship of Tola (10:1-2).

The name Tola (תּוֹלַעַ) means either "worm" or "scarlet." This name, combined with Puvvah, appears in Gen 46:13; Num 26:23; and 1 Chron 7:1, 2. The normal words associated with judgeship are found here: "he arose after Abimelech to deliver Israel." Apart from that we learn that he is the son of Puah and the grandson of Dodo, a man of Issachar. However, his judgeship took place in Ephraimite hill country in the city of Shamir. He judged Israel twenty-three years, died, and was buried in Shamir.

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<sup>183</sup>Kitchen, *OROT*, p. 186, "These facts suggest that in fact Shechem rapidly lost its local power after Labayu [Amarna tablets], and became a mere satellite, politically, of neighboring Tirzah."

## B. The judgeship of Jair (10:3-5).

Jair's name is more encouraging. It means something about giving light, perhaps Yahweh gives light. Jair lived east of the Jordan in Gilead. He judged Israel 22 years. The word Israel probably does not encompass all Israel, but those located in Gilead and surrounding areas. He is noted for his 30 sons<sup>184</sup> who rode on 30 donkeys, and they had 30 cities.<sup>185</sup> They were called the Villages of Jair still in the time of the narrator. Jair died and was buried in Kamon.

These two judgeships indicate an extended period of peace and thus reflects on the administrative ability of the judges without resorting to warfare.<sup>186</sup>

## XI. Israel revolts again (10:6-16).

## A. The oppression (10:6-10).

“The Israelites again did evil in the sight of Yahweh and served . . .” For the first time we have articulated seven ethnic deities. Baals, Ashtaroath, the gods of Aram (Syria), Sidonians, Moab, Ammon, and the Philistines. But they abandoned the one true God, the covenant-keeping God, Yahweh. The Arameans worshipped the storm God, Hadad; the Sidonians Baal, Moab Chemosh, Ammon Milcom, and the Philistines Dagon. Block refers to this as the Canaanization of Israel.<sup>187</sup>

Consequently, the jealous God Yahweh became incredibly angry against Israel. He sold them into the hand of the Philistines<sup>188</sup> and the

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<sup>184</sup>Boling, *Judges*, p.188, argues that the 30 sons are a political relationship, not familial. The same would be true of Gideon's 70 sons.

<sup>185</sup>MT repeats donkeys, but some MSS read עָרִים *'arim*, or cities.

<sup>186</sup>Boling, *Judges*, p. 189.

<sup>187</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 344.

<sup>188</sup>Garstang, *Joshua-judges*, pp. 329-31, says that Egypt had placed sea peoples in garrisons such as the pentapolis to control the land. With the decline of Egyptian

Ammonites. This means that trouble was coming from the west and the east.

They (the Ammonites since the Philistines operated only on the west side of the Jordan) harassed for 18 years the east side of the Jordan in Gilead.<sup>189</sup> The verbs are powerful: רָצַף *raṣaṣ* and רָעַף *ra'as* to crush to break. Their abuse of the Israelites east of the Jordan was devastating (10:8).

However, they were not content with that pillage. They also crossed the Jordan to fight against Judah,<sup>190</sup> Benjamin, and Ephraim. So, Israel was really distressed. Now, as usual, the Israelites have no place to turn but to Yahweh. They confess that they have abandoned their God<sup>191</sup> and have served the Baals. Baal, the storm god, took many forms and had local manifestations, hence, the plural (10:9-10).

B. Yahweh's response (10:11-16).

Yahweh reminded them that he had delivered them from the oppression of Egypt, the Amorites, the Ammonites, Philistines, Sidonians, Amalekites, and Maon.<sup>192</sup> Despite that, says Yahweh, you abandoned me and served other gods. Therefore, I am not going to deliver you now. You should cry out to those gods for help. But the Israelites would not cease

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influence in the Levant, the Philistines were positioned to assert their dominance over Israel.

<sup>189</sup>Boling, *Judges*, p. 191, “The narrative interest is on the Ammonite side, for it was on that side that Jephthah was effective.” The awkward syntax, “They oppressed Israel in that year, 18 years all the Israelites in Gilead” is explained by Garstang, *Joshua-Judges*, p. 331, as referring one year to the oppression west of the Jordan.

<sup>190</sup>The first mention of Judah since the opening of the book.

<sup>191</sup>A few MSS have “Yahweh our God.”

<sup>192</sup>Greek has  $\mu\alpha\delta\iota\alpha\mu$  = Midian. The Meunites may have been a subgroup of the Midianites.



crying out. Do whatever you wish to us (good in your eyes) but deliver us from our troubles. To show good faith, they got rid of their idols and served Yahweh alone. So, God’s “soul” was grieved at the travail of his people.

C. Basis of Jephthah's summons (10:17-18).

Now the table is set. The Ammonites muster<sup>193</sup> their troops and encamp against Gilead. The Israelites gather and encamp in Mizpah.<sup>194</sup> Then the people, namely the princes of Gilead, met to discuss their leadership options. “Whoever is willing to lead the fight against Gilead shall be the head of all the inhabitants of Gilead.” Apparently, none of them were willing to lead the battle.<sup>195</sup>

XII. The judgeship of Jephthah (11:1—12:7).

A. Jephthah’s genealogy (11:1-3).

The action crosses the Jordan to the east territory of Gilead. Jephthah was a soldier’s soldier (mighty man of valor), but he had a dubious family history: his mother was a prostitute.<sup>196</sup> As a result, he was driven out by his half-brothers. This begins to sound a bit like Abimelech. He fled to the land of Tob. This place is mentioned as part of the Aramean coalition that came to the defense of Ammon against David (2 Sam

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<sup>193</sup>The form is *niphal* or passive.

<sup>194</sup>Mizpah is an important town during this period, but it is on the west side of the Jordan. Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, pp. 533-34, thinks Jephthah may have been at Mizpah when he sent messenger to the Ammonite king. But there may have been a Mizpah in Gilead.

<sup>195</sup>Butler, *Judges*, p. 268, “Thus the people of Israel have to go to battle without a divine or human leader. They have to learn that God cannot be manipulated or predicted. They have to learn that serving God is a full-time job, not just an escape mechanism when trouble appears.”

<sup>196</sup>Boling, *Judges*, p. 197, says that “Gilead fathered him” is just a way of saying that he had no known father.

10:6-19). Tobiah the Ammonite is an obscure figure in Nehemiah (2:10). Most link him with the venerable Tobiad family of Transjordan and make him a Jewish governor of Ammon. A group of “empty” men scratch themselves together to follow him (sounds more like Abimelech).

B. Gileadites “eat crow” and plead with Jephthah (11:4-11).

When the Ammonites prepared to attack Gilead, the elders went to plead with Jephthah to lead them in battle. They ask him to become a leader (קָצִין *qaṣin*). Literally, it means “a decider” (11:4-5).

Jephthah asks logically why they have come to him to help when they get into trouble since they drove him out. The elders deflect his statement<sup>197</sup> and tell him they will make him head of all Gilead if he will return with them. Jephthah brings in the name Yahweh at the beginning of his response. This goes counter to some commentators who take a negative view toward Jephthah. He reiterated their offer, and they swear before Yahweh to do it. He goes back, and the people of Gilead make him both “decider” and head. Jephthah then reiterates all these words before Yahweh in Mizpah (11:6-11).

C. Jephthah’s message to the Ammonites (11:12-28).

1. Ammon’s historical claim (11:12-13).

Jephthah sent messengers to ask the King of the Ammonites why he was making war. The answer is that Israel stole his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok (north and south) and the Jordan (west). Now he wants it back. This is a large piece of territory and takes in much of Reuben and Gad.

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<sup>197</sup>Text is difficult. שָׁבְנוּ *šabnu* “we have returned” but it may mean we have repented. לָקַח *laken* may be as in Greek, לֹא כֵן *lo ken* “not so; we have repented.”

2. Jephthah's historical lesson (11:14-22).

Jephthah's argument is that Israel avoided the territory of Edom and Moab but captured from Sihon king of the Amorites, the land just stipulated by the Ammonite king.<sup>198</sup>

3. Jephthah's application of the historical lesson (11:23-28).

Now Yahweh has deposed the Amorites and given their land to the Israelites. So why are you trying to possess it? Take what your god Chemosh has given you and be content with it, and we will take what Yahweh has given us (11:23-24).

Then Jephthah makes a second argument. Israel has dwelt in Heshbon, Aroer, and other towns next to the Wadi Arnon for 300 years.<sup>199</sup> Why did you not try to take them back during that time? (11:25-26).

Furthermore, he says, I have not wronged you, so why are you trying to bring trouble to me? May Yahweh, the judge, judge between you and Israel. But the Ammonites would not heed him (11:27-28).

D. The Spirit Yahweh came on Jephthah and his rash vow (11:29-33).

This statement indicates that Yahweh was in the middle of this entire skirmish (in contrast to Abimelech where no mention of Yahweh is made). He even made a vow to Yahweh. Because animals were kept in the house, he expected the first thing to come out to be a cow or a sheep, but it turned out to be his daughter and only child. He then engaged with

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<sup>198</sup>Boling, *Judges*, p. 203, says, “. . . Ammon had only recently emerged as a small national entity [in Num. 21] at the edge of the desert. Thus, the King of Ammon in this later period can only make his claims and charges in the name of Moabite sovereignty over the disputed territory . . .”

<sup>199</sup>300 is roughly equivalent to the combined times of oppression and rulership of the judges at this point.

the Ammonites, and Yahweh delivered them into his hand. So, the Ammonites were humbled under the Israelites.

E. The fulfillment or the vow (11:34-40).

It is hard to imagine the distress of Jephthah when his daughter appeared, dancing and playing the timbrels. What is meant by the offering of his daughter? There are two basic theories: 1) she is turned over to a life of service (perhaps at the tabernacle like Samuel), or 2) she was actually killed and offered as a holocaust offering. The second is clearly prohibited by Yahweh, so my inclination is toward the first theory. However, with most of the Israelites being half pagan, the second one is possible.<sup>200</sup>

F. More centrifugal civil war (12:1-7).

The tendency for the tribal confederacy to fly apart is illustrated again and again in the judges. Just as the Ephraimites chided Gideon for not contacting them earlier (because of the spoils?), so they now chide Jephthah. However, Gideon assuaged their anger, but Jephthah did not. He claims that he called for them to help, but they did not come, and he had to take his life in his hand to deliver Israel from Ammon. So, he asks them, why have you come against me this day to fight me? They said, “Because you Gileadites are refugees in the midst of Ephraim and Manasseh.” I assume that means, you do not belong here (12:1-4).

Jephthah captured the fords of the Jordan where Ephraimites who had not been killed tried to cross. If an Ephraimite tried to cross, claiming that he had escaped from the Ephraimites, they would ask them to pronounce the word for grain or Shibboleth. Their Ephraimite dialect pronounced it with a simple “s” and so it was a giveaway. Some 42,000 Ephraimites were killed at that time. What an awful time (12:5-6).

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<sup>200</sup>Butler, *Judges*, pp. 290-93, is rather adamant that the reference is to a life sacrificed by death. I am not sure his confidence is justified.

Jephthah then judged Israel for six years. He died and was buried in his city in Gilead (12:7).<sup>201</sup>

G. Three more minor judges (12:8-15).

1. Ibzan (12:8-10).

His home is Bethlehem. Is he related to David's family? He seems to be noteworthy for the number of children he has. He has 30 sons for whom he brought wives and 30 daughters whom he gave to others.<sup>202</sup> He judged Israel seven years. When he died, he was buried in Bethlehem.

2. Elon (12:11-12).

The next Judge is named Elon who came from Zebulun in the Galilee region. He judged Israel for ten years. When he died, he was buried in Aijalon, a town in Zebulun.

3. Abdon (12:13-15).

Abdon (something about service), the son of Hillel was from Pirathon in Ephraim. Again, he is noteworthy because of 40 sons and 30 grandsons. They, as with those of Jair, rode on donkeys. He judged Israel eight years. When he died, he was buried in his town in the land of Ephraim.<sup>203</sup>

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<sup>201</sup>Reading with the Greek *בְּעִירוֹ בְּגִלְעָד* *b<sup>e</sup> ʾiro b<sup>e</sup>gilʾad*. Jephthah receives a lot of criticism from commentators, but Boling, *Judges*, p. 214, says, "All in all the pragmatic compiler leaves us with his impression that within his anxious limitations (11:30-40) Jephthah was a good judge, the best since Othniel."

<sup>202</sup>See Butler, *Judges*, p. 297, for the idea that these are political alliances.

<sup>203</sup>The MT has in addition, "in the mountain of the Amalekites." See also 5:14 for some connection between Ephraim and the Amalekites, if the text is correct.

XIII. The judgeship of Samson (13:1—16:31).

- A. Israel again abandons Yahweh, and Yahweh abandons them to the hand of the Philistines (13:1).

The Pelest, as the Hebrew refers to the Philistines, are only mentioned five times in the first 10 chapters of Judges. In the Samson narrative, the name appears 24 times. From now on the Philistines will be prominent in the history of Israel. Saul was raised up to begin the attack on them, and David will finish. See pp. 153, for further discussion. Samson will make his contribution (Judges 13:5).

“The Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Yahweh” appears in 2:11; 3:9; 6:1. “The Israelites again did evil in the eyes of Yahweh” appears in 3:12; 4:1; 10:6; 13:1. This thematic statement appears a total of seven times. So, here we are again with an old problem and a new enemy.

- B. Yahweh’s call of Samson (13:2-7).<sup>204</sup>

1. The situation (13:2).

Here we learn of a man named Manoah. He is from the village of Zerah of the tribe of Dan. This was prior to the northern migration of Dan found in the dark appendix (13:17-18). The other issue is that his wife (always unnamed)<sup>205</sup> was barren. So, like Sarah, Hannah, and Elizabeth, a supernatural conception takes place to produce an Isaac, a Samuel, and a John.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>204</sup>For an excellent discussion of the literary structure and the place of Judges 13-16 in the Book of Judges, see Block, *Judges, Ruth*, pp. 391-394.

<sup>205</sup>The naming of her husband does not elevate him, as the narrative shows, but merely identifies him and his tribe.

<sup>206</sup>Butler, *Judges*, says, “As in the Gideon narrative, so here, the expected framework notice that God has raised up a judge is highly noticeable by its absence. Instead, a simple birth story ensues,” p. 322.

2. The Angel of Yahweh appeared to the woman (13:3-5).

Here is the angel of Yahweh again. This passage is very similar to that of Gideon in chapter 6. In 6:14 it is Yahweh who turns to speak to him (although there is one manuscript that adds Angel). Furthermore, the standard idea that one cannot see God and live is expressed by Manoah in 13:22. Thus, there is no question that this is a theophany.

The Angel of Yahweh tells Manoah's wife that she will conceive and bear a son. Having given her that marvelous news, he now provides details about the child. His mother is not to drink wine or intoxicating drink, nor shall she eat any unclean thing. The reason for this is that this boy is to be under the Nazirite vow from the womb (as was Samuel). Thus, Samson's mother was a Nazirite until his birth.

Nazir (נָזִיר), as a vow, appears in Numbers 6 as well as this passage, Judges 16:17, and Amos 2:11-12. Normally, the Nazirite vow would be for a given amount of time. The one making the vow must abstain from alcoholic beverages and grape products. He is not to cut his hair or approach any dead body. In the case of Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist, the vow is not temporary but lifelong. When Samson's hair was cut by Delilah, his vow was broken, and his strength left.

3. She tells her husband (13:6-7).

In this section, she identifies the Angel as the angel of God, and further describes him as being very awesome. She did not ask where he was from, nor did he volunteer his name. She then repeats the Angel's story to her husband.

C. Manoah asks Yahweh to reappear (13:8-14).

He asked Yahweh to send the man of God again to instruct them as to what they should do with the child. Yahweh has already given explicit instructions, but Manoah wants more.

The Angel of Yahweh appears again, but not to Manoah. In these sorts of scenes, the woman is usually the more astute (cf. 2 Kings 4). The woman ran for her husband. He returned with her and asked the angel if he were the same one who had appeared earlier. He then asked the Angel what they are to do with the child, and the Angel of Yahweh told him again.

D. Manoah wants to feed him (13:15-23).

1. Offering must be to Yahweh (13:15-16).

Manoah then asked the Angel to allow them to prepare a kid (see Gideon in 6:18-19). The Angel's response is strange. "I will not eat of your food, and if you make an offering, it must be to Yahweh." Manoah did not recognize him and asked for his name<sup>207</sup> (13:15-16).

2. The angel's name is Pele (13:17-18).

He asked him why he wants to know his name since it is "miraculous." The consonants פֶּלְיָ *Pel'y* are used in the words "miraculous deeds" (6:13). I believe he is saying that his name is incomprehensible (13:17-18).<sup>208</sup>

3. Miraculous action (13:19-21).

The Angel then acted in accordance with his name. The same root פֶּלְיָ *pl'* is used here: "he acted miraculously." He apparently did something similar to that in Gideon's story. He burned the offering and then ascended with it out of sight. Manoah and his wife were looking on. The Angel never reappeared to them.

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<sup>207</sup>Apparently, they wanted to name the son after this angel.

<sup>208</sup>Butler, *Judges*, p. 329, "The mysterious answer shows that God will not reveal himself completely. Manoah cannot have access to the inner reality of God represented by his name. That name is 'Miraculous.'"



## 4. Miraculous fear (13:22-23).

Then Manoah thought they would die for they had seen God. His wife, the logical one, says Yahweh would not have acted toward them as he did if he planned to kill them (13:23).

## 5. Fulfillment of the promise (13:24-25).

She bore a son (what a blessing!). She called him שִׁמְשׁוֹן *Shimshon* or Samson. This name means something about the sun. It is strange indeed that the Semitic sun God, Shemesh, should be used rather than one including Yahweh's name.<sup>209</sup> As the child grew, Yahweh blessed him. The spirit of Yahweh began to move in Samson<sup>210</sup> locally between Zerah and Eshtaol in Mahaneh-dan (cf. 18:12).

## E. The first encounter with the Philistines (woman of Timna) (14:1—15:20).

## 1. Samson chooses a wife (14:1-4).

It is strange that God uses methods he otherwise forbids to enact his will (see 14:4). He clearly forbids the intermarriage with non-believers, yet sanctions Samson's marriage so as to stir up animosity with the Philistines.

Timnah is on the border with the Philistines. It was there that Samson saw and desired a woman. He returned to his parents and asked them to take her for him as a wife. In spite of their protes-

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<sup>209</sup>See Boling, *Judges*, p. 225 for a discussion of the name.

<sup>210</sup>Butler, *Judges*, p. 330, "The spirit does not show approval of Samson's spiritual condition, nor does it fill him with an inner spirituality. Again, as with Gideon and with Jephthah, the coming of the Spirit does not indicate a moral or devotional purity but a power to accomplish acts for God."

tations to the contrary, he forcefully demanded<sup>211</sup> that they take her as a wife for him.<sup>212</sup>

His parents did not recognize the hand of Yahweh in the matter. He was looking for something to stir up the hostility of the Philistines.<sup>213</sup> The text states that, at that time, the Philistines were ruling Israel. The Israelites had accepted their foreign rule in spite of God's command to drive them out.

2. The first act of supernatural power (the woman of Timnah) (14:5-9).

The three of them made their way to Timnah. Now when Samson, apparently separated from his parents,<sup>214</sup> encountered a lion who came roaring at him. The spirit of Yahweh seized him, and he tore the lion apart with his bare hands, as one does a kid, but he did not tell his parents. He made his way to Timnah, spoke to the woman, and she pleased him (14:5-7).

He came back after a certain time to take her as a wife. On the way, he turned aside to see the corpse of the lion<sup>215</sup> to discover that bees had made honey in the body. He scooped it out and ate as he walked and gave some to his parents but did not tell them its source (14:8-9).

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<sup>211</sup>The Hebrew says literally, “*Her* take for me, for she is right for me.”

<sup>212</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, goes too far, I believe, in seeing nothing but cultural significance in their concern. His is an argument from silence, p. 425.

<sup>213</sup>Note that God used a forbidden act (child sacrifice) to make a point with Abraham.

<sup>214</sup>BHS suggest deleting “his father and his mother” from the text. This makes good sense, but there is no textual evidence supporting it.

<sup>215</sup>The Nazirite vow in Num. 6 says not to come at dead bodies, but perhaps this does not include animals. This is contra Block, *Judges, Ruth*, pp. 429-30, who seems intent on making a bad Samson worse.

## 3. Samson's riddle (14:10-18).

His father went down to finalize the marriage arrangements,<sup>216</sup> and Samson made a customary feast for the young men. This was expensive, for he had to sustain 30 companions,<sup>217</sup> and the feast lasted seven days. Samson gave them a riddle based on the lion and the honey: “from the eater came out food and from the strong came out sweetness” (14:10-14).

The companions could not solve the riddle and faced with impoverishment due to the cost if they lost the wager, they threaten the woman with death. She pulled the feminine wile of “if you love me...” Samson finally yielded, and she passed on the answer (14:15-17).

On the seventh day, they gave the answer to Samson. Knowing full well what happened, he said, “if you had not plowed with my heifer, you would not have known” (14:18).

## 4. The second act of supernatural power (30 Philistines) (14:19-20).

For the second time, the spirit seized him. He went to Ashkelon, killed 30 men, took their spoil,<sup>218</sup> and seven garments, and gave them to those who had explained the riddle.<sup>219</sup> His anger was still hot when he went up to his father's house.

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<sup>216</sup>BHS suggests moving “Samson” in v. 10 to substitute for “his father...” Again, this makes more sense, but has no textual support.

<sup>217</sup>The Greek says these men were selected “for fear of him,” rather than the MT “When they saw him,” hence, they were body guards, not companions. These verbs רָאָה *ra'ah* “to see” and יָרֵחַ *yareh* “to fear” are easily confused.

<sup>218</sup>לְבָשִׁים *l'bisim* usually of armor, so something about stuff they had obtained through warfare. This is Samson's substitute for the 30 *s'dinim* or shirts.

<sup>219</sup>Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, p. 410, “Likewise, Samson's murderous deed should be viewed as an act of war against the Philistines. From the very beginning of the story, we know the Lord intended to deliver Israel from the Philistines through Samson (Judg.

5. Samson's next attack on the Philistines (15:1-8).

The time is the wheat harvest (important for what follows). He visited his wife to consummate the marriage. He also brought a gift of a kid. However, her father barred his entrance. He explained that he was convinced that Samson must have thoroughly hated her (for her betrayal), and so he gave her to one of his companions. Then in a cloying way, he says, "her sister is prettier than she, why not take her as a substitute (compare Laban with Jacob) (15:1-2).

Samson declares that anything he does to the Philistines cannot now be held against him (because of what they did to him) (15:3).

Consequently, he went out, captured 300 foxes, placed torches on each pair of foxes, lit the torches, and turned the foxes loose in the standing grain of the Philistines. The burning included shocks, standing grain, and came up to the olive vineyards. This was devastating destruction (15:4-5).

The Philistines want to know who did this dastardly deed and were told that it was Samson who was responding to the perfidy of his father-in-law. Then the Philistines burned the Timnite woman and her father to death. Such irony: the threat against them earlier is now carried out for different reasons. Samson proceeded to avenge himself of what they had done by a great violent attack. Then he went down and lived in a cleft of a rock (or cave, see the Greek) at Etam (15:6-8).

6. Judah's perfidy (15:9-13).

The Philistines responded by besieging Judah, more specifically, they surrounded Lehi. The Judeans complained to the Philistines, asking why they are there. They say, we have come up to bind Samson so as to do to him what he did to us. What a series of tit for tats! (15:9-11).

The Judeans limply complied to their rulers by taking 3000 men to

force Samson to surrender. This is a long way from where Joshua left them in chapter 1. He agrees to their timid request to bind him. Samson tells them to swear that they will not kill him. They agreed to bind him without killing him, and to turn them over to the Philistines. So, they bound him with two new ropes and brought him up from the rock (15:12-13).

7. The third act of supernatural power (15:14-20).

When the Philistine saw him, they roared out to meet him, but the spirit of Yahweh seized him, and the ropes on his arms became like flax when it is burned, and the bonds melted from his hands. This is wonderful descriptive language. He found a fresh (not yet dried) jawbone of a donkey. This is a formidable weapon. He reached out, grabbed it, and killed 1000 men. He then waxed poetic again and said,

“with the jawbone of a donkey (תַּמּוֹרִית *ḥ̄mor*) a heap of heaps (תַּמּוֹרִית תַּמּוֹרִים *ḥ̄mor ḥ̄morim*);  
with the jawbone of a donkey. I have killed a thousand men” (15:14-16).

When he finished his poem, he threw the jawbone away and named the spot. “Jawbone Heights.” Then, after all the exertion, he was terribly thirsty and cried out to Yahweh. “You have given into your servant’s hands this great victory, and now I must die of thirst and fall into the hand of these uncircumcised?” Then God split open a place<sup>220</sup> in Lehi and waters flowed out of it. Samson drank, and his spirit returned, and he revived. Thus, he called it “the fountain of the one calling.” This fountain was still there when the narrator was writing. The passage closes with the same words as in 16:31, Samson judged Israel 20 years (15:17-20).

F. Samson’s second encounter with the Philistines through women (Prosti-

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<sup>220</sup>There is a place in the Israeli Negev called “the Maktesh” or “mortar.” This is the same word.

tute and Delilah) (16:1-31).

1. The harlot of Gaza (16:1-3).

Samson went to the pentapolis city of Gaza. There he saw a harlot woman and went into her. It was reported to the Philistines.<sup>221</sup> They surrounded the brothel and lay in ambush all night within the gate of the city. They kept quiet all night, hoping to kill him in the morning (16:1-2).

Samson lay in bed until the middle of the night, when he arose, seized the doors of the gate of the city along with the two door posts, pulled them up with the bolts, placed them on his shoulders, and brought them to the top of the hill overlooking Hebron. This passage leaves a lot of questions unanswered. Where were the Philistines while he was doing this? This distance looks formidable—40 miles—and uphill all the way. There is no mention of the spirit of Yahweh seizing him. However, nothing else was added to the narrative. Samson must have said, “Ha, that will teach you?” How does this further the conquest of the Philistines? (16:3).

2. The fatal encounter with Delilah (16:4-22).

The third Philistine woman with whom he interacts has a name. The meaning of Delilah is not clear.<sup>222</sup> The Sorek Valley lies in the Shephelah or the lowlands of Israel. It is a place of choice vine growing.

This time the rulers get involved. Some action, they believe, must be taken. The leaders bribed Delilah to discover the secret of his strength. The bribe was high: 1100 silver shekels to be paid by each, or 5500 total (16:4-5).<sup>223</sup>

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<sup>221</sup>The Hebrew is strange. The Greek has “it was reported” to the Gazans. The text may be defective.

<sup>222</sup>Ugaritic does have a male name, Delil.

<sup>223</sup>Butler, *Judges*, p. 350 suggests a value of some \$15 million.

Delilah begins the first of four attempts to wheedle from Samson the source of his strength. He diverts her with seven fresh cords, new ropes, and weaving of seven locks of hair. Each time, she did what he told her and then called for the Philistines. Each time the ruse failed. She then used the same feminine wile as the Timnite woman: “If you loved me. . .”

Her constant nagging finally struck pay dirt,<sup>224</sup> and he told her the truth. It would appear that the most important part of the Nazirite vow was the uncut hair. Commentators who carp at Samson’s other missteps miss this. She told the rulers, and they paid her off. She then had his hair cut off. The vow is over; his strength is gone. He did not know that Yahweh had departed him. The Philistines bound him, punched out his eyes, and brought him to Gaza where they bound him with bronze fetters and put him to grinding in the prison. However, his hair began to grow again (16:6-22).

3. The Philistines celebrate Samson’s humiliation (16:23-27).

A great celebration to the God Dagon was planned by the rulers.<sup>225</sup> This would be an occasion of rejoicing. The people praise their god Dagon for delivering Samson into their hand. They have triumphed over one who ravished their land and piled up corpses. As the celebration tempo increased (their heart was good), they called for Samson to provide entertainment. Samson was brought from the prison, and he amused them. The text does not say what he did. The Greek says, “they mocked him.” They made him stand between the pillars (16:23-25).

Then Samson said to the young man (chosen to show how docile Samson had become) holding his hand, “lead me so that I might feel the pillars on which the temple is supported, so that I might lean on them.” There was a full house: the rulers, the men, and the women. Some 3000 were even sitting on the rooftop. They were watching

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<sup>224</sup>The Hebrew uses strong language.

<sup>225</sup>Some Philistine temple ruins have been unearthed by the river Yarkon near Tel Aviv.

Samson amuse them (16:26-27).

4. Samson's final blow to the Philistines (16:28-31).

Then Samson called to Yahweh. This is the second time this is said of Samson (see 15:18). His prayer was simple, "Oh Lord, Yahweh, remember me and strengthen me just this time, Oh God, and let me this time take vengeance on the Philistines for one of my two eyes." Then Samson leaned into the center pillars on which the temple stood and was supported, one with his right hand and one with his left. Then he said, "Let me die with the Philistines." Then the temple fell on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus, Samson killed more in his death than he had in his life (16:28-30).

His brothers and extended family came down, took him up, brought him up, and buried him between Zorah and Eshtaol in the tomb of his father Manoah. He judged Israel 20 years. And so, he ended up where the spirit began to move him between Zorah and Eshtaol (16:31).

#### Samson: An appraisal

Samson is probably the most enigmatic personality in the Old Testament. On the one hand, he is separated by Yahweh from his mother's womb to be a deliverer of Israel from the Philistines, and God is with him throughout his exploits of strength. On the other hand, he seems to be narcissistic, oversexed, and non-compassionate. What should we make of this? Modern commentators seem to be determined to psychoanalyze him, but their attempts have failed as much as Freud's analysis of Dostoyevsky's epilepsy.

Victor Davis Hanson in his *The Case for Trump* compares Trump to the Western frontier stories of Shane and Achilles of the Greek sagas.<sup>226</sup> An amoral, crude, but extremely effective hero is brought in to defeat the bad person or persons who are plaguing the people. Samson seems to me to fit into that description. He opened the war against the Philistines that Saul and Samuel continued, and David completed. As Luther once allegedly said, "I

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<sup>226</sup>V. D. Hanson, *The Case for Trump*, p. 342 (Kindle Edition).



am a dull axe, so more energy must be exerted to make it cut” (Ecclesiastes 10:10). Samson was a dull axe. Yet, as Butler says, “at least, the narrator wants to see Samson as more complex an individual than commentators often paint him. His weaknesses are all too obvious, but he also had a sense of need for God’s help, knew the source of his strength lay in his Nazirite vow, and called on God for help in his most threatening moments.”<sup>227</sup> It should be a source of encouragement to know that even the worst of us can be used to accomplish God’s will.

#### XIV. Three appendixes to the book of Judges (Judges 17:1—Ruth 4:22).

One of the purposes of the Book of Judges is to show the moral decline from the triumphant Joshua and thus the desperate need for a good and godly leader. The first two appendixes are a nadir in that process. However, the Book of Ruth depicts good people (Naomi, Ruth, Boaz) and the founding of a godly line that culminates in David, a good and godly leader.<sup>228</sup>

##### A. The idolatry of Micah, and the migration of the tribe of Dan (17:1—18:31).

###### 1. Micah’s idols (17:1-6).

The good side of the story is the place of Yahweh. This man Micah is from the mountains of Ephraim, and his mother named him, “Who is like Yahweh?”<sup>229</sup> The rhetorical answer is, “No one.” When the woman’s son confessed to her that he had stolen her 1100 shekels of silver,<sup>230</sup> his mother cried out, “Blessed (are you), my son by Yahweh.”<sup>231</sup> This shows that Yahweh was special to the Israelites,

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<sup>227</sup>Butler, *Judges*, p. 345.

<sup>228</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, pp. 4744, 75, lists nine points the first two appendixes have in common. His discussion makes an excellent contribution to the topic.

<sup>229</sup>Boling, *Judges*, p. 254, translates it “Yahweh-the-Incomparable.”

<sup>230</sup>This reminds the reader of the 1100 shekels times five used to bribe Delilah.

<sup>231</sup>See Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 479, for a discussion of the form *l’Yahweh*.

but he was not unique. The Israelites continuously fell into syncretism in their worship. His mother declared her intention of completely dedicating (Hebrew construction) the silver to Yahweh to make a molten image.<sup>232</sup> Block says, “The tragedy is that the actors do not realize the incongruity of their actions. Like Jephthah in 11:30-40, both Micah and his mother are deadly serious in their religious expression but thoroughly pagan in action.”<sup>233</sup>(17:1-2).

Micah returned the shekels to his mother, and she took 200 of them (where are the other 900?). The molten image wound up in Micah’s (house). The use of his name in the full form (מִיכָיָהוּ; Micay<sup>e</sup>hu) shows the irony of the situation. Micah (short form hereafter) had a shrine for which he made an ephod (chest piece), teraphim (probably the same as the molten image,) and consecrated one of his boys who became his priest. The narrator, as if shaking his head, reminds us that there was no king in Israel in those days, and that each person did what seemed right to him. This is reiterated in 18:1; 19:1; and 21:25 (17:3-6).

## 2. The apostasy of the Levite (17:7-13).

The picture of a wondering Levite looking for work speaks volumes of the religious situation of that day. This young Levite, who should have been trained and supervised for tabernacle work, must go about soliciting ministry. He is from Bethlehem Judah, from the family of Judah. He is a Levite, sojourning in Ephraim<sup>234</sup> (17:7). He left home to go wherever he could find work. He wound up in Mount Ephraim making his way to the house of Micah (17:8).<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>232</sup>This is considered to be hendiadys: the second word explains the first word further.

<sup>233</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 482.

<sup>234</sup>Elkanah in 1 Sam 1:1 is identified with Ephraim though a Levite.

<sup>235</sup>The shorter form of his name will be found in the rest of the story (17:8, 9, 10, 12, 12, 13; 18:2, 3, 4, 13, 15, 18, 22, 22, 23, 26, 27).

Micah asked him where he was from. He told them he was a Levite from Bethlehem and that he was going anywhere he could. Micah then makes a proposal. “If you will sign up with me to be a father and a priest, I will give you 10 shekels of silver annually, a suit of clothes, and your maintenance.” The priests served as fathers to the people who came to them. Technically, Levites were not priests, but what else is new in this syncretistic society? So, the Levite came (17:9-11).

The Levite was satisfied with the arrangements, and so became as one of his sons. Then Micah consecrated him, and he became a priest in his shrine. Micah was delighted and assumed that Yahweh would treat him well because of the priestly arrangement (17:12-13).

### 3. The migration of the tribe of Dan (18:1-31).

The reiterated theme, “there was no king in Israel” indicates a new segment in the story. The Danites were unable to capture their allotted area. “The Amorites forced the Danites into the mountains and would not permit them to come down to the valley” (1:34). Consequently, they decided to move. So, they selected five men of valor from the various parts of the tribe to spy out the land and to search it out. They came from Zorah and Eshtaol (Samson’s towns). They told them, “Go and search out the land.” Their journeys took them to Mount Ephraim, to the house of Micah, and they spent the night there (18:1-2).

While there they heard a Judean accent and noted the young Levite. So, they turned aside and asked him three questions: 1) who brought you here; 2) what are you doing in his place; and 3) what do you have here? He responded, “Micah did such and such to me and hired me; thus, I became his priest.” His apparatus (ephod, teraphim, etc.) indicates divination. So, they ask him to inquire of God (divine) so that they might know whether the way they were on would prosper.<sup>236</sup> The priest said to them, “Go in peace; the way you are traveling is before Yahweh (right with Yahweh)” (18:3-6).

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<sup>236</sup>They use Elohim rather than Yahweh, which is telling.

The five men went on their way and came to Laish. They saw the people there living securely as the Sidonians,<sup>237</sup> quiet and confident, and there was no governor<sup>238</sup> humiliating in anything in the land.<sup>239</sup> They were far from the Sidonians, and there was no communication with anyone (18:7).<sup>240</sup>

They returned to their brothers at Zorah and Eshtaol, and their brothers said, (What’s up?). They responded, “Get up,<sup>241</sup> and let us go up against them, because we have seen the land and it is very good and you are keeping quiet—do not be lazy about going to possess the land.” They told him they would find the people living confidently and that God had given it into their hands. They said it was a place lacking nothing in the land (18:8-10).

Consequently, 600 men, equipped for war, moved out from the family of Dan from Zorah and Eshtaol. On their way north, they camped in Kiriath-jearim in Judah. Is this the entire tribe of Dan or preliminary movement to be followed later by more? Later in the

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<sup>237</sup>כְּמִשְׁפַּט צִדְוֹנִים *k<sup>e</sup>mišpat sidonim* is puzzling. It could mean that they lived *like* the Sidonians, or that, in some sense, they were under the sway of the Sidonians.

<sup>238</sup>No one having restraint.

<sup>239</sup>The text is difficult with many attempts to translate it:

KJV There was no magistrate in the land that might put them to shame in anything.

RSV Lacking nothing that is in the earth and possessing wealth.

NASB There was no ruler humiliating them in the land.

ESV Lacking nothing that is in the earth and possessing wealth.

Boling, *Judges*, p. 263, says, no emendation is necessary. He translates, “without anyone perverting anything in the territory, or usurping coercive power.”

<sup>240</sup>Butler, *Judges*, p. 394, says, “Egyptian execration texts and Mari letters show that Laish was an important commercial city about 2000 B.C.E. Abraham’s armies chased the enemy here (Gen 14:14). The spies find the still well-to-do Late Bronze city, perhaps still relying on the Middle Bronze ramparts and fortifications.”

<sup>241</sup>Reading plural with several MSS.

story we have little ones. Block, *Judges, Ruth*, pp. 503-04 argues that it is only part of the tribe. Their encampment made such an impression that the place was still called the Camp of Dan in the day of the narrator, look, it was behind Kiriath-jearim (18:11-12).

They crossed over from there to Mount Ephraim and came to Micah's house.<sup>242</sup> Then the five men who had spied out Laish said to their brothers, "Do you know that in these houses there is an ephod, teraphim, and a molten image? Now, you know what you should do" (18:13-14).

The 600 turned aside and came to the young Levite's house at Micah's shrine.<sup>243</sup> They asked him how he was doing. The 600 men of war were standing at the entrance of the gate with all their military equipment. They must have been an imposing sight. The five spies enter the gate and took the carved image, the ephod (which probably covered it), the teraphim, and the molten image. The priest was standing at the entrance of the gate with the 600 armed men. These came to the shrine of Micah and took the carved image, the ephod, the teraphim, and the molten image. The priest asked them what they were doing. They told him to be quiet and come with them and be a father. "Would you rather be a priest for a one-man shrine or for a tribe and family in Israel?" The young Levite was delighted at these new prospects, so he grabbed the ephod, teraphim, and carved image and joined up. They put the little ones, the animals, and the valuables in front of them and moved out (18:15-21).

Micah and his neighbors discovered their loss when the Danites were some distance away, and they pursued them with much yelling. They overtook them and confronted them. The Danites asked them what their problem was that they were making so much noise. Micah said, "You have taken my gods that I made and the priest so that I have nothing left, and yet you ask what my problem is?" The Danites told him to quiet down or some of their nasty guys would

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<sup>242</sup>בֵּית מִיכָה Beth Micah can be Micah's house, a place called Beth Micah, or even Micah's shrine.

<sup>243</sup>BHS treats this as a gloss.

kill them. The Danites went on their way, and Micah saw that they were stronger than he, so he turned back and went home. So, God uses the Danites to force Micah and neighbors back to aniconic worship of Yahweh.<sup>244</sup> (18:22-26).

So, they took what Micah had made and the priest he had acquired<sup>245</sup> and came to Laish, against a quiet, trusting people. They struck them with the edge of the sword and burned the city with fire. There was no one to help, for they were far from the Sidon and had no commerce with anyone.<sup>246</sup> It was in the Valley of Beth Rehob. So, they rebuilt the city and lived in it (18:27-28).

They renamed the city Dan after their ancestor who was born to Israel, but the former name was Laish. So, the Danites erected the carved image,<sup>247</sup> and Jonathan, ben Gershon, ben Moses,<sup>248</sup> and his sons became priests to the tribe of Dan until the exile of the land.<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>244</sup>See Boling, *Judges*, p. 264. Butler, *Judges*, p. 396 says astutely, “The text places neither Micah nor the Danites in the role of hero or as part of God’s people. Rather the idolater is condemned along with the Levite and with the robbers who take priest and idolatrous cultic paraphernalia.” See Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 509.

<sup>245</sup>Thus, the silver Micah had stolen from his mother was stolen from him (at least the 200 shekels).

<sup>246</sup>Since “anyone” אָדָם *adam* and Syria אַרָם *Aram* look so much alike, one version of Greek has Syria. (This is true also in 18:7). Boling, *Judges*, reads Syria, p. 260.

<sup>247</sup>It is probable that Jeroboam I augmented this pagan worship in Dan with his golden calf (1 Kings 12:32-33).

<sup>248</sup>The Masoretes or scribes could not allow this apostate to be a son of Moses, so they inserted the letter “n” and made it Manasseh: מְנַשֶּׁה with the “n” elevated.

<sup>249</sup>This may refer to the defeat and deportation of Dan by the Assyrians in 721 B.C. If so, the compiler is taking existing text and working it into the story of the Danite migration. However, Butler, *Judges*, p. 399, says, “If, as I understand the situation, the book of Judges was composed in its entirety in Judah during or shortly after the reign of Jeroboam, then the downfall of Shiloh, the central sanctuary in Jeroboam’s Ephraim, would be an important point of reference. The dual loss of Dan and Shiloh along with the destruction of Shechem under Abimelech should indicate that the site of the central

They set up the carved image Micah had made all the days the house of God was in Shiloh<sup>250</sup> (18:29-31).

B. A Story of depravity, the Levite's concubine (19:1—21:25).

These stories are masterpieces, and the literary connections are obvious. A young Levite from Bethlehem Judah makes his way to Mt. Ephraim where he will be involved in a false religion (Chapters 17-18). In this unit an old Levite makes his way from Mt. Ephraim to Bethlehem where a saga of sordidness and depravity begins (Chapters 19-21).

1. The Levite makes merry with his father-in-law (19:1-10).

The narrator provides a heading to set the stage for the ensuing disaster: “There was no king in Israel in those days.” There was an older Levite who was sojourning (note not living) in the remote parts or Ephraim. He had taken a wife for himself who was a concubine. This is the only place (out of 25) where הַשִּׁישָׁה *ha 'šišah* (wife) is associated with a concubine. The word for wife is not used in the rest of the account when the Levite gives his testimony at Mizpah (20:4). He is referred to only as the husband of the woman who was murdered (not as the husband of the concubine). Likewise, 19:3 speaks of her husband. This should indicate that she was of a higher rank than an ordinary concubine.<sup>251</sup>

The Levite's wife committed harlotry<sup>252</sup> against him and went home to her father in Bethlehem Judah where she stayed four months. The

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sanctuary had been moved to Jerusalem.”

<sup>250</sup>Shiloh was apparently destroyed in the middle of the 11<sup>th</sup> century by the Philistines. See page 170 for a reference.

<sup>251</sup>Wright, “Family,” in *ABD*, pp. 766-769. “The status of wives was legally and socially quite distinct.” Butler, *Judges*, p. 421, says, “Schneider correctly suggests that the author was trying to establish that even though the woman character was a *pil'gesh*, she was considered a wife in this case.”

<sup>252</sup>BHS proposes וַתִּזְנַח *watiznah* with the Greek, “She became angry with him.” The

Levite went after her to “sweet talk her”<sup>253</sup> and bring her back.<sup>254</sup> He had with him a servant (young man) and a pair of donkeys. She brought him to her father’s house. The girl’s (נַעֲרָה) *na* “*rah*) father saw him and rejoiced. A continual drink fest followed, lasting five days. Finally, on the fifth day, they started out late in the afternoon (they no doubt slept in). It is only three miles to Jebus.

2. The unhappy choice of Gibeah as a place to spend the night (19:11-15).

Since it was almost dark, and they were across the Hinnom Valley from the Canaanite town of Jebus, the servant recommended they spend the night there. However, the Levite was unwilling to stay in a foreign (not Israelite) city. He decided to move on to Gibeah<sup>255</sup> or Ramah (19:11-13).

So, they crossed over the valley and went on. Just as the sun was setting, they came to Gibeah which belongs to Benjamin. They entered the city and sat in the street, but no one offered hospitality (19:14-15).

3. The hospitable Ephraimite in Gibeah (19:16-21).

An old man from Ephraim was living as a stranger in the city and had just come in from work in the field. The narrator wants us to know that he was an Ephraimite (as was the Levite), but the people of Gibeah were Benjamite (19:16).

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ה “h” and the ח “heth” are easily confused, but no variants are indicated. Boling, *Judges*, p. 274, says she became an adulteress by walking out on him.

<sup>253</sup>Hebrew: “to speak to her heart.”

<sup>254</sup>Read the Qere not the Ketib (לְהַשִּׁיבָהּ) *lah<sup>a</sup>ššibah* “to return her.”

<sup>255</sup>Gibeah was Saul’s home (1 Sam 10:26).



The old man saw the travelers and asked about their journey. The Levite explained his situation. He was on his way home to his house<sup>256</sup> in Ephraim, but no one was showing him hospitality in Gibeah. Furthermore, he would not be a burden, since he had provisions for both his people<sup>257</sup> and his animals. The old man happily welcomed them into his home, fed the animals, washed their feet, and they ate and drank together (19:17-21).

4. The sexual perversion of the men of Gibeah (19:22-26).

This story is parallel to the Lot story and the men of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 19:4-14).<sup>258</sup> Some would argue that the sin of Sodom and Gomorrah was a failure to provide hospitality, but Judges 19 belies that idea.

They were feeling merry (again!) when some worthless men (אֲנָשִׁים בְּלִיעֵל *anše b<sup>e</sup>ne baliyya ‘al*)<sup>259</sup> surrounded the house and were beating on the door. They said to the old man who owned the house,<sup>260</sup> “Bring out the man who came to your house that we might know him.” “Knowing” someone is a euphemism for sexual relations. Hence, they want to commit a homosexual act (19:22).

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<sup>256</sup>The text says, “I am going to the house of Yahweh,” but there was no Yahweh temple at that time. So, most read “my house” including the Greek text. However, Butler, *Judges*, p. 408, says the absurd statement that he was going to Shiloh is part of his persona to be bragging about something.

<sup>257</sup>The reference to אַמָּה *‘amah* (handmaid) says Butler, is negative and demeaning, “and may give the old man reason to offer her to the gang later,” *Judges*, p. 423.

<sup>258</sup>See Block, *Judges, Ruth*, pp. 532-34, for a chart comparing Genesis and Judges and Chisholm, *Judges and Ruth*, p. 533-34.

<sup>259</sup>See Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 535, for a good discussion of this phrase.

<sup>260</sup>He had been sojourning long enough to own a home.

The old man is right in what he first says: “Do not do this wicked thing . . . do not do this foolish<sup>261</sup> thing.” But the second statement is heinous. “I will bring out my virgin daughter and his concubine, and you may abuse them and do to them whatever you wish, but do not do anything foolish to this man.” There is no way to defend this as a cultural act. It is despicable in the worst way. He is more concerned about showing hospitality to the Levite than preserving a moral standard relative to the women<sup>262</sup> (19:23-24).

When the men refused to listen to him, he seized his<sup>263</sup> concubine and brought her outside to them. They “knew” her and abused her all night. They dismissed her as the sun arose. The woman came as dawn was breaking and fell at the entrance of the door of the house until full light (19:25-26).

5. The calloused response of the Levite (19:27-30).

The hardened heart of the Levite is unfathomable. He does not say anything about or to the woman. He probably slept all night while she was just outside being abused. And now he demands that she get up so that they can be on their way. When they got home, he cut her body into twelve pieces and sent them to all the tribes of Israel. The people are shocked at what they saw.

6. The assembly of the tribes at Mizpah and the testimony of the Levite (20:1-7).

The people of Israel were horrified at what had happened, and gathered from north to south, including the eastern portion of Gilead

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<sup>261</sup>See Butler, *Judges*, p. 424, for a discussion of this word.

<sup>262</sup>See *Ibid.*

<sup>263</sup>Probably refers to the Levite rather than the old man. The same word is used in 19:29 for seizing her to cut her up.

as an assembly or community<sup>264</sup> to Yahweh at Mizpah.<sup>265</sup> The chiefs<sup>266</sup> of all the people, all the tribes of Israel presented themselves in the assembly of the people of God, 400,000 footmen who drew the sword.<sup>267</sup> Then the Benjamites heard that the Israelites had come up to Mizpah<sup>268</sup> (20:1-2).

The Israelites asked, “How did this wicked deed come about?” (Assuming the rape and murder, not the carving up of the woman’s body). Then the Levite, the husband of the woman who was killed, answered. He recounted the horrible event without implicating himself.<sup>269</sup> He calls them “rulers of the city.” He adds that they were planning to kill him, but there is no indication of that in the original story. He then challenges all Israel to respond with advice on dealing with the men who did this (20:3-7).<sup>270</sup>

#### 7. The military strategy (20:8-11).

The people arose and said that no one was to go home. At the first reading of the text, it seems their plan is to cast lots as to who would go up against the Benjamites. They would select ten percent of the people. However, this may be read to indicate that the ten percent

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<sup>264</sup>See Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 551.

<sup>265</sup>Mizpah is a name used of more than one place. It has at its root the meaning of watch point. It refers to a place to meet Yahweh in Judges 11:11; 1 Sam 7:6, 16; 10:17.

<sup>266</sup>Unusual use of פְּנֵי *pinoth*, “corners,” as those who supported the house.

<sup>267</sup>See Boling, *Judges*, pp. 284-85, for a discussion of these extraordinary numbers. See also Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 550.

<sup>268</sup>BHS adds (with no textual support), “But they refused to go in their midst.”

<sup>269</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, “He transforms an explanation of the events into a self-centered apologia,” p. 554.

<sup>270</sup>*Ibid.*, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 553-54, gives an excellent overview of the Levite’s rather duplicitous presentation of the story.

“of those involved will be needed for the quartermasters corps.”<sup>271</sup>  
They will take provisions and go against Benjamin because of their act of folly. So, all the men of Israel were gathered, joined as one man against the city.

8. The Benjamites refuse to yield up the wicked men (20:12-16).

The tribes of Israel sent men throughout the tribe of Benjamin, asking, what is this evil which has been done among you? They then ask them to give up those worthless men so that they might be killed and thus root out wickedness from Israel. The Benjamite’s refused. One has to admire the courage of the Benjamites. They mustered for war to take on superior forces. There were 26,700 from Gibeah against 400 thousand of Israel. There were 700 choice “slingers” who were left-handed and could sling a stone within a hair’s breadth and not miss.<sup>272</sup> The latter may help explain Benjamite victory over superior forces.

9. The assembly at Bethel; Judah leads out (20:17-19).

They also have moved from Mizpah to Bethel<sup>273</sup> to seek the mind of Yahweh (although the word used is Elohim). The scenario is similar to 1:2. They ask who should open the battle, and Yahweh answers that it is Judah.<sup>274</sup> So, the Israelites got up in the morning and encamped against Gibeah. The commentators suggest that Israel made their decisions and then asked God to “bless” them.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>271</sup>Bolling, *Judges*, p. 284.

<sup>272</sup>This is a good place to see the meaning of  $\text{חָטָא}$  *hata* ‘“to sin” in Hebrew: “to miss the mark.”

<sup>273</sup>Bethel (house of God) has a long cultic use. Later Jeroboam I will set up a golden calf here. A long, legitimate use of Bethel is indicated by the presence of the ark (is it being circulated?) and by legitimate priests (perhaps Phinehas II).

<sup>274</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, suggests the propriety of Judah going first because the Levite and his concubine wife were from Bethlehem, p. 559.

<sup>275</sup>See, e.g., Butler, *Judges*, p. 444.

## 10. The first defeat of Israel (20:20-23).

The Israelites (Judah?) went out for war and lined up against Gibeah.<sup>276</sup> The Benjamites came out of Gibeah and killed 22 thousand Israelites. The people rallied, lined up again as at the first. They sought direction again from Yahweh, weeping all day. They ask whether they should fight again, and Yahweh said yes. The use of the word “brother” in reference to Benjamin, may indicate that the Israelites were having second thoughts.

## 11. Israel again assembles at Bethel to ask Yahweh’s mind (20:24-28).

The second confrontation resulted in another 18 thousand Israelites killed. There is still no mention of Benjamite casualties. Consequently, the Israelites gathered at Bethel (not Mizpah) to ask Yahweh what the problem was. They wept, fasted, and offered sacrifices. They enquired of Yahweh. As an aside the narrator wants us to know that the ark of God was at Bethel in those days. Where was the tabernacle? He also tells us that Phinehas ben Eleazar, ben Aaron was presiding over it in those days. The question posed was whether they should fight the Benjamites again. The answer from Yahweh was yes, with the promise of victory.

## 12. Benjamin was defeated (20:29-35).

A plan was made that sounds much like the defeat of Ai under Joshua (Joshua 8). A group of Israelites were placed behind the city as an ambush. The remainder of Israel lined up in front of the city, and the Benjamites attacked as before, and some 30 Israelites fell. This took place at the Y in the roads going to Bethel and Gibeah. The Benjamites fell into the trap, and the main force arose to attack them. They lined up in Baal Tamar as the ambushcade gushed out

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<sup>276</sup>See Block, *Judges, Ruth*, for a schematic comparing the three battles, p. 558.



seems to say, “those who were from the cities were killing them in their midst”<sup>280</sup> (21:42-44).

They encircled Benjamin, pursued him, and trampled on him without letup<sup>281</sup> until they were opposite Gibeah<sup>282</sup> eastward. So, there fell from Benjamin 18 thousand men, all outstanding men. Then they turned and fled to the wilderness, to the Rock Rimmon. They “picked off” some five thousand men.<sup>283</sup> They stuck close to them to Gidom. Then they killed another two thousand men. So, the total Benjamites who fell came to 25 thousand (21:45-46).

So, 600 men turned and fled to the Rock Rimmon<sup>284</sup> and stayed there four months. Then the Israelites returned to Benjamin and struck them with the sword, the entire city, the cattle, and all that was found. Furthermore, they burned all the cities found (21:47-48).

#### 14. The problem created by Israel (21:1-4).

When they were at Mizpah (before the war) the Israelites swore not to give their daughters to the Benjamites. Now they recognize that they made a mistake but cannot go back on their great oath. So, with the dismal prospects for the future of Benjamin, they weep until the evening. They ask how one tribe could be missing from Israel. Are they totally without self-awareness? Instead of punishing the city of Gibeah, they punished the whole tribe. Now they want to know how it happened. The next day they built an altar and offered holocaust offerings and peace offerings (cf. 20:26).

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<sup>280</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 287.

<sup>281</sup>מְנוּחָה *menuḥah* means “rest,” but the negative (no rest) is missing, unless the “m” serves that purpose. Greek has a place name, so, it may mean “from Minoḥah.”

<sup>282</sup>Gibeah does not fit the geographic discussion and perhaps should be read Geba.

<sup>283</sup>See Boling, *Judges*, p. 288.

<sup>284</sup>See Patrick Arnold, “Rimmon (Place), *ABD*, pp. 773-74.

15. Remedy #1 for the lack of wives for Benjamin (21:5-15).

They said, “One tribe of Israel today has been cut off.<sup>285</sup> They decided to go after those who did not join them originally at Mizpah. They had sworn to kill those who did not join them in the battle (21:5-7).

The logical thought process is 1) who did not join us, 2) they felt sorry for the 600 without wives, therefore, 3) Jabesh-gilead must pay the price. They would be attacked as in *herem* warfare (see 1 Sam 15:1-9). Only single young women were spared. This resulted in 400 young virgins whom they brought to Shiloh. Can you imagine the terror of these teen-aged girls? (21:8-12).

So, they approached the 600 at Rock Rimmon and extended an olive branch. The Benjamites returned, and the Israelites gave them 400 women. The rest of the Hebrew is difficult. Literally, it says, “They did not find thus for them.” The best we can do is, “They did not find enough for them” (21:13-15).

16. Remedy #2 for the lack of wives (21:16-24).

The elders raised the issue of no wives for the 200. They said, “It is not right that one tribe in Israel should be wiped out. However, we cannot give our own daughters” (21:16-18).

So, they came up with a brilliant idea (they thought) to circumvent their oath. There is an annual celebration of Yahweh at Shiloh (north of Bethel, east of the highway going up from Bethel to Shechem, and south of Lebonah) (21:19)

So, they told the Benjamites to hide in the vineyards and snatch the girls when they come out to dance. They concocted a story if fathers or brothers complained. They would say, “Be gracious to us concerning them, since we were unable to take wives for them in

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<sup>285</sup>Boling, *Judges*, points out that the verb נִגְדָה *nigda* ‘is part of Gideon’s name, “the hacker” pp. 291-92.



war (against Jabesh-gilead).” Furthermore, the Shilonites did not give them captive women. So, if they do not release their daughters, they will become guilty (of the great oath) (21:20-21).

The Benjamites followed through, snatched the girls, and returned to their old stomping grounds. They rebuilt their cities and lived in them. Then Israel returned to their homes (21:22-24).

17. Epilogue of the sad state of affairs in Israel (21:25).

The narrator shakes his head again (as do we) and explains that this mess was because there was no good king in Israel and everyone was doing what was right in his own eyes.

This verse provides a good lead into Ruth. We need a good king from a good line. That will be David. But why could not the elders make good decisions without a king? They did not consult Yahweh as to the proper action against Gibeah and Benjamin, even though they came to Mizpah to Yahweh. With the calamity of an almost extinct tribe, they still did not consult Yahweh for advice, but blamed him for the problem.

The people of Israel were in a sad state spiritually. They wanted Yahweh on their side but were unwilling to follow him unconditionally. In spite of that, God gave the Benjamites the first king whose name was Saul. The destruction of the Jabesh-gileadites probably provided an ancestral mother for Saul and caused Saul to feel sympathy for the Jabesh-gileadites in 1 Samuel 11. Even though the narrator of Ruth sees this as God’s beautiful provision of David ten generations later. Still, it is ironic that the greatest leader ever in the Christian church was the second Saul of the tribe of Benjamin.



## Ruth

### C. The third appendix, a godly line established (Ruth 1:1—4:22).

After working through the book of Judges, one feels the need of a shower. This makes the little book of Ruth a shower most refreshing. It is an idyllic, godly respite in the midst of the canaanization of the Jewish people. The sordid story of the acquisition of wives for the Benjamites is in sharp contrast to the acquisition of a wife by Boaz. The mutual concern of Naomi and Ruth is radically different from the attitude of the Levite to his concubine wife.

#### 1. Struggling in Bethlehem (1:1).

The existence of a famine is an oxymoron in an area known for its productivity. Bethlehem means “house of bread.” The story happened sometime during the period of the judges, but obviously, it is being produced in final form after the time of David. It, no doubt, is designed to help elevate the family of David, perhaps over the family of Saul. The famine caused a migration to a part of the world that was not under a famine.

In contrast to the book of Judges, everyone has a name: Elimelech (my God is King); Naomi (pleasant); Mahlon (sickly); and Chilion (puny). This whole family unit made the fairly long journey to Moab<sup>286</sup> and settled there.<sup>287</sup>

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<sup>286</sup>The theological implications of Elimelech's action are discussed by Block, *Judges, Ruth*, pp. 626-27.

<sup>287</sup>Language would not have been a problem (see the Moabite stone). There would have been dialectical differences.

2. Struggling in Moab (1:2-5).

Unfortunately, this major family move did not prove salutary. First, Elimelech died. Then her two sons married Moabite girls. Orpah, the meaning of whose name is uncertain, but some suggest that it is a variant of Oprah, a gazelle, and Ruth. BDB derives her name from רְעוּתָה R<sup>e</sup>‘uth meaning “friendship.” HALOT derives it from a different root, and so (refreshment.)<sup>288</sup> Then the two boys died. We are told that the family lived there for ten years, but the intermediate time elements are not given, however, since there were no babies, the boys must have died shortly after marriage.<sup>289</sup> So, Naomi was left with no blood kinsman.

3. Returning to Bethlehem (1:6-18).

Rumor has announced that Yahweh had returned prosperity to the house of bread.<sup>290</sup> Consequently, Naomi packs up her meager belongings to go home. Her daughters-in-law are with her.<sup>291</sup> They started out on the arduous trek to Judah. Naomi turns to her two daughters-in-law and urges them to return to their parents’ home. The MT (*ketib*) says that Yahweh will show kindness to them as they have toward her but reads (*qere*) a form that makes it a prayer, “May Yahweh show you kindness...” Her prayer continues, asking Yahweh to make them find rest, each in the house of her husband. The women were still young, so, she prays that they will find a second husband.

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<sup>288</sup>Koehler-Baumgarten, *Hebrew and Aramaic Dictionary of the Old Testament*, *op. cit.*

<sup>289</sup>Jouïon, *Ruth*, says, “The text does not say that Orpah and Ruth lived ten years in marriage, but that the two sons (and Naomi) resided ten years in Moab,” p. 33.

<sup>290</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 631, “The ‘house of bread’ is being restocked.”

<sup>291</sup>Jouïon, *Ruth*, says, “To be loved so deeply by her daughters-in-law, Naomi would probably be the most loving of mothers-in-law. The unselfish nature of her affection is shown in her efforts to dissuade her daughters-in-law from sharing her sad life and her concern to find a husband for Ruth,” p. 9.

Then she kissed them, and they cried. In unison, they said, “let us return with you.” (1:6-11).

Naomi explains, logically, that she is incapable of providing more sons as husbands. Even if she could, they would not be willing to wait until they were grown. She does not want them to share in the bitterness she has received from the hand of Yahweh on their account. Here is the first mention of her bitterness (cf. 1:20). The meaning is not clear as to whom she compares her bitterness. Campbell says, “She makes her case against God stronger by comparing her condition to that of her daughters-in-law.”<sup>292</sup> So, they both weep again, and Orpah leaves to return home,<sup>293</sup> but Ruth clings to Naomi (1:12-14).

We now turn to one of the most beautiful accounts in the Bible. Naomi urges Ruth to follow Orpah. Ruth begs Naomi to stop urging her to leave her. “Wherever you go, I go, and wherever you stay, I will stay; your people will be my people, and your God, my God. Wherever you die, I will die and be buried. Thus, may Yahweh do to me [the oath formula] and even more, if anything but death separate us.” Ruth is acknowledging her allegiance to Yahweh, not Chemosh the god of the Moabites. So, Naomi accepted the determination of Ruth to go with her and gave up urging her (1:15-18).

#### 4. Coming home after a ten-year absence (1:19-22).

As they entered the village of Bethlehem, the women gathered around in astonishment. They had assumed they would never see her again. They ask, “Is this really Naomi.” However, Naomi replies bitterly, “Do not call me pleasant, but call me bitter, for Shadday (the Almighty) has treated me very bitterly.” Here she uses Shadday not Yahweh because she argues that God could have prevented her problems had he chosen to. She says that she went out full, but

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<sup>292</sup>Campbell, *Ruth*, p. 70.

<sup>293</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 606 argues that Naomi may not be a “confessional monotheist.” Still when she urges the girls to go back, she appeals to Yahweh to bring his blessing upon them.

Yahweh has returned her empty. So, why should you call me pleasant. Yahweh has answered<sup>294</sup> (in court) against me, and Shadday has mistreated me. Now she brings both names into the action. Whether the covenant keeping Yahweh or the powerful Shadday, she has been the brunt of bad treatment.

The narrator concludes with the statement that Naomi and the foreign girl Ruth returned to Bethlehem at the beginning of the barley harvest.<sup>295</sup>

5. The kinsman redeemer (*goel*) (2:1-3).<sup>296</sup>

The kinsman redeemer or *goel* has four usages in the Old Testament. The classic passage is Lev 25:23-28. 1) when a person sells land because of poverty, the next of kin is to buy it back so that it can stay in the family. If he has no kinsman, but he regained his prosperity, he may buy it back himself. He buys it back on a pro-rata basis. If he is unable to buy it back, it remains in the hand of the purchaser until the year of Jubilee (Lev 25:10). An example is found in Jeremiah 32, where Jeremiah's cousin, Hanamel, asked Jeremiah to buy property occupied by the Babylonian army. 2) Blood avenger (Numbers 35). The next of kin is to kill the one who killed a man. The cities of refuge were established to allow room for accidental killing. 3) An Israelite sells himself to a sojourner as a slave (Lev 25:47-5). A kinsman may redeem him on a prorated basis. 4) God as the *goel* of Israel appears 21 times in Isaiah alone. So, in the Book of Ruth, the redemption of Abimelech's land by Boaz is clearly the enactment of the redeemer of land to keep it in the family.

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<sup>294</sup>Greek has "afflicted me." The consonants are the same for both meanings. Joüion suggests a different reading, "He has acted against me," p. 43.

<sup>295</sup>Generally, in April.

<sup>296</sup>See Boling, *Ruth*, p. 109, for a discussion of the literary structure of this chapter.

A second set of laws is merged into the Ruth story: the levirate<sup>297</sup> marriage. This practice is defined in Deut 25:5-10. If a man dies without a son, his brother is obligated to marry the widow. The first son born to this union belongs to the dead brother and inherits his property. The implementation of this practice is found in Genesis 38.

The story of Ruth and Boaz does not quite fit the regulation.<sup>298</sup> Boaz is not Elimelech's brother; even if so, he should not marry Ruth, but Naomi. Thus, we have a mixture of the practice of *goel* of property and partial levirate marriage. The implementation of this was probably lax and, therefore, allowed for flexibility.<sup>299</sup>

So, we meet Boaz. Note that he is a relative of Elimelech, not Mahlon, but it is through Ruth that he raises seed to Elimelech.

This Boaz is a *יש גבור חיל ish gibbor hayil*. This phrase appears some 15 times (plus *אשת חיל ishet hayil* of Ruth in 3:11, and of the virtuous woman in Proverbs 31). In the plural (men of valor), it appears some 29 times. The vast majority of the times it refers to fighting men (especially in the plural). Here in Ruth, the translators struggle to know how to deal with it. KJV “mighty man of wealth”; NASB “great wealth”; ESV “a worthy man”; NIV “a man of standing.” I once read an article (now lost to me) where the author posited that Boaz was a member of the militia. This is more in keeping with the basic meaning. However, we also have Proverbs 31:10 where a good woman is referred to as a woman of valor. She is not a *gibbor*

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<sup>297</sup>*Levir*, means “brother-in-law” in Latin.

<sup>298</sup>Boling, *Ruth*, p. 109, uses “covenant brother” to indicate relationship entered into voluntarily rather than the accident of blood relationship.

<sup>299</sup>See Joüon, *Ruth*, p. 16, “In the book of *Ruth*, we are not really dealing with a levirate marriage, but only a marriage of the levirate type.” See his discussion for more details, pp. 14-17.

(man). In any event, Boaz is one who stands out.<sup>300</sup> It is important to note that he is a kinsman of Elimelech.<sup>301</sup>

Ruth displays her diligence (see Proverbs 31) in setting out to provide food for her little family as only poor people can. Joüion cites Janssen regarding a scene where poor Arabs glean in modern times.<sup>302</sup> It was “just her luck” to ask at a field owned by Boaz.<sup>303</sup> The narrator, of course, is committed to the idea that Yahweh is engineering this whole process.

6. The kinsman redeemer notices (2:4-7).

And look! Says the narrator. Here comes the man himself. He called out a greeting (really a blessing) to the reapers. They respond in kind. All this sets the frame for the picture that Boaz is a good, godly man. He looks behind the reapers and sees a young woman. He turns to the man in charge and asks, “To whom does this girl belong?”<sup>304</sup> His response is brief but clear, she is the Moabite girl who came back with Naomi from Moab. She asked permission to glean, and she has been at it all day except for a bit of rest in the house.<sup>305</sup>

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<sup>300</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 651, says, “Boaz is not an ordinary, run-of-the-mill Israelite. This will be confirmed by the following episode, where he is presented as a man with land and servants. On the other hand, as in Prov 31:10, which employs the feminine equivalent, the name can also mean ‘noble with respect to character’ a genuine *Mensch*.”

<sup>301</sup>Joüion, *Ruth*, p. 45, “literally *mighty of power*, has here (and in 1 Sam. 9:1) the sense of very rich. חַיִל *hayil* has also the sense of riches in 4:11 (but 3:11: *virtue*.”

<sup>302</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 48.

<sup>303</sup>This stress on “luck” is designed to draw attention to God’s sovereignty at work. It is similar to Esther 4:14: “another place” and “you have attained royalty for such a time as this.”

<sup>304</sup>The *lamed* in לַמִּי *l<sup>mi</sup>* indicates that she belongs to someone. Joüion, *Ruth*, p. 47.

<sup>305</sup>This is a difficult phrase. See Joüion, *Ruth*, p. 49, who translates, “she has not taken even a little rest.”



7. The kinsman redeemer gives special attention (2:8-16).

Boaz begins the choreography by urging her to spend the rest of the harvest in his field.<sup>306</sup> He tells her he has charged the young men to leave her alone (was this a common problem?). Furthermore, when she is thirsty, she is to come to the water station and drink. She fell on her face and expressed her thanksgiving, but Boaz said that he already knows her story. He calls on Yahweh to fully reward her; this Yahweh under whose wings she has taken refuge.<sup>307</sup> She again expressed her appreciation (2:8-13).

He takes it one step further. He tells her to come to the place they eat and participate with them. The Hebrew is subtle, but it looks as though he, himself, dipped some parched corn for her in the vinegar, she ate it, was satisfied, and had some left over. After lunch, she went back to work, and he charges the servants to let her glean among the sheaves and not to insult her. Furthermore, he tells them to pull out some of the stalks and leave them for her and again tells them not to rebuke her (2:14-16).

8. The kinsman redeemer revealed (2:17-23).

Ruth kept working until the evening, then she beat out the grain and had about half an ephah of barley. This comes to approximately one-half bushel. She shows<sup>308</sup> this, plus the extra parched grain, to Naomi who is amazed. She wants to know where she gleaned to get so much

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<sup>306</sup>Some are cynical about Ruth's motives, but Boling, *Ruth*, says, "His characters are to be taken at face value and without devious motives. This is important to realize here in chapter 2, and all the more important for understanding chapter 3 correctly. What is at issue here is men and women, old and young, living out publicly the sort of lives the storyteller commends," p. 112.

<sup>307</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 219, says, "In the man who speaks to this Moabite field worker biblical *hesed* becomes flesh and dwells among mankind."

<sup>308</sup>The Hebrew has either, "she showed her mother-in-law (as here) or "her mother-in-law saw." I have followed the former with a few MSS, Syriac, and Vulgate.

barley. She told Naomi everything, including the name Boaz. Naomi praised God and told her he was a near kinsman, one who could redeem them. Naomi agreed with Boaz that she should stick with his maidens so that no one could molest her in another field. Consequently, she stuck with Boaz’s maidens until the barley harvest and wheat harvest were over. During that time, she stayed with her mother-in-law.

9. Naomi’s plan of attack (3:1-5).<sup>309</sup>

Naomi, having come to know who Boaz was, as a potential husband for Ruth, sets out to create a situation in which he commits himself.<sup>310</sup> She says to Ruth, should I not seek a pleasant rest<sup>311</sup> for you? <sup>312</sup>“Rest” in this context means security and care from a husband (3:1).<sup>313</sup>

Now, she says, “Boaz, our acquaintance, with whose female servants you were—look, he is winnowing on the barley threshing floor tonight.” Winnowing consists of throwing the stalks into the air after beating them with a flail. The wind blows away the chaff (Psalm 1:4),

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<sup>309</sup>Boling, *Ruth*, pp. 130-33 has an excellent discussion of the literary skill of the narrator.

<sup>310</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 124, “Ruth’s action has put Boaz on the spot, and that is what it was intended to do. Boaz must now act, and, of course he will do so in accordance with what righteous human behavior calls for.”

<sup>311</sup>In 1:9 she prays that Yahweh will make it possible for the girls to find מנוחה *m<sup>e</sup>nuḥah* (“rest”) each in the house of her husband. Now Naomi sets out to assist Yahweh in the fulfillment by seeking מנוחה *manoah* “rest.” Joüon, *Ruth*, says this is a different form but with the same sense, p. 63.

<sup>312</sup>Hebrew: “which will be good for you.”

<sup>313</sup>“The verbal link [with 1:9] invites the reader to consider whether subsequent events are to be viewed not only as the consequence of Naomi’s scheming, but also the result of her prayer in 1:8-9,” Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 681.

and the grain falls to the ground.<sup>314</sup> She then tells Ruth what to do.<sup>315</sup> These are short commands: wash, anoint, put on your garment, and go down to the threshing floor.<sup>316</sup> She is not to reveal herself until he has finished eating and drinking. Next, when he lies down, she is to mark the place, uncover his feet, and lie down. She tells her that Boaz will take it from there. Ruth agreed to do all this (3:2-5).

10. The encounter on the threshing floor (3:6-13).

She did as she was told, and when Boaz had eaten and drunk, he was tipsy (his heart was good), and he lay down by the heaps (of barley). She came quietly and uncovered his feet (literally, the place of his feet). This action would presumably awaken him when his feet became cold.<sup>317</sup> In the middle of the night, Boaz awoke trembling and looked all around. Look, there was a woman lying at the place of his feet. He asked her who she was, and she replied, I am Ruth your servant, therefore,<sup>318</sup> spread out your garment (wing) over your handmade, for you are a kinsman redeemer (3:6-9).

What is this strange request Ruth, makes? Ezek 16:8 spells it out explicitly as an action of Yahweh with Israel: “I crossed over to you and saw you, and look, your time for loving had come. So, I spread my garment (wing) over you, and covered your nakedness. I swore to you and entered a covenant with you, says Yahweh, and you became mine.” This makes it clear that Ruth was asking Boaz to marry her.

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<sup>314</sup>See Joüion, *Ruth*, pp. 64-65 for a fuller discussion of winnowing.

<sup>315</sup>Hebrew uses the waw consecutive perfect as an imperative.

<sup>316</sup>Block argues that these actions indicate an end of her mourning for husband. This is attractive, but there is no way to know how long her mourning period was, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 684.

<sup>317</sup>Joüion, *Ruth*, p. 68.

<sup>318</sup>Waw consecutive perfect again as an imperative or a request.

Boaz praised her for her kindness to him (latter kindness, *hesed*) in that she has chosen an older man rather than one of the young guys. So, he understood her actions to be a request of marriage, and he commits himself to it (3:10).

However, there is an impediment, she has a nearer kinsman than he. He tells her to spend the night, and, in the morning, the great shootout will begin (3:11-13).

11. The kinsman redeemer ensnared (3:14-18).

Ruth lay at his feet until the crack of dawn (did either of them sleep?), and Boaz said, “We do not want anyone to know that a woman has come to the threshing floor.” Boaz is concerned about the reputation of both of them. He told her to make a lap out of her robe.<sup>319</sup> He measured six measures of barley.<sup>320</sup> He put the barley on her, and she went<sup>321</sup> to the village (4:14-15).

She came to her mother-in-law, who said (probably loudly), “who are you, my daughter?” This construction means “what is your situation?” Naomi had probably been up all night. Now she’s anxious to hear how it all came down. So, Ruth told her everything, as well as showed her the six measures of barley. Naomi told her to sit tight and wait to see how it would all fall out. She was sure that the man would not stay quiet until he had solved everything.

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<sup>319</sup>The only occurrence of this word. It is probably the same as the garment in 3:3, Boling, *Ruth*, p. 127.

<sup>320</sup>We are not sure of the amount, but it was a lot! He did not want to send her to her mother-in-law empty, the same word Naomi used of herself in 1:21, Boling, *Ruth*, p. 128.

<sup>321</sup>Hebrew: “He went,” but a lot of MSS have “She went.”

## 12. The kinsman redeemer checkmates the closer kinsman (4:1-6).

As Naomi suspected, Boaz wasted no time dealing with the issue.<sup>322</sup> He was well prepared and rehearsed as to what to say and do. The gates of walled cities had seats installed where official business could take place. He went to the gate early and took a seat.<sup>323</sup> He must have known the habits of the near kinsman. When he strolled by, Boaz invited him to take a seat. He does not name him, because the storyteller wants him out of the picture. Consequently, he calls him “Mr. so-and-so.”<sup>324</sup> Then Boaz took ten men of the elders of the city and seated them in the gate (4:1-2).

Boaz then addressed the near kinsman. That piece of land belonging to our relative (literally, brother), Elimelech, Naomi, who returned from Moab is selling.<sup>325</sup> “So, I said, I will tell you about it (literally uncover your ear), saying, acquire it before those sitting here and before the elders of my people. If you want to redeem it, redeem, but if you will not redeem it, tell me so that I might know, for you are the only one to redeem it, and I am after you.” The near kinsman almost nonchalantly says, “I will buy it.” The “I” is emphatic (4:3-4).

Then Boaz pulls the string on the trap. As soon as you get the field from Naomi,<sup>326</sup> you also get Ruth, the Moabitess, the wife of the dead,

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<sup>322</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, says that the lack of the usual waw consecutive imperfect to show sequence, “by front-loading Boaz, the reader’s attention is drawn to this character. Admittedly Ruth’s fate will be a key issue in the court proceedings, but the narrator hereby forces the reader to focus on Boaz,” p. 704.

<sup>323</sup>See Block, *Judges, Ruth*, for a discussion of God’s hidden hand in the events, p. 705

<sup>324</sup>Of course, these are the narrator’s words. Boaz would have used his name, Joüon, *Ruth* p. 76, but see Boling’s long discussion, *Ruth*, pp. 142-43.

<sup>325</sup>*Ibid.*, for a discussion of the time of selling, but see Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 710, for an entirely different discussion of the meaning of this word.

<sup>326</sup>The KJV translates “Thou must buy *it* also of Ruth . . .” They are following the MT, but most now treat the ׀ “m” *from* as an enclitic “m,” used for emphasis.

so as to raise up the name of the dead on his inheritance.<sup>327</sup> The near kinsman immediately demurred because of his fear of what it might do to his inheritance.<sup>328</sup> “You go ahead and redeem my redemption rights” (4:5-6).

13. The kinsman redeemer’s triumph (4:7-12).

The narrator, who is some distance in time from the events, explains what is about to happen. Any kind of redemption or exchange was accompanied by the removal of a sandal and giving it to the other party. This became a testimony in Israel. The near kinsman did just that. This practice is different from the original *goel* legislation in Deut 25:5-10. There, the woman pulls off the man’s sandal and spits in his face. Time apparently has affected the tradition.

Now, Boaz was free to turn to the people gathered, and to the ten elders, “You are witnesses that I have acquired all that was Elimelech’s and all that was Chilion’s and Mahlon’s from Naomi. And *also*, Ruth the Moabitess, wife of Mahlon, I have acquired as a wife to establish the name of the dead on his inheritance, so that the name of the dead would not be cut off from his brothers and the gate of his place—you are witnesses this day.” Everyone happily agreed, raised their hands as witnesses, and prayed a prayer: “May Yahweh make this woman who has come into your house like Rachel and Leah, the two of whom built the house of Israel. And may he acquire wealth in Ephrathah, and may people call out his name in Bethlehem. Furthermore, may your house be like the house of Perez<sup>329</sup> whom Tamar birthed to Judah. All this from the seed which Yahweh will give you from this woman.”

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<sup>327</sup>Block, *Judges, Ruth*, p. 715, says, “Because the personal story of these characters must lead inexorably and ultimately to David, this sentence is one of the most significant in the book.”

<sup>328</sup>See Joüon, *Ruth*, pp. 80-81, for a discussion of the nearer kinsman’s situation relative to the property.

<sup>329</sup>This was another story of levirate marriage. Judah refused his third son to Tamar, who then tricked Judah into fathering her child.

## 14. The marriage made in heaven (4:13-17).

Marriages were made when a man took the woman to the bridal chamber and consummated the relationship. Soon Ruth was pregnant and produced a son. Naomi plays a different role. Under ordinary circumstances, Boaz would marry Naomi and raise up seed to Elimelech. Since Naomi was beyond childbearing age, it is Ruth who has the child, but he belongs to Naomi. So, the women said to Naomi, “You are blessed of Yahweh who did not allow a redeemer this day to cease, and his name will be called out in Israel. This child shall restore your life and sustain you when you get old, because your daughter-in-law who loves you, has given birth to him. She is better to you than ten sons.” Naomi then took the baby, placed him in her bosom and became his nurse. The neighbors called out a name for the baby saying, “A son has been born to Naomi.” So, they called him Obed (he is the father of Jesse, the father of David).

## 15. The main purpose of the book of Ruth (4:18-22).

Suddenly, there is an insert into the story that takes us back to Genesis, “these are the generations of . . .” A genealogical list of ten names, culminating with David is given. Ten is an important number in genealogies. One has to ask whether the ten names provided are in any sense related to the prohibition of the Moabites from entering the assembly of the Lord (Deut 23:3). I suspect Jack Deere has it right, “The treatment of Ruth, however, by Boaz along with other Israelites of Bethlehem demonstrates that this law was never meant to exclude one who said, ‘your people will be my people and your God, my God’ (Ruth 1:16).”<sup>330</sup> It is astounding that this foreign woman, and a Moabitess at that, is now placed on a par with the matriarchs of Israel and included by Matthew in the genealogy of Jesus.

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<sup>330</sup>Deere, *Deuteronomy*, p. 303.





## FIRST SAMUEL<sup>331</sup>

### I. *Historical background to the Books of Samuel.*<sup>332</sup>

The beginning date for the activity of the Books of Samuel is early in the eleventh century B.C. The Hittites, Mitanni and Babylon were kingdoms in decline or complete defeat during this time in the north. The Arameans or Syrians began to move into the northern area in large numbers but did not consolidate until after David's time.

The Sea People (from the Aegean) had invaded the entire Levant in the preceding century. They were defeated by the Egyptians, but at great cost to the latter who were weak during the time of the judges. Some of the Sea People became the Philistines. They apparently brought with them the secret of iron smelting which they kept for themselves and dominated the Israelites.<sup>333</sup>

The Canaanites were subdued by the Israelites and the Philistines. Pockets of them were probably under Philistine control as they had previously been under Egyptian control. Some Canaanites moved to Tyre and Sidon and became great maritime people, establishing colonies along North Africa and in southern Spain. They were called Phoenicians.

There were small kingdoms on the eastern border called Ammon, Moab, and Edom. There were continual clashes between them and Israel. Israel, during the time of the Judges, was struggling to consolidate her power particularly in

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<sup>331</sup>See Heater, *God Rules among Men*, for an integrated harmony of these books.

<sup>332</sup>*Ibid.*, *A Theology of Samuel and Kings*.

<sup>333</sup>There were Philistines in "Palestine" during the time of the patriarchs. This later wave joined and dominated an older group. See M. H. Segal, *The Pentateuch*, p. 34.

the central hill country. Her religious state as a whole was abysmal. She had adopted many of the practices of the Canaanites. There was a centrifugal force (tribal units) and a centripetal force (central worship). These forces obviously created constant tension. Israel moved rapidly under David and Solomon to become the most powerful nation in the Middle Eastern arena.<sup>334</sup>

## II. *The place of 1 and 2 Samuel in Israel's history.*

Judges is a period without a king, with much internecine conflict and considerable practice of paganism and accompanying immorality. Ruth is a delightful interlude to an otherwise tragic drama. There is a central sanctuary, but the pericope on the Danite migration (Judges 17-18) may indicate little support for the priesthood and a typically independent approach to religion and rule.

1 and 2 Samuel form a transition between the judges who were raised up spontaneously by God to be charismatic defenders of his people and the monarchy, an inherited rule of one who was to represent, defend, and judge God's people.

The man Samuel looms large in this transition. From his Nazirite youth to his recall after death, he was a man of deep convictions, impeccable conduct, and unrelenting commitment to the cause of right. Yet, his compassion for Saul is evident when Yahweh rebukes Samuel for continuing to mourn Saul after his rejection.

## III. *The authorship and composition of the Books of Samuel.*

The name Samuel is attributed to the books because he dominates the history of the era. That he did not write them all is obvious from the fact that he was dead during the entire period of 2 Samuel. The books were originally one, which accounts for Samuel's name being attached to both books. The LXX used 1-4 Kingdoms to describe 1 and 2 Samuel and 1 and 2 Kings.

Samuel and other prophets were involved in writing as indicated by 1 Chron 29:29f: "Now the acts of King David, from first to last, are written in the chronicles of Samuel the seer, in the chronicles of Nathan the prophet, and in

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<sup>334</sup>See Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, pp. 86ff.

the chronicles of Gad the seer.”<sup>335</sup> Did the account of Nathan’s confrontation with David and the Davidic covenant come from that prophet’s hand? Samuel’s records of the kingship (1 Sam 10:25) probably are reflected in that section of the book. The final form of the book may have come about through court prophets, but we do not know who finally composed the book from the various sources.

#### IV. *The text of Samuel.*

The text of Samuel contains a number of corruptions. Haplography is one of the more common problems. Some help comes from LXX and Qumran, but all this material must be evaluated carefully before trying to correct the MT. It is unfortunate that Cross has not yet published the Samuel texts from Qumran after more than four decades. Some of the work appears in the critical apparatus of BHS.<sup>336</sup>

#### V. *The purpose of Samuel.*

These books were not written merely to present history. Their contents are historical, but the arrangement and emphases are to point up God’s work among His people through the judges (e.g., Samuel) and through the kings. Much of the book is to show God’s plan in rejecting Saul and selecting David with whom he makes his covenant and promises a dynasty (2 Samuel 7). The place of the sanctuary is also central to the book when one compares the loss and restoration of the ark (1 Samuel 4-6) with David’s placement of it in Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6) and the plan for the temple with the ensuing covenant (2 Samuel 7) and finally with the discovery of the place of the future temple (2 Samuel 24).

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<sup>335</sup>There are two different words for “seer” here.

<sup>336</sup>In this connection, Fokkelman’s seminal work (*Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel*), is instructive: “A concrete example: While the *Bible de Jerusalem* numbers 400 adjustments in I-II Sam. in relation to the MT, the acceptance of the text which has been handed down brings one to the discovery that the number of alternations [sic] can be reduced considerably. In this way I see the necessity of only a dozen alternations [sic] in II Sam. 9-20 and I Kings 1-2,” p. 5. Kyle McCarter (*First Samuel* in AB, p. ix) says he had access to all the photographs of the Qumran texts.

## VI. *Synthesis of Samuel.*

The books of Samuel were composed after the death of David from court records, eyewitness accounts, and the writings of the prophets Samuel, Nathan and Gad. Though there are many sub themes running through the books (such as obedience and reward), the main purpose of the books seems to center on the concept that God is working out his divine purposes through the covenant kindness shown to David and his seed.

Few would question this thesis in 1 Samuel 16—2 Samuel, but even in 1 Samuel where Samuel is being contrasted to Eli's house, this seems to be the case. Samuel will bring the word of judgment on Eli's house, and David (via Solomon) will execute it over fifty years later (1 Kings 2:26-27). In the concluding verse of Hannah's psalm (2:10), the king/anointed is mentioned. For Hannah this was a non-specific statement predicated on earlier statements about the coming monarchy (Gen 17:6); from the author's viewpoint, this could only refer to David.

The "man of God" who brings a prophetic word against the house of Eli says, "But I will raise up for myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in my heart and in my soul; and I will build him an enduring house, and he will walk before my anointed always." This is the position Zadok will hold under David.

Thus, Samuel, the antithesis of the sons of Eli and the one who confirms the message of judgment on the dynasty of Eli (3:12-14), also anoints David. Both the Davidic dynasty and the Zadokite priesthood are established. The writer of 1-2 Samuel is showing his readers how God's purposes through David were worked out decades before he came on the scene.

The place of Saul in the argument of the books seems to be transitional—not from judges to a monarchy, but from judges to David. Saul, as a member of the now insignificant tribe of Benjamin, was probably selected as the least threatening possible king of the tribes. His task was designated as attacking the Philistines (1 Sam 9:16), a task completed by David. A deliberate contrast is made between Saul and David from 1 Samuel 16 on (note the juxtaposition of the Spirit of the Lord on David and away from Saul in 1 Sam 16:13, 14). All of first Samuel is leading up to David becoming king in 2 Samuel.

The first eight chapters of 2 Samuel represent the apex of David's reign. These events did not transpire in a short time; they occurred throughout David's reign.<sup>337</sup> Consequently, this unit is designed to show that God blessed David's reign and fulfilled His promises to him. The first four chapters are devoted to showing how David, through patience and wisdom, came to rule over all twelve tribes of Israel. Two important events are listed in chapter 5: the selection of the Jebusite fortress for the capital and the defeat of the Philistines. Chapter 6 records the movement of the ark to Jerusalem making that the site of the central sanctuary. Chapter 7 gives the all-important Davidic covenant which will form the basis of God's future dealings with the descendants of David. Finally, chapter 8 lists the many surrounding small states David defeated. This chapter closes with a list of David's administrative cabinet showing that the kingdom is established (cf. the same type of list at the end of chapter 20 showing the *reestablishment* of the kingdom).<sup>338</sup> The following chart shows how First Samuel is laying the groundwork for 2 Samuel 1-8.

Once the kingdom was established, the writer now wants to develop two themes: (1) the issue of the successor of David who will thus come under the Davidic covenant promises and (2) the development of the temple as the central sanctuary.

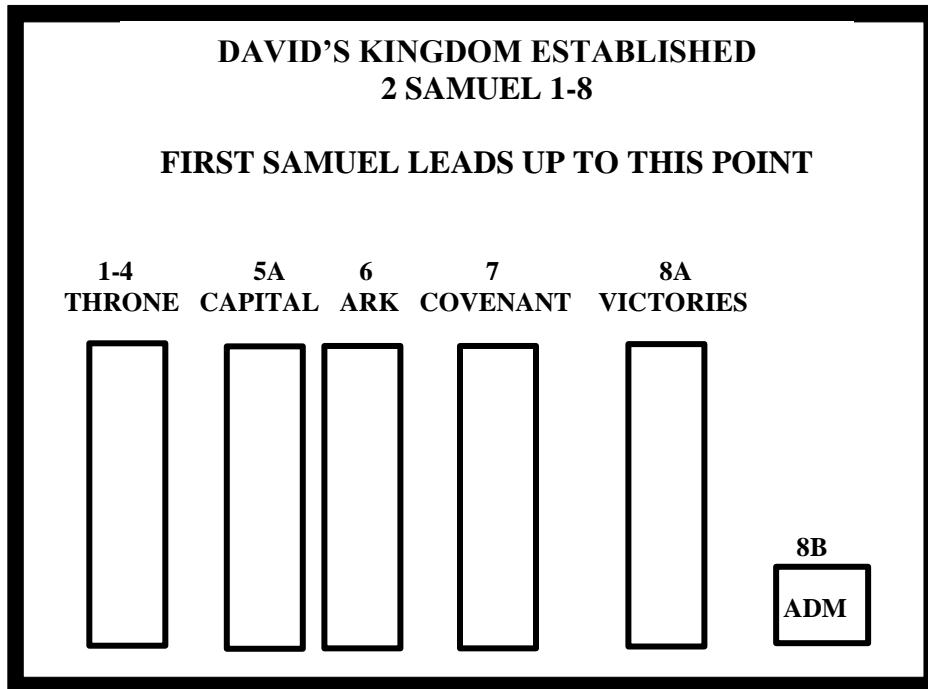
Most commentators speak of the succession narrative and identify it with 2 Samuel 9-20 and 1 Kings 1-2.<sup>339</sup> From the author's point of view, the issue of succession begins in chapter 10. Chapter 9 shows David's kindness to Jonathan's son (per their agreement) and is to be compared with chapter 21 where David turns seven of Saul's family over to the Gibeonites for execution.

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<sup>337</sup>See Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests, a History of Old Testament Israel*, pp. 238-39, who argues for a time later in David's rule for the movement of the ark to Jerusalem.

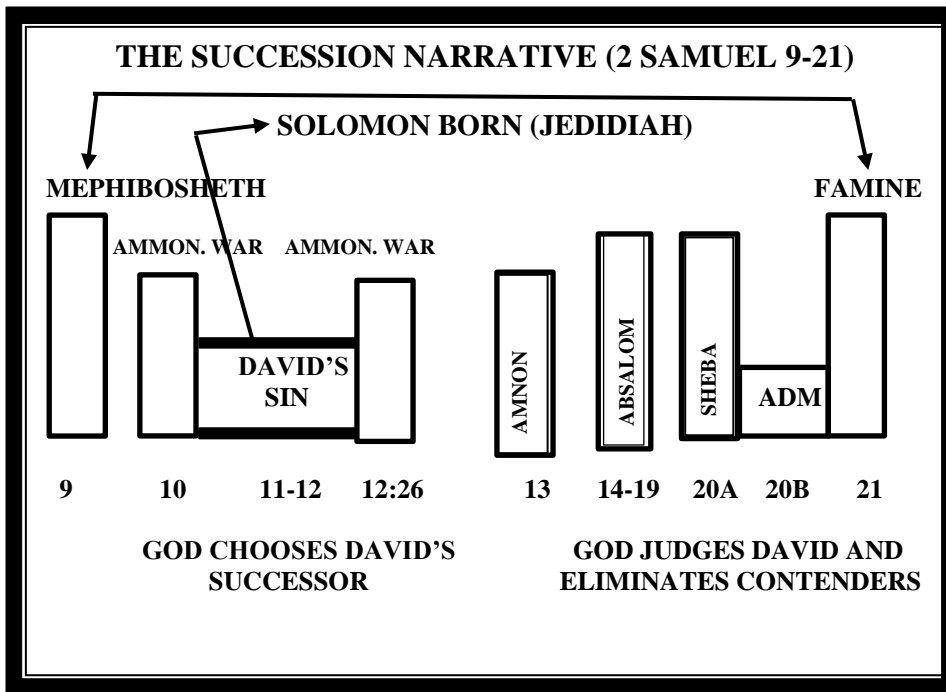
<sup>338</sup>Cf. H. Hertzberg, *First and Second Samuel*, p. 375.

<sup>339</sup>See, e.g., M. H. Segal, "The Composition of the Books of Samuel," *JQR* 55 (1965): 319 and A. A. Anderson, *2 Samuel*, pp. xxx-xxxv.



Chapters 10-12 form a unit designed to show that God has chosen Solomon to be the successor to David. The Ammonite war brackets the story (10:1—11:1 with 12:26-31). The Ammonites were dealt with in a summary fashion in chapter 8 along with the other surrounding peoples. They are reintroduced here in detail to provide the setting for the sin of David with Bathsheba and Uriah. While this unit gives us much information about several issues, the author draws attention to the fact that the child born from the union of David and Bathsheba was Solomon. Lest there be any question about the relation of Solomon to David, he is the second son born after Uriah's death. 1 Sam 12:24 says of Solomon: "Now the Lord loved him." This is the Hebrew way of saying; the Lord chose him. Furthermore, the Lord sends word through Nathan the prophet stating that the other name of Solomon is to be Jedidiah (Yahweh loves). Clearly, then, this unit is designed to show the next successor to David. Furthermore, chapter 7 has indicated that David's son will build the temple. Thus, Solomon will build it.

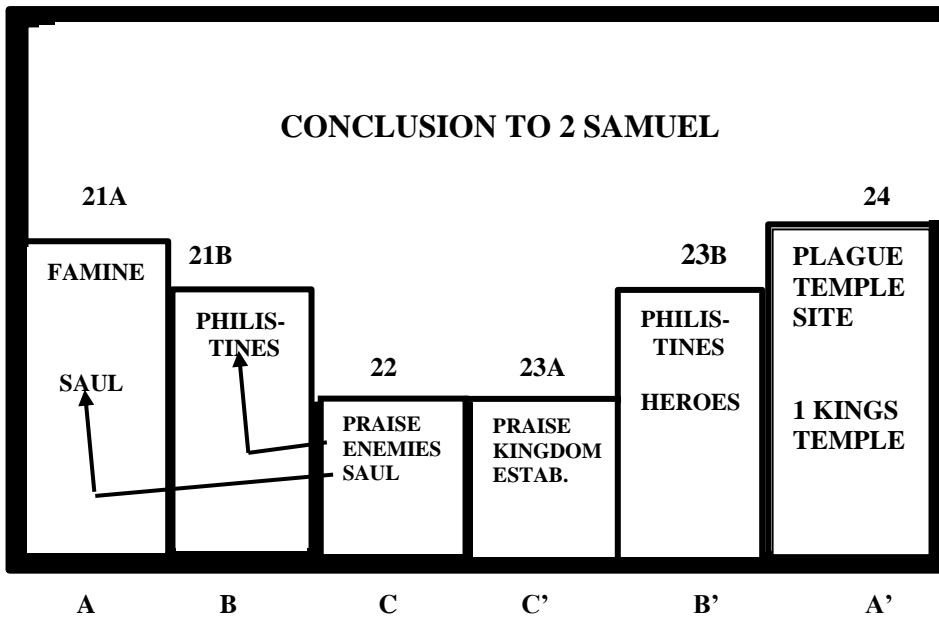
The unit from chapter 13 to chapter 20 (1 Kings 1-2 is included in the whole narrative) shows how God judged David for his sin (negative part of Davidic covenant), but also how he eliminated the contenders for the throne who would threaten Solomon. Amnon, Absalom and Adonijah were all from David's earlier marriages and therefore in line for the throne by birth. Amnon shows his unworthiness to rule and is killed by his brother. Absalom because of rebellion against his father is killed, and finally Adonijah, who decided to "buck the odds," is killed in a foolish bid for the kingship. The way now is clear for Solomon to rule without opposition.



The final unit in 2 Samuel is chapters 21-24. The literary structure of this unit looks back on David's victories and forward to the temple. As the chart below shows, there is a chiasm with the Famine in 21 paralleling the plague in 24; the defeat of the Philistines in 21b parallels the heroes of David (who defeated the Philistines). The two middle sections of praise tie the unit together: Chapter 22 praises God for victory over the house of Saul (21a) and over all his enemies (21b). Chapter 23 praises God for the establishment of the king-

dom. Chapter 24 speaks of David’s sin in the census, but the outcome of that sin (the plague) is stopped at the very site that will later become the temple. There David builds an altar and sacrifices. Chronicles (1 Chron 21:18—22:2) ties the plague into the temple site. Given the Chronicler’s predilection for omitting David’s sins, the presence of the census/plague is singular and argues for its position in both Samuel and Chronicles as an indicator of the future site of the temple.

Thus, the purposes of God are being worked out through his *hesed* to David, his anointed. David’s seed will be blessed in obedience and disciplined in disobedience. The first “seed” of David will be Solomon whom God chose over his older brothers as David was chosen over his older brothers. To Solomon goes the task of building the temple, but David chose the city and the altar site for its location. Henceforth, the worship of Yahweh in Jerusalem at the temple will be a main issue to the author of Kings. Further the successors of David will be judged in light of the Davidic covenant.





VII. *Notes on First Samuel.*

## A. Samuel, Prophet, Priest and Judge (1 Sam 1:1—7:17).

## 1. The Birth of Samuel (1:1—2:10).

## a. Samuel's tribal origins (1:1).

First Samuel clearly identifies Elkanah with the tribe of Ephraim while 1 Chron 6:28, 33 places him squarely in the Levitical family. The reason for this is that Levites often became identified with the tribe to which they were ministering. Samuel should be considered a member of the priestly family.<sup>340</sup>

## b. Elkanah's family struggle (1:2-8).

Hannah (hypocoristic for “Yahweh is gracious”) was childless: a virtual curse for an Old Testament woman. Peninnah (probably a “precious stone”) had children. Elkanah carried out his responsibility as an Israelite man by going to the worship center at Shiloh annually to sacrifice (actually they were to appear before the Lord three times a year [Deut 16:16], but this was obviously not being obeyed). Shiloh was the place where the tabernacle was pitched after the tribes had settled in the land (Josh 18:1, 8-10).

Eli and his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, are mentioned here to prepare for their involvement later. Elkanah's favoritism is shown by his giving to Hannah a double portion of the sacrificial feast. There was rivalry between the two women, with Peninnah practicing particular cruelty toward Hannah.

## c. Hannah's prayer and vow (1:9-11).

Hannah resorted to prayer to alleviate her problem. Eli was sitting in his customary place where he could observe the worshippers.

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<sup>340</sup>Critical scholarship argues for a tribal identification with Ephraim that was turned into a Levitical identification by the Chronicler. Amerding concedes this to a point when he argues for a royal priesthood for David and Solomon and perhaps for Samuel, “Were David's Sons really priests?”

Hannah told the Lord that if he would answer her prayer and give her a son that she would devote him to the Lord “all the days of his life and a razor shall never come on his head.” This clearly was a dedication of her son as a Nazirite (Num 6:13-21) though the text does not call him that. A fragment from Qumran (4QSam<sup>a</sup>) has a phrase at 1:11 and 1:22 not found in either the MT or LXX that says, “And I will dedicate him as a Nazirite forever, all the days of his life.”<sup>341</sup>

d. Eli’s misunderstanding of Hannah (1:12-18).

It is a sad commentary on the spiritual state of affairs that Eli would assume a worshipper to be drunk because she was moving her lips in prayer. It is to Eli’s credit that he rebuked her. Hannah’s defense was that she was not a worthless woman (Hebrew: בַּת בְּלִיַּעַל *bath b’liyy’al*). This phrase will be used to describe the sons of Eli later (2:12). Recognizing the integrity of Hannah, Eli dismissed her with his blessing.

e. Hannah’s prayer answered (1:19-20).

Yahweh *remembered* Hannah, and she bore a son and named him Samuel. The reason for the name, she said was “because I have asked him from the Lord.” The name Saul (Heb.: שְׂאֹוּל *Ša’ul*) means “asked one.” Samuel (Heb.: שְׂמוּאֵל *Šmu’el*) ought to mean “Name of God,” or something like that unless it is a reduction of שְׂמוּעָאֵל *Šmu’el*, i.e., “Heard of God.” The latter is probably correct, and she was saying, “I asked for him, and God heard.”

f. Dedication of Samuel (1:21-28).

The time for the annual trek to the tabernacle arrived, but Hannah refused to go up until she had weaned Samuel, at which point, she promised, she would leave the child in the tabernacle. Elkanah

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<sup>341</sup>F. M. Cross, “A New Qumran Biblical Fragment Related to the Original Hebrew Underlying the Septuagint,” *BASOR* 132 (1953):15-26. McCarter, *First Samuel*, *loc. cit.*, says that 1:22 is original.

may have been worried that she would not follow through on her vow, and so he said, “Only may the Lord confirm His word” (1:21-23). The husband was responsible to approve or annul his wife’s vows (Num 30:1f) (1:21-23).

True to her vow, she brought Samuel to the tabernacle when she had weaned him. This was truly a festive occasion (cf. Gen 21:8). She may have nursed Samuel until he was about four (2 Macc 7:27: three years), but even so he was very young to leave at the tabernacle. KJV says she brought three bullocks; NASB says a three-year-old bull. Both LXX and Qumran (4QSam<sup>a</sup>) have one three-year-old bull and this is probably the correct reading (1:24).

The phrase, “although the child was young” (Heb.: “The child was a child”) is very unusual in Hebrew and looks suspiciously like a form of haplography.<sup>342</sup> The LXX has “and *the child* was with them and they brought [him] before the Lord, and his father killed the sacrifice which he was making annually to the Lord, and she brought *the child*.” Unfortunately, Qumran has a break in the manuscript at this point, but there is room for this line in the break. Hertzberg, on the other hand, argues for the MT, comparing it with Judges 8:20 where a similar construction appears (1:25).<sup>343</sup>

This godly woman then surrendered her son to Eli and explained to him that she was the woman who had prayed for a son and who had vowed to give him to the Lord all the days of his life. What an example! (1:26-28).

g. Hannah’s psalm of thanksgiving and praise (2:1-10).

One of the most beautiful psalms of the Old Testament is this prayer of Hannah. The psalm was probably already in circulation (the mention of the barren having children makes it so apropos to the circumstances); Hannah recited it, and thus it became a part

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<sup>342</sup>True haplography would have only one “child.”

<sup>343</sup>Hertzberg, *First and Second Samuel*, p. 27.

of Scripture. Hannah's psalm should be compared to Mary's *Magnificat*, composed under similar circumstances.

The psalm eulogizes the Lord's *greatness* and his *graciousness*. It shows that God does not always operate as people think he should. He exalts the lowly and humbles the mighty. He strengthens the weak and feeds the hungry. He searches the heart and knows all that each one thinks. He will ultimately set things right and vindicate those who put their trust in him. These themes of the psalm will be worked out in the lives of the characters of these books.

2. The Family of Eli (2:11—4:22).

a. The writer's purpose.

The purpose of this section is to contrast the godly life of Samuel with the ungodly life of Eli's two sons (Samuel now ministers at the altar) and to show why God removed the family of Eli from the priesthood.<sup>344</sup> Eli seems to be a good man. He was concerned about the life of the people as evidenced in the way he dealt with Hannah. Yet, he was weak, lacking the fortitude to discipline his own sons. Therefore, he suffered the consequences personally, and the people nationally.

b. The practice of Eli's sons (2:12-17).

The character of Hophni and Phinehas is indicated by the fact that they "did not know the Lord." This means that they had no regard for him. They were totally selfish in their thoughts and conduct (2:12).

They were also called "worthless" men. This is the same phrase (בְּנֵי בְלִיַּ'אֵל *b'ne b'liyy'al*) Hannah uses in denying Eli's charge.

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<sup>344</sup>Not only is 1 Samuel preparing the way for David, the recognition of the Zadokite priesthood in lieu of Eli's is also a theme. The fulfillment is in 1 Kings 2:26-27. Samuel becomes the agent of judgment on the house of Eli and Saul. He will also select David as God's chosen one.

The word in 2 Cor 6:15, Belial, is from this Hebrew word. It means first to be worthless and then it refers to the most worthless of all creatures: Satan. The character of these men is demonstrated in the way they treated God's people who came to sacrifice. They chose whatever meat they wanted, disregarding the normal practices decreed by the law of Moses (2:13-17).

c. The contrast of the boy Samuel (2:18-21).

Samuel served as a little priest, and his mother provided for him annually. Whenever Elkanah and Hannah came to Shiloh, Eli would bless them. God's blessing in their lives was evident in the birth of five children. God's intervention in history to bring this little boy into the world was no little thing. He was raising up a very significant person to carry out his divine will for Israel. The boy Samuel grew before the Lord (as the sons of Eli failed to know or obey the Lord).

d. More on the wickedness of Eli's sons (2:22-26).

The women "who served at the doorway of the tent of meeting" seem to be housekeepers or some other such maintenance people (cf. Exod 38:8), (the word "served" is related to *S<sup>e</sup>baoth* (שְׂבָאוֹת) which usually refers to an army or some other such organization). One can only wonder whether the conduct in 2:22 may involve Canaanite cult practices. Eli protests their wickedness to no avail (2:23-25). God's purpose is given in 2:25, but like the hardening of Pharaoh's heart, human responsibility should be seen prior to the judgment. The contrast of Samuel's life to Eli's sons is given in v. 26. The similarity of this statement to the one made of Jesus in Luke 2:52 is not accidental.

e. Prediction of judgment on Eli's house through a prophet (2:27-36).

God sent a man of God (a prophet) to tell Eli that in spite of the fact that he held an elect position as a member of Levi's family, God was going to judge his house because of the crass disobedience of Hophni and Phinehas (2:27-30). The destruction of the family would not be complete, but they would lose their privileged position. Furthermore, both Hophni and Phinehas

would be killed on the same day. In addition, God promised to raise up a faithful priest who would walk before God's king forever.

The implication of this message is that Samuel would take the place of Eli, as he indeed did, acting as priest-judge. But Eli's house was not to be totally destroyed, only demoted. Several years later, the tabernacle was at Nob and Ahimelech, a descendant of Eli, was ministering as high priest (1 Samuel 21, cf. 14:3 also). The entire family, with the exception of Abiathar, was wiped out. Later (1 Kings 2:26-37), Solomon dismissed Abiathar to his village of Anathoth and replaced him with Zadok who became the "faithful priest."

- f. Prediction of judgment on Eli's house through faithful Samuel (3:1-21).

The situation out of which the prophecy arose was that Samuel was ministering in the tabernacle (lighting lights, running errands). God's word was rare, visions were infrequent (this means that there were few prophets). Eli was sleeping (in the adjoining buildings to the tabernacle?). He was old and going blind. The ceremonial lights were still burning. Samuel was also sleeping in the adjoining rooms. The Lord called to Samuel three times. Samuel assumed that it was Eli. Eli finally discerned that it was Yahweh calling and he instructed Samuel to respond: "Speak Lord for your servant hears." Samuel and Eli's sons are again contrasted. Eli's sons did not "know the Lord" in the sense that they did not obey him. Samuel has not yet had such an opportunity, but it has now come, and he responds affirmatively.

The revelation is given (3:10-14) because the servant responds in obedience. This message is that God will judge Eli's house. It is an "ear tingling" word of judgment. All previous promises will be carried out. Eli is held responsible for his sons' conduct. ("Brought a curse on themselves"—this is a *correction of the scribes, Tiquin Sopherim*, designed to prevent the text from saying, "they cursed God." Cf. LXX: "Because his sons were

cursing God.”).<sup>345</sup> The issue of atonement is not personal atonement, but corporate, i.e., there is nothing that will prevent God from removing Eli’s house from the priesthood.

The revelation was communicated only at Eli’s insistence (3:15-18). Samuel was afraid to tell the revelation, but Eli adjures him to tell all, and so he does. Eli as a man of God accepts the judgment of God as just. A crescendo of judgment was reached in Samuel (1) Eli rebukes his sons (2) a prophet rebukes Eli (3) Samuel relays God’s rebuke.

The prominence of Samuel is shown again by the statement that he grew spiritually and God blessed him (3:19-21). All Israel knew that Samuel was a prophet.<sup>346</sup>

- g. The Judgment of God against the house of Eli begins (4:1-22).

Contrary to a number of scholars,<sup>347</sup> this is not an independent story of the ark originating separately from chapters 1-3. Though Samuel is not mentioned (he was too young to be involved in the war), it shows the fulfillment of the threat to Eli’s sons (predicted through Samuel) and God’s faithfulness to his covenant represented by the ark.

The Philistine threat, so prominent in the book of Judges rears its head again in Samuel. The chapter begins with the statement that Samuel’s word came to all Israel. That is in the capacity of judge, people from all over came to respect this man of God to whom God revealed himself. The Philistines gathered at Aphek which lies just north of Philistine territory. The Israelites mustered at

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<sup>345</sup>See Würthwein, *The Text of the OT*, pp. 14ff.

<sup>346</sup>The word prophet, נָבִי *nabi*?, only appears about seventeen times prior to this book (two of these are feminine). Usually, “man of God” refers to a prophet, cf., e.g., 2:27. Samuel’s period marks the real beginning of the prophetic movement—see Young, *My Servants the Prophets*.

<sup>347</sup>See, e.g., Hertzberg, *First and Second Samuel*, *loc. cit.*

Ebenezer (a proleptic name, since it will be called “stone of help” after the defeat of the Philistines in Chapter 7) (4:1-2).

The Israelites were soundly defeated in the first foray. About 4,000 were killed. The defeat called for self-examination. The elders concluded rightly that God had allowed the defeat, but they concluded wrongly that the ark of God could be used as sort of a talisman to ward off the enemy. Perhaps they thought they could replicate the battle of Jericho. Thus, the purposes of God were worked out in the judgment against Hophni and Phinehas. The ark was brought into the battle with Eli’s two sons in attendance (4:3-4).<sup>348</sup>

Of course, this abuse of the ark only brought a second defeat by Philistines (4:5-11). The Philistines were frightened at first when the ark entered but rallied to defeat the Israelites (4:5-10). (Note: The Philistines knew how God delivered Israel from Egypt [4:8]. This makes the defeat doubly bitter and shows that God will not defend even His own people when they are disobedient.)

The ark of the covenant was captured, and the sons of Eli were killed as prophesied in 2:34. The report of the battle eventually came to Eli (4:12-18). Eli’s great concern was for the ark. Eli was ninety-eight years old and virtually blind (cataracts?). At the news of his sons’ death, but especially at the news of the capture of the ark, Eli fell from his bench and broke his neck. This is a powerful lesson for anyone in spiritual leadership.

Phinehas’ wife went into labor at the news of her husband’s death. She called her new son Ichabod (אֵי קָבוֹד *’ey kabod* lit.: “Where is the glory”). The loss of the ark symbolized to her that God was absent from Israel since the shekinah glory represented his

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<sup>348</sup>The phrase “Lord of Hosts” (יהוה צְבָאוֹת *Yahweh s<sup>e</sup>ba’oth*) begins to be used at this point. See M. Tsevat “Studies in the Book of Samuel,” *HUCA* 36 (1965): 49-58 who argues that “Hosts” is an appositional noun like “Elisha: Chariots and Horsemen of Israel.” Yahweh: the “army” of Israel.



presence. This is the final commentary on the results of disobedience to the divine law (4:19-22).

3. The evidence of God's continued grace in the protection of the ark of the covenant (5:1—7:2).
  - a. The vicissitudes of the ark are recounted in chapters 5 and 6. The purpose in this section is to show that the ark of the covenant, a symbol of God's presence among the people, cannot be abused by either the Israelites (talismen) or the Philistines (triumph over a national god). God shows them that a proper attitude toward him (represented by the ark) brings blessing (the men of Kiriath Jearim, 7:1).<sup>349</sup>
  - b. Confrontation between paganism and Jehovah (5:1-12).

The ark was first brought to the temple at the ancient Philistine city of Ashdod and placed in the temple of Dagon. This deity was once thought to be a fish god (Heb.: דָּג *dag* = fish) worshipped by the Aegean Philistines. We now know that Dagon (Heb.: דָּגוֹן *dagōn* = grain) was a deity in the Canaanite pantheon. The presence of the ark brought judgment on the pagan divinity Dagon (1-5)<sup>350</sup> and on the people (6-12). As a result, the ark was taken to three cities in the Philistine pentapolis (see atlas). The Ekronites insisted that the ark be returned to Israel (5:11-12).

- c. The restoration of the ark with recognition of the position of the God of Israel (6:1-20).

The diviners suggested a return of the ark with a guilt offering (Heb.: אֲשָׁם *'asham*, Leviticus 5). This offering recognized a trespass against God (6:1-3). The guilt offering was to consist of golden replicas of the tumors and mice—one for each lord/city of

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<sup>349</sup>Note a similar teaching about the ark when David tries to bring it to Jerusalem improperly (2 Samuel 6), as a matter of fact, the author of Samuel may be relating these two incidents.

<sup>350</sup>See *ANET* p. 130.

the Philistines. LaSor suggests that this act represents sympathetic magic, i.e., the same kind of thing that has caused the damage is made. The mention of mice may point to some kind of plague carried by rodents (6:4-5).<sup>351</sup> The diviners gave glory to the God who brought Israel from Egypt and advised action that would require a miracle (two cows taken away from their young) (6:7-9). The miracle happened, indicating that Jehovah was working in the circumstances (6:10-16).

The cows made their way to the border town of Beth Shemesh. The Beth Shemeshites were Israelites. They rejoiced when the ark was returned, and the Levites offered sacrifice. The offering is recounted (6:17-18), and the statement is made that the stone on which the ark was placed was still there in the time of the author. The Beth Shemeshites profaned the ark by following idle curiosity and looking into the sacred box.<sup>352</sup> God judged them by destroying 50,070 men.<sup>353</sup> The Beth Shemeshites came under the same wrath as had the Philistines. Instead of acknowledging that they were responsible, they complained about the inapproachability of God (6:19-20).

The men of Kiriath-jearim (Forestville) were not priests, nor was Kiriath-jearim a priestly city. This city was chosen probably because it was near Beth Shemesh. Aminadab was surely a Levite, or his son Eleazar would not have been consecrated to supervise the ark. A larger question is why the ark was not taken back to Shiloh. The answer may lie in the fact that the city was

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<sup>351</sup>LaSor, *et al.*, *Old Testament Survey*, p. 243. See also J. B. Geyer, "Mice and Rites in 1 Samuel 6:5," *VT* 31 (1981): 293-304 who argues that it is not a plague of or from mice. The plague produced dysentery and piles came from the plague. עֲפֹלִים *epholim* is used in the story, but עֲכָבְרִים *akb'rim* in the offering to take away guilt (אָשָׁם *asham*).

<sup>352</sup>Syriac: "They defiled the ark." Looking may imply more than mere gazing.

<sup>353</sup>The Hebrew construction is so unusual, the number so large for a small town, and the fact that some Hebrew manuscripts do not have the number 50,000, leads Keil and Delitzsch to assume a textual error: that only seventy were killed. They are surely right.

defeated and possibly the tabernacle destroyed (cf. Jer 7:12).<sup>354</sup> The (rebuilt) tabernacle shows up later at Nob (1 Sam 21:6) and Gibeon (2 Chron 1:3), suggesting that it was removed in some way from Shiloh. The ark remained in Kiriath-jearim for twenty years after which we should understand that the events of the rest of the chapter took place. Many years after that, David brought the ark to Jerusalem (6:21—7:2).

The relation of this unit to the structure of 1-2 Samuel should not be missed (see Hertzberg). Here the ark is lost and returned. In 2 Samuel 6 David brings it to Jerusalem and in 2 Samuel 7 he plans to build the temple. 2 Samuel 24 provides the place for the sanctuary.<sup>355</sup>

d. Defeat of the Philistines (7:3-17) (The right approach to battle).

There is no indication as to when this event took place. A contrast is being drawn between Samuel's spiritual life and leadership with that of Hophni and Phinehas in chapter 4 (7:3-4).

The first criterion to success is a repentant heart. ("Return to the Lord with all your heart.") This will be evidenced by the renunciation of paganism: the removal of the Ashtoreth (fertility goddess) and Baal (storm god). Baal means "master" or "Lord" and was once used of Jehovah (cf. the word Beulah—married—in Isa 62:4). Because of the problem of syncretism, the name was dropped and Bosheth (shameful) was substituted (cf. Ishbosheth, Mephibosheth). Wondrously the Israelites repented and followed the first commandment of the covenant by "having no other gods before them."

Samuel prepared Israel further by bringing them to Mizpah (watch point), one of his "circuit" cities and famous even in later times (Jeremiah 40; 1 Maccabees 3). They poured out water as a libation, fasted, repented, and Samuel judged them. Normally, "to

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<sup>354</sup>See Shiloh, "Did the Philistines Destroy the Israelite Sanctuary at Shiloh?" *BAR* 1:2 (1975): 3-5 for the archaeological evidence of Shiloh.

<sup>355</sup>See the structure of 1 Samuel on p. 153f.

judge” means to adjudicate disputes. Here it must mean that they confessed their wrongs. Samuel thus continued the tradition of judgeship so well-known already in Israel (7:5-6).

The Philistines assumed that the Israelites were preparing for war and began to muster their troops. The Israelites were afraid and begged Samuel to pray for them. In response, Samuel offered up a whole burnt offering and prayed for God to deliver them. God’s response was to bring confusion to the Philistines allowing the Israelites to defeat them. Israel was poorly armed. Only prayer and the answer of God in direct intervention could save them. This was the war of Yahweh, not the war of his people. As such, he won decisively (7:7-11).

After this great victory of Yahweh, Samuel erected a cairn to commemorate the victory. “Even” means “stone” and “Ezer” (as in Ezra) means “help” (אֶבֶן הָעֵזֶר *’eben ha’ezer*). This battle was decisive: The Philistines were subdued, and many of the former Israelite cities were restored. (The Philistines were not finished, of course, for they still must be defeated by Saul and David) (7:12-14).

This major section is concluded with a summary of Samuel’s ministry. He was a judge. This is proven by his work at Mizpah. He acted as one of the judges in the book of Judges, but he loomed larger than any of them. As a matter of fact, he was more like Moses, and was included with him in Jer 15:1 (where the stress is on intercession). He conducted his ministry in various cities of southern Israel much like a circuit preacher. Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah were the three chief centers. No further mention is made of Shiloh, nor is he connected with the ark at Kiriath-jearim. His home was in Ramah (7:15-17).

B. Samuel and Saul, a time of transition (8:1—15:35).

1. The people’s choice: a monarchy rather than a theocracy (8:1-22).

## a. The Problem—Samuel’s sons (8:1-3).

It is ironic that Samuel’s sons turn out to be unspiritual and unworthy just like Eli’s sons. One would think that Samuel would have profited from the bad example of Hophni and Phinehas, but he apparently did not. Nothing provokes people like injustice. Because of the perversion of their office, (perhaps exacerbated by the Philistine threat) the sons of Samuel caused the people to look for a king.

## b. The request of the people (8:4-18).

The blunt request of the elders must have been a shock to Samuel. “You are old, your boys are bad, and so we need a king.” Samuel turned to the Lord who told him that it was not Samuel who was being rejected, but the Lord himself. Critics see in this section an ambivalent attitude toward the idea of a kingship which continues as a tension throughout the historical period. The “Deuteronomist,” they say, is opposed to the idea of a king and so inserts his theology into the narrative.<sup>356</sup> But God often allows people to choose the second best (“He gave them the desires of their heart and sent leanness to their souls”). In the case of the monarchy, he even chose to bless it by selecting David as the predecessor of the Messiah. God told Samuel to listen to the people and select a king for them. Implicit in this statement is the divine sanction of the monarchy. However, he first told Samuel that he must warn them of the consequence. Israel wanted a king “like all the nations.” Israel was unique in her leadership. The other nations: Egypt, the Hittites, Mitanni, Assyria, Babylonia, Tyre, Sidon, Moab, and Philistia all had a highly developed office of king. Samuel rehearsed to the people all that this king would do to them. These practices were all followed by subsequent kings. Solomon especially overtaxed the resources of the people so that they

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<sup>356</sup>For a discussion of the issue that the two ideas (monarchy/theocracy) are antithetical concepts in later Israel see Cohen, “The Role of the Shilonite Priesthood in the United Monarchy of Ancient Israel” *HUCA* 36 (1965) 59-98; also I. Mendelsohn, “Samuel’s Denunciation of Kingship in the Light of the Akkadian Documents from Ugarit,” *BASOR* 143 (1956) 17-22.

finally revolted against his son Rehoboam. Samuel also told them that they must be prepared to suffer the consequences, for God would not listen to them in the day they cry out to Him for deliverance from an oppressive king.

c. The response of the people (8:19-22).

The people, as is often the case, traded the present for the future. Perhaps their greatest fear was to go out to war without a proper leader. Their experience in battle against the Philistines under Eli left them worried, and even the victory under Samuel did not offset their fear. They wanted a king to lead them into battle.

The Lord yielded to their desire and permitted them to have a king. Samuel sent the people away in anticipation of a future appointment. Now the stage is set for the transition from a simple, *ad hoc* judgeship directly under God, to a complex monarchy that will bring much grief to the people. We are now ready to be introduced to the enigmatic Saul.

The importance of this unit cannot be overemphasized. Moving from the leadership of judges to a monarchy was as significant for Israel's history as the destruction of the first temple. Not only would the political structure be forever altered, but God's covenant also would soon be made with David, giving theological direction to the course of Israel's history unthought-of before the monarchy.

2. The selection of Saul as King (9:1—10:27).

a. Background of the story (9:1-4).

The genealogy. The tribe of Benjamin was involved in the civil war of Judges 19-21 which resulted from the sordid affair of the Levite concubine. The Benjamites were virtually decimated. This may account for the choice by God of this tribe: it was less of a

threat to the rest of the tribes. (Saul of Tarsus, of course, was from this tribe and was named after the first king.)<sup>357</sup>

Saul's father was Kish of Abiel of Zeror of Becorath of Aphiah. Kish was a "mighty man of valor" (גִּבּוֹר חַיִּיל *gibbor ḥayil*) usually a Hebrew idiom for an outstanding soldier but used of Boaz (Ruth 2:1) to mean "sturdy" that is wealthy man. So, it should be understood here.

Saul ben Kish is described as a choice young man, very handsome and tall. This may have led Samuel to look for a comparable person to replace Saul (1 Samuel 16). However, God told Samuel not to look on the outward appearance.

The immediate circumstances leading up to the story were that some of Kish's donkeys were lost and Saul and his servant had been looking for them without success.

b. The circumstances for the encounter with Samuel (9:5-10).

Saul suggested that they return home because they had been gone so long that Kish would be worried about them. The servant suggested looking up the "man of God" in a nearby city to ask about the lost donkeys. The city was no doubt one of the circuit cities (1 Sam 7:16-17). This indicates that in the popular concept, prophets were thought of almost as "crystal ball gazers." As a matter of fact, the editor informs us that in earlier times the prophet was called a "see-er." (This editorial aside indicates that this part of the book is being written quite a bit later than the events in it.) Furthermore, the "seer" had to be paid for his

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<sup>357</sup>There were two forces at work in Israel's history: one was centripetal and the other was centrifugal. The centripetal force was the central sanctuary. It was the rallying point for *all* the people of Israel. The centrifugal force was tribal independence. Each tribe wanted to go its own way and to ignore any central authority. The schismatic altar (Joshua 22 esp. v. 29), the Benjamite war (Judges 19-21), jealousy against Gideon and Abimelech as judges (Judges 9), anti-Judah feelings after the Davidite civil war (2 Samuel 19), and finally the breach after Solomon's death, show that the nation was always ripe for dissension and division.

services. Saul happily acceded to the servant's advice, and they set out to the city to find the seer.

c. The arrival of Samuel at the city (9:11-14).

Saul and his servant climbed the entrance slope to the city where they encountered girls leaving to draw water. The girls told them the seer had already arrived to carry out his priestly function in the "high place." The high place was a cult center where either Jehovah or the pagan gods could be worshipped.<sup>358</sup> Later, because of their identification with paganism, the high places were removed. Here it is legitimate as a center for the worship of the Lord.<sup>359</sup> On the way to the high place, their paths crossed that of

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<sup>358</sup>See A. Mazar, *Archaeology and the Land of the Bible*, pp. 350-51 for a description of a high place found in Samaria.

<sup>359</sup>The phrase "the place which Yahweh your God shall choose from all your tribes to put his name there" (Deut 12:5, 11, 14, 18, 21, 26; 14:23, 24, 25; 15:20; 16:2, 6, 7, 11, 15, 16; 17:8, 10; 18:6; 26:2; 31:11), or some variation thereof, has been the linchpin of the theory that Deuteronomy was composed in the seventh century during the time of Josiah to force all Israel to worship at Jerusalem. If this is a command to choose one site out of all Israel as the only place Yahweh can be legitimately worshiped, it conflicts with the obvious popularity of the high places (בָּמוֹת *bamoth*) and their use by Yahweh's representatives throughout the monarchy as well as preceding it. M. H. Segal (*The Pentateuch*, pp. 87-89) argues (with predecessors) that the rule is not for one place only, but for pure, non-Canaanite places. "That place" in Deut 12:3 refers to all Canaan which is to become a holy place where God causes his name to dwell. Every altar in it is to be divinely sanctioned or destroyed. Woudstra, *Joshua* and Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, agree. Furthermore, it seems to me that the use of the word "to sacrifice" (זָבַח *zabāḥ* in the context of Deut 12:20-23 argues that private sacrifice was allowed if the distance to the sanctuary was too great. This word always means to sacrifice, not simply to kill, with the possible exception of 1 Sam 28:24 where the witch of Endor prepared a calf, and I have to wonder if that does not refer to ritual killing. The history of the central sanctuary is uneven. It began at Shiloh (Josh 18:1) but was destroyed in the Philistine wars of Samuel's day (Jeremiah 7). It was at Nob when David fled Saul (1 Sam 21:1) and was at Gibeon when Solomon became king (2 Chron 1:3). A permanent sanctuary did not come into existence until the tenth century. Many other "high places" and cult centers existed along with Shiloh and even with Solomon's temple until reform under Hezekiah and Josiah forced their closing. These centers existed because of the lack of a clear-cut central city. Precedent was given for this in the erection of altars by Joshua (Josh 8:30-35). Therefore, their use was considered legitimate until they



Samuel. All of these circumstances were being divinely engineered to bring about the anointing of Saul.

d. The amazing encounter with Samuel (9:15-21).

God had already revealed to Samuel that the promised king of chap. 8 would appear on this particular day. This man would become a “prince” (נָגִיד *nagid*) over “my people Israel” (cf. David in 2 Sam 5:2). His task would be to deliver Israel from the Philistines. This deliverance was God’s response to the cry of the Israelites.

When Saul and his servant appeared, God told Samuel that this was the man of whom he had spoken. At Saul’s query on the location of the seer’s house, Samuel identified himself and invited Saul to join him at the feast connected with the sacrifice. He promised to release him the next day after telling him all that was on his mind. Samuel then gave to Saul a confirmatory sign authenticating his ministry by telling him about the donkeys even before Saul asked about them. (Cf. Jesus and Nathanael—John

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became corrupted with syncretism. The similarity of Israelite faith with Canaanite religion made “crossover” very easy (names for God, common sacrifices, and the “high places”). Consequently, syncretism became the order of the day and absolutely required the closing down of these high places and priests connected with them (2 Kings 23:4-9). (Cf. A. Mazar, “Bronze Bull Found in Israelite ‘High Place’ from the Time of the Judges,” *BAR* 9 [1983] 34-40.) However, the central sanctuary at Shiloh, Nob, Gibeon and eventually Jerusalem was a rallying point for the people of Israel. They chose their king, consulted about war and tribal matters as well as worshipped there. The books of Samuel are usually considered to be the product of the “Deuteronomist” who wrote Israel’s history with a particular viewpoint. This deuteronomistic philosophy is against high places. However, when we have a section like this one where Samuel is closely identified with a high place, McCarter, (1 Samuel, p. 177), e.g., says “The present passage with its unflinching association of Samuel and a high place is pre-Deuteronomic in origin and has escaped editorial censorship.” This is argument in a circle. W. F. Albright (*From Stone Age to Christianity*, p. 282) says the theory of “progressive centralization of cult” has never been proved. He prefers to speak of “an oscillatory movement rather than unilateral evolution.”

1:47-51.) Saul gave a very humble response, similar to that given by Gideon when God called him to a similar task in Judges 6.

e. Samuel and Saul at the sacrificial meal (9:22-24).

Samuel took them to the feast and seated them in the place of honor and ordered the choice piece of meat he had asked the cook to set aside just for this occasion.<sup>360</sup> The “appointed time” indicates that God was providentially working in this situation.

f. Preparation for the anointing of Saul (9:25-27).

Samuel and Saul went down from the high place to the city to a house. (If the city were Ramah, the house would probably be Samuel’s. If it were some other, as it seems to be since Samuel was invited to the feast, the house would belong to someone else.) The Hebrew sequence of events is a little awkward:

He spoke with Saul on the roof top  
They arose early  
Daybreak came and Samuel called to Saul on the roof

The Greek text (B) has:

They spread (a bed) for Saul on the roof top  
He lay down

Daybreak came, and Samuel called to Saul on the roof

The difference between “speak” *dbr* and “spread” *rdb* is a matter of inverted letters. The Hebrew words for “rise early” *škm* and “lie down” *škb* are very similar also.

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<sup>360</sup>This is a good place to observe the way some of the sacrifice was carried out. The animal was killed, offered to God, and the people then shared in the meal of the cooked meat. Cf. 1 Samuel 2 where this was taking place at the tabernacle. Here it takes place on the “high place,” a substitute for the central sanctuary.

MT וידבר עם שאול על הגג וישכמו *wyḏbr 'm šaul 'lhgg wyškmu*

LXX): וירבדו לִשְׂאוּל עַל הַגַּג וַיִּשְׁכַּב  
(retroverted) *wyrbdu l šaul 'lhgg wyškb*

Consequently, the LXX probably has the better reading. “And they spread for Saul [a bed] on the roof top, and he lay down.”

Samuel told Saul to send his servant ahead so that he might reveal to him the word of God (9:27).

g. The private anointing of Saul (10:1-8).

The first anointing of Saul was done by Samuel with no one looking on (10:1). There was a public anointing later.<sup>361</sup>

So that there will be no question in Saul’s mind about the validity of this anointing, Samuel gave confirming signs (10:2-7). (Can you imagine Saul’s bewilderment? There has never been a king in Israel; he had never met Samuel before; he was a simple country man looking for his donkeys—and he is told he is to be a king.)

The signs are: (1) Saul will meet two men near Rachel’s tomb (near Bethlehem) who will tell him about the donkeys. (2) Saul will meet three men going up to (worship) God in the cult center of Bethel. They will share their food with him. (3) Saul will meet a group of prophets whom he will join and begin to prophesy.<sup>362</sup>

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<sup>361</sup>The Hebrew word “to anoint” is *mašach*. The passive form is *mešiaḥ* (מָשִׁיחַ). From this comes the word “Messiah” which can be applied to either a priest, king, or the Messiah. When David says that he will not touch the Lord’s anointed, this is the word he uses. The Greek counterpart is *christos* from which we get Christ.

<sup>362</sup>Only a word on prophets and prophesying can be given here. For an excellent discussion, see Young, *My Servants the Prophets*. The word prophet is the Hebrew *nabi* (נָבִיא). The etymology is obscure. Some argue for “to bubble forth,” more a reflection of their idea of a prophet than an etymology. Others (e.g., Albright, in *From Stone Age to Christianity*, p. 303) argue that it means “to be called.” It most certainly means to be a spokesman for God, but its precise etymology cannot be determined. The classic passage

Saul was then told to go to Gilgal where he was to wait seven days for Samuel who would come to offer sacrifices and give Saul more instruction (10:8).<sup>363</sup>

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on the Old Testament prophet is Deuteronomy 18 where Moses was preparing the people to enter Canaan where they would encounter all kinds of occult practices. In contrast to this false activity, Israel is to listen to her prophets. Amos is told by Amaziah to go home and prophesy rather than in Israel. Likewise, Ezekiel is told to “prophesy to the bones and say . . .” This implies that the idea of prophesying means basically to communicate what God says. On the other hand, the references to prophesying in Samuel (chapter 10, 18 [an evil spirit causes it!], 20) indicate that sometimes, at least, bizarre behavior accompanied prophesying. Certainly, it means that God overpowered the prophet so that he was no longer acting of his own accord. Instead of simply going home, Saul prophesied. Instead of capturing David, Saul lay naked. God seizes upon men to carry out His divine purposes as he did the seventy elders working with Moses to help in judging.

<sup>363</sup>Critical scholars argue that chapter 13 originally followed chapter 10 (see Hertzberg, *First and Second Samuel, loc. cit.*, or McCarter, *I Samuel, loc. cit.*, for a discussion.) In chapter 10, Samuel told Saul to go to Gilgal and wait seven days for him to come and offer sacrifices. In chapter 13 Saul waited seven days and forced himself to make the sacrifices. It is my opinion that the directions in chapter 10 were standing orders to be fulfilled as the occasion demanded. He could not have fulfilled it in chapter 10 because (1) No one knew who Saul was or that he had been anointed. How could he muster the troops of Israel against the Philistines? This is not insuperable, since an analogous situation is the story of Gideon where it is the Angel of Yahweh who speaks. Samuel’s statement to Saul (10:7) “And it shall be when these signs come to you, do for yourself what the occasion requires; for God is with you” sounds as though that might be the beginning of his charismatic ministry. The signs did indeed come to pass, but Saul merely went home. Furthermore, Gideon had to make his commission known by tearing down the altar of Baal in his back yard. (2) The more likely sequence is that presently in the MT: Saul went back home to farming, conscious that God was going to use him, but probably puzzled as to how that would come about. Samuel publicly anointed him at Mizpah, and Saul then mustered the troops for the Ammonite war in chapter 11. (3) The promise was made to Saul in chapter 13 that the kingdom would be removed from him. It would be strange if this were done the very same day that Saul’s delivering work began. See also Keil: God had told Samuel that Saul would deliver from the Philistines. He would go to Gilgal at the right time for preparation for war and wait seven days. After the intervening events, he went there, but despaired of Samuel’s coming.

h. The fulfillment of the signs (10:9-13).

Saul became a new man as he left Samuel. How are we to interpret this statement? Does it refer to salvation? It means at least that God performed a supernatural work on Saul so that he would be different in the future.

The most significant evidence of the change in Saul was the third sign, when Saul joined with the group of prophets in prophesying. Saul's character apparently was so changed that the people were surprised to see him among the prophets, and his presence even created an aphorism: when someone acted in a way that was out of character, some wag would say, "Is Saul also among the prophets?" The phrase "Now who is their father" probably means that each prophet received his own call and did not enter the prophetic office by birth. Hence, even Saul could join the group though his father was not a prophet. (Saul's action in 19:22ff. called up the same aphorism.)

i. Saul's reception at home (10:14-16).

Saul explained only that they went to Samuel for help in finding the lost donkeys, refusing to satisfy his uncle's curiosity by telling him more about Samuel.

j. The public anointing of Saul (10:17-27).

Samuel had anointed Saul privately, but it was now necessary to present him to the people. Instead of simply saying that he had anointed Saul, Samuel used the lot as an evidence of divine choice of Saul. Samuel brought the people to Mizpah for the anointing of Saul as he had brought them there for judging in chap. 7 (10:17).

After delivering a rebuke to the people for asking for a king, Samuel used the lot to select the tribe, family and individual who would be king. Saul was chosen, but he shyly hid in the baggage from which the people took him after God told them he was there (10:18-23).

Samuel then proudly presented Saul to the people. He took a fatherly interest in Saul from that time forward. The people excitedly accepted Saul as their king, and Samuel went home after giving the people a list of things to expect from the king (10:24-25).

Saul also went to his home followed by a band of loyal adherents in whom the Lord had worked. Of this new king Wright says: “Saul was no wealthy, learned,<sup>364</sup> cosmopolitan statesman. He was a warrior, primarily, who stood head and shoulders above the ordinary Israelite: that is, he was over six feet tall. He was a charismatic hero, just like a number of judges before him, and he owed his position to the fact that the people thought he possessed special gifts which had been given him by God, and indeed he did. He differed from judges like Othniel, Barak, and Gideon only by the fact he was a permanent leader, not a temporary one—chosen as such because of the Philistine crisis.”<sup>365</sup> Seeds of discontent were already sown in the minds of certain worthless men (בְּנֵי בְלִיַּיָּאֵל *b<sup>e</sup>ne b<sup>e</sup>liyya<sup>’</sup>al*). Saul was wise enough to keep quiet. (But for a different text regarding this phrase, see the next section.)

3. The first test of the new king (11:1-15).

a. The provocation (11:1-5).

Nahash, King of the Ammonites, besieged the Manassite city of Jabesh-gilead.<sup>366</sup> Frank Cross tells us of a fragment of Samuel from Qumran which has a paragraph not in the MT nor in the LXX (though it is reflected in Josephus and the last phrase of

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<sup>364</sup>For Saul’s “palace” in Gibeon see Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, pp. 122-123.

<sup>365</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>366</sup>See Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 181 who suggests that Saul’s ancestors were the Jabesh-gileadites who were brought in to marry the few men left in Benjamin (Judges 21). This would help to explain Saul’s interest in this city.

chapter 10).<sup>367</sup> “But he kept silent” [וַיִּהְיֶה כְּמַחְרִישׁ] *wayehi k<sup>l</sup>maḥrish*] is translated in LXX as “And it came about after about a month” [וַיִּהְיֶה כְּחֹדֶשׁ] *wayehi kaḥodesh*]. Nahash had recaptured some of the cities taken by the Reubenites and Gadites and mutilated the inhabitants. When 7,000 men fled to Jabesh-gilead, Nahash laid siege to the city. This data would help explain the reason for Nahash’s attack on Jabesh-gilead and his demand that they put out their right eyes. Some take this paragraph for a Midrashic addition, but Cross argues rather well for its genuineness. If it were lost, it would have been lost by haplography (Nahash . . . Nahash).

The Jabesh-gileadites persuaded the Ammonites to give them time to seek help. Apparently Nahash was fully confident of his superiority and granted it. The elders sent to Saul for help.

b. The response of Saul (11:6-11).

Saul came home from plowing (note what this indicates about the kingdom of that time) and heard the report. The Spirit of God “came upon Saul mightily.” The Hebrew word translated “came upon mightily” is *tislah* (תִּצְלַח). It normally means “to advance” and will most commonly be translated “to prosper.” In this instance it means to “move on someone strongly.” Used of the Holy Spirit coming on men, it is applied to Samson (3x’s), Saul (3x’s) and once to David. The same word is used of the evil spirit coming on Saul (once). Saul summoned the army of Israel with the dramatic act of cutting the oxen into pieces. He mustered 330,000 people, attacked, and devastated the Ammonites.

c. The new respect for Saul (11:12-14).

The “worthless men” of chap. 10 were threatened, but Saul spared them. Samuel took Saul and the people to Gilgal to renew the

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<sup>367</sup>F. M. Cross, “New Directions in Dead Sea Scroll Research,” *Bible Review* 1 (1985): 26-29.

kingdom. The people happily accepted Saul as the king over Israel.

4. Samuel's testimonial (12:1-25).

a. Samuel calls for a testimony of his pure life (12:1-5).

The transition has now taken place. Samuel will continue to act as a prophet of God who is actually over the king. This precedent will be continued throughout the monarchy. The king may kill the prophet, but he can never destroy the prophetic office, and prophets will continue to challenge the king to do what is right before God. Samuel called the people to bear witness to his conduct.<sup>368</sup> The corruption of public office included theft, fraud, oppression, and bribery. The people testified that Samuel's life had been above reproach; what a testimony!

b. Samuel's farewell message (12:6-18).

Samuel rehearsed God's acts in history to remind them that they had sinned in asking for a king and to challenge them to a life of obedience in the future. This practice is typical of the teachers in Israel—cf., e.g., Stephen's sermon in Acts 7. The word "plead" in this form (v. 7) (Heb.: **יִשְׁאָפֵת** *iššap<sup>e</sup>tah*) means to enter into a court case with someone.

Samuel recounted God's deliverance of Israel from Jacob to the most recent situation with Nahash (12:6-12).<sup>369</sup> Samuel next turned their attention to the new and first king of Israel and admonished king and people to follow the Lord (12:13-17). Samuel then called on the Lord for a miracle which was given to authenticate Samuel's ministry (12:18).

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<sup>368</sup>Cf. Paul's testimony before the Ephesian elders in Acts 20.

<sup>369</sup>Bedan in v. 11 is not known in the Judges. It may be that he was a minor judge unmentioned in the book of Judges, but it is probably an old copyist error for Barak, corrected in the LXX.



- c. Samuel prays for the people (12:19-25).

The people, in fear, asked Samuel to entreat the Lord in their behalf. Samuel gave the people a warm and encouraging message, perhaps the most poignant in the book, promising to pray for them.

5. Saul battles the Philistines (13:1—14:52).

- a. One of the purposes for which God raised up Saul was to drive out the Philistines (9:16). This he began to do. Samson had made a slight impact on them, and some victory had been won under Samuel, but their grip was not loosened from the Israelites. Now Saul, and more significantly, his valiant son Jonathan began to make inroads into them. It was David, however, who, once and for all, broke the back of Philistine control over the Israelites.

- b. The chronology of 13:1 is very difficult.

The KJV has “Saul reigned one year and when he had reigned two years . . .” but this attempt to solve the problem is syntactically untenable. The normal reading would be “Saul was \_\_\_ years old when he began to reign, and he reigned \_\_\_ years over Israel.” NASB has “Saul was forty years old when he began to reign, and he reigned thirty-two years over Israel.” NIV has “Saul was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel forty-two years.” Acts 13:21 seems to indicate 40 years for Saul’s reign. Some would argue that the 40 years in Acts includes Samuel’s time. We will have to leave the matter unsolved.<sup>370</sup>

- c. Saul decided to attack the Philistine garrison which was the reason he kept only 3,000 troops. The Philistines reacted strongly to the defeat of one of their garrisons, and Saul returned to Gilgal. The Philistines mustered a strong army and many of the Israelites began to flee the country (13:2-7).

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<sup>370</sup>Cf. also Noth, *History of Israel*, p. 176.

- d. Saul violated the word of God which had been given by Samuel to Saul.<sup>371</sup> The result is the promise that God will not allow the kingdom of Saul to endure (13:8-14).
- e. Samuel left, and Saul had only about 600 men, and the Philistines sent out raiders who were probably instrumental in disarming most of the Israelites (13:15-18).
- f. The statement in 13:19-22 is difficult in light of the fact that Israel has won wars against the Philistines and against Ammon. The answer must be that Israel was probably not that well-armed to begin with, and the disarming in recent times had left them poorly armed (which is probably the significance of the phrase “neither was there sword or spear found in the hands of any of the people”).<sup>372</sup>
- g. Jonathan performs a brave deed and defeats another Philistine garrison (14:1-15).

This act of Jonathan was one of great faith and showed him to be a spiritual man, and like David later, in contrast with his father. God supernaturally intervened and caused consternation among the Philistines which later led to an Israelite victory.

- h. There is a regrouping of the Israelites, and they pursue and defeat the Philistines (14:16-23).

This unit contains some very strange things. First the watchmen saw the Philistines sneaking away, and this could not be explained. Assuming that someone must have done something to cause this, Saul mustered the troops and found Jonathan missing.

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<sup>371</sup>Keil argues that Saul was not acting as priest—the priests would have offered the sacrifice—but he failed to obey the word of the Lord spoken through Samuel, but see Cohen, “The Role of the Shilonite Priesthood in the United Monarchy of Ancient Israel,” *HUCA* 36 [1965] 153-160. He says it was the intrusion into the sacrifice, but he sees it as a power struggle between Samuel and Saul.

<sup>372</sup>See Schedl, *History of the Old Testament*, 3:88 for a discussion of the necessity of the supernatural in Old Testament history.

Then Saul asked Ahijah to bring the ark to help ascertain Yahweh's will in this matter.<sup>373</sup> While the priest was consulting the mind of Yahweh, the noise of the Philistine retreat grew, and they even began to kill one another. Saul, in haste, broke off efforts to communicate with God and began to fight (14:16-19).

Jews who had apparently allied with the Philistines came over to Saul as well as those who had slunk away when the threat of war came.<sup>374</sup> Consequently, the advantage shifted to the Israelites and they won the battle (14:20-23).

- i. Saul makes a rash vow, ordering the soldiers to not eat anything (14:24-30).

This rash vow was a measure of Saul's poor leadership. Men in the heat of battle need nourishment. Jonathan ironically fell under the curse; he was the one who caused the victory to begin with.

- j. The victory goes to Israel, but the people are so hungry they begin to eat blood with the meat (14:31-35).

The rash vow of Saul brought the people under a curse since they were so hungry. They fell on the slaughtered animals and were breaking God's law by eating the flesh with the blood. Saul wisely saved the day by asking the people to bring the animals where they could be properly prepared for food. (Perhaps this offset his foolish act of depriving the people of food.)

- k. Saul decides to pursue the Philistines into their own territory, but God does not answer him when he inquires, so he assumes it to be because of some fault (14:36-46).

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<sup>373</sup>LXX has "ephod" instead of ark which has led some scholars to argue that the LXX has the original reading. However, there was already a precedent for bringing the ark into battle (1 Samuel 4). Consequently, we should follow the hard reading of the MT. But see Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, pp. 202-3 who supports the reading "ephod."

<sup>374</sup>Some argue that these "Hebrews" are really the old *'apiru* who are now Philistine mercenaries. See Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 202.

Did God withhold an answer to force Saul's hand in the rash vow? It was Saul's rashness that has caused the problem. The refusal of the Lord to answer Saul's request will become a pattern as God's rejection moves to a climax. The lot fell on Jonathan who answered his father derisively. Saul was determined to kill his son, but the people interceded, and Jonathan was saved.

1. Summary of the remainder of Saul's reign (14:47-52).

Saul as the military-judge-king, wars against the surrounding nations of Moab, Ammon, Edom, Zobah, and the Philistines. A roster is given of Saul's family and administration:

Sons: Jonathan, Ishvi, and Malchi-shua  
Daughters: Merab and Michal  
Wife: Ahinoam bath Ahimaaz  
General of the army: Abner ben Ner, Saul's cousin  
Father: Kish (14:47-51).

A summary statement of the wars with the Philistines is given (14:52).

6. Saul's second rejection comes with his failure in the *herem* war against the Amalekites (15:1-35).

a. God calls for a "total destruction" war (15:1-3).

The Hebrew word for "totally destroy" in 15:3 is from *herem* (חֵרֵם). It refers to something consecrated or dedicated to a particular use. It is somewhat similar to the word holy (קֹדֶשׁ *qadosh*). (In Arabic it refers to the sultan's wives who are off limits to all other men.) Jericho was to be a "*herem*" city when Joshua attacked it: its treasures were to be turned over to the sanctuary, and all men, women and children were to be killed (except for Rahab and her family). Achan's sin was to take some of the spoil (in other cities that would not be a sin for it was not "banned"). Now God called upon Saul to carry out a "*herem*" war against the Amalekites because of their implacable hatred of Israel.

b. Saul wins the battle but loses the “war” (15:4-9).

Saul mustered the troops and won a decisive victory over these ancient enemies. However, he made a fatal mistake in capturing Agag alive and preserving a number of the finer animals instead of killing them as he had been instructed. Saul could (as he did) argue that the people were out of hand, but proper leadership could have dealt with the problem in such a way as to avoid God’s wrath. This is a classic example of partial obedience. When so much “good” is accomplished, the human propensity is to justify the “non-good.” In fact, it is disobedience and that to a direct command.

c. God confronts Saul with his sin through Samuel (15:10-33).

Samuel’s distress over God’s judgment of Saul indicates the deep love he had for this man. From the time he anointed him until his own death, Samuel had a special place in his heart for Saul. He arose after a sleepless night of praying for Saul and searched for him in Carmel (this town is located in Judah). Someone told Samuel that Saul had set up a monument (apparently to commemorate his victory) and had gone on. Samuel finally caught up with him in Gilgal (15:10-12).

Saul came out to meet Samuel in high spirits. He expected to receive a blessing for the battle he had won. Instead, Samuel asked him about the animals that had been left over. Immediately, Saul blamed the people for having kept them. Samuel proceeded to rebuke him (15:13-16).

In words similar to Nathan’s rebuke of David, Samuel told Saul that he was king by the grace of God, but that he had violated God’s word by his disobedience. Saul again tried to blame the people for keeping out some of the animals for sacrifice, but Samuel told him that the Lord is interested in obedience far more than in sacrifice. As a result, said Samuel, Saul was rejected from being king over Israel (15:17-23).

Saul made an effort at repentance, but Samuel refused to let it affect him. The torn mantle was a symbol of the dismemberment

of Solomon's kingdom also (1 Kings 11:30-33). Samuel finally agreed to go back with Saul to the celebration and killed King Agag (15:24-33).

d. Samuel left Saul and returned to Ramah (15:34-35).

Samuel went sorrowfully to his home in Ramah. In anthropocentric terms, the text says that God repented having made Saul king. This means, of course, that God was going to judge Saul for the way he was turning out.

What can we say about Saul? He seemed humble enough at the beginning. He seemed to have had a genuine religious desire to please God. He consulted Yahweh about the battle, he made a vow designed to please the Lord. One has the sense that Saul was struggling to please God but did not know how to go about it ("who being ignorant of God's righteousness . . ."). The self-centeredness of his acts did not show up in Scripture until David came on the scene. David was all that Saul wanted to be but did not want to pay the price to be. Consequently, under divine judgment, Saul became paranoid about everyone. He is a tragic figure and no more so than when he consults the witch of Endor in a last futile effort to contact the God who has rejected him.

C. Saul and David—Struggle for Power (1 Samuel 16-31).

1. The rise of David (16:1—17:58).

a. His anointing (16:1-13).

The choice of this humble, talented, loving young man is one of the most heart-warming stories in the Bible. We must not lose sight of the fact that God was fulfilling his own purposes in selecting a man for the throne of Israel through whom he would install a dynasty culminating in the person of Jesus Christ. Samuel, influenced by the physical characteristics of Saul, looked for a similar type of person. God showed him that his choice went beyond the physical to the inner person. David had the spiritual characteristics God looks for in those who will lead his people.

David, probably to the chagrin of his brothers, is brought from the flock and anointed king over Israel. What an idyllic picture: the ruddy, fuzzy faced youth, chosen over his experienced, jealous brothers to be the prince over God's flock.

The Holy Spirit came upon David from that point on. The same Holy Spirit who came upon the judges to carry out Yahweh's purposes; the same Holy Spirit who came upon Saul, but later left him, now came upon David.<sup>375</sup>

b. His first contact with Saul (16:14-23).

The evil spirit coming on Saul is very puzzling. Was it a fallen demon that God allowed to trouble Saul? Was it a good spirit whose punishment of Saul was evil (calamitous)? (1 Kings 22 records that in the heavenly scene, one of God's spirits said he would go forth and be a deceiving spirit in the mouth of the prophets). In either case, how did David's playing affect it? There is no question that God was sovereignly bringing Saul to a point of judgment because of his disobedience. Assuming that this was a good spirit doing something calamitous, God allowed David's harp playing to soothe Saul, and God was bringing David to the court where He wanted him to be. Saul was unwittingly fulfilling God's purposes.

c. His second contact with Saul (17:1-58).

David and Goliath: Gooding “*Whose son* is this youth?” (17,55); ‘Inquire *whose son* the stripling is’ (17,56); ‘*Whose son* are you’ (17,58); I am *the son* of your servant Jesse . . .’ (17,58). Any but the slowest of readers would surely get the point: it is David's father, not David, that Saul is wanting to inform himself about. And it is hardly surprising, Saul . . . has promised, that if any man can defeat the champion, he (Saul) will make his father's house free in Israel (17,25). It is only natural, therefore,

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<sup>375</sup>Some would question how David could be called a “mighty man of valor” (16:18) when he was such a youth, but Keil and Delitzsch argue that the feats with the bear and the lion were enough to allow him to be so described.

that as he sees David go out to battle, and even more as he sees him come in, he should be concerned to find out all he can about David's father and family." (p. 223; p. 60 in D. W. Gooding, *et al. The Story of David and Goliath.*)<sup>376</sup>

The battle scene was a confrontation between Saul's men and the Philistine army. Saul had become militarily strong enough to cause this stand-off, otherwise the Philistines would have overrun the Israelites. The giant, Goliath is called a champion in NASB. The Hebrew calls him a "between" man (הַבַּנַּיִם *habbenayim*) that is, one to stand between the armies. Saul was scared<sup>377</sup> (17:1-11).

David met Saul again as he came from Bethlehem to bring food for his older brothers. Critics see in this section a *first* introduction of David. The nexus of the two encounters, however, is found in 17:15. He was Saul's court musician and armor bearer in chapter 16, but he was going back and forth to his father's place (17:12-16).

David's opportunity came because of his obedience to his father. As he came to the army camp, he heard the blasphemous challenge of Goliath and inquired as to its significance (17:17-30).

Perhaps the best-known story in the Old Testament is that of this inexperienced youth taking on the oversized, experienced warrior of the Philistines. Linked with his anointing in the preceding chapter, this warm exciting account of the faith of the Hebrew stripling in the face of overwhelming odds and the cowardice of his own people creates one of the greatest and most endearing dramas of the Bible. David's example should be encouraging and challenging to all of us. "God is able to do exceeding abundant above all we can ask or think" (17:31-40).

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<sup>376</sup>I assume this is D. W. Gooding, but I can no longer find the reference.

<sup>377</sup>Sélincourt, *The World of Herodotus*, pp. 124-25, recounts a story of Greeks having 300 picked champions from each side to fight each other in lieu of the whole army.



David's personal victory over Goliath, brought corporate victory over the Philistines.<sup>378</sup> David was then identified as to his family lineage so that Saul could conscript him into his army (17:41-58)

2. The conflict between David and Saul (18:1—27:12).

a. David and Jonathan (18:1-5).

The beginning of a unique relationship came when Jonathan was so impressed with David that he identified completely with him. This loyalty never left even when it meant that Jonathan would not succeed to the throne. This unwavering loyalty caused David to say at Jonathan's death "his love was greater than that of women" (2 Sam 1:26). This is an example of a high and proper relationship between two young men.<sup>379</sup>

b. Saul's first jealousy (18:6-9).

As the drama unfolds, the intense love and loyalty between David and Jonathan is contrasted with the beginning of an intense jealousy that led to paranoia on the part of Saul. This is a case study on the results of disobedience and defensiveness that leads to psychological problems of great magnitude.

c. Saul's first attack (18:10-16).

David was performing his customary task of trying to soothe Saul who was overcome by the "evil spirit." Saul tried to kill David.

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<sup>378</sup>17:54 raises two problems: whose tent and why Jerusalem. J. K. Hoffmeier ("The Aftermath of David's Triumph over Goliath," *ArchBW* 1:1 [1991] 18-23) argues that the tent belongs to Goliath (David had seized it, a practice known from Egypt and Assyrian evidence). He threw the head in Jerusalem to serve notice on the Jebusites that this was what David did to his enemies. However, Merrill (*Kingdom of Priests*, p. 241) believes that Nob would have been considered part of greater Jerusalem, and this is where David probably took both the head and the sword.

<sup>379</sup>See Cohen, "The Role of the Shilonite Priesthood in the United Monarchy of Ancient Israel," *HUCA* 36 [1965] 153-160, for a refutation of sexual relationship. The covenant was political.

The contrast between the two men is set forth by the author in 17:14-16: David prospers, Saul becomes paranoid.

d. Saul's subterfuge—Merab (18:17-19).

Saul's evil duplicity was shown in his treatment of David. By rights, David should have had Merab as his wife as soon as he defeated Goliath, for Saul had promised his oldest daughter to the one who would defeat him (17:25). Saul promised her again, but with the idea that David would try to show himself worthy and get himself killed. However, Saul gave Merab to someone else when the time came for the marriage. This was a terrible insult.

e. Saul's second subterfuge—Michal (18:20-30).

Saul used a concocted dowry as a means of getting David killed. For a hundred Philistine foreskins, David would be able to marry Saul's second daughter (who loved David). David characteristically went to battle and brought two hundred foreskins to Saul. Saul was unable to thwart David's marriage this time, and he and Michal were apparently happily married. Now two members of Saul's house loved David. This isolated Saul even further and caused him to become even more of an enemy of David. In contrast, David behaved himself wisely and became highly respected.<sup>380</sup>

f. Jonathan's defense of David (19:1-7).

Jonathan made a valiant effort to reconcile his father to David. Saul responded emotionally (as he did in every instance where he was confronted with his sin) and vowed that David would not be killed. This brought a temporary cessation of hostilities.

g. Saul's second attack (19:8-17).

The occasion of the renewed paranoia was apparently the great victories over the Philistines brought about by David's leader-

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<sup>380</sup>See my "Young David and the Practice of Wisdom."

ship. Saul threw his spear at David, trying to kill him. This time Michal protected him from her father as Jonathan was also to do.<sup>381</sup> This is the last recorded contact between David and Michal until he forced her return from the man to whom Saul gave her after David's flight. The story of David and Michal is a sad one indeed!

h. David's flight (19:18-24).

Hertzberg says correctly (for the wrong reasons): "This interest [in David's departure from the court] is to be explained not just as an interest in David's person, but also as an interest in the monarchy. We have already pointed out how important it seems to have been to the tradition to show that David's path in succeeding to the throne was a legitimate one. . . . It is therefore important that one after another Saul's daughter Michal, the prophetic leader Samuel, and now, too, the crown prince and heir to the throne, should all have helped David's flight."<sup>382</sup>

David sought refuge with the only man he could really trust: Samuel. He went to Samuel's home in Ramah where Samuel was apparently carrying on a prophetic ministry with followers. It is a bit much to speak of this as a "school," but 19:20 indicates a supervisory capacity of some kind. This seems to be the beginning of a movement called the "sons of the prophets" which was more developed in Elijah's day.

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<sup>381</sup>The Hebrew word *teraphim* means in all other places an idol (household idol). Rachel, e.g., stole her father's household idols which may have had economic significance as well as religious. The question here is whether David would have tolerated such pagan practice in his house even if one were to conclude that Saul's daughter were the real culprit. There is no verbal root in Hebrew for this word, but in Aramaic, the root *trp* means to be soft, then to blaspheme. In Arabic it means to be soft, effeminate or luxurious. Is it possible that Michal folded up clothes so as to look like a man, and the Hebrew word for idol or image fits that activity? I would be inclined in that direction rather than to the idea of a man-sized idol in David's home.

<sup>382</sup>Hertzberg, *First and Second Samuel*, p. 171.

God sovereignly protected David by causing the Spirit to overpower Saul as He did at the beginning of Saul's public ministry. Saul thought he could destroy God's choice to the throne, but God overpowered him and caused him to prophesy. Whether they were singing, praising or what is not clear; it is not likely that they were involved in ecstatic utterances of some kind.

i. Jonathan's protection (20:1-42).

David, taking the occasion of Saul's prophetic state as his opportunity, fled to Jonathan to make one final investigation into Saul's intentions. Jonathan assured him that he had his father's confidence, and that he knew nothing of a plot to kill David. David developed a plan to determine Saul's intentions. David would not play into Saul's hands by coming to the feast, but Saul's intentions would become known through David's absence (20:1-11).

They went out to the field where Jonathan devised a scheme to communicate his father's intentions to David. They then made a covenant in which David promised to treat Jonathan's seed properly. This is the *hesed* (חֶסֶד) covenant that will become so important later (20:12-23).

The plan worked, in that it evoked Saul's anger not only against David, but also against Jonathan for protecting David. Jonathan communicated the information to David who prepared to flee (20:24-42).

j. David's second flight (21:1-10).

At Nob where the tabernacle was located and the priests were descendants of Eli, David received food and a sword. Doeg the Edomite was unfortunately there (21:1-9).

At Gath David reached a low point by trying to join the traditional enemies of Israel—even those whom he had so successfully fought. Achish the *Saran* of Gath said that he had enough crazy men around him, and David left there (he had pretended madness to protect himself) (21:10-15).

At Adullam David hid in caves where he was joined by about four hundred malcontents<sup>383</sup> (22:1-2).

At Moab David left his parents for the duration of his exile (22:3).

At the “Stronghold” (Masada?) David stayed until the prophet Gad warned him to leave (the Hebrew word for stronghold is Masada [מַצְדָּה]). From there he went to Hereth (22:4-5).

k. The slaughter of the priests of Nob (22:6-23).

Saul’s frustration at his inability to control David, his nemesis, led him to the most dastardly deed of his entire life. His paranoia led him to believe that everyone around him was conspiring against him. Doeg, the Edomite, to ingratiate himself with the king tells of David’s stop at the tabernacle. The priests who were located at Nob were all summoned to Saul’s courts and charged with treason. Reason could not prevail over an unreasonable king, and Saul ordered their death (22:6-10).

When none of Saul’s men would lift a hand against Yahweh’s priests, Saul turned to the treacherous Doeg, who happily fell on the priests and slaughtered everyone connected with the tabernacle (22:11-19).

Only one young priest, named Abiathar, escaped. He went to David and joined the dissident forces. He was David’s priest from that time on (22:20-23).

l. David at Keilah (23:1-13).

David defeated the Philistines when they attacked the Judahite city of Keilah. When the city welcomed them into its walls, Saul decided he would be able to take David there. Yahweh revealed to him that the Keilahites would surrender him and his men to Saul, and so they left the city and frustrated Saul’s plans.

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<sup>383</sup>The limestone rock formations leave many caves in this area. Cf. the bell caves where the limestone was excavated.

m. David at Haresh (23:14-29).

Saul continually looked for David, who moved from place to place in the Judean wilderness. While he was at Haresh, Jonathan came to David to encourage him. They renewed their covenant (23:14-18).

Saul pursued David at Haresh when the Ziphites tried to betray him to Saul. Saul chased him from Haresh to Ziph, and they hid in Maon. There, David barely escaped with his life when Saul was summoned back to face a Philistine threat. David fled to En Gedi (23:19-29).

n. David at En Gedi (24:1-22).

En Gedi (goat fountain) was a town in the mountains overlooking the Dead Sea. It figured throughout Israel's history and was significant to the Bar Kokhba revolt.<sup>384</sup> David had his first opportunity to kill Saul, but graciously refused to put his hand on Yahweh's anointed. David refused to come to the throne by assassinating the ruling king. How could he expect to be safe as a king if he came through illegitimate means? (24:1-7).

David challenged Saul to give him a reason for his pursuit. The cloth in hand, cut from Saul's garment, was proof that David could have killed him had he chosen to (24:8-15).

Saul typically showed emotional remorse and promised David not to harm him. He admitted that David would be the next king and asked David to swear to take care of Saul's descendants. David did, and they separated (24:16-22).

o. David and Nabal (25:1-44).

Two important events are recorded in this chapter: the death of Samuel and the acquisition of Abigail by David. The first event shows that David was officially alone and prepares for the scene

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<sup>384</sup>See Yadin, *The Finds from the Bar Kokhba Period in the Cave of Letters*.

with the witch of En Dor. The second one not only shows David's activities while in exile, but also explains the presence of Abigail as a wise woman, who with all wise people, understood the divine place of David in Judah's history.<sup>385</sup>

David's practice was to protect the shepherds in the wilderness when they were pasturing the flock. This protection was necessary as the servants of Nabal later recount. David in this manner, provided food for his entourage, but he was also preparing the people for his rulership by acting as protector and judge. At the time of shearing, he sent to Nabal, a rich sheep owner in Carmel (of Judah), but he refused to help David (25:2-13).

Abigail showed great wisdom in bypassing her husband and making direct contact with David. She brought him the food he had requested and begged his compassion on her foolish husband. David responded favorably and was impressed by her wise action (25:14-35).<sup>386</sup>

Nabal awoke from his drunken sleep, and Abigail told him of how close he had come to being killed. The news shocked him so much that he apparently had a stroke and died as a result (25:36-38).

David rejoiced when he heard the news of Nabal's death because he recognized God's hand in the matter. Remembering Abigail's attractiveness as a wise woman, David sent a marriage proposal to her which she gladly accepted (25:39-42).

David by now had collected three wives: Ahinoam, Abigail and Michal, but Saul had treacherously given Michal to another man (25:43-44).

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<sup>385</sup>See my "Young David and the Practice of Wisdom," pp. 56-57.

<sup>386</sup>Cf. Proverbs in its contrast between the fool and the wise person.

p. David at Ziph (26:1-25).

The Ziphites kept their word to watch for David and to inform Saul. They told him that David was in Hachilah, and Saul came after him. David observed Saul's camp and was able to approach it unmolested because everyone was soundly sleeping. He now had his second opportunity to kill his adversary, and Abishai urged him to do so, but David refused (26:1-12).

For the second time David challenged Saul, and for a second time Saul acted remorseful. They each went their way never to see one another again (26:13-25).

q. David at Gath (27:1-12).

David went to Achish once again and convinced Achish of his enmity to Saul and loyalty to Achish. Achish received him as one of his officers. As a result, Saul stopped looking for David (27:1-4).

David asked permission to live in a remote Philistine town and permission was granted. This allowed him to raid Judah's enemies and to claim that he was raiding Judah. Consequently, he was able to help Judah without the Philistines knowing it (27:5-12).

3. Saul's last days (28:1—31:13).

a. Preparation for the battle (28:1-7).

Achish naively wanted to take David along, who avowed his complete loyalty to his overlord (28:1-2).

The historical note about Samuel's death and Saul's removal of the mediums from the land is necessary to the story about to follow (28:3).

The ranks of the armies gathered and got set in the Valley of Jezreel. The Philistines camped at Shunem, and Saul was on



Mount Gilboa (a fairly large mountain near Beth Shan [cf. 29:1]) (28:4).

The complete desertion of Saul by Yahweh is clearly set forth by the fact that He would not answer Saul when he consulted him in desperation. Saul then resorted to a medium as a last-ditch attempt to get some kind of guidance (28:5-7).

b. Saul and the witch of Endor (28:8-25).

Saul overcame the fears of the necromancer and asked her to contact someone for him. She then called up someone who turned out to be Samuel. Samuel told Saul the same thing he had told him before: Yahweh had rejected him and tomorrow he and his sons would be dead. This was Saul's final rejection.<sup>387</sup>

c. The Final Battle (29:1—31:13).

(1) The Ziklag interlude (29:1—30:31).

The Philistine overlords adamantly refused to let David join in this important battle. David was thereby spared from an impossible situation that would surely have resulted in dire harm to him and his men. David and his men returned to Ziklag as the battle was joined (29:1-11).

When David and his men got home, they discovered that their hometown had been attacked by the Amalekites, the city burned, the property all looted, and their wives and children taken captive. This created so much consternation that David's men almost

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<sup>387</sup>The practice of consulting with the dead is a longstanding one in the middle east. It is condemned in the Scripture, but obviously continued to be popular in spite of its ban. The "witch" would be called a "medium" today. Literally she is referred to as a "woman possessing a (necromancing) spirit" (אִשָּׁה בַּעֲלֵת אוֹב) *eshet ba'alt 'ob*). The word 'ob may refer to the chirping sounds made in the efforts to consult the dead. Presumably, then as now, most of this activity was charlatanism, although Satanic activity is always a possibility. It seems that this woman was surprised to see Samuel coming up as a "god" or a supernatural creature. I suspect she was surprised because it did not normally happen. In this case God brought Samuel back in spirit form to give the final message to Saul.

turned on him. (They may already have been unhappy at the prospects of joining the Philistines in war against Israel and may have argued that David should have stayed home) (30:1-6).

David strengthened himself in the Lord and consulted the Lord for guidance through Abiathar the priest. Yahweh told him to pursue the Amalekites for he would overtake them and deliver the captives. So, David and his men took off after the Amalekites (30:7-10).

An Egyptian slave, deserted by his master when he became sick, gave David all the intelligence he needed about the Amalekites (30:11-15).

The Amalekites, thinking that David was preoccupied in the war, were enjoying the fruits of plunder when David overtook them and utterly defeated them. The spoils were divided, and David insisted that even those who had dropped out in weariness should share equally. This became a dictum in the future practices (30:16-25).

David wisely sent gifts to the people of Judah, thus helping to cement his relationship with them (30:26-31).

(2) Saul and Israel are defeated (31:1-13).

The scene is a sad one. Saul's armies, fighting on the slopes of Mt. Gilboa, are being pursued and slaughtered. The inexorable "fate" of Saul caught up with him, and wounded, he pled with his armor bearer to kill him. The latter refused, and Saul fell on his own sword ending his tragic life. Saul's three sons were also killed (31:1-6).

The Philistines were completely triumphant. The once powerful lords of the Israelites were again dominant. They found Saul, removed his head to show in the cities of the Philistines and hung his and his sons' bodies on the wall at Beth Shan (31:7-10).

The Jabesh-gileadites, first to enjoy the benefits of Saul's leadership (chapter 11) and perhaps his relatives, braved the Philis-

stine defense to remove the bodies of the Saulides and gave them a decent burial (31:11-13).



## SECOND SAMUEL<sup>388</sup>

D. The apex of David’s reign (1:1—8:18). See charts on p. 158.

1. Transition—God prepares David for rule over all Israel (1:1—4:12)

a. Report of Saul’s death (1:1-16).

It is ironic that an Amalekite killed Saul. It was his failure to eradicate the Amalekites that caused his downfall. There were surely many bands of these semi-nomadic Amalekites, however, and this young man may have come from a different one than that in chapter 15. Another band was involved in the attack on Ziklag.

1 Sam 31:5-6 says Saul committed suicide, but 2 Sam 1:10 says an Amalekite killed him. There are two possible explanations:

- (1) Saul fell on his sword; his armor bearer thought he was dead and killed himself. However, Saul did not die and asked the Amalekite to finish him off (“my life is *still* in me” *ki kol ‘od naphshi bi* כִּי כֹל עוֹד נַפְשִׁי בִּי).
- (2) The Amalekite stripped the dead Saul and made up the story of killing him, hoping for reward.<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>388</sup>For the theological background of Samuel and Kings, see Heater, “*A Theology of Samuel and Kings*.”

<sup>389</sup>McCarter agrees with this explanation, *II Samuel*, p. 59.

Whatever the situation, the young Amalekite, thinking he would be greatly rewarded saw his plan backfire, and David killed him for daring to “destroy the Lord’s anointed” (1:11-16).

b. David’s lament psalm over Saul and Jonathan (1:17-27).

David wrote a lament and ordered that it be taught to the sons of Judah as the “song of the bow” (1:17-18). The word “lament” is the Hebrew *qinah* (קִינָה) which is probably onomatopoeia (word comes from the sound). The keening sound of mourning is its root. The “song of the bow” probably means that it is to be understood as a war song. This would account for its having been written in the book of Jashar, a non-extant book that seems to have had military accounts in it.

David expresses his great love for Jonathan in this psalm. One wonders whether David understood a woman’s love when he makes this statement about Jonathan (1:26-27).

c. David is made king over Judah (2:1-4a).

David begins carefully to make his move toward being king over all Israel. Every action becomes critical. David’s attitude is good and proper, but he is also fully aware of the political implications of all he does. Yahweh led him to Hebron where he was anointed king by the tribe of Judah. All the rest of Israel was under the titular king Ishbosheth.<sup>390</sup>

d. David expresses thanks to the Jabesh-gileadites (2:4b-7).

David showed genuine compassion for Saul, but he also showed political astuteness in rewarding the Jabesh-gileadites since Ishbosheth ruled Gilead.

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<sup>390</sup>In the “individual combat” (2:15), Benjamin is the chief tribe of the rest of Israel.

- e. Abner tries to continue the Saulide dynasty contrary to God's purpose (2:8-11).

Abner, Saul's general, made Ishbosheth king and took him to the east side of Jordan from where he ruled. Ishbosheth was 40 when he became king. Abner of course ruled in fact, and Ish-bosheth was the figurehead.<sup>391</sup>

David ruled seven- and one-half years in Hebron. David's total rule was forty years. Ishbosheth ruled only two years. These two years may be the last two of David's seven, and it took five years for Abner to regain territory from the Philistines (2:11).<sup>392</sup>

- f. Abner fights against Joab, David's general (2:12-32).

David's overture to the Jabesh-gileadites who are in Ishbosheth's and Abner's backyard probably precipitated this military confrontation between the two groups.<sup>393</sup> The individual contest is probably to be understood in a similar fashion to David and Goliath's battle. The winner takes all.<sup>394</sup> The principals of the combat are Abner (Saul's relative and de facto head of the kingdom of the north) and Joab, Abishai, and Asahel: three sons of Zeruiah, sister of David (1 Chron 2:16). These men were rash, ruthless and

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<sup>391</sup>Ishbosheth is a change in name what was probably made in the Hebrew text by later scribes. The name Baal was once used of Yahweh since it means "lord" or "master." The confusion with the Canaanite deity, however, required that it be dropped. Consequently, names that once had as the divine element, Baal (e.g., Ish Baal: Man of Baal), were changed to "Man of the Shameful (bosheth) deity." The LXX still has Ish Baal (as does 1 Chron 8:33), so the text was probably changed by the *Sopherim*. (Sopherim were the pre-Masoretic scribes who worked with the text. For a good discussion see McCarter, *II Samuel*, pp. 85-86.)

<sup>392</sup>So Keil and Delitzsch, *The Books of Samuel*, p. 295.

<sup>393</sup>See Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests*, p. 181, who suggests that Saul's ancestors were the Jabesh-gileadites who were brought in to marry the few men left in Benjamin (Judges 21).

<sup>394</sup>See McCarter, *II Samuel*, *loc. cit.*, for a good discussion of the historical parallels.

somewhat precipitate in their actions. David, on more than one occasion, differentiates himself from them and seems unable to control them (2:12-13).

Twelve young men were chosen to represent each side. The results were inconclusive as they killed one another. Consequently, the war was prosecuted, and Abner was defeated. (There was bad blood between the Gibeonites (where the battle took place) and Saul as we will learn in chapter 21. They may have been favorably disposed to David's men.) (2:14-17).

The second part of the account that is significant for the future involves the death of the younger brother Asahel at the hands of Abner. This will show why Joab treacherously killed Abner when he came to make a covenant with David. Asahel pursued Abner relentlessly as was his nature. In spite of Abner's pleas, Asahel would not turn back, and Abner killed him. A truce was called, and each group went to its respective home (2:18-32).

2. Circumstances work together to bring David to the place where he is allowed by God to take over the whole kingdom (3:1—4:12.)

A historical interlude is given showing God's blessing on David. Apparently the war lasted most of the seven years David ruled in Hebron. However, God's divine purposes were being realized as David grew stronger, and the house of Saul grew weaker. David's family was also increasing: he now had six wives, each of whom had a child. Take note of Amnon, Absalom, and Adonijah, each of whom will figure prominently in the coming narrative (3:1-5).

A charge against Abner by Ishbosheth caused a rift between them. Abner was the de facto ruler, while Ishbosheth was the titular head. Ishbosheth accused Abner of going in to one of Saul's concubines (Rizpah whose love for her children is demonstrated in 21:8-11). To "go in to a concubine" is to assert dominance (cf., e.g., Gen 35:22; 1 Kings 2:21 and esp. 2 Sam 16:20-23). This would be a strange charge for Ishbosheth to make if it were not true. It may be that Abner was moving toward making himself king. Abner recognized that God



intended for David to have the whole kingdom and openly asserted his intention of turning the northern unit over to David (3:6-11).

Abner made an overture to David by asking for a covenant with him. David responded positively with only one condition: his wife Michal must be taken from her second husband and returned to David. This appears to be a violation of Deut 24:1-4 as well as a very cruel act (note the way Paltiel, her husband, follows her weeping). However, David did this for political as well as personal reasons. Apparently Michal, who had loved David in her younger days, never forgave him for this act (note her attitude in 6:20-23) (3:12-16).

Abner demonstrated considerable finesse in convincing the northern tribes as well as Saul's tribe of Benjamin of the wisdom of making David king. He consulted with the other segments of the kingdom and reminded them of their past love for David and erstwhile willingness to have him over them. He reminded them that God had chosen David to be the ruler of Israel and to deliver them from the Philistines (3:17-19).

Abner's attempts to make a covenant with David resulted in tragedy because of Joab's treachery. Abner came to Hebron and was welcomed by David. Joab was away at the time and became very unhappy when he heard about David's pact with Abner. Joab told David he was worried that Abner had merely come to spy out the situation, but he had two motives for murdering Abner: Abner would be his rival as general of the army, and Abner was the slayer of his brother. In typical Semitic fashion, Joab believed he had to avenge his brother's death in spite of the fact that Abner killed Asahel reluctantly, because Asahel would not fall back. Joab's deed is even more heinous when we remember that Hebron was a Refuge City, specifically designed to protect a man from the *goel* or avenger of blood (Josh 20:7). Joab sent messengers to bring Abner back and treacherously murdered him (3:20-30).

David publicly lamented Abner's death and convinced the people that he had nothing to do with the treachery. He led in Abner's funeral and keened a lament (*qinah* קִינָה) as he did for Saul and Jonathan. David fasted until sundown. This evidence of his concern pleased the people.

David admitted his impotency before the sons of Zeruah, a tragic admission, but one that proved true throughout David's reign. He left it to Solomon to bring judgment on the head of Joab, something he himself should have done earlier. Joab exercised enormous influence over David during the rest of his rule (3:31-39).

The death of Abner signaled the end of Ishbosheth's rule in Mahanaim. Two historical notes set the stage for following events: (a) two officers from among the Benjamites are mentioned who will assassinate Ishbosheth and (b) Mephibosheth is introduced as a son of Jonathan, who was crippled when his nurse dropped him. The two officers, Rechab and Baanah, murdered Ishbosheth and brought his head to David. (There seem to be two accounts of the murder of Ishbosheth: one says they went in and killed him in the house, and the other says they killed him in his bedroom. The second statement allows the writer to add the feature of the removal of the head, which would be brought to David. Cf. 3:22, 23; 5:1-3 for similar accounts.) David rebuked them for their dastardly deed and had them executed (4:1-12).<sup>395</sup>

3. David becomes king over all Israel and establishes his throne in the Jebusite city (5:1-16).
  - a. The elders of all Israel came to make David king and acknowledged that God had chosen him (5:1-3).

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<sup>395</sup>Even though David knew God had given him the kingdom, he refused to come to the throne by force. Thus, he refused to kill Saul on two different occasions. He was quite willing to work out a peaceful arrangement with Abner without bloodshed. The same attitude was displayed here in that he was not willing to kill Ishbosheth to gain his territory. This is a good example of trusting God for the details instead of trying to work them out by oneself. Everything David did worked to his political advantage, but it would be wrong to charge him with crass motives. He was putting into practice the many things he learned as a youth (wisdom) and then as a fugitive in trusting Yahweh to bring about His divine will. See also, Heater, "*Young David and the Practice of Wisdom*," pp. 50-61.

- b. David’s age when he became king over Judah was 30. He reigned in Hebron seven years and over all Israel 33 years. Hence, he was 70 when he died (5:4-5).
- c. David captured the fortress of Jebus and made it his capital (5:6-10).

The Jebusites taunted David, thinking the city was impregnable. David captured the city. The word “water tunnel” is *sinnor* (סִנּוֹר), an obscure word which some think may refer to the Jebusite water shaft reaching up to the city. Others think it refers to a grappling hook.<sup>396</sup> Jebus (Jerusalem) as David’s capital was to become perhaps the most famous city in the world.<sup>397</sup>

David set up his throne in the city and reinforced it. “Millo” apparently is from the Hebrew word *male* “to fill” (מָלָא) and probably refers to the building of double walls or as Avigad says: “apparently the built-up terraces on the eastern slope of the Eastern Hill, on which other structures were then built.”<sup>398</sup> (See also 1 Chron 11:8; 1 Kings 9:15, 24; 11:27; 2 Chron 32:5.)

David’s success as a king and a leader was because the Lord of Hosts was with him (5:10). Yahweh of Hosts *Yahweh ṣ̣’baoth* (יְהוָה צְבָאוֹת) is a powerful title for God. It indicates that he is in charge of heaven and earth. He was responsible for the fact that David was becoming ever more powerful.

- d. More evidence of David’s advancement is shown by the interest of international people and by the growth of his family (5:11-16).

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<sup>396</sup>See Unger, *Archaeology and the Old Testament*, p. 206.

<sup>397</sup>See the diagram of the city in Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem*, p. 25, and a beautiful reconstruction of the city and recent archaeology in H. Shanks, “The City of David after Five Years of Digging,” *BAR* 11 (1985) 22-38. See also the URL <http://archpark.org.il/intro.asp>.

<sup>398</sup>Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem*, p. 24.

Hiram the Tyrian king became a life-long friend of David. This friendship was extended to Solomon as well. Eleven more sons (as well as unnamed daughters) were born in Jerusalem. Only Solomon became prominent.

- e. David begins to act in the capacity of a military leader against the Philistines (5:17-25).

The Lord sent him against the Philistines at Rephaim, and David defeated them at Baal-perazim (5:17-21). The Philistines came against David again at Rephaim, and again the Lord led David to victory over them (5:22-25).

- 4. David brings the ark, the symbol of God's presence, to Jerusalem (6:1-23).

- a. The ark of the covenant was left in Kiriath-jearim after the Philistines returned it (1 Sam 7:1-2). Now David prepared to bring it to Jerusalem. The tabernacle was apparently rebuilt in Nob (1 Sam 21:1-6). In Solomon's day it was in Gibeon (1 Kings 3:3-5 with 2 Chron 1:3). At this time, the ark seemed to have a separate existence, and David brought it to Jerusalem where it was placed in a special tent, but not the tabernacle (cf. 1 Chron 16:38-39).

David assembled a picked group of 30,000 men and went to Baale-Judah to bring up the ark. God is referred to as "the Name" (*hashem* אֲשֶׁר), "the Lord of Hosts," and the one who "is enthroned above the cherubim." This latter refers to the fact that God dwelt over the outstretched wings of the cherubim, which were placed on the two ends of the ark of the covenant (6:1-2).

The ark was placed on a new cart (as the Philistines had done, 1 Sam 6:7). The ark was supervised by Uzzah and Ahio who were sons of Abinadab. This was the Abinadab into whose house the ark was brought and whose son had been consecrated to keep the ark after the Philistines brought it to Beth Shemesh (1 Sam 7:1-2). 1 Sam 7:2 says the ark was there for twenty years. Samuel and Saul occupied forty years and some ten years have elapsed of David's rule. There would have been a period of seventy years

during which the ark was at Kiriath-jearim. These men were either very old or they are grandsons of Abinadab (6:3-4).

- b. The first attempt to bring up the ark was a failure (6:5-11).

David and company were celebrating and worshipping before the Lord with all kinds of musical instruments when disaster struck. Uzzah reached out to steady the ark and was killed. God was making a point about his holiness as he did with the Beth Shemeshites. Uzzah acted in ignorant innocence, but he was violating the rules just the same. The text says that the “anger of the Lord burned against Uzzah, and God struck him.” There is no question of what happened. The only question is “why.” David became angry with the Lord and called the place “Perez-Uzzah” (“breaking forth against Uzzah”).<sup>399</sup> David feared the Lord and wondered whether it was possible to bring up the ark (6:5-9).

The ark was left at the house of Obed-Edom the Gittite for three months. Gittite could mean that he was from the Philistine city of Gath, but “gath” means a winepress and is used of a number of places. There was a Levitical city called Gath-rimmon (Pomegranate Press) in the tribe of Dan (Josh 21:24; 19:45). Obed-Edom is mentioned as a gatekeeper in 1 Chron 26:4, cf. Exod 6:21; 18:16) and from the family of Kohath and Merari. Why he was called a servant of Edom is not known. Critics want this to be a foreign deity, but there must be some other explanation.<sup>400</sup> God’s blessing was evident on the house of Obed-Edom (6:10-11).

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<sup>399</sup>In 5:20 David named the place of victory Baal Perazim because the Lord “broke through against his enemies.” Here it is Perez Uzzah because the Lord “broke through” against Uzzah.

<sup>400</sup>Cf. McCarter, *II Samuel*, loc. cit.

- c. The second attempt to bring up the ark was successful because David followed different procedures (6:12-19).

David decided that God's blessing on Obed-Edom signaled his intent to allow David to bring up the ark. The fact that they "carried" the ark (no mention of a cart) probably indicates that they were following God's original instructions to have priests carry the ark on their shoulders with staves (Exod 25:12-14). 1 Chron 15:1 may indicate that Levites were not involved in the first attempt. The hymn David sang on this occasion is recorded in 1 Chronicles 16. Compare it with Psalm 132, which is connected with the ark (Ephrathah would refer to a different place than around Bethlehem, and field of Jaar would be comparable to Kiriath-jearim) and with the Davidic covenant (6:12-15).

Michal indicated her hatred of David when she despised him as he was dancing before the ark. Some would argue that Michal was only concerned with proper decorum, but it seems more likely that she was reflecting her anger at David for what he did to her and perhaps some disdain for the whole ark proceeding. Her father had some contact with the ark (1 Sam 14:18), but he apparently made no attempt to bring it up (although an argument could be made that the Philistine proximity made that impossible until David had defeated them). His complete disdain for the priests at Nob and whatever he did to the Gibeonites at the same time do not show a great spiritual sensitivity. Perhaps Michal reflected her father's attitude. The ark was deposited, sacrifices were made, and David dismissed the people with gifts (6:16-19).

- d. David and Michal develop a permanent breach because she despises David (6:20-23).

She vented her anger by calling David "a fool who uncovers himself before the maids." David reminded her that God chose him over her father Saul (this must have been galling). David said that he was willing to go even further in abasing himself in order to glorify such a God. Michal was childless the rest of her life. It is probable that David had nothing more to do with her. This pericope is also to show that no descendants of Saul were to come

from David. Had Michal had children by David, there could have been some complication in the succession. The author is showing us that one by one Saul's house is being set aside: Saul, Jonathan, Abner, Ishbosheth, and now Michal. God has chosen David's dynasty, as will be seen in the next chapter.

5. God makes a covenant with David promising him a throne and a kingdom forever (7:1-29).
  - a. The Davidic covenant was a pivotal point in Israel's history. While a basic intent of this covenant is connected with Solomon and the building of the temple, its long-range perspective has to do with the eternity of David's throne, and ultimately is fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ (Luke 1:32-33). It is paralleled in Ps. 89 and 1 Chron 17.<sup>401</sup>
  - b. David plans to build a temple and seeks Nathan's approval (7:1-3).

The conversation recorded between David and Nathan is quite short. It is likely that extended discussions had taken place regarding the possibility of building a temple. David was concerned that he was living in a beautiful home while the ark was in a tent. By now David had established Jerusalem as the political and religious center (comparable to Shiloh). It was only fitting that a permanent temple be constructed. Nathan, as a court prophet, expressed his approval of David's plan.

- c. God tells Nathan that He does not approve of David's plan (7:4-7).

God asked whether David is the one to build the temple, thus implying his disfavor with the idea. He rehearsed his past dealings with Israel to show that he does not need a temple. This is an important theological statement about God. He is not confined to any one spot. The tabernacle and later the temple and the ark were simply means of communication with the people, but

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<sup>401</sup>See J. Walvoord, "The Kingdom Promises to David," *BibSac* 110 [1953]: 97-110.

God was not confined to any of those. It was difficult to dislodge the misconception from the minds of the people.

d. God makes His covenant with David (7:8-17).

God states his past faithfulness to David. It is almost a formulaic word that God gave to Saul (1 Sam 15:17) and now to David. Nathan will utter the words again in the condemnation of David's adultery and murder (2 Sam 12:7-8). Yahweh continually reminds these men that it is by his grace that they serve. God promised to appoint a place for Israel and give them peace such as they have never had before (7:8-11a).

God also promised David that he would give him a dynasty (so the meaning of "house"). David will die, but God will raise up a descendant (seed, *zera* זֶרַע). This descendant will build the temple, and his throne will be established in perpetuity. God will have a special relationship with him: Father to son. When he commits iniquity, God will discipline him; yet, God will never remove his covenant kindness (*hesed* חֶסֶד) from him. Again, God states that the shift of the kingdom from Saul to David was God's doing. Finally, God says that David's dynasty and throne will be established forever. (Cf. Psalm 89 for elaboration on this theme.) Summary statement: Nathan carried out his commission to relate this vision to David (7:11b-17).

e. David extols God for his great grace and mercy (7:18-29) (cf. Psalm 89).

David expressed his thanks for God's dealings with him in the past. ("And this is the custom of man," 7:19, refers to the fact that God was dealing with man [David] as God reveals in the law, viz., "love thy neighbor") (7:18-19).

David acknowledged God's sovereignty in choosing Israel and David. Furthermore, he stated that the choice of Israel was really for God's own glory: (1) it was according to God's word and his own heart, (2) there is no God like Jehovah, his choice of Israel



and the miraculous deliverance from Egypt was to exalt God and bring glory to him (7:20-24).

David humbly gave thanks for God's choice of Him and his dynasty to carry out God's purpose (7:25-29).

6. God's blessing on David is evidenced in David's victories over the surrounding people (8:1-18).
  - a. The Philistines were subdued. At long last the hated harassers of Israel are brought to their knees. The war, begun under Samuel and continued under Saul, was finished by David. "Chief city" *metheg ha'ammah miyad P<sup>e</sup>lištim* (מֶתֶגַּ הָאָמָה מִיַּד פְּלִשְׁתִּים) means the metropolis which ruled the area (1 Sam 29:2; cf. 27:1). Chronicles says "Gath and her towns" (1 Chron 18:1).
  - b. The Moabites were defeated, and half of the captured men are killed (8:2).
  - c. The Arameans of Zobah were defeated at the Euphrates River (8:3-4).
  - d. The Arameans of Damascus were defeated when they went to the assistance of those of Zobah (8:5-8).<sup>402</sup>

The result was that David garrisoned the Aramean cities with their capital at Damascus. A side note is that by limiting the advances of the Arameans, David was providing breathing space for the Assyrians in the east. With the Arameans out of the way, Assyria could grow apace.

- e. The Hittite city-state of Hamath was elated at David's victories since they removed a dreaded enemy from its southern flank (8:9-12).<sup>403</sup>

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<sup>402</sup>See Unger, *The Arameans of Damascus*.

<sup>403</sup>See Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, p. 125.

- f. The Edomites are the subject of 8:13-14.

This is indicated by the parallel account in Chronicles (1 Chron 18:12) where Abishai was the chief instigator, and by the morphology of the name: Edom and Aram look like this in Hebrew: אֲרָם אֲרָם

- g. A summary statement about God's blessing on David is given (8:15-18).

The kingdom David inherited was operated on a very simple scale. It was not highly nor well organized. David began the organization process, which was brought to a peak by Solomon. David may well have gone to Egypt for ideas on organization, and one name in the list here may even be Egyptian.<sup>404</sup>

All of 1 Samuel moves toward the events of 2 Samuel 1-8. Here in summary form are the main achievements of David: (1) He became king over all Israel, (2) He captured Jebus and made it his capital, (3) He brought up the ark, (4) He received the Davidic covenant, (5) He conquered all his enemies. The rest of 2 Samuel will answer the question. "Who will *succeed* me in my new dynasty?"<sup>405</sup>

E. The Struggle for Succession—Choice of Solomon (2 Sam 9:1—12:31).

1. David demonstrates grace by showing kindness to Jonathan's son (9:1-13).
  - a. David had promised Jonathan to look after his family (1 Sam 20:12-17).

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<sup>404</sup>See Wright, *Biblical Archaeology*, pp. 125, 126. On David's sons being priests, cf. 1 Kings 4:5 where the parallel (1 Chron 18:17 has "chief advisors)." C. Amerding ("Were David's Sons Really Priests?" in *Current Issues in Biblical and Patristic Interpretation*, pp. 75-86) argues that the sons really were priests. See also my discussion in "A Theology of Samuel and Kings," p. 120.

<sup>405</sup>See the charts on p. 158.

- b. David's act of kindness encouraged the rest of Israel (cf. also David's lament for Saul and Jonathan, taking back the king's daughter, reception of Abner and mourning for him, and killing of the men who murdered Ishbosheth).
- c. Jonathan had a son named Mephibosheth (9:1-8).

Mephibosheth's name is Meribbaal in 1 Chron 8:33. Meribbaal means "contending for the Lord" (cf. Jerubbaal/Gideon in Judges 6:31-32). As indicated earlier the name has been edited to drop out the name Baal because of its idolatrous connotations and to substitute "bosheth" "shameful" in its place. The meaning of Mephibosheth is "from the mouth of the god of shame."

David inquired about descendants of Saul. "Kindness" (*hesed* חֶסֶד) is an important Old Testament word. It pertains to "grace," "mercy," or "kindness." The "saint" of the Old Testament is a *hasid* (חַסִּיד), that is, one who is the recipient of God's kindness.<sup>406</sup>

A servant of Saul's house by the name of Ziba was brought to David. He was introduced and asked about Saul's family. Ziba told about Mephibosheth who was crippled in both feet (cf. 4:4). He was then living in the home of Machir in Lo-debar. Machir was a descendant of Manasseh (Gen 50:23), whose descendants conquered Gilead (Num 32:39, 40). This Machir showed friendship to Saul's house when the army came to Mahanaim, but David's magnanimous gesture to Mephibosheth probably won him over. In any event, he extended kindness to David in his distress (2 Sam 17:27). Lo-debar is in Gilead on the northeast side of the Jordan where the house of Saul had fled, and Abner had set up a rump government (9:2-4).

David summoned Mephibosheth and treated him generously. Mephibosheth probably expected bad treatment, but David restored to him Saul's lands and permitted him to eat daily at the

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<sup>406</sup>Cf. Ps. 16:10. Note that David shows this kindness to a descendant of Saul for "Jonathan's sake" as God has shown us kindness for "Jesus' sake" (Eph. 4:32) (9:1).

king's table. (Ancestral lands were supposed to be restored to the original owners under Mosaic law, but kings often appropriated the lands of people). Mephibosheth showed his gratitude (9:5-8).

David called Ziba and charged him with the care of Saul's properties. (Cf. chap. 16 for the tragic aftermath of this wonderful beginning) (9:9-13).

2. David demonstrates wisdom in showing grace and then justice to the Ammonites (10:1-19). (This victory is summarized in 8:12.)<sup>407</sup>
  - a. The death of Nahash became an occasion for a provocative act against David (*casus belli*) (10:1-5).

Nahash died. He was the enemy whom Saul defeated in 1 Samuel 11. Since that time, he had become a friend of David. David's act of kindness (*hesed* חֶסֶד) was misinterpreted, and David's ambassadors were abused (nakedness and shaving in this way were insulting to a Semite). David told the men to stay in Jericho until their hair had regrown. Nothing is said about David becoming angry—nothing needs to be said.

- b. David's army wins the battle decisively (10:6-19).

The Ammonites, expecting retaliation, called on Aramean allies for help. Beth-Rehob and Zoba furnished 20,000 men; Maacah, 1,000 and Tob, 12,000. David called up his army in response. The battle was set, and Joab's generalship won the day (10:6-14).

The Arameans decided to make a major effort to defeat David and so sent for help beyond the Euphrates. The king leading the coalition was Hadadezer (cf. 1 Kings 11:23). His name means "Hadad" (the storm god) is "help." He was the king of Zoba. David defeated them at Helem (an unknown place on the east side

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<sup>407</sup>Chapters 10 and 12:26-31 are a window frame around David's sin. The Ammonite war is summarized in chapter 8. Apparently, this unit gives details to set the stage for David's sin, which ultimately resulted in the birth of Solomon whom God chose as the next king. See the excursus, p. 240.

of the Jordan). The Arameans became tributaries to Judah, but in later years they became the nemesis of both Israel and Judah (10:15-19).

3. David demonstrates folly in his sin with Bathsheba (11:1—12:31).
  - a. Certain events set the stage for the ensuing tragedy (11:1).

It was the time of year conducive to battle, and General Joab and the army were besieging Rabbah (capital of the Ammonites who had been defeated in chap. 10). David stayed at home rather than going to the battle.<sup>408</sup>

- b. David falls into temptation and yields to it (11:2-5).

David was walking on the rooftop when he saw a beautiful woman bathing. Instead of resisting temptation, he sent messengers to find out who she was. The report came back that she was Bathsheba (daughter of an oath) daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah (Jehovah is light) the Hittite. The fact that Uriah was a Hittite indicates that he was a foreigner who had embraced the faith of David. Certainly now, David should have stopped. The woman was married and to one of his trusted loyal officers at that. Instead, he brought her to the palace and had sex with her. Bathsheba became pregnant, a rather embarrassing situation since her husband was away on a long campaign.

- c. David tries to cover his sin and fails (11:6-13).

David called for Uriah on the pretext of finding out how the siege was going. David sent Uriah to his house, hoping he would have sex with his wife and thus would be assumed to be the father of Bathsheba's child. (How did David think that no one of all those who knew about the incident would ever tell on him?) Uriah slept with the king's servants. David urged him to go home, but Uriah stated his tremendous loyalty to the army, ark, and general. David

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<sup>408</sup>In 21:15-17, his men encouraged him to stay out of battle.

then tried to get him so drunk that he would go home without realizing it, but Uriah refuses to go.

- d. David then decides to murder Uriah (11:14-25).

David sent the letter of execution by the hand of the man who trusted him so explicitly that he would never think of looking at the letter (apart from the divine implications of this passage, this ironic action is masterful storytelling). Joab carried out the orders by putting Uriah in the front ranks and withdrawing from him. Uriah and others were killed, and Joab sent a report on the war (which was not going too well at that point) with the ameliorating statement that Uriah was dead. David accepted the report and laconically ordered the messenger to tell Joab that things happen that way at times.

- e. David then takes over the estate he has robbed (11:26-27) (cf. Naboth's vineyard).

Bathsheba fulfilled her days of mourning, and David brought her to the palace. She bore a son, but the thing that David had done was displeasing to the Lord (Literaly, it was evil in his eyes).<sup>409</sup>

- f. God confronts David through Nathan the prophet (12:1-15a).

Nathan, to make his point, gave a heart-rending parable of a man with one little ewe. David became angry and averred that the man who stole the ewe lamb was worthy of death, and that the man must make four-fold restitution. (Because he did the deed and because he had no compassion.) Nathan then applied the parable to David: God had blessed David with everything he could possibly want. David had despised the word of the Lord by this

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<sup>409</sup>In the presentation of the history of Israel by the writer of 1 and 2 Samuel, there is the constant theme that those who obey the Lord will enjoy his blessing, and that those who disobey the Lord will be disciplined. It is being made clear that not even the messianic proto-type is able to sin with impunity. David's sin was especially egregious because of his unique position. The sin consisted of adultery and murder; both punishable by death according to the Mosaic law.

awful act, and as a consequence, Yahweh promised that the sword would never depart from David's house. David's own family would turn against him, and his wives would be given to another. God would humiliate David publicly because David had acted secretly.

- g. David accepts the rebuke and repents (12:13-15a).

David recognized that his sin was ultimately only against the Lord (cf. Psalm 51). God forgave David and spared him from death, but he punished him by taking away the life of the newly born boy. Because of David's position, his sin caused the enemies of Yahweh to blaspheme.

- h. David's son dies (12:15b-23).

The baby became sick; David inquired of God; prayed and fasted. The child died on the seventh day, and David recognized that there was nothing more to be done. He had hoped to avert the hand of God but was unable to do so. Before this was over, David lost (1) Bathsheba's first son, (2) Amnon, (3) Absalom, and (4) Adonijah—four sons. Is this four-fold restitution?

- i. David and Bathsheba have a second child (12:24-25).

David named him Solomon (שְׁלֹמֹה) something about peace). The Lord chose Solomon, and as a result he was also called Jedidiah.<sup>410</sup> The historian is saying that God is going to continue his work in the theocratic kingdom through Solomon. This is the centerpiece in the frame of the Ammonite war. David's successor will be Solomon.

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<sup>410</sup>The name means, "Yahweh loves." The word "love" seems to have the meaning of "choose" on occasion. When God says he loved Jacob and hated Esau, he is speaking of his choice, not of an emotional response. Jesus means the same thing when he says that children are to hate their parents. He is saying that they must choose God over their parents.

- j. The Ammonites are finally defeated (12:26-31).

The siege may have lasted two years. Joab had all but won, and he sent for David to finish the battle. The “city of waters” means that it was situated on the Jabbok River. David came, defeated the city, and made the Ammonites slaves.<sup>411</sup>

- F. The Struggle for Succession—Rejection of Other Sons (2 Sam 13:1—20:26). See chart on p. 158.

- 1. The second step in God’s judgment on David is in the sordid sin of Amnon (13:1-39).

- a. David had married a certain Maacah who was the daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur. This was apparently a small kingdom on the east side of the Jordan. David raided it according to 1 Sam 27:8. (Is this when he took Maacah?). He had two physically beautiful children from this union: Absalom and Tamar.

- b. Amnon, half-brother to Tamar, lusted for her to the point of total frustration (13:1-6).

He was afraid to force the issue, but he had a “slick” friend who was a first cousin by the name of Jonadab. Jonadab advised Amnon to trick his sister by playing sick and asking for Tamar. This entire incident speaks volumes about the type of life the palace “kids” lived.

- c. When Tamar comes, in spite of her protestations, Amnon forces her and rapes her (13:7-14).

- d. Amnon, having sated his lust, hates her, and sends her away (13:15-19).

He hated her as much as he had previously thought he loved her. (Hebrew uses the word love [*’ah<sup>a</sup>vah* אָהַבָה] in a general way).

“Love” is being used in this context to say that Amnon wanted

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<sup>411</sup>See McCarter, *II Samuel*, *loc. cit.*, who shows that this is not torture of the Ammonites, but enslavement for work.



her. We make a distinction (properly so) between lust and love. Lust gets, love gives. The New Testament distinguishes between these concepts in its language. The Old Testament distinguishes between them in its theology (13:15-17).

Convention and Old Testament law (Deut 22:28-29) required him to marry her, but he thrust her out with no consideration. She went out mourning the fact that she was raped without recourse (13:18-19).

- e. Absalom keeps his sister in his home and plots revenge (13:20-22).

David failed to discipline Amnon in this very serious sin and breach of ethics. Was he affected by his own sin with Bathsheba? It is truly impossible to lead and train others when your own life is not in order. LXX has an addition that gives another reason: “And he did not trouble his son Amnon’s spirit because he loved him, because he was his firstborn.” The Qumran fragment supports at least part of this reading. The addition may have come from the commentary in 1 Kings 1:5 on Adonijah’s conduct: “And his father had never crossed him at any time by asking, ‘Why have you done so?’”

- f. Absalom carries out revenge against Amnon (13:23-39).

Absalom prepared a feast and invited David and all his brothers to come. Absalom’s servants killed Amnon, and the royal sons fled. The report came to David that all the boys had been killed. Absalom fled and the sons came home to David. Absalom escaped to his grandfather’s home on the east side of the Jordan and spent three years there. David was unwilling to forgive Absalom and bring him back.<sup>412</sup>

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<sup>412</sup>I believe Fokkelman (*Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel* 1:126, 452-53) is correct in his analysis of this passage. He arrives at an opposite meaning for the context than is usually given. Two words need to be reinterpreted: “And the heart of King David longed to go out *to* Absalom.” (“Heart” must be supplied. It has dropped out of the text as indicated by the versions and Qumran.) The preposition “to” in Hebrew (לְ *’el*) and “upon” or “against” (עַל *’al*) are semantically similar and quite often cross over in

2. The Restoration of Absalom prepares the way for Absalom's rebellion against his father (14:1-33).

a. Joab's stratagem to bring Absalom back (14:1-24).

Joab wanted Absalom brought back, perhaps because he was next in line to succeed to the throne, but he was apparently unwilling to confront David directly since David was still opposed to the idea. As Fokkelman says, Absalom's rage had become so dangerous that Joab intercedes, not from compassion for Absalom, but for the sake of king and country (p. 145). He coached a woman to bring a complaint to the king about the threatened loss of her son (14:1-3). The woman presented her case and David promised to adjudicate it (14:4-11). The woman urged him further and told him that the same situation applied to David and Absalom (14:12-17). David asked whether this plan came from Joab, and she said, "yes" (14:18-20). David then told Joab to bring Absalom back (14:21-24). Yet, David refused to see Absalom.

b. Absalom is very popular in Israel (14:25-27).

Absalom was very handsome and perhaps vain. He had three sons and a daughter, Tamar, who was apparently named after his sister.

c. Absalom insists on seeing the king (14:28-33).

Joab did not seem to be interested in helping Absalom reconcile with his father (was he concerned that he may have done too much already?). Absalom had been back for two years for a total

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usage (this is particularly so in Jeremiah). Furthermore, two MSS have  $\text{בַּי} \text{ 'al}$ . Fokkelman would read (following a forthcoming article by Jongeling, "Joab and the Tekoite Woman"): "David really wanted to go out *against* Absalom." The word "comforted" in the niphal can have the meaning of "to be sorry" and therefore, we should read "because David was sorry for his son Amnon because he had died." This is supported further by the fact that David refused to see Absalom when he returned. Fokkelman argues that Joab would have gone directly to David had he been favorably disposed toward his son; that the *indirect* approach was only partially successful.

of five years since killing Amnon. Absalom burned Joab's field to get his attention, and Joab then brought him to David where there was at least a superficial reconciliation.

3. The third step in God's judgment on David is the rebellion of Absalom (15:1—18:33).

a. Absalom wins the people from David (15:1-6).

Absalom developed a retinue and intercepted those who were coming to David from the northern tribes to have their cases heard. He would then plant seeds of doubt in their minds about the fairness of David. The result was that he "stole away the hearts of the men of Israel" playing on the natural disaffection between Israel and Judah.

b. Absalom begins the rebellion (15:7-12).

He feigned a spiritual reason for his absence from court.<sup>413</sup> He sent spies throughout the land to prepare the people for the signal of rebellion. He sent for Ahithophel, David's counselor, who was apparently in on the conspiracy.

c. David is informed of the rebellion (15:13-18).

A messenger brought the bad news of the rebellion, and David fled with his servants. He left ten concubines to keep the house.

d. Ittai from Gath expresses his loyalty (15:19-23).

A number of Philistines had become loyal to David, probably during the time he was serving under Achish. Ittai is one of those very loyal followers. David admonished Ittai to go home. Ittai insisted on identifying with David.

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<sup>413</sup>Note that David did a similar thing with Saul for different reasons (1 Sam 20:6). Saul plotted the murder of David who fled, pretending to go to a feast. Absalom plotted the murder of David using the same ruse.

David and the people crossed the Kidron valley on the way to the wilderness. It must have been a sad sight (indeed the people were weeping) to see the mighty potentate shamefully making his way up the Mount of Olives toward the Jordan River (15:23).

- e. Zadok and Abiathar show their loyalty (15:24-29).

These two priests brought the ark of the covenant. David sent the ark back, trusting his future to the Lord. Zadok was to keep in touch with the situation in Jerusalem and send David word.

- f. Hushai shows his loyalty (15:30-37).

David and his entourage crossed the Mount of Olives, weeping as they went. David heard that Ahithophel was among the conspirators and prayed for God to frustrate Ahithophel's counsel. Hushai joined him, and David sent him back to Jerusalem to work with Zadok, Abiathar, Jonathan and Ahimaaz. Hushai and Absalom arrived at Jerusalem at the same time.

- g. Ziba, a Benjamite, acts treacherously against his master Mephibosheth (16:1-4).

Ziba, pretending loyalty, brought provisions to David. He claimed that Mephibosheth thought the kingdom would be restored to the house of Saul (a believable charge under the circumstances).

- h. Shimei, a Benjamite, shows contempt for David (16:5-14).

Shimei, from the house of Saul, cursed David as a bloody, evil man from whom the kingdom had been taken. Abishai, Joab's brother, wanted to kill Shimei, but David insisted on taking the cursing as punishment from God. David and his people arrived at their destination, weary and in need of refreshment.

- i. Absalom arrives at Jerusalem and meets Hushai (16:15-19).

Hushai hailed Absalom as king, and Absalom was understandably suspicious. Hushai, however, convinced him of his loyalty.

- j. Ahithophel shows his disloyalty to David by advising Absalom (16:20—17:4).

Ahithophel's first advice was for Absalom to defile the concubines of David. This would infuriate David, make the breach permanent, and would show dominance over the kingdom (16:20-22). This act was an unwitting fulfillment of God's word to David that God would have his wives defiled openly (12:11). Ahithophel's counsel was highly regarded in that day (16:23). Ahithophel's second piece of advice was for Absalom to allow him to take 12,000 men and defeat David while he was weary (17:1-4).

- k. Ahithophel's advice is rejected in favor of Hushai's (17:5-14).

Hushai pointed out the weakness of Ahithophel's advice (17:5-10). Hushai then advised that Absalom form a large force of men and overpower David over a period of time (17:11-14). Hushai was thus buying time for David.

- l. Hushai then sends word of all that had transpired by Jonathan and Ahimaaz who narrowly escape. En Rogel is near Jerusalem (17:15-20).
- m. Hushai's advice allows David to escape across the Jordan (17:21-23).

The lads were able to get the information to David. David and his people got across the Jordan. Ahithophel committed suicide because his counsel was rejected. Thus, David's prayer was answered.

- n. David comes to Mahanaim in Gilead (17:24-26).

Mahanaim was where Abner had set up the kingdom with Ishbosheth. It was a fertile area and defensible. Absalom put Amasa, cousin of Joab, over his army and brought his troops to Gilead also (cf. 19:13 where David replaces Joab with Amasa to punish Joab and to win Absalom's followers over).

- o. Others show loyalty to David in Gilead (17:27-29).

Shobi, son of Nahash was from Rabbah of Ammon. Is this a son or a grandson of Nahash, king of Ammon? Since Nahash is used of at least three people in the Bible, it may be a common enough name, and this person may be no relation to the king of Ammon. Machir, who had hosted Mephibosheth, came out to meet David. Barzillai from Gilead also welcomed David.

- p. Absalom is defeated in the civil war (18:1-33).

David mustered the troops and organized them into three major battalions. He placed the battalions under Joab, Abishai, and Ittai. David stayed in the city of Mahanaim at the request of the people because he was more valuable than anyone else. David charged the commanders publicly to deal gently with his son Absalom (18:1-5).

The battle was joined in the forest of Ephraim. Since Absalom had moved his troops to Gilead, and David was already in Gilead, it is difficult to place this battle site. Some would argue for a place on the east side of the Jordan with this name (Forest of Ephraim), but that would be strange. David's troops may have been drawn up in Gilead, and Absalom withdrew to the west side of the Jordan in Ephraim. Others argue that some Ephraimites must have settled on the East side of the Jordan. The trees were so thick that many people were killed as they ran or rode rapidly through the forest. 20,000 men were slaughtered (18:6-8).

Absalom was caught in a tree and killed. The danger of riding through the forest is shown by what happened to Absalom. A soldier saw him and told Joab who chided him for not killing him. The man replied that he would not have killed him for a thousand shekels, since King David had admonished them not to hurt Absalom. Joab then thrust three darts or spears into Absalom's heart, and his armor bearers finished him off. (KJV: darts; NASB: spears; Heb.: *š<sup>e</sup>vatim* שְׁבִטִים staves or shafts. It is probably a smaller weapon like a dart) (18:9-15).

Joab blew the shophar and terminated the war. Absalom's body was thrown into a pit. Absalom had set up a pillar in his own name, so this is irony: as Absalom had boasted in his life with a monument, so now a monument will celebrate his death. There is a large conical pillar in the Kidron called Absalom's pillar, but it is closer to New Testament times in its origin (18:16-18).

The news was brought to David who was devastated by it. Ahimaaz wanted to go, but Joab would not let him (perhaps Joab felt that the bad news of Absalom's death should be brought by someone else. Later David assumed that Ahimaaz would only bring good news). The Cushite (Ethiopian?) was sent with the news, and Ahimaaz was allowed to follow. David sat anxiously in the gate and was told of the runners' coming. Ahimaaz outran the Cushite but was only willing or able to tell David that Joab's troops had won the battle. The Cushite then told David that Absalom was dead. David began to mourn Absalom, but his response was more maudlin than compassionate, affected as much by guilt as anything else. Absalom deserved to die for what he had done, and yet David would probably have spared him (18:19-33).

4. The fourth step in God's judgment—restoration but more rebellion against David (19:1—20:22).
  - a. David's maudlin reaction to Absalom's death almost ruined his victory (19:1-8a).

David's deep grief caused the people to sneak off in confusion. They thought they had done a good thing, but David's response said the opposite. Joab rebuked David, and though David deeply resented it, he assumed his responsibility and the people were encouraged.

- b. The tribes of Israel are confused now that Absalom is dead but decide to bring David back (19:8b-10).

That centrifugal force we spoke about earlier is at work again. David's action was not sharp and decisive as it had once been. A vacuum was created that would be hard to deal with.

- c. To avoid undue influence from the northern tribes, David urges Judah to become involved in bringing him back (19:11-15).

David again used Zadok and Abiathar as mediators to convince Judah to receive him. David's anger against Joab for killing Absalom, rebuking David, and all his previous acts brought David to the point of confronting this powerful man and setting him aside. Consequently, he appointed Amasa as general of the army. Judah went out to welcome David.

- d. David's restoration has an impact on several people (19:16-43).

Gilgal belonged to the tribe of Benjamin, and Shimei and Ziba had a vested interest in welcoming David back! Ziba acted as a sycophant in bringing supplies. Shimei, with a "peasant's cunning" (Hertzberg), begged forgiveness with the same openness he had once cursed David. He counted on the fact that "being the first of the house of Joseph" to welcome David home would make it difficult for David to kill him. It probably helped his case to have Abishai want to kill him, since the Zeruahites are out of favor with David at the moment (19:16-23).

Mephibosheth found himself in a virtually defenseless position. As Saul's grandson he stood to gain by David's fall; at least psychologically. Furthermore, his own servant had convinced David of Mephibosheth's complicity. Consequently, the best he could do was throw himself on David's mercy. David's response was somewhat petulant: he divided the land between Mephibosheth and Ziba (19:24-30).

Barzillai was a genuine friend to David. David invited him to live with him in Jerusalem, but Barzillai eloquently begged off the invitation and sent his son [?] Chimham (note Jeremiah 41:17 which seems to indicate a fiefdom in perpetuity). This is a particularly delightful scene and shows that in the midst of the flattery and perfidy, that there were honest men with no self-interest in David (19:31-39).

An Israelite/Judahite struggle broke out because Israel was jealous that Judah had brought David back without consulting



with them. Judah argued that David was their relative, to which the Israelites responded that they were larger and therefore deserved greater consideration. This hostility planted the seed for further rebellion (19:40-43).

- e. The northern tribes follow Sheba ben Bichri, a Benjamite (20:1-22).

Sheba was a worthless fellow (*ish b<sup>e</sup>liyyal* אִישׁ בְּלִיַּעַל), but all Israel followed him. David isolated the concubines whom Absalom had violated and ordered Amasa to muster all the troops to go after Sheba. When Amasa delayed, David sent Abishai to take his place. Joab went along with all his men, obviously determined not to relinquish control of the army. Joab deceived Amasa (as he had Abner) and killed him. The men were called upon to declare for David and for *Joab*. Abel Beth-Maacah (a northern city in Dan) was placed under siege because Sheba was there. Under the threat of destruction, a wise woman contacted Joab and advised the city to throw out the head of Sheba.<sup>414</sup> The rebellion was over.

- 5. The historian lists the officials of David’s court (20:23-25).

<i>Chapter 20</i>	<i>Office</i>	<i>Chapter 8</i>
Joab	Military Commander	Joab
Benaiah	Bodyguard	Benaiah
Adoram	Supervisor forced labor	None
Jehoshaphat	Recorder	Jehoshaphat
Sheva	Scribe	Seraiah
Zadok/Abiathar	Priests	Zadok/Abiathar
Ira	Cohen/Cohens	David’s sons

Of this list Hertzberg says, “The second list is thus a second edition of the first. It forms an appropriate conclusion to the section 9-20, just as the other list closes the previous section, and like it, shows that the

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<sup>414</sup>See an excellent discussion of the wise woman in the archaeological context of Abel-Beth Maacah by Nava Panitz-Cohen and Naama Yahalom-Mack, “The Wise Woman of Beth Maacah,” *BAR* 45:July-September, 2019, pp. 26-33.

kingdom of David is now set in order after the tumult surrounding the succession.”<sup>415</sup>

G. A concluding section on David’s reign (2 Sam 21:1—24:25).

Chronicles has a long section devoted to David’s last days in which he prepares young Solomon for the rule and the building of the temple. That is omitted in Samuel; instead, we have two judgmental pestilences and their expiation (Gibeonites and census). The former must have taken place earlier in David’s reign and the latter toward the end. Secondly, there is a long psalm commemorating God’s deliverance of David from his enemies, then David’s last words. Finally, there is a series of vignettes from the Philistine wars celebrating David’s heroes.

1. David slays seven of Saul’s sons as punishment for Saul’s sin in breaking the Gibeonite covenant (21:1-14).
  - a. Sometime in David’s reign (perhaps early), there was a three-year famine (21:1-2).

David prayed to the Lord for a reason for the drought. God told him it was because Saul had broken the Gibeonite covenant made with these non-Israelites by Joshua (Joshua 9). Saul had apparently attempted to wipe out the Gibeonites in his zeal. Josh 9:27 indicates that the Gibeonites had been made servants of the sanctuary “in the place that He would choose.” 2 Chron 1:3 indicates that the tabernacle was pitched at Gibeon. Is it possible that the Gibeonites were affected by the slaughter of the priests at Nob (1 Samuel 21); that it had some impact on them so that they were removed from the tabernacle service? When David asked, “How can I make atonement that you may bless the inheritance of the Lord,” he may have been intimating a restoration of the Gibeonites to service.<sup>416</sup>

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<sup>415</sup>Hertzberg, *First and Second Samuel*, p. 375.

<sup>416</sup>See *Ibid.*, pp. 382-83.

- b. David allows the Gibeonites to set the punishment (21:3-6).

David wanted to make an atonement (<sup>a</sup>*kapper* אָכַפֵּר), but the Gibeonites were not interested in money or that anyone but Saul's family in Israel should suffer. They did want vengeance on Saul's house. The vengeance would be against seven of Saul's descendants. David acceded to their request. Throughout, we are reminded that Saul was God's chosen one, yet he had rebelled against the Lord, and as a result even his sons were punished.<sup>417</sup>

- c. The deed is carried out; the Saulides are killed (21:7-9).

David spared Mephibosheth because of his oath to Jonathan. Rizpah, Saul's concubine, lost two sons, and Merab, Saul's daughter, lost five sons. The hanging took place in the beginning of the barley harvest (they were killed and their bodies hung up).

- d. Rizpah mourns her sons and keeps the birds away from their corpses for a long time (21:10-14a).

Rizpah protected their bodies until the rains came. Their corpses were hung in mid-April. The early rains come in November, but God ended the famine (probably by rain) so her vigil ceased earlier than November. Her task was nevertheless a long one. David, moved by what she did, collected the bones of Saul and Jonathan from Jabesh-gilead and the bones of Saul's sons and grandsons and brought them to Zela in the tribe of Benjamin for burial.

- e. God was appeased, and the famine ceased (21:14b).

2. There is a list of various battles against the Philistines and the rest of Goliath's family is killed (21:15-22).

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<sup>417</sup>If this event took place prior to David's elevation of Mephibosheth in chapter 9, we must assume that David had said something like: "Make sure you leave any of Jonathan's sons alone."

- a. David's last major battle was against the Philistines (21:15-17).

David became weary in the battle, and Ishbi-Benob (a brother of Goliath?) tried to kill him. Abishai saved the day, but David was asked by his men not to return to the battlefield. David was called "the lamp of God."

- b. Three more giants were killed by David's men (21:18-22).

Saph, a descendant of the giant, was killed by Sibbecai, the Hushathite. Lachmi, brother to Goliath was killed by Elhanan (with 1 Chron 20:5). This is a textual problem:

1 Chron 20:5: "and Elhanan the son of Jair killed Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear *was* like a weaver's beam."

2 Sam 21:19: "and Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim the Bethlehemite killed Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam."

Hertzberg argues that there are two contradictory traditions about who killed Goliath. He says that the "compiler of Samuel did not feel inconvenienced at its presence and certainly did not include the note to correct the David story!" He argues that the Chronicles text is a clumsy attempt to reconcile the passages.<sup>418</sup> It would seem quite strange to me that the "compiler" would leave such a contradiction; therefore, I would accept the Chronicles passage not as an attempt to harmonize, but as the correct text.

The multi-digit giant was killed by Jonathan, son of Shimei, David's brother (otherwise unknown).

Thus, five giants in all were killed including Goliath. These victories over the "giant family" are placed here (though they took place earlier in David's reign) to show that David triumphed over all his enemies as he sang in chap. 22. Hertzberg: "Gutbrod's

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<sup>418</sup>Hertzberg, *1 and 2 Samuel*, p 387.

hypothesis (II, p. 247) that the four warriors here in the service of the Philistines appear ‘as it were as the last of the strange and uncanny race of giants’ is attractive; it would in that case have been seen as ‘a sign of the stature and achievement of David that under his leadership it was possible to overcome the last of the race of giants which reached right back into the days of pre-history.’ This makes the preparation of this list of David’s victories comprehensible.<sup>419</sup>

3. David’s history is presented as a Psalm of praise and thanksgiving to God (22:1-51).
  - a. This psalm is parallel to Psalm 18. There are very few differences. The psalm was placed here, and the same psalm was edited (by David?) for the Psalter. (This is an example of the way a piece of literature can be edited twice or it can be prepared for one part of Scripture and reedited for another part. These should not be looked upon as recensions within the canon, but revisions of material in the earlier books to be placed in later books.) Both, of course, were done under inspiration. As Hertzberg says, other psalms of David could have been chosen to be here, but this one shows David’s military victories.<sup>420</sup> It also shows God’s grace throughout David’s life.
  - b. David speaks of his personal devotion to the Lord, and his prayer for deliverance in time of trouble (22:1-7).
  - c. David uses poetic language to describe God’s deliverance (22:8-20).
  - d. David speaks of his own life of obedience and God’s response to that life of obedience (22:21-30). Note the same theology in Hannah’s psalm.

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<sup>419</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 388.

<sup>420</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 393.

- e. David extols God's greatness and His grace (22:31-43).
  - f. David recounts the way the Lord made him king (22:44-49).
  - g. David concludes the Psalm with a statement on why he sings praise—God shows loving kindness (*hesed*) to David and his descendants forever (Davidic Covenant) (22:50-51).
4. A Summary of the theology of the books of Samuel is given in David's last words (23:1-7).
- a. David speaks of his position before God (23:1).  

He was the son of a humble man, Jesse; yet he was a man raised on high. He was anointed by the God of Jacob, and the sweet singer of Israel.
  - b. David speaks of his prophetic office (one who speaks for God) (23:2).
  - c. David speaks of God's greatness (23:3-4).
  - d. David reviews the Davidic covenant (23:5).
5. A list of David's famous soldiers is given to conclude the military summary (23:8-39)

#### JOAB—ARMY COMMANDER

Shammah    Josheb Bashebeth    Eleazar

Abishai (Chief of 30)    Benaiah (chief of Guard)

- |             |               |
|-------------|---------------|
| 1. Asahel   | 16. Eliahba   |
| 2. Elhanan  | 17. Jonathan  |
| 3. Shammah  | 18. Shammah   |
| 4. Elikah   | 19. Abiam     |
| 5. Helez    | 20. Eliphelet |
| 6. Ira      | 21. Eliam     |
| 7. Mebunnai | 22. Hezro     |

- |               |             |
|---------------|-------------|
| 8. Zalmon     | 23. Paarai  |
| 9. Maharai    | 24. Igal    |
| 10. Heleb     | 25. Bani    |
| 11. Ittai     | 26. Zelek   |
| 12. Benaiah   | 27. Naharai |
| 13. Hiddai    | 28. Ira     |
| 14. Abi-albon | 29. Gareb   |
| 15. Asmaveth  | 30. Uriah   |

6. David's sin in taking a census becomes the basis for the choice of the temple site (24:1-25).

- a. For some reason, God was angry at Israel and moved David to number them. (1 Chron 21:1 attributes the action to Satan, who, of course, was God's intermediary) (24:1).
- b. David called Joab to number the people in spite of Joab's remonstrance. The number was 800,000 and 500,000 for Israel and Judah respectively or 1,300,000 total fighting men (24:2-9).
- c. David's heart was stricken by God, and he confessed his sin (24:10-11).
- d. God sent Gad, the court prophet, to confront David (24:12-14).

David was given three choices of punishment: (a) Seven years of famine, (b) flee three months (c) three days of plague. David cast himself on God's mercy (24:14).

- e. God sent a plague in Israel that killed 70,000 Israelites (24:15-17).

People died from Dan to Beersheba. The angel was about to smite Jerusalem when God stopped him. David confessed his sin.

- f. God tells David to build an altar on the site (24:18-25).

(1 Chron 22:1 says that David then and there chose that site for the temple.)

### Excursus on the purpose of Second Samuel

The author of this book is setting out the purpose and grace of God in selecting David to be the king through whom He would bring a perpetual dynasty. As such, a good part of the book deals with who will succeed David to the throne. Much of it is devoted to who is not worthy and why. The inference may be, as Hertzberg notes,<sup>421</sup> that David originally thought to perpetuate his line through Saul's family. This would explain his insistence on bringing Michal back. However, she was childless, perhaps so indicating as with Abraham, that the seed would come through his choice not David's.

The thread of Saul's rejection is woven throughout the book. His death and that of his three sons; Michal's childlessness; the Gibeonite affair resulting in the death of seven descendants; Sheba, Ziba, and Mephibosheth all bear on this topic and show that not only Saul, but his line was rejected.

The emphasis is then placed on David's sons. Chapter 9 through the end of the book turns on this issue of succession. The reason for placing the Ammonite war in chapter 10 is to show how David's heinous sins resulted in the birth of Solomon. This boy was called Jedidiah (whom Yahweh loves) by the Lord Himself to show that He was electing Solomon as the next king. Chronicles develops this idea much further.

Amnon was the eldest son and in line for the throne, but his character was so awful, that obviously he could not be king. On the other hand, Absalom, who looked and acted the part of a prince could never be king because he could not wait on the Lord. The third in line was Adonijah who was pronounced a "spoiled brat" in 1 Kings. He likewise was not God's choice. Solomon was the son of David who would build David's house and God's House.

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<sup>421</sup>Hertzberg, *First and Second Samuel*, pp. 375-79.



## FIRST KINGS<sup>422</sup>

H. *Solomon's Reign* (1:1—11:43).

A. The Davidic covenant is implemented in the transition from David to Solomon (1:1-2:12).

1. David is about to die (1:1-4).

David's age would have been about 70 (2 Sam 5:4). He was sick and unable to keep warm. Abishag the Shunammite girl was brought in to stimulate him. I know of no other way to explain this than that in the folk medicine of the day, it was thought that sexual arousal might stimulate David's circulation and so warm him. That this is immoral from the New Testament perspective is clear enough, but it was considered an acceptable practice in Old Testament times.<sup>423</sup> It is also necessary to the narrative to introduce Abishag because of the way she figures in the later succession struggle.<sup>424</sup>

2. The struggle for succession continues (Nathan's prophecy [2 Sam 12:10] about internecine strife comes into play again) (1:5-53).

a. Adonijah was the fourth son of David and, therefore, considered himself to be next in line for the throne.<sup>425</sup>

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<sup>422</sup>See my *God Rules among Men* for an integrated harmony of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles.

<sup>423</sup>But see Bähr in *Lange's Commentary*. He argues that it is strictly medicinal and quotes Galen.

<sup>424</sup>The evident co-regency of David and Solomon in Chronicles indicates that David must have improved.

<sup>425</sup>See 2 Sam 3:2-5; Chiliab (called Daniel in 1 Chron 3:1) does not figure at all in the

- b. Adonijah set out to become king by preparing himself as Absalom had. However, he was undisciplined as a youth, and the writer is telling us that he was unfit to be king. He allied himself with Joab and Abiathar, and excluded Zadok (priest), Benaiah (Head of Bodyguard), Nathan (prophet), and other military officers (1:8-10).
- c. Nathan worked out a plan to get God's choice, Solomon, on the throne. Bathsheba, David's favorite wife, was to remind David of his oath about Solomon. She was also to inform David of Adonijah's plans. Bathsheba carried out the plan and challenged David to rise to the occasion. Nathan came after her to confirm her words (1:11-27).
- d. David responded to the information and took action to enthrone Solomon. He called Bathsheba and reaffirmed his promise to her. He called Zadok, Nathan and Benaiah and charged them to anoint Solomon at Gihon and seat him on David's throne (1:28-37).
- e. Solomon was anointed and declared king. He rode David's mule to Gihon where Zadok anointed him, the shophar was blown, and the people received him with rejoicing. A full account of the events was given to Adonijah by Jonathan who fled to the altar for refuge because he feared Solomon. He clung to the altar awaiting assurance from Solomon. Solomon placed him on parole (1:38-53).<sup>426</sup>

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history: did he die?

<sup>426</sup>The succession narrative comprising most of Second Samuel is continued into Kings. One more son of David must be declared ineligible so that God's choice, Solomon, might rule in peace and with success. Saul's descendants have been dispatched, Amnon and Absalom are dead; Adonijah is put out of commission, but as long as he lived, he was a threat. Consequently, he will be killed in the succeeding chapters along with Joab the most potent anti-Solomon personage of all. Abiathar (descendant of Eli) will be "put out to pasture" to render him ineffective.

3. David gives a final charge to Solomon and leaves orders to remove all other obstacles to Solomon's rule (2:1-9).

a. David charged Solomon to obey God (2:1-4).

David stressed the place of the Mosaic law to Solomon in his role as king of Israel. The formula for success is obedience to that law. David reminded Solomon of the importance of the Davidic covenant as it related to the Mosaic law. Obedience to the law brings the blessings of the Davidic covenant.

b. David charges Solomon to deal with certain people (2:5-9).

David solemnly commanded Solomon to see to it that Joab was executed. David's relation with Joab is somewhat enigmatic. Joab was David's nephew but shared few of David's ideals. He was a strong, efficient military leader, but he also seemed to be without scruples. Thus, he killed Abner by treachery as he later killed Amasa because they both threatened his position as commander of the armies. He had no compunction about dispatching Absalom in spite of David's orders to the contrary. David seemed to be somewhat in awe of Joab and his brothers (2 Sam 3:39). He complained that they were too hard for him. From the Absalom incident on, David wanted to get rid of Joab, but was apparently unable to do so. On his deathbed he charged Solomon to make sure that Joab was judged for his bloody life (2:5-6).

Barzillai, David's wonderful and loyal friend, was to be honored. His descendants were to be allowed to eat at the king's table (2:7).<sup>427</sup>

Shimei, who cursed David, was shrewd enough to meet David and to claim to be the first of the Northerners to welcome him back. He candidly admitted his guilt and begged David's forgiveness. Under those circumstances, David could hardly do

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<sup>427</sup>Cf. Jer 41:17 where Chimcham (Barzillai's son?) seems to have a piece of property as a "fiefdom."

anything else. However, he did not forget Shimei's crime and left to Solomon the task of bringing Shimei's life to an end (2:8-9).

4. David dies, and Solomon secures the throne (2:10-12).

David's life is succinctly summarized, and it is stated that he was buried in the city of David. We now know that the city of David was the small promontory extending south of the present old city and *outside* the walls. The tomb of David shown to tourists is on the western hill, which was unoccupied in David's time. In the Medieval era that section became identified with Zion, and so David's tomb was "discovered." However, the tombs of the Judean kings have not yet been located.

Solomon took undisputed control of the kingdom. However, this is a summarizing statement. Before it became actually true, certain loose ends had to be tied up and additional enemies or potential enemies had to be removed.

B. Solomon carries out David's charges and removes opposition to the throne (2:13-46).

1. Adonijah makes a foolish request and loses his life (2:13-25).

a. Adonijah requested Abishag for a wife (2:13-18).

Adonijah's action is difficult to understand. A claim to a former king's concubine was obviously a claim to the throne.<sup>428</sup> Why he made the power play at this point is not clear, but it was certainly the wrong thing or the wrong time to do it.

b. Bathsheba passed on the request to Solomon who reacted predictably (2:19-25).

Bathsheba's role is also puzzling. She was surely sufficiently experienced in the "Harem battle" to understand the implications of Adonijah's request, and yet she supported him in it. Is it pos-

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<sup>428</sup>So, we must understand Abner and Rizpah and Absalom and David's concubines, cf. also Reuben and Jacob's concubine.

sible that she was aware of this so as to give Solomon an excuse to get rid of Adonijah? In any event, Solomon read an evil intent into the request and ordered Adonijah's death.

2. Abiathar is dismissed from the priesthood (2:26-27).

Abiathar had joined the wrong faction. It is understandable that he would support the next in line only if he were ignorant of God's promises through Nathan. Zadok stayed on the right side as did the court prophet Nathan. Solomon spared Abiathar's life because of his relationship with David, but he sent him to Anathoth, his village.<sup>429</sup> This dismissal was part of the fulfillment of God's word to Eli (1 Sam 2:31-36).

3. Joab is executed for his treacherous acts and because he followed Adonijah (2:28-35).

Joab knew that his life was over. He had gambled throughout his life in the various palace intrigues that grew with the passing of time. He supported Absalom to a point but killed him when he thought it necessary. In the succession struggle, he presumably thought he could maintain his influence through Adonijah, but he gambled and lost. He fled to the altar as a place of refuge, but Solomon did not spare him. He told Benaiah to kill him as he clung to the horns. Not a very noble way for the old warrior to die! Solomon then appointed Benaiah to Joab's position as general of the armies.

4. Shimei, who cursed David, is dispatched (2:36-46).

While David was tricked into forgiving Shimei, the cunning peasant, he never personally forgave him and ordered Solomon to find a way to kill him. Solomon set a trap which the avaricious Shimei fell into and was killed by the executioner.

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<sup>429</sup>Jeremiah, a priest, also lived in this village.

C. God's blessing on Solomon (Jedidiah) as the legitimate descendant of David is evidenced in Solomon's commitment to Yahweh and the wisdom granted by Yahweh (3:1-28).

1. Two introductory observations are made to explain following events (3:1-2).

a. Solomon's political alliances were indications of the international sophistication Israel was beginning to take on. However, 1 Kings 11 indicates that this entanglement with foreign powers brought Solomon into the deleterious practice of syncretism. It all began with the alliance with Egypt. Solomon's bargaining strength is indicated by the fact that Pharaoh sent his daughter to Solomon's harem. This happened early in Solomon's reign for his great building projects had not yet begun.

b. The second thing the historian wants us to see is that the people were still using the high places because the temple was not yet built. The disapproval is evident, for he knows all the spiritual implications of the high places and how later it will be necessary to tear them down to maintain the people's spiritual integrity.<sup>430</sup>

2. Yahweh reveals himself to Solomon and promises blessing on his rule (3:3-15).

a. Solomon's early life was characterized by obedience (3:3-4).

The historian's unhappiness with high places is evident in this section. Solomon was a young man who sought to obey the Lord, but he was still offering sacrifices in the high places.<sup>431</sup> Solomon made a major sacrificial offering at the beginning of his ministry.

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<sup>430</sup>For a discussion on high places, see my Samuel notes, p. 174.

<sup>431</sup>The temple was not finished, and the tabernacle was at Gibeon according to the parallel account in Chronicles.

b. Yahweh appeared to Solomon in Gibeon (3:5-15).

Yahweh gave Solomon the opportunity to ask for anything he wanted. Solomon rehearsed God's goodness to David and reminded Him of the Davidic covenant (*hesed* חֶסֶד). He humbly confessed his limitations and requested wisdom (*hokmah* חִכְמָה) for service (3:5-9).

God answered in words that indicate the fulfillment of covenant promises: He will give Solomon practical wisdom (*hokmah* חִכְמָה), material blessing, and long life if he obeys. Solomon awoke from the dream and offered sacrifice (3:10-15).

3. An example of Solomon's wisdom (*hokmah*) is given (3:16-28).

Wisdom as a way of life and as literature really began with Solomon in Israel. There was certainly wisdom before that time (and Job is a type of wisdom literature), but under Solomon it reached its apex. Solomon was the example, *par excellence*, of the man with a gift from Yahweh to discern circumstances in such a way as to render good decisions. Books such as Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and some Psalms discuss wisdom in both theoretical and practical ways.

The case was presented: two prostitutes had children, but one child had died. The mother of the dead child switched children. Solomon must answer the discernment question (*hokmah*): whose was the living child? (3:16-22).

The case was solved when Solomon discerned that one of the women was the true mother. There was no way to prove it except by drastic measures. Solomon called for a sword to divide the child. The real mother wanted to spare the child. Solomon then had proof and declared her to be the mother of the living child. Everyone acknowledged that God had given *hokmat Elohim* to Solomon (חִכְמַת אֱלֹהִים) (3:23-28).

D. The organization of Solomon’s kingdom (4:1-34).

1. Solomon’s cabinet was similar to David’s (4:1-6).<sup>432</sup>

<i>Office</i>	<i>David</i> (2 Samuel 8)	<i>David</i> (2 Samuel 20)	<i>Solomon</i> (1 Kings 4)
Priest		Ira	Azariah
Secretary	Seraiah	Sheva	Elihoreph/Ahijah
Recorder	Jehoshaphat	Same	Jehoshaphat
Gen. of Army	Joab	Same	Benaiah
Priests?	Zadok/Ahimelech	Same	Zadok
Chief deputy			Azariah
Cohen	Sons		Zahud
Chief Gang Labor		Adoram	Adoniram

2. Solomon organized the country into districts (4:7-20).

David had probably organized the southern part of Israel, so Solomon had the task of organizing the entire country. This involved assigning sub-leaders to various sections to maintain order and provide for the king’s needs.

Each deputy had to supply a month’s provisions (4:7).

- Ben-hur—Ephraim
- Ben-deker—Makaz, Shaalbim, Beth Shemesh, Elon-beth-hanan.
- Ben-hesed—Arabboth
- Ben-abinadab—Dor
- Baana—Taanach, Megiddo, Beth-Shean
- Ben-geber—Ramoath-gilead
- Ahinadab—Mahanaim
- Ahimaaz—Naphtali
- Baana—Asher and Bealoth
- Jehoshaphat—Issachar
- Shimei—Benjamin
- Geber—Gilead (south)

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<sup>432</sup>See DeVries, *1 Kings*, *loc. cit.*, for a discussion of the various offices.



3. Solomon ruled in a time of peace and prosperity (4:21-28).

The first three kings each had a unique contribution to make to Israel's history. Saul was instrumental in beginning to drive out the Philistines. Only the dark side of Saul is seen in Scripture, but he laid a solid military groundwork for his successors. He showed that the seemingly invincible Philistines could be defeated and provided the opportunity for David to develop as a military leader against the very people whom he would later defeat completely. David brought organization and structure to the kingdom. He also provided a spiritual dimension unknown to either Saul or Solomon. As a matter of fact, David stands out over almost all of his successors. David brought military and political stability to the kingdom. It was left to Solomon to introduce culture and sophistication. For the first time the nation had the leisure, security, and money to pursue the arts and the intellect. Solomon also brought David's organization to a peak and became the most powerful potentate of his time in that area of the world.

His kingdom extended to the Euphrates.<sup>433</sup> He dominated the surrounding kingdoms west of the Euphrates, and they brought him tribute. He developed chariotry and chariot cities. The number in 4:16 is 40,000. 2 Chron 9:25 has 4,000 as does one Hebrew MS for Kings. The lower number is more realistic. The deputies kept him supplied for the abundant needs of the palace.

4. Solomon's personal ability was extensive (4:29-34).

a. Solomon was given great wisdom (4:29).

Wisdom (*ḥokmah* חִכְמָה) (deciding the best course of action);

Discernment (*ḥebunah* חִבּוּנָה) (problem solving);

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<sup>433</sup>This should be understood in the sense of garrisons such as David had already stationed in Damascus. This is indirect control not direct and should not be considered a fulfillment of the Abrahamic covenant.

Breadth of heart (*rohab leb* רֹחַב לֵב) (capacity to embrace diverse compartments of knowledge).

- b. His wisdom surpassed that found in Egypt, Ethan, Heman, Calcol and Darda (4:30-31).

There is a body of wisdom literature from the middle east that goes back beyond the time of Solomon. It is found in Babylonia and in Egypt.

- c. His wisdom was in written form (4:32-34).

He set forth wisdom in proverbs (3000) and songs (1,005) (we have only a few—Psalms 72; 127). He was something of a naturalist.<sup>434</sup> Everyone wanted to meet him.

#### E. Solomon builds the temple and his palace (5:1—9:9)

1. Solomon makes a contract with Hiram to prepare materials (5:1-18).

Solomon brought from Hiram not only materials and craftsmen, but surely ideas as well. It is now conceded that the temple of Solomon probably looked very much like most other temples of his day. It is a bit ironic that a pagan king and country should furnish the people and material to build the temple of Yahweh when the tabernacle was built by spirit-gifted individuals from Israel.

2. Solomon constructs the temple (6:1-38).

- a. The temple construction began in the fourth year of Solomon's rule, which was the four hundred eightieth year after Israel had come out of Egypt. This date is the anchor for the chronology that places the exodus at 1441 BC plus or minus a few years. Those who would argue for a thirteenth century date for the exodus must treat this reference as a round number of twelve times forty.

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<sup>434</sup>Cf. Ecclesiastes 2.

- b. The temple was built more or less on the pattern of the tabernacle. It consisted of a holy place and a holy of holies that was cubic in structure. The furniture was similar: laver, lampstand, ark of the covenant, etc., but the style was quite different. The more recent depictions of Solomon's temple, e.g., the reconstruction in the model of Jerusalem, follow middle eastern styles in general and are probably more accurate than the older ones.

3. Solomon constructs his palace (7:1-12).

Solomon's palace must have been magnificent. It took thirteen years to build the palace whereas the temple took seven years. This building project necessitated expanding the city to accommodate these immense architectural additions. The city was expanded north and a huge retaining wall and platform were built. Herod expanded this platform when he rebuilt the temple.

4. A recapitulation is given of the fine work of the temple (7:13-51).

A certain Tyrian-Israelite artisan supervised the vast amount of casting and carving done on the temple. The value of the temple would be impossible to calculate, but it must have been immense. The riches of this building would always be a temptation to kings, and more than once in the future, its walls would be stripped to buy off the latest marauder.

5. Solomon dedicates the temple (8:1-66).

- a. The priests moved the ark from the tent in the city of David and brought it to the temple. It was deposited in the holy of holies and God's presence was manifested with the glory cloud filling the temple (8:1-11).
- b. Solomon addressed the assembly stating the reasons for the building of the temple and David's part in it.
- c. Solomon prayed to the Lord and rehearsed again the elements of the Davidic covenant. He then laid out the importance the temple would play in the lives of the covenant people: sin would be revealed, drought would be prayed for, famine would cause them

to come before God, foreigners would be awed by it, Israel would pray when they went out to battle, in captivity they would turn toward the temple (8:12-53).

- d. Solomon then blessed the people and prays that all will acknowledge that there is only one God (8:54-61).
  - e. For seven days Solomon offered sacrifices and peace offerings. On the eighth day he dismissed the people with happy hearts (8:62-66).
6. God accepts the dedication (9:1-9).

In the words of the Davidic covenant, Yahweh told Solomon that he would bless him if he walked in obedience. However, if his seed should fail to obey God, then they could only expect the judgment of God in their lives.

- F. Solomon settles with Hiram (9:10-14).

Solomon paid Hiram in cities, giving him twenty in the land of Galilee, but Hiram was not pleased with them. He called them *cabul* (כָּבוּל) which may mean “as nothing.”<sup>435</sup> Verse 14 can only make sense as a pluperfect: Hiram *had* given Solomon 120 talents of gold. Solomon probably had borrowed this money to help in the extensive building projects, which probably cost more than even wealthy Solomon could raise. Solomon presumably had expected to repay the money with the twenty cities. Chronicles (1 Chron 8:2) indicates that Hiram refused the cities, so Solomon would have had to repay the loan with later revenue.

- G. A list of activities and accomplishments is given (9:15-28).

Like his successor, Herod, a millennium later, Solomon engaged in almost frenzied building activity. The most significant projects were the temple and the palace, but Solomon also built and refortified many cities. Excava-

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<sup>435</sup>See Zvi Gal, “Cabul a Royal Gift Found,” *BAR* 19 Mar/Apr (1993) 38-44, 84. Gal excavated a site he believes is Galilean Cabul.

tions at Hazor (north), Megiddo (north central) and Gezer (south) have turned up similar gateways coming from the Solomonic period.<sup>436</sup> These cities controlled the passes coming into Palestine. The stables at Megiddo once attributed to Solomon are now attributed to Ahab, but the structures would have been similar. The narrow ridge on which the Jebusites built their city was not adequate for expansion. The “millo” may be terraced walls for added construction.<sup>437</sup>

#### H. Solomon’s wisdom brings renown and wealth (10:1-29).

Solomon prayed for wisdom in chapter 3, and an example of that wisdom was given when he arbitrated the dispute of the contesting mothers. God’s other promise was material prosperity. This too was illustrated with the coming of the Queen of Sheba.

##### 1. The Queen of Sheba (10:1-10).

- a. The amazing story of the Queen of Sheba has caught the fancy of many people through the centuries. The Ethiopians argue that Sheba is to be identified with Ethiopia and that Solomon and the queen carried on a dalliance that produced the beginning of the monarchy that was still in existence in modern times in Haile Selassie (strength of the trinity). She was probably from the Arabian coast, however, and had heard of Solomon through his trading expeditions.
- b. She tested him in riddles, saw his opulence and came away saying she had only heard half of the story. She gave him an appropriate gift.

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<sup>436</sup>See G. J. Wightman (“The Myth of Solomon,” *BASOR* 227/28[1990] 5-22) who argues that these gates must be dated later. He does not deny a flourishing period under Solomon, only the archaeological dating. See Dever’s response in the same issue, “Of Myths and Methods,” pp. 121-30.

<sup>437</sup>See Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem*.

2. Solomon's trade (10:11-29).

Solomon's vast international trade (maritime and overland) made him fabulously wealthy. Gold was so common it made silver insignificant. We hear that Solomon was both wealthy and wise, but his wisdom was insufficient to prevent him from falling into apostasy.<sup>438</sup>

I. Solomon falls in spite of his wisdom (11:1-43).

1. The occasion for the fall was his international marriages (11:1-8).

- a. Solomon's destruction began with the political alliances sealed with marriages. He was allied with Egypt, Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon, and the Hittites. We have discussed "loved" previously in connection with Ammon. This does not mean romantic love, but the choice of a person. Solomon chose to cement his political relations with intermarriage, so much a part of the culture of that day (11:1-2).
- b. Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines. Each foreign wife would have brought her retinue of priests. In deference to the various countries, Solomon built shrines to their deities. He then became ensnared in them himself (11:3-4).
- c. The deities Solomon worshipped were Ashtoreth of the Sidonians; Milcom /Molech<sup>439</sup> of the Ammonites; and Chemosh of the Moabites. There were many more deities represented in Jerusalem, but these are the best known and seemed to have the deepest impact on the people of Israel. This was particularly true

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<sup>438</sup>Alan Millard, "Does the Bible Exaggerate King Solomon's Golden Wealth?" *BAR* 15 (1989): 20-34.

<sup>439</sup>Albright (*Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan*, p. 236) says that Moloch is a term for human sacrifice and not a deity. The word *Topheth*, he says, refers to cremation pits for child sacrifice. However, more recent scholarship is swinging back to the biblical position that Moloch is really a deity. See works on the Phoenicians for more information on *Topheth* and child sacrifice.

of Milcom/Molech because children were sacrificed to him (11:5-8).

2. God judged Solomon because of this syncretism (11:9-40).
  - a. The historian certainly admires Solomon for his wisdom, prosperity and in particular for building the temple. However, this does not prevent him from painting Solomon in the garish colors of his spiritual apostasy.
  - b. Yahweh was angry with Solomon because He had appeared to him twice and had ordered him to avoid such practices. “To whom much is given, much is required.” As a result, Yahweh promised to tear the kingdom from his son and to leave only one tribe (11:9-13).
  - c. Yahweh began to raise up adversaries; the first was Hadad of Edom who had fled to Egypt in David’s time (11:14-22).
  - d. The second adversary was an Aramean named Rezon. He took advantage of the vacuum left by David’s death to rule in Damascus (11:23-25).
  - e. The third adversary was Jeroboam who would one day become the king of the northern tribes. This young man was appointed an overseer of the forced labor used to build Millo. The prophet Ahijah from Shiloh told him through symbolic action that he would receive the majority of the kingdom. He was told that if he obeyed God, he would have an everlasting dynasty like David’s. The prophet also told him that one tribe would be left for David in accordance with the Davidic covenant (11:26-40).
3. Solomon’s death is recorded after a forty-year reign over Israel. The source for much of the material in this first book of kings comes from the *Acts of Solomon*, a non-extant book. An apparently smooth transition was accomplished with his son Rehoboam (11:41-43).

II. *Divided Kingdom—Rehoboam/Jeroboam to Jehoshaphat/Ahab* (12:1—16:34). (The first eighty years—931-850 BC)

[From here on the northern kings will be in italics.]

The centrifugal force has now overcome the centripetal force. The rupture has taken place. The northern kingdom will have a leadership that is essentially ungodly from *Jeroboam I* until the last king *Hoshea*. Only six kings in Judah will be considered godly men. The chronology of this era is very difficult because of the lack of an absolute chronology, different methods of reckoning ascension years, to say nothing of co-regencies of father and son and dual regencies.<sup>440</sup> The attached chart is to help visualize the period of the monarchy. See p. 258.

A. The rupture of the kingdom under Rehoboam (12:1-33).

1. The foolish decision of Rehoboam cost him the northern tribes (12:1-15).
  - a. The succession seemed to be fairly smooth. Rehoboam went to Shechem to be made king.<sup>441</sup> *Jeroboam* had fled to Egypt (11:40) where he heard of Solomon's death and returned. (Follow the reading in 1 Chron 10:2. The Hebrew "he was living" and "he returned" look the same without vowels) (12:1-2).
  - b. The people challenged Rehoboam to change the policies of his father (remember what Samuel told them would happen, 1 Samuel 8?). Rehoboam consulted with the elders who advised him to listen to the people. Rehoboam asked his young peers what he should do, and they advised him to be hard on the people. Rehoboam told the people he would be even harsher than his father was (12:3-14).

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<sup>440</sup>See Thiele, *Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*.

<sup>441</sup>Shechem was an ancient religious center for the northern tribes in Ephraim. *Jeroboam* was from Ephraim. It would appear that Rehoboam was being forced to come to northern territory to defend himself, cf. Judg. 9:1-2.



- c. The historian tells us that all this was in accord with God's purpose in removing part of the kingdom from Solomon as he had predicted through Ahijah the Shilonite (12:15).
2. Rehoboam's foolish act prompted the northern tribes to break off (12:16-20).

The Israelites in the north returned home and made Jeroboam king. The rebellion was made permanent when the chief of the gang labor was stoned to death, and Rehoboam barely escaped with his life.

3. Rehoboam was dissuaded from trying to restore the ten tribes by force (12:21-24).

Rehoboam gathered his army, determined to prosecute the war against Israel. Shemaiah, the prophet, warned them that this rebellion was from the Lord, and they must not fight. The civil war was avoided.

4. *Jeroboam* instituted a religious system to keep the Israelites from going to Jerusalem (12:25-33).
  - a. He rebuilt Shechem, an ancient town going back to the patriarchs, along with Penuel. Jeroboam worried about Israel being enticed to return to Jerusalem (the centripetal force) and so made two golden calves which he set up in the ancient cult center of Bethel and in the extreme north in Dan (12:25-30).<sup>442</sup>
  - b. He built temples on the high places and ordained priests from the non-Levitical families.<sup>443</sup> He instituted a feast in the eighth month to rival the feast in Jerusalem (did the grain ripen later in the north

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<sup>442</sup>See A. Mazar, "Bronze Bull Found in Israelite 'High Place' from the Time of the Judges," *BAR* 9 [1983] 34-40.

<sup>443</sup>See 2 Chron 11:13-17 where Levites and priests from all the tribes moved to Judah. See also Magen Broshi and Israel Finkelstein, "The Population of Palestine in Iron Age II," *BASOR* 287 (1992): 47-60.

**The Period of the Monarchy**Saul (40?) (1051-1011) **Samuel**David 40 (1011-971) **Nathan**Solomon 40 (971-931) **Gad**

King	Years	Date	Prophet	Foreign Power	Prophet	Date	King	Years
Rehoboam	17	931/30	<b>Shemaiah</b> <b>Iddo</b>	(Egypt) Shishak	<b>Unk Prophet</b> <b>Ahijah</b>	931/30	*Jeroboam	22
Abijam	3	913						
Asa	41	911/10	<b>Azariah</b> <b>Hanani</b>	(Assyria) Tiglath-Pileser II (968-936)	<b>Jehu</b>	910/9	Nadab	2
Jehoshaphat	25	870/69		Ashur-nazir-pal II (884-860)		909/8	*Baasha	24
(873/2) co-reg? Jehoram (52) co-reg?				Shalmaneser III (859-825)	<b>Elijah</b>	886/5	Elah	2
				In 853 he conquered a northern coalition of which Ahab was a part	<b>Elisha</b> <b>Micaiah</b>	885/4	*Zimri	7 days
				Jehu paid tribute to Shal. III in 841.		885/4	*Omri	12
Ahaziah	1	841				874/3	Ahab	22
Athaliah	7	841		Samas-Ramman IV 824		853	Ahaziah	2
						852	Jehoram	12
Joash	40	835		Adad-Nirari III 810	<b>Jonah</b> <b>Amos</b> <b>Hosea</b>	841	*Jehu	28
(Jehoash)				Shalmaneser IV 783				
Amaziah	29	796				814/3	Jehoahaz	17
Azariah	52	767 (790)				798	Joash	16
(Uzziah)							(Jehoash)	
(co-regency)						782/1	Jeroboam II	41
							(793/2)	
Jotham	16	732 (750)		Tiglath-Pileser III (745-727) 2 Kgs. 15:19 (Pul)		753	Zechariah	6 mos
(co-regency)				Menahem became tributary. Came against Pekah (2 Kgs. 15:29)		753	*Shallum	1 mo
						752	*Menahem	10
Ahaz	16	732	<b>Isaiah</b> <b>Micah</b>	Ahaz sent to T-P for help & became a vassal (2 Kgs. 16:7). T-P put Hoshea on the throne.		742/1	Pekahiah	2
(co-regency)		(735)				740/39	*Pekah	20
Hezekiah	29	716/15		Shalmaneser V (727-22)		732/31-23	*Hoshea	9
Manasseh	55	687/6		Carried away Hoshea & Israel (723/22)				
(696/95)				Sargon II (722-705)			*Dynasty	
Amon	2	642/1		Sennacherib (705-681) Went west to suppress trouble, failed to conquer Jerus. (2 Kgs. 18).				

	<b>Nahum</b>		
Josiah 31 640-609		Esarhaddon (681-669)	
	<b>Jeremiah/Zephaniah</b>	Assur-bani-pal (669-631)	
Jehoahaz 3 mos 609			<b>Joel(?)</b>
	<b>Habakkuk (?)</b>	Sin-sar-iskun (Last Assyrian king fell in 605).	
Jehoiakim 11 609			
Jehoiachin 3 mo 597		(Babylon)	
		Nebuchadnezzar II (605-561)	
Zedekiah 11 597		J'kim tributary (2 Kgs. 24:1, 606/5). Carried off J'chin in 597.	
		Zedekiah rebelled and in 586/5 Neb. destroyed the city/temple and carried away captives.	<b>Daniel</b>
	<b>Obadiah (?)</b>		<b>Ezekiel</b>

or was this to make the break sharper?). He was burning incense on the altar (12:31-33).

B. God sent an anonymous prophet to speak against the altar (13:1-32).

1. The prophet spoke against the altar and was vindicated by God (13:1-10).
  - a. He said that a king by the name of Josiah would rise up to destroy the altar (Josiah ruled from 640-609 B.C. This prophecy was almost 300 years prior to the event. See 2 Kings 23:15-18 for the fulfillment). He stated that God would give a sign to validate the message. King *Jeroboam* stretched out his hand to order the prophet arrested, and his arm was miraculously stiffened. The sign of the ruptured altar was given simultaneously (13:1-4).
  - b. The king asked the prophet to pray for him which he did, and the king's arm was restored. The king tried to persuade the prophet to go home with him, but he said that he was divinely prohibited from going anywhere but back to Judah. The prophet left to go home a different way from the way he had come (13:5-10).

2. The prophet is enticed to go home with an old prophet in Bethel (13:11-19).

There was an old prophet living in Bethel who heard the story from his sons and went after the prophet to invite him home. The prophet refused, saying that Yahweh had prohibited it. The old prophet then told him that Yahweh had revealed himself to him and told him to bring the prophet home with him.

3. God judged the prophet for disobeying him (13:20-32).

God used the lying prophet to bring the message of judgment upon the prophet from Judah. A lion killed the man of God. The lying prophet brought his body back and told the boys he wanted to be buried with him because he knew God would fulfill the word spoken through him.<sup>444</sup>

- C. *Jeroboam* was not sufficiently affected to change spiritual directions, and his sin became a perpetual stumbling block in the history of the northern kingdom (13:33-34).
- D. God gave to *Jeroboam* a message of judgment through Ahijah the prophet (14:1-20).
  1. *Jeroboam*'s son Abijah was sick (14:1).
  2. *Jeroboam* wanted help from Ahijah, but he was afraid to face him directly (14:2-5).

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<sup>444</sup>Who was this old prophet, and why did he lie to the prophet from Judah? He certainly seems to be a prophet of Yahweh because of his constant allusions to him. The only thing I can conclude is that he was so desirous of associating with this man that he lied to get him to come to his home. Was the old prophet compromised to the point that he was ineffective as a prophet and yet sensitive enough to want to be identified with the truth? It may seem unfair that Yahweh would kill the Judean prophet since the old prophet professed to be speaking from Yahweh, but God expects his prophets to obey him, and his orders were quite explicit and clear on the issue. Those who are closest to the Lord are expected to obey him best.

He told his wife to disguise herself. What made these kings think they could hide from God?<sup>445</sup> Yahweh revealed to Ahijah that *Jeroboam* was sending his wife to him and that she would be disguised.

3. Ahijah delivered his message of judgment to Mrs. Jeroboam (14:6-16).

Ahijah recited what God had done for *Jeroboam* and yet *Jeroboam* had rejected God. Because of that apostasy, *Jeroboam*'s family would be judged severely, and that judgment would begin with the son of *Jeroboam*. God was going to raise up a king for himself who would cut off the house of *Jeroboam*. Furthermore, Israel would also be judged and sent into captivity beyond the Euphrates because she followed *Jeroboam*

4. *Jeroboam*'s wife returned home, and the child died as predicted (14:17-18).
5. *Jeroboam* died (14:19-20).

This first king of the northern tribes, an Ephraimite, ruled twenty-two years, a rather long reign. His contribution to Israel nationally was fairly significant. What he did religiously was to reinforce the tendency to syncretism already found in this people so greatly influenced by the Gentiles around them. The rival worship centers, however much they might be related to Yahweh (as some scholars contend), were images of the bull, the symbol of fertility throughout the middle east, and were instrumental in leading Israel farther from Yahweh.

- E. Rehoboam's career did not exemplify godly characteristics (14:21-31).

1. Judah's spiritual state is abysmal during his reign (14:21-24).
  - a. Rehoboam was forty-one at his ascension and he reigned seventeen years. The historian puts great stress on the fact that Yahweh

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<sup>445</sup>Take note of Gehazi, Elisha's servant (2 Kings 5), and *Ahab* (1 Kings 22) who disguised himself in battle.

chose the city of Jerusalem over all other sites for the temple. This is an editorial comment against the high places throughout Israel.

- b. Judah began to decline under Solomon. That decline increased under Rehoboam. There were high places: (*bamoth* בָּמוֹת) sacred pillars: (*maṣṣebot* מַצְבֹּת); Asherim (אֲשֵׁרִים); and male cult prostitutes: (*qodeshim* קֹדְשִׁים).
2. The Egyptians under Shishak invaded Judah and robbed the temple (14:25-28).
    - a. Shishak was a Libyan who had risen in the ranks of the Egyptian army until he was able to become Pharaoh, bringing in the 22<sup>nd</sup> dynasty. He invaded Judah and Israel even though he had given asylum to *Jeroboam* (14:25-26).<sup>446</sup>
    - b. Rehoboam substituted bronze shields for the gold ones, which had been plundered. This was the beginning of a succession of acts of plunder of the temple (14:27-28).
  3. Rehoboam died and so concluded a reign marked by mediocrity and war between him and *Jeroboam*. His son Abijam became king in his place (14:29-31).
- F. Abijam's (Abijah) reign was characterized by the same sinful practices of his father (15:1-8).<sup>447</sup>
1. Abijam had a short reign of three years. His mother was Maacah the (grand)daughter of Abishalom. Assuming this man is the son of David, Maacah would have been the daughter of Absalom's only

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<sup>446</sup>For a list of cities Shishak claims to have conquered, see *ANET*, pp. 242-243. A fragment of a monumental stela was found at Megiddo which may indicate that he really conquered that city.

<sup>447</sup>Kings uses Abijam which means my father is the sea. This sounds much like the Ugarit material where *jam* or *yam* means "the sea." The Chronicler uses a more orthodox name, Abijah, "my father is Yahweh."

daughter, Tamar, who in turn was married to Uriel (see 2 Chron 11:20; 13:2) (15:1-2).

2. Abijam was as sinful as his father Rehoboam had been (15:3-6).
    - a. His “heart was not wholly devoted to Yahweh” (15:3).
    - b. God still allowed him to be king because He was honoring the Davidic covenant. It is for David’s sake who was a godly man in spite of his great sin against Uriah the Hittite (15:4-5).
    - c. The wars begun by his father against *Jeroboam* continued under Abijam (15:6).
  3. Abijam finished his reign with no notable contribution (15:7-8).
- G. Asa broke the pattern of his predecessors and sought to please Yahweh (15:9-24).
1. Asa brought a certain amount of reform to Judah (15:9-15).
    - a. He ruled forty-one years and his (grand)mother’s name was Maacah. (Maacah is mentioned because of her prominence and because she was removed from the Queen Mother’s position) (15:9-10).
    - b. Asa proceeded to remove paganism. He even removed his grandmother because of her paganism (15:11-13).
    - c. Asa did not remove the high places, because they were probably not yet looked upon as being pagan even though they no doubt were in fact. He did embellish the temple (15:14-15).
  2. Asa carried on war with *Baasha* (Israel) (15:16-22).

*Baasha* was able to control Ramah, about ten kilometers north of Jerusalem, which indicates Asa’s weakness militarily. Asa began the bad practice of hiring outside military help; in this case Ben-Hadad,

the Aramean king in Damascus.<sup>448</sup> The treaty worked. Northern pressure caused *Baasha* to back off from Ramah. Asa tore down the fortifications and refortified other cities.

3. Asa died with foot disease, and Jehoshaphat reigned in his place (15:23-24).

H. *Nadab* ruled in the north in the place of his father *Jeroboam* (15:25-31).

1. *Nadab* ruled only two years and was an evil king (15:25-26).
2. *Baasha*, an army officer, became king (15:27-30).

It seems as though near anarchy was prevailing. While *Nadab* was besieging an enemy city, an army officer by the name of *Baasha* treacherously killed him. He then proceeded to kill all the household of *Jeroboam*, and thus God's word through Ahijah was fulfilled (14:9-10).

I. *Baasha* was a wicked king who incurred God's judgment (15:32—16:7).

1. He fought against Asa in the south as we have already seen. God pronounced judgment against him through Jehu son of Hanani: God will judge *Baasha* as He judged *Jeroboam* (15:31—16:4).
2. *Baasha* died, and his son *Elah* ruled. God's judgment came upon *Baasha's* family because of his personal sin, and because he carried out God's judgment against *Jeroboam* (offenses must come, but woe to the one by whom they come) (16:5-7).

J. A period of bloody civil war follows in Israel's history, in which God judges the house of *Baasha* (16:8-28).

1. *Elah* reigned two years in Tirzah. While in a drunken stupor, he was killed by one his officers, *Zimri* (16:8-10).

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<sup>448</sup>See God's rebuke through Hanani in 2 Chron 16:7-9.



2. *Zimri* then wiped out the family of *Elah (Baasha)* as God had predicted (16:11-14).
3. *Zimri* only lasted seven days because another officer was made king (in the ongoing siege against Gibbethon) (16:15-20).

*Omri* and his men besieged the capital of Tirzah, and *Zimri* killed himself (16:19-20).

4. *Omri* prevailed in the civil strife that followed (16:21-28).

A certain Tibni took part of the people, but *Omri* was able to kill him. *Omri* ruled six years at Tirzah and then moved the capital to a new city called Samaria. *Omri* was a very wicked king.<sup>449</sup>

- K. *Ahab*, a powerful king, came to the throne, and the stage was set for his confrontation with the prophets of Israel (16:29-34).
1. *Ahab* ruled Israel for twenty-two years in Samaria and was pronounced by the historian to be worse than all his predecessors. He was personally wicked (16:29-30).
  2. *Ahab's* crowning evil was to bring in the Sidonian princess Jezebel, daughter of Ethbaal, who became an aggressive missionary for Baal.<sup>450</sup> These were thoroughgoing Baal worshippers (16:31).
  3. *Ahab* became a follower of Baal, building him a temple and erecting an altar in it. He also built Asherim as well (16:32-33).<sup>451</sup>

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<sup>449</sup>Note: Assyria will hereafter refer to Israel as *Bit Omri*, i.e., the dynasty and land of *Omri*.

<sup>450</sup>Jezebel may mean “without cohabitation” indicating her connection with the fertility cult. Ethbaal means “man of Baal.”

<sup>451</sup>The Bible does not speak much of the Assyrians at this time, but they were beginning to make themselves felt. Contact came in the ninth century when a coalition of kings (Arameans and others) which Ahab joined fought Assyria. This coalition was an effort to assert independence in the west from the Assyrian over lordship. The account of this battle is found in Shalmaneser III's annals and is dated at 853 B.C. The Assyrians

L. God's curse on Jericho, given in Joshua's day, was carried out at this time (16:34).<sup>452</sup>

III. *Divided Kingdom—Elijah versus the dynasty of Ahab and Jezebel* (17:1—2 Kings 1:18 [874-853 BC])

Samuel, Nathan, and Isaiah were closely related to the royal court, that is, they were in almost an advisory capacity. There was never any question as to who spoke with the greater authority—that was the prophet, but there was a greater sense of cooperation than seems to be true later. That cooperation no doubt grew out of the spiritual sensitivity of the kings to whom the prophets were ministering. In any event, prophets such as the unknown man who spoke against the altar of *Jeroboam*, Micaiah, Jeremiah, and, most of all, Elijah carried on an adversarial relationship. *Ahab* will say "Have you found me, Oh my enemy?"

Elijah holds a great place in biblical history. His name is consonant with his message: Yahweh is God (יהוה). Malachi predicts that he will come before "the great and terrible day of Yahweh" (Mal 4:5). As a result, the Jews were looking for Elijah and even asked John the Baptist if perchance he were Elijah (John 1:25). The people of Jesus' day assumed that, among other possibilities, Jesus may have been Elijah (Matt 16:14). It is Elijah who appeared with Jesus before the chosen three on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt 17:3) and prompted the disciples to ask Jesus about the coming of Elijah. Jesus' reply was that John the Baptist, coming in the spirit and power of Elijah, was in a sense Elijah. But Elijah must yet come (Matt 17:9-13).

This "Elijah cycle" (17:1—22:40) is unusual in that it centers on the northern kingdom. The rest of the book emphasizes Judah. These long narrative accounts involve Elijah as God's spokesman to the wicked house of *Ahab*.

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claimed victory, but they did not return for some time, and it took several battles before they were completely triumphant. This happened in 841 B.C. and Jehu, king of Israel, and other kings were forced to come to Nahr el-Kelb to pay tribute. This event was recorded on Shalmaneser's black obelisk (*CAH*, 3:13-14).

<sup>452</sup>See DeVries, *1 Kings*, for a discussion of the paganism involved.

A. God spoke through His prophet Elijah to bring a famine on the land to punish *Ahab* and then protected his servant (17:1-24).

1. The proclamation of the famine is given to King *Ahab* (17:1-7).
  - a. Elijah was called the Tishbite (NASB does not treat this as a proper noun. “Settlers” is deriving it from the Hebrew *yašab* [יָשַׁב]), and his country was on the east side of the Jordan in Gilead. Elijah proclaimed that there would be neither rain nor dew for a period of time (the time is known later as three years). It is important to note that Baal is the storm god and the fertility god. He should be the one to bring rain in the time of drought. Yahweh was therefore challenging the entire religious system of Baalism (17:1).
  - b. Yahweh then sent Elijah to a place where he would be safe and provided for him. He showed His control over nature by sending the ravens to feed him. In the natural course of events, the brook dried up because of the drought (17:2-7).
2. Yahweh sent him to Zarephath, a Sidonian city, to preserve him (17:8-16).
  - a. Elijah was now outside the boundaries of *Ahab*’s control, and God also had a widow woman to take care of him there. (Her reference to “Yahweh your God” [v. 12] indicates that she at least knew about Israel’s God.) Jesus makes a point of the fact that during the famine, Elijah went to only one widow, and she was a Sidonian (Luke 4:24-26) (17:8-9).
  - b. Elijah performed a miracle, which convinced the widow of his genuineness (17:10-16). (The miracle also provided them with food for the duration.)
3. Elijah healed the widow’s dead son and further convinced her of his position as representative of Yahweh (17:17-24).

The widow’s only child became sick and died. She blamed Elijah because she assumed his godly presence had caused a holy God to judge her. Elijah prayed for Yahweh to heal the boy, and he answered his prayers. The woman then testified strongly that Elijah was a man

of God, and that the word of Yahweh was in his mouth. This great testimony came from a Gentile of Sidon.

B. Yahweh challenged the Baal prophets through Elijah and vindicated himself (18:1-46).

1. Yahweh sent Elijah to confront *Ahab* and tell him that He would bring rain (18:1-6).

Three years had lapsed since Elijah had told *Ahab* there would be no rain. Elijah was to proclaim that Yahweh would bring rain on the earth (not Baal). *Ahab* and his steward Obadiah were looking for water (this Obadiah [servant of Yahweh] protected a hundred prophets of Yahweh when Jezebel was trying to exterminate them).

2. Elijah met Obadiah and told him to inform *Ahab* of his presence (18:7-15).

Obadiah feared that Elijah would be gone when he returned with *Ahab*, and that he would suffer the consequences. *Ahab* had looked everywhere for Elijah to kill him, (apparently it was common knowledge that the Spirit of God moved Elijah around), but Elijah assured him that no harm would come to him (18:15).

3. Elijah threw down the gauntlet to *Ahab* (18:16-19).

*Ahab* blamed Elijah, but Elijah charged him with forsaking the commandments of Yahweh and following Baal (how easily we blame others when in reality it is our refusal to follow the Lord that is the reason for the problem). Elijah challenged *Ahab* to bring 450 prophets of Baal and 400 prophets of Asherah to meet him at Mt. Carmel. These were all subsidized, professional prophets.<sup>453</sup>

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<sup>453</sup>Only the 450 prophets of Baal are referred to later. Perhaps the Asherah prophets decided not to come.

4. Elijah squared off with the 450 prophets of Baal before the people (18:20-24).

Elijah challenged the people to choose between Yahweh and Baal. Elijah then fixed the ground rules—two oxen, two altars, two gods. The test was to see who the true god of the storm was.

5. The prophets of Baal went through all their ritual but were unable to bring rain (18:25-29).

Their worship included dancing and self-mutilation. Elijah mocked them as they tried futilely to get Baal to answer.

6. Elijah proved that Yahweh was the God of rain and fruitfulness (18:30-40).

- a. Elijah repaired an existing altar of Yahweh, which had been torn down, emphasizing repeatedly the name Yahweh, and the covenant of Yahweh (18:30-32).

- b. He dug a trench around the altar and had the sacrifice drenched with water (from the Mediterranean Sea), then prayed in the hearing of all the people, emphasizing that Yahweh was the ancient God of the patriarchs, and that Elijah was His spokesman (18:33-37).

- c. God answered with a miraculous fire that caused the people to acknowledge that Yahweh was God (18:38-39).

- d. Elijah killed the 450 prophets of Baal (18:40).

7. Elijah predicted that Yahweh would now bring the promised rain (18:41-46).

- a. He told *Ahab* to eat and drink, then he went to look for the water-bearing cloud which appeared after seven trips by the servant (God seems to test people on occasion by forcing them to wait) (18:41-44).

- b. *Ahab* harnessed up the chariot to go to Jezreel before the rain caught him. Elijah in the power of Yahweh outran the chariot to Jezreel (18:45-46).
- C. Elijah, Yahweh's servant, became discouraged because he thought victory had been turned into defeat (19:1-21).
1. Jezebel sent messengers threatening Elijah's life. She was not the slightest daunted by the great victory on Carmel nor in the death of so many of her prophets (19:1-2).
  2. Elijah fled for his life (19:3-8).
    - a. The word "life," Hebrew *nepheš* (נֶפֶשׁ), can mean life, but here probably means "soul" or his innermost being. Elijah was not fleeing because he was frightened (otherwise he would not have had to go as far as he did), but because he was defeated (19:3).<sup>454</sup>
    - b. He traveled south in the Negeb and pleaded with God to kill him. Elijah had spent a grueling day on Mt. Carmel; he had run all the way to Jezreel; and now he had come all the way to the Negeb and taken another day's journey into the wilderness. He was psychologically and physically worn out (19:4).
    - c. God encouraged His weary and defeated servant by giving him food and rest. How gracious of God to nourish and sustain before trying to discipline (19:5-7).
    - d. Elijah then traveled forty days into the wilderness. The distance is not that far to Horeb, so he must have "wandered" as the Israelites did. Elijah was on a pilgrimage (19:8).
  3. Yahweh confronted His servant in the same place He confronted Moses (19:9-14).

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<sup>454</sup>Furthermore, the Hebrew words, "to see" and "to fear" in this construction, without vowels, look exactly alike. I would opt for the first meaning, "When he saw . . ." [as in the MT]. Even if the translation should be "and he was afraid," fear was not the only reason for fleeing.

- a. Elijah came to “the” cave (*hamm<sup>e</sup>‘arah* הַמְּעָרָה).<sup>455</sup> Yahweh asked Elijah what he was doing there, and Elijah complained that he alone served Yahweh (9:9-10).
- b. Yahweh told Elijah to stand on the mountain where a wind, an earthquake, and a fire occurred.<sup>456</sup> Yahweh did not manifest himself in the spectacular events. He revealed Himself as a still, small voice. Yahweh then asked the same question of Elijah and got the same answer (19:11-14).

It seems that Elijah went back to the place Yahweh had met with Israel to make a covenant. Elijah ate divinely provided food, roamed forty days in the wilderness, he came to Mt. Horeb (Sinai), he came to “the” cave, and phenomena of nature appear similar to that in Exodus 19-20. God was gently letting His servant know that circumstances are still in His control. The similarity between Elijah and Moses is not accidental:

*Moses (Exodus 33)*

1. People had gone after calves.
2. Moses interceded.
3. Moses wanted to see God’s glory.
4. God hid Moses in a niche.
5. Israel was at Mt. Sinai.
6. Israel wondered forty years.

*Elijah (1 Kings 19)*

1. Israel had gone after Baal.
2. Elijah believed he was alone representing God.
3. God showed His glory to Elijah.
4. Elijah came to *the* cave.
5. Elijah came to Mt. Sinai.
6. Elijah “wandered” forty days and nights.

4. Yahweh recommissioned Elijah and sent him back (19:15-21).

First, God told Elijah to go to Syria and anoint Hazael to be the next king (this showed that Yahweh was in charge even in foreign

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<sup>455</sup>Is this the cleft of the rock in which Yahweh hid Moses when he passed by (Exod. 33:22)? The Hebrew says “The” cave.

<sup>456</sup>Is this representative of what happened when Yahweh revealed himself to Israel?

countries). Secondly, He told Elijah to anoint *Jehu* king over Israel (this showed that He would punish the house of *Ahab*). Thirdly, He told Elijah to anoint Elisha to take his place (this showed that Elijah was not indispensable). Yahweh also reminded Elijah that he was not alone in the task. Elijah carried out the third part of the commission. The other two were implemented by his successors who represented him.

- D. Yahweh proved His universality by giving *Ahab* continuous victory over the Arameans (20:1-29).

The historian's attitude toward the wicked house of *Ahab* is indicated in his treatment of his history. Chapter 16 introduces him historically with his evil wife Jezebel. His name is used six times. Chapters 17 through 19 record the confrontation between *Ahab*/Jezebel and Elijah. His name appears eighteen times in these three chapters (sixteen in chapter 18). Chapter 21 recounts his evil act against Naboth, and his name is used fifteen times. The 22nd chapter tells of his alliance with Jehoshaphat (condemned in Chronicles), but his name does not appear until v. 20 where God pronounces judgment on him. Later in the chapter the normal chronicle note is given of his death and his successor. *Ahab*'s name occurs in 2 Kings some twenty-seven times either in a straightforward chronicle statement or in a pejorative context. Chapter 20 is the only chapter that presents an account of *Ahab* that is favorable or at least neutral. In this chapter he is the king of Israel, God's chosen people. A foreign king is besieging God's people, and God delivers them. The armies of *Ahab* are weak, and they are being confronted with an impossible situation, but God is on their side. This chapter shows the generally capable leadership of *Ahab* as king of Israel, but of course we know from the other chapters that he was morally bankrupt. It is as though the historian cannot bring himself to talk about this king by name. He used his name in v. 1 when the story began and in vv. 13, 14 where the prophet came to him. Otherwise, he refers to him as "the king of Israel." This chapter probably does not come from the "Elijah cycle." Elijah is not mentioned, but the prophets who are featured are no doubt part of the "school of the prophets."



1. Ben-Hadad in a coalition of thirty-two kings besieged Samaria and demanded total capitulation (20:1-6).

Ben-Hadad<sup>457</sup> besieged the city into which *Ahab* had fled because he was unable to fight the Syrian coalition in the open field. When Ben-Hadad demanded silver, gold, wives, and children, *Ahab* had no option but to concede.<sup>458</sup>

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<sup>457</sup>Son of the storm god Hadad. See *ANET* p. 655 for a brief inscription of this king from the time of *Ahab*.

<sup>458</sup>An Aramaic inscription written by a certain Zakir comes from the eighth century and is a generation later than the context of 1 Kings 20. It represents the petty-state wars in this era.

A stela set up by Zakir, king of Hamat and Lu'ath, for Ilu-Wer, [*his god*].

I am Zakir, king of Hamat and Lu'ath. A humble man I am. Be'elshamayn [*helped me*] and stood by me. Be'elshamayn made me king over Hatarikka [Hadrach—see Zech. 9:1].

Barhadad, [Aramaic has Bar for the Hebrew Ben] the son of Hazael, king of Aram, united [seven of] a group of ten kings against me: Barhadad and his army; Bargush and his army; the king of Cilicia and his army; the king of 'Umq and his army; the king of Gurgum and his army; the king of Sam'al and his army; the king of Milidh and his army. [All these kings whom Barhadad united against me] were seven kings and their armies. All these kings laid siege to Hatarikka. They made a wall higher than the wall of Hatarikka. They made a moat deeper than its moat. But I lifted up my hand to Be'elshamayn, and Be'elshamayn heard me. Be'elshamayn [spoke] to me through seers and through *diviners*. Be'elshamayn [said to me]: Do not fear, for I made you king, and I shall stand by you and deliver you from all [these kings who] set up a siege against you. [*Be'elshamayn*] said to me: [*I shall destroy*] all these kings who set up [a siege against you and *made this moat*] and this wall which . . . .

[. . .] *charioteer* and *horseman* [. . .] its king in its midst [. . .]. I [*enlarged*] Hatarikka and added [to it] the entire district of [. . .] and *I made him king* . . . all these strongholds everywhere within the bor[ders].

I build houses for the gods everywhere in my country. I built [. . .] and Apish [. . .] and the house of [. . .]

I set up this stele before Ilu-Wer, and I wrote upon it my achievements [. . .]. Whoever shall remove (this record of) the achievements of Zakir, king of Hamat and Lu'ath, from

2. *Ahab* refused an impossible demand (20:7-12).

Ben-Hadad arrogantly demanded that since everything belonged to him, he should be able to search the houses for what he wanted. *Ahab* and the elders refused this excessive demand.<sup>459</sup>

3. A prophet of Yahweh told *Ahab* that He would deliver the Arameans into his hand (20:13-15).

*Ahab* was morally bankrupt, but because he was the king of God's people, God sent him a prophet with a message of great encouragement.

4. *Ahab* won a great victory (20:16-21).

God told *Ahab* to send out the "squires of the commandants."<sup>460</sup> These men formed the vanguard that the Syrians considered harmless, but they killed those who came out to meet them. Then *Ahab* released the seven thousand he was holding at the gates, and there was a great victory over the drunken Syrians.

5. A prophet of Yahweh warned *Ahab* that there would be another war and that Yahweh would give them victory to show that He is not geographically limited (20:22-25).

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this stele and whoever shall remove this stele from before Ilu-Wer and banish it from its [place] or whoever shall stretch forth his hand [to . . .], [may] Be'elshamayn and I[l]u-Wer and . . . and Shamash and Sahr [and . . .] and the Gods of Heaven [and the Gods] of Earth and Be'el- '[. . . deprive him of h]ead and [. . . and] his root and [. . ., and may] the name of Zakir and the name of [his house endure forever]! *ANET* pp. 655, 56.

<sup>459</sup>Hezekiah paid similar tribute to Sennacherib when he capitulated but did not surrender. Sennacherib adds to the tribute paid: "daughters and women of the palace." *ANET*, p. 288.

<sup>460</sup>So J. A. Montgomery, *The Books of Kings*, *loc. cit.* This translation assumes that the word "young men" (*n<sup>e</sup> arim* נְעָרִים) is a military term referring to the officers of the provincial rulers under the king.

6. *Ahab* won another great victory the next year (20:26-30).

The Arameans reorganized their army.<sup>461</sup> They argued polytheistically that Yahweh must be a God of the mountains,<sup>462</sup> therefore, they would fight them in the plain. They mustered at Aphek and were decisively defeated. Ben-Hadad escaped to Aphek where he hid in an inner room.

7. *Ahab* foolishly made a covenant with Ben-Hadad and spared him (20:31-34).

Ben-Hadad's advisors negotiated a surrender of their king to *Ahab* who chose to spare him, made a covenant with him, and sent him home.

8. A prophet of Yahweh told *Ahab* that he would lose his life because of this indiscretion (20:35-43).

This entire incident presumes that this Aramean battle was declared by Yahweh to be a *herem* war. In v. 42, the phrase “devoted to destruction” (*herem* חֲרֵם) occurs. Like Saul before him, *Ahab* failed to carry out the conditions of the war and incurred the judgment of God. He was told that he would die because of this disobedience.

Sometime in this era, a famous battle took place in which *Ahab* allied with the Arameans to fight against Assyria. It is called the Battle of Qarqar (Karkar) and was fought in 853 BC. Shalmaneser III was the King of Assyria. He says: “I departed from Argana and approached Karkara. I destroyed, tore down and burned down Karkara, his royal residence. He brought along to help him 1,200 chariots, 1,200 cavalymen, 20,000 foot soldiers of Adad-'idri (i.e. Hadadezer) of Damascus, 700 chariots, 700 cavalymen, 10,000 foot soldiers of Irhuleni from Hamath, 2,000 chariots, 10,000 foot soldiers of Ahab, the Israelite, 500 soldiers from Que, 1,000 soldiers from Musri, 10

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<sup>461</sup>Is this a centralization of power in Damascus?

<sup>462</sup>See Montgomery, *The Books of Kings*, *loc. cit.*, for examples of this language elsewhere.

chariots, 10,000 soldiers from Irqanata, 200 soldiers of Matinu-ba'lu from Arvad, 200 soldiers from Usanata, 30 chariots, 1[0?],000 soldiers of Adunu-ba'lu from Shian, 1,000 camel-(rider)s of Gindibu', from Arabia, [. . .],000 soldiers of Ba'sa, son of Ruhubi, from Ammon—all together) these were twelve kings. They rose against me [for a ] decisive battle. I fought with them with (the support of) the mighty forces of Ashur [god], which Ashur, my lord, has given to me, and the strong weapons which Nergal [god], my leader, has presented to me, (and) I did inflict a defeat upon them between the towns of Karkara and Gilzau."<sup>463</sup> We know from the chronology, that the year 853 BC was the year of *Ahab's* death. However, he did not die in this Assyrian battle, but in the battle with the Arameans in chapter 22. These two battles, therefore, one allied with the Arameans and one against them, were fought in the same year.

E. Yahweh demanded justice of *Ahab* and Jezebel for the wicked acts committed against Naboth in taking his inheritance and his life (21:1-29).

1. *Ahab* wanted an adjacent vineyard, but its owner refused to sell it to him (21:1-4).

*Ahab's* primary residence was in Samaria, but he had a royal residence in Jezreel as well (cf. 1 Kings 18:45). Adjacent to this property was a vineyard belonging to a certain Naboth. *Ahab* rather petulantly tried to buy or trade for this vineyard. Naboth refused, following the old Mosaic code of the land staying in the patrimony. *Ahab* went home angry and pouting.

2. Jezebel took action to acquire the vineyard for her husband (21:5-16).

Jezebel, a stubborn, selfish, but decisive woman set events in motion to acquire the vineyard for *Ahab*. This required that false witnesses be hired against Naboth. The letters had to be sent because she was in Samaria. Naboth was stoned to death on the thinnest of trumped-up charges. *Ahab* at his wife's behest went to take the vineyard.

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<sup>463</sup>ANET, pp. 278-79.

3. Yahweh sent Elijah to confront *Ahab* (21:17-24).

Elijah predicted the death of *Ahab* and of Jezebel, saying that the dogs would lick his blood and eat her. His dynasty would be like that of *Jeroboam* and *Baasha*. These are the only two predecessors of *Ahab* of whom it could be said that they had a dynasty. *Jeroboam* ruled twenty-two years, and his son *Nadab* ruled two years. *Baasha* ruled twenty-four years and his son *Elah* ruled two years. *Zimri* does not count for he only ruled seven days and had no children succeed him. This was Yahweh's judgment pronounced on this family that tried so ardently to impose the religion of Baal in Israel and to persecute those who stood true to Yahweh.

4. The historian inserted a statement indicating the extent of *Ahab's* sin (21:25-26).

Jezebel is charged with inciting *Ahab* to his sin. She does appear in the accounts to be the stronger person. *Ahab* himself withstood Elijah, and was therefore completely culpable, but at times (e.g., after the Carmel experience) he seemed somewhat willing to submit to Yahweh.

5. *Ahab* repented and God promised to postpone the judgment (21:27-29).

Because of a genuine attitude of repentance in *Ahab*, Yahweh told Elijah that he would postpone the judgment on his house to a later day. Jehu carried it out.

- F. Yahweh brought final judgment upon *Ahab* through the word of the prophet Micaiah (22:1-40).

1. *Ahab* and Jehoshaphat formed an alliance (22:1-4).

Jehoshaphat was essentially a godly king. However, he chose ill-advisedly to join with *Ahab* in a war with the Arameans. There had been a three-year lapse since the last war with the Arameans. Ramoth-gilead had been taken by the Arameans and *Ahab* wanted to recover it. Jehoshaphat agreed to join fully with him.

2. Jehoshaphat asked *Ahab* to inquire of Yahweh (22:5-12).

- a. Jehoshaphat was a thoroughgoing worshipper of Yahweh. *Ahab*, on the other hand, was syncretistic. He had not yet learned the lesson of Carmel. He was surrounded by a coterie of prophets who were supported by the king and therefore told him what he wanted to hear. In response to Jehoshaphat's request to seek Yahweh's mind in the matter, *Ahab* assembled the prophets. *Ahab* did not mention the name of Yahweh; he simply said, "Should we go up to war or not?" Their first response did not use the name Yahweh but the generic term Adonai (אֲדֹנָי) or Master that could be used of any deity.<sup>464</sup> It was only after Jehoshaphat's displeasure with their prophecy became evident that they began to use the name Yahweh (22:5-6).
  - b. The prophets of Baal assured *Ahab* he would win. Jehoshaphat, apparently becoming uneasy at this display put on by prophets, asked whether there was a prophet of Yahweh there. *Ahab* acknowledged Micaiah ("who is like Yahweh"), but said that he hated him (22:7-12).
3. Micaiah was brought to *Ahab* with the admonition not to "rock the boat" (22:13-28).
    - a. Micaiah first answered with sarcasm. The ready availability of Micaiah and his return to prison at the end of the interview probably indicate that he was in prison all along. This would demonstrate *Ahab*'s attitude toward true prophets of Yahweh. Micaiah, knowing what the other prophets were saying, sarcastically added his vote to theirs: "Go up and succeed for Yahweh will give it into your hand." The obvious tone of voice caused *Ahab* to demand a true response (22:13-16).
    - b. Micaiah, in sober tones, predicted that *Ahab* would be killed in battle. When *Ahab* rejected the message, attributing it to Mica-

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<sup>464</sup>Several Hebrew MSS and the Targum have Yahweh, but I suspect the text should stand as it is.

iah's personal animosity, Micaiah told how the heavenly court had worked out the destruction of *Ahab* (22:17-23).<sup>465</sup>

- c. Zedekiah, the false prophet, angered by this clear revelation of false prophecy, struck Micaiah on the cheek, and stated dramatically that the spirit of Yahweh belonged to him not Micaiah. What audacity! Micaiah was remanded to prison with the Parthian shot that if the king returned in peace, Yahweh had not spoken to him. This was an oblique way of saying, when *Ahab* dies everyone will know that Yahweh has spoken by me (22:24-28).
4. The battle was lost, and *Ahab* was killed (22:29-40).
    - a. *Ahab* in his foolishness tried to disguise himself so as to avoid the prophecy of Micaiah. He was shot "inadvertently" by a bowman shooting randomly. The death of the king enervated the army, and they called a retreat. When his chariot was washed out in Samaria the dogs licked his blood as Elijah had predicted (22:29-38).
    - b. The succession statement is made including a brief recapitulation of *Ahab's* building projects in Samaria along with the ivory house. Samaria has been excavated and the palace of *Ahab* was unearthed. *Ahaziah* succeeded his father (22:39-40).

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<sup>465</sup>We have already seen an evil spirit "from Yahweh" coming upon Saul as God's judgment for his disobedience. This passage in Kings tells us that even false prophecy is under the control of God. (See Josephus, *Antiquities*, viii, §4-5 for his discussion of this issue.) These false prophets are being used to fulfill the divine purpose of bringing *Ahab* to his death. The only real question concerns the identity of the spirit in the heavenly court. The ethical question is Does God do evil? Since it is His spirit that caused the lying, God was in some way responsible for the lying. I am not sure that we can satisfactorily solve this dilemma. God is sovereign and controls evil as well as good. Our efforts to explain these situations sometimes result more in casuistic reasoning than solutions. The prophets were false before the spirit came; they were therefore lying before he came. It seems that the spirit in some way used these prophets to lie in the "right" way so as to bring about *Ahab's* death.

G. Jehoshaphat ruled in Judah as a good king (22:41-50).

Jehoshaphat was a good king although he came in for more severe criticism in the book of Chronicles. He was noted for following his father Asa's good example in spite of the fact that the high places were not removed. It is stated without criticism that he made peace with the king of Israel. His spiritual character was evident in his removal of the sacred male prostitutes from the land. Edom had a deputy, and Jehoshaphat carried on shipping from Ezion-Geber as Solomon had done. He refused to join with *Ahaziah* in a shipping alliance.

H. *Ahaziah* ruled in Israel as a wicked king (22:51-53).

*Ahaziah*'s reputation was no different from his father's. He worshipped Baal and otherwise did evil as his father and mother had done.



## SECOND KINGS<sup>466</sup>

Since 1 and 2 Kings are really one book, the outline will continue.<sup>467</sup>

[The names of northern kings are italicized in these notes.]

H. Elijah opposed *Ahaziah* (2 Kings 1:1-18).

1. Moab threw off the Israelite yoke (1:1).<sup>468</sup>
2. *Ahaziah* was injured and inquired of a pagan god (1:2-4).
  - a. He sent messengers to inquire of Baal-Zebub (Zebul) of Ekron.<sup>469</sup>  
There is intended irony that a king of Israel inquired of a pagan god, “will I recover from this sickness?” In 8:8 a pagan king inquired of Yahweh with the very same words (1:2).<sup>470</sup>

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<sup>466</sup>See my *God Rules among Men*, for an integrated harmony with Chronicles.

<sup>467</sup>For an excellent discussion of the literary composition of Second Kings, see T. R. Hobbs, *Second Kings*, pp. xvii-xxx. He represents a school of thought that refuses to accept the fragmentation caused by form-criticism and seeks to explain divergences and tensions on a literary basis rather than on a form-critical basis. This is a welcome movement, although their work will not be accepted by many. See his commentary for literature on the subject.

<sup>468</sup>See the discussion at 3:4 for the inscription of the Moabite king who rebelled.

<sup>469</sup>This name means “Lord of the fly” which is a Jewish pun on “Exalted Lord.”

<sup>470</sup>See Hobbs, *Second Kings*, p. xix.

- b. Elijah intercepted the messengers at Yahweh’s direction and challenged *Ahaziah*. Elijah told the messengers that *Ahaziah* would die (1:3-4).
3. *Ahaziah* ascertained that the man was Elijah and sent army men to capture him (1:5-14).
  - a. The prophet Elijah was distinctive in appearance: he was hairy and wore a leather belt. This sounds much like John the Baptist (1:7-8).
  - b. *Ahaziah* sent a squad of fifty soldiers, but they were killed by fire. He sent a second squad, and they were killed. He sent a third squad, and the officer pled with Elijah (1:9-14).<sup>471</sup>
4. At God’s encouragement, Elijah went down to *Ahaziah* and repeated the message about his death (1:15-18).

The purpose of this unit is to show that Yahweh is the God of Israel. Kings should submit to him and not go to foreign gods for their messages.

#### IV. Elisha and Jehu against Baal—2 Kings 2:1—10:36 (841-814 B.C.).

- A. The mantle of the prophetic leadership passes from Elijah to Elisha (2:1-25.)

We have already discussed the relationship between Elijah’s flight to Sinai and Moses’ activity in the wilderness. We should also see similarities in this account and that of Moses and Joshua as well. Hobbs

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<sup>471</sup>On this three-fold repetition see Hobbs: “In chap. 1 the judgment on *Ahaziah* is found three times, but within this story is another which tells of three attempts to arrest the prophet. In chap. 2, Elisha is reminded three times that his master will leave him and he is also instructed to leave his master. . . . In chap. 4 three attempts are made to raise the dead boy, and in chap. 9 three scouts are sent out to the approaching rebels headed by Jehu. Such threefold repetition is not accidental, but deliberate, and is a common feature of folk literature, offering a rhythm to such stories. Always, on the third ‘beat,’ the story comes to some kind of conclusion” *Second Kings*, p. xxix.

says: “Within the stories of Elisha (chaps. 2-8; 13) there are also a number of items of style that warrant brief notice. As with the kings, one model dominates the traditions concerning Elijah and Elisha. That model is Moses. This is nowhere more evident than in the transition from the ministry of Elijah to Elisha in chaps. 1-2. The narrative is so constructed as to present a smooth transition from one to the other, but the narrative is also dominated by allusions to incidents from the career of Moses, and indeed Joshua. This is especially clear in the location of the ascension of Elijah and the actions which accompany that ascension.”<sup>472</sup>

1. Elijah and Elisha went to Bethel (2:1-4).

The “schools of prophets” (*b<sup>e</sup>ne hann<sup>e</sup>vi'im* בְּנֵי הַנְּבִיאִים) had their beginning apparently under Samuel’s ministry. The precise nature and composition of the bands is not clear, but they did apparently live in groups; there was much poverty (vow of poverty?); they had “heads” (Samuel, Elijah, Elisha) and special disciples (Elisha to Elijah and Gehazi to Elisha); they carried prophetic statements to the kings (often negative in content). In this chapter there are groups in Bethel and Jericho (at least fifty in Jericho and one hundred at Gilgal in 4:38-44) as well as at Naioth in Ramah (1 Samuel 19).<sup>473</sup> Both Gilgal and Bethel have ancient spiritual connotations. Because of the role they played in the invasion under Joshua, so does Jericho. As a matter of fact, the incident of dividing of the waters (Red Sea: Moses, Jordan: Joshua), this incident is being tied into the pristine past.

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<sup>472</sup>Hobbs, *Second Kings*, p. xxix.

<sup>473</sup>For an excellent brief discussion on the issue of the sons of the prophets, see Hobbs (*Second Kings*, pp. 25-27). He opts for a minimal interpretation of the phenomena of the prophetic movement, I believe too much so, but he is correct in showing that much flesh has been manufactured to cover the bare bones (and many missing at that) in these accounts.

2. Elijah and Elisha went to Jericho (2:5-6).

There was a community awareness that Elijah was going to be removed from the prophets. They kept telling Elisha about it, but he essentially ignored them.

3. Elijah was transported to heaven and Elisha received a double portion of his spirit (2:7-14).

While the Jericho band was watching, Elijah divided the Jordan, and he and Elisha crossed it. Elisha asked for a double portion of the spirit, and Elijah said he would have it if he saw his departure. Elijah was translated before over fifty watching people, and Elisha tore his garments into two (double portion), took Elijah's mantle, smote the Jordan River and it parted. The allusion to the double portion for the first-born (Deut. 21:17) is not accidental. Truly Elisha had succeeded Elijah.

4. The prophets accepted Elisha's leadership (2:15-18).

Apparently, it was customary for Elijah to disappear under the influence of the Spirit (Obadiah was afraid this would happen in 1 Kings 18). The prophets sent fifty men to search for him, but they did not find him as Elisha had predicted.

5. Elisha purified the water at Jericho (2:19-22).

The following series of miraculous acts by Elisha are not to be considered mere anecdotes of his life and ministry. These are confirmatory acts. The "sons of the prophets" saw the transfer of authority, but they now see the concomitant ability attached to it.<sup>474</sup>

The Hebrew word "unfruitful" in v. 19 (*m<sup>e</sup>šaccalet* מִשְׁכָּלֶת) is otherwise used of miscarriage. It may be that the families were having difficulty carrying pregnancies to term. Salt had a very important

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<sup>474</sup>Note in another context Paul's statement in 2 Cor 12:12: "The signs of an apostle were wrought by me."

place in the ancient medicinal process. This fountain is identified with the spring near modern Jericho, ‘Ain es-Sultan, or Elisha’s spring.

6. Elisha called judgment on the young people who mocked him (2:23-25).

This miraculous act is quite troubling on the surface. It seems more the petulant act of an irritated man than a godly response of a prophet of Yahweh. Two issues have led some to argue that there is more than meets the eye: the bald head is said not to be typical for those who live outdoors a lot in the middle east.<sup>475</sup> Therefore, some would argue that it represented some kind of priestly tonsure. The second issue is the locale of the event. Bethel was where some of the prophets were located as we are told in 2:3 (Jeroboam’s cult was centered here as well). Consequently, some would argue, these children (they are little youths, [נְעָרִים קְטַנִּים *n<sup>e</sup>’arim q<sup>e</sup>tannym*]) were offspring of some of the prophets who were rejecting the authority of the prophetic office of Elisha. However, this kind of speculative reconstruction needs to be viewed with caution. The least that can be said is that God does not take lightly the mocking of his holiness (as with touching the ark and burning up the fifties that came against Elijah).

- B. Elisha guided Jehoram and Jehoshaphat in their war against Moab (3:1-27).

1. *Jehoram* succeeded *Ahab* and was as wicked (3:1-3).

*Jehoram* was the second son of *Ahab* who ruled after his brother *Ahaziah* from 852 to 841 B.C. He also was wicked, but the statement against him is ameliorated by the fact that he removed the Baal pillar his father had made. These pillars (*masebboth* מַצֵּבֹת) were objects of veneration.<sup>476</sup>

2. Jehoshaphat allied with *Jehoram* as he had with Jehoram’s father, *Ahab*. He seemed determined to maintain this non-spiritual relationship (3:4-8).

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<sup>475</sup>Montgomery, *Kings loc. cit.*

<sup>476</sup>See pictures of the excavations of Hazor in *ANEP* for examples.

- a. There were friendly relations between the Davidic dynasty and the Omride family in the north. This culminated in the marriage alliance of *Ahab* and Jezebel's daughter, Athaliah, to Jehoshaphat's son. This proved to be a disaster, for Athaliah inherited all her mother's devious skill.
- b. There are two accounts of the rebellion of Moab against Israel. One is the biblical reference of chapter 3 that speaks of a punitive expedition against Moab by Israel and Judah, joined by Edom.<sup>477</sup> This ended in a bloody defeat for Moab, but the long-term results were indecisive. Moab was not returned to "the fold." The other account comes from the King of Moab himself.<sup>478</sup>

"I am Mesha, son of Chemosh [ . . . ], king of Moab, the Dibonite—my father had reigned over Moab thirty years, and I reigned after my father,—(who) made this high place for Chemosh in Qarhoh [ . . . ] because he saved me from all the kings and caused me to triumph over all my adversaries. As for Omri, (5) king of Israel, he humbled Moab many years (lit., days), for Chemosh was angry at his land. And his son followed him and he also said, "I will humble Moab." In my time he spoke (thus), but I have triumphed over him and over his house, while Israel hath perished forever! (Now) Omri had occupied the land of Medeba, and [Israel] had dwelt there in his time and half the time of his son [Ahab], forty years; but Chemosh dwelt there in my time."<sup>479</sup> Either the subjugation began when Omri was still an officer or 40 represents a round number (testing?) since total rule of all Omri is 44-48 years. "Son" must mean grandson. (Nine lines out of twenty-two). The Moabite stone was discovered in 1878.

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<sup>477</sup>The anomaly of Edom joining Judah/Israel is explained by Haran (*IEJ* 18) by the fact that Edomite king is only a Judean viceroy who joins the battle automatically.

<sup>478</sup>See S. H. Horn, "Why the Moabite Stone was Blown to Pieces," *BAR*, 12:3 (1986): 50-61 for an excellent popular discussion of this important inscription. See also Hobbs, *Second Kings*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>479</sup>*ANET*, p. 320.

3. When they were in distress, Jehoshaphat called for a true prophet as he had done before, and Elisha appeared (3:9-12).

The logistics of moving a large number of troops through the wilderness of Edom are considerable, and they ran out of water. Elisha was near enough for them to make personal contact with him.

4. Elisha rebuked *Jehoram* as Elijah had rebuked *Ahab*, but then promised help for the sake of Jehoshaphat (3:13-20).

Elisha scathingly denounced *Jehoram* and demanded to know why he did not consult his own deity. *Jehoram* rather humbly replied that it looked as though these three kings had come together for defeat. Elisha promised provision and victory for the sake of Jehoshaphat.

On the harp playing and prophecy, Hobbs says: “This incident is unique in the stories of the prophets and provides one of the very few glimpses at the mechanics of prophetic inspiration. To generalize from this lone incident to a theory of prophetic inspiration, even for this early period of prophecy, would be unwise.<sup>480</sup> Music and musicians play a role in the activity of the band of prophets descending from the high place in 1 Sam 10:1-16, but other means of inspiration such as vision and audition are also found in the OT (Jer 1:11-15, etc.). That this was typical, or that one can appeal to the analogy of the dervish guilds of a much later age for parallels (so W. R. Smith, *The Prophets of Israel*, 2<sup>nd</sup>. Ed. [London: A. C. Black, 1895] 391-92, are unwarranted conclusions. Cf. also J. Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*, 59.”<sup>481</sup>

5. The Moabites were defeated, and the king committed a horrible act in sacrificing his eldest son (3:21-27).

“Anger against Israel” is a problem. The word translated “anger” (*qesep* אַרְצֵי) means just that in Hebrew, but in Syriac, it means to be

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<sup>480</sup>Cf. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*, 2:59.

<sup>481</sup>Hobbs, *Second Kings*, p. 36.

“sad” or “anxious.” The word “against” can also mean “upon” or “on.” Perhaps the Israelites became so upset over this horrible deed that they withdrew. “There was great sadness on Israel.” Surely, we cannot assume that God’s anger was against them for the deed of the Moabite king. Margolit agrees. He cites Ugaritic for the practice of offering the first born.<sup>482</sup>

C. Elisha performed several local miracles (4:1-44).

1. Elisha provided for the financial needs of one of the prophet’s widows (4:1-7).

This is a touching story of God’s provision for the needs of his servants. This woman does not seem to be living with a group, which might argue against the idea that the prophets lived communally. It probably does reflect a general situation of virtual poverty among the prophets. With so much venal prophecy going on, the only way they could protect their spiritual integrity was not to take money for their ministry.

2. Elisha prophesied that the Shunammite woman would become pregnant (4:8-17).

The story of the gracious lady of Shunem has caught the fancy of people for generations. She was generous with this man who probably lived on just such provisions. (Our phrase “prophet’s chamber” comes from this story.) She had no material needs, but she desperately wanted a child which he promised her.

3. Elisha raised the Shunammite woman’s dead son (4:18-37).

Doubly bitter is the sorrow of a woman who had been given a child after years of hopelessness only to have it taken in death. Small wonder that she spoke so bitterly to Elisha about frustrated hope.

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<sup>482</sup>Margolit, “Why King Mesha of Moab Sacrificed His Oldest Son,” *BAR* 12 (1986): 62-63.



Gehazi was unable to raise the boy as Jesus' disciples had been unable to cast out the demon. When Jesus raised the only son of a widow lady (Luke 7), people concluded that a great prophet had arisen in their midst.

4. Elisha purified the poison stew (4:38-41).

Elisha's ministry was confirmed also in the miracle of the stew. There was a famine in the land, and the prophets were eating whatever they could get their hands on. As a result, there was poisoned food. Elisha purified it.

5. Elisha fed a hundred men with twenty loaves (4:42-44).

Like Jesus feeding the five thousand, Elisha multiplied the meager food to feed an impossible number of people. No wonder the people said of Jesus, "He is Elijah, Jeremiah or one of the prophets" (Matt 16:14).

- D. Elisha performed a miracle of international dimensions (5:1-27).

1. Naaman came to the king of Israel for healing (5:1-7).

We have already seen the continuous warfare between the Syrians and the Israelites. In this story, a Syrian army general came to the king of Israel and demanded healing. This was an important man who had come with credentials from the Syrian king. Small wonder the king of Israel was in great consternation and could only assume that Syria was looking for a chance to start another war.

The purpose of this section is the same as 2 Kings 1, that the Syrians might know that there is a God in Israel (cf. 2 Kings 5:8).

2. Elisha sent for Naaman and told him to wash in the Jordan (5:8-14).

Elisha's intent was to let this foreign general know that there was a prophet (of Yahweh) in Israel. As a foreigner, worshipping foreign gods, Elisha wanted him to come to know the reality of Yahweh God of Israel. This indeed happened. Elisha, acting the part of a prophet

above king or general, disdained even to greet Naaman. The latter almost lost his opportunity to be healed because of his pride. He did as he was told and came back healed.

3. Naaman acknowledged Yahweh as God and wanted to pay Elisha (5:15-19).

This is a marvelous account of a man in Old Testament times who became intellectually convinced of the truth of the existence of one God named Yahweh. It is almost amusing to see Naaman struggle with the issue of compromise as a subordinate officer. He prays for Elisha's forgiveness if he has to go to the temple of the Syrian gods with his master. Elisha concedes the situation.

4. Gehazi's greed led him to lie to become rich (5:20-27).

The historian is not only revealing God's word to us, he is also a masterful storyteller. The account of the naive Gehazi, struggling with greed in the midst of poverty yet surrounded by Naaman's wealth is as true to life as it is pathetic. His lust led him to lie to the one man who would always know whether he were lying and from that to the leprosy of Naaman. Elisha, like Paul, knew that an effective ministry to a corrupt society depended on being free from the taint of purchased ministry. There was no place in Elisha's work for a man who would sell his ministry for money.

- E. Elisha performed another miracle with the prophet band (6:1-7).

Elisha caused an iron axe head to float. Intriguing questions are raised by this pericope: what kind of a building were they constructing? Did they live as in a commune? Does the borrowed axe represent poverty? The story is given to add to the weight of confirmation of Elisha's ministry. This miracle shows God's control over nature.

- F. Elisha performed miracles against the Aramean king (6:8-23).

1. He warned the king of Israel of the Arameans' location (6:8-14).
2. The Aramean king sent a small army to capture Elisha (6:15-19).

3. (If an Aramean king could move with impunity into Israelite territory to try to capture Elisha, what must this say about the impotence of the king of Israel?)
4. Elisha led them blinded to the king of Israel who released them at Elisha's orders (6:20-23).

This miracle shows God's control over Syria.

- G. Elisha spoke for God in delivering the city of Samaria from the Arameans (6:24—7:20).

1. The siege caused tragic circumstances (6:24-31).

Food had become so scarce that mothers were eating their babies. The king was asked to judge between two women who were quarreling over the fact that one mother would not produce the baby she had promised for food. The king blamed Elisha for the problem and threatened to kill him.

2. Elisha responded to the king's threat with a scathing remark and a promise of deliverance (6:32—7:2).

The king had sent a messenger, and he came later. Elisha knew they were coming and told the elders with whom he was sitting. The king told him that there was no point in waiting on Yahweh anymore. Elisha promised that food would be in abundance on the next day. A royal advisor mocked the promise, and Elisha predicted his death.

3. God gave a great victory without any human help, and four lepers discovered the abandoned camp (7:3-8).

The account of four discards from society discovering the abandoned Syrian camp is a delightful and ironic story. The powerful army of the Syrians, such a dire threat to Israel, was routed by a sound the Lord caused them to hear.

4. The lepers brought the news to the gate (7:9-15).

The lepers collected items until they were sated and became uneasy for not telling those in the city. The people are skeptical at first, but the king reconnoitered and discovered that it was true.

5. Elisha's prophecy proved to be true in all the details (7:16-20).

This miracle is more typical of the prophetic actions than most of the others in the Elisha section. God had apparently brought judgment on Samaria in the form of the siege. The King was religiously wearing sackcloth but was unrepentant in heart. The desperate circumstances of the siege finally drove him to challenge Elisha and Yahweh. God vindicated himself and his prophet by bringing great deliverance apart from human ability. The disdainful advisor was killed as Elisha had predicted (you will see it, but you will not eat it).

- H. Elisha warned the Shunammite woman of a coming famine, and she fled. When she returned, the king was told of Elisha's miracle with her (8:1-6).

Since Gehazi is presented here with the king, it is probable that this event took place before chapter 5 (Gehazi was a leper after that). This story is told to show the ability of Elisha to prophesy and to indicate the influence he had even on the king.

- I. Elisha anointed Hazael to be king over Syria (8:7-15).

1. Elijah had received, as part of his recommissioning, the responsibility of appointing three people whom God would use in the battle against Baal: Elisha, *Jehu* and Hazael. God's involvement through his prophets in Syria is almost the same as his work among the people of Israel. During this time there seems to have been a fair amount of contact between the prophets and Syria. The time has now come to anoint Hazael to be king over Syria (1 Kings 19:15-18). That assignment was carried out by his disciple.
2. Elisha told Hazael, Ben-Hadad's messenger, that the king would recover from his sickness (this sickness was probably a battle wound), but in an aside, he told Hazael the king would die. The man was

perplexed until Elisha told him that he would be the next king. Presumably, Ben-Hadad began to get well the next day, but Hazael killed him and became king in his place. Shalmaneser III says of these two kings: “I defeated Hadadezer of Damascus together with twelve princes, his allies. I stretched upon the ground 20,900 of his strong warriors like *su-bi*, the remnants of his troops I pushed into the Orontes river and they dispersed to save their lives; Hadadezer (himself) perished [N. B. he does not say *how* he perished]. Hazael, a commoner (lit.: son of nobody), seized the throne, called up a numerous army and rose against me. I fought with him and defeated him, taking the *chariots* of his camp. He disappeared to save his life. I marched as far as Damascus, his royal residence [and cut down his] gardens.”<sup>483</sup>

J. Jehoram began to reign in Judah (8:16-24).

Jehoram was allied by marriage with the house of *Ahab* (8:16-24).

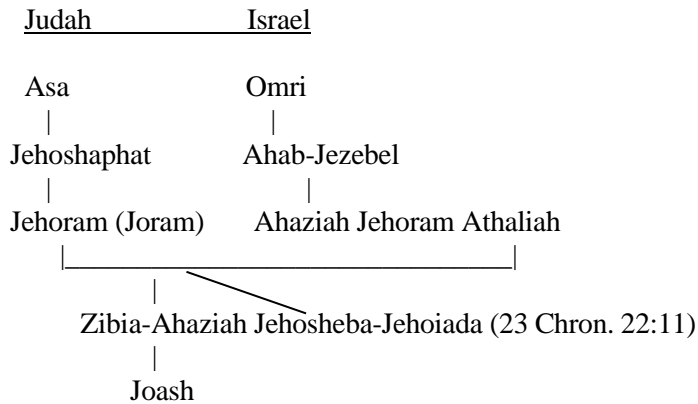
1. The bad blood of the *Ahab/Jezebel* family was transferred to Judah when their daughter, Athaliah, married Jehoshaphat’s son, Jehoram. She later became queen of Judah. The impact of this alliance on Jehoram was devastating. The south was as ripe for judgment as the north, but God postponed judgment because of the Davidic covenant (8:16-19).
2. The only act of Jehoram recorded in Kings is his attack on Edom. Edom revolted, and though Jehoram won a battle against them, he was unable to restore them to vassal status. Libnah is otherwise unknown but was probably a border Judean town. This rebellion shows the general state of chaos beginning to develop in Judah and is given here to show the beginning of God’s judgment on Judah for her sins (8:20-24).

K. Ahaziah began to reign in Judah (8:25-29).

There are so many similar names in this section, we will need a chart to keep them sorted out.

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<sup>483</sup>ANET, p. 280.



1. NASB’s “granddaughter” in v. 26 is a correct translation, but it is really “daughter” in Hebrew. “Son” and “daughter” can be used of any descendant or even of a successor (as in Daniel). The translation “son-in-law” of the house of *Ahab* is not a good translation. This Hebrew word *ḥathan* (חָתָן) means to be related by marriage. In this context, it is referring to the fact that the Davidide dynasty has become intermarried with the Omride dynasty (8:25-26).
  2. Ahaziah acted like the house of *Ahab* (as was to be expected under the circumstances) and, like his father, became entangled with an alliance with Israel to fight the Arameans at Ramoth-gilead. *Jehoram* of Israel was wounded in the battle. When he was recuperating in Jezreel, Ahaziah, his nephew, came to visit him (8:27-29).
- L. Elisha and *Jehu* began to exterminate Baal worship in Israel (9:1-36).
1. Elisha sent a prophet to anoint *Jehu*, an officer in *Jehoram*’s army (9:1-13).

*Jehu* was an older, experienced officer, having fought with *Ahab*. Elisha sent one of the prophets to anoint *Jehu* over Israel to avenge the blood of Naboth and the prophets of Yahweh whom Jezebel had slain. He interrupted the meeting, anointed *Jehu*, and fled. *Jehu*’s fellow officers then proclaimed him king, and he began his extermination of the dynasty of *Ahab*.

2. *Jehu* killed *Jehoram* and Ahaziah (9:14-29).

*Jehu* rode furiously to Jezreel, the royal house, where he killed both *Jehoram* and his nephew Ahaziah. There is an apparent discrepancy in the accounts of Kings and Chronicles on the place and manner of Ahaziah's death. Chronicles is a very abbreviated account because it is not concerned with the northern dynasty. Keil shows how some of it can be harmonized but says that the details are too sparse to allow for complete understanding. We will have to leave it at that.

3. *Jehu* killed Jezebel (9:30-37).

This is the account of the clash of two proud, callous people. Jezebel showed her character by painting herself to look nice in death and defying *Jehu* to kill her. She called him *Zimri*, because *Zimri* killed *Elah* and in turn only lived seven days. *Jehu* showed his character by sitting down to a full meal after the grisly death of Jezebel. In fulfillment of Elijah's prophecy, the dogs ate much of her body and carried most of it off.

4. *Jehu* had seventy sons of *Ahab* killed (10:1-11).

*Jehu*'s bold ruthlessness intimidated the elders of Samaria into killing seventy of *Ahab*'s sons and sending their heads to *Jehu* who told the people that he had nothing to do with their deaths.

5. *Jehu* killed forty-two relatives of Ahaziah (10:12-14).

*Jehu* in a very bloody manner killed these relatives of Ahaziah who were coming up to visit him.

6. *Jehu* allied with Jonadab the Rechabite (10:15-17).

Jonadab was a member of the semi-nomadic Rechabites who had little sympathy with the soft living of the royal house. He linked hands with *Jehu* to further the purge of *Ahab*'s house. (For Jeremiah's use of the descendants of Jonadab three hundred years later as examples of obedience, see Jeremiah 35.)

7. *Jehu* killed Baal adherents in Baal's temple (10:18-28).

Through an ingenious subterfuge, *Jehu* trapped a large number of adherents in the temple of Baal and killed them. They destroyed the sacred pillars and the temple of Baal. This action of *Jehu* was a major blow at the official cult of Baal. Two kings, the original promoter of Baalism (Jezebel), and many adherents were dead. The temple was destroyed, and the new king was an ardent advocate of Yahweh. Therefore, the historian can say that Baal had been eradicated. Baalism continued to be a significant force in Israel, but officially it was struck a mighty blow.

The prophet Hosea was ministering during the reign of *Jeroboam II*, a great-grandson of *Jehu*. The times are corrupt as is the house of *Jeroboam*. Hosea predicts judgment on that dynasty and says: "for yet a little while, and I will punish the house of *Jehu* for the bloodshed of Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of the house of Israel" (Hosea 1:4). Something about *Jehu's* acts did not please the Lord. Was it his attitude?

8. *Jehu* continued to pursue religious policies of the *Jeroboam* cult (10:29-31).

Three major reform movements began and failed in Israel. *Jehu's* reform was fairly superficial and short-lived, partly because *Jehu's* spirituality was questionable. Hezekiah's reform and Josiah's were more significant in the south and also came from men who were far more committed to Yahweh. Yet they failed. Hezekiah still faced an Assyrian invasion and Josiah was killed at Megiddo, and his movement ceased. In all this the inevitability of judgment because of the sins of the people seems to be in the foreground of the historian's mind. These efforts at reform, as important and valuable as they were, were insufficient to turn around this rebellious and sinful people. (There were other reform movements of less significance such as Asa's and Jehoshaphat's).



9. God began to cut off Israel piece by piece (10:32-36).

God's judgment, culminating in the Assyrian deportation of 722 B.C., began here. This encroachment on Israel's property by others is an indication of God's displeasure with Israel.

- V. The divided kingdom to the fall of Samaria (841-722 B.C.)—2 Kings 11:1—17:41.

- A. God protected the Davidic line through Joash (11:1-21).

1. Athaliah took the throne and tried to kill all the royal seed (11:1-3).

Ahaziah was killed by *Jehu* and Athaliah, his mother, took the throne. She murdered the royal seed, but her daughter (or stepdaughter), Jehosheba, rescued Joash and kept him alive (her husband was Jehoiada the priest). Joash was protected for six years in the temple while Athaliah ruled.

2. Jehoiada organized a *coup d'état* (11:4-16).

Jehoiada carefully organized the troops, brought out the king and crowned him. Athaliah was murdered, and the *Ahab/Jezebel* family finally came to an end.

3. Jehoiada made a covenant between the Lord and the king and the people to return to him (11:17-21).

- B. Joash (Jehoash) began to rule in Judah (12:1-21).

1. Joash followed Yahweh under the tutelage of Jehoiada (12:1-3).
2. Joash set about to repair the temple which had been damaged by Athaliah and her sons (2 Chron 24:7) (12:4-5).
3. The Priests apparently used the money for their own maintenance and had none left over for the repair (12:6-7).

4. The king took the project out of their hands and collected the money separately (12:8-16).
5. Hazael, king of Syria, captured Gath and besieged Jerusalem. Joash bought him off (12:17-18).
6. Joash's later years were characterized by apostasy. He re-instituted Baalism and even killed Jehoiada's son Zechariah for speaking out against him (2 Chron 24:15-24).
7. Joash was assassinated by his servants (12:19-21).

C. *Jehoahaz* and *Joash* ruled in Samaria (13:1-25).

1. *Jehoahaz* ruled seventeen years (13:1-9).

He was an evil king, and God delivered him over to Hazael. At *Jehoahaz's* entreaty, Yahweh gave Israel some relief from Hazael. Israel did not turn away from their sins, however, and Yahweh allowed them to be reduced to a virtually non-existent army. *Jehoahaz* died.

2. *Joash* ruled sixteen years (13:10-13).

*Joash* like his father was a wicked king. He fought against Amaziah, king of Judah. *Joash* died.

3. A vignette about Elisha is given at the conclusion of the *Joash* chronicle that took place before *Joash* had died. Elisha was about to die, and *Joash* came down to weep for him. Elisha showed him through shooting an arrow that he would have victory over Aram. Elisha showed him by having him hit the arrows on the floor that he would have three victories (but only three since he only hit three times) (13:14-19).
4. Elisha's body was the cause of a dead man being revived. *Joash* had the three promised victories over Aram (13:20-25).

D. Amaziah ruled twenty-nine years in Judah (14:1-22).

1. He was generally a good king (14:1-4).

He is faulted, as are so many kings, for not removing the high places. Again, this reflects the later judgment on the high places when they were totally compromised with Baalism.

2. He killed those who had assassinated his father (14:5-6).

Amaziah's desire to keep the law of Moses was evidenced in the refusal to kill the children of the Assassins.

3. He had a great victory over Edom (14:7).

God gave him a great victory, but it caused him to become proud and led him to an ill-advised war with Israel. The Chronicler adds a unit on his apostasy (2 Chron 25:14-16).

4. He then picked a fight with Israel (14:8-14).

*Joash* (king of Israel) warned him against the provocation, but he refused to pay attention. Israel won the battle. (A parable is given in which the thorn bush tries to form a marriage alliance with the cedar. This may indicate that a real attempt had been made by Amaziah to forge a marriage alliance with Joash. Amaziah was taken hostage and Azariah served as co-regent.)

5. A side note is given on *Joash* (14:15-16).

Information on the reign of the northern king is given here because he was mentioned in this context.

6. Amaziah was assassinated in Lachish (14:17-22).

The people became dissatisfied with King Amaziah for some reason, and he was forced to flee to Lachish, but they pursued him there and

killed him. Then his son Azariah (Uzziah) became king at age sixteen. Azariah (Uzziah) rebuilt the port city of Elath.

E. *Jeroboam* II ruled forty-one years in Samaria (14:23-29).

1. He was an evil king (14:23-24).

*Jeroboam* was the last significant king in the *Jehu* dynasty (his son ruled six months). During his rule the northern kingdom regained some of its former glory. Hosea and Amos both prophesied during his reign and excoriated king and people for an opulent life style that resulted in further departure from Yahweh and oppression of the poor.

2. He restored the borders of Israel (14:25-27).

a. The borders were pushed to Hamath in the north and to the Dead Sea in the south as prophesied by Jonah (14:25-26).

Cohen says, “Assyria lay nearly prostrate before its northern foe; it was impoverished and dispirited. Well might a prophet be believed who would proclaim: ‘Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!’”<sup>484</sup>

b. The historian gives God’s reasons for preserving Israel in spite of their wickedness (14:27).

3. He restored territory that had once belonged to Judah under David. It was as far north as Hamath (but not including it) and Damascus (included); hence he had conquered the kingdom of Damascus (14:28).

4. He died and *Zechariah*, his son ruled in his place (14:29).

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<sup>484</sup>S. Cohen, “The Political Background of the Words of Amos,” *HUCA* 36 (1965) 53-160. He goes on to say in f.n. 13, “Although the book is a piece of didactic fiction, it is based on a sound historical reminiscence, for the prophet Jonah ben Amittai (II Kings 14:25) could very well have lived about the time when Nineveh was threatened with capture and destruction.”

F. Azariah (Uzziah) ruled fifty-two years in Judah (15:1-7).

1. Azariah was essentially a good king (15:1-4).

It is good when a king rules well and long. He is charged in the matter of the high places, but otherwise he followed the Lord.

2. He was punished for entering the priestly office (15:5).

The office of the priest was historically carefully separated from that of the king. David was involved to some extent in a priestly function (e.g., when he brought up the ark), but that was the exception. The intrusion into the priests' office was dealt with by God to show that it was improper (cf. 2 Chron 26:19).<sup>485</sup>

3. He was a very successful king (2 Chronicles 26).

2 Chron 26:6 speaks of the expansion of the kingdom under him.

5. He died and Jotham took his place (15:6-7).

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<sup>485</sup>Assyria declined somewhat at the end of the ninth century, but the mighty Tiglath-Pileser III (744-727) brought his country back to great heights. He campaigned in the west from 743-738. There he encountered a certain Azariah of Judah in Syria, defeated him and destroyed much of his territory (*ANET*, p. 282). Some scholars have a problem accepting Azariah as the biblical one, but Bright (*History of Israel*, p. 252) is surely correct in saying that it would be exceptional to have two kings and two territories with the same name in the same period of time. (See also Tadmor "Azriyau of Yaudi" in *Scripta Hierosolymitana* 8 [1961] 232-271 for a thoroughgoing defense of the identity.) The devastation spoken of in Isaiah 1 is therefore probably the result of this attack from Assyria, and so, early on Judah came under the shadow of this eastern scourge. Kitchen, *OROT*, p. 18 says it is unlikely.

G. Five kings ruled in Samaria, reflecting a time of insecurity (15:8-31).

1. *Zechariah* son of *Jeroboam* ruled six months (15:8-12).

He was a wicked king who only lasted a short time. He was assassinated by his successor, bringing an end to the dynasty of *Jehu* in the fourth generation as God had promised (15:12).

2. *Shallum*, *Zechariah*'s murderer, ruled one month (15:13-16).

The anarchy continued when *Menahem* murdered *Shallum* after the latter had ruled for only one month. (This was not a good time to be king!) *Menahem* took over.

3. *Menahem*, *Shallum*'s murderer, ruled ten years (15:17-22).

He was an evil king. He bribed Pul (Tiglath-Pileser) to confirm and support his reign. Assyria now began to meddle in the west more and more. Tiglath-Pileser says: “[As for Menahem I ov]erwhelmed him [like a snowstorm] and he . . . fled like a bird, alone, [and bowed to my feet(?)]. I returned him to his place [and imposed tribute upon him, to wit:] gold, silver, linen garments with multicolored trimmings . . . great . . . [I re]ceived from him. Israel (lit.: “Omri-Land” *Bit Humria*) . . . all its inhabitants (and) their possession I led to Assyria.”<sup>486</sup> *Menahem* died.

4. *Pekahiah*, *Menahem*'s son, ruled two years (15:23-26).

He was an evil king, and he was assassinated by his successor, *Pekah*.

5. *Pekah*, *Pekahiah*'s murderer, ruled twenty years (15:27-31).

The long stable rule of *Uzziah* in the south is in stark contrast to the chaos of the time during which five different kings ruled in the north. *Pekah* assassinated *Pekahiah*. He was an evil king. Assyria captured cities from him and carried away captives. He was assassinated. Tig-

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<sup>486</sup>ANET, p. 283.

lath-Pileser says: “They overthrew their king Pekah and I placed *Hoshea* as king over them. I received from them 10 talents of gold, 1,000(?) talents of silver as their [tri]bute and brought them to Assyria”<sup>487</sup>

H. Jotham, Uzziah’s son, ruled sixteen years in Judah (15:32-38).

1. He was a good king (15:32-35).

A series of good kings ruled in the south. Jotham is pronounced a good man except for the perennial matter of the high places.

2. *Pekah* and Rezin of Syria came against him (15:36-37).

This diabolical combination will still be in existence in the days of Ahaz when they make a devastating attack on Jerusalem and bring forth the great prophecy of Isaiah in chapter 7.

3. Jotham died and was succeeded by his son Ahaz (15:38).

I. Ahaz, Jotham’s son, ruled sixteen years in Judah (16:1-20).

1. Ahaz was a wicked king (16:1-4).

He even passed his son through the fire (the consummate sin) and practiced the Canaanite religion (16:4).<sup>488</sup>

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<sup>487</sup>*ANET*, p. 284. For a discussion of the idea that *Pekah* ruled in Gilead for twelve of his twenty year, overlapping *Menahem* and *Pekahiah*, see Thiele, *MNHK*, p. 63. He cites Hosea 5:5: “Therefore, shall Israel and Ephraim . . . Judah also.”

<sup>488</sup>See L. E. Stager and S. R. Wolff, “Child Sacrifice at Carthage—Religious rite or Population Control?” *BAR* 10:1(1984): 31-51 for an excellent discussion of the Canaanite practice of child sacrifice as carried on at Carthage.

2. Israel and the Arameans conspired against him (16:5-6).

They attacked Jerusalem. For the prophetic view on this entire incident, see Isaiah 7. There Isaiah met Ahaz and challenged him to trust in Yahweh rather than in human help. He offered Ahaz any sign in heaven or earth to confirm his faith, but he refused. Out of that incident grew the great virgin prophecy.

The Arameans' strength is indicated when they take the port city of Elath from Ahaz, deport the Jews and resettle it with their own people. When we remember that Elath is at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba, this is a remarkable statement of Judean weakness.

3. Ahaz sent to Tiglath-Pileser (16:7-9).

In spite of Isaiah's exhortation, Ahaz bribed Tiglath-Pileser with money from the temple to put pressure on Syria and Israel. Tiglath-Pileser attacked Syria, and they withdrew from Judah (Assyria would have come west to suppress the rebellion of Pekah and Rezin without Ahaz's encouragement.)

4. Ahaz copied a pagan altar (16:10-16).

Ahaz' syncretism is evidenced in that he was enamored of an altar he saw when he went up to visit Tiglath-Pileser. Consequently, he had plans drawn of the altar, copied it and set it up in the temple precincts. His vassalage to Assyria probably involved some religious subservience as well.

5. Ahaz removed much of the temple furniture "because of the king of Assyria" (perhaps to keep him from getting them) (16:17-18).

6. Ahaz died leaving only the marks of his apostasy (16:19-20).

- J. The judgment of God came upon the kingdom of Israel (17:1-41).



1. *Hoshea* ruled nine years, but Assyria defeated him and deported Israel because he conspired against Assyria (17:1-6).

Sargon II says: “At the begi[nning of my royal rule, I . . . the town of the Sama]rians [I besieged, conquered] (2 lines destroyed) [for the god . . . who le]t me achieve (this) my triumph. . . . I led away as prisoners [27,290 inhabitants of it (and) [equipped] from among [them (soldiers to man)] 50 chariots for my royal corps . . . [The town I] re[built] better than (it was) before and [settled] therein people from countries which [I] myself [had con]quered. I placed an officer of mine as governor over them and imposed upon them tribute as (is customary) for Assyrian citizens”<sup>489</sup>

2. The historian explains why all this happened (17:7-23).

This extended sermon is given by the historian, writing from the perspective of early in the Judean exile, to explain the deep apostasy into which Israel had fallen. He begins with their deliverance from Egypt and shows that throughout their history they had followed pagan religious practices until they reached the point of no return. Judgment, long promised by the prophets, came.

The historian explains that Judah sinned also following the practices of the north, but their time had not yet come.

3. The mixed population asked for an Israelite priest since they were not doing well in the land (17:24-33).

A priest was brought back who taught them about Yahweh. In light of the northern history, one has to wonder what this priest taught them. In spite of this teaching about Yahweh, each ethnic group carried on its own religious practice, and chaos ensued. This is the beginning of the “Samaritan” sect.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>489</sup>ANET, p. 284.

<sup>490</sup>See Macdonald, *The Theology of the Samaritans*, p. 29. “The later prophets do not refer to the Samaritans, but to Israel, and assume that they are in the plan of God rather than a ‘mongrel’ race. He believes that the Judean account of the origins of the

4. The historian gives a final word explaining historically the problem of rejecting Yahweh (17:34-41).

At the time this book was composed, these polytheistic practices were still going on. Ezra and Nehemiah should be read to gain insight into the practices of these syncretistic Jews in the north and those left in the south after the debacle of 586 B.C. The final word of the historian is telling: “So while these nations feared the Lord, they also served their idols; their children likewise and their grandchildren, as their fathers did, so they do to this day” (17:41)

#### VI. Judah to the captivity (716-586 B.C.) (2 Kings 18:1—25:30).

##### A. Hezekiah’s good reign over Judah (2 Kings 18—20).

1. Hezekiah was 25 years old when he became king and he reigned 29 years (18:1-2).
2. Hezekiah was a good king in spite of the spiritual apostasy of his father (18:3-8).

He was pleasing to Yahweh. He destroyed much of the idolatry including the bronze serpent Moses had made (*n<sup>e</sup> hash hann<sup>e</sup> hosheth* נִחַשׁ הַנְּחֹשֶׁת). The historian says that there was no king prior to Hezekiah who trusted Yahweh as he did (hence, he trusted him more than David) nor was there any like him afterward. 2 Kings 25:24-25 says almost the same thing about Josiah. The difference between the two men was apparently a matter of emphasis: Hezekiah trusted

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Samaritans is suspect, but this does not mean that the Samaritan account is reliable.”

“Each had polemic reasons to bend history to their own dogmas. Any claim for Samaritan borrowing from Judaism is nonsense, as anyone who has read all the available literary material must judge. What is true beyond doubt is that both Samaritanism and Judaism developed from a common matrix. Both possessed the Law, albeit they were at variance over points of difference in their respective texts of it, and both were evolving in an atmosphere wherein many ideas and ideals were being nurtured.” See also I. Koch, *et al.* “Forced resettlement and immigration at Tel Hadid,” *BAR* 46:3, pp. 28-33, for archaeological evidence of this action by Assyria.

Yahweh while Josiah was carrying out the directions of the newly discovered law book. Both were outstanding, godly kings. (This statement may be simply a strong way of saying they were very good kings.) Because of his trust in Yahweh, Hezekiah received the blessing of Yahweh. He successfully rebelled against the Assyrian overlord and defeated the Philistines.

3. Hezekiah was the king when Israel was deported (18:9-12).

Shalmaneser is credited with the deportation, but Sargon claims credit in his annals. 722 is the year for the death of Shalmaneser and the beginning of Sargon's rule. Therefore, they were probably both involved in the act. This section of the synchronization between the northern and southern kingdoms and external dates is fraught with great difficulty.<sup>491</sup>

The reason for the deportation is stated here succinctly (a longer sermon is given in chap. 17) (18:12).

4. Hezekiah had his troubles with Assyria after he rebelled against them (18:13-17).

Sennacherib says: "In the continuation of my [third] campaign I besieged Beth-Dagon, Joppa, Banai-Barqa, Azuru, cities belonging to Sidqia who did not bow to my feet quickly (enough); I conquered (them) and carried their spoils away. The officials, the patricians and the (common) people of Ekron—who had thrown Padi, their king, into fetters (because he was) loyal to (his) solemn oath (sworn) by the god Ashur, and had handed him over to Hezekiah, the Jew . . . (and) he (Hezekiah) held him in prison, unlawfully, as if he (Padi) be an enemy—had become afraid and had called (for help) upon the kings

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<sup>491</sup>See Thiele *Mysterious Numbers of the Hebrew Kings*, and Stigers, "The Inter-phased Chronology of Jotham, Ahaz, Hezekiah and Hoshea," *JETS* 9 (1966) 81-90. (Note that the chart on p. 261 shows Hezekiah beginning his rule after the northern captivity took place. Hezekiah must have been co-regent with his father in 722). See also p. 308.

of Egypt. . . As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and to the countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered (them) by means of well stamped (earth-)ramps, and battering-rams brought (thus) near (to the walls) (combined with) the attack by foot soldiers, (using) mines, breeches as well as sapper work. I drove out (of them) 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle beyond counting, and considered (them) booty. Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded him with earthwork in order to molest those who were leaving his city's gate. His towns which I had plundered, I took away from his country and gave them (over) to Mitinti, king of Ashdod, Padi, king of Ekron, and I still increased the tribute and the *katru*-presents (due) to me (as his) overlord which I imposed (later) upon him beyond the former tribute, to be delivered annually. Hezekiah himself, whom the terror-inspiring splendor of my lordship had overwhelmed and whose irregular and elite troops which he had brought into Jerusalem, his royal residence, in order to strengthen (it), had deserted him, did send me, later to Nineveh, my lordly city, together with 30 talents of gold, 800 talents of silver, . . . In order to deliver the tribute and to do obeisance as a slave he sent his (personal) messenger.”<sup>492</sup>

a. Sennacherib came west to suppress the rebellion begun by Hezekiah (18:13).<sup>493</sup>

b. Hezekiah capitulated and paid the required tribute (18:14-16).

5. A suggested sequence for this difficult chronology is as follows:<sup>494</sup>

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<sup>492</sup>ANET, pp. 287, 288.

<sup>493</sup>See ANEP for the siege of Lachish.

<sup>494</sup>The chronology at the time of Hezekiah is very difficult. In the parallel account of Isaiah, Isaiah takes priority. I owe to Dr. Todd Beall the following argument: 1) Isaiah 36:2 ties in with Isaiah 7:3 (where God tells Isaiah to meet Ahaz). This is important in Isaiah, but not in Kings. 2) “the Holy One of Israel” is used 25 times in Isaiah, elsewhere in the Old Testament only six times. One time in 2 Kings 19:22 (=Isaiah 37:23). So, it

- a. Hezekiah rebelled against Assyria (18:7).
  - b. In the fourteenth year, Sennacherib came west, and Hezekiah promised to submit (18:13-16).
  - c. Sennacherib sent messengers to challenge Hezekiah (18:17-37).
  - d. Isaiah promised deliverance through a rumor (19:7).
  - e. Rabshakeh pulled back after hearing of Tirhakah (19:9).
  - f. He sent more letters to Hezekiah (19:10).
  - g. Hezekiah prayed and Isaiah promised deliverance (19:14-34).
  - h. Sennacherib's army was struck and 185,000 were killed (19:35).
  - i. Sennacherib was assassinated by his sons (19:37).
6. Sennacherib decided to punish Hezekiah (18:17-37).
- a. His representatives came to Jerusalem and stood at the very spot Isaiah had met Hezekiah's father, Ahaz (Isa 7:1-3), and admonished him to trust Yahweh rather than go to Assyria for help (18:17).
  - b. Rabshakeh challenged Hezekiah's officials as to their ability to withstand the great force of Assyria. He asked them whom they could rely on: Egypt? Yahweh? (saying that Hezekiah had offended him by removing his high places). He asked them whether they could mount horses with soldiers if he gave them

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would seem to follow that Kings is simply following the Isaiah account, using both the place name in 36:2 that makes sense in Isaiah and the Holy One of Israel name used almost exclusively in Isaiah. 3) The whole mess with the chronology of 2 Kings 18 is solved when one realizes that Kings changes sources in 2 Kings 18:13. But the *previous* references to Hezekiah's reign in 2 Kings 18 (vv. 1, 9, and 10) refer to the beginning of his coregency with Ahaz. Why the switch? Well, because in 2 Kings 18:13 the writer of 2 Kings switches to Isaiah's narrative.

the horses (a real insult). Finally, he told them that Yahweh himself had sent Sennacherib to destroy the land (18:18-25).

- c. The Rabshakeh then addressed the people directly. The officials tried to get the Rabshakeh to speak in Aramaic, the trade language of that era, rather than in Hebrew. The Rabshakeh refused and redoubled his efforts to convince the people to surrender and let him deport them to another land. In the process he blasphemed Yahweh by considering him to be as any other god. The people did not respond (18:26-36).
  - d. The officials brought this report to Hezekiah with clothes torn as a sign of mourning (18:37).
7. Yahweh responded to Hezekiah's trust and delivered Judah from Sennacherib (19:1-37).

- a. Hezekiah sent to Isaiah the prophet for spiritual help (19:1-5).

The godly character of Hezekiah is shown in this time of crisis. He recognized that all his political acumen would not deliver him from this dilemma. Consequently, he went to the prophet Isaiah to ask him for prayer. The contrast between Hezekiah and Ahaz is sharp.

- b. Isaiah responded that God would answer his prayer and deliver Judah (19:6-7).
- c. The Rabshakeh lifted the siege because of confusion about the location of Sennacherib (19:8-9).
- d. He sent a threatening letter to Hezekiah (19:10-13).
- e. Hezekiah took the letter to the Lord and prayed for deliverance (19:14-19).
- f. Isaiah brought a message from the Lord stating his sovereignty and promising to judge the Assyrian (19:20-28).

- g. Yahweh even gave a sign to Hezekiah (19:29-34). (Note the Davidic covenant again in 19:34).
  - h. Yahweh sent a plague killing 185,000, and Sennacherib returned home and was assassinated by his sons (19:35-37). (Compare Isaiah 36-39, a parallel account used by the author of Kings. See f.n. on p. 308).
8. Hezekiah became sick, and his life was prolonged by Yahweh (20:1-21).
- a. Hezekiah became sick and was told by Isaiah that he would die. Hezekiah prayed for healing, and Yahweh answered his prayer and gave him fifteen more years. He gave him a sign (backward movement of the sundial or of the shadow on the stairs—same miracle) (20:1-11).
  - b. The newly emerging power, Babylon, sent ambassadors to inquire of Hezekiah's health (ostensibly) and to promote western resistance to Assyria (20:12-19).

The Arameans who had infiltrated the southern end of the Mesopotamian valley and insinuated themselves into the government of Babylon were trying to break away from a weakening Assyria. Berodach or Merodach sent messengers west to foment trouble (20:12).

Hezekiah followed the new policy of supporting anyone but Assyria that would prove fatal to the Judean kingdom (20:13).

Isaiah rebuked him for this indiscretion and promised judgment on Judah through Babylonia (20:14-19).<sup>495</sup>

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<sup>495</sup>The structure of the book of Isaiah places chapters 38-39 covering this same situation just before the second section of the book dealing with the Babylonian exile so as to tie together the prophecy of Isaiah with its fulfillment in the exile.

- c. Hezekiah died. Mention is made of the pool and the conduit he built (20:20-21).

The inscription found on the wall of Hezekiah's tunnel reads as follows: "[. . . when] (the tunnel) was driven through. And this was the way in which it was cut through:—While [. . . ] (were) still [. . . ] axe(s), each man toward his fellow, and while there were still three cubits to be cut through, [there was heard] the voice of a man calling to his fellow, for there was *an overlap* in the rock on the right [and on the left]. And when the tunnel was driven through, the quarrymen hewed (the rock), each man toward his fellow, axe against axe; and the water flowed from the spring toward the reservoir for 1,200 cubits, and the height of the rock above the head(s) of the quarrymen was 100 cubits."<sup>496</sup>

- B. Manasseh became king at the age of 12 and had a long, wicked rule of fifty-five years (21:1-18).

1. Manasseh had a very negative impact on Judah (21:1-9).

He restored the idolatry Hezekiah had destroyed. He built pagan altars in the temple. (Note the astral religion of the Assyrians.) He sacrificed his son in the fire and practiced sorcery and witchcraft. He put a carved image of Asherah in the temple. The historian reminds us of the sacredness of the temple and of Yahweh's promised blessing for obedience.

2. Yahweh spoke a message of judgment against Manasseh through the prophets (21:10-15).

He ascribed the reason for the judgment to Manasseh's perfidy which he said was worse than all the Amorites before him. He promised an "ear tingling" judgment on Judah and Manasseh. Furthermore, Jerusalem and Manasseh would suffer the same kind of judgment brought against Samaria and *Ahab*.

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<sup>496</sup>ANET, p. 321.



3. The historian recorded further evil deeds of Manasseh (21:16-18).

Manasseh was also a cruel murderer. Chronicles records that Manasseh was carried to Babylon in fetters where he repented and was returned to Jerusalem. However, his repentance was too late, and the results of his evil too entrenched to allay the judgment (2 Chron 33:10-13.) The later Jews, curious about the content of Manasseh's prayer, wrote one—"The Prayer of Manasseh."

- C. Amon became king at age 22 and ruled only two years (21:19-26).

1. Amon was also wicked, walking in all the ways of his father and forsaking the Lord (21:19-22).
2. Amon was assassinated by his servants and the people of the land made Josiah king (21:23-26).

- D. Josiah became king at age eight and ruled thirty-one good years (22:1—23:30).

1. Josiah came to the throne as a minor, and under the tutelage of someone like Jehoiada, was a spiritual boy and later a spiritual man (22:1-2).
2. Historical survey of the last days of Judah.

640-608 Josiah reigned in Judah. He began reform in his 12th year (628-7) and extended it further in his 18th year (623-2) after weakness of Assyria became apparent when they were driven from Babylon by Nabopolassar (626-5). Hogarth, *CAH*, III, 146, thinks the Scythians may have broken Assyrian power in the west. Egypt also felt free to begin to move. Jeremiah began his ministry in the 13th year of Josiah (Jer 1:2).

627 Jeremiah was called to the prophetic ministry at a young age.

624 At age sixteen, Josiah began to seek the Lord.

- 622 At age 18, he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of idolatry.
- 626-623 Tablet #25127 (British Museum).<sup>497</sup>  
Nabopolassar defeated the Assyrian army at the gates of Babylon and was crowned king of Babylon—November 23, 626. Nabopolassar was not strong enough to attack Nineveh.
- 616-608 Tablet #21901 (British Museum).  
A gap covering 622-617 exists.  
Medes were the head of an anti-Assyrian group. Egypt had allied herself with Assyria.
- 614 The Medes defeated Asshur in 614. Nabopolassar joined them and defeated Nineveh in 612 B.C. The Book of the Law was found in the temple, bringing further reform. The waning power of the Assyrians allowed Josiah to take the reform movement into the northern area that was formerly Israel. These people were still Jewish, however mixed with foreigners. They were basically apostate, and Josiah tried to influence them spiritually.
- 612 A remnant of the Assyrian army fled to Haran under Assurballit II who tried to reconstitute the kingdom. They were forced out of Haran by Babylon in spite of extensive Egyptian help in 610. The Egyptians joined Assyria in an effort to retake the garrison in 609 but failed. Josiah tried to interdict the Egyptian army at Megiddo and was killed. (2 Kings 23:28-30; 2 Chron 35:20-27. Chronicles referred to the battle area as Carchemish.) The Egyptians at this point take over control of Syria after the defeat of the Assyrians. Pharaoh-Necho on his way back, deposed Jehoahaz who had ruled only three months after the death of Josiah, his father, and puts Jehoiakim, another son of Josiah, on the throne.
- 607-696 Tablet #22047.  
Babylonian armies under Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar battle against mountain people and try to control Egyptians in

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<sup>497</sup>D. J. Wiseman, *The Chronicles of Chaldaean Kings (626-556 B.C.)*.

Syria. The latter were entrenched at Carchemish. Nabopolassar returned to Babylon in 606-5 where he died.

- 605-594 Tablet #21946.  
Nebuchadnezzar in sole command of the army, marched against the Egyptians at Carchemish and defeated them. Jer 46:2 places this in the fourth year of Jehoiakim. (cf. also Jer 25:1, who relates the fourth year of Jehoiakim to the first year of Nebuchadnezzar.)
- 605 Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem and Jehoiakim became his vassal. (2 Kings 24:1) (Dan 1:1 says that in Jehoiakim's *third* year Nebuchadnezzar carried off captives. Daniel must be using the accession year of Nebuchadnezzar which was not counted as his first year.) Cf. also 2 Chron 36:6 where Jehoiakim is bound but apparently not carried off, or perhaps he was taken to Babylon in a victory parade and then returned to Jerusalem.
- 601-600 In December Nebuchadnezzar marched against Egypt. Judah was probably still a vassal of Babylon. (He would not likely have left his rear exposed to a hostile army.) The battle was fierce and Babylon suffered heavy losses. Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon to regroup his army. (*ANET* sup. p. 564). It was probably at this time that Jehoiakim rebelled (2 Kings 24:2).
- 600-599 While Nebuchadnezzar was refurbishing his troops, Judah enjoyed a measure of independence, but Nebuchadnezzar probably was involved in encouraging other of his vassals against Jerusalem (2 Kings 24:2).
- 598 In December Nebuchadnezzar came west again to put an end to the rebellion. Jehoiachin, son of the now dead Jehoiakim, was on the throne. On March 16, 597, Jerusalem was defeated, Jehoiachin and others were deported to Babylon, and Zedekiah, another son of Josiah, was put on the throne.
- 595-4 A local rebellion in Babylon led Zedekiah's advisors to believe they could throw off Babylon's yoke. This was in direct opposition to the word of the Lord (cf. Jer 28:1ff).

586 In spite of Jeremiah's constant urging to submit to the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar as God's servant, Zedekiah entered into alliances to revolt against Babylonia. Nebuchadnezzar came west and besieged the city of Jerusalem in 588. After one and a half years, the walls were breached. Zedekiah tried to escape but was captured and sent to Babylon. The city was destroyed, the temple was razed, and many people were taken into captivity. The final destruction of the city and temple are absent from the Babylonian Chronicle due to a gap. The data for that final destruction and deportation are found in 2 Kings 25 and 2 Chronicles 36.

Gedaliah, a member of the royal family, was appointed governor by the Babylonians. Just three months after the fall of the city, he was assassinated, and the remnant fled to Egypt. Jeremiah and Baruch were also taken to Egypt, where Jeremiah continued to prophesy to an unrepentant people.

582 Jer 52:30 speaks of a deportation of 745 people in this year. Was this a punitive raid to deal with the assassination of Gedaliah?

560 Thirty-seven years after the first attack on Jerusalem, Jehoiachin was elevated by Evil-Merodach (Ewal-Marduk) 2 Kings 25:27-30. He seemed to be regarded as the official king even in exile (cf. Ezek 1:2).<sup>498</sup>

3. Josiah began to repair the temple as had Joash (22:3-7).
4. The priest, Hilkiah, found the book of the law (22-8-13).
  - a. This may be the book of Deuteronomy, or it could be the entire Pentateuch. Probably it is the former since it was read in what appears to be a rather short time. Additionally, it is the Palestinian covenant to which Yahweh seems to refer (22:8-9).

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<sup>498</sup>For more historical details of this important era, see my notes to the book of Jeremiah in *Old Testament Prophets*.

- b. Shaphan reported to Josiah that the repairs had been made and that they had found the law book (22:10).
  - c. Josiah was dismayed when he read the book because its contents had not been obeyed by the fathers (22:11-13).<sup>499</sup>
5. Yahweh, through Huldah, the prophetess, told Josiah that He was going to bring the judgments mentioned in the book of the law upon Judah, but that Josiah would be spared because he had humbled himself (22:14-20).
  6. Josiah and the people entered a covenant to keep the contents of the book (23:1-3).
  7. Josiah then began to purge the temple (23:4-14).

He removed the vessels dedicated to pagan deities and got rid of the idolatrous priests. He destroyed the idols and the houses of the male prostitutes. He tried to bring the Levitical priests from the various high places to the religious center at Jerusalem, but not all came. He defiled Topheth in the valley of Hinnom to prevent any more dedication of children to the god Molech. He got rid of the horses and chariots dedicated to the sun. He got rid of altars on the roof of the palace and the altars in the two courts and tore down the high places Solomon had erected to various foreign gods.

8. Josiah then began to purge the northern kingdom (23:15-20).

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<sup>499</sup>The present prevailing opinion in critical circles is that the history of Israel found in the Bible was written by a school or movement whose theology is reflected in the book of Deuteronomy. These people during and/or after the exile took existing materials and constructed them in such a way as to reflect their interpretation of God's working in His people. The earlier critical view was that the book of Deuteronomy was concocted out of whole cloth to force upon the people the idea that Yahweh could only be worshipped in the temple at Jerusalem. More recent opinion believes that much of Deuteronomy is old, but that it was put together in the seventh century to bring about religious reform. For a good discussion of this issue, see D. J. Wiseman, "Ancient Orient, 'Deuteronism,' and the Old Testament," pp. 1-24. See also my comments on p. 176.

- a. The ability to move into the area ruled by Assyria shows that Assyrian power had weakened considerably. Whether Josiah had political aims in the north as well can only be conjectured.
  - b. He tore down the altar at Bethel and so fulfilled the prediction of the prophet in 1 Kings 13. He acknowledged the tomb of the prophet who had predicted that Josiah would destroy the altar. He destroyed temples in Samaria and killed the priests who were serving them.
9. Josiah then celebrated the Passover (23:21-23).
10. Josiah extended the reform (23:24-25).
- He got rid of the mediums and spiritists to conform to the word of God in the law. He received the highest encomium possible in that day.<sup>500</sup>
11. All Josiah's good work did not atone for the sins of Judah. Yahweh had determined judgment, and it would be carried out in time (23:26-27).
12. Josiah was killed trying to support the ill-advised policies instituted by his great-grandfather, Hezekiah, viz., to support the Babylonians against Assyria. Pharaoh Necho was going to the support of a weakened Assyria, and Josiah was killed trying to intercept him (23:28-30).
- E. Josiah's son Jehoahaz, an evil young man, was put on the throne by the people, but he was deposed by Pharaoh Necho after only three months (23:31-33).

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<sup>500</sup>See the comment relative to Hezekiah, *loc. cit.*

- F. Jehoiakim, another son of Josiah, was put on the throne by Pharaoh Necho as a vassal to Egypt (23:34—24:7).

Jehoiakim was wicked also. Nebuchadnezzar came against Jerusalem in 606/5 and Jehoiakim became a vassal to Babylonia. These judgments, says the historian, were God's punishment for disobedience. Jehoiakim died after eleven years of rule (age 36). He was probably killed in a palace coup.<sup>501</sup>

- G. Jehoiachin, Josiah's grandson, ruled only long enough to surrender the city to Nebuchadnezzar the second time (24:8-17).

There had been a rebellion against Babylonia. The vessels of the temple were deported as well as the choice artisans of the city (Ezekiel was in this group). Jehoiachin was also deported.

- H. Zedekiah, a third son of Josiah, became king at the age of twenty-one and ruled eleven years (24:18—25:21)

Scope of the deportation: "Casual readers of the Bible generally assume that virtually the entire population of Judah was carried off to Babylon at this time with only the most derelict remaining behind. This picture may not be accurate. H.M. Barstad, for instance, while agreeing that Nebuchadnezzar did serious damage in the capital and crippled the national leadership, interprets the archaeological and textual evidence as indicating that the basic structure of society stayed substantially intact."<sup>502</sup> For an opposing view, see Yigal Levin, "Ancient Israel Through a Social Scientific Lens," *BAR* 40, no. 5 (2014): 43–47, 66. He quotes Faust extensively who argues that the land was empty.

1. Zedekiah was a wicked king who also rebelled against Babylonia (24:18-20).

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<sup>501</sup>See Jeremiah 36 for an intimate look at Jeremiah's relation to this impious king.

<sup>502</sup>H. M. Barstad, *The Myth of the Empty Land: A Study in the History and Archaeology of Judah during the 'Exilic' Period*, p. 281. I cannot find the author of the original quote.

2. Nebuchadnezzar besieged the city again (25:1-7).

The city was under siege for over two years. The Babylonians broke into the city. The king and his family were taken to Riblah to be judged by Nebuchadnezzar. Zedekiah's sons were slaughtered before his eyes, and he was blinded.

3. Officers returned to Jerusalem to destroy the temple and the houses and to deport more people and more temple treasure (25:8-17).
  4. Key Jewish rulers were executed (25:18-21).
- I. Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah as governor of the people to be left in the land (25:22-26).
    1. Gedaliah promised the people they would be all right if they would obey the king of Babylon (25:22-24).
    2. Gedaliah was assassinated, and the people fled to Egypt (25:25-26).<sup>503</sup>
  - J. Jehoiachin was elevated in captivity and given a daily allowance (25:27-30).

We have now come to the end of an era. The kingdom is defeated, there is no king, and the temple as the visible symbol of God's presence (and blessing) is destroyed. During the exile there must be a reevaluation of the spiritual perspective of the people. There must be an explanation of the events that happened. There must be a regrouping with a new approach to Scripture, synagogue and separation. Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah will contribute much to that practice and theology.

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<sup>503</sup>See Jeremiah for many more details as well as the prophetic point of view.



## FIRST AND SECOND CHRONICLES<sup>504</sup>

### I. *Historical background.*

A ray of hope appeared in 560 B.C. with the elevation of Jehoiachin, former king of Israel, by Ewal Marduk, King of Babylon. A brighter ray came in 539 B.C. with the invasion of Babylon by Cyrus who then issued his famous decree allowing captive peoples and religions to return home: “. . . I returned to (these) sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries of which have been ruins for a long time, the images which (used) to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I (also) gathered all their (former) inhabitants and returned (to them) their habitations. Furthermore, I resettled upon the command of Marduk, the great lord, all the gods of Sumer and Akkad whom Nabonidus has brought into Babylon to the anger of the lord of the gods, unharmed, in their (former) chapels, the places which make them happy.”<sup>505</sup> Isa 45:1 speaks of Cyrus as the anointed of the Lord. Cyrus had already conquered most of the territory controlled by the Medes and was now conquering that controlled by Babylon.

The band of Jews that returned to the homeland faced a long up-hill battle. Myers says, “Almost everything detrimental to the purity and vigor of religious devotion is to be found there [in the book of Malachi].”<sup>506</sup> The economic situation was most difficult, and many of the returning Jews married into the surrounding peoples. The temple was begun in 536 B.C. but not finished for another twenty years. The *golah* (exile) was under constant threat from the Samaritans and the Edomites who had moved into the Negev after the defeat of Jerusalem and under pressure from the Arabs. Myers says again,

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<sup>504</sup>For a running comparison of Chronicles and Kings, see Heater, *God Rules Among men*.

<sup>505</sup>ANET, p. 316.

<sup>506</sup>Myers, *First Chronicles*, p. XXXVII.

“Strict cult orthodoxy, exclusivism and the support of a more broadly based cult personnel were of the utmost importance if the community was to succeed in its efforts.”<sup>507</sup>

The Chronicler, writing at least a century after that initial return, is presenting to the Jewish community an outline of the plan of God in history that centers first on David and then the returning community of Jews as the faithful remnant in God’s eternal program. Even the genealogies, beginning with Adam and ending in the *golah*, are written from the perspective of God’s grace in delivering a people through their apostasy, judgment and restoration.

The Chronicler deals with the faithful remnant and either ignores or speaks judgmentally of northern Israel. As a result, he omits virtually all the history of the northern kingdom, even the great prophetic sections of Elijah and Elisha, because that part of Israel apostatized and were forever judged for their sin.

The Chronicler is aware of the necessity of purity of worship. All the sources from which he is working show both Israel and Judah steeped in idolatrous practice that pulled them away from Yahweh. Consequently, much of the emphasis of this history is on the establishment of proper worship in the temple. Large passages in the Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah and Josiah narratives deal with the keeping of the Passover, the liturgical order of worship, the officers and servants of the temple, and the music and the musicians.

The person of David increasingly becomes a type of the ideal king—the Messiah. Much stress is put on the Davidic genealogy. A large section is devoted to David’s preparation for the temple which Solomon built. The Chronicler continues this emphasis by stressing that Solomon built the temple and developed the services connected with it. It may be that the stress on David as the messianic ideal leads the chronicler to omit portions of David’s life that reflect negatively on him. This was not to suppress the information, (it was already in the public domain through Kings), but simply to use David as a picture of the king God is going to raise up who will fulfill the Davidic ideal.

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<sup>507</sup>*Ibid.*, p. XXIX.

II. The major sections that differ with Kings, illustrating the Chronicler's methodology.

A. Genealogies (1 Chronicles 1-9).

These lists are incomplete and fragmentary. See Keil for a discussion of their emphasis and composition. He says, on the importance of these genealogies:

“The Chronicler's supposed predilection for genealogical lists arose also from the circumstances of his time. From Ezra ii. 60 ff. we learn that some of the sons of priests who returned with Zerubbabel sought their family registers, but could not find them, and were consequently removed from the priesthood; besides this, the inheritance of the land was bound up with the families of Israel. On this account the family registers had, for those who had returned from the exile, an increased importance, as the means of again obtaining possession of the heritage of their fathers; and perhaps it was the value thus given to the genealogical lists which induced the author of the Chronicle to include in his book all the old registers of this sort which had been received from antiquity.”<sup>508</sup>

1. Early history from the creation of man to Israel for whom the nation is named (1:1-54).
  - a. The line of Adam (1:1-4).
  - b. The line of Japheth (1:5-7).
  - c. The line of Ham (1:8-12).
  - d. The line of Canaan (1:13-16).
  - e. The line of Shem (1:17-27).
  - f. The line of Abraham (1:28-34).
  - g. The line of Esau (1:35-42).

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<sup>508</sup>Keil, *I and II Chronicles*, p. 22.

- h. A list of the Edomite kings (1:43-54).
- 2. Genealogies from the twelve clans of Israel with the focus on Judah down to David (2:1-55).
  - a. A summary of the sons of Israel (2:1-2).
  - b. The genealogy from Judah to David (2:3-17).
  - c. Alternate lines of Hezron (2:18-24).
  - d. The line of Jerahmeel (2:25-41).
  - e. The line of Caleb (2:42-55).
- 3. The kingly line from David (3:1-24).
  - a. David's immediate family (3:1-9).
    - David's line born in Hebron (3:1-4).
    - David's line born in Jerusalem (3:5-9).
  - b. The kingly line to Zedekiah (3:10-16).  
(Athaliah not mentioned.)
  - c. David's line in the exilic and post-exilic periods (3:17-24).
- 4. Genealogies of the twelve tribes (4:1—8:40).
  - a. The line of Judah (4:1-23). (Fourth born.)
  - b. The line of Simeon (4:24-43). (Second born.)
  - c. The line of Reuben (5:1-10). (First born.)
  - d. The line of Gad (5:11-22). (Seventh born.)
  - e. The line of the half tribe of Manasseh in the east side of the Jordan (5:23-26). (Son of eleventh born Joseph.)

- f. The line of Levi (6:1-81). (Third born.)

The amount of space devoted to the descendants of Levi, and only three families at that, indicates the emphasis the Chronicler is placing on the Levitical work in the temple.

- g. The line of Issachar (7:1-5). (Ninth born.)
- h. The line of Benjamin (7:6-12). (Twelfth born.)
- i. The line of Naphtali and the rest of Manasseh (7:13-19). (Sixth born.)
- j. The line of Ephraim (7:20-29). (Son of the eleventh born Joseph.)
- k. The line of Asher (7:30-40). (Eighth born.)
- l. The line of Benjamin (8:1-40). (Twelfth born.)

This second (and different) list of Benjamin is placed here because of the importance of the tribe and its first king. The direct ancestry of Saul is given a second time in 9:35-44. Dan and Zebulon are not even mentioned.

- 5. The record of the remnant back in the land (9:1-44).
  - a. Introduction—the southern kingdom was taken into exile (9:1).
  - b. A listing of the important people inhabiting Jerusalem in the post-exilic period (9:2-34). (They are identified with the jobs their predecessors had before the exile.)

Introduction—the people are divided into four groups—Israel (the people), priests, Levites, and the temple servants (9:2).

A list of the important people in the city (9:3-9).

A list of the important priests in the city (9:10-13).

A list of the important Levites in the city (9:14-16).

The gatekeepers (9:17-27).

A list of the temple servants in the city (9:28-34.)

The singers (9:33-34).

- c. Saul's family (9:35-44).

This list is similar to that in 8:29-40.

B. The Chronicler's perspective on Saul (10:1-14).

1. All of First Samuel is compressed into one chapter.
2. Saul's death is recorded (10:1-10).
3. The deed of the Jabesh-gileadites is recorded (10:11-12).
4. Saul's rejection and the reason for it are recorded (10:13-14).
  - a. He did not carry out the *herem* war against Amalek (10:13a).
  - b. He consulted the witch of En Dor (10:13b-14).

It was necessary to mention Saul to get him out of the picture and to bring in David, the messianic ideal.

C. The Chronicler's perspective on David (11:1—29:30).

1. All David's early years, his seven-year rule at Hebron, and the Ish-bosheth rule in the north are ignored by the Chronicler because he is interested in the established David.
2. David is made king in Hebron by all Israel (11:1-3).
3. David captures Jebus (11:4-9).
4. The special soldiers are listed as in Kings (11:10-47).
5. A list is given of men who joined David at Ziklag before he became king (12:1-22). (Benjamin, Gad, More Benjamin, Judah, and Manasseh.)

6. A numbers list of men who joined David at Hebron is given (12:23-40).
  7. David brings up the ark (correctly) and appoints Levites to places of ministry (15:1—16:6).
  8. Asaph, *et al.*, write the first Psalm for the new dwelling of the ark (16:7-36).
  9. A list of servants to the ark/tent is given (16:37-43).
  10. Significantly omitted are the accounts of Amnon, Bathsheba, and Absalom.
  11. The plague on Israel because of David's sin in numbering the people is recorded because the site of the temple is determined by the termination of the plague and subsequent sacrifice (21:1—22:1).
  12. A long section detailing David's preparation for the temple (which he was prohibited to build) is given including the recognition of Solomon not only as the temple builder, but also as the next king (22:6-13; 23:1; 28:5-10; 29:1), but 29:22b-25 reflect a later period when Solomon was anointed by Nathan at Gihon (22:1—29:30). (The rebellion of Absalom no doubt took place after the events of Solomon's recognition as the next king and so overshadowed him that he was bypassed in the attempt of Adonijah to become king. It is also possible that David lived longer than anticipated in 1 Kings 1-2 and established Solomon.)
- D. The Chronicler's perspective on Solomon (2 Chronicles 1-9).
1. The transitional struggle is omitted by the Chronicler because, as with David, he wants to deal with an "established" Solomon.
  2. The construction of the temple is recorded, but there is more in the Kings account than in Chronicles, because this activity of Solomon's was as important to the prophetic writer of Kings as to the Chronicler (2 Chronicles 1-7).

- a. Solomon is established (1:1-17).
  - b. Singers and priests are established (5:11-14).
  - c. Fire comes down from heaven at the dedication (7:1-3).
3. The appointment of Jeroboam by God and the promised division of the kingdom is passed over.
  4. The Chronicler passes over the fact that Solomon's pagan wives influenced him away from the Lord (1 Kings 4:29-34).
- E. The divided kingdom to the exile (2 Chron 10:1—36:23).
1. The northern kingdom is passed over as though it had never existed except to note that Jeroboam impiously began the calf cult and whenever the two kingdoms impinge on one another. The movement of the Levites from Israel to Judah is given in Chronicles but not in Kings (11:13-17).
  2. He gives the message of Shemaiah the prophet in the days of Rehoboam when Shishak invaded (11:5-8).
  3. The Chronicler records a scathing message about the rebellion of the northern tribes when Abijah, of Judah, fought Jeroboam (13:1-20).
  4. The Chronicler records more on Asa and his reform and his battle against the Ethiopians (Egypt) (14:2-15). The message of Azariah the prophet to encourage Asa and Asa's response is found in 15:1-19.
  5. The Chronicler records a warning against Asa by Hanani and Asa's wicked response (16:7-10).
  6. The Chronicler devotes four chapters to Jehoshaphat because he was a good king (17:1—21:3).
    - a. He sent teachers throughout Judah (17:7-9).



- b. The Chronicler records the alliance of Jehoshaphat with Ahab as in 1 Kings 22, but he adds a section of the stinging rebuke of Jehoshaphat by Jehu (19:1-3).
  - c. Jehoshaphat extends reform (19:4-11).
  - d. Jehoshaphat is delivered from Edom (20:1-30).
  - e. Jehoshaphat's navy sinks before it sails because it was an alliance with the northern kingdom as Eliezer prophesied (20:35-37). (Cf. 1 Kings 22:47-49.)
7. Only one chapter is devoted to Joram because he is wicked (21:4-20).
- a. He kills his brothers (21:4).
  - b. God preserves him because of his covenant with David (21:5-7).
  - c. A posthumous letter from Elijah rebukes him for his sinfulness like the house of Ahab. Jehoram was married into the Ahab dynasty. Elijah probably wrote the letter to be sent at the appropriate time (21:8-15).
8. The Chronicler records the destruction of the last of Ahab's dynasty (22:1-12).
- a. *Ahab's* influence, as Ahaziah's grandfather, is extended to Judah (22:1-5).
  - b. He was killed by Jehu at the Lord's behest (22:6-9).
- (There is no way to reconcile this statement about the death of Ahaziah with Kings, because of its summary nature. See my notes at the Kings passage.)
9. The Chronicler records the earlier good days of Joash as well as his departure from the faith (22:10—24:27).

- a. Jehoiada the priest establishes more offices for the Levites (23:16-21).
  - b. The sins of Joash and his stoning of Zechariah are recorded (24:15-22).
  - c. The Syrian defeat of Gath and the putting of Judah under tribute are recorded (24:23-24).
10. The Chronicler records Amaziah's expedition against Edom as well as other material in Kings (25:1-28).
- a. He hires Israelite mercenaries and is rebuked by a man of God (25:7-10, 13).
  - b. He worships the gods of the Edomites (25:14-16).
11. The Chronicler records some additional items about Uzziah's successes and defeats (26:1-23).
- a. Zechariah the seer apparently influenced Uzziah for a time (26:5).
  - b. Uzziah had success in building and battles (26:6-15).
  - c. The Chronicler gives more details about the way Uzziah contracted leprosy (26:16-23).
12. The Chronicler records that Jotham was a good king. He also records his victory over the Ammonites (27:1-9).
13. The Chronicler records more information on the Syro-Ephraimite war and other attacks against Ahaz (28:5-19).
- a. He records a great captivity of Judah (28:5-8).
  - b. The captives were released through the intercession of a prophet named Oded (28:9-15).

- c. Judah suffers from other invasions (28:16-19).
14. The Chronicler devotes four chapters to Hezekiah because he is basically a good king (29:3—32:31).
- a. He records in a long section the cleansing of the temple (29:3-36).
  - b. Hezekiah celebrates the Passover, even trying to take it north (30:1—31:1).
  - c. He establishes proper order in the temple services (31:2-21).
  - d. He builds the wall and digs the Siloam tunnel in preparation for Sennacherib's invasion (32:1-8).
15. Some additional material is recorded about Manasseh (33:11-20).
- a. He is carried captive to Babylon where he repents and is returned to Jerusalem (33:11-13).
  - b. He effects some reform and rebuilds walls, but he has already done great spiritual damage (33:14-20).
16. Not much is said about wicked Amon (33:21-25).
17. The Chronicler devotes two chapters to perhaps the best of all the southern kings, Josiah (34:1—35:27).
- a. He begins to seek the Lord at age 16 (34:3-7).
  - b. The Levites are mentioned in connection with the repair of the temple (34:11-13).
  - c. The long listing of iconoclastic activity in 2 Kings 23:4-14 is omitted.
  - d. The celebration of the Passover is recorded in great detail (35:1-19).

- e. The Chronicler records the Egyptian Pharaoh's speech telling Josiah not to meddle since the Lord has sent the Pharaoh against the Babylonians (35:21-25).
18. The Chronicler says that Zedekiah "stiffened his neck" and was carried into captivity (36:13-16).
- F. The closing note in the Chronicler's account is that Cyrus the Persian in 536 B.C. allowed the Jews to return to their homeland in fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy (This is also the only place where the seventy years are tied into the Sabbath rest of the land. The land had not lain fallow for 490 years which would also help explain Daniel's 490 years in the future) (36:22-23).

## EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

### I. *Persian Period (550-330) and Background of Ezra/Nehemiah*

“When Cyrus entered Babylon in 539 B.C., the world was old. More significant, it knew its antiquity.”<sup>509</sup>

“The story of the ancient Orient is drawing to its close. And yet, by a strange contrast, on the very eve of the final crisis it achieves its maximum extension, unification and power. Up to and beyond its boundaries, from India to Libya, a single empire is built up from diverse peoples, and the synthesis which had existed momentarily under the Assyrians now becomes a stable condition, reinforced by an enlightened policy of liberality and tolerance.”<sup>510</sup>

The chief actors in this new phase of history are Indo-Europeans, known to be present long since on the Iranian plateau, but who form strong political organisms only during the first millennium.

The prologue to the new chapter of history is provided by the empire of the Medes, who are of Iranian stock and closely related to the Persians. In the seventh century B.C., they established a powerful state and, under king Cyaxares, defeated Assyria and penetrated into Armenia and Anatolia, checked only at the river Halys by the resistance of the Lydians (along with Nabopolassar,<sup>511</sup>). The empire disappeared soon after its rise. In the middle of the following century, Cyrus’ Persians threw off its yoke, took over the

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<sup>509</sup>Olmstead, *The History of Persia*, p. 1.

<sup>510</sup>Moscati, *The Face of the Ancient Orient*, p. 285.

<sup>511</sup>*ANET*, 304-305.

power and set out along the open road of expansion (note maps for Median expansion alongside the Neo-Babylonian empire). The ancient name Hakhamanish or Achaemenes becomes the dynastic title and the Persian rulers are henceforth known as the Achaemenids.

A. *Cyrus II (550-529)*

The story of Astyages, king of the Medes who married his daughter to an unimportant Persian (Cambyses I—a king but under Median thumb) is recounted by Herodotus.<sup>512</sup> Of this marriage was born Cyrus who was destined to death by Astyages (because of a dream that his daughter gave birth to water which flooded the world) but was kept alive by a herdsman. Harpagus had been assigned the task of killing the child, and when Cyrus grew up, Astyages discovered him and cooked Harpagus' son and fed him to him.

Cyrus became king of Anshan in 560 or 559 B.C.<sup>513</sup> and made his move against the Medes in 550 B.C., and Harpagus deserted to his side. "Ecbatana was captured, and its wealth of gold, silver, and precious objects was carried off to Anshan."<sup>514</sup> Cyrus became the ruler of the Medes and the Persians and conquered an empire that stretched to India in the East and to the western edge of Anatolia. This vast empire, with its disparate peoples could only have come about through a policy of the Persians that differed immensely from their predecessors. Cyrus allowed a measure of local autonomy and allowed the return of various gods, the rebuilding of temples, and the recognition of local cultures. Isaiah (40-45) tells us that God raised him up as his anointed (Isa 45:1-2). The Jews benefited from the policy in that they were allowed to return to their land, rebuild their temple, and restore their worship system.<sup>515</sup> The

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<sup>512</sup>*The History of Herodotus*, Clio I, paragraphs 108-119. See also de Sélecourt, *The World of Herodotus*, pp. 207-10.

<sup>513</sup>Cook, *The Persian Empire*, p. 24.

<sup>514</sup>Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire*, p. 37.

<sup>515</sup>Cyrus' famous decree allowing people to return to their homelands (Ezra 1:1-4) was issued in 538 B.C This allowed the Jews to return to their homeland, but only a relatively

decree of Cyrus, found on the Cyrus Cylinder is on p. 348. in a footnote.<sup>516</sup>

Three major military expeditions (in addition to the many minor ones) were necessary to bring this about (note the three ribs in the Bear in Daniel's vision—ch. 7). The Lydian campaign began in 547 B.C. when Croesus moved to take over the part of the empire left by the now defunct Medes. Cyrus moved west to interrupt this action and forced the old Assyrian/Median groupings to submit to him. He defeated Croesus in the winter of 547 even though he had called on his allies the Babylonians and the Egyptians to help him. Cyrus also began the process of forcing the Ionian Greeks to submit to him as well.<sup>517</sup>

The capture of Babylon took place some eight years later.<sup>518</sup> The reason for the delay is not clear. Since the Greek sources talk about his developing a number of canals north of Babylon (with which Herodotus says he diverted the Euphrates River to allow him to invade Babylon), some argue that he was developing irrigation projects while waiting for Babylon to fall into his hands.<sup>519</sup> Sippar fell on 10 October and Nabonidus fled to Babylon where he was captured when the Persian forces entered the city. Cyrus himself entered on 29 October, 539 B.C., and the Babylonian territories became Persian thereafter. These territories included the “Abar Nahara” satrap, encompassing Syria and Palestine and thus the Jews. Cyrus' son Cambyses was appointed the king of Babylon. Cyrus was killed in a campaign of 530 B.C., and his son Cambyses became king in his place.

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small group of them actually returned under Sheshbazzar/Zerubbabel.

<sup>516</sup>ANET, p 316.

<sup>517</sup>See Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire*, pp. 39-40.

<sup>518</sup>When Babylon fell to him in 539 B.C., “Persia was raised to the position of a world empire, which encompassed the whole Near East.” (Stern, “The Archaeology of Persian Palestine,” 1:70).

<sup>519</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 31.

B. *Cambyses II (529-522 B.C.).*

Some identify him with Darius the Mede (Dan 5:31ff), since he ruled Babylon under his father, but that is not likely.<sup>520</sup> Cambyses as the King's son "took the hands of Marduk" in 538 B.C. and was called king of Babylon.<sup>521</sup> Cook believes that Cambyses irritated the priests at Babylon and that he was not king again until 530 when his father went to the battle in which he was killed.<sup>522</sup> But Olmstead says he ruled as governor the entire time.<sup>523</sup>

Cambyses began the Egypt campaign in 526 B.C. (the third major thrust) and conquered all Egypt in 525 B.C. Darius was a spear bearer in Cambyses' army, and Cook argues that he may have been moving in the highest circles at that time.<sup>524</sup> Amasis the resourceful pharaoh died as Cambyses began his campaigns and the Greek mercenaries deserted to Cambyses. The new pharaoh was defeated in the delta and at Memphis. Cambyses became the king of upper and lower Egypt. He campaigned further south, but it is difficult to sort out malicious rumor and legend from the truth.

C. *Gaumata (522-521 B.C.)*

In Cambyses' long absence, there was a usurpation back home. The details are conflicting and confused. Cambyses' manner of death is disputed. He died in Syria in 522, some of the Greek sources say due to a wound suffered when he fell on his dagger. There is confusion in the empire during this time, and the details are hard to determine. Darius,

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<sup>520</sup>Wiseman, *et al.*, *Notes on Some Problems in the Book of Daniel*.

<sup>521</sup>So Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire*, pp. 86-87, and Cook, *The Persian Empire*, pp. 32,37. But Wiseman, *Notes on Some Problems*, says that Cambyses was never called "king."

<sup>522</sup>Cook, *The Persian Empire*, p. 32.

<sup>523</sup>Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire*, pp. 86-87.

<sup>524</sup>Cook, *The Persian Empire*, p. 46.



whose vested interest in the story clouds his reliability, claims that a usurper had pretended to be Cambyses' brother, Bardyia (the Greeks pronounced it Smerdis), had taken over the throne and was killed by Darius and/or the nobles. It may be that Bardyia had indeed taken over the throne in the extended absence of Cambyses and was killed by Darius who was an officer in the army.<sup>525</sup>

D. *Darius I (Hystaspes, 521-486 B.C.).*

Darius the Great was the great imperialist, noted for the Behistun inscription.<sup>526</sup> He is mentioned by Ezra (he was not a direct descendant of Cyrus but of royal blood). Darius immediately faced rebellion in the empire. After much bloody fighting, he succeeded in establishing his rule. This was accomplished by 520 B.C. He claims that he fought nineteen battles and took captive nine kings in one and the same year.<sup>527</sup> It was in this year that Zechariah began his ministry (Zech 1:1). All the world was at peace, but Israel was unhappy. Work on the temple was resumed in 520 B.C., and the Cyrus decree was found in Ecbatana (they first looked in Babylon—Ezra 6:1-2), the temple was finished in 516 B.C. twenty years after it had been started. The Persian wars against the Greeks began in 492 and continued under Xerxes. Darius was defeated by the Greeks at Marathon in 490 B.C. Egypt revolted four years later, and Darius died as he was setting out to put down the revolt.

E. *Xerxes I (Ahasuerus, 486-465 B.C.).*

This is the mad king who in a mighty combined operation sought to avenge Marathon, and whom the Greeks defeated at Salamis (480 B.C.) and Plataea (479 B.C.). The feast and assembly of Esth 1:3 is plausibly equated with Herodotus 7:8 (the king pays attention to his harem), while

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<sup>525</sup>See *Ibid.*, pp. 50-55.

<sup>526</sup>The Behistun inscription in Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian, is an "autobiography" of Darius. For a discussion on the inscription and bibliography, see Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire*, pp. 116-18.

<sup>527</sup>Cook, *The Persian Empire*, p 56.

Esth 2:16 may be a reference to the events of Herodotus 9:108, 109, according to Blaiklock.<sup>528</sup> [Xerxes wanted the wife of a friend but refrained from taking her. He brought her daughter to the palace and married her to his son but took liberties with her himself. Through a series of events, his wife learned of it and mutilated the mother of the girl (Herodotus).]

F. *Artaxerxes I (Longimanus, 464-424 B.C.).*

It was this monarch who permitted Ezra to go to Jerusalem to restore the affairs of the Jewish community (Ezra 7, 8—458 B.C.) and who promoted the mission of his cup-bearer Nehemiah thirteen years later (445 B.C.).<sup>529</sup> Malachi is usually dated through internal evidence to the first half of the fifth century (c. 450 B.C.).

G. *Later Persian Kings—424-330 B.C.*

*Xerxes II* (Promptly murdered by half-brother, Sogdianus)  
*Sogdianus* (Murdered after a few months by half-brother, Ochus)  
*Ochus* known as *Darius II* (423-404)  
*Arsaces* known as *Artaxerxes II* (404-358)  
*Ochus* known as *Artaxerxes III* (358-338)  
*Arses* (338-336) murdered by *Darius III*  
*Darius III* (336-330)

The last one hundred years of Persian rule were chaotic. The kings tended to weaknesses, were often dominated by their women, and were filled with cruelty. The Satraps often revolted and declared independence.

II. *The Political Structure of Judah under the Persians.*

The Assyrians had effectively destroyed independent entities in Syria-Palestine except for Tyre, Sidon, and Judah. The native dynasts were re-

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<sup>528</sup>E.M. Blaiklock, "Persia" in *ZPBD*.

<sup>529</sup>*Ibid.*

placed by Assyrian governors. Judah also lost her independence to Babylon. When Cyrus took over the Babylonian territory these provinces submitted to Persia and were incorporated into the structure of the empire.<sup>530</sup>

“For the government of this wide-extending territory, he [Cyrus] adopted in principle the organization first devised by the Assyrians, who replaced the states they had conquered by formal provinces. Each was ruled by a governor with a full staff of subordinates, and all kept in close touch with the central power through frequent exchange of orders and reports.”<sup>531</sup> The word Satrap means “protector of the Kingdom.” The hereditary position of the Satrap created problems of loyalty which were handled by making the military directly responsible to the King.

Palestine was part of the very large satrap called Abar Nahara (Ezra 4:10, 11, 16, 17, 20; 8:36). This word means the “Cross River” area. Stern says that the term was already in use as early as the Assyrian period.<sup>532</sup> Abar Nahara was combined by Cyrus with the whole of the territory captured from Babylonia.<sup>533</sup> The Satrap seat was in Damascus. Therefore, when Nehemiah and Ezra returned, that Satrap was already in existence.

The many changes in the satrap of Abar Nahara that took place over the years, obviously affected Judah as well. Presumably, the divisions and subdivisions of Palestine were already in effect under the Babylonians. Two of the more significant units were Samaria and Palestine (see map, p. 365). The information on this era is sparse indeed, but more information is coming to light. Cross shows that there were a series of Sanballats who ruled as governor of Samaria.<sup>534</sup> As for Judah as a province, the Bible speaks of Sheshbazzar as

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<sup>530</sup>Avi-Yonah, *The Holy Land: From the Persia to the Arab Conquests (536 B.C. to A.D. 640); a Historical Geography*, p. 11.

<sup>531</sup>Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire*, p. 59.

<sup>532</sup>Stern, *The New Encyclopedia*, 78.

<sup>533</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>534</sup>Cross, “Papyri from the Fourth Century B.C From Daliyeh,” 41-62.

“prince of Judah” and Zerubbabel as “the governor of Judah” as it does also of Nehemiah. The Elephantine papyri speak of a certain Bagohi as a governor after Nehemiah. Stern also refers to a group of coins from the end of the Persian period that bear the legend: “Jehezekiah the governor.”<sup>535</sup> As a summary, Avi-Yonah lists six known governors of Judah during the two hundred years of Persian rule (there may even have been times when there was no governor): Sheshbazzar, Zerubbabel, Nehemiah, Bigoai or Bagohi, Yehoezer, Ahio.<sup>536</sup> He also argues for the separate Jewish province in spite of the interference of the Samaritans in the Book of Ezra. He says that the loose Persian rule lent itself to disputes among the provinces.<sup>537</sup>

“In summary, Palestine in the Persian period was apparently organized into a number of provinces or ‘states’ (*medinoth*). Each unit was ruled by a dynasty of governors, generally of a local family: Samaritans in Samaria (according to the wadi Daliyeh papyri) and Arabs in the south (according to the Tell el-Maskhuta inscriptions), and possibly also in Judah (as is suggested by stamp impressions, *bullae*, and coins of Jehezekiah). These governors had small courts, imitating those of the satraps, and they stood at the head of small administrative organizations. They were probably in charge of small military garrisons and were allowed to keep official stamps of the ‘state’ in their possession, one of the most frequent finds of that period at sites excavated in the province. The governors also seem to have been permitted to strike the small silver coins, which are now known as ‘Palestinian’ coins. Thus far the inscriptions of four of the provinces are clearly legible: Samaria, Judah, Ashdod, and Gaza. The provinces were subdivided into ‘parts’ (*pelek*; Neh 3:9, 17).”<sup>538</sup>

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<sup>535</sup>Stern, *The New Encyclopedia*, p. 80.

<sup>536</sup>Avi-Yonah, *The Holy Land*, pp. 13-14.

<sup>537</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>538</sup>Stern, *The New Encyclopedia*, p 81. See Avi-Yonah, *The Holy Land from the Persian Period to the Arab Conquest*, p. 367, for a map of the provinces.

### III. *Introduction to the books.*

#### A. The relation of the two books.

The evidence in all the versions and ancient records points to the fact that Ezra and Nehemiah were once one account of the “new exodus” from Babylon to rebuild the temple, walls and community. “We may therefore conclude by affirming that there is good reason to approach Ezra and Nehemiah as two parts of a single work and that this work is to be regarded as complete as it stands.”<sup>539</sup>

#### B. Authorship and composition of the books.

There is much controversy over the dates, chronology and inter-relationship of the books. For background information see the most recent studies in Fensham, *The Book of Ezra and Nehemiah*, *New International Commentary on the Old Testament*; Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah* in *Word Biblical Commentary*; and Myers, *Ezra, Nehemiah* in *Anchor Bible*. The trend in the past was to see Ezra-Nehemiah as part of the overall “Chronicler’s” work (1-2 Chronicles, Ezra-Nehemiah) and Albright argued for the Chronicler to be Ezra.<sup>540</sup> Williamson denies that Ezra wrote the Chronicles.<sup>541</sup>

Fensham suggests five major sources for the books: (1) Ezra 1-6 describing the history prior to the arrival of Ezra.<sup>542</sup> (2) Ezra 7-10

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<sup>539</sup>H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, p. xxiii.

<sup>540</sup>W. F. Albright, *JBL* 40 (1921) 104-24; more recently, Myers, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, lxviii-lxx.

<sup>541</sup>Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, p. xxxi.

<sup>542</sup>Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, p. xxiv, argues that seven sources underlie Ezra 1-6: (a) the decree of Cyrus (1:2-4); (b) the inventory of temple vessels (1:9-11); (c) the list of those returning (chap. 2, a compilation of those who returned during the first twenty years or so of Achaemenid rule); (d) two letters which the editor summarizes at 4:6 and his writing of 4:1-3; (e) a letter in Aramaic from Rehum and others to Artaxerxes (4:8-16) and (f) Artaxerxes’ reply (4:17-22); (g) a letter from Tattenai to Darius (5:6-17) and (h) Darius’

constituting the first part of the memoirs of Ezra. (3) Neh. 1:1—7:72a comprising part of the Nehemiah memoir. (4) Nehemiah 8-10 continuing the Ezra memoir (5) Neh. 11:1—13:31 continuing the Nehemiah memoir.

C. Broad outline of the books.

1. Return under Sheshbazzar and Zerubbabel to build the temple (538 B.C.) (Ezra 1-6).
2. Return of Ezra for spiritual reform (458 B.C.) (Ezra 7-10).
3. Return of Nehemiah to rebuild the walls (445-433 B.C.) (Neh. 1-7).
4. Revival of the people (Nehemiah 8-12).
5. Nehemiah's second return (Nehemiah 13).

D. The chronological sequence of the books.

1. Events under Cyrus, first king of Persia (539-529 B. C.).
  - a. Edict issued returning people and temple contents (538 B.C.).
  - b. Temple foundation laid (536 B.C.).
2. Events under Cambyses, Cyrus' son (529-522 B. C.).

No biblical events. Cambyses conquered Egypt (referred to in the Elephantine papyri).
3. Events under Darius, the great, Persian general (522-486 B. C.).
  - a. Darius defeats usurper to throne (Gaumata) and struggles to put down rebellions (done by 518).
  - b. Zechariah begins his ministry in second year of Darius.

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reply.

- c. The temple was completed in 516.
- d. Darius was defeated at Marathon by Greeks in 490.
- 4. Events under Xerxes (Ahasuerus) (486-465 B. C.).
  - a. Xerxes was defeated at Salamis in 480.
  - b. The events of Esther may have taken place after his return.
- 5. Events under Artaxerxes I (465-424 B.C.).
  - a. Accusations against the Jews (Ezra 4:6).
  - b. Ezra's return to promote religious reform (458 B.C.)

Fensham says the Egypt Satrap revolted in 460 B.C., and the revolt was suppressed in 456 B.C. Artaxerxes needed loyal people in Judah and may have sent Ezra for this purpose (Ezra 7:8).<sup>543</sup>

- c. Nehemiah's first return (445 B.C. Neh 5:14).

#### IV. *The work of Ezra the Priest.*

“To judge from the Ezra material, it appears fairly clear that the great religious leader was concerned primarily with the reorganization of the cult on the basis of the Pentateuchal legislation . . . it is becoming increasingly certain that Ezra did not function as governor. What he came to do was more significant in the long run—laying the foundations of Judaism that was to make an incalculable impact upon the world in the following centuries. . . It is perhaps not too much to say that what Nehemiah did for the body of Judaism, Ezra did for its soul.”<sup>544</sup>

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<sup>543</sup>See also Porten, *Archives of Elephantine*, p. 26.

<sup>544</sup>Myers, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, p. lxii.

The idea of a scribe is an old one, but the only early biblical reference to the word (*sopher*) is in the poetic section of Judges 5. Under the monarchy they served as court secretaries. Baruch was a scribe to Jeremiah. However, it is with Ezra that the New Testament type of scribe emerges. He is one who is trained in the law of Moses—to copy it and to interpret it. (*KJV* has “ready scribe”; *NASB* has “a scribe skilled.”) The Hebrew phrase *sopher maher* means first a fast writer and then a skilled writer and then a competent person. As Samuel was to the prophetic movement, so Ezra was to the scribal movement.<sup>545</sup>

Ezra’s purpose was to study the law, to practice it, and to teach the statutes and ordinances to Israel (7:10). Williamson says, “The scribe, we should note, was not only a student of Scripture, but explicitly a practitioner and especially a teacher of its requirements. And these qualities we find exemplified in Ezra’s ministry.”<sup>546</sup>

Artaxerxes had sent a special decree with Ezra (7:11-26). Fensham says that the “Jewishness” of the letter is to be explained by the fact that Ezra probably drafted the letter that went out in the name of the king.<sup>547</sup> He permitted people to go with Ezra and permitted him to collect money for the undertaking. Ezra was to take utensils to be used in the temple back with him. Artaxerxes gave him an expense voucher and freed certain temple workers from taxes. He commissioned Ezra to appoint officers to enforce the Mosaic law.<sup>548</sup>

Williamson says, “It has been widely accepted since Schaefer’s work that ‘the scribe of the law of the God of heaven’ was an official Persian title, so

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<sup>545</sup>Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, pp. lvii-lxii.

<sup>546</sup>Williamson, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, p. 93.

<sup>547</sup>Fensham, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, p. 103. See also Myers, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, p. 62.

<sup>548</sup>On Persian interest in local religions, see p. 355.



that some have gone so far as to translate ‘minister/secretary of state for Jewish affairs.’<sup>549</sup>

Ezra’s purpose in coming to Jerusalem was two-fold: (1) He was to “inquire concerning Judah and Jerusalem according to the law of your God which is in your hand” (7:14). Williamson suggests that this facet of the commission took three directions. First it would investigate how closely the temple worship related to the Mosaic law. Second, the concern with mixed marriages may have in part been concerned with who legitimately came under this law. Third, it may have involved checking up on the use of state aid for the temple worship.<sup>550</sup> (2) The second purpose is more difficult to understand (7:25). He was to appoint “magistrates and judges” (*shaph<sup>e</sup>tin w<sup>e</sup>dayyanin* שָׁפְטִים וַיָּדָיָן). This was no doubt designed to regulate the lives of those in the Abar Naharna Satrap who considered themselves to be Jews.

#### V. *The work of Nehemiah.*

Hanani (shortened form for Hananiah) is referred to as Nehemiah’s brother. This reference should be understood in a literal sense because of 7:2. There is another Hananiah connected with the Elephantine community, but whether they are the same man is not clear. The breaking down of the walls is debated. Sometime during the first 20 years of Artaxerxes, an attempt was made to rebuild the city and walls (Ezra 4:7-22). The attempt was thwarted, and the present state of the walls was worse than in 586 B.C. The walls continued to lie in ruins even though the temple had been built. The people were vulnerable to attacks from all those around them.

Sanballat the Horonite is known from the Elephantine Papyri as the governor of Samaria. The date of that papyrus is 408 B.C. There he was older, and his sons were representing him. The Nehemiah context is over thirty years earlier. The reference to him as a Horonite is not clear. It may refer to the town of lower Beth Horon or it may refer to a deity.

Tobiah the Ammonite is an obscure figure. Quite a bit is known about the Tobiads of the third century. Josephus tells us that they played an important

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<sup>549</sup>Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, p. 100.

<sup>550</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 101.

part in the events leading up to the Maccabean revolt. “The great man of the family was Joseph, the son of Tobiah, who was active under Ptolemy III Euergetes (246-221 B.C.).”<sup>551</sup> A tomb inscription, *Tobiah*, is dated by Mazar in the sixth or fifth centuries. He concludes that, “This Tobiah [in Nehemiah] was not only a Jew (not half-Ammonite and half-Jew, or even pure Ammonite, as some scholars hold to this day), but one of the heads of the Jews and a relative of the high priest, exactly like Tobiah the father of Joseph a hundred and fifty years later. Nehemiah states expressly (vi, 18) that ‘there were many in Judah sworn unto him.’”<sup>552</sup> The use of the phrase in Nehemiah “the Ammonite servant” is for Mazar to be equated with “servant of the king,” i.e., of the king of Persia, and thus concludes that Tobiah may have been the governor of Ammon.<sup>553</sup> Williamson argues that he was probably an associate of Sanballat and may have had some temporary responsibility in Judah in the absence of a governor.<sup>554</sup> “Ammonite” is certainly a pejorative term. Nehemiah recorded a past event in which Eliashib had become related by marriage to Tobiah. Eliashib had prepared a special room for him in the temple when he visited (Neh 13:5). Fensham argues that this is not the same Eliashib as the high priest since this one is over the chamber.<sup>555</sup>

An additional adversary appears in 2:19 by the name of Geshem the Arab. This man is well-known as a powerful Arabian operating within the Persian empire with a fair amount of independence. There is no way of knowing why he is hostile to Nehemiah, who could have posed little threat to him, unless he simply does not want any strengthening of the Persian influence in a neighboring province.<sup>556</sup>

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<sup>551</sup>B. Mazar, “The Tobiads,” *IEJ* 7 (1957): 137-145; 229-238.

<sup>552</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 144.

<sup>553</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>554</sup>Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, pp. 182-183.

<sup>555</sup>Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, p. 260.

<sup>556</sup>See Naveh, “Hebrew Texts in Aramaic Script in the Persian Period?” *BASOR* 203 (1971): 27-32, for Aramaic script.

Fensham says the Persian general who defeated Egypt became angry at Artaxerxes and revolted against him. Later he declared loyalty and was restored, but again Artaxerxes would want loyal leaders in the west and so may have sent Nehemiah.<sup>557</sup>

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### CHRONOLOGY OF THE RESTORATION PERIOD

535 530 525 520 515 510 505 500 495 490 485 480 475 470 465 460 455 450 445 440 435 430 425 420 415

Cyrus (539-29)	Cambyeses (529-22)	Darius I (522-486)	Xerxes (Ahasuerus) (486-465)	Artaxerxes (465-424)	Darius II (423-404)
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Edict (538)				Ezra returned (spiritual) 458	
Temple begun (536)				Nehemiah returned (walls) 445	
Temple finished (516)				Nehemiah back to Susa 432	
				Nehemiah back to Jerusalem 427 (?)	

Haggai  
Zechariah

Malachi? Chronicles Written?

[ Ezra 1-6 ]

[ Esther ] [Ezra 7-10] [Neh. 1-12][Neh 13:4-31]

Genealogical list ---> Altar, worship  
(Ezra 2)

Same list --> Reading of word,  
Covenant to keep the law  
(Neh 7)

Purpose of Ezra/Nehemiah, Esther, and Chronicles:<sup>558</sup>

Chronicles: Historical basis for the restoration of God's covenant people (Judah) to their land in faithfulness and pure worship.

Ezra/Nehemiah: Historical outworking of the basis. Judah is restored, the temple is rebuilt, the city reconstructed, purity in marriages and temple established.

Esther: God's preservation of His covenant people in exile.

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<sup>557</sup>Fensham, *The Books of Ezra and Nehemiah*, pp. 149-50.

<sup>558</sup>M. Throntveit ("Ezra-Nehemiah" in *Interpretation*, p. 37) says: "In the perspective of these books, the salient theological moments of the restoration period cohere in three parallel returns—under Zerubbabel (Ezra 1-6), Ezra (Ezra 7-10), and Nehemiah (Neh 1:1—7:3)—each of which resulted in a different project of reconstruction, namely, the temple, the community, and the walls."

- A. Ezra apparently came back a second time early in Nehemiah's period (Neh 8-10; 12:36).
- B. Nehemiah returns a second time (after 432 B.C. Neh 13:6).

VI. *Outline notes on Ezra-Nehemiah.*

- A. The return under Sheshbazzar/Zerubbabel to build the temple (from the first year of Cyrus to the second year of Darius: 538 B.C. to 516 B.C.) (Ezra 1:1—6:22).
  - 1. The return from Babylon (1:1—2:70).

The edict was issued to return.<sup>559</sup> Most people will argue that the reference to Jeremiah is to the seventy-year prediction (ch. 25, 29). Williamson argues that it should be related to Jeremiah 51, tied in with Isaiah 41, 44, and 45, but I would still go with the seventy-year element as the Chronicler does. The leaders were chosen, and the material of the temple returned. Sheshbazzar (1 Chron 3:18) is either another name for Zerubbabel or another person who must have died

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<sup>559</sup>All the kings of the entire world from the Upper to the Lower Sea, those who are seated in throne rooms, (those who) live in other [types of buildings as well as] all the kings of the West land living in tents, brought their heavy tributes and kissed my feet in Babylon (Su.an.na). (As to the region) from . . . as far as Ashur and Susa, Agade, Eshnunna, the towns Zamban, Me-Turnu, Der as well as the region of the Gutians, I returned to (these) sacred cities on the other side of the Tigris, the sanctuaries of which have been ruins for a long time, the images which (used) to live therein and established for them permanent sanctuaries. I (also) gathered all their (former) inhabitants and returned (to them) their habitations. Furthermore, I resettled upon the command of Marduk, the great lord, all the gods of Sumer and Akkad whom Nabonidus has brought into Babylon (Su.an.na<sup>ki</sup>) to the anger of the lord of the gods, unharmed, in their (former) chapels, the places which make them happy.

May all the gods whom I have resettled in their sacred cities ask daily Bel and Nebo for a long life for me and may they recommend me (to him); to Marduk, my lord, they may say this: Cyrus, the king who worships you, and Cambyses, his son, . . . all of them I settled in a peaceful place . . . ducks and doves, . . . I endeavoured to fortify/repair their dwelling places. . . . *ANET*, 316-17, supplement with Berger, *ZAW* 64 [1975]:192-234).

before the edict was carried out.<sup>560</sup> The list of the people returning is given (2:1-70).

Zerubbabel	<i>Levites</i>
Jeshua	
Nehemiah	Jeshua and Kadmiel
Seraiah	Hodaviah
Reelaiah	
Mordecai	<i>Singers</i>
Bilshan	
Mispar	Asaph
Bigvai	
Rehum	<i>Gatekeepers</i>
Baanah	
<i>Men of the people</i>	Shallum
	Ater
Talmon	
Parosh	Akkub
Shephatiah	Hatita
Arah	Shoba
Pahath-moab	
Jeshua and Joab	<i>Temple servants</i>
Elam	
Zattu	Ziha
Zaccai	Hasupha
Bani	Tabbaoth
Bebai	Keros
Azgad	Siaha
Adonikam	Padon
Bigvai	Lebanah
Adin	Hagabah
Ater of Hezekiah	Akkub

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<sup>560</sup>Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, argues that they are two different men; so Fensham, *The Book of Ezra and Nehemiah*, pp. 49-50. J. Myers, *Ezra-Nehemiah*, p. 28, suggests that Sheshbazzar would have been old (55-60) and Zerubbabel about 40. As his deputy, he was the active leader.

Bezai  
Jorah  
Hashum  
Gibbar  
Bethlehem  
Netophah  
Anathoth  
Azmaveth  
Kiriath-arim  
Chephirah  
Beeroth  
Ramah  
Geba  
Michmas  
Bethel  
Ai  
Nebo  
Magbish  
Elam  
Harim  
Lod  
Hadid  
Ono  
Jericho  
Senaah

Hagab  
Shalmai  
Hanan  
Giddel  
Gahar  
Reaiah  
Rezin  
Nekoda  
Gazzam  
Uzza  
Paseah  
Besai  
Asnah  
Meunim  
Nephisim  
Bakbuk  
Hakupha  
Harhur  
Bazluth  
Mehida  
Harsha  
Barkos  
Sisera  
Temah  
Neziah  
Hatipha

*Priests*

Jedaiah of house of Jeshua  
Immer  
Pashhur  
Harim

2. The Beginning of the temple construction (3:1-14).

a. Jeshua and Zerubbabel led in building the altar (3:1-6).

Jeshua was the grandson of the last officiating high priest before the exile (cf. 2 Kings 25:18 and 1 Chron 6:15). Jeshua himself

soon assumed that office and was prominent in Zechariah 1-8. Zerubbabel was a descendant of the Davidic family. 1 Chron 3:19 lists him as a son of Pedaiah, a younger son of Jeconiah rather than Shealtiel. Shealtiel could have had a levirate adoption of this son, but the text does not explain what happened. The altar of burnt offering was erected and offerings began to be made.

- b. They began the temple construction (3:7-13).

5:16 indicates that Sheshbazzar was the one who laid the original foundation whereas this passage indicates that it was Zerubbabel. Either the two are to be equated or Sheshbazzar was the real governor while Zerubbabel worked under him. Williamson argues that 3:7—4:5 are a “recapitulation” of the events that actually only began under Darius. This, however, assumes chronological inaccuracies in ch. 3 which is unacceptable.

3. There was continued opposition to the work of the Lord by enemies of the returning Jews (4:1-24).

The native Jews and Samaritans (as they will later be called) were refused when they offered assistance. Mention is made of Ahasuerus (Xerxes) and a letter<sup>561</sup> to Artaxerxes I is given to show that there was opposition to the returning Jews for about 100 years.<sup>562</sup> The opposition was successful in having the temple construction halted.

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<sup>561</sup>The language of 4:8 through 6:18 is Aramaic. This is because so many of the transactions regarding the rebuilding of the temple involved official correspondence with the Persian government. The language of government and commerce was Aramaic. Even the transition verses (4:17, 23-24; 5:1-6; 6:1-2, 13-16;) are in Aramaic. The concluding verses (6:19-22) are in Hebrew which as Williamson says (*Ezra, Nehemiah*, p. 73), are probably written in the Jewish language as a fitting conclusion to this section. The use of “King of Assyria” in this passage is a loose construction. Myers, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, says that Herodotus and Xenophon refer to Babylon as the capital of Assyria.

<sup>562</sup>A number of historical problems exist in the identification of this letter.

(1) The older commentaries link Ahasuerus with Cambyses (this would then place the letter in 529 B. C). They also link Artaxerxes with Gaumata (as Darius called him) who

4. Work was resumed on the temple under the urging of Zechariah and Haggai (5:1—6:22).
  - a. The work was resumed, and the Governor of the Satrap of Abar Nahara (including Jerusalem) investigated the work (5:1-5).

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struggled for the throne after the death of Cambyses in 522 B.C. Working from A. T. Olmstead, *History of the Persian Empire*, and J. M. Cook, *The Persian Empire*, Cambyses ruled from 529 to 522 and left for Egypt in 526 never to return to Mesopotamia (he died near Mt. Carmel). If he is indeed Ahasuerus, he would also be the Persian king of Esther. This is not impossible but Cook says that Cambyses was in Babylonia at Abanu near Uruk in 528. The setting for Esther is Susa in the Satrap of Elam. He could have returned to Susa for the events of Esther during the two years before he left for Egypt.

(2) The Artaxerxes/Gaumata/Smerdis/Bardiya equation is more difficult since it is made nowhere else that I know of, and it would require the introduction of an otherwise unknown Artaxerxes. Furthermore, this was a time of great disturbance with Bardiya (Cambyses' brother) taking over the throne. He only ruled about six months. It is more difficult to suppose that the leaders of Samaria would write to Bardiya/Gaumata while Cambyses was in their area or that the time would permit a letter and a response as in Ezra 4.

(3) The letter does not speak of the temple (the situation in question), but it does speak of the walls—a situation apropos to Nehemiah's time (the historical situation underlying the accusation in Ahasuerus' [Xerxes'] time, and the aborted attempt to build a wall in Artaxerxes' time are otherwise unknown).

(4) The temple was completed according to the decrees of Cyrus, Darius and Artaxerxes (6:14). The order is important. It is not Cyrus, Ahasuerus, Artaxerxes, Darius as in Chapter 4, but Cyrus, Darius Artaxerxes. Ezra, the writer of this book, is functioning under the decree of Artaxerxes (458 B.C.). That decree mentions the temple in 7:11, 15, 16, 23 and even says the temple is to be adorned in 7:27. Ezra, therefore, *views* Artaxerxes' decree as having a vital function in relation to the temple.

(5) Williamson (*Ezra, Nehemiah*, p. 59) citing others, argues that 4:5 and 4:24 are literary markers (referring to Darius) that indicate the insertion of material in between.

I therefore would concur with Keil and now Fensham, *The Book of Ezra and Nehemiah*, that this chapter contains a collage of letter writing used to illustrate the continuous opposition the Jews encountered.



- b. A letter was sent to the court of Darius asking if this permission had ever been granted (5:6-17).
  - c. Darius replied favorably since the original document authorizing the return was found (6:1-12).
  - d. The governor carried out the orders, and the temple was completed in 516 B.C. The temple was dedicated, and the Passover was observed (6:13-22).
- B. The return of Ezra for spiritual reform (in the seventh year of Artaxerxes: 458 B.C.) (7:1—10:44).

Fifty-eight years have elapsed between chapters 6 and 7.

- 1. Ezra prepared the people and made the trip (7:1—8:36).
  - a. Ezra was a priest descended through Phinehas and Zadok (Num. 25:7, 11; 2 Sam 8:17ff) (7: 1-5).<sup>563</sup>

Ezra's theology of the priesthood:

Ezra listed Aaron as the first High Priest, followed by seven Priests.

He omitted the next six priests, followed by Azariah who was High Priest when Solomon dedicated the temple.

He then listed seven other priests and concluded with himself.

Jehozadok would have been in that slot, but since he was identified with the captivity, Ezra wants us to know that he is identified with the return, and then, in a sense, supplants Jehozadok.<sup>564</sup>

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<sup>563</sup>See p. 343, for a discussion of Ezra's work.

<sup>564</sup>Throntveit, "Ezra and Nehemiah," p. 41 indicates that there are seven priests after Aaron, seven after Azariah, and finally Ezra the priest (in Ezra; in Chronicles it is Jehozadok).

<b>1 Chronicles 6</b>	<b>Ezra 7</b>
Aaron	Aaron
Eleazar	Eleazar
Phinehas	Phinehas
Abishua	Abishua
Bukki	Bukki
Uzzi	Uzzi
Zerahiah	Zerahiah
Meraioth	Meraioth
Amariah	
Ahitub	
Zadok	
Ahimaaz	
Azariah	
Johanan	
Azariah (High Priest during Solomon's time)	Azariah
Amariah	Amariah
Ahitub	Ahitub
Zadok	Zadok
Shallum	Shallum
Hilkiah	Hilkiah
Azariah	Azariah
Seraiah	Seraiah
Jehozadok (Went into Captivity to Babylon)	Ezra (Brought back from Babylon)

- b. Ezra was a competent scribe (7:6).<sup>565</sup>
- c. Ezra brought more temple servants with him (7:7-9).

The Nethinims (Heb: *nethinim* נְתִינִים = given ones) are considered by many to be temple slaves as were the Gibeonites. The trip to Jerusalem took four months (a distance of eight or nine hundred miles). He attributed his success to the “good hand of

<sup>565</sup>See p. 344, for a description of a scribe.

God on him” (see 7:6, 9, 28; 8:18, 22, 31; Neh. 2:8, 18 for this expression).

- d. Ezra’s purpose was to study the law (*derosh* דִּרְוֹשׁ), to practice it (*‘soth* עָשָׂה) and to teach (*limmed* לִמֵּד) the statutes and ordinances to Israel (7:10).

Williamson<sup>566</sup> says, “The scribe, we should note, was not only a student of Scripture, but explicitly a practitioner and especially a teacher of its requirements. And these qualities we find exemplified in Ezra’s ministry.”

- e. Artaxerxes had sent a special decree with Ezra (7:11-26).

Fensham says that the “Jewishness” of the letter is to be explained by the fact that Ezra probably drafted the letter that went out in the name of the king.<sup>567</sup> He permitted people to go with Ezra, and permitted him to collect money for the undertaking. Ezra was to take utensils to be used in the temple back with him. Artaxerxes gave him an expense voucher and freed certain temple workers from taxes. He commissioned Ezra to appoint officers to enforce the Mosaic law.

On Persian interest in local religions, Porten says, “Darius’ effect on religious matters in his empire is also worth noting. In Asia Minor he ordered the satrap Gadates to respect certain rights and privileges of the sacred gardeners of Apollo. In Judah he ordered the *pehah* Tattenai to supply whatever material was necessary for the building of the Temple there to provide sacrifices to be offered in the name of the royal family (Ez. 5:17-6:12). In Egypt he restored the House of Life of the goddess Neith at Sais, contributed to temples at Edfu and Abusir, and displayed his

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<sup>566</sup>Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, p. 93.

<sup>567</sup>Fensham, *The Book of Ezra and Nehemiah*, p. 103, see also Myers, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, p. 62.

liberality toward other sanctuaries as well. It was probably he who constructed the temple to Amon-Re in the oasis of Kargeh.”<sup>568</sup>

See p. 344, for the idea of a Minister of state for Jewish Affairs.

- f. Ezra praised God for this provision (7:27-28).

The narrative moves from third to first person through the device of the prayer of Ezra. In like manner, it goes from first to third through prayer in 9:15.

- g. Ezra has a genealogical list with some names like those in chapter 2, but with significant differences (8:1-14).

Some of the same twelve family names occur in both chapters. This indicates only that some of the same families contributed immigrants to both returns.<sup>569</sup> The list is somewhat stylized (that is, only selected names are given). The priesthood is mentioned first, then the royal house (Hattush), and finally twelve families are listed. There would have been probably about 5,000 people returning with Ezra.

- h. Ezra needed more Levites and rounded some up (8:15-20).

There were already Levites at Jerusalem, and apparently there was not a great deal of enthusiasm to return in the second wave. That thirty-eight came on such short notice caused Ezra to recognize the “good hand of God” on him.

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<sup>568</sup>Porten, *Archives from Elephantine*, p. 23.

<sup>569</sup>See Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, for a defense of the authenticity of this list.

- i. Ezra fasted and prayed for God’s protection (8:21-23).

The long journey was fraught with danger, and they needed God’s care, but Ezra wanted to preserve his testimony that he trusted in God. God heard his prayer.

- j. Ezra consigned the gold and silver to certain priests (8:24-30).

He gave them all the collected money (8:24-25). It was a large sum of money.<sup>570</sup> He reminds them of the sacredness of the trust (8:28-30).

- k. The wealth was delivered to the temple in Jerusalem (8:31-34).

They completed the journey safely but waited three days to deliver the money to the temple (perhaps they arrived just before the Sabbath). They delivered the money.

- l. The people carried out their task (8:35-36).

They made their offerings and delivered the king’s commissions. The shift from first to third person for these last two verses probably indicates that Ezra added them to the account later.

2. Ezra dealt with spiritual problems (9:1—10:44).

We learn in 10:9 that chapter 9 took place in the ninth month or four months after Ezra’s return. He must have been carrying out the king’s decrees for four months and only now was free to deal with the problem.<sup>571</sup>

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<sup>570</sup>See Myers, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, p. 67, who says, “*six hundred and fifty talents*. Slightly over 24.5 tons. . . . On the value of these contributions, cf. Pavlovsky, *Biblica* 38 (1957), 297-301.”

<sup>571</sup>Note the stress on separation (*nivdal* נִבְדַּל). The Pharisee sect apparently took their name from the Hebrew word “paraš” (פָּרַשׁ, to separate).

Why did Ezra not know about the mixed marriages for four months, and why does he act so strongly at this point if he did know? Williamson<sup>572</sup> argues that he did know about it and had already given advice that it be dealt with. He derives this from 10:3 where the crucial word is “my Lord.” The MT has pointed this word to mean “the LORD.” There are some MSS that even have Yahweh. One MS has “my Lord” as in NASB. Since the reference is to the “counsel” it sounds more like human advice than divine revelation. I suspect Williamson is correct.

If Ezra knew about it, why does he conduct himself in such a violent way here as if he were learning about it for the first time? It is important to note that Ezra shows his frustration, anger and rage in front of the temple where people could see him. This is a public display of spiritual grief. Even though Ezra knew of the problem, he waited for the elders and the people to react themselves. Now he could identify with them in their confession of culpability.

- a. The problem was presented: intermarriage with unbelievers (9:1-2).

This issue was not racial but religious. Foreign wives were not unknown to the patriarchs and many of the people of Israel. Some foreign wives (Rahab, Ruth) are extolled. The problem is intermarriage with Canaanites who would take the people away from Yahweh. The text does not tell us whether they had converted to Yahwism.

From Ezra’s point of view, the purest people were those who had returned from the exile (the *golah*). These had been purged from idolatry. On the other hand, the vast majority of Jews had not gone into exile (Jeremiah indicates 4,600 to Babylon while Kings indicates 10,000). Only some 50,000 returned with Zerubbabel. It is likely that those who remained in the land continued in semi-paganism. Is it possible that Ezra referred to these as

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<sup>572</sup>Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, *loc. cit.*

“foreigners”? Williamson thinks not. Below is a chart of the three groups of people.<sup>573</sup>

- b. Ezra reacted with confession (9:3-15).

Ezra pulled out his hair as a sign of mourning, and others joined him in the confession. After a day of fasting, he arose to pray: (1) he spoke of the sins of the fathers; (2) he spoke of God’s grace in bringing them back from captivity;<sup>574</sup> (3) He lamented the sin of intermarriage (Exod 23:32; Deut 7:3) and (4) he prayed for mercy.

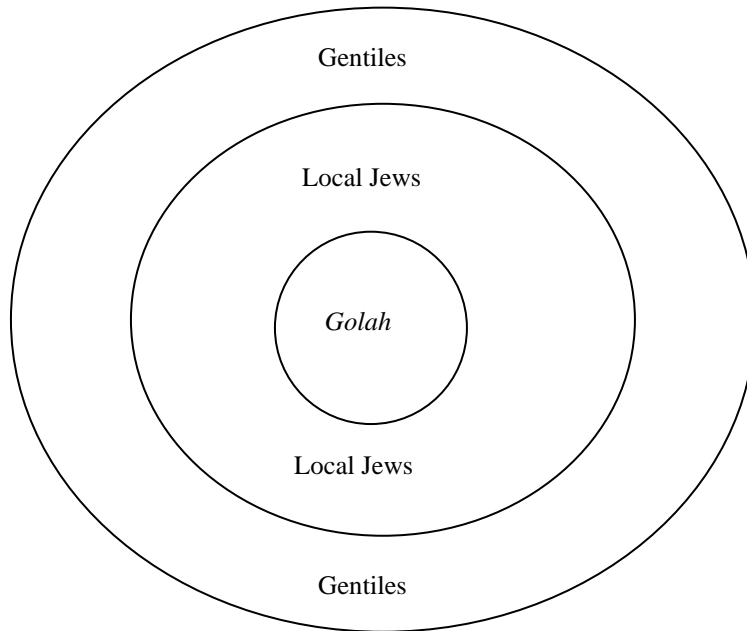
- c. The elders suggested that the foreign wives be divorced (10:1-8).

The people gathered contritely. The elders suggested divorce and promised to stand with Ezra. Ezra adjured them to carry out this suggestion. He then called a general assembly of the people.

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<sup>573</sup>Throntveit (*Ezra-Nehemiah*) says on p. 36, “The theme of exclusivity, which first arose in the careful investigation of lineage in chapter 2 and formed the basis of the community’s refusal of the assistance offered in 4:1, is furthered in the application of the term ‘Israel’ to the ‘returned exiles’ (v. 16. These, and these alone, who understand themselves as the purified remnant of Israel of old, can lay claim to being the people of God.”

<sup>574</sup>See Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, for a discussion of the wall. Some have used this verse to argue that Ezra came back after Nehemiah, but the word “wall” is *geder* (גֵּדֶר) not the normal word for city wall (*ḥomah* חֹמַה). He argues for a metaphorical usage of a vineyard wall.



- d. The assembly came confessing and agreed on a method to implement this covenant (10:9-17).

The people agreed that what had happened was sin, and they confessed it. They agreed to divorce the wives but asked that the implementation be handed over to local leaders since the weather was too bad to do anything at that time. Some opposition was expressed (10:15) by some who may have wanted to proceed forthwith.

- e. A list of the priests who were compromised in the matter is given (10:18-44).<sup>575</sup>

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<sup>575</sup>See *Ibid.*, for an excellent discussion of the difficulties associated with this list and the chronology of Ezra-Nehemiah.



## NEHEMIAH

### C. The return under Nehemiah to build the wall (Neh 1:1—7:73).

Much debate surrounds the chronological relationship between Ezra and Nehemiah. Some will argue that Ezra actually came to Jerusalem after Nehemiah in spite of the statements to the contrary in the books themselves. Some will rearrange the material between the two books.<sup>576</sup>

1. The person involved is Nehemiah, son of Hacaliah (1:1).

Nehemiah means “Yahweh comforts.” Hacaliah is otherwise unknown. The setting is Susa, the winter palace of the Persian kings.

2. Nehemiah’s brother brings a report about Jerusalem (1:2-3).<sup>577</sup>
3. Nehemiah responds in prayer (1:4-11).

Weeping, mourning, fasting, and prayer were part of Nehemiah’s worship. He addressed God in covenantal terms and identified with his people as he confessed. He reminded God of the Deuteronomic covenant and closed with an entreaty for God to hear his prayer and grant him an open door with the king.

4. Nehemiah approached King Artaxerxes with a bold petition (1:1b—2:8).

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<sup>576</sup>E.g., Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah*. See Fensham, *The Book of Ezra and Nehemiah*, for a good current discussion that is also somewhat conservative.

<sup>577</sup>See p. 345, for a fuller discussion of Hanani.

- a. Nehemiah was in a strategic position (1:11b—2:1).

He was the king's cupbearer.<sup>578</sup> For a Jew to arrive at this position speaks well of Nehemiah and of God's providence. Some would argue that he was a eunuch because of the tendency in the Persian empire to make eunuchs of those who served the king and came into contact with the harem. What a contrast this would be with Ezra who was a priest. Nehemiah does not make his move until he had had extended prayer and until a propitious moment arrived. This was not a sign of weakness (we know from his later action that he is a resolute man), but because he recognized the priority of seeking God before acting. It was the 20th year of Artaxerxes I (445 B.C.) in Nisan (March/April). He had a sad countenance. Williamson argues that the month Nisan may have been a time when Persian kings granted favors. Thus, Nehemiah waited until this moment to let his emotions show through.

- b. Nehemiah used his strategic position (2:2-8).

The king asked about Nehemiah's countenance. Given the capriciousness of Persian kings, Nehemiah was in a precarious position (cf. the book of Esther). Nehemiah explained that he was sad because of the desolation of Jerusalem. The king gave him an opportunity to make a request, and he asked for leave to go and rebuild Jerusalem. The king asked for a time frame. Nehemiah gave him one and boldly asked for papers and a voucher.

5. Nehemiah went to Jerusalem and began the work (2:9-20).

- a. He presented his letters to the governors of the provinces of the Satrap of Abar Nahara (Beyond the river) (2:9). (He was accompanied by Persian troops.)

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<sup>578</sup>See Fensham, *The Book of Ezra and Nehemiah*, for a discussion of the important place the cupbearer held in the palace.

- b. The governors were not happy to see him (2:10).

Myers<sup>579</sup> says there were four provinces around Judah: Samaria, Ammon, Ashdod, and Arabia.<sup>580</sup>

- c. Nehemiah made a night survey (2:11-16).

He spent three days in Jerusalem, during which time, he went with a few of his men at night to reconnoiter the broken walls.

He went out the valley gate

Dragon's well  
Refuse gate  
Fountain gate  
King's pool  
Ravine—valley gate

He kept all this quiet.

The locations of these sites as well as the extent of the city traversed and rebuilt by Nehemiah are all debated.<sup>581</sup>

- d. Nehemiah presented his plan to the Jews, priests, nobles, and officials (2:17-20).

The situation required immediate action. Nehemiah argued that the circumstances were conducive to building the walls (he cited the way God had worked to this point). The three enemies mocked them, but Nehemiah gave a testimony to God.

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<sup>579</sup>Myers, *Ezra, Nehemiah*.

<sup>580</sup>See p. 346, for a discussion of the enemies of Nehemiah.

<sup>581</sup>For a popular discussion, see Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem*. For a discussion of the province of Judah in general, see M. Avi-Yonah, *The Holy Land from the Persian to the Arab Conquests (536 B.C. to A. D. 640); a Historical Geography*, pp. 11-31.

6. Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of Jerusalem (3:1-32).

a. The Sheep Gate and onward (3:1-5).

Eliashib the high priest began the work with the construction of the Sheep Gate (this gate would probably have been north of the city to admit sheep to the sheep pool and to the temple area). The men of Jericho/son of Imri built the wall, and then more of the wall was built.

b. The Old Gate and onward (3:6-27).

Joiada and Meshullam repaired the Old Gate. More of the wall was built.<sup>582</sup>

The Valley Gate (3:13).

The Refuse Gate and onward (3:14).

The Fountain Gate and onward (3:15-27).

The Water Gate is included (this gate is probably the access gate to the Gihon spring).

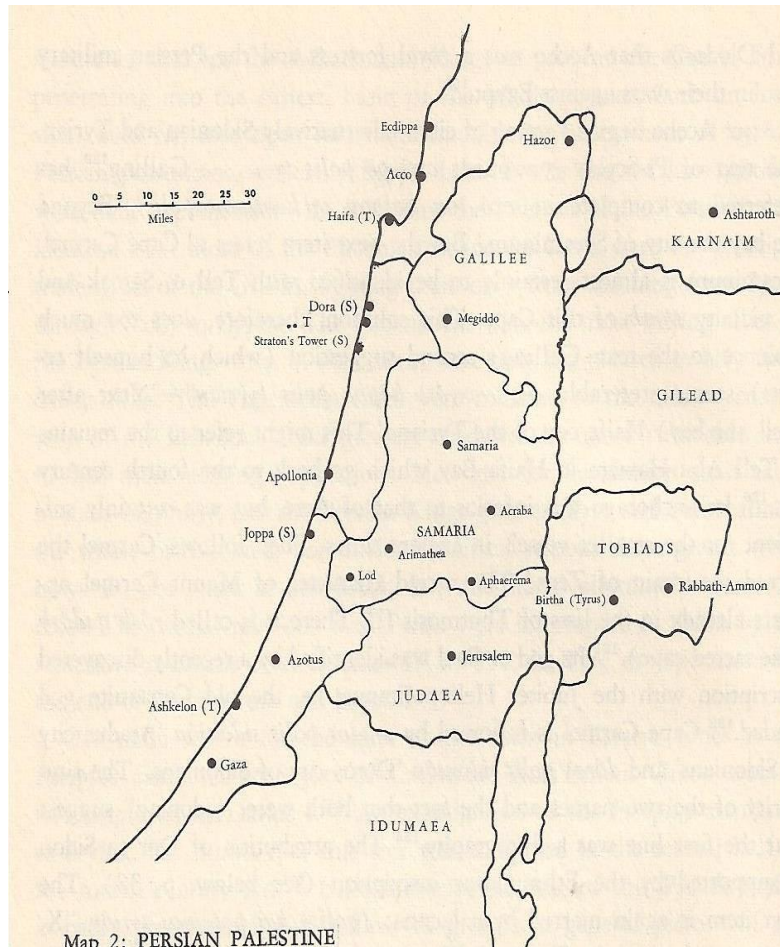
c. The Horse Gate and onward (3:28-31).

The Inspection Gate is included in this section.

d. Back to the Sheep Gate (3:32).

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<sup>582</sup>See Avigad, *Discovering Jerusalem*, for a discussion of the broad wall.



PROVINCES AROUND JUDAH<sup>583</sup>

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<sup>583</sup>M. Avi-Yonah, *The Holy Land from the Persian to the Arab Conquests (536 B.C. to A.D. 640) A Historical Geography*, p. 30.

7. Opposition to the building intensified (4:1-23).

- a. Sanballat and Tobiah tried mockery, but Nehemiah committed them to the Lord's justice and kept on working (4:1-6).
- b. Sanballat & Co. planned to kill the Jews but were frustrated (4:7-14).

Representatives from the provinces planned to attack the Jews. Nehemiah prayed for protection and set up a guard against them. Nehemiah was informed of their plan on ten different occasions (this may have been done intentionally to discourage him). "They will come up against us from every place where you may turn" is difficult (4:12). Literally, the Hebrew says, "from all the places which you will return upon us." Williamson translates, "Thus it was that 'time and again' groups of concerned relatives and fellow villagers were coming to Jerusalem to implore their menfolk: 'you must return to us.'" The people were so frightened that Nehemiah had to encourage them.

- c. The work continued with much watchfulness (4:15-23).

Nehemiah's action is a good pattern to follow when one is trying to accomplish something worthwhile but is receiving opposition. Nehemiah trusted the Lord, armed the people, organized them well, and kept up the work until it was finished.

8. Problems arose within the community in the matter of usury (5:1-19).

The events of this chapter apparently came about because the absence of the men to work on the wall exacerbated an already difficult agrarian situation.<sup>584</sup> The concluding verses indicate that the writing of the chapter took place at the end of Nehemiah's twelve-year stint as governor. It is placed at this point to show that not only were there

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<sup>584</sup>See Williamson, *Ezra and Nehemiah*, for a defense of the chronological sequence of chapters 4 and 5.

external problems faced by the Jewish community, there were also serious internal problems.

- a. A shortage of food and money caused some poorer Jews to mortgage their property, borrow money to pay taxes and to make slaves of their children to richer Jews (5:1-5).
- b. Nehemiah demanded that the situation be rectified because this bondage was wrong. He had been loaning money and goods as well, but this candid admission may have helped win the people to his side. He asked them to return what had been taken as usury. He graphically illustrated (shaking out the garment) what would happen to those who did not comply (5:6-13).
- c. Nehemiah spoke of his own unselfish work (5:14-19).

He had not taken the normal governor's allowance from the people (previous governors had). He dedicated himself to the wall, not even buying land and had fed 150 Jews and others who showed up. He called on God to remember him. One is reminded of Paul's "boasting" on his own behalf to the Corinthians.

This unit (5:14-19) gives us some important historical data: (1) Nehemiah was appointed governor by Artaxerxes (2) his first term lasted twelve years (445-433 B.C.) (3) provincial governors were entitled to take certain taxes and (4) previous governors (most of them unknown to us) had taken full advantage of their perquisites.

9. The opposition took a different tack (6:1-19).
  - a. The wall was finished although all the doors had not been set up (6:1).
  - b. Sanballat and Geshem tried to lure Nehemiah into a trap (6:2-9).

Nehemiah refused their invitation to come to the plain of Ono. They sent five different letters and finally threatened to tell the

king of Persia that Nehemiah was leading a revolt with himself as king. Nehemiah denied their charge.

- c. Shemaiah tried to lure Nehemiah into the temple so that he could be charged with improper activity (6:10-14).

Shemaiah told him he would be safe in the temple. Nehemiah refused to go, perceiving that subterfuge was involved. Nehemiah prayed, committing himself to the Lord. (If Nehemiah were a eunuch, he would have been banned from the temple. Was Shemaiah trying to trick him so that he would be charged with improper conduct?)

Shemaiah was not the only prophet trying to mislead Nehemiah. A certain Noadiah the prophetess and the rest of the prophets were trying to frighten him as well.

- d. The task was completed in spite of the fifth column in the city (6:15-19).

The wall was finished in 52 days. This was a phenomenal achievement! It may be that the walls were not entirely destroyed by the Babylonians, or that the quality of his work was not of the highest nature, but even so Nehemiah accomplished a gigantic task. As a result, the enemies were discouraged. Communication had been going on between the enemies and certain Jews in the city. As a matter of fact, Jehohanan was the offspring of Tobiah who had married a Jewish girl. Tobiah is a Jewish name, but he seems to be excluded from the Jewish community by Nehemiah, so he may in actuality be a foreigner. This would be another case of mixed marriage and would explain the hesitancy of some Jews to follow Nehemiah.<sup>585</sup>

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<sup>585</sup>For a discussion on the Tobiad family, see B. Mazar, "The Tobiads," *IEJ* 7 (1957) 137-45; 229-38.



10. Nehemiah organized the city and reviewed the genealogy (7:1-73).

- a. He organized a watch for the city (7:1-4).

The gates were installed, and Nehemiah appointed his brother and another man in charge of the city. The number of people in the city was small and the entire area was therefore quite vulnerable.

- b. He reviewed the genealogy as found in Ezra 2 (7:5-73a).

The completion of the walls of the city was viewed by Nehemiah as a milestone in their history. Consequently, he reviewed the genealogies as they came from Babylon almost a century before. Myers (*Ezra, Nehemiah*) argues that Nehemiah may have used this list to encourage people to move into Jerusalem. The list, with a few exceptions, probably due to textual transmission, is the same as that in Ezra 2.

Ezra 2:70—3:1

Now the priests and the Levites, some of the people, the singers, the gate keepers, and the temple servants lived in their cities, and all Israel in their cities. Now when the seventh month came, and the sons of Israel were in the cities, the people gathered together as one man to Jerusalem. Then Jeshua the son of Josadak and his brothers the priests, and Zerubbabel the son of Shealtiel, and his brothers arose and built the altar of the God of Israel, to offer burnt offerings on it, as it is written in the law of Moses, the man of God.

Nehemiah 7:73—8:1

Now the priests, the Levites, the gatekeepers, the singers, some of the people, the temple servants, and all Israel, lived in their cities. And all the people gathered as one man at the square which was in front of the Water Gate, and they asked Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the law of Moses which the Lord had given to Israel.

- c. The people returned home in the seventh month (7:73b).

The genealogical list of Ezra 2 concluded with the people coming together under Zerubbabel and Jeshua to build the altar and to resume their worship in the land. Nehemiah used the same list and concluded with the people coming together to read the law under Ezra. This is a deliberate effort to link the two events: the altar was finished (Ezra 3) and the wall was finished (Nehemiah 7).

D. Revival of the people under Ezra and Nehemiah (8:1—12:47).

1. The reading of the Law of Moses began to play a very significant part in the lives of the people (8:1-18).

Because of the sudden introduction for the first time in Nehemiah of Ezra, and because of the emphasis Ezra placed on the law in his own “memoirs” (Ezra 8), many scholars believe this chapter should follow Ezra 8 (or some such configuration). To do this, they must reject the mention of Nehemiah (8:9) as a later addition by the redactor.<sup>586</sup> Fensham (*The Book of Ezra and Nehemiah*) argues for chap. 8 in its present location.

- a. The reading of the law (8:1-8).

The *people* called for Ezra the Interpreter (scribe) to bring the Book of the Law of Moses. Ezra brought the law before the people: (1) It was the first day of the seventh month, (2) he read to men and women who could understand (*mehin lishmo* ‘a מְהִינְ לִישְׁמוֹ = “discerning to hear”), (3) he read in the “wide place” before the water gate which probably gave access to the Gihon Spring, (4) he read it from early morning until noon. (Lit.: “from the light to the middle of the day.”) Ezra was surrounded by thirteen men as he spoke. The people stood when the law was about to be read, and Ezra led an invocation to which the people replied, “Amen, Amen” and bowed to the ground. The law was explained and translated to give the sense by thirteen men in

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<sup>586</sup>See for example, Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*.

addition to the Levites: (1) The word “explained” is מְבִינִים (*m<sup>e</sup>binim*) as in v. 2. It means to give understanding, discernment, i.e., to explain. (2) The word “translating” is מְפָרֵשׁ (*m<sup>e</sup>porash*) and may mean “to translate” (from Hebrew to Aramaic) or “to interpret.” A literary device was created after the exile to handle the language problem called the “Targum.” This was an Aramaic paraphrase so that the people, whose Hebrew was rusty, could understand. That may be what is going on here.

- b. The people responded favorably to the reading of the law (8:9-18).

The leaders encouraged the people (8:9-12).

Ezra, Nehemiah and the Levites told the people not to weep since this was a holy day. He (probably Ezra) told them to enjoy food and to rejoice in the Lord. The Levites quieted the people who then went away rejoicing. They sent gifts to one another and kept a great feast because they had understood the word of the Lord.

The assembly kept the feast of weeks or Succoth (Lev 23:39-44) (8:13-18).

The reading in the Law brought more information which they proceeded to carry out. The feast of booths was to remind them of the exodus from Egypt and was celebrated on the 15th of the seventh month. They built booths and lived in them. Ezra read from the book of the law of God for the seven days of the feast.

How do we understand 8:17 (“The sons of Israel had indeed not done so from the days of Joshua the son of Nun to that day”) in light of Ezra 3:4 that says Zerubbabel (in 538/7) led them in the celebration of Succoth? It is said of Josiah’s Passover: “Surely such a Passover had not been celebrated from the days of the judges who judged Israel, nor in all the days of the kings of Israel and of the kings of Judah” (2 Kings 23:22). This verse uses the word “like,” but the sentiment is similar. Nehemiah must be referring to the circumstances or the spirit of the celebration rather than to the celebration itself. However, Williamson (*Ezra*,

*Nehemiah*) says, “They were enacting the ‘exodus’ from Babylon in Jerusalem (hence, the reference to Joshua) whereas previous booths may have been those used in the fields as part of the harvest.”

A logical question is why the Day of Atonement is not mentioned here since it was to be observed on the tenth day of this same month between Trumpets and Succoth. Williamson argues that Succoth was more tied in with the reading of the law, and Atonement was now primarily a priestly matter. I assume he means that it was observed, but quietly, and by the priests.

2. Another day was set aside to read Scripture and worship the Lord (9:1-38).
  - a. The people gathered on the twenty-fourth day of the seventh month with fasting (9:1-4).

They were fasting and humbling themselves. They separated themselves from foreigners. They read from the law for one fourth of the day and confessed their sins for another fourth. The Levites were leading the worship from a platform.

- b. The Levites led in a psalm of confession and praise (9:5-38).

(This “recital of the acts of God” will become a stock form in the future presentations [cf. Stephen in Acts 7]). Yahweh is the creator God who made a covenant with Abraham (9:5-8). Yahweh brought Israel from Egypt and made a covenant with them (9:9-15). In spite of Israel’s arrogant disobedience, God was gracious to them for forty years and brought them into the promised land (9:16-25). In spite of Israel’s sin in the land, God was continuously gracious until he sent them into captivity (9:26-31). The Levites called upon God to be gracious to them in their present distress and vowed to put their names in writing to separate themselves from the people of the land and to keep the covenant with God (9:32-38).

3. The list of names and the vow were presented (10:1-39).
  - a. The list contains the names of Nehemiah the governor, Zedekiah, and twenty-one priests; seventeen Levites and forty-four leaders of the people (10:1-27).
  - b. They committed themselves to obey the Law of Moses (10:28-31).

They promised to avoid mixed marriages (10:28-30). (Some of those involved later in mixed marriages may not have taken this vow.)

They promised to keep the Sabbath holy and not to sell to Gentiles on that day (10:31a).

They promised to forego the crop of the seventh year (Sabbath year) and every loan made on pledge (release of debt, slaves) (10:31b).
  - c. They committed themselves to an annual temple tax (10:32-33).

There was no specific provision in the law for temple support on an ongoing basis, but some precedent was established in the half shekel of Exod 30:11-16 and 38:25-26.
  - d. They committed themselves to bring wood, first fruits, and tithes to the temple. In fine, they agreed to support the temple (10:34-39).
4. The problem of the occupancy of the newly fortified city of Jerusalem was confronted and a name list was given (11:1—12:26).

The problem of the occupation of the city of Jerusalem was first addressed at 7:4. From that problem came the review of the census list with the end in mind of bringing people into the city. The solution to the problem is given in this chapter.

- a. The leaders were already living in Jerusalem, but they cast lots to see which people would move in (11:1-2).
- b. The religious leaders moved to the city even though they owned property in the country (11:3).
- c. The names of the Judahites and Benjamites who lived in the city are given (11:4-9).
- d. The names of the priests are given (11:10-14).
- e. The names of the Levites are given (total 284) (11:15-18).
- f. Other names are given. Gatekeepers are listed (total 172). Other people (priests, Levites and others) were living in their various cities. The temple servants were living in Ophel (11:19-21).
- g. The Levitical leadership was controlled indirectly by the king of Persia (11:22-24).
- h. A list of various areas outside of Jerusalem is given (11:25-36).

Verse 36 indicates that some of the Levites assigned to Judah were given to Benjamin.

- i. The priests and Levites who came up with Zerubbabel (12:1-7).
- j. The Levites who were in charge of worship (12:8-11).

Jeshua (538), Joiakim (?), Eliashib (458), Joiada (417, 40 years), Jonathan (377, Johanan? 40 years), Jaddua (337, 40 years).<sup>587</sup> Williamson says (1) this list could be incomplete (another Johanan is known to have served, but is not in this list), (2) Josephus is wrong to date Jaddua as late as Alexander, or (3) there

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<sup>587</sup>See Keil & Delitzsch, p. 150, for a defense of the idea that Nehemiah lived long enough to see Jaddua at age 25.

were two Jaddua's.<sup>588</sup> Cross says that Jaddua had to take office before 404.<sup>589</sup>

- k. A list of priests is given (12:12-21).
  - l. A list of Levites is given (12:22-26) (who served in the period of Joiakim, Ezra and Nehemiah).
5. The wall of the city was dedicated (12:27-43).
- a. The Levites were summoned (12:27-30).
  - b. Nehemiah appointed two choirs (12:31-43).

One choir went south toward the refuse gate with Ezra. From there they went up to the fountain gate, up the stairs to David's city and to the water gate on the east (12:31-37).

The second choir lined up from the Broad wall to the Sheep gate and the Gate of the Guard (12:38-43).

They sang and sacrificed. They seem to be somewhat opposite one another.

- c. Men were appointed to be in charge of the stores, tithes, etc., to carry on the tradition begun by David (12:44-47).
- E. Nehemiah returned a second time (13:1-31).
- 1. Nehemiah enforced the law of Moses further (13:1-9).
    - a. At the completion of the dedication, a reading of the law reminded them of the exclusion of Ammonites and Moabites (Deut 23:4-7). As a result, they forced out all foreigners (13:1-3).

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<sup>588</sup>Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, p. 363.

<sup>589</sup>F. M. Cross, "Papyri of the Fourth Century B.C. from Daliyeh," p. 56.

- b. Nehemiah recorded a past event in which Eliashib had become related by marriage to Tobiah (see the discussion at 2:17ff) (13:4-9).

Tobiah may have been in charge of the Transjordan area which was called Ammon. He is probably being linked with the Ammonites here though he has a Jewish name.

Eliashib had prepared a special room for him in the temple when he visited (13:5).

Fensham (*The Book of Ezra and Nehemiah*) argues that this is not the same Eliashib as the high priest since this one is over the chamber.

Nehemiah speaks for the first time of the fact that he had been gone from Jerusalem for much of this time (Keil says several years) (13:6).

When he returned to Jerusalem, he threw Tobiah's stuff out and cleansed the room (13:7-9).

- 2. Nehemiah corrected the neglect of the Levites (13:10-14).

In Nehemiah's absence the temple servants had been neglected because the people did not pay the tithe. They were forced to go their farms for support. Nehemiah rebuked the leaders and rectified the situation.

- 3. Nehemiah corrected Sabbath abuses (13:15-22).

The native Jews were not observing the Sabbath by continuing their normal daily work. Furthermore, Gentile merchants were selling stuff on the Sabbath. Nehemiah corrected this situation by closing the gates to prevent people from going in and out on the Sabbath. When the merchants tried to spend the night outside the walls, he threatened them with force.



4. Nehemiah corrected the problem of intermarriage that had cropped up again (13:23-29).

The perennial problem of intermarriage with pagans had to be dealt with again. The children of these marriages were barely able to speak Hebrew. Nehemiah took forthright action to stop the practice.

5. Nehemiah purified the Levites (13:30-31).

Nehemiah summarizes his work and calls upon God again to remember him for his work.



## ESTHER

### I. Introduction.

LaSor, et al., say: “Esther is a remarkably different biblical book: neither the word for God nor the name Yahweh occurs in the Hebrew text; the scene is Susa, winter capital of Persia, not Israel; the book concerns the marriage of its Jewish heroine with a gentile king; it solves the problem of an incipient anti-Semitism (actually, anti-Jewish action) by a bloody self-defense, which—even worse—is so enjoyable that it is repeated by Esther’s request on the following day! Nevertheless, the scroll belongs in the canon, as Jewish scholars recognized after long discussion, and commands consideration.”<sup>590</sup>

Actually, LaSor’s assessment is too negative. The story of Esther shows God’s providential protection of His people in exile and explains the origin of the feast of Purim. Esther is presented in story form whereas the material we have covered so far is more historical narrative. More than story, it is drama and can almost be divided into scenes as we will do.<sup>591</sup>

The Ahasuerus of 1:1 is usually linked with Xerxes (485-465 B.C.). Ahasuerus is also mentioned in Ezra 4:6. Xerxes was defeated by the Greeks at Salamis and Plataea in 480 B.C. The events of Esther 2 and following are usually linked with those events. Vashti is linked by Wright with Amestris, Xerxes’ wife and the situation of Esther 2 is linked with Herodotus’ story of

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<sup>590</sup>LaSor, *et al.*, *Old Testament Survey*, p. 624.

<sup>591</sup>The historicity of Esther is questioned by critical scholars, but see Wright, “The Historicity of Esther.” pp. 37-47.

Amestris' vengeance on her husband by mutilating the mother of a girl with whom he had a dalliance.

## II. Outline of Esther.

### A. Scene 1: The Great Banquet (Preparation for the Greek War?) (1:1-22).

1. The historical background for the book is given (1:1-2).

India to Ethiopia is the vast Persian territory known from the Greek sources. The 127 provinces are not to be confused with the Satrapies. Judah was a *province* under the Satrap of Abar Nahara. (Herodotus says there were 20 Satrapies.) The setting is in the capital of Susa (one of three).

2. The king throws a party for all his important invited guests (1:3-9) (N. B. his *third* year).

The first one lasts for 180 days (1:3-4). The second one for even more people lasts seven days (1:5-8). Vashti/Amestris has a banquet for the women (1:9).

3. The king demands an appearance of Vashti (1:10-22).

The king, in a drunken stupor, decides to show off his wife (1:10-11). Vashti refuses (perhaps he wanted some lewd performance from her; Wright thinks she might have been pregnant) (1:12). The king consults with his counselors to determine the proper punishment for his wife (1:13-15). They advise the king to depose his wife and to inform all the people of his provinces of his act so that every man may be master in his house (1:16-22).

### B. Scene 2: Four years later—the introduction of Esther and Mordecai (2:1-23).

1. The lapse of four years (1:1 with 2:16) is probably to be accounted for by the years of preparation for the Greek war and the war itself. Wright links the replacement of Vashti/Amestris with Xerxes' desire to get rid of his wife after she had mutilated the wife of Xerxes'

brother. He says the vow at the banquet now becomes an excuse for him to replace her.

2. The king is advised to seek out young virgins and to choose a new queen from among them (2:1-4).
3. Mordecai and Esther are now introduced to the story (2:5-7).
  - a. Mordecai is probably a corruption of Babylonian Marduk, a Babylonian deity.

Kish was Saul's father; Shimei was the one who cursed David when he fled. These may be presented as ancestors, not immediate relatives. The question arises about the age of Mordecai: if he were carried away even as a baby, he would be over 120 years old. The answer may be that the "who" of v. 6 refers to Kish (assuming this is not Saul's father, but a later man who was Mordecai's actual father).

Wright equates him with a Martakas, a eunuch who was very close to the king in his campaign against the Greeks and with a Marduka, a high official at Susa during the early years of Xerxes. He may have had a political set-back (did he side with Vashti/Amestris and lose ground?). He had to have some political clout to get Esther introduced and to ignore Haman's demands to bow to him.<sup>592</sup>

- b. Esther (her Hebrew name was Hadassah or "Myrtle") has a Persian name related to the Greek word *aster* or "Star." Mordecai, her cousin, reared her after the death of her parents.
4. Esther is chosen as the new queen (2:8-18).

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<sup>592</sup>See Wright, "The Historicity of the Book of Esther."

- a. Esther gains favor with the eunuch in charge (2:8-9).<sup>593</sup> She does not reveal her Jewish identity as Mordecai had instructed her (2:10). Mordecai keeps in touch (2:11). Esther greatly pleases the king and he chooses her as his new queen (2:12-18).
  - b. The reality of this situation must be faced. Esther is competing with other young women to become the queen and a part of the harem. She had sex with the king and was then selected to become the queen. This is hardly the Old Testament picture of virtue, but God uses the situation in spite of the “non-ideal” setting.
5. Mordecai shows loyalty to the king which will grant him favor in the days to come (2:19-23).

The pace quickens as Mordecai is allowed to overhear a plot against the king’s life.<sup>594</sup> Mordecai passed the word on to Esther who informed the king in Mordecai’s name and it became a part of court chronicles. This is important for the later situation. The plot was frustrated and the conspirators hanged.

C. Scene 3: Introduction of the enemy Haman (3:1-15).

1. Haman the Agagite wants to destroy all Jews (3:1-6).
  - a. Agag is the name of the Amalekite Saul spared (1 Samuel 15); is this intended irony that a descendent of Saul is pitted against a descendent of Agag? There is no way to prove any connection (3:1).
  - b. Mordecai refuses to bow to Haman (because of implications of deity or other reasons?), and Haman is infuriated and decides to attack all Jews (3:2-6).

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<sup>593</sup>Cf. Daniel in Daniel 3.

<sup>594</sup>Gordis, “Studies in the Esther Narrative,” *JBL* 95 (1976): 183, says that Esther immediately had Mordecai promoted to a minor magistrate.

2. Haman makes plans to destroy the Jews (3:7-15).

He casts lots to find a lucky day. In the twelfth year of the king (451 B.C.) he convinces the king to kill the Jews in the various provinces and take their money (3:8-11).<sup>595</sup> The official letters are drawn up and sent out (3:12-15).

D. Scene 4: Haman is defeated by Mordecai and Esther (4:1—7:10).

1. Mordecai forces Esther's hand to help the Jews (4:1-17).

Mordecai fasts and wails in the midst of the city, and there is mourning in all the provinces (4:1-3). Esther tries to comfort him, but he tells her of the imminent threat and asks her to appeal to the king (4:4-8). Esther tells him there is nothing she can do, but Mordecai warns her she will not escape. She agrees to approach the king if the Jewish community will fast for her (4:9-17).

2. Esther approaches the king with prudence and sets her trap (5:1-14).

- a. She is received by the king, and at his bidding requests a banquet with Haman present (5:1-4).<sup>596</sup>
- b. Haman comes to this feast, and the queen asks that he come again the next day to another feast (5:5-8).
- c. Haman is thrilled and recounts all his good fortune to his family. However, his enthusiasm is dampened by the fact that Mordecai refuses to honor him (notice the irony building up). His wife and

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<sup>595</sup>This would have been seven years after Ezra returned to Jerusalem—how would it have affected the group in Judah?

<sup>596</sup>Cf. the request of the daughter of Xerxes' brother's wife for his robe. Herodotus, *Histories*, Book IX.

friends suggest that he prepare a high gallows on which to hang Mordecai (5:9-15).<sup>597</sup>

3. The first step in Haman's downfall is the elevation of Mordecai (6:1-14).
  - a. The king's insomnia leads him to promote Mordecai (6:1-9).

The chronicles are read to put him to sleep, and he is reminded of Mordecai's act that saved his life (6:1-2). The king wants to honor him and calls for the first person in the court who *happens* to be Haman (6:3-4). (He had come to ask about having Mordecai hanged.) Haman is asked for suggestions to honor someone, and he happily complies, thinking he is the someone (6:5-9). (Notice more irony building up.)

- b. Haman is humiliated by having to carry out the honor he hoped would be his but is given to Mordecai (6:10-14).

He leads an ornately attired Mordecai on a horse proclaiming his honor (6:10-11). He goes home completely embarrassed and receives his summons to appear at the banquet (6:12-14). (When it rains, it pours.)

4. The final step in Haman's downfall comes at the banquet (7:1-10).

The king asks Esther to make her request. Esther tells him of an enemy of her people, and when the king asks who, she tells him it is Haman (7:1-6). The king walks away in his anger, and Haman falls on Esther's couch to plead mercy. The king orders his execution, and he is hanged on the tree designed for Mordecai (7:7-10).

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<sup>597</sup>Fifty cubits—75 feet—may just mean very high gallows.



E. Scene 5: Disaster is averted by Mordecai and Esther's action (8:1—9:19).

1. The king's original edict cannot be rescinded, but it is negated (8:1-17).

Esther tells the king she is Mordecai's cousin, and Mordecai is given Haman's job (8:1-2). Esther pleads for her people (8:3-6). The king allows Mordecai to write the Jews allowing them to defend themselves (8:7-14).<sup>598</sup> The Jews in Susa and all the provinces rejoice (8:15-17).

2. The Jews gain the victory over the enemies (9:1-19).

The Jews defend themselves and kill 500 people in Susa alone in addition to Haman's ten sons (9:1-10). Esther requests an extension of one day to allow the Jews to take further vengeance (9:11-15). (This seems quite vindictive.) The Jews in the other provinces have equal success (9:16-19).

F. Scene 6: Mordecai and Esther establish the feast of Purim (9:20-32).

1. Mordecai records these events (is he the author of the book of Esther, and did he avoid the mention of Yahweh to avoid offending Xerxes who was a worshipper of Ahuramazda?) (9:20-29). Since Haman was looking for a lucky day by casting lots (*pur*), they called these days Purim.
2. Mordecai and Esther sent out letters establishing this feast officially (9:30-32).

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<sup>598</sup>Gordis, "Studies in the Esther Narrative," pp. 43-48. He is probably correct when he argues that 8:11 uses the phrase "women and children" as part of the direct object of "attack." The Jews thus were not enjoined to kill women and children but to protect them from their attackers.

G. Scene 7: Mordecai is exalted (10:1-3).

1. The Persian chronicles are being quoted which close this section with a mention of tribute imposed by the king (10:1).
2. The next section of the chronicles mentions the greatness of Mordecai (10:2-3).

He was second to the king, esteemed among the Jews, and in favor with the multitude of his kinsmen.

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*ANEP Ancient Near East in Pictures*. J. B. Pritchard, ed. Princeton: Princeton U. Press, 1969.

*ANET Ancient Near Eastern Texts*. As above.

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BDB Brown Driver and Briggs Hebrew Lexicon.

BHS *Biblica Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.

*BKC Bible Knowledge Commentary*.

*BibSac Bibliotheca Sacra*.

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*HUCA* Hebrew Union College Annual.

*JETS* Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society.

*JQR* Jewish Quarterly Review.

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MS, MSS Manuscript, Manuscripts.

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NIV *New International Version*.

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ZPBD Zondervan Pictorial Bible Dictionary.