

# 2 SAMUEL

South of the City of David, base of a wall that was about 10 feet wide; dated to Middle Bronze Age (2220–1550 BC). The Assyrians destroyed the wall in 701 BC.

## INTRODUCTION TO 2 SAMUEL

### Circumstances of Writing

Early tradition suggests 1 and 2 Samuel were originally one book. Some scholars believe Samuel was largely responsible for the material up to 1 Samuel 25 and that the prophets Nathan and Gad gave significant input to the rest (based on 1Ch 29:29). This proposal, however, must remain speculative, because the books name no authors. First Samuel 27:6 suggests the book was not completed until perhaps a few generations after the division of the kingdom around 930 BC.

After Israel's conquest of the land during the days of Joshua, Israel entered a time of apostasy. The book of Judges describes recurrences of a cycle with predictable phases. First, the people sinned against the Lord and fell into idolatry. Second, the Lord raised up an adversary to afflict them and turn them back to him. Third, the people cried out to the Lord in repentance. Fourth, the Lord brought deliverance for them through a judge whom he raised up. The book of Judges' famous verse, "In those days there was no king in Israel; everyone did whatever seemed right to him" (21:25), aptly describes the period. The book of 1 Samuel picks up the historical record toward the end of those stormy days.

### Contribution to the Bible

The books of 1 and 2 Samuel describe Israel's transition from a loosely organized tribal league under God (a theocracy) to centralized leadership under a king who answered to God (a monarchy). Samuel's life and ministry greatly shaped this period of restructuring as he consistently pointed people back to God.

Saul's rule highlighted the dangers to which the Israelites fell victim as they clamored for a king to lead them. Samuel's warnings fell on deaf ears (1Sm 8:10–20) because

God's people were intent on becoming like the nations around them. In the end, they got exactly what they asked for, but they paid a terrible price. Saul's life stands as a warning to trust God's timing for life's provisions.

David's rule testified to the amazing works the Lord could and would do through a life yielded to him. Israel's second king seemed quite aware of God's blessing on his life and displayed a tender heart toward the things of God (2Sm 5:12; 7:1–2; 22:1–51; 23:1–7). Later generations would receive blessing because of David's life (Is 37:35). God's special covenant with David (2Sm 7:1–29) found its ultimate fulfillment in Jesus, the Son of David (Lk 1:32–33). The consequences of David's sin with Bathsheba, however, stand as a warning to all who experience sin's attraction. God holds his children accountable for their actions, and even forgiven sin can have terrible consequences.

### Structure

Second Samuel 1–4 describes the struggle for Israel's throne that began with Saul's death. David was anointed king by the men of Judah (2:4), but Abner anointed Ish-bosheth, Saul's oldest surviving son, as king over Israel (2:8–9). A two-year civil war resulted in Ish-bosheth's death and in David's becoming king over all Israel.

Second Samuel 5–24 presents highlights of David's reign. God established a special covenant with David, promising to establish the throne of his kingdom forever (7:1–29). David's sin with Bathsheba, however, brought disastrous consequences to his reign and became a turning point in 2 Samuel. In the end, David's repentance confirmed his designation as a man after God's heart, but his sin showed that even the king is not above breaking God's laws.



### RESPONSES TO SAUL'S DEATH

**1** After the death of Saul, David returned from defeating the Amalekites and stayed at Ziklag two days. <sup>2</sup> On the third day a man with torn clothes and dust on his head came from Saul's camp. When he came to David, he fell to the ground and paid homage. <sup>3</sup> David asked him, "Where have you come from?"

He replied to him, "I've escaped from the Israelite camp."

<sup>4</sup> "What was the outcome? Tell me," David asked him.

"The troops fled from the battle," he answered. "Many of the troops have fallen and are dead. Also, Saul and his son Jonathan are dead."

<sup>5</sup> David asked the young man who had brought him the report, "How do you know Saul and his son Jonathan are dead?"

<sup>6</sup> "I happened to be on Mount Gilboa," he replied, "and there was Saul, leaning on his spear. At that very moment the chariots and the cavalry were closing in on him. <sup>7</sup> When he turned around and saw me, he called out to me, so I answered: I'm at your service. <sup>8</sup> He asked me, 'Who are you?' I told him: I'm an Amalekite. <sup>9</sup> Then he begged me, 'Stand over me and kill me, for I'm mortally wounded,<sup>a</sup> but my life still lingers.' <sup>10</sup> So I stood over him and killed him because I knew that after he had fallen he couldn't survive. I took the crown that was on his head and the armband that was on his arm, and I've brought them here to my lord."

<sup>11</sup> Then David took hold of his clothes and tore them, and all the men with him did the same. <sup>12</sup> They mourned, wept, and fasted until the evening for those who died by the sword — for Saul, his son Jonathan, the LORD's people, and the house of Israel.

<sup>13</sup> David inquired of the young man who had brought him the report, "Where are you from?"

"I'm the son of a resident alien," he said. "I'm an Amalekite."

<sup>14</sup> David questioned him, "How is it that you were not afraid to lift your hand to destroy the LORD's anointed?" <sup>15</sup> Then David summoned one of his servants and said, "Come here and kill him!" The servant struck him, and he died. <sup>16</sup> For David had said to the Amalekite, "Your blood is on your own head because your own mouth testified against you by saying, 'I killed the LORD's anointed.'"

<sup>17</sup> David sang the following lament for Saul and his son Jonathan, <sup>18</sup> and he ordered that the Judahites be taught The Song of the Bow. It is written in the Book of Jashar:<sup>b</sup>

<sup>19</sup> The splendor of Israel lies slain  
on your heights.  
How the mighty have fallen!

<sup>20</sup> Do not tell it in Gath,  
don't announce it in the marketplaces  
of Ashkelon,  
or the daughters of the Philistines will rejoice,  
and the daughters of the uncircumcised  
will celebrate.

<sup>21</sup> Mountains of Gilboa,  
let no dew or rain be on you,  
or fields of offerings,<sup>c</sup>  
for there the shield of the mighty  
was defiled —  
the shield of Saul, no longer anointed with oil.

<sup>22</sup> Jonathan's bow never retreated,  
Saul's sword never returned unstained,<sup>d</sup>  
from the blood of the slain,  
from the flesh<sup>e</sup> of the mighty.

<sup>23</sup> Saul and Jonathan,  
loved and delightful,  
they were not parted in life or in death.  
They were swifter than eagles,  
stronger than lions.

<sup>24</sup> Daughters of Israel, weep for Saul,  
who clothed you in scarlet,  
with luxurious things,  
who decked your garments  
with gold ornaments.

<sup>25</sup> How the mighty have fallen in the thick  
of battle!

Jonathan lies slain on your heights.  
I grieve for you, Jonathan, my brother.  
You were such a friend to me.

Your love for me was more wondrous  
than the love of women.

<sup>27</sup> How the mighty have fallen  
and the weapons of war have perished!

### DAVID, KING OF JUDAH

**2** Some time later, David inquired of the LORD: "Should I go to one of the towns of Judah?"

The LORD answered him, "Go."

Then David asked, "Where should I go?"

"To Hebron," the LORD replied.

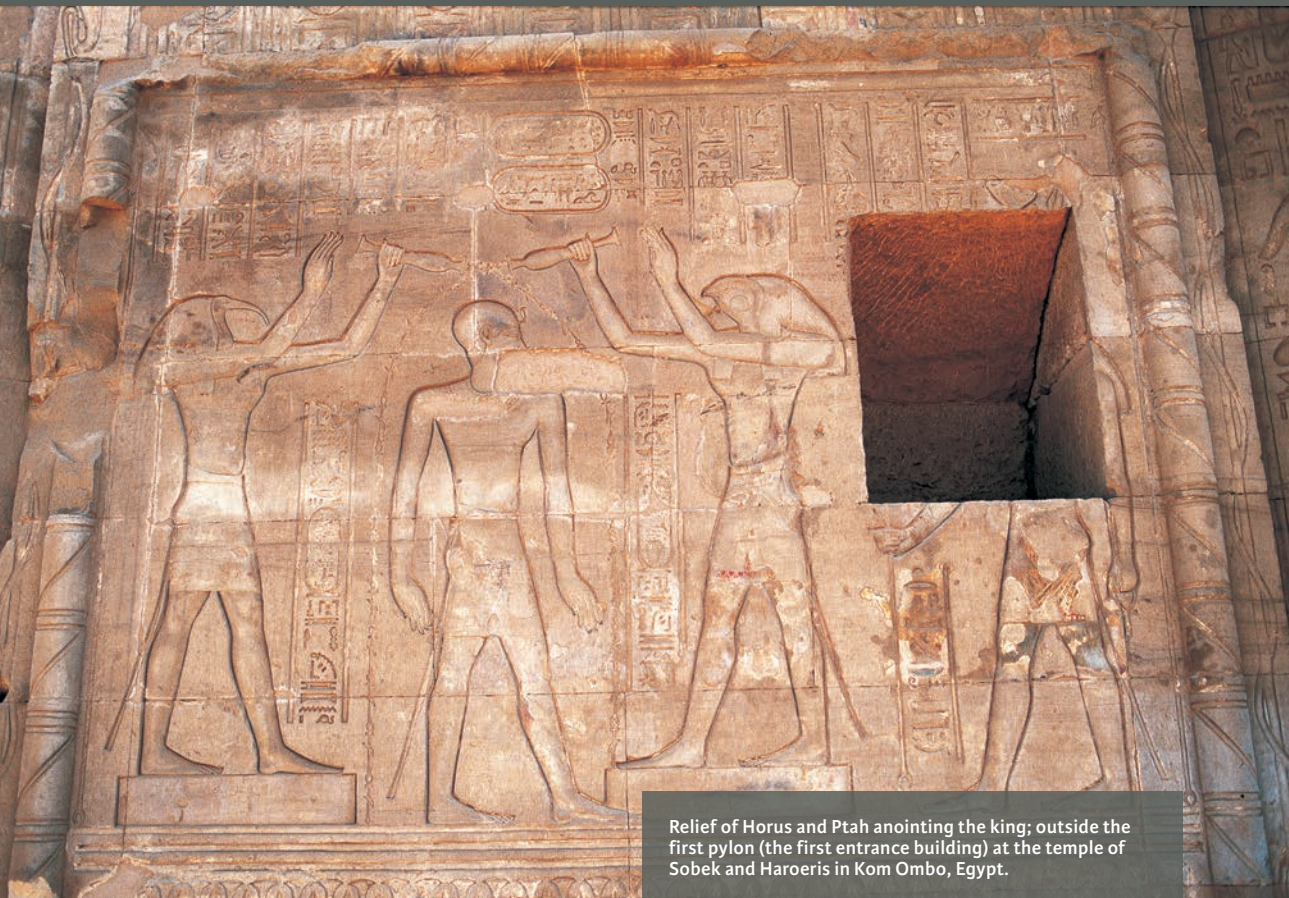
<sup>2</sup> So David went there with his two wives, Ahinoam the Jezreelite and Abigail, the widow of Nabal the Carmelite. <sup>3</sup> In addition, David brought the men who were with him, each one with his family, and they settled in the towns near Hebron. <sup>4</sup> Then the men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah. They told David, "It was the men of Jabesh-gilead who buried Saul."

<sup>5</sup> David sent messengers to the men of Jabesh-gilead and said to them, "The LORD bless you because

<sup>a</sup>1:9 LXX reads for terrible darkness has taken hold of me

<sup>b</sup>1:18 Or of the Upright <sup>c</sup>1:21 LXX reads firstfruits <sup>d</sup>1:22 Lit empty

<sup>e</sup>1:22 Lit fat



Relief of Horus and Ptah anointing the king; outside the first pylon (the first entrance building) at the temple of Sobek and Haroeris in Kom Ombo, Egypt.

Anointing involved smearing or pouring oil on a person or an object. People typically used olive oil; at times they also used oils from plants, nuts, and fish. Sometimes they mixed the oils with aromatic spices (Ex 30:22–25).<sup>1</sup>

People used anointing for various common purposes. Naomi instructed Ruth to anoint herself with oil before meeting Boaz (Ru 3:3). Anointing with oil was also used for medicinal purposes (Is 1:6) and when preparing a body for burial (Mk 16:1). The word *anoint* also occurs referring to oiling a shield (Jr 22:14), painting a house (Lv 22:14), and coating unleavened bread with oil (Lv 2:4).<sup>2</sup>

Although people anointed for everyday purposes, the Bible most often speaks of anointing in the context of setting an object or

person apart for God. Such objects or persons then fulfilled a special function in the worship or service of God.

After Jacob had his vision of the stairway reaching from earth to heaven, he set up a stone as a marker and anointed it (Gn 28:18). Anointing indicated the stone was not simply a marker, but a holy reminder of a holy event and God's presence. Moses anointed the tabernacle, the altar, the basin and stand, and all the vessels used in worship, setting them apart from everyday use (Ex 40:9–11). Someone who broke a pot could not go to the tabernacle and borrow a vessel for cooking a meal or storing water. Those vessels exclusively served a religious function. The tabernacle, the altar, and the vessels were

holy, set apart for worshiping God. The act of anointing them with oil indicated their holiness and their separation from common use.

Moses also anointed his brother Aaron and Aaron's sons to be priests (Ex 40:12–15). This anointing not only set Aaron and his sons apart, but also initiated a permanent priesthood. Following this tradition, the Israelites continued to anoint the priest and especially the high priest, as he came to serve in this important office and function (Lv 21:10–12). Only one instance exists of a biblical prophet being anointed and that is Elijah's anointing of Elisha to succeed him (1Kg 19:16). Yet other prophets considered themselves anointed as well, although by God's Spirit rather than by human agency (Is 61:1).

Most references to the anointing of persons are to the anointing of kings. A prophet alone might anoint the new king as when Samuel anointed Saul (1Sm 10:1) and David (16:13). In some cases, the people anointed the new king. David had already been anointed by Samuel, but following Saul's death the people of Judah anointed David as king (2Sm 2:4). Later the elders of the other Israelite tribes anointed David as their king too (5:3).

The Hittites anointed their kings as part of their enthronement ceremony. The act conferred on the new leader the right and power to rule. The Assyrians and Babylonians did not anoint their kings. In Egypt, the new pharaoh did not receive anointing, but he anointed his high officials into office. Among the Hittites and in Egypt, anointing indicated an individual's elevation to a particular office with the

accompanying authority to execute the role.<sup>3</sup>

In the Old Testament, the anointing of a king indicated his new position, but it seems also to have indicated that God had conveyed "power and ability to perform the function for which one was being anointed. It further designated that the person had been chosen by God (1 Sam 9:16), and so kings in particular could be referred to as 'the Lord's anointed' (24:6)."<sup>4</sup> As the Spirit of the Lord entered the judges so that they could deliver their people (Jdg 3:10; 6:34), so the ceremony of anointing symbolized the Spirit of the Lord entering the king and empowering him to lead God's people in God's ways (1Sm 16:13).

As someone God chose and set apart for his service, the anointed king represented the Lord in a special way. To honor the king was

to honor God. To disrespect the king was to disrespect God. Twice David had the opportunity to kill Saul and become king (1Sm 24:1–22; 26:1–25), but each time he refused. David respected Saul as God's anointed for as long as Saul lived.

Isaiah foretold that the Lord would use "his anointed" (Is 45:1) to bring the Jews back from Babylonian captivity. Another—the Messiah, God's anointed One—would ultimately come and sit on David's throne and rule with perfect justice and righteousness (9:6–7). ❖

<sup>1</sup>Mike Mitchell, "Anoint, Anointed" in *HIBD*, 70. <sup>2</sup>Klaus Seybold, "שָׁמַח; שְׁמַח" (*mashach*, to anoint; *mashiach*, anointed one) in *TDOT* vol. 9 (1998), 45. <sup>3</sup>Franz Hesse, "χρίω" (*chrio*, to smear or anoint) in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament (TDNT)*, ed. Gerhard Friedrich, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, vol. 9 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 496–97. <sup>4</sup>Timothy B. Cargal, "Anoint" in *EDB*, 66.

you have shown this kindness to Saul your lord when you buried him. <sup>6</sup> Now, may the LORD show kindness and faithfulness to you, and I will also show the same goodness to you because you have done this deed. <sup>7</sup> Therefore, be strong<sup>a</sup> and valiant, for though Saul your lord is dead, the house of Judah has anointed me king over them."

<sup>8</sup> Abner son of Ner, commander of Saul's army, took Saul's son Ish-bosheth<sup>b,c</sup> and moved him to Mahanaim. <sup>9</sup> He made him king over Gilead, Asher, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin — over all Israel. <sup>10</sup> Saul's son Ish-bosheth was forty years old when he became king over Israel; he reigned for two years. The house of Judah, however, followed David. <sup>11</sup> The length of time that David was king in Hebron over the house of Judah was seven years and six months.

<sup>12</sup> Abner son of Ner and soldiers of Ish-bosheth son of Saul marched out from Mahanaim to Gibeon. <sup>13</sup> So Joab son of Zeruiah and David's soldiers marched out and met them by the pool of Gibeon. The two groups took up positions on opposite sides of the pool.

<sup>14</sup> Then Abner said to Joab, "Let's have the young men get up and compete in front of us."

"Let them get up," Joab replied.

<sup>15</sup> So they got up and were counted off — twelve for Benjamin and Ish-bosheth son of Saul, and twelve from David's soldiers. <sup>16</sup> Then each man grabbed his opponent by the head and thrust his sword into his opponent's side so that they all died together. So this place, which is in Gibeon, is named Field of Blades.<sup>d</sup>

<sup>17</sup> The battle that day was extremely fierce, and Abner and the men of Israel were defeated by David's soldiers. <sup>18</sup> The three sons of Zeruiah were there: Joab, Abishai, and Asahel. Asahel was a fast runner, like one of the wild gazelles. <sup>19</sup> He chased Abner and did not turn to the right or the left in his pursuit of him.

<sup>20</sup> Abner glanced back and said, "Is that you, Asahel?" "Yes it is," Asahel replied.

<sup>21</sup> Abner said to him, "Turn to your right or left, seize one of the young soldiers, and take whatever you can get from him." But Asahel would not stop chasing him. <sup>22</sup> Once again, Abner warned Asahel, "Stop chasing me. Why should I strike you to the ground? How could I ever look your brother Joab in the face?"

<sup>23</sup> But Asahel refused to turn away, so Abner hit him in the stomach with the butt of his spear. The spear went through his body, and he fell and died right there. As they all came to the place where Asahel had fallen and died, they stopped, <sup>24</sup> but Joab and Abishai pursued Abner. By sunset, they had gone as far as the hill of Ammah, which is opposite Giah on the way to the wilderness of Gibeon.

<sup>25</sup> The Benjaminites rallied to Abner; they formed a unit and took their stand on top of a hill. <sup>26</sup> Then

Abner called out to Joab, "Must the sword devour forever? Don't you realize this will only end in bitterness? How long before you tell the troops to stop pursuing their brothers?"

<sup>27</sup> "As God lives," Joab replied, "if you had not spoken up, the troops wouldn't have stopped pursuing their brothers until morning." <sup>28</sup> Then Joab blew the ram's horn, and all the troops stopped; they no longer pursued Israel or continued to fight. <sup>29</sup> So Abner and his men marched through the Arabah all that night. They crossed the Jordan, marched all morning,<sup>e</sup> and arrived at Mahanaim.

<sup>30</sup> When Joab had turned back from pursuing Abner, he gathered all the troops. In addition to Asahel, nineteen of David's soldiers were missing, <sup>31</sup> but they had killed 360 of the Benjaminites and Abner's men. <sup>32</sup> Afterward, they carried Asahel to his father's tomb in Bethlehem and buried him. Then Joab and his men marched all night and reached Hebron at dawn.

### CIVIL WAR

**3** During the long war between the house of Saul and the house of David, David was growing stronger and the house of Saul was becoming weaker.

<sup>2</sup> Sons were born to David in Hebron:

His firstborn was Amnon,  
by Ahinoam the Jezreelite;

<sup>3</sup> his second was Chileab,  
by Abigail, the widow of Nabal the Carmelite;  
the third was Absalom,  
son of Maacah the daughter of King Talmai

of Geshur;

<sup>4</sup> the fourth was Adonijah,  
son of Haggith;  
the fifth was Shephathiah,  
son of Abital;

<sup>5</sup> the sixth was Ithream,  
by David's wife Eglah.

These were born to David in Hebron.

<sup>6</sup> During the war between the house of Saul and the house of David, Abner kept acquiring more power in the house of Saul. <sup>7</sup> Now Saul had a concubine whose name was Rizpah daughter of Aiah, and Ish-bosheth questioned Abner, "Why did you sleep with my father's concubine?"

<sup>8</sup> Abner was very angry about Ish-bosheth's accusation. "Am I a dog's head<sup>f</sup> who belongs to Judah?" he asked. "All this time I've been loyal to the family of your father Saul, to his brothers, and to his friends and haven't betrayed you to David, but now you accuse me of wrongdoing with this woman!" <sup>9</sup> May God

<sup>a</sup>2:7 Lit *Therefore, strengthen your hands* <sup>b</sup>2:8 Some LXX mss read *Ishbaal*; 1Ch 8:33; 9:39 <sup>c</sup>2:8 = Man of Shame <sup>d</sup>2:16 Or *Helkath-hazzurim* <sup>e</sup>2:29 Or *marched through the Bithron* <sup>f</sup>3:8 = a despised person

punish Abner and do so severely if I don't do for David what the LORD swore to him: <sup>10</sup> to transfer the kingdom from the house of Saul and establish the throne of David over Israel and Judah from Dan to Beer-sheba." <sup>11</sup> Ish-bosheth did not dare respond to Abner because he was afraid of him.

<sup>12</sup> Abner sent messengers as his representatives to say to David, "Whose land is it? Make your covenant with me, and you can be certain I am on your side to turn all Israel over to you."

<sup>13</sup> David replied, "Good, I will make a covenant with you. However, there's one thing I require of you: You will not see my face unless you first bring Saul's daughter Michal when you come to see me."

<sup>14</sup> Then David sent messengers to say to Ish-bosheth son of Saul, "Give me back my wife Michal. I was engaged to her for the price of a hundred Philistine foreskins."

<sup>15</sup> So Ish-bosheth sent someone to take her away from her husband, Paltiel son of Laish. <sup>16</sup> Her husband followed her, weeping all the way to Bahurim. Abner said to him, "Go back." So he went back.

### THE ASSASSINATION OF ABNER

<sup>17</sup> Abner conferred with the elders of Israel: "In the past you wanted David to be king over you. <sup>18</sup> Now take action, because the LORD has spoken concerning David: 'Through my servant David I will save my people Israel from the power of the Philistines and the power of all Israel's enemies.'"

<sup>19</sup> Abner also informed the Benjaminites and went to Hebron to inform David about all that was agreed on by Israel and the whole house of Benjamin. <sup>20</sup> When Abner and twenty men came to David at Hebron, David held a banquet for him and his men.

<sup>21</sup> Abner said to David, "Let me now go and I will gather all Israel to my lord the king. They will make a covenant with you, and you will reign over all you desire." So David dismissed Abner, and he went in peace.

<sup>22</sup> Just then David's soldiers and Joab returned from a raid and brought a large amount of plundered goods with them. Abner was not with David in Hebron because David had dismissed him, and he had gone in peace. <sup>23</sup> When Joab and his whole army arrived, Joab was informed, "Abner son of Ner came to see the king, the king dismissed him, and he went in peace."

<sup>24</sup> Joab went to the king and said, "What have you done? Look here, Abner came to you. Why did you dismiss him? Now he's getting away. <sup>25</sup> You know that Abner son of Ner came to deceive you and to find out about your military activities<sup>a</sup> and everything you're doing." <sup>26</sup> Then Joab left David and sent messengers after Abner. They brought him back

from the well<sup>b</sup> of Sirah, but David was unaware of it. <sup>27</sup> When Abner returned to Hebron, Joab pulled him aside to the middle of the city gate, as if to speak to him privately, and there Joab stabbed him in the stomach. So Abner died in revenge for the death of Asahel,<sup>c</sup> Joab's brother.

<sup>28</sup> David heard about it later and said, "I and my kingdom are forever innocent before the LORD concerning the blood of Abner son of Ner. <sup>29</sup> May it hang over Joab's head and his father's whole family, and may the house of Joab never be without someone who has a discharge or a skin disease, or a man who can only work a spindle,<sup>d</sup> or someone who falls by the sword or starves." <sup>30</sup> Joab and his brother Abishai killed Abner because he had put their brother Asahel to death in the battle at Gibeon.

<sup>31</sup> David then ordered Joab and all the people who were with him, "Tear your clothes, put on sackcloth, and mourn over Abner." And King David walked behind the coffin.<sup>e</sup>

<sup>32</sup> When they buried Abner in Hebron, the king wept aloud at Abner's tomb. All the people wept, <sup>33</sup> and the king sang a lament for Abner:

Should Abner die as a fool dies?

<sup>34</sup> Your hands were not bound,  
your feet not placed in bronze shackles.

You fell like one who falls victim to criminals.

And all the people wept over him even more.

<sup>35</sup> Then they came to urge David to eat food while it was still day, but David took an oath: "May God punish me and do so severely if I taste bread or anything else before sunset!" <sup>36</sup> All the people took note of this, and it pleased them. In fact, everything the king did pleased them. <sup>37</sup> On that day all the troops and all Israel were convinced that the king had no part in the killing of Abner son of Ner.

<sup>38</sup> Then the king said to his soldiers, "You must know that a great leader has fallen in Israel today. <sup>39</sup> As for me, even though I am the anointed king, I have little power today. These men, the sons of Zeruiah, are too fierce for me. May the LORD repay the evildoer according to his evil!"

### THE ASSASSINATION OF ISH-BOSHETH

**4** When Saul's son Ish-bosheth heard that Abner had died in Hebron, he gave up,<sup>f</sup> and all Israel was dismayed. <sup>2</sup> Saul's son had two men who were leaders of raiding parties: one named Baanah and the other Rechab, sons of Rimmon the Beerothite of the Benjaminites. Beeroth is also considered part of Benjamin, <sup>3</sup> and the Beerothites fled to Gittaim and still reside there as aliens today.

<sup>a</sup>3:25 Lit *your going out and your coming in* <sup>b</sup>3:26 Or *cistern*  
<sup>c</sup>3:27 Lit *And he died for the blood of Asahel* <sup>d</sup>3:29 LXX reads *who uses a crutch* <sup>e</sup>3:31 Or *the bier*; lit *the bed* <sup>f</sup>4:1 Lit *his hands dropped*

<sup>4</sup> Saul's son Jonathan had a son whose feet were crippled. He was five years old when the report about Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel. His nanny picked him up and fled, but as she was hurrying to flee, he fell and became lame. His name was Mephibosheth.

<sup>5</sup> Rechab and Baanah, the sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, set out and arrived at Ish-bosheth's house during the heat of the day while the king was taking his midday nap. <sup>6</sup> They entered the interior of the house as if to get wheat and stabbed him in the stomach. Then Rechab and his brother Baanah escaped. <sup>7</sup> They had entered the house while Ish-bosheth was lying on his bed in his bedroom and stabbed and killed him. They removed his head, took it, and traveled by way of the Arabah all night. <sup>8</sup> They brought Ish-bosheth's head to David at Hebron and said to the king, "Here's the head of Ish-bosheth son of Saul, your enemy who intended to take your life. Today the LORD has granted vengeance to my lord the king against Saul and his offspring."

<sup>9</sup> But David answered Rechab and his brother Baanah, sons of Rimmon the Beerothite, "As the LORD lives, the one who has redeemed my life from every distress, <sup>10</sup> when the person told me, 'Look, Saul is dead,' he thought he was a bearer of good news, but I seized him and put him to death at Ziklag. That was my reward to him for his news! <sup>11</sup> How much more when wicked men kill a righteous man in his own house on his own bed! So now, should I not require his blood from you and purge you from the earth?"

<sup>12</sup> So David gave orders to the young men, and they killed Rechab and Baanah. They cut off their hands and feet and hung their bodies by the pool in Hebron, but they took Ish-bosheth's head and buried it in Abner's tomb in Hebron.

#### DAVID, KING OF ISRAEL

**5** All the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and said, "Here we are, your own flesh and blood." <sup>2</sup> Even while Saul was king over us, you were the one who led us out to battle and brought us back. The LORD also said to you, 'You will shepherd my people Israel, and you will be ruler over Israel.'

<sup>3</sup> So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron. King David made a covenant with them at Hebron in the LORD's presence, and they anointed David king over Israel.

<sup>4</sup> David was thirty years old when he began his reign; he reigned forty years. <sup>5</sup> In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned thirty-three years over all Israel and Judah.

<sup>6</sup> The king and his men marched to Jerusalem against the Jebusites who inhabited the land. The Jebusites had said to David, "You will never get in here. Even the blind and lame can repel you" thinking, "David can't get in here."

<sup>7</sup> Yet David did capture the stronghold of Zion, that is, the city of David. <sup>8</sup> He said that day, "Whoever attacks the Jebusites must go through the water shaft to reach the lame and the blind who are despised by David."<sup>8</sup> For this reason it is said, "The blind and the lame will never enter the house."<sup>c</sup>

<sup>9</sup> David took up residence in the stronghold, which he named the city of David. He built it up all the way around from the supporting terraces inward. <sup>10</sup> David became more and more powerful, and the LORD God of Armies was with him. <sup>11</sup> King Hiram of Tyre sent envoys to David; he also sent cedar logs, carpenters, and stonemasons, and they built a palace for David. <sup>12</sup> Then David knew that the LORD had established him as king over Israel and had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel.

<sup>13</sup> After he arrived from Hebron, David took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem, and more sons and daughters were born to him. <sup>14</sup> These are the names of those born to him in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, <sup>15</sup> Ibhar, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, <sup>16</sup> Elishama, Eliada, and Eliphelet.

<sup>17</sup> When the Philistines heard that David had been anointed king over Israel, they all went in search of David, but he heard about it and went down to the stronghold. <sup>18</sup> So the Philistines came and spread out in Rephaim Valley.

<sup>19</sup> Then David inquired of the LORD: "Should I attack the Philistines? Will you hand them over to me?"

The LORD replied to David, "Attack, for I will certainly hand the Philistines over to you."

<sup>20</sup> So David went to Baal-perazim and defeated them there and said, "Like a bursting flood, the LORD has burst out against my enemies before me." Therefore, he named that place The Lord Bursts Out. <sup>21</sup> The Philistines abandoned their idols there, and David and his men carried them off.

<sup>22</sup> The Philistines came up again and spread out in Rephaim Valley. <sup>23</sup> So David inquired of the LORD, and he answered, "Do not attack directly, but circle around behind them and come at them opposite the balsam trees. <sup>24</sup> When you hear the sound of marching in the tops of the balsam trees, act decisively, for then the LORD will have gone out ahead of you to strike down the army of the Philistines."<sup>25</sup> So David did exactly as the LORD commanded him, and he struck down the Philistines all the way from Geba to Gezer.

<sup>a</sup>5:1 Lit *your bone and your flesh* <sup>b</sup>5:8 Alt Hb tradition, LXX, Tg, Syr read *who despise David* <sup>c</sup>5:8 Or *temple, or palace* <sup>d</sup>5:20 Or *Baal-perazim*; 2Sm 6:8; 1Ch 13:11

#### DAVID MOVES THE ARK

**6** David again assembled all the fit young men in Israel: thirty thousand. <sup>2</sup> He and all his troops set out to bring the ark of God from Baale-judah. <sup>a</sup> The ark bears the Name, the name of the LORD of Armies who is enthroned between the cherubim. <sup>3</sup> They set the ark of God on a new cart and transported it from Abinadab's house, which was on the hill. Uzzah and Ahio,<sup>8</sup> sons of Abinadab, were guiding the cart <sup>4</sup> and brought it with the ark of God from Abinadab's house on the hill. Ahio walked in front of the ark. <sup>5</sup> David and the whole house of Israel were dancing before the LORD with all kinds of fir wood instruments,<sup>c</sup> lyres, harps, tambourines, sistrums,<sup>d</sup> and cymbals.

<sup>6</sup> When they came to Nacon's threshing floor, Uzzah reached out to the ark of God and took hold of it because the oxen had stumbled. <sup>7</sup> Then the LORD's anger burned against Uzzah, and God struck him dead on the spot for his irreverence, and he died there next to the ark of God. <sup>8</sup> David was angry because of the LORD's outburst against Uzzah, so he named that place Outburst Against Uzzah,<sup>e</sup> as it is today. <sup>9</sup> David feared the LORD that day and said, "How can the ark of the LORD ever come to me?" <sup>10</sup> So he was not willing to bring the ark of the LORD to the city of David; instead, he diverted it to the house of Obed-edom of Gath. <sup>11</sup> The ark of the LORD remained in his house three months, and the LORD blessed Obed-edom and his whole family.

<sup>12</sup> It was reported to King David, "The LORD has blessed Obed-edom's family and all that belongs to him because of the ark of God." So David went and had the ark of God brought up from Obed-edom's house to the city of David with rejoicing. <sup>13</sup> When those carrying the ark of the LORD advanced six steps, he sacrificed an ox and a fattened calf. <sup>14</sup> David was dancing<sup>f</sup> with all his might before the LORD wearing a linen ephod. <sup>15</sup> He and the whole house of Israel were bringing up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of the ram's horn. <sup>16</sup> As the ark of the LORD was entering the city of David, Saul's daughter Michal looked down from the window and saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, and she despised him in her heart.

<sup>17</sup> They brought the ark of the LORD and set it in its place inside the tent David had pitched for it. Then David offered burnt offerings and fellowship offerings in the LORD's presence. <sup>18</sup> When David had finished offering the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of Armies. <sup>19</sup> Then he distributed a loaf of bread, a date cake, and a raisin cake to each one in the entire Israelite community, both men and women. Then all the people went home.

<sup>20</sup> When David returned home to bless his household, Saul's daughter Michal came out to meet him.

"How the king of Israel honored himself today!" she said. "He exposed himself today in the sight of the slave girls of his subjects like a vulgar person would expose himself."

<sup>21</sup> David replied to Michal, "It was before the LORD who chose me over your father and his whole family to appoint me ruler over the LORD's people Israel. I will dance before the LORD, <sup>22</sup> and I will dishonor myself and humble myself even more."<sup>g</sup> However, by the slave girls you spoke about, I will be honored." <sup>23</sup> And Saul's daughter Michal had no child to the day of her death.

#### THE LORD'S COVENANT WITH DAVID

**7** When the king had settled into his palace and the LORD had given him rest on every side from all his enemies, <sup>2</sup> the king said to the prophet Nathan, "Look, I am living in a cedar house while the ark of God sits inside tent curtains."

<sup>3</sup> So Nathan told the king, "Go and do all that is on your mind, for the LORD is with you."

<sup>4</sup> But that night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: <sup>5</sup> "Go to my servant David and say, 'This is what the LORD says: Are you to build me a house to dwell in? <sup>6</sup> From the time I brought the Israelites out of Egypt until today I have not dwelt in a house; instead, I have been moving around with a tent as my dwelling. <sup>7</sup> In all my journeys with all the Israelites, have I ever spoken a word to one of the tribal leaders of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, asking: Why haven't you built me a house of cedar?'

<sup>8</sup> "So now this is what you are to say to my servant David: 'This is what the LORD of Armies says: I took you from the pasture, from tending the flock, to be ruler over my people Israel. <sup>9</sup> I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have destroyed all your enemies before you. I will make a great name for you like that of the greatest on the earth. <sup>10</sup> I will designate a place for my people Israel and plant them, so that they may live there and not be disturbed again. Evildoers will not continue to oppress them as they have done <sup>11</sup> ever since the day I ordered judges to be over my people Israel. I will give you rest from all your enemies.

"The LORD declares to you: The LORD himself will make a house for you. <sup>12</sup> When your time comes and you rest with your ancestors, I will raise up after you your descendant, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. <sup>13</sup> He is the one who will build a house for my name, and I will establish the

<sup>a</sup>6:2 = Kiriath-jearim in 1Sm 7:1; 1Ch 13:6; 2Ch 1:4 <sup>b</sup>6:3 Or *And his brothers* <sup>c</sup>6:5 DSS, LXX read *with tuned instruments with strength, with songs*; 1Ch 13:8 <sup>d</sup>6:5 = an Egyptian percussion instrument <sup>e</sup>6:8 Or *Perez-uzzah*; 2Sm 5:20 <sup>f</sup>6:14 Or *whirling* <sup>g</sup>6:22 LXX reads *more and I will be humble in your eyes* <sup>h</sup>6:22 Lit *more and I will be humble in my own eyes*

# The Origins of the Monarchy in Israel

by Claude F. Mariottini

The monarchy was an anomaly and a late development in Israel. Israel became a nation when Yahweh delivered her from the oppression in Egypt. Israel was born a free nation in order to express God's justice and faithful love among the nations. Israel was a special nation, a community of free citizens in which the people would always remember that they had been slaves in Egypt, and the remembrance of that event would influence their treatment of each other and of the stranger in their midst. However, something happened after Joshua's death that caused the chaotic situation in the days of the judges. Those who at one time were oppressed, and whose God was known as the "God of the oppressed," were willing now to establish the kind of government from which they sought to escape.

The clans of Israel were willing to give up their individual autonomy to establish a form of government that created and promoted social inequality and social oppression among its population. Why were the people willing to give up so much in order to support a king who, like a Canaanite king, would force them to plow and to reap for him, who would tax their property and their crops, and who would exact their services as slaves and servants (1Sm 8:11–18)?

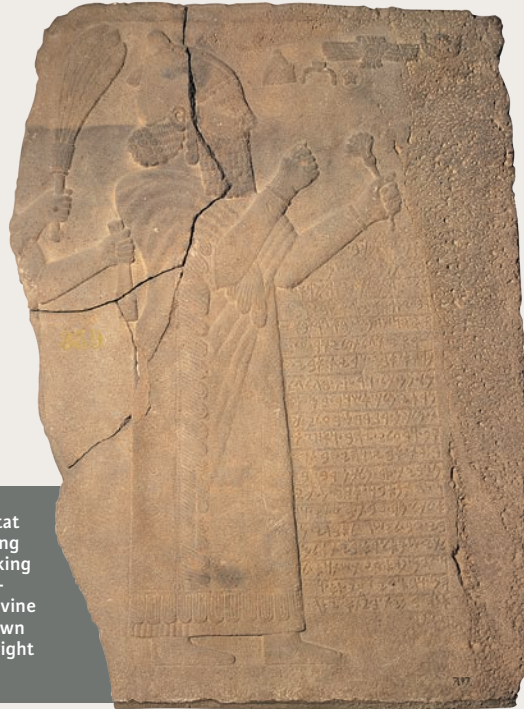
Two reasons can be adduced to explain the antimonarchic feelings in Israel. The first reason was the belief that kingship would jeopardize God's rule. In the ancient Near East, monarchy was a sacred institution and the king was highly exalted by the community and often honored as a god. The rejection of hereditary kingship in Israel was based on the idea that such a view of kingship was contrary to Israel's theocratic traditions.

The second reason for the antimonarchic feelings was that ancient Israelite society was organized as a patriarchal system that gave much power to the leaders of the clans.

From its beginning, Israel was a tribal society, a nation composed of twelve tribes, each named after one of the sons of Jacob. A tribe was composed of several clans, and a clan was composed of several families. Traditionally the political decisions among the tribes were made by the representatives of each tribe who were selected from among the leaders of the clans. In times of community crisis, the elders of the tribes would come together and make decisions that were binding on all the tribes. In case of national crisis, several tribes would unite to fight against a common enemy, and God would raise up a leader from among the people who would lead them to war against the oppressors. The judges who appear in the book of Judges were military leaders who led the tribes in their struggle against the foreign nations that oppressed Israel. Once the struggle ended and the danger diminished,

the tribes would again revert to their traditional distributed political patterns. Early Israel resisted the establishment of a central government and refused to elect a person to be the king of the entire nation. The imposition of kingship would bring a radical change in the basic structure of Israelite society. Monarchy would shift the power of decision away from the tribes and from their clan leaders to an individual, who in turn would make decisions that would affect the whole nation.

In spite of any opposition, the monarchy was established in Israel. The emergence of the state reshaped Israelite society; it abolished many of the old traditions of the community and created new ones. Even with Samuel's warning (1Sm 8:10–18), the people believed that the benefits derived from the monarchy outweighed the inequities and the cruelties brought about by the state.



Basalt orthostat image depicting the Aramean king Barrekup worshipping the Divine Emblems, shown in the upper-right corner.

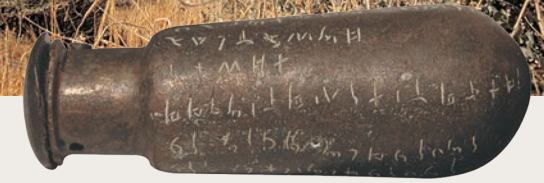


The Mediterranean Sea from Ashkelon, which was a coastal city of the Philistines.

Whenever a community is faced with a serious struggle for survival, it will seek to centralize its power and resources in order to fight against a common enemy. These conflicts can be external—such as wars—or internal—such as revolts and insurrections. The most serious threat to Israel's survival during the times of the judges was the Philistines' desire for supremacy in Canaan. As early as the time of Shamgar, one of the judges of Israel (Jdg 3:31), and the days of Samson (Jdg 15:20), the Philistines were already menacing Israel. Although during his lifetime Shamgar was able to deliver Israel from Philistine oppression, Samson failed to do so. By Samuel's time, the Philistines had become Israel's most dangerous and persistent enemies and were established in the coastal area of Canaan as a federation of five cities: Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron (Jos 13:3). Samson's victories over them were not sufficient to remove the threat posed to the community. The Philistines' victory at Aphek, the conquest of the ark, and the destruction of Shiloh (1Sm 4:1–11; Jr 7:12–14) reemphasized the perceived need for a stronger centralized power that would be equal to the Philistine military organization.<sup>1</sup>

The Philistine menace was based on their superior military power

over Israel and their control of the production and use of iron. The Philistines' military power was the result of their use of chariots and superior weapons of war (1Sm 13:19–22).<sup>2</sup> Initially with Egypt's consent, the Philistines established themselves in Canaan, seeking to extend their control over most of the Canaanite city-states as well as over Israel. By the time Israel elected Saul as king, the Philistines had expanded their control to Geba (1Sm 13:3), Ziklag (1Sm 27:5–6), and Bethlehem (2Sm 23:14). The rules and regulations imposed by the Philistines on Israel reflect the Philistines' desire to control Israel's economy. Such a control would have been disastrous for Israel. Control of Israel's agricultural and pastoral life by the Philistines would have meant not only the end of formal independence for the tribes but also the impoverishment of Israel's predominantly peasant population. Philistine conquest of Israel would have opened the way for the drafting of Israelite men to fight under Philistine command and the drafting of



A bronze bottle from Tel Siron dating from the mid-seventh century BC. The bottle is engraved with an account of the works done by Amminadab, king of the Ammonites.

Israelite manpower for state labor either to serve on building projects or to serve the Philistines' agricultural needs.

The result of this Philistine domination would have been for Israel a reestablishment of her condition of bondage under the Egyptian pharaoh. The nation was also beset by attacks of the Moabites, Canaanites, Midianites, and Ammonites. Faced with a struggle for survival, the members of the tribes came to Samuel at Ramah, asking for a king who would form a militaristic, centralized government, with a monopoly on the use of force in order to fight against the enemy.

Because of perceived political necessity, internal problems, and external pressures, the clans of Israel first delegated power to the judges, then centralized power in the hands of Saul, and finally institutionalized power under David. ❖

<sup>1</sup> John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2000), 186.

<sup>2</sup> LaMoine DeVries, "Philistines, The" in *HoLBD*, 1108.

**DIGGING DEEPER** *House of David Inscription*

When the ancients wanted to make a permanent, public proclamation, they would inscribe a message in a stone object known as a *stele* and then erect it in a prominent location so everyone could read it. While excavating at Tel Dan in northern Israel in 1993, Avraham Biran uncovered an early eighth-century BC Aramaic stele that was likely erected by King Hazael of Syria, an enemy of Israel (2Kg 8:7–15; 10:32). The inscription is a valuable piece of evidence that establishes the reliability of the biblical descriptions of several kings of Judah, Israel, and Syria, including Ahab (1Kg 16:28), Joram (2Kg 8:16), Ahaz (2Kg 15:38), and Ben-hadad (1Kg 15:20; 2Kg 8:15). However, the most striking part of the stele is that it contains the Aramaic phrase “house of David” (*bytdwd* or *Beth-David*) which is the first known reference to David and his dynasty outside the Bible (2Sm 7:1–29; Zch 12:8,10). Since its discovery, critical scholars have attempted to argue that the phrase refers to a place rather than a person named David. This theory has not been well received; there is no biblical or extrabiblical evidence for a *place* named “house of David.”

throne of his kingdom forever. <sup>14</sup>I will be his father, and he will be my son. When he does wrong, I will discipline him with a rod of men and blows from mortals. <sup>15</sup>But my faithful love will never leave him as it did when I removed it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. <sup>16</sup>Your house and kingdom will endure before me<sup>a</sup> forever, and your throne will be established forever.’”

<sup>17</sup>Nathan reported all these words and this entire vision to David.

**DAVID’S PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING**

<sup>18</sup>Then King David went in, sat in the LORD’s presence, and said,

Who am I, Lord God, and what is my house that you have brought me this far? <sup>19</sup>What you have done so far<sup>b</sup> was a little thing to you, Lord God, for you have also spoken about your servant’s house in the distant future. And this is a revelation<sup>c</sup> for mankind, Lord God. <sup>20</sup>What more can David say to you? You know your servant, Lord God. <sup>21</sup>Because of your word and according to your will, you have revealed all these great things to your servant.

<sup>22</sup>This is why you are great, Lord God. There is no one like you, and there is no God besides you,

as all we have heard confirms. <sup>23</sup>And who is like your people Israel? God came to one nation on earth in order to redeem a people for himself, to make a name for himself, and to perform for them<sup>d</sup> great and awesome acts,<sup>e</sup> driving out nations and their gods before your people you redeemed for yourself from Egypt. <sup>24</sup>You established your people Israel to be your own people forever, and you, LORD, have become their God.

<sup>25</sup>Now, LORD God, fulfill the promise forever that you have made to your servant and his house. Do as you have promised, <sup>26</sup>so that your name will be exalted forever, when it is said, “The LORD of Armies is God over Israel.” The house of your servant David will be established before you <sup>27</sup>since you, LORD of Armies, God of Israel, have revealed this to your servant when you said, “I will build a house for you.” Therefore, your servant has found the courage to pray this prayer to you. <sup>28</sup>Lord GOD, you are God; your words are true, and you have promised this good thing to your servant. <sup>29</sup>Now, please bless your servant’s house so that it will continue before you forever. For you, Lord God, have spoken, and with your blessing your servant’s house will be blessed forever.

**DAVID’S VICTORIES**

**8** After this, David defeated the Philistines, subdued them, and took Metheg-ammah<sup>f</sup> from Philistine control. <sup>2</sup>He also defeated the Moabites, and after making them lie down on the ground, he measured them off with a cord. He measured every two cord lengths of those to be put to death and one full length of those to be kept alive. So the Moabites became David’s subjects and brought tribute.

<sup>3</sup>David also defeated Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah, when he went to restore his control at the Euphrates River. <sup>4</sup>David captured seventeen hundred horsemen<sup>g</sup> and twenty thousand foot soldiers from him, and he hamstrung all the horses and kept a hundred chariots.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>5</sup>When the Arameans of Damascus came to assist King Hadadezer of Zobah, David struck down twenty-two thousand Aramean men. <sup>6</sup>Then he placed garrisons in Aram of Damascus, and the Arameans became David’s subjects and brought tribute. The LORD made David victorious wherever he went.

<sup>a</sup>7:16 Some Hb mss, LXX, Syr; other Hb mss read *you* <sup>b</sup>7:19 Lit *Yet this* <sup>c</sup>7:19 Or *custom, or instruction* <sup>d</sup>7:23 Some Hb mss, Tg, Vg, Syr; other Hb mss read *you* <sup>e</sup>7:23 LXX; MT reads *acts for your land* <sup>f</sup>8:1 Or *took control of the mother city*; Hb obscure <sup>g</sup>8:1 LXX reads *them, and David took tribute out of the hand of the Philistines* <sup>h</sup>8:4 LXX, DSS read *1,000 chariots and 7,000 horsemen* <sup>i</sup>8:4 Or *chariot horses*

<sup>7</sup>David took the gold shields of Hadadezer’s officers and brought them to Jerusalem. <sup>8</sup>King David also took huge quantities of bronze from Bethah<sup>a</sup> and Berothai, Hadadezer’s cities.

<sup>9</sup>When King Toi of Hamath heard that David had defeated the entire army of Hadadezer, <sup>10</sup>he sent his son Joram to King David to greet him and to congratulate him because David had fought against Hadadezer and defeated him, for Toi and Hadadezer had fought many wars. Joram had items of silver, gold, and bronze with him. <sup>11</sup>King David also dedicated these to the LORD, along with the silver and gold he had dedicated from all the nations he had subdued — <sup>12</sup>from Edom,<sup>b</sup> Moab, the Ammonites, the Philistines, the Amalekites, and the spoil of Hadadezer son of Rehob, king of Zobah.

<sup>13</sup>David made a reputation for himself when he returned from striking down eighteen thousand Edomites<sup>c</sup> in Salt Valley.<sup>d</sup> <sup>14</sup>He placed garrisons throughout Edom, and all the Edomites were subject to David. The LORD made David victorious wherever he went.

<sup>15</sup>So David reigned over all Israel, administering justice and righteousness for all his people.

- <sup>16</sup> Joab son of Zeruiah was over the army; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was court historian;
- <sup>17</sup> Zadok son of Ahitub and Ahimelech son of Abiathar were priests; Seraiah was court secretary;
- <sup>18</sup> Benaiah son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and the Pelethites; and David’s sons were chief officials.<sup>e</sup>

**DAVID’S KINDNESS TO MEPHIBOSHETH**

**9** David asked, “Is there anyone remaining from the family of Saul I can show kindness to for Jonathan’s sake?” <sup>2</sup>There was a servant of Saul’s family named Ziba. They summoned him to David, and the king said to him, “Are you Ziba?”

“I am your servant,” he replied.

<sup>3</sup>So the king asked, “Is there anyone left of Saul’s family that I can show the kindness of God to?”

Ziba said to the king, “There is still Jonathan’s son who was injured in both feet.”

<sup>4</sup>The king asked him, “Where is he?”

Ziba answered the king, “You’ll find him in Lo-debar at the house of Machir son of Ammiel.” <sup>5</sup>So King David had him brought from the house of Machir son of Ammiel in Lo-debar.

<sup>6</sup>Mephibosheth son of Jonathan son of Saul came to David, fell facedown, and paid homage. David said, “Mephibosheth!”

“I am your servant,” he replied.

<sup>7</sup>“Don’t be afraid,” David said to him, “since I intend to show you kindness for the sake of your father Jon-

athan. I will restore to you all your grandfather Saul’s fields, and you will always eat meals at my table.”

<sup>8</sup>Mephibosheth paid homage and said, “What is your servant that you take an interest in a dead dog like me?”

<sup>9</sup>Then the king summoned Saul’s attendant Ziba and said to him, “I have given to your master’s grandson all that belonged to Saul and his family. <sup>10</sup>You, your sons, and your servants are to work the ground for him, and you are to bring in the crops so your master’s grandson will have food to eat. But Mephibosheth, your master’s grandson, is always to eat at my table.” Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.

<sup>11</sup>Ziba said to the king, “Your servant will do all my lord the king commands.”

So Mephibosheth ate at David’s<sup>f</sup> table just like one of the king’s sons. <sup>12</sup>Mephibosheth had a young son whose name was Mica. All those living in Ziba’s house were Mephibosheth’s servants. <sup>13</sup>However, Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem because he always ate at the king’s table. His feet had been injured.

**WAR WITH THE AMMONITES**

**10** Some time later, the king of the Ammonites died, and his son Hanun became king in his place. <sup>2</sup>Then David said, “I’ll show kindness to Hanun son of Nahash, just as his father showed kindness to me.”

So David sent his emissaries to console Hanun concerning his father. However, when they arrived in the land of the Ammonites, <sup>3</sup>the Ammonite leaders said to Hanun their lord, “Just because David has sent men with condolences for you, do you really believe he’s showing respect for your father? Instead, hasn’t David sent his emissaries in order to scout out the city, spy on it, and demolish it?” <sup>4</sup>So Hanun took David’s emissaries, shaved off half their beards, cut their clothes in half at the hips, and sent them away.

<sup>5</sup>When this was reported to David, he sent someone to meet them, since they were deeply humiliated. The king said, “Stay in Jericho until your beards grow back; then return.”

<sup>6</sup>When the Ammonites realized they had become repulsive to David, they hired twenty thousand foot soldiers from the Arameans of Beth-rehob and Zobah, one thousand men from the king of Maacah, and twelve thousand men from Tob.

<sup>7</sup>David heard about it and sent Joab and all the elite troops. <sup>8</sup>The Ammonites marched out and lined up in battle formation at the entrance to the city gate

<sup>a</sup>8:8 Some LXX mss, Syr read *Tebah* <sup>b</sup>8:12 Some Hb mss, LXX, Syr; other Hb mss read *Aram*; 1Ch 18:11 <sup>c</sup>8:13 Some Hb mss, LXX, Syr; other Hb mss read *Arameans*; 1Ch 18:12 <sup>d</sup>8:13 = the Dead Sea region <sup>e</sup>8:18 LXX; MT reads *were priests*; 1Ch 18:17 <sup>f</sup>9:11 LXX; Syr reads *the king’s*; Vg reads *your*; MT reads *my*

## Who Were the Arameans?

by Joel F. Drinkard Jr.

First, *where* were the Arameans? They were in Syria and Mesopotamia—both in many English translations and in history. So, *who* were the Arameans? The Arameans were the neighbors of Israel to the north and east, primarily east of the Jordan River and the Rift Valley as far as the Middle Euphrates and its tributaries.

The Arameans were Semitic tribes who were closely related to the Israelites. The Aramaic language the Arameans spoke was a Semitic language closely related to Hebrew. Abraham was living in Aram when God called him to go to Canaan (Gn 11:31–12:1). Abraham's brother, Nahor, Isaac's wife Rebekah, and Jacob's wives Leah and Rachel all lived in Aram.

The Arameans occupied much of the territory that linked trade and commerce between Egypt and Assyria-Babylon. They lived north of Canaan-Israel and east of Phoenicia. The primary god of the Arameans was Hadad, a storm god. The Arameans eventually became strong enough that they controlled much of the region of eastern Syria and Assyria. Partly because of this expansion and partly because their language was alphabetic (unlike the cuneiform-syllabic languages of Assyria and Babylon), Aramaic became a common language of trade and commerce as well as diplomacy during the Assyrian and Babylonian empires of the late eighth to sixth centuries BC. Aramaic then became the lingua franca for almost all the Near East during the Persian and Hellenistic periods.<sup>1</sup> Aramaic and Greek were the two primary languages of the New Testament era throughout the Near East.

The earliest specific mention of the Arameans was in Assyrian texts dated to the time of Tiglath-pileser I (reigned 1115–1077 BC). He fought against the Arameans and defeated them from Tadmor (Palmyra) in



Ruins at Tadmor (known in English as Palmyra); located in the central Syrian desert, Tadmor was an important stop for travelers and caravans along the route from Mesopotamia westward. Tiglath-pileser I defeated the Arameans at Tadmor.

modern Syria as far as Babylonia.<sup>2</sup> By this time, the Arameans were spread from central Syria eastward across the Euphrates River at least as far as the Babylonian territory. The Assyrian texts describe the Arameans both as pastoral tribal groups and also as ones who dwelled in towns or villages.

The Arameans mentioned in 2 Kings 5 were those who lived west of the Euphrates in what is modern Syria. They never formed a unified nation. Instead they had a series of



Aramean debt contract established before four witnesses. The contract states a man borrowed twenty-seven silver shekels from Bait' el-Yada', leaving him a slave as deposit; dates to about 570 BC, the thirty-fourth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign; from Aleppo.

independent city-states, including Aram-Damascus. David occupied Aram-Damascus (2 Sm 8:6), and it remained under Israel's control during his reign. Rezon recaptured Damascus from Solomon.

Ben-hadad II (who is probably also named Hadadezer) along with Israel's king Ahab fought against Assyria's king Shalmaneser III at the battle of Qarqar in 853 BC. Ben-Hadad II had twelve hundred chariots, twelve hundred cavalry, and twenty thousand soldiers in the battle; Ahab had two thousand chariots and ten thousand soldiers.<sup>3</sup> As prophesied by both Elijah and Elisha, Hazael assassinated Ben-Hadad in 842 BC and became king (1Kg 19:15; 2Kg 8:13). Hazael is most likely the Aramean king in the Tel Dan stele. In the stele's inscription, the king claims to have killed both the kings of Israel and Judah, Joram and Ahaziah.<sup>4</sup> During Hazael's reign, Aram-Damascus reached its greatest extent east of the Jordan and subjugated Israel and Judah (2Kg 12–13). Tiglath-pileser III

(reigned 744–727 BC) conquered the Arameans of Damascus in 732 BC, and the Arameans ceased to be a political force in Syria. ❖

<sup>1</sup> Benjamin Mazar, "The Aramean Empire and Its Relations with Israel," *BA* 25.4 (1962): 111. <sup>2</sup> James B. Pritchard, ed., *ANET*, 3rd ed. with sup., 275. <sup>3</sup> Pritchard, *ANET*, 278–79. <sup>4</sup> William M. Schniedewind, "Tel Dan Stela: New Light on Aramaic and Jehu's Revolt," *BASOR* 302 (1996): 75–79; Matthew J. Suriano, "The Apology of Hazael: A Literary and Historical Analysis of the Tel Dan Inscription," *JNES* 66.3 (2007): 163–76.



Basalt statue of an Aramean king. Dates from the late Hittite period: ninth century BC.



Bedouin tent and herd near Sheikh Mizken (translated "leader of the poor people") in Syria. Some Arameans were rural tent dwellers; others lived in cities.

while the Arameans of Zobah and Rehob and the men of Tob and Maacah were in the field by themselves. <sup>9</sup>When Joab saw that there was a battle line in front of him and another behind him, he chose some of Israel's finest young men and lined up in formation to engage the Arameans. <sup>10</sup>He placed the rest of the forces under the command of his brother Abishai. They lined up in formation to engage the Ammonites.

<sup>11</sup>"If the Arameans are too strong for me," Joab said, "then you will be my help. However, if the Ammonites are too strong for you, I'll come to help you. <sup>12</sup>Be strong! Let's prove ourselves strong for our people and for the cities of our God. May the LORD's will be done."<sup>a</sup>

<sup>13</sup>Joab and his troops advanced to fight against the Arameans, and they fled before him. <sup>14</sup>When the Ammonites saw that the Arameans had fled, they too fled before Abishai and entered the city. So Joab withdrew from the attack against the Ammonites and went to Jerusalem.

<sup>15</sup>When the Arameans saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they regrouped. <sup>16</sup>Hadadezer sent messengers to bring the Arameans who were beyond the Euphrates River, and they came to Helam with Shobach, commander of Hadadezer's army, leading them.

<sup>17</sup>When this was reported to David, he gathered all Israel, crossed the Jordan, and went to Helam. Then the Arameans lined up to engage David in battle and fought against him. <sup>18</sup>But the Arameans fled before Israel, and David killed seven hundred of their charioteers and forty thousand foot soldiers. <sup>8</sup>He also struck down Shobach commander of their army, who died there. <sup>19</sup>When all the kings who were Hadadezer's subjects saw that they had been defeated by Israel, they made peace with Israel and became their subjects. After this, the Arameans were afraid to ever help the Ammonites again.

#### DAVID'S ADULTERY WITH BATHSHEBA

**11** In the spring when kings march out to war, David sent Joab with his officers and all Israel. They destroyed the Ammonites and besieged Rabbah, but David remained in Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup>One evening David got up from his bed and strolled around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing — a very beautiful woman. <sup>3</sup>So David sent someone to inquire about her, and he said, "Isn't this Bathsheba, daughter of Eliam and wife of Uriah the Hethite?"<sup>c</sup>

<sup>4</sup>David sent messengers to get her, and when she came to him, he slept with her. Now she had just been purifying herself from her uncleanness. Afterward, she returned home. <sup>5</sup>The woman conceived and sent word to inform David, "I am pregnant."

<sup>6</sup>David sent orders to Joab: "Send me Uriah the Hethite." So Joab sent Uriah to David. <sup>7</sup>When Uriah came to him, David asked how Joab and the troops were doing and how the war was going. <sup>8</sup>Then he said to Uriah, "Go down to your house and wash your feet." So Uriah left the palace, and a gift from the king followed him. <sup>9</sup>But Uriah slept at the door of the palace with all his master's servants; he did not go down to his house.

<sup>10</sup>When it was reported to David, "Uriah didn't go home," David questioned Uriah, "Haven't you just come from a journey? Why didn't you go home?"

<sup>11</sup>Uriah answered David, "The ark, Israel, and Judah are dwelling in tents, and my master Joab and his soldiers<sup>o</sup> are camping in the open field. How can I enter my house to eat and drink and sleep with my wife? As surely as you live and by your life, I will not do this!"

<sup>12</sup>"Stay here today also," David said to Uriah, "and tomorrow I will send you back." So Uriah stayed in Jerusalem that day and the next. <sup>13</sup>Then David invited Uriah to eat and drink with him, and David got him drunk. He went out in the evening to lie down on his cot with his master's servants, but he did not go home.

#### URIAH'S DEATH ARRANGED

<sup>14</sup>The next morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. <sup>15</sup>In the letter he wrote:

Put Uriah at the front of the fiercest fighting, then withdraw from him so that he is struck down and dies.

<sup>16</sup>When Joab was besieging the city, he put Uriah in the place where he knew the best enemy soldiers were. <sup>17</sup>Then the men of the city came out and attacked Joab, and some of the men from David's soldiers fell in battle; Uriah the Hethite also died.

<sup>18</sup>Joab sent someone to report to David all the details of the battle. <sup>19</sup>He commanded the messenger, "When you've finished telling the king all the details of the battle — <sup>20</sup>if the king's anger gets stirred up and he asks you, 'Why did you get so close to the city to fight? Didn't you realize they would shoot from the top of the wall?' <sup>21</sup>At Thebez, who struck Abimelech son of Jerubbesheth?<sup>e,f</sup> Didn't a woman drop an upper millstone on him from the top of the wall so that he died? Why did you get so close to the wall?' — then say, 'Your servant Uriah the Hethite is dead also.'" <sup>22</sup>Then the messenger left.

When he arrived, he reported to David all that Joab had sent him to tell. <sup>23</sup>The messenger reported to David, "The men gained the advantage over us

<sup>a</sup>10:12 Lit the LORD do what is good in his eyes <sup>o</sup>10:18 Some LXX mss; MT reads horsemen; 1Ch 19:18 <sup>c</sup>11:3 DSS add Joab's armor-bearer <sup>d</sup>11:11 Lit servants <sup>e</sup>11:21 LXX reads Jerubbaal <sup>f</sup>11:21 = Gideon

and came out against us in the field, but we counterattacked right up to the entrance of the city gate. <sup>24</sup>However, the archers shot down on your servants from the top of the wall, and some of the king's servants died. Your servant Uriah the Hethite is also dead."

<sup>25</sup>David told the messenger, "Say this to Joab: 'Don't let this matter upset you because the sword devours all alike. Intensify your fight against the city and demolish it.' Encourage him."

<sup>26</sup>When Uriah's wife heard that her husband, Uriah, had died, she mourned for him.<sup>a</sup> <sup>27</sup>When the time of mourning ended, David had her brought to his house. She became his wife and bore him a son. However, the LORD considered what David had done to be evil.

#### NATHAN'S PARABLE AND DAVID'S REPENTANCE

**12** So the LORD sent Nathan to David. When he arrived, he said to him:

There were two men in a certain city, one rich and the other poor. <sup>2</sup>The rich man had very large flocks and herds, <sup>3</sup>but the poor man had nothing except one small ewe lamb that he had bought. He raised her, and she grew up with him and with his children. From his meager food she would eat, from his cup she would drink, and in his arms she would sleep. She was like a daughter to him. <sup>4</sup>Now a traveler came to the rich man, but the rich man could not bring himself to take one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare for the traveler who had come to him. Instead, he took the poor man's lamb and prepared it for his guest.<sup>b</sup>

<sup>5</sup>David was infuriated with the man and said to Nathan, "As the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! <sup>6</sup>Because he has done this thing and shown no pity, he must pay four lambs for that lamb."

<sup>7</sup>Nathan replied to David, "You are the man! This is what the LORD God of Israel says: 'I anointed you king over Israel, and I rescued you from Saul. <sup>8</sup>I gave your master's house to you and your master's wives into your arms,<sup>c</sup> and I gave you the house of Israel and Judah, and if that was not enough, I would have given you even more. <sup>9</sup>Why then have you despised the LORD's command by doing what I consider<sup>o</sup> evil? You struck down Uriah the Hethite with the sword and took his wife as your own wife — you murdered him with the Ammonite's sword. <sup>10</sup>Now therefore, the sword will never leave your house because you despised me and took the wife of Uriah the Hethite to be your own wife.'

<sup>11</sup>"This is what the LORD says, 'I am going to bring disaster on you from your own family: I will take your wives and give them to another<sup>f</sup> before your very

eyes, and he will sleep with them in broad daylight.'<sup>f</sup> <sup>12</sup>You acted in secret, but I will do this before all Israel and in broad daylight."<sup>g</sup>

<sup>13</sup>David responded to Nathan, "I have sinned against the LORD."

Then Nathan replied to David, "And the LORD has taken away your sin; you will not die. <sup>14</sup>However, because you treated<sup>h</sup> the LORD with such contempt in this matter, the son born to you will die." <sup>15</sup>Then Nathan went home.

#### THE DEATH OF BATHSHEBA'S SON

The LORD struck the baby that Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he became deathly ill. <sup>16</sup>David pleaded with God for the boy. He fasted, went home, and spent the night lying on the ground. <sup>17</sup>The elders of his house stood beside him to get him up from the ground, but he was unwilling and would not eat anything with them.

<sup>18</sup>On the seventh day the baby died. But David's servants were afraid to tell him the baby was dead. They said, "Look, while the baby was alive, we spoke to him, and he wouldn't listen to us. So how can we tell him the baby is dead? He may do something desperate."

<sup>19</sup>When David saw that his servants were whispering to each other, he guessed that the baby was dead. So he asked his servants, "Is the baby dead?" "He is dead," they replied.

<sup>20</sup>Then David got up from the ground. He washed, anointed himself, changed his clothes, went to the LORD's house, and worshiped. Then he went home and requested something to eat. So they served him food, and he ate.

<sup>21</sup>His servants asked him, "Why have you done this? While the baby was alive, you fasted and wept, but when he died, you got up and ate food."

<sup>22</sup>He answered, "While the baby was alive, I fasted and wept because I thought, 'Who knows? The LORD may be gracious to me and let him live.'<sup>23</sup>But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I'll go to him, but he will never return to me."

#### THE BIRTH OF SOLOMON

<sup>24</sup>Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba; he went to her and slept with her. She gave birth to a son and named<sup>i</sup> him Solomon.<sup>j</sup> The LORD loved him, <sup>25</sup>and he sent a message through the prophet Nathan, who named<sup>k</sup> him Jedidiah,<sup>l</sup> because of the LORD.

<sup>a</sup>11:26 Lit her husband <sup>b</sup>12:4 Lit for the man who had come to him <sup>c</sup>12:8 Lit bosom <sup>d</sup>12:9 Alt Hb tradition reads what he considers <sup>e</sup>12:11 Or to your neighbor <sup>f</sup>12:11 Lit in the eyes of this sun <sup>g</sup>12:12 Lit and before the sun <sup>h</sup>12:14 Alt Hb tradition, one LXX ms; MT reads treated the enemies of; DSS read treated the word of <sup>i</sup>12:24 Alt Hb tradition reads he named <sup>j</sup>12:24 In Hb, the name Solomon sounds like "peace." <sup>k</sup>12:25 Or prophet to name <sup>l</sup>12:25 = Beloved of the LORD



From Eshnunna, statue of a seated Mesopotamian prince. The Laws of Eshnunna dealt with marital relationships and other domestic and civic matters.

## ADULTERY IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

David and all Israel had been warned about the gravity of the sin of adultery. Not only was this act condemned in the Ten Commandments and in the other sexual laws of the Pentateuch, but from the time of Abraham adultery was labeled a “great sin” (*Hb chata’ah gedolah*). Abraham had journeyed to the land of Gerar and told Abimelech, the king, that Sarah was his sister, thinking that someone might slay him in order to take Sarah for a wife. Abimelech believed

Abraham and took Sarah for his own wife innocently, but providentially did not “touch her” (Gn 20:6). God warned Abimelech in a dream that Sarah was actually Abraham’s wife. In his rebuke of Abraham, Abimelech thought of how close he had come to committing adultery with Sarah and asked Abraham why he had brought on Abimelech and his nation a “great sin” (“enormous guilt” in v. 9).<sup>1</sup> When Abimelech restored Sarah to Abraham, he greatly rewarded them in order to remove any curses and divine judgments

against Abimelech and the people of Gerar.

Generations later, the Pentateuch included adultery in a list of sexual crimes that would defile the land of Israel and cause the land to “vomit out its inhabitants” (Lv 18:20–25). God’s standards had not changed.

The reasons for the severity of the sin of adultery are not explicitly stated in the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup> Obviously this sin was an assault on the integrity of the family and a violation of the ideal marital state that God expressed to Adam and Eve (Gn 2:24). Other suggestions center on the patrilineal nature of Israelite society and the divine directive that property was never to be removed from one tribe to another (Nm 36:7). Mistaken paternity could lead to the bequeathal of the family inheritance to an illegitimate heir.<sup>3</sup> Whatever might have been the social, religious, and economic factors behind the strong condemnation of adultery in Scriptures, Israel saw adultery as a crime worthy of the death of both parties (Dt 22:22).

## THE “GREAT SIN” IN THE ANCIENT NEAR EAST

Ancient Israel was not alone in the view of adultery as the “great sin.” Evidence has come to light indicating that other nations of the ancient Near East shared this opinion. Four ancient Egyptian marriage contracts, one dating around 850 BC, labeled adultery as the “great sin.” The phrase in the Egyptian documents is similar to that in Genesis 20:9.<sup>4</sup> Further, another ancient Egyptian text, “The Story of Two Brothers,” tells the story of two brothers who were working in the field at planting time. When they ran short of seed, the older brother sent the younger one to the village to get more seed. The younger brother found his brother’s wife alone at home, fixing her hair. The woman tried to seduce her brother-in-law, but he refused her saying, “What . . . is this great crime

which you have said to me? Don’t say it to me again!”<sup>5</sup>

Archaeologists have also found references to adultery as the “great sin” among the Akkadian documents of Ugarit in northern Syria. One of the texts, which dates to about 1245 BC, tells of the king’s wife, in whom was found a fault. Her action forced her to flee Ugarit to take refuge in her native land of Amurru. In interpreting details of the record, scholars have consistently designated the queen’s indiscretion as the “great sin,” adultery.<sup>6</sup>

Other ancient laws dealt with repercussions and extenuating circumstances related to adultery. Among the Hittites, a law stated that a man who seized a woman in the mountains was singularly guilty and would be killed. But if the act occurred in her house, the woman was to blame and would be killed. A husband who found his wife and another man in the act of adultery could kill them both without punishment.<sup>7</sup> Likewise, a Middle Assyrian law allowed a husband to kill his wife and a man if the husband caught the two committing adultery.<sup>8</sup> A similar stipulation was also in the Code of Hammurabi.<sup>9</sup>

Still other ancient Near Eastern law codes helped to clarify the concept of adultery. One of the Laws of Eshnunna in Mesopotamia (dated to 1950 BC) dealt with a case in which a man might be kidnapped or otherwise forcibly separated from his wife for an extended time. If his wife had become another man’s wife because of the extended absence, the law gave guidelines on whether the first husband could reclaim her if he returned home. Another of the Laws of Eshnunna dealt with a husband’s voluntary abandonment of his wife and how that might affect another man’s right to marry her.<sup>10</sup> Similar laws regarding the husband’s extended absence or abandonment were a regular part of Middle Assyrian law codes.<sup>11</sup>

Interpreters have found parallels between the ancient Near Eastern documents and the Old Testament references and laws about adultery.<sup>12</sup> Similarities in phrasing, the variety of extenuating circumstances, degrees of punishment or lack thereof, and other factors give evidence that ancient societies and peoples shared a general consensus that adultery was the “great sin.” Even though the nations that were contemporaries of ancient Israel undermined their own laws by worshiping fertility gods, tacitly accepting harlotry, practicing polygamy, and demonstrating generally low moral standards, they saw the need to prohibit violations of marriage contracts. Whether instinctively or by experience, they apparently understood that the stability of a nation depended on a careful ordering of

society and that the safeguarding of the nuclear family was essential to the endurance of a nation. ❖

<sup>1</sup> Five times, the Old Testament uses the phrase “great sin,” this one time in respect to adultery. The other four instances refer to idolatry (“grave sin” in Ex 32:21,30,31; “immense sin” in 2Kg 17:21). This reflects the Old Testament’s likening Israel’s idolatrous practices to the nation committing adultery. See Jacob J. Rabinowitz, “The ‘Great Sin’ in Ancient Egyptian Marriage Contracts,” *JNES* 18.1 (1959): 73. <sup>2</sup> Elaine Adler Goodfriend, “Adultery” in *ABD*, 1:82. <sup>3</sup> Goodfriend, “Adultery.” <sup>4</sup> Rabinowitz, “Great Sin,” 73. <sup>5</sup> “Egyptian Myths, Tales, and Mortuary Texts” in *ANET*, 3rd ed. with sup., 24. <sup>6</sup> W. L. Moran, “The Scandal of the ‘Great Sin’ at Ugarit,” *JNES* 18.4 (1959): 280–81; Carole Roche, “The Lady of Ugarit,” *NEA* 63.4 (2000): 214–15. <sup>7</sup> “The Hittite Laws” in *ANET*, 196. <sup>8</sup> “The Middle Assyrian Laws” in *ANET*, 181. <sup>9</sup> “The Code of Hammurabi” in *ANET*, 171. <sup>10</sup> “The Laws of Eshnunna” in *ANET*, 162. <sup>11</sup> “The Middle Assyrian Laws” in *ANET*, 183. <sup>12</sup> Rabinowitz, “Great Sin,” 73.



Statue depicting either Hammurabi or a prince who served him.

**CAPTURE OF THE CITY OF RABBAH**

<sup>26</sup> Joab fought against Rabbah of the Ammonites and captured the royal fortress. <sup>27</sup> Then Joab sent messengers to David to say, "I have fought against Rabbah and have also captured its water supply. <sup>28</sup> Now therefore, assemble the rest of the troops, lay siege to the city, and capture it. Otherwise I will be the one to capture the city, and it will be named after me." <sup>29</sup> So David assembled all the troops and went to Rabbah; he fought against it and captured it. <sup>30</sup> He took the crown from the head of their king,<sup>a</sup> and it was placed on David's head. The crown weighed seventy-five pounds<sup>b</sup> of gold, and it had a precious stone in it. In addition, David took away a large quantity of plunder from the city. <sup>31</sup> He removed the people who were in the city and put them to work with saws, iron picks, and iron axes, and to labor at brickmaking. He did the same to all the Ammonite cities. Then he and all his troops returned to Jerusalem.

**AMNON RAPES TAMAR**

**13** Some time passed. David's son Absalom had a beautiful sister named Tamar, and David's son Amnon was infatuated with her. <sup>2</sup> Amnon was frustrated to the point of making himself sick over his sister Tamar because she was a virgin, but it seemed impossible to do anything to her. <sup>3</sup> Amnon had a friend named Jonadab, a son of David's brother Shimeah. Jonadab was a very shrewd man,<sup>4</sup> and he asked Amnon, "Why are you, the king's son, so miserable every morning? Won't you tell me?"

Amnon replied, "I'm in love with Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister."

<sup>5</sup> Jonadab said to him, "Lie down on your bed and pretend you're sick. When your father comes to see you, say to him, 'Please let my sister Tamar come and give me something to eat. Let her prepare a meal in my presence so I can watch and eat from her hand.'"

<sup>6</sup> So Amnon lay down and pretended to be sick. When the king came to see him, Amnon said to him, "Please let my sister Tamar come and make a couple of cakes in my presence so I can eat from her hand."

<sup>7</sup> David sent word to Tamar at the palace: "Please go to your brother Amnon's house and prepare a meal for him."

<sup>8</sup> Then Tamar went to his house while Amnon was lying down. She took dough, kneaded it, made cakes in his presence, and baked them. <sup>9</sup> She brought the pan and set it down in front of him, but he refused to eat. Amnon said, "Everyone leave me!" And everyone left him. <sup>10</sup> "Bring the meal to the bedroom," Amnon told Tamar, "so I can eat from your hand." Tamar took the cakes she had made and went to her brother Amnon's bedroom. <sup>11</sup> When she brought them

to him to eat, he grabbed her and said,<sup>c</sup> "Come sleep with me, my sister!"

<sup>12</sup> "Don't, my brother!" she cried. "Don't disgrace me, for such a thing should never be done in Israel. Don't commit this outrage! <sup>13</sup> Where could I ever go with my humiliation? And you — you would be like one of the outrageous fools in Israel! Please, speak to the king, for he won't keep me from you." <sup>14</sup> But he refused to listen to her, and because he was stronger than she was, he disgraced her by raping her.

<sup>15</sup> So Amnon hated Tamar with such intensity that the hatred he hated her with was greater than the love he had loved her with. "Get out of here!" he said.

<sup>16</sup> "No," she cried,<sup>d</sup> "sending me away is much worse than the great wrong you've already done to me!"

But he refused to listen to her. <sup>17</sup> Instead, he called to the servant who waited on him, "Get this away from me, throw her out, and bolt the door behind her!" <sup>18</sup> Amnon's servant threw her out and bolted the door behind her. Now Tamar was wearing a long-sleeved<sup>e</sup> robe, because this is what the king's virgin daughters wore. <sup>19</sup> Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the long-sleeved robe she was wearing. She put her hand on her head and went away crying out.

<sup>20</sup> Her brother Absalom said to her, "Has your brother Amnon been with you? Be quiet for now, my sister. He is your brother. Don't take this thing to heart." So Tamar lived as a desolate woman in the house of her brother Absalom.

**ABSALOM MURDERS AMNON**

<sup>21</sup> When King David heard about all these things, he was furious.<sup>f</sup> <sup>22</sup> Absalom didn't say anything to Amnon, either good or bad, because he hated Amnon since he disgraced his sister Tamar.

<sup>23</sup> Two years later, Absalom's sheepshearers were at Baal-hazor near Ephraim, and Absalom invited all the king's sons. <sup>24</sup> Then he went to the king and said, "Your servant has just hired sheepshearers. Will the king and his servants please come with your servant?"

<sup>25</sup> The king replied to Absalom, "No, my son, we should not all go, or we would be a burden to you." Although Absalom urged him, he wasn't willing to go, though he did bless him.

<sup>26</sup> "If not," Absalom said, "please let my brother Amnon go with us."

The king asked him, "Why should he go with you?"

<sup>27</sup> But Absalom urged him, so he sent Amnon and all the king's sons.<sup>g</sup>

<sup>a</sup>12:30 LXX reads of *Milcom*; some emend to *Molech*; 1Kg 11:5,33  
<sup>b</sup>12:30 Lit a talent <sup>c</sup>13:11 Lit said to her <sup>d</sup>13:16 Lit she said to him  
<sup>e</sup>13:18 Or ornate; Gn 37:3 <sup>f</sup>13:21 LXX, DSS add but he did not  
 grieve the spirit of Amnon his son, for he loved him because he was his  
 firstborn; 1Kg 1:6 <sup>g</sup>13:27 LXX adds And Absalom prepared a feast  
 like a royal feast.

<sup>28</sup> Now Absalom commanded his young men, "Watch Amnon until he is in a good mood from the wine. When I order you to strike Amnon, then kill him. Don't be afraid. Am I not the one who has commanded you? Be strong and valiant!" <sup>29</sup> So Absalom's young men did to Amnon just as Absalom had commanded. Then all the rest of the king's sons got up, and each fled on his mule.

<sup>30</sup> While they were on the way, a report reached David: "Absalom struck down all the king's sons; not even one of them survived!" <sup>31</sup> In response the king stood up, tore his clothes, and lay down on the ground, and all his servants stood by with their clothes torn.

<sup>32</sup> But Jonadab, son of David's brother Shimeah, spoke up: "My lord must not think they have killed all the young men, the king's sons, because only Amnon is dead. In fact, Absalom has planned this<sup>h</sup> ever since the day Amnon disgraced his sister Tamar. <sup>33</sup> So now, my lord the king, don't take seriously the report that says all the king's sons are dead. Only Amnon is dead."

<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, Absalom had fled. When the young man who was standing watch looked up, there were many people coming from the road west of him from the side of the mountain.<sup>i</sup> <sup>35</sup> Jonadab said to the king, "Look, the king's sons have come! It's exactly like your servant said."<sup>j</sup> Just as he finished speaking, the king's sons entered and wept loudly. Then the king and all his servants also wept very bitterly. <sup>37</sup> But Absalom fled and went to Talmai son of Ammihud, king of Geshur. And David mourned for his son<sup>k</sup> every day.

<sup>38</sup> After Absalom had fled to Geshur and had been there three years,<sup>39</sup> King David<sup>l</sup> longed to go to Absalom, for David had finished grieving over Amnon's death.

**ABSALOM RESTORED TO DAVID**

**14** Joab son of Zeruiah realized that the king's mind was on Absalom. <sup>2</sup> So Joab sent someone to Tekoa to bring a wise woman from there. He told her, "Pretend to be in mourning: dress in mourning clothes and don't put on any oil. Act like a woman who has been mourning for the dead for a long time. <sup>3</sup> Go to the king and speak these words to him." Then Joab told her exactly what to say.<sup>e</sup>

<sup>4</sup> When the woman from Tekoa came<sup>f</sup> to the king, she fell facedown to the ground, paid homage, and said, "Help me, Your Majesty!"

<sup>5</sup> "What's the matter?" the king asked her.

"Sadly, I am a widow; my husband died," she said.

<sup>6</sup> "Your servant had two sons. They were fighting in the field with no one to separate them, and one struck the other and killed him. <sup>7</sup> Now the whole clan has risen up against your servant and said, 'Hand over the one who killed his brother so we may put him to death for the life of the brother he murdered. We will

eliminate the heir!' They would extinguish my one remaining ember by not preserving my husband's name or posterity on earth."

<sup>8</sup> The king told the woman, "Go home. I will issue a command on your behalf."

<sup>9</sup> Then the woman of Tekoa said to the king, "My lord the king, may any blame be on me and my father's family, and may the king and his throne be innocent."

<sup>10</sup> "Whoever speaks to you," the king said, "bring him to me. He will not trouble you again!"

<sup>11</sup> She replied, "Please, may the king invoke the LORD your God, so that the avenger of blood will not increase the loss, and they will not eliminate my son!"

"As the LORD lives," he vowed, "not a hair of your son will fall to the ground."

<sup>12</sup> Then the woman said, "Please, may your servant speak a word to my lord the king?"

"Speak," he replied.

<sup>13</sup> The woman asked, "Why have you devised something similar against the people of God? When the king spoke as he did about this matter, he has pronounced his own guilt. The king has not brought back his own banished one. <sup>14</sup> We will certainly die and be like water poured out on the ground, which can't be recovered. But God would not take away a life; he would devise plans so that the one banished from him does not remain banished.

<sup>15</sup> "Now therefore, I've come to present this matter to my lord the king because the people have made me afraid. Your servant thought: I must speak to the king. Perhaps the king will grant his servant's request. <sup>16</sup> The king will surely listen in order to keep his servant from the grasp of this man who would eliminate both me and my son from God's inheritance. <sup>17</sup> Your servant thought: May the word of my lord the king bring relief, for my lord the king is able to discern the good and the bad like the angel of God. May the LORD your God be with you."

<sup>18</sup> Then the king answered the woman, "I'm going to ask you something; don't conceal it from me!"

"Let my lord the king speak," the woman replied.

<sup>19</sup> The king asked, "Did Joab put you up to<sup>g</sup> all this?"

The woman answered. "As you live, my lord the king, no one can turn to the right or left from all my lord the king says. Yes, your servant Joab is the one who gave orders to me; he told your servant exactly what to say."<sup>20</sup> Joab your servant has done this to address the issue indirectly,<sup>1</sup> but my lord has

<sup>a</sup>13:32 Lit In fact, it was established on the mouth of Absalom  
<sup>b</sup>13:34 LXX adds And the watchman came and reported to the king saying, "I see men on the Horonaim road on the side of the mountain."  
<sup>c</sup>13:37 Probably Amnon <sup>d</sup>13:39 DSS, LXX, Tg read David's spirit  
<sup>e</sup>14:3 Lit Joab put the words into her mouth <sup>f</sup>14:4 Some Hb mss, LXX, Syr, Tg, Vg; other Hb mss read spoke <sup>g</sup>14:19 Lit "Is the hand of Joab in" <sup>h</sup>14:19 Lit he put all these words into the mouth of your servant  
<sup>i</sup>14:20 Lit to go around the face of the matter

wisdom like the wisdom of the angel of God, knowing everything on earth.”

<sup>21</sup> Then the king said to Joab, “I hereby grant this request. Go, bring back the young man Absalom.”

<sup>22</sup> Joab fell with his face to the ground in homage and blessed the king. “Today,” Joab said, “your servant knows I have found favor with you, my lord the king, because the king has granted the request of your servant.”

<sup>23</sup> So Joab got up, went to Geshur, and brought Absalom to Jerusalem. <sup>24</sup> However, the king added, “He may return to his house, but he may not see my face.” So Absalom returned to his house, but he did not see the king.<sup>a</sup>

<sup>25</sup> No man in all Israel was as handsome and highly praised as Absalom. From the sole of his foot to the top of his head, he did not have a single flaw. <sup>26</sup> When he shaved his head — he shaved it at the end of every year because his hair got so heavy for him that he had to shave it off — he would weigh the hair from his head and it would be five pounds<sup>b</sup> according to the royal standard.

<sup>27</sup> Three sons were born to Absalom, and a daughter named Tamar, who was a beautiful woman. <sup>28</sup> Absalom resided in Jerusalem two years but never saw the king. <sup>29</sup> Then Absalom sent for Joab in order to send him to the king, but Joab was unwilling to come to him. So he sent again, a second time, but he still would not come. <sup>30</sup> Then Absalom said to his servants, “See, Joab has a field right next to mine, and he has barley there. Go and set fire to it!” So Absalom’s servants set the field on fire.<sup>c</sup>

<sup>31</sup> Then Joab came to Absalom’s house and demanded, “Why did your servants set my field on fire?”

<sup>32</sup> “Look,” Absalom explained to Joab, “I sent for you and said, ‘Come here. I want to send you to the king to ask: Why have I come back from Geshur? I’d be better off if I were still there.’ So now, let me see the king. If I am guilty, let him kill me.”

<sup>33</sup> Joab went to the king and told him. So David summoned Absalom, who came to the king and paid homage with his face to the ground before him. Then the king kissed Absalom.

#### ABSALOM’S REVOLT

**15** After this, Absalom got himself a chariot, horses, and fifty men to run before him. <sup>2</sup> He would get up early and stand beside the road leading to the city gate. Whenever anyone had a grievance to bring before the king for settlement, Absalom called out to him and asked, “What city are you from?” If he replied, “Your servant is from one of the tribes of Israel,” <sup>3</sup> Absalom said to him, “Look, your claims are good and right, but the king does not have anyone to listen to you.” <sup>4</sup> He added, “If only someone would

appoint me judge in the land. Then anyone who had a grievance or dispute could come to me, and I would make sure he received justice.” <sup>5</sup> When a person approached to pay homage to him, Absalom reached out his hand, took hold of him, and kissed him. <sup>6</sup> Absalom did this to all the Israelites who came to the king for a settlement. So Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.

<sup>7</sup> When four<sup>d</sup> years had passed, Absalom said to the king, “Please let me go to Hebron to fulfill a vow I made to the LORD. <sup>8</sup> For your servant made a vow when I lived in Geshur of Aram, saying, ‘If the LORD really brings me back to Jerusalem, I will worship the LORD in Hebron.’”<sup>e</sup>

<sup>9</sup> “Go in peace,” the king said to him. So he went to Hebron.

<sup>10</sup> Then Absalom sent agents throughout the tribes of Israel with this message: “When you hear the sound of the ram’s horn, you are to say, ‘Absalom has become king in Hebron!’”

<sup>11</sup> Two hundred men from Jerusalem went with Absalom. They had been invited and were going innocently, for they did not know the whole situation. <sup>12</sup> While he was offering the sacrifices, Absalom sent for David’s adviser Ahithophel the Gilonite, from his city of Giloh. So the conspiracy grew strong, and the people supporting Absalom continued to increase.

<sup>13</sup> Then an informer came to David and reported, “The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom.”

<sup>14</sup> David said to all the servants with him in Jerusalem, “Get up. We have to flee, or we will not escape from Absalom! Leave quickly, or he will overtake us quickly, heap disaster on us, and strike the city with the edge of the sword.”

<sup>15</sup> The king’s servants said to the king, “Whatever my lord the king decides, we are your servants.”

<sup>16</sup> Then the king set out, and his entire household followed him. But he left behind ten concubines to take care of the palace. <sup>17</sup> So the king set out, and all the people followed him. They stopped at the last house<sup>18</sup> while all his servants marched past him. Then all the Cherethites, the Pelethites, and the people of Gath — six hundred men who came with him from there — marched past the king.

<sup>19</sup> The king said to Ittai of Gath, “Why are you also going with us? Go back and stay with the new king since you’re both a foreigner and an exile from your homeland. <sup>20</sup> Besides, you only arrived yesterday; should I make you wander around with us today while I go wherever I can? Go back and take your

<sup>a</sup>14:24 Lit king’s face <sup>b</sup>14:26 Lit 200 shekels <sup>c</sup>14:30 DSS, LXX add So Joab’s servants came to him with their clothes torn and said, “Absalom’s servants have set the field on fire!” <sup>d</sup>15:7 Some LXX mss, Syr, Vg; other LXX mss, MT read 40 <sup>e</sup>15:8 Some LXX mss; MT omits in Hebron

brothers with you. May the LORD show you<sup>a</sup> kindness and faithfulness.”

<sup>21</sup> But in response, Ittai vowed to the king, “As the LORD lives and as my lord the king lives, wherever my lord the king is, whether it means life or death, your servant will be there!”

<sup>22</sup> “March on,” David replied to Ittai. So Ittai of Gath marched past with all his men and the dependents who were with him. <sup>23</sup> Everyone in the countryside was weeping loudly while all the people were marching out of the city. As the king was crossing the Kidron Valley, all the people were marching past on the road that leads to the wilderness.

<sup>24</sup> Zadok was also there, and all the Levites with him were carrying the ark of the covenant of God. They set the ark of God down, and Abiathar offered sacrifices<sup>b</sup> until the people had finished marching past. <sup>25</sup> Then the king instructed Zadok, “Return the ark of God to the city. If I find favor with the LORD, he will bring me back and allow me to see both it and its<sup>c</sup> dwelling place. <sup>26</sup> However, if he should say, ‘I do not delight in you,’ then here I am — he can do with me whatever pleases him.”<sup>d</sup>

<sup>27</sup> The king also said to the priest Zadok, “Look,<sup>e</sup> return to the city in peace and your two sons with you: your son Ahimaaz and Abiathar’s son Jonathan. <sup>28</sup> Remember, I’ll wait at the fords<sup>f</sup> of the wilderness until word comes from you to inform me.” <sup>29</sup> So Zadok and Abiathar returned the ark of God to Jerusalem and stayed there.

<sup>30</sup> David was climbing the slope of the Mount of Olives, weeping as he ascended. His head was covered, and he was walking barefoot. All of the people with him covered their heads and went up, weeping as they ascended.

<sup>31</sup> Then someone reported to David, “Ahithophel is among the conspirators with Absalom.”

“LORD,” David pleaded, “please turn the counsel of Ahithophel into foolishness!”

<sup>32</sup> When David came to the summit where he used to worship God, Hushai the Archite was there to meet him with his robe torn and dust on his head. <sup>33</sup> David said to him, “If you go away with me, you’ll be a burden to me, <sup>34</sup> but if you return to the city and tell Absalom, ‘I will be your servant, Your Majesty! Previously, I was your father’s servant, but now I will be your servant,’ then you can counteract Ahithophel’s counsel for me. <sup>35</sup> Won’t the priests Zadok and Abiathar be there with you? Report everything you hear from the palace to the priests Zadok and Abiathar. <sup>36</sup> Take note: their two sons are there with them — Zadok’s son Ahimaaz and Abiathar’s son Jonathan. Send them to tell me everything you hear.” <sup>37</sup> So Hushai, David’s personal adviser, entered Jerusalem just as Absalom was entering the city.

#### ZIBA HELPS DAVID

**16** When David had gone a little beyond the summit,<sup>g</sup> Ziba, Mephibosheth’s servant, was right there to meet him. He had a pair of saddled donkeys loaded with two hundred loaves of bread, one hundred clusters of raisins, one hundred bunches of summer fruit, and a clay jar of wine. <sup>2</sup> The king said to Ziba, “Why do you have these?”

Ziba answered, “The donkeys are for the king’s household to ride, the bread and summer fruit are for the young men to eat, and the wine is for those to drink who become exhausted in the wilderness.”

<sup>3</sup> “Where is your master’s grandson?” the king asked.

“Why, he’s staying in Jerusalem,” Ziba replied to the king, “for he said, ‘Today, the house of Israel will restore my grandfather’s kingdom to me.’”

<sup>4</sup> The king said to Ziba, “All that belongs to Mephibosheth is now yours!”

“I bow before you,” Ziba said. “May I find favor with you, my lord the king!”

#### SHIMEI CURSES DAVID

<sup>5</sup> When King David got to Bahurim, a man belonging to the family of the house of Saul was just coming out. His name was Shimei son of Gera, and he was yelling curses as he approached. <sup>6</sup> He threw stones at David and at all the royal<sup>h</sup> servants, the people and the warriors on David’s right and left. <sup>7</sup> Shimei said as he cursed, “Get out, get out, you man of bloodshed, you wicked man! <sup>8</sup> The LORD has paid you back for all the blood of the house of Saul in whose place you became king, and the LORD has handed the kingdom over to your son Absalom. Look, you are in trouble because you’re a man of bloodshed!”

<sup>9</sup> Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said to the king, “Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and remove his head!”

<sup>10</sup> The king replied, “Sons of Zeruiah, do we agree on anything? He curses me this way because the LORD<sup>i</sup> told him, ‘Curse David!’ Therefore, who can say, ‘Why did you do that?’” <sup>11</sup> Then David said to Abishai and all his servants, “Look, my own son, my own flesh and blood,<sup>j</sup> intends to take my life — how much more now this Benjaminite! Leave him alone and let him curse me; the LORD has told him to. <sup>12</sup> Perhaps the LORD will see my affliction<sup>k</sup> and restore goodness to me instead of Shimei’s curses today.” <sup>13</sup> So David and his men

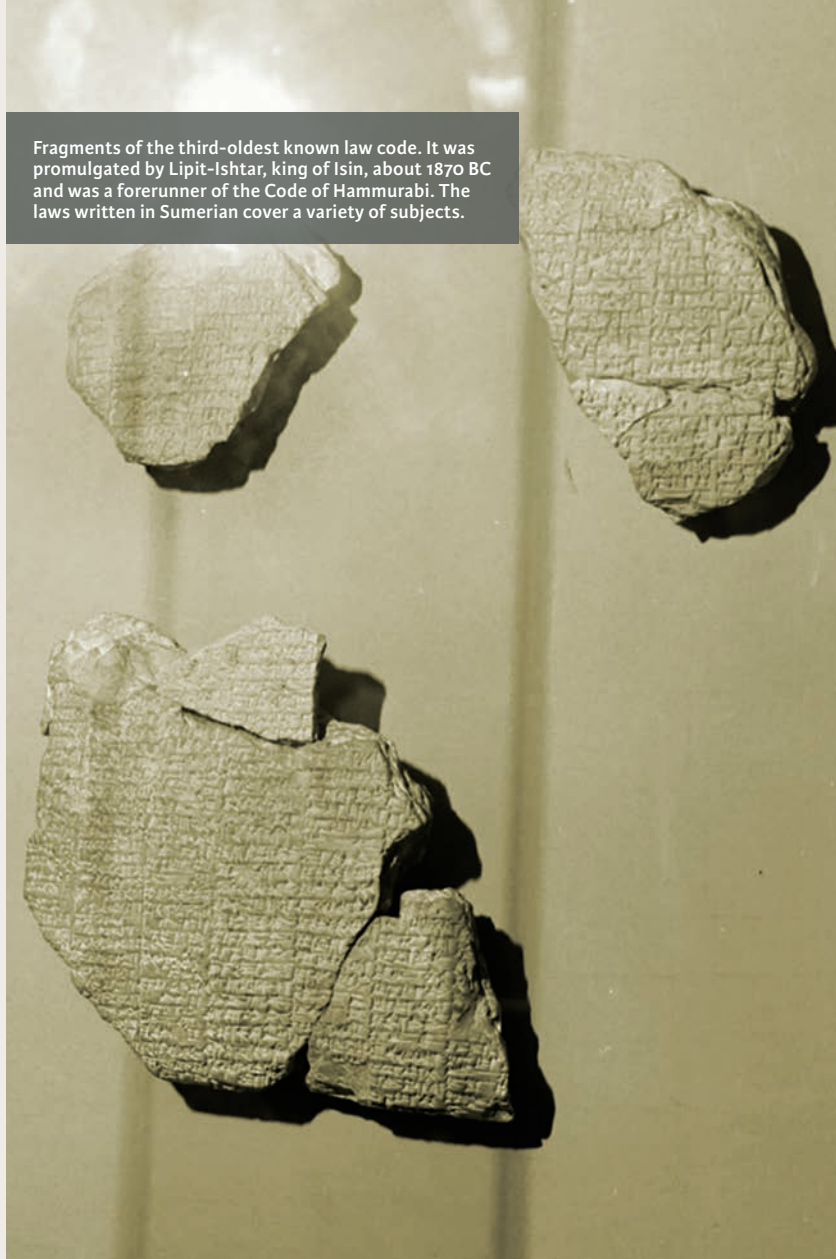
<sup>a</sup>15:20 LXX; MT omits Lit *May the LORD show you* <sup>b</sup>15:24 Or *Abiathar went up* <sup>c</sup>15:25 Or *his* <sup>d</sup>15:26 Lit *me what is good in his eyes* <sup>e</sup>15:27 LXX; MT reads *“Are you a seer?”* <sup>f</sup>15:28 Alt Hb tradition reads *plains* <sup>g</sup>16:1 = Mount of Olives <sup>h</sup>16:6 Lit *all King David’s* <sup>i</sup>16:10 Alt Hb tradition reads *If he curses, and if the LORD* <sup>j</sup>16:11 Lit *son who came from my belly* <sup>k</sup>16:12 Some Hb mss, LXX, Syr, Vg; one Hb tradition reads *iniquity*; alt Hb tradition reads *eyes*; another Hb tradition reads *will look with his eye*

**W**ere ancient Near Eastern monarchs held to personal standards of morality in keeping with the laws of their nations? A great wealth of textual material exists that relates to kingship in the ancient Near East, which could help to answer this question.

Although formal legal similarities existed among Israel's neighbors regarding the expectations of the king, the extent to which the king followed these standards obviously was not the same in every society. Evidence also exists that some of Israel's neighbors had a tendency to deify their own kings.

From textual and iconographic data, it is clear that the king was the central symbol of the social system for the nation. In the ancient Near East, the king was primarily in power to establish order. In most nations, he served as warrior, judge, and even priest. As warrior, he was to protect the state from external enemies and internal threats. As judge, he was to guarantee order by administering justice and equity. As priests, Israel's neighboring monarchs fulfilled the wishes of the gods and were the earthly representatives of the divine realm. Easily the people took the short step from affirming that the gods set the king in place to upholding the conviction that the king himself carried divine prerogatives.

The vast literary evidence—particularly that from the prologues and epilogues of ancient Near Eastern law codes—demonstrates a remarkably consistent expectation of the monarch.<sup>1</sup> These law codes provide the clearest evidence that the king had the responsibility of establishing and maintaining the divine order. The king issued the laws for the nation, stood as the authority to enforce penalties for violating those laws, and threatened punishment for any who might attempt to change the laws in any way.



Fragments of the third-oldest known law code. It was promulgated by Lipit-Ishtar, king of Isin, about 1870 BC and was a forerunner of the Code of Hammurabi. The laws written in Sumerian cover a variety of subjects.

From around 1800 BC, ancient Babylon provides one example of how a particular Near Eastern king related to the law. The prologue to the Code of Hammurabi, a legal code promulgated by a Babylonian king, states that, as king, Hammurabi was responsible to establish law and justice in the land. He was

to “cause justice to prevail in Babylon, to destroy wicked and evil, to stop the strong from oppressing the weak, and to rule like the sun over blackheaded people.”<sup>2</sup> The epilogue concludes with a number of powerful curses against anyone who might break the laws in Hammurabi's Code. Consequently,

Hammurabi was the purveyor and the enforcer of the laws of the land.

Old Testament legal codes take this expectation a surprising step further. In them, the king himself was accountable to faithfully observe the requirements of God's law. He was not merely responsible for promulgating the laws of the land for others to follow. The king was to have his own copy of the law on a scroll so he could read it every single day and thus abide by it. Finally, he was not to be above his countrymen in terms of keeping the law but was himself accountable to it. Thus subordination to the law was the great equalizer in Israelite society—no matter what one's position might have been. Practically, however, the Old Testament indicates that Israelite monarchs violated these commands.

In Genesis 12, Abraham lied and said Sarah was his sister. Abraham's actions demonstrate his fear about the king's power to do exactly as David later did with Uriah's wife. The question, therefore, is not whether kings had the capabilities to do such evils. They most certainly did. The question is whether they were accountable for such actions.

The highly stratified Near Eastern social structure, which obviously existed in Babylon, consisted of an urban society with a noble class, an artisan class, and a slave class. Different penalties existed for violations of the law—based on one's social status. Consequently, the king's limited power likely did not allow for a fair measure of democracy for the lower classes.

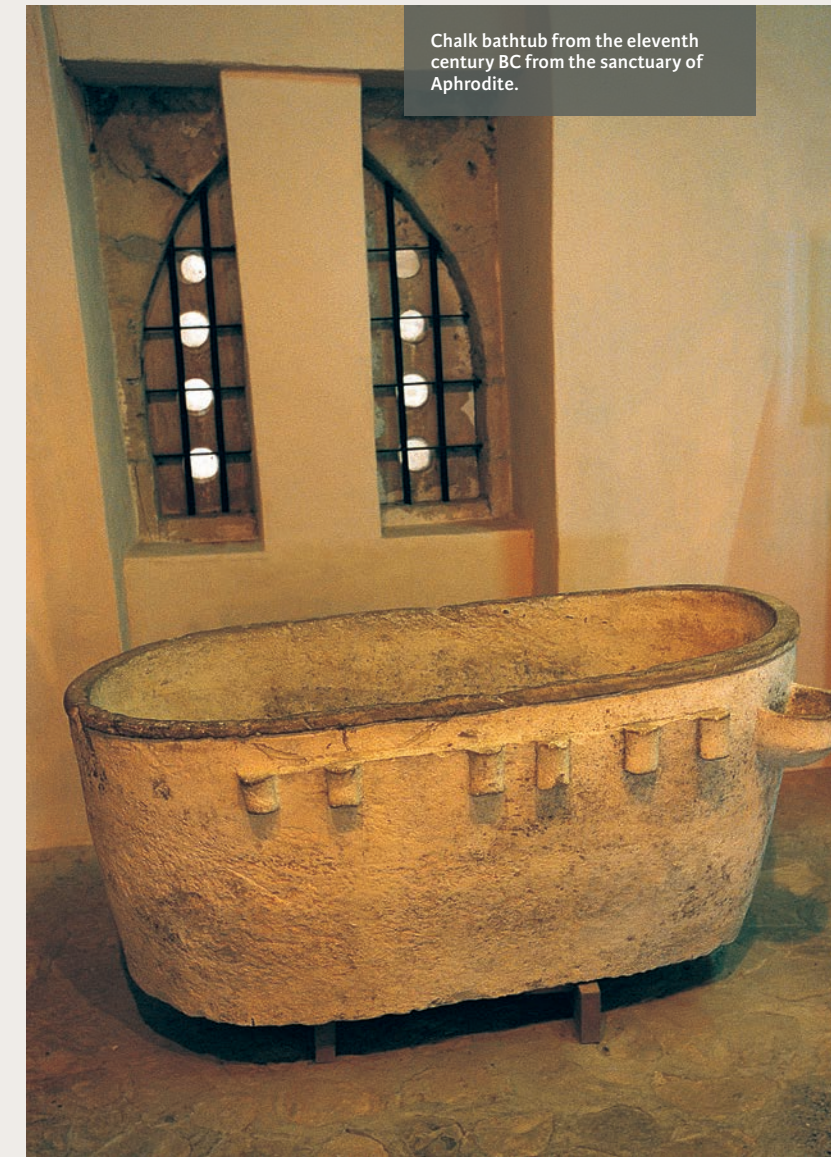
In the biblical account of David's adultery, the prophet Nathan squarely condemned David for his sinful actions. Middle Assyrian laws allowed payment of restitution to a wronged husband in the case of adultery.<sup>3</sup> David could have easily forced Uriah to demand only symbolic reparation for the king's violation of Uriah's wife. Instead, his solution went to the opposite extreme.

The story of David's coveting Uriah's wife and the account of Ahab's coveting Naboth's vineyard have some striking parallels.<sup>4</sup> Both kings encountered a prophet, and in both cases these monarchs were accountable to the law's standards.

Although other monarchies may have allowed their kings to commit immoral behavior and may have seen it as a privilege, God's law for Israel held the action as a punishable offense—even for a king. ❖

<sup>1</sup> The literary examples come from sources such as the law codes of Lipit-Ishtar and Hammurabi and from royal Sumerian hymns and Egyptian royal inscriptions.

<sup>2</sup> Celia Brewer Marshall, *A Guide through the Old Testament* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1989), 58. <sup>3</sup> Baruch Halpern, *David's Secret Demons* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 93. <sup>4</sup> Victor Hamilton, *Handbook on the Historical Books* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 330.



Chalk bathtub from the eleventh century BC from the sanctuary of Aphrodite.

proceeded along the road as Shimei was going along the ridge of the hill opposite him. As Shimei went, he cursed David, threw stones at him, and kicked up dust.<sup>14</sup> Finally, the king and all the people with him arrived<sup>a</sup> exhausted, so they rested there.

#### ABSALOM'S ADVISERS

<sup>15</sup> Now Absalom and all the Israelites came to Jerusalem. Ahithophel was also with him. <sup>16</sup> When David's friend Hushai the Archite came to Absalom, Hushai said to Absalom, "Long live the king! Long live the king!"

<sup>17</sup> "Is this your loyalty to your friend?" Absalom asked Hushai. "Why didn't you go with your friend?"

<sup>18</sup> "Not at all," Hushai answered Absalom. "I am on the side of the one that the LORD, this people, and all the men of Israel have chosen. I will stay with him. <sup>19</sup> Furthermore, whom will I serve if not his son? As I served in your father's presence, I will also serve in yours."

<sup>20</sup> Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, "Give me your advice. What should we do?"

<sup>21</sup> Ahithophel replied to Absalom, "Sleep with your father's concubines whom he left to take care of the palace. When all Israel hears that you have become repulsive to your father, everyone with you will be encouraged."<sup>b</sup> <sup>22</sup> So they pitched a tent for Absalom on the roof, and he slept with his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel.

<sup>23</sup> Now the advice Ahithophel gave in those days was like someone asking about a word from God — such was the regard that both David and Absalom

**17** had for Ahithophel's advice. <sup>1</sup> Ahithophel said to Absalom, "Let me choose twelve thousand men, and I will set out in pursuit of David tonight. <sup>2</sup> I will attack him while he is weary and discouraged,<sup>c</sup> throw him into a panic, and all the people with him will scatter. I will strike down only the king<sup>3</sup> and bring all the people back to you. When everyone returns except the man you're looking for, all<sup>d</sup> the people will be at peace."<sup>4</sup> This proposal seemed right to Absalom and all the elders of Israel.

<sup>5</sup> Then Absalom said, "Summon Hushai the Archite also. Let's hear what he has to say as well."

<sup>6</sup> So Hushai came to Absalom, and Absalom told him, "Ahithophel offered this proposal. Should we carry out his proposal? If not, what do you say?"

<sup>7</sup> Hushai replied to Absalom, "The advice Ahithophel has given this time is not good."<sup>8</sup> Hushai continued, "You know your father and his men. They are warriors and are desperate like a wild bear robbed of her cubs. Your father is an experienced soldier who won't spend the night with the people. <sup>9</sup> He's probably already hiding in one of the caves<sup>e</sup> or some other place. If some of our troops fall<sup>f</sup> first, someone is sure to hear and say, 'There's been a slaughter among the

people who follow Absalom.'<sup>10</sup> Then, even a brave man with the heart of a lion will lose heart<sup>g</sup> because all Israel knows that your father and the valiant men with him are warriors. <sup>11</sup> Instead, I advise that all Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba — as numerous as the sand by the sea — be gathered to you and that you personally go into battle. <sup>12</sup> Then we will attack David wherever we find him, and we will descend on him like dew on the ground. Not even one will be left — neither he nor any of the men with him. <sup>13</sup> If he retreats to some city, all Israel will bring ropes to that city, and we will drag its stones<sup>h</sup> into the valley until not even a pebble can be found there." <sup>14</sup> Since the LORD had decreed that Ahithophel's good advice be undermined in order to bring about Absalom's ruin, Absalom and all the men of Israel said, "The advice of Hushai the Archite is better than Ahithophel's advice."

#### DAVID INFORMED OF ABSALOM'S PLANS

<sup>15</sup> Hushai then told the priests Zadok and Abiathar, "This is what! Ahithophel advised Absalom and the elders of Israel, and this is what<sup>i</sup> I advised. <sup>16</sup> Now send someone quickly and tell David, 'Don't spend the night at the wilderness ford,<sup>k</sup> but be sure to cross over the Jordan,<sup>l</sup> or the king and all the people with him will be devoured.'<sup>m</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Jonathan and Ahimaaz were staying at En-rogel, where a servant girl would come and pass along information to them. They in turn would go and inform King David, because they dared not be seen entering the city. <sup>18</sup> However, a young man did see them and informed Absalom. So the two left quickly and came to the house of a man in Bahurim. He had a well in his courtyard, and they climbed down into it. <sup>19</sup> Then his wife took the cover, placed it over the mouth of the well, and scattered grain on it so nobody would know anything.

<sup>20</sup> Absalom's servants came to the woman at the house and asked, "Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?"

"They passed by toward the water,"<sup>n</sup> the woman replied to them. The men searched but did not find them, so they returned to Jerusalem.

<sup>21</sup> After they had gone, Ahimaaz and Jonathan climbed out of the well and went and informed King David. They told him, "Get up and immediately ford the river, for Ahithophel has given this advice against you."<sup>22</sup> So David and all the people with him got up

<sup>a</sup>16:14 LXX adds at the Jordan <sup>b</sup>16:21 Lit father, the hands of everyone with you will be strong <sup>c</sup>17:2 Lit and weak of hands <sup>d</sup>17:3 LXX reads to you as a bride returns to her husband. You seek the life of only one man, and all <sup>e</sup>17:9 Or pits, or ravines <sup>f</sup>17:9 Lit And it will be when a falling on them at <sup>g</sup>17:10 Lit melt <sup>h</sup>17:13 Lit drag it <sup>i</sup>17:15 Lit "Like this and like this" <sup>j</sup>17:15 Lit and like this and like this <sup>k</sup>17:16 Some Hb mss; MT reads plains <sup>l</sup>17:16 the Jordan supplied for clarity <sup>m</sup>17:20 Or brook; Hb obscure

and crossed the Jordan. By daybreak, there was no one who had not crossed the Jordan.

<sup>23</sup> When Ahithophel realized that his advice had not been followed, he saddled his donkey and set out for his house in his hometown. He set his house in order and hanged himself. So he died and was buried in his father's tomb.

<sup>24</sup> David had arrived at Mahanaim by the time Absalom crossed the Jordan with all the men of Israel. <sup>25</sup> Now Absalom had appointed Amasa over the army in Joab's place. Amasa was the son of a man named Ithra<sup>a</sup> the Israelite;<sup>b</sup> Ithra had married Abigail daughter of Nahash.<sup>c</sup> Abigail was a sister to Zeruiah, Joab's mother. <sup>26</sup> And Israel and Absalom camped in the land of Gilead. <sup>27</sup> When David came to Mahanaim, Shobi son of Nahash from Rabbah of the Ammonites, Machir son of Ammiel from Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim <sup>28</sup> brought beds, basins,<sup>d</sup> and pottery items. They also brought wheat, barley, flour, roasted grain, beans, lentils,<sup>e</sup> <sup>29</sup> honey, curds, sheep, goats, and cheese<sup>f</sup> from the herd for David and the people with him to eat. They had reasoned, "The people must be hungry, exhausted, and thirsty in the wilderness."

#### ABSALOM'S DEFEAT

**18** David reviewed his troops and appointed commanders of thousands and of hundreds over them. <sup>2</sup> He then sent out the troops, a third under Joab, a third under Joab's brother Abishai son of Zeruiah, and a third under Ittai of Gath. The king said to the troops, "I must also march out with you."

<sup>3</sup> "You must not go!" the people pleaded. "If we have to flee, they will not pay any attention to us. Even if half of us die, they will not pay any attention to us because you are worth<sup>g</sup> ten thousand of us. Therefore, it is better if you support us from the city."

<sup>4</sup> "I will do whatever you think is best," the king replied to them. So he stood beside the city gate while all the troops marched out by hundreds and thousands. <sup>5</sup> The king commanded Joab, Abishai, and Ittai, "Treat the young man Absalom gently for my sake." All the people heard the king's orders to all the commanders about Absalom.

<sup>6</sup> Then David's forces marched into the field to engage Israel in battle, which took place in the forest of Ephraim. <sup>7</sup> Israel's army was defeated by David's soldiers, and the slaughter there was vast that day — twenty thousand dead. <sup>8</sup> The battle spread over the entire area, and that day the forest claimed more people than the sword.

#### ABSALOM'S DEATH

<sup>9</sup> Absalom was riding on his mule when he happened to meet David's soldiers. When the mule went under the tangled branches of a large oak tree, Absalom's

head was caught fast in the tree. The mule under him kept going, so he was suspended in midair.<sup>h</sup> <sup>10</sup> One of the men saw him and informed Joab. He said, "I just saw Absalom hanging in an oak tree!"

<sup>11</sup> "You just saw him!" Joab exclaimed. <sup>12</sup> "Why didn't you strike him to the ground right there? I would have given you ten silver pieces<sup>i</sup> and a belt!"

<sup>13</sup> The man replied to Joab, "Even if I had the weight of a thousand pieces of silver<sup>j</sup> in my hand, I would not raise my hand against the king's son. For we heard the king command you, Abishai, and Ittai, 'Protect the young man Absalom for me.'<sup>k</sup> <sup>14</sup> If I had jeopardized my own<sup>l</sup> life — and nothing is hidden from the king — you would have abandoned me."

<sup>15</sup> Joab said, "I'm not going to waste time with you!" He then took three spears<sup>m</sup> in his hand and thrust them into Absalom's chest. While Absalom was still alive in the oak tree, <sup>16</sup> ten young men who were Joab's armor-bearers surrounded Absalom, struck him, and killed him. <sup>17</sup> Joab blew the ram's horn, and the troops broke off their pursuit of Israel because Joab restrained them. <sup>18</sup> They took Absalom, threw him into a large pit in the forest, and raised up a huge mound of stones over him. And all Israel fled, each to his tent.

<sup>19</sup> When he was alive, Absalom had taken a pillar and raised it up for himself in the King's Valley, since he thought, "I have no son to preserve the memory of my name." So he named the pillar after himself. It is still called Absalom's Monument today.

<sup>20</sup> Ahimaaz son of Zadok said, "Please let me run and tell the king the good news that the LORD has vindicated him by freeing him from his enemies."

<sup>21</sup> Joab replied to him, "You are not the man to take good news today. You may do it another day, but today you aren't taking good news, because the king's son is dead." <sup>22</sup> Joab then said to a Cushite, "Go tell the king what you have seen." The Cushite bowed to Joab and took off running.

<sup>23</sup> However, Ahimaaz son of Zadok persisted and said to Joab, "No matter what, please let me also run behind the Cushite!"

Joab replied, "My son, why do you want to run since you won't get a reward?"<sup>n</sup>

<sup>24</sup> "No matter what, I want to run!"<sup>o</sup> "Then run!" Joab said to him. So Ahimaaz ran by way of the plain and outran the Cushite.

<sup>a</sup>17:25 Or Jether <sup>b</sup>17:25 Some LXX mss read Ishmaelite <sup>c</sup>17:25 Some LXX mss read Jesse <sup>d</sup>17:28 LXX reads brought 10 embroidered beds with double coverings, 10 vessels <sup>e</sup>17:28 LXX, Syr; MT adds roasted grain <sup>f</sup>17:29 Hb obscure <sup>g</sup>18:3 Some Hb mss, LXX, Vg; other Hb mss read because there would now be about <sup>h</sup>18:9 Lit was between heaven and earth <sup>i</sup>18:11 Lit Joab said to the man who told him <sup>j</sup>18:11 About four ounces of silver <sup>k</sup>18:12 About 25 pounds of silver <sup>l</sup>18:12 Some Hb mss, LXX, Tg, Vg; other Hb mss read 'Protect, whoever, the young man Absalom'; Hb obscure <sup>m</sup>18:13 Alt Hb tradition reads jeopardized his <sup>n</sup>18:14 Lit rods <sup>o</sup>18:22 Or you have no good news?

<sup>24</sup> David was sitting between the city gates when the watchman went up to the roof of the city gate and over to the wall. The watchman looked out and saw a man running alone. <sup>25</sup> He called out and told the king.

The king said, "If he's alone, he bears good news."

As the first runner came closer, <sup>26</sup> the watchman saw another man running. He called out to the gatekeeper, "Look! Another man is running alone!"

"This one is also bringing good news," said the king.

<sup>27</sup> The watchman said, "The way the first man runs looks to me like the way Ahimaaz son of Zadok runs."

"This is a good man; he comes with good news," the king commented.

<sup>28</sup> Ahimaaz called out to the king, "All is well," and paid homage to the king with his face to the ground. He continued, "Blessed be the LORD your God! He delivered up the men who rebelled against my lord the king."

<sup>29</sup> The king asked, "Is the young man Absalom all right?"

Ahimaaz replied, "When Joab sent the king's servant and your servant, I saw a big disturbance, but I don't know what it was."

<sup>30</sup> The king said, "Move aside and stand here." So he stood to one side.

<sup>31</sup> Just then the Cushite came and said, "May my lord the king hear the good news: The LORD has vindicated you today by freeing you from all who rise against you!"

<sup>32</sup> The king asked the Cushite, "Is the young man Absalom all right?"

The Cushite replied, "I wish that the enemies of my lord the king, along with all who rise up against you with evil intent, would become like that young man."

<sup>33</sup> The king was deeply moved and went up to the chamber above the city gate and wept. As he walked, he cried, "My son Absalom! My son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you, Absalom, my son, my son!"

#### DAVID'S KINGDOM RESTORED

**19** It was reported to Joab, "The king is weeping. He's mourning over Absalom." <sup>2</sup> That day's victory was turned into mourning for all the troops because on that day the troops heard, "The king is grieving over his son." <sup>3</sup> So they returned to the city quietly that day like troops come in when they are humiliated after fleeing in battle. <sup>4</sup> But the king covered his face and cried loudly, "My son Absalom! Absalom, my son, my son!"

<sup>5</sup> Then Joab went into the house to the king and said, "Today you have shamed all your soldiers — those who saved your life as well as your sons, your wives, and your concubines — <sup>6</sup> by loving your enemies and hating those who love you! Today you have made it

clear that the commanders and soldiers mean nothing to you. In fact, today I know that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead, it would be fine with you!<sup>a</sup>

<sup>7</sup> "Now get up! Go out and encourage<sup>b</sup> your soldiers, for I swear by the LORD that if you don't go out, not a man will remain with you tonight. This will be worse for you than all the trouble that has come to you from your youth until now!"

<sup>8</sup> So the king got up and sat in the city gate, and all the people were told, "Look, the king is sitting in the city gate." Then they all came into the king's presence.

Meanwhile, each Israelite had fled to his tent. <sup>9</sup> People throughout all the tribes of Israel were arguing among themselves, saying, "The king rescued us from the grasp of our enemies, and he saved us from the grasp of the Philistines, but now he has fled from the land because of Absalom. <sup>10</sup> But Absalom, the man we anointed over us, has died in battle. So why do you say nothing about restoring the king?"

<sup>11</sup> King David sent word to the priests Zadok and Abiathar: "Say to the elders of Judah, 'Why should you be the last to restore the king to his palace? The talk of all Israel has reached the king at his house. <sup>12</sup> You are my brothers, my flesh and blood. <sup>c</sup> So why should you be the last to restore the king?' <sup>13</sup> And tell Amasa, 'Aren't you my flesh and blood?' <sup>d</sup> May God punish me and do so severely if you don't become commander of my army from now on instead of Joab!'"

<sup>14</sup> So he won over<sup>e</sup> all the men of Judah, and they unanimously sent word to the king: "Come back, you and all your servants." <sup>15</sup> Then the king returned. When he arrived at the Jordan, Judah came to Gilgal to meet the king and escort him across the Jordan.

<sup>16</sup> Shimei son of Gera, the Benjaminite from Bahurim, hurried down with the men of Judah to meet King David. <sup>17</sup> There were a thousand men from Benjamin with him. Ziba, an attendant from the house of Saul, with his fifteen sons and twenty servants also rushed down to the Jordan ahead of the king. <sup>18</sup> They forded the Jordan to bring the king's household across and do whatever the king desired.<sup>f</sup>

When Shimei son of Gera crossed the Jordan, he fell facedown before the king <sup>19</sup> and said to him, "My lord, don't hold me guilty, and don't remember your servant's wrongdoing on the day my lord the king left Jerusalem. May the king not take it to heart. <sup>20</sup> For your servant knows that I have sinned. But look! Today I am the first one of the entire house of Joseph to come down to meet my lord the king."

<sup>21</sup> Abishai son of Zeruiah asked, "Shouldn't Shimei be put to death for this, because he cursed the LORD's anointed?"

<sup>a</sup>19:6 Lit *be right in your eyes* <sup>b</sup>19:7 Lit *speak to the heart of*  
<sup>c</sup>19:12 Lit *my bone and my flesh* <sup>d</sup>19:13 Lit *my bone and my flesh?*  
<sup>e</sup>19:14 Lit *he turned the heart of* <sup>f</sup>19:18 Lit *do what is good in his eyes*

## Joab: A Man after His Own Heart

by T. Van McClain

Scripture describes David as a man after God's own heart (1Sm 13:14). Joab could aptly be described as a man who was after *his* own heart.

Joab was the son of David's sister Zeruiah. Her three exceptional sons were Abishai, Joab, and Asahel. Abner, an enemy general, reluctantly killed Asahel in self-defense (2Sm 2:19–23). Abner later came over to David's side, but Joab murdered him treacherously. David clearly disavowed some of Joab's actions, but he did not deal with Joab for his crimes.

Joab became commander of David's army due to his bravery in the capture of the city of Jerusalem. Joab proved himself a proficient warrior and commander in a battle against Ammonite and Aramean forces (10:6–14). When King David fell into sin with Bathsheba, Joab assisted the king in his murderous plot to end the life of Uriah the Hittite. Second Samuel 12:26–31 describes Joab conquering Rabbah, the capital city of the Ammonites; apparently he wanted to honor King David by allowing him the privilege of leading the army into the city. Was this an act of respect to David? Actually, his actions could have been a way of both showing respect and protecting his position.

David's son Absalom killed his brother Amnon in revenge for



Part of the underground water tunnel that leads from inside the city of Jerusalem to an outside water source. At the end of the tunnel is a 43 1/2-foot shaft that drops down to the Gihon Spring. The tunnel system provided the people of Jerusalem access to water, even when the city was under attack from outsiders.

raping his sister, then he fled the country. Joab was instrumental in reconciling Absalom with his father, David. However, Absalom then attempted to usurp the throne. In a later battle, Joab put Absalom to death, running spears through his heart while Absalom hung by his hair in a tree—although David had clearly indicated he did not want Absalom to die. David mourned for Absalom, but Joab convinced him to refrain from mourning. In a bid to gain the confidence of those who had followed Absalom and Amasa, David offered Amasa

command of the army in place of Joab. Amasa accepted the offer, and in jealousy, Joab would later murder Amasa.

Joab did show some wisdom in advising King David not to take a census, but Joab was overruled and the census was taken (chap. 24). As a consequence of David's sin, a great pestilence came upon Israel.

Joab did show loyalty to David at times and offered sound advice, but Joab was a man who followed his own heart and did not seek after God's heart. As a result, he received his just reward (1Kg 2:34). ❖



The forest of Ephraim where Joab disobeyed King David's command to spare Absalom's life.

<sup>22</sup> David answered, “Sons of Zeruiah, do we agree on anything? Have you become my adversary today? Should any man be killed in Israel today? Am I not aware that today I’m king over Israel?” <sup>23</sup> So the king said to Shimei, “You will not die.” Then the king gave him his oath.

<sup>24</sup> Mephibosheth, Saul’s grandson, also went down to meet the king. He had not taken care of his feet, trimmed his mustache, or washed his clothes from the day the king left until the day he returned safely. <sup>25</sup> When he came from Jerusalem to meet the king, the king asked him, “Mephibosheth, why didn’t you come with me?”

<sup>26</sup> “My lord the king,” he replied, “my servant Ziba betrayed me. Actually your servant said, ‘I’ll saddle the donkey for myself<sup>a</sup> so that I may ride it and go with the king’ — for your servant is lame. <sup>27</sup> Ziba slandered your servant to my lord the king. But my lord the king is like the angel of God, so do whatever you think best. <sup>28</sup> For my grandfather’s entire family deserves death from my lord the king, but you set your servant among those who eat at your table. So what further right do I have to keep on making appeals to the king?”

<sup>29</sup> The king said to him, “Why keep on speaking about these matters of yours? I hereby declare: you and Ziba are to divide the land.”

<sup>30</sup> Mephibosheth said to the king, “Instead, since my lord the king has come to his palace safely, let Ziba take it all!”

<sup>31</sup> Barzillai the Gileadite had come down from Rogelim and accompanied the king to the Jordan River to see him off at the Jordan. <sup>32</sup> Barzillai was a very old man — eighty years old — and since he was a very wealthy man, he had provided for the needs of the king while he stayed in Mahanaim.

<sup>33</sup> The king said to Barzillai, “Cross over with me, and I’ll provide for you<sup>c</sup> at my side in Jerusalem.”

<sup>34</sup> Barzillai replied to the king, “How many years of my life are left that I should go up to Jerusalem with the king? <sup>35</sup> I’m now eighty years old. Can I discern what is pleasant and what is not? Can your servant taste what he eats or drinks? Can I still hear the voice of male and female singers? Why should your servant be an added burden to my lord the king? <sup>36</sup> Since your servant is only going with the king a little way across the Jordan, why should the king repay me with such a reward? <sup>37</sup> Please let your servant return so that I may die in my own city near the tomb of my father and mother. But here is your servant Chimham; let him cross over with my lord the king. Do for him what seems good to you.”<sup>d</sup>

<sup>38</sup> The king replied, “Chimham will cross over with me, and I will do for him what seems good to you, and whatever you desire from me I will do for you.” <sup>39</sup> So

all the people crossed the Jordan, and then the king crossed. The king kissed Barzillai and blessed him, and Barzillai returned to his home.

<sup>40</sup> The king went on to Gilgal, and Chimham went with him. All the troops of Judah and half of Israel’s escorted the king. <sup>41</sup> Suddenly, all the men of Israel came to the king. They asked him, “Why did our brothers, the men of Judah, take you away secretly and transport the king and his household across the Jordan, along with all of David’s men?”

<sup>42</sup> All the men of Judah responded to the men of Israel, “Because the king is our relative. Why does this make you angry? Have we ever eaten anything of the king’s or been honored at all?”<sup>e</sup>

<sup>43</sup> The men of Israel answered the men of Judah, “We have ten shares in the king, so we have a greater claim to David than you. Why then do you despise us? Weren’t we the first to speak of restoring our king?” But the words of the men of Judah were harsher than those of the men of Israel.

#### SHEBA’S REVOLT

**20** Now a wicked man, a Benjaminite named Sheba son of Bichri, happened to be there. He blew the ram’s horn and shouted:

We have no portion in David,  
no inheritance in Jesse’s son.  
Each man to his tent,<sup>f</sup> Israel!

<sup>2</sup> So all the men of Israel deserted David and followed Sheba son of Bichri, but the men of Judah from the Jordan all the way to Jerusalem remained loyal to their king.

<sup>3</sup> When David came to his palace in Jerusalem, he took the ten concubines he had left to take care of the palace and placed them under guard. He provided for them, but he was not intimate with them. They were confined until the day of their death, living as widows.

<sup>4</sup> The king said to Amasa, “Summon the men of Judah to me within three days and be here yourself.”

<sup>5</sup> Amasa went to summon Judah, but he took longer than the time allotted him. <sup>6</sup> So David said to Abishai, “Sheba son of Bichri will do more harm to us than Absalom. Take your lord’s soldiers and pursue him, or he will find fortified cities and elude us.”<sup>g</sup>

<sup>7</sup> So Joab’s men, the Cherethites, the Pelethites, and all the warriors marched out under Abishai’s command;<sup>h</sup> they left Jerusalem to pursue Sheba son of Bichri. <sup>8</sup> They were at the great stone in Gibeon when Amasa joined them. Joab was wearing his uniform and

<sup>a</sup>19:26 LXX, Syr, Vg read *said to him, ‘Saddle the donkey for me*

<sup>b</sup>19:27 Lit *do what is good in your eyes* <sup>c</sup>19:33 LXX reads *for your old age*; Ru 4:15 <sup>d</sup>19:37 Lit *what is good in your eyes*, also in v. 38

<sup>e</sup>19:42 LXX reads *king’s or has he given us a gift or granted us a portion*

<sup>f</sup>20:1 Alt Hb tradition reads *gods* <sup>g</sup>20:6 Lit *and snatch away our eyes*

<sup>h</sup>20:7 Lit *out following him*

over it was a belt around his waist with a sword in its sheath. As he approached, the sword fell out. <sup>9</sup> Joab asked Amasa, “Are you well, my brother?” Then with his right hand Joab grabbed Amasa by the beard to kiss him. <sup>10</sup> Amasa was not on guard against the sword in Joab’s hand, and Joab stabbed him in the stomach with it and spilled his intestines out on the ground. Joab did not stab him again, and Amasa died.

Joab and his brother Abishai pursued Sheba son of Bichri. <sup>11</sup> One of Joab’s young men had stood over Amasa saying, “Whoever favors Joab and whoever is for David, follow Joab!” <sup>12</sup> Now Amasa had been writhing in his blood in the middle of the highway, and the man had seen that all the troops stopped. So he moved Amasa from the highway to the field and threw a garment over him because he realized that all those who encountered Amasa were stopping. <sup>13</sup> When he was removed from the highway, all the men passed by and followed Joab to pursue Sheba son of Bichri.

<sup>14</sup> Sheba passed through all the tribes of Israel to Abel of Beth-maacah. All the Berites<sup>4</sup> came together and followed him. <sup>15</sup> Joab’s troops came and besieged Sheba in Abel of Beth-maacah. They built a siege ramp against the outer wall of the city. While all the troops with Joab were battering the wall to make it collapse, <sup>16</sup> a wise woman called out from the city, “Listen! Listen! Please tell Joab to come here and let me speak with him.”

<sup>17</sup> When he had come near her, the woman asked, “Are you Joab?”

“I am,” he replied.

“Listen to the words of your servant,” she said to him.

He answered, “I’m listening.”

<sup>18</sup> She said, “In the past they used to say, ‘Seek counsel in Abel,’ and that’s how they settled disputes. <sup>19</sup> I am one of the peaceful and faithful in Israel, but you’re trying to destroy a city that is like a mother in Israel. Why would you devour the LORD’s inheritance?”

<sup>20</sup> Joab protested: “Never! I would never devour or demolish!”<sup>21</sup> That is not the case. There is a man named Sheba son of Bichri, from the hill country of Ephraim, who has rebelled against King David. Deliver this one man, and I will withdraw from the city.”

The woman replied to Joab, “Watch! His head will be thrown over the wall to you.”<sup>22</sup> The woman went to all the people with her wise counsel, and they cut off the head of Sheba son of Bichri and threw it to Joab. So he blew the ram’s horn, and they dispersed from the city, each to his own tent. Joab returned to the king in Jerusalem.

<sup>23</sup> Joab commanded the whole army of Israel; Benaiah son of Jehoiada was over the Cherethites and Pelethites;

- <sup>24</sup> Adoram<sup>8</sup> was over forced labor; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was court historian;
- <sup>25</sup> Sheva was court secretary; Zadok and Abiathar were priests;
- <sup>26</sup> and in addition, Ira the Jairite was David’s priest.

#### JUSTICE FOR THE GIBEONITES

**21** During David’s reign there was a famine for three successive years, so David inquired<sup>c</sup> of the LORD. The LORD answered, “It is due to Saul and to his bloody family, because he killed the Gibeonites.”

<sup>2</sup> The Gibeonites were not Israelites but rather a remnant of the Amorites. The Israelites had taken an oath concerning them, but Saul had tried to kill them in his zeal for the Israelites and Judah. So David summoned the Gibeonites and spoke to them. <sup>3</sup> He asked the Gibeonites, “What should I do for you? How can I make atonement so that you will bring a blessing on<sup>d</sup> the LORD’s inheritance?”

<sup>4</sup> The Gibeonites said to him, “We are not asking for silver and gold from Saul or his family, and we cannot put anyone to death in Israel.”

“Whatever you say, I will do for you,” he said.

<sup>5</sup> They replied to the king, “As for the man who annihilated us and plotted to destroy us so we would not exist within the whole territory of Israel, <sup>6</sup> let seven of his male descendants be handed over to us so we may hang<sup>e</sup> them in the presence of the LORD at Gibeah of Saul, the LORD’s chosen.”

The king answered, “I will hand them over.”

<sup>7</sup> David spared Mephibosheth, the son of Saul’s son Jonathan, because of the oath of the LORD that was between David and Jonathan, Saul’s son. <sup>8</sup> But the king took Armoni and Mephibosheth, who were the two sons whom Rizpah daughter of Aiah had borne to Saul, and the five sons whom Merab<sup>f</sup> daughter of Saul had borne to Adriel son of Barzillai the Mehola-thite<sup>9</sup> and handed them over to the Gibeonites. They hanged<sup>g</sup> them on the hill in the presence of the LORD; the seven of them died together. They were executed in the first days of the harvest at the beginning of the barley harvest.<sup>h</sup>

#### THE BURIAL OF SAUL’S FAMILY

<sup>10</sup> Rizpah, Aiah’s daughter, took sackcloth and spread it out for herself on the rock from the beginning of the harvest<sup>i</sup> until the rain poured down from heaven

<sup>a</sup>20:14 LXX, Vg read *Bichrites* <sup>b</sup>20:24 Some Hb mss, LXX, Syr read *Adoniram*; 1Kg 4:6; 5:14 <sup>c</sup>21:1 Lit *sought the face of*

<sup>d</sup>21:3 Lit *will bless* <sup>e</sup>21:6 Or *impale*, or *expose* <sup>f</sup>21:8 Some Hb mss, LXX, Syr, Tg; other Hb mss read *Michal* <sup>g</sup>21:9 Or *impaled*, or *exposed*, also in v. 13 <sup>h</sup>21:9 = March–April <sup>i</sup>21:10 = April to October

on the bodies. She kept the birds of the sky from them by day and the wild animals by night.

<sup>11</sup> When it was reported to David what Saul's concubine Rizpah daughter of Aiah had done, <sup>12</sup> he went and got the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from the citizens of Jabesh-gilead. They had stolen them from the public square of Beth-shan where the Philistines had hung the bodies the day the Philistines killed Saul at Gilboa. <sup>13</sup> David had the bones brought from there. They gathered up the bones of Saul's family who had been hanged <sup>14</sup> and buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan at Zela in the land of Benjamin in the tomb of Saul's father Kish. They did everything the king commanded. After this, God was receptive to prayer for the land.

#### THE PHILISTINE GIANTS

<sup>15</sup> The Philistines again waged war against Israel. David went down with his soldiers, and they fought the Philistines, but David became exhausted. <sup>16</sup> Then Ishbi-benob, one of the descendants of the giant, <sup>a</sup> whose bronze spear weighed about eight pounds<sup>b</sup> and who wore new armor, intended to kill David. <sup>17</sup> But Abishai son of Zeruiah came to his aid, struck the Philistine, and killed him. Then David's men swore to him, "You must never again go out with us to battle. You must not extinguish the lamp of Israel."

<sup>18</sup> After this, there was another battle with the Philistines at Gob. At that time Sibbecai the Hushathite killed Saph, who was one of the descendants of the giant.

<sup>19</sup> Once again there was a battle with the Philistines at Gob, and Elhanan son of Jaare-oregim the Bethlehemite killed<sup>c</sup> Goliath of Gath. The shaft of his spear was like a weaver's beam.

<sup>20</sup> At Gath there was still another battle. A huge man was there with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot — twenty-four in all. He, too, was descended from the giant. <sup>21</sup> When he taunted Israel, Jonathan, son of David's brother Shimei, killed him.

<sup>22</sup> These four were descended from the giant in Gath and were killed by David and his soldiers.

#### DAVID'S SONG OF THANKSGIVING

**22** David spoke the words of this song to the LORD on the day the LORD rescued him from the grasp of all his enemies and from the grasp of Saul. <sup>2</sup> He said:

The LORD is my rock, my fortress,  
and my deliverer,

<sup>3</sup> my God,<sup>d</sup> my rock where I seek refuge.  
My shield, the horn of my salvation,  
my stronghold, my refuge,  
and my Savior, you save me from violence.

<sup>4</sup> I called to the LORD, who is worthy of praise,  
and I was saved from my enemies.

<sup>5</sup> For the waves of death engulfed me;  
the torrents of destruction terrified me.

<sup>6</sup> The ropes of Sheol entangled me;  
the snares of death confronted me.

<sup>7</sup> I called to the LORD in my distress;  
I called to my God.

From his temple he heard my voice,  
and my cry for help reached his ears.

<sup>8</sup> Then the earth shook and quaked;  
the foundations of the heavens<sup>e</sup> trembled;  
they shook because he burned with anger.

<sup>9</sup> Smoke rose from his nostrils,  
and consuming fire came from his mouth;  
coals were set ablaze by it.<sup>f</sup>

<sup>10</sup> He bent the heavens and came down,  
total darkness beneath his feet.

<sup>11</sup> He rode on a cherub and flew,  
soaring<sup>g</sup> on the wings of the wind.

<sup>12</sup> He made darkness a canopy around him,  
a gathering<sup>h</sup> of water and thick clouds.

<sup>13</sup> From the radiance of his presence,  
blazing coals were ignited.

<sup>14</sup> The LORD thundered from heaven;  
the Most High made his voice heard.

<sup>15</sup> He shot arrows and scattered them;  
he hurled lightning bolts and routed them.

<sup>16</sup> The depths of the sea became visible,  
the foundations of the world were exposed  
at the rebuke of the LORD,  
at the blast of the breath of his nostrils.

<sup>17</sup> He reached down from on high  
and took hold of me;  
he pulled me out of deep water.

<sup>18</sup> He rescued me from my powerful enemy  
and from those who hated me,  
for they were too strong for me.

<sup>19</sup> They confronted me in the day  
of my calamity,  
but the LORD was my support.

<sup>20</sup> He brought me out to a spacious place;  
he rescued me because he delighted in me.

<sup>21</sup> The LORD rewarded me  
according to my righteousness;  
he repaid me  
according to the cleanness of my hands.

<sup>a</sup> 21:16 Or *Raphah*, also in vv. 18, 20, 22 <sup>b</sup> 21:16 Lit 300 (shekels)  
<sup>c</sup> 21:19 1Ch 20:5 adds *the brother of* <sup>d</sup> 22:3 LXX, Ps 18:2 read *my God*; MT reads *God of* <sup>e</sup> 22:8 Some Hb mss, Syr, Vg read *mountains*;  
Ps 18:7 <sup>f</sup> 22:9 Or *him* <sup>g</sup> 22:11 Some Hb mss; other Hb mss, Syr, Tg  
read *he was seen* <sup>h</sup> 22:12 Or *sieve*, or *mass*; Hb obscure

<sup>22</sup> For I have kept the ways of the LORD  
and have not turned from my God  
to wickedness.

<sup>23</sup> Indeed, I let all his ordinances guide me<sup>a</sup>  
and have not disregarded his statutes.

<sup>24</sup> I was blameless before him  
and kept myself from my iniquity.

<sup>25</sup> So the LORD repaid me  
according to my righteousness,  
according to my cleanness<sup>b</sup> in his sight.

<sup>26</sup> With the faithful  
you prove yourself faithful,  
with the blameless  
you prove yourself blameless,  
with the pure

you prove yourself pure,  
but with the crooked  
you prove yourself shrewd.

<sup>28</sup> You rescue an oppressed people,  
but your eyes are set against the proud —  
you humble them.

<sup>29</sup> LORD, you are my lamp;  
the LORD illuminates my darkness.

<sup>30</sup> With you I can attack a barricade,<sup>c</sup>  
and with my God I can leap over a wall.

<sup>31</sup> God — his way is perfect;  
the word of the LORD is pure.  
He is a shield to all who take refuge in him.

<sup>32</sup> For who is God besides the LORD?  
And who is a rock? Only our God.

<sup>33</sup> God is my strong refuge,<sup>d</sup>  
he makes my way perfect.<sup>e</sup>

<sup>34</sup> He makes my feet like the feet of a deer  
and sets me securely on the<sup>f</sup> heights.<sup>g</sup>

<sup>35</sup> He trains my hands for war;  
my arms can bend a bow of bronze.

<sup>36</sup> You have given me the shield  
of your salvation;  
your help<sup>h</sup> exalts me.

<sup>37</sup> You make a spacious place beneath me  
for my steps,  
and my ankles do not give way.

<sup>38</sup> I pursue my enemies and destroy them;  
I do not turn back until they are wiped out.

<sup>39</sup> I wipe them out and crush them,  
and they do not rise;  
they fall beneath my feet.

<sup>40</sup> You have clothed me with strength  
for battle;  
you subdue my adversaries beneath me.

<sup>41</sup> You have made my enemies retreat  
before me;<sup>i</sup>

I annihilate those who hate me.

<sup>42</sup> They look, but there is no one  
to save them —  
they look to the LORD, but he does not  
answer them.

<sup>43</sup> I pulverize them like dust of the earth;  
I crush them and trample them like mud  
in the streets.

<sup>44</sup> You have freed me from the feuds  
among my people;  
you have preserved me as head of nations;  
a people I had not known serve me.  
<sup>45</sup> Foreigners submit to me cringing;  
as soon as they hear, they obey me.  
<sup>46</sup> Foreigners lose heart  
and come trembling from their fortifications.

<sup>47</sup> The LORD lives — blessed be my rock!  
God, the rock of my salvation, is exalted.

<sup>48</sup> God — he grants me vengeance  
and casts down peoples under me.

<sup>49</sup> He frees me from my enemies.  
You exalt me above my adversaries;  
you rescue me from violent men.

<sup>50</sup> Therefore I will give thanks to you among  
the nations, LORD;  
I will sing praises about your name.

<sup>51</sup> He is a tower of salvation for<sup>j</sup> his king;  
he shows loyalty to his anointed,  
to David and his descendants forever.

#### DAVID'S LAST WORDS

**23** These are the last words of David:  
The declaration of David son of Jesse,  
the declaration of the man raised on high,<sup>k</sup>  
the one anointed by the God of Jacob.  
This is the most delightful of Israel's songs.  
<sup>2</sup> The Spirit of the LORD spoke through me,  
his word was on my tongue.  
<sup>3</sup> The God of Israel spoke;  
the Rock of Israel said to me,  
"The one who rules the people with justice,  
who rules in the fear of God,  
<sup>4</sup> is like the morning light when the sun rises  
on a cloudless morning,  
the glisten of rain on sprouting grass."

<sup>a</sup> 22:23 Lit *Indeed*, all his ordinances have been in front of me  
<sup>b</sup> 22:25 LXX, Syr, Vg read *to the cleanness of my hands*; Ps 18:24  
<sup>c</sup> 22:30 Or *a ridge*, or *raiders* <sup>d</sup> 22:33 DSS, some LXX mss, Syr, Vg  
read *God clothes me with strength*; Ps 18:32 <sup>e</sup> 22:33 Some LXX mss,  
Syr; MT reads *he sets free the blameless his way*; Hb obscure  
<sup>f</sup> 22:34 LXX; some Hb mss read *my*; other Hb mss read *his*  
<sup>g</sup> 22:34 Or *on my high places* <sup>h</sup> 22:36 LXX reads *humility*; Ps 18:35  
<sup>i</sup> 22:41 Lit *you gave me the neck of my enemies* <sup>j</sup> 22:51 DSS read *he  
gives great victory to* <sup>k</sup> 23:1 Or *raised up by the high God*

For Hebrews in the centuries before Christ, music was a vehicle for the worshiper to experience supernatural moments with God (1Sm 10:5–6; 16:23; 2Kg 3:14–16).

There were two worship traditions in the Old Testament. First, worship was spontaneous and ecstatic, exemplified in the above passages. Much religious poetry and music was improvised in response to events in the lives of worshipers. After the Israelites were delivered from the Egyptians, Moses and Miriam led in celebration that was

poetic, vocal, and instrumental (Ex 15:1–21). The song they sang was repetitive, involving much physical movement and rhythm.

Worship could also be professional and formal.<sup>1</sup> David led in the organization of worship leader teams who were trained and well skilled at leading and performing music in the temple. The opening ceremony for the temple was a musical spectacular (2Ch 5:12–13).

In Hebrew worship of the tenth century, Scripture was not spoken. It was chanted or sung to melody.

This was to honor the sanctity of Scripture, setting it apart from the conversations of daily life.<sup>2</sup> Harmony was not used. Voices and instruments performed the same melody, with each performer adding embellishments. There are some indications that drones under the melody might have been common. The spirit was exuberant and most scholars believe it to have been quite loud. The instruments used to accompany and help create this heterophonic sound included string (harp, lyre), wind (ram's horn, trumpet), and percussion (tambourine, cymbals, rattles).

Some implications concerning performance style can be drawn from poetry texts. Many psalms have heading designations that indicate who was to perform the poetry. Several are delineated as repertoire for specific musician



A ninth-century BC shofar made from a conch shell.



A woman with tambourines or cymbals.

guilds that David established (e.g., psalms of Asaph: 73–83). Some headings identify the occasion for which the psalm was intended; others suggest melodic formulas and instruments that were to be part of the performance.<sup>3</sup> Others denote instructions for music leadership and style of performance. The term *selah* occurs throughout the Psalms. Several meanings of this term have been conjectured. The most commonly accepted theory is that it indicated some sort of pause, probably a musical interlude between verses of the text.

One musicological scholar has asserted that the various symbols and marks that appear over and under letters throughout Hebrew Scriptures are a form of musical notation. (Scholars have generally considered these marks to be accent marks or punctuation.) Using the musical interpretation of these marks, a system of notation has been devised and some transcription and recording of melodies accomplished.<sup>4</sup>

The structure of the poetry is also important in understanding how Israelites worshiped through music. Psalms were written with textual parallelism in which a statement was followed by a restatement of the same idea using different words. This textual style was conducive to musical performance. It allowed for *responsorial* performance where the worship

leader sang the first statement and a group of singers responded with the reiteration. Style of writing also allowed *antiphonal* performance where two groups alternated singing the text. Several psalms use a repeated refrain that allowed for a *litany* in which the congregation could respond with each repetition (e.g., Ps 136).

There was no rhyme scheme to Hebrew poetry. The syllable accents within a line were inconsistent and did not allow an even meter as does our music today. There were strong and weak accents within the lines of poetry, and the rhythm of these textual inflections probably guided the rhythm of the music as opposed to any kind of steady beat. The melodic formulas would also have accommodated these irregular poetry lines.<sup>5</sup> ❖

<sup>1</sup> Donald P. Hustad, *Jubilate II: Church Music in Worship and Renewal* (Carol Stream, IL: Hope, 1993), 131–32. <sup>2</sup> Andrew Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 23. <sup>3</sup> Wilson-Dickson, *Story*, 20. <sup>4</sup> Suzanne Haik-Vantoura, *The Music of the Bible Revealed*, trans. Dennis Weber (Berkeley, CA: BIBAL, 1991). <sup>5</sup> Wilson-Dickson, *Story*, 21.



The remains of this lyre were found in the king's grave (Tomb 789) located near that of Sub-ad (Pu-abi) in the royal cemetery at Ur.



A harp from Egypt that was made soon after 1580 BC.

- <sup>5</sup> Is it not true my house is with God?  
For he has established a permanent covenant  
with me,  
ordered and secured in every detail.  
Will he not bring about  
my whole salvation and my every desire?  
<sup>6</sup> But all the wicked are like thorns raked aside;  
they can never be picked up by hand.  
<sup>7</sup> The man who touches them  
must be armed with iron and the shaft  
of a spear.  
They will be completely burned up on the spot.

#### EXPLOITS OF DAVID'S WARRIORS

<sup>8</sup> These are the names of David's warriors:  
Josheb-basshebeth the Tahchemonite was chief  
of the officers. <sup>a</sup> He wielded his spear <sup>b</sup> against eight  
hundred men that he killed at one time.

<sup>9</sup> After him, Eleazar son of Dodo son of an Ahohite  
was among the three warriors with David when they  
defied the Philistines. The men of Israel retreated  
in the place they had gathered for battle, <sup>10</sup> but Ele-  
azar stood his ground and attacked the Philistines  
until his hand was tired and stuck to his sword. The  
LORD brought about a great victory that day. Then  
the troops came back to him, but only to plunder  
the dead.

<sup>11</sup> After him was Shammah son of Agee the Har-  
rarite. The Philistines had assembled in formation  
where there was a field full of lentils. The troops fled  
from the Philistines, <sup>12</sup> but Shammah took his stand  
in the middle of the field, defended it, and struck  
down the Philistines. So the LORD brought about a  
great victory.

<sup>13</sup> Three of the thirty leading warriors went down  
at harvest time and came to David at the cave of Adul-  
lam, while a company of Philistines was camping  
in Rephaim Valley. <sup>14</sup> At that time David was in the  
stronghold, and a Philistine garrison was at Beth-  
lehem. <sup>15</sup> David was extremely thirsty <sup>c</sup> and said, "If  
only someone would bring me water to drink from  
the well at the city gate of Bethlehem!" <sup>16</sup> So three of  
the warriors broke through the Philistine camp and  
drew water from the well at the gate of Bethlehem.  
They brought it back to David, but he refused to drink  
it. Instead, he poured it out to the LORD. <sup>17</sup> David said,  
"LORD, I would never do such a thing! Is this not the  
blood of men who risked their lives?" So he refused to  
drink it. Such were the exploits of the three warriors.

<sup>18</sup> Abishai, Joab's brother and son of Zeruiah, was  
leader of the Three. <sup>d</sup> He wielded his spear against  
three hundred men and killed them, gaining a repu-  
tation among the Three. <sup>19</sup> Was he not more honored  
than the Three? He became their commander even  
though he did not become one of the Three.

<sup>20</sup> Benaiah son of Jehoiada was the son of a brave  
man from Kabzeel, a man of many exploits. Benaiah  
killed two sons <sup>e</sup> of Ariel <sup>f</sup> of Moab, and he went down  
into a pit on a snowy day and killed a lion. <sup>21</sup> He also  
killed an Egyptian, an impressive man. Even though  
the Egyptian had a spear in his hand, Benaiah went  
down to him with a staff, snatched the spear out of  
the Egyptian's hand, and then killed him with his  
own spear. <sup>22</sup> These were the exploits of Benaiah son  
of Jehoiada, who had a reputation among the three  
warriors. <sup>23</sup> He was the most honored of the Thirty,  
but he did not become one of the Three. David put  
him in charge of his bodyguard.

<sup>24</sup> Among the Thirty were  
Joab's brother Asahel,  
Elhanan son of Dodo of Bethlehem,  
<sup>25</sup> Shammah the Harodite,  
Elika the Harodite,  
<sup>26</sup> Helez the Paltite,  
Ira son of Ikkesh the Tekoite,  
<sup>27</sup> Abiezer the Anathothite,  
Mebunnai the Hushathite,  
<sup>28</sup> Zalmon the Ahohite,  
Maharai the Netophathite,  
<sup>29</sup> Heleb son of Baanah the Netophathite,  
Ittai son of Ribai from Gibeah  
of the Benjaminites,  
<sup>30</sup> Benaiah the Pirathonite,  
Hiddai from the wadis of Gaash, <sup>g</sup>  
<sup>31</sup> Abi-albon the Arbatite,  
Azmaveth the Barhumite,  
<sup>32</sup> Eliahba the Shaalbonite,  
the sons of Jashen,  
Jonathan son of <sup>h</sup> <sup>33</sup> Shammah  
the Hararite,  
Ahiam son of Sharar the Hararite,  
<sup>34</sup> Eliphelet son of Ahasbai  
son of the Maacathite,  
Eliam son of Ahithophel the Gilonite,  
<sup>35</sup> Hezro the Carmelite,  
Paarai the Arbite,  
<sup>36</sup> Igal son of Nathan from Zobah,  
Bani the Gadite,  
<sup>37</sup> Zelek the Ammonite,  
Naharai the Beerothite, the armor-bearer  
for Joab son of Zeruiah,  
<sup>38</sup> Ira the Ithrite,  
Gareb the Ithrite,  
<sup>39</sup> and Uriah the Hethite.  
There were thirty-seven in all.

<sup>a</sup>23:8 Some Hb mss, LXX read *Three* <sup>b</sup>23:8 Some Hb mss; other Hb mss, LXX read *He was Adino the Eznite* <sup>c</sup>23:15 Lit *And David craved* <sup>d</sup>23:18 Some Hb mss, Syr read *the Thirty* <sup>e</sup>23:20 LXX; MT omits sons <sup>f</sup>23:20 Or *two warriors* <sup>g</sup>23:30 Or *from Nahale-gaash* <sup>h</sup>23:32 Some LXX mss; MT omits *son of*; 1Ch 11:34

## Threshing Floors

by J. Mark Terry



Threshing floor at Zaatara, outside Bethlehem. After winnowing barley on the threshing floor at Bethlehem, Boaz fell asleep. He awakened to find Ruth lying at his feet.



Wooden winnowing fan from Egypt's New Kingdom. Employed in pairs, these fans were used to throw the trodden grain into the air for the breeze to separate the chaff from the grain.

The farmers in ancient Israel raised several types of grain. The Old Testament mentions wheat (Gn 30:14), spelt (an inferior type of wheat, Ex 9:32), barley (v. 31), and millet (Ezk 4:9). The King James Version usually employs the word translated "corn" for all types of grain, but the translators did not have in mind the corn (maize) that is grown in North America.<sup>1</sup>

Threshing is the process of separating the kernels of grain from the husks. Normally the Israelites threshed their grain on a threshing floor. The threshing floor (Hb *goren*) was a level surface in the open air. It could be either smoothed stone or hard-packed earth. Usually the threshing floor was circular in shape and about fifty feet in diameter with a stone border to keep the grain inside. Most floors were located on the outskirts of the village or town, often on a hilltop. The Hebrews preferred to place their threshing floors on hill-tops so the wind would blow away the chaff. Some floors were privately owned, like those of Atad (Gn 50:10) and Araunah (2Sm 24:16), but most floors belonged to the community.<sup>2</sup>

Threshing time was a time for community celebration. Normally the workers cut the grain in the field with sickles, leaving some stalks on the margins of the field for the poor. Once the grain was cut, the harvesters gathered the grain into bundles or sheaves. The workers then transported the sheaves to the threshing floor. A small amount of grain might be threshed by flailing the grain on the threshing floor. Sometimes the grain would be threshed by walking an ox over the grain. More often, the thresher would use a sledge (Jb 41:30) or a cart (sometimes called a wheel; Is 28:27). The threshing board (Is 41:15) was made of wooden planks nailed together with rocks or metal objects attached to the bottom. Usually oxen or horses pulled the sledge across the grain again and again. The farmer often piled stones or stood on the sledge to make it heavier. Somewhat later the Hebrews used a threshing cart or wheel (Pr 20:26). This was a metal roller that threshed the grain more efficiently.

During the threshing, the farmer would turn the sheaves over fre-

quently with a wooden "fork." This enabled the breeze to blow some of the chaff away. After threshing was complete, workers would then winnow the grain. This involved putting the grain into large shallow baskets and tossing the grain into the air. Again, the purpose was to allow the wind to blow away the chaff. The chaff was burned, and the grain was stored in underground silos or in clay jars until it was needed.<sup>3</sup>

The process of threshing took several days. While the threshing proceeded, someone would sleep on the threshing floor to guard the grain, lest robbers come to steal it. Boaz was doing just that when Ruth came to the floor and slept at his feet (Ru 3:7-8). ❖

<sup>1</sup>See "Grain" in *HIBD*, 680. <sup>2</sup>L. G. Herr, "Thresh; Threshing" in *ISBE*, vol. 4 (1988), 844; and Nelson B. Baker, "Threshing" and "Threshing Floor" in *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopedia*, ed. Charles F. Pfeiffer, Howard F. Vos, and John Rea (Chicago: Moody, 1975), 1701. <sup>3</sup>Baker, "Threshing."

**DAVID'S MILITARY CENSUS**

**24** The LORD's anger burned against Israel again, and he stirred up David against them to say, "Go, count the people of Israel and Judah."

<sup>2</sup> So the king said to Joab, the commander of his army, "Go through all the tribes of Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba and register the troops so I can know their number."

<sup>3</sup> Joab replied to the king, "May the LORD your God multiply the troops a hundred times more than they are — while my lord the king looks on! But why does my lord the king want to do this?"

<sup>4</sup> Yet the king's order prevailed over Joab and the commanders of the army. So Joab and the commanders of the army left the king's presence to register the troops of Israel.

<sup>5</sup> They crossed the Jordan and camped in Aroer, south of the town in the middle of the valley, and then proceeded toward Gad and Jazer. <sup>6</sup> They went to Gilead and to the land of the Hittites<sup>a</sup> and continued on to Dan-jaan and around to Sidon. <sup>7</sup> They went to the fortress of Tyre and all the cities of the Hivites and Canaanites. Afterward, they went to the Negev of Judah at Beer-sheba.

<sup>8</sup> When they had gone through the whole land, they returned to Jerusalem at the end of nine months and twenty days. <sup>9</sup> Joab gave the king the total of the registration of the troops. There were eight hundred thousand valiant armed men<sup>b</sup> from Israel and five hundred thousand men from Judah.

<sup>10</sup> David's conscience troubled him after he had taken a census of the troops. He said to the LORD, "I have sinned greatly in what I've done. Now, LORD, because I've been very foolish, please take away your servant's guilt."

**DAVID'S PUNISHMENT**

<sup>11</sup> When David got up in the morning, the word of the LORD had come to the prophet Gad, David's seer: <sup>12</sup> "Go and say to David, 'This is what the LORD says: I am offering you three choices. Choose one of them, and I will do it to you.'"

<sup>13</sup> So Gad went to David, told him the choices, and asked him, "Do you want three<sup>c</sup> years of famine to come on your land, to flee from your foes three months while they pursue you, or to have a plague in your land three days? Now, consider carefully<sup>d</sup> what answer I should take back to the one who sent me."

<sup>14</sup> David answered Gad, "I have great anxiety. Please, let us fall into the LORD's hands because his mercies are great, but don't let me fall into human hands."

<sup>15</sup> So the LORD sent a plague on Israel from that morning until the appointed time, and from Dan to Beer-sheba seventy thousand men died. <sup>16</sup> Then the angel extended his hand toward Jerusalem to destroy it, but the LORD relented concerning the destruction and said to the angel who was destroying the people, "Enough, withdraw your hand now!" The angel of the LORD was then at the threshing floor of Araunah<sup>e</sup> the Jebusite.

<sup>17</sup> When David saw the angel striking the people, he said to the LORD, "Look, I am the one who has sinned; I am the one<sup>f</sup> who has done wrong. But these sheep, what have they done? Please, let your hand be against me and my father's family."

**DAVID'S ALTAR**

<sup>18</sup> Gad came to David that day and said to him, "Go up and set up an altar to the LORD on the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite."<sup>19</sup> David went up in obedience to Gad's command, just as the LORD had commanded. <sup>20</sup> Araunah looked down and saw the king and his servants coming toward him, so he went out and paid homage to the king with his face to the ground.

<sup>21</sup> Araunah said, "Why has my lord the king come to his servant?"

David replied, "To buy the threshing floor from you in order to build an altar to the LORD, so the plague on the people may be halted."

<sup>22</sup> Araunah said to David, "My lord the king may take whatever he wants<sup>g</sup> and offer it. Here are the oxen for a burnt offering and the threshing sledges and ox yokes for the wood. <sup>23</sup> Your Majesty, Araunah gives everything here to the king." Then he said to the king, "May the LORD your God accept you."

<sup>24</sup> The king answered Araunah, "No, I insist on buying it from you for a price, for I will not offer to the LORD my God burnt offerings that cost me nothing." David bought the threshing floor and the oxen for twenty ounces<sup>h</sup> of silver. <sup>25</sup> He built an altar to the LORD there and offered burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then the LORD was receptive to prayer for the land, and the plague on Israel ended.

<sup>a</sup> 24:6 LXX; MT reads of *Tahtim-hodshi*; Hb obscure <sup>b</sup> 24:9 Lit *men of valor drawing the sword* <sup>c</sup> 24:13 LXX; MT reads *seven*; 1Ch 21:12 <sup>d</sup> 24:13 Lit *Now, know and see* <sup>e</sup> 24:16 = Ornan in 1Ch 21:15–28; 2Ch 3:1 <sup>f</sup> 24:17 LXX reads *shepherd* <sup>g</sup> 24:22 Lit *take what is good in his eyes* <sup>h</sup> 24:24 Lit *50 shekels*