

CHAPTER

4

Israel Becomes a People

Exodus and Wilderness

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Timeline

- 1500 B.C.E. Beginning of the Late Bronze Age
- 1305 B.C.E. Beginning of the reign of Pharaoh Seti
- 1290 B.C.E. Beginning of the reign of Ramses II
- 1280 B.C.E. Possible date of the Exodus from Egypt
- 1250 B.C.E. Frequent guess for date of Israelite entrance into the Promised Land
- 1224 B.C.E. Mernerptah's invasion of Palestine
- 1200 B.C.E. Beginning of the Iron Age

Chapter Outline

- I. The Book of Israel's Beginnings
- II. Moses: Birth and Wilderness Years
- III. Moses: The Struggle with the Pharaoh
- IV. The Exodus Event
- V. Sinai and the Giving of the Law
- VI. After Mount Sinai
- VII. Themes in the Pentateuch

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

This chapter covers a vast amount of biblical material: the books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy. What holds all of this material together is the gigantic figure of Moses, who is born in Exodus 2 and dies in Deuteronomy 34. The first part of the book of Exodus will tell the story of the departure of the Israelites from Egypt. After this, the forging of the Israelites as a people appears in four movements that alternate in form and content. Exodus 14–18 will tell the initial story of the Israelites in the wilderness, leading up to their arrival at Mount Sinai. A large, diverse collection of legal material then fills the vast majority of Exodus 19 through Numbers 9 (including the entire book of Leviticus). A second collection of wilderness narratives is found in Numbers 10–36, with smaller pieces of legal material within it. Finally, most of the book of Deuteronomy contains legal material presented by Moses to the Israelites in Moab as they wait to enter the Promised Land. Thus, the whole story presents an alternating pattern: wilderness–law–wilderness–law. This pattern highlights the contrast between the threat of death and disorder and the promise of life and order contained in Mosaic law.



The Literary Structure of Exodus

The book of Exodus, because of its varied and composite nature, does not have an easily discernible overall design. Many attempts to determine a structure for the book of Exodus have focused upon place and movement. The book would then fall into sections such as

1:1–12:36	The Israelites in Egypt
12:37–18:27	The Israelites in the Wilderness
19:1–40:30	The Israelites at Sinai

On the other hand, based upon literary form, Exodus falls roughly into two halves: the story of the departure from Egypt (1–18) and the reception of the law at Mount Sinai (19–40). The situation is more complex than either of these simple outlines, though. There is legal material in the first half of the book, and there is narrative material in the second half. The relationship between the book of Exodus and the book of Leviticus, which follows it, also complicates the issue. There is a strong sense of continuity between the second half of Exodus and Leviticus, just as there is continuity between Genesis and the first half of Exodus. Thus, this second book of the Bible tends to get pulled apart from both ends. If there is a sense of unity and literary design to the book, then the feeling of movement and the mixture of literary forms indicate that it should probably be based upon transitions and points of connection. The structure proposed here is less certain and less defined than that proposed earlier for the book of Genesis, but it may point to a way to view the book of Exodus as a whole.

Rather than understanding the beginning of the legal material in Exodus as a break or division, it may be more helpful to view it as a transitional center. The giving of the Ten Commandments in 20:1–21 may function as a pivotal point in the story. Until the end of chapter 19, the people of Israel are moving toward God with Moses in the lead (19:17). The experience of receiving the Ten Commandments convinces the people that they want no part in direct contact with God, but want Moses to act as an intermediary (20:18–21). The stories of the first half of the book of Exodus (slavery, calling of Moses, plagues, wilderness travels) are centered on the Passover legislation, in which Moses receives instructions from God and passes them on to the people (12:1–27). Everything operates according to plan, and God liberates the Israelites. The legal material in the second half of the book is centered on the golden calf episode in chapters 32 to 34. This set of stories illustrates the danger of

not following proper procedures. Implements of worship are produced without instructions from Moses, and disaster follows. The two halves of the book thus operate as mirror images of one another and establish a pattern of law and narrative functioning together for the rest of the Torah. The giving of the Ten Commandments is a story about giving and receiving law that works out the way in which it should be done. It turns out that the Exodus story solves a major problem for those in Israel who wished to publish a body of laws. The story operates as an ideal vehicle for presenting the legal material, and it provides its main character, Moses, to be the ideal teacher of the law.

THE BOOK OF ISRAEL'S BEGINNINGS

In the Hebrew Bible, Exodus is called *w'elah sh'mot*, “these are the names,” referring to the twelve sons of Jacob. It also has been called “the book of the departure from Egypt,” by the LXX, or Septuagint, from which our title *Exodus* is derived.

Exodus begins Israel's story with Moses, his preparation for and elevation to the leadership of his people (by the LORD's hand) and the Exodus (1:1–12:36). It continues with the wilderness experiences (12:37–18:27), and it ends with the giving of the Law at Sinai, including the Covenant Code and the story of the completion of the tabernacle (18:28–40:38).¹

The Importance of the Exodus Story

What the Fourth of July is to the citizens of the United States, Bastille Day is to the French, and the Magna Carta is to the English, the Exodus was to the Israelites. The Israelite writers have mentioned the Exodus more than any other event in their history. In the book of Psalms, for instance, the Exodus theme is sounded again and again. A good example is Psalm 105. After recounting the plagues, the psalmist says:

Then he brought Israel out with silver and gold,
 and there was no one among their tribes who stumbled.
 Egypt was glad when they departed,
 for the dread of them had fallen upon it.
 He spread a cloud for a covering,
 and fire to give light by night.
 They asked, and he brought quails,
 and gave them food from heaven in abundance.
 He opened the rock, and the water gushed out;
 it flowed through the desert like a river.
 For he remembered his holy promise,
 and Abraham, his servant.

The Nature of the Exodus and the Exodus Materials

The picture that emerges from a superficial reading of the narrative portions of the books of Exodus and Numbers gives the familiar outline of the Exodus as most people know it—the sojourn in Egypt; the birth and preparation of Moses; the Exodus, with its dramatic delivery of the Israelites at the Red Sea; the wilderness wanderings and the rebellious murmurings of the people; the giving of the Law at Sinai; and the subsequent experiences of the people in the years before the invasion of Palestine.

The picture given, however, is the simplified version of a much more complicated process. None of my own ancestors came to America prior to the American Revolution. Yet, I, like most Americans, speak of our “founding fathers” as if I actually had an ancestor among the early settlers at Jamestown or Plymouth. Likewise, later Israelites, and even present-day Jews, speak as though they are all direct descendants of the people Moses led out of Egypt. Yet, as Joshua 24:14–28 indicates, what became Israel actually was a diverse group, composed of people of a Semitic background as well as non-Semites, including people of the land who never had been in Egypt. This is supported by a careful reading of the book of Exodus, which shows how various sources have been brought together to tell what the LORD had done for Israel. Moses is the major human character in the Exodus narratives, but they are designed not to glorify Moses, but rather to glorify the LORD, the God of Israel. It was the LORD of history and the master of the created order who brought Israel out of Egypt. The narration of the Exodus events was a central theme in the worship of Israel, and no word of praise was too elaborate to describe what the LORD did in bringing Israel from Egyptian slavery.²

MOSES: BIRTH AND WILDERNESS YEARS

Changed Times and Changed Circumstances (Exod. 1)

Joseph could not live forever, nor could one expect the Hyksos rulers to dominate Egypt forever. Joseph died, and the Hyksos were overthrown. As native Egyptians regained control of their government, the circumstances of the Hebrews changed. They had been settled in northeastern Egypt, east of the delta, where the Nile broke up into a number of branches, like the fingers on a hand. The area known as Goshen was suitable for the grazing of the sheep and cattle of the tent-dwelling Hebrews.

Over time, the original seventy persons in the family of Jacob prospered and their numbers expanded. This alarmed the rulers of Egypt, who, in typical political exaggeration, said that the people of Israel were “too many and too mighty for us” (1:9). This was their justification for enslaving the Hebrews to build projects at the cities of Pithom and Ramses (1:11). It is not clear how the Pharaoh and the Egyptians thought that enslaving the Israelites would limit their population growth. The failure of such a plan is indicated by two additional attempts to control their population. The first of these plans fails when the midwives, Shiphrah and Puah, refuse to help the Pharaoh by killing all of the Hebrew male children at the time of their birth. The effects of the second plan, commanding the Egyptian people to throw all Hebrew baby boys into the Nile, are never described, but this ploy sets the stage for the dramatic events in the next chapter.

Moses’ Early Life³

It is a great irony that Moses will eventually rise up and defeat Egypt, for he is “thrown into the Nile,” just as the Pharaoh commanded, at the end of the first chapter. It is also the Pharaoh’s own daughter who saves Moses. The second chapter of Exodus moves through the life of Moses in rapid fashion. One of the problems it must solve is that of the Egyptian identity Moses has acquired in the story. By the end of this chapter, though, Moses has fled from danger in his own family, traveled through the wilderness, met his wife by a well, become the caretaker of his father-in-law’s sheep, and had a son. He has shed the Egyptian identity and begun to look quite a lot like an Israelite, specifically like Jacob.

Moses’ future identity as the liberator of Israel is foreshadowed in this chapter by the story in which he kills an Egyptian who is beating a Hebrew slave. This story raises some difficult moral

Miriam

The sister of Moses receives only occasional attention in the Exodus and wilderness stories. When her name is first mentioned in Exodus 15:20, she is not identified as the sister of Moses but rather as the sister of **Aaron**. It is commonly assumed that Miriam is the sister who, in Exodus 2:1–11, makes sure that Moses ends up taken care of by Pharaoh’s daughter, but her name is never provided in that story. It is not until a genealogical notice in Numbers 26:59 that **Miriam** is specifically identified by name as the sister of Moses. The Exodus and wilderness narratives provide only occasional glimpses of this character in Exodus 15:20–21. She is portrayed singing in celebration of the defeat of the Egyptians and is described as a “prophet.” The words of her brief song have already been absorbed, however, into the longer Song of the Sea, sung by Moses in 15:1–18.



The next time Miriam appears is in the strange story in Numbers 12 in which she and Aaron complain about Moses’ marriage to a Cushite woman. It is not clear why they object to this marriage. The claim made by Miriam and Aaron that God had also spoken through them likely confirms the earlier identification of Miriam as a prophet. Nevertheless, God is angered by their opposition to Moses and strikes Miriam with leprosy. Curiously, Aaron is not punished in any way here. Aaron, of course, is the High Priest, and a High Priest with leprosy would be a tremendous problem. Aaron, however, does plead for the life of Miriam. As a result, her leprosy is limited to a seven-day period and her life is spared.

The next mention of Miriam is a brief notice of her death in Leviticus 20:1. Later remembrances of Miriam are split in their view of her. In Deuteronomy 24:9 her leprosy is used as a threat against potential disobedience by the Israelites. In Micah 6:4 she is listed, along with Moses and Aaron, as a leader sent by God to Israel. It seems likely that the role of Miriam may have been significant, but it has been overshadowed in Israelite tradition by the gigantic figure of Moses.

issues regarding Moses, but the person Moses is coming to resemble, Jacob, was also of questionable moral character. It is difficult to miss the significant role that female characters play in making the career of this great liberator possible. He would not have survived were it not for the actions of his mother, who hid him; his sister, who watched over him; and the Pharaoh’s daughter, who took him from the water. The sister is not named here, but she will be identified later as Miriam, a woman with whom Moses has a complicated relationship (see Exodus 15 and Numbers 12).⁴

The birth story of Moses invites some comparison with the birth stories of other ancient heroes, particularly an Akkadian king named Sargon, who lived about 1000 years earlier. The legend of Sargon includes a story in which he was saved from danger as an infant by a mother who hid him in a basket in a river. Moses’ story is something of a reversal of Sargon’s, who was royal offspring endangered by internal conflict and was raised as a commoner after he was rescued from the river.⁵

Exodus 2 ends the way Exodus 1 begins, with the death of a pharaoh. Still, the Israelites are suffering in slavery, but God hears their cries and “remembers his covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

The Call of Moses (Exod. 3:1–4:17)

Moses was not destined to be a shepherd all his life. His solitary job through the years had given him knowledge of the desert that was to be invaluable in the work of leading the people

from Egypt. It was not conscious preparation on Moses' part. Rather, for the storyteller, it was the providence of God working to prepare the man for the work he was to do.

Those years of preparation came to an end on a mountain called Horeb in one tradition (3:1) and Sinai in another (19:11). While pasturing his flocks, Moses suddenly became aware of a bush that was aflame, seemingly without burning up. As he went closer, he became aware of a "presence." Out of this experience came Moses' call to lead the people out of Egypt. This call experience is significant because it was said to be the time when God revealed his personal name to Moses. Of the two major terms used by Israel to speak of God, *Elohim* was what one might call the general or, to use a common analogy, the "family," name for God. It was not only used to refer to the one God, but also might be used to refer to any god or gods (3:1–5).

The name **YHWH** seems to be related to God's statement 'eyeh 'eyeh (translated I AM WHO I AM in the New Revised Standard Version) in Exodus 3:14. This name, first revealed to Moses on the mountain, was the personal name of God. For example, there might be a large family of Fafoofniks, but only one Fafoofnik with the personal name Abercrombie. Thus, there were many *Elohim*s, but only one YHWH.

The proper pronunciation and meaning of the name YHWH is subject to much debate because it ceased to be pronounced sometime after the Babylonian Exile. It is believed, however, that it was pronounced *Yahweh*. In Jewish religious services today, the tetra-grammaton, YHWH, is not pronounced, because to pronounce it wrongly would defile the holiness of God. A substitute word, *Adonai* (translated LORD), is used. This practice of using LORD for YHWH is followed in this textbook. Its meaning is variously interpreted: I AM WHO I AM, I WILL BE WHO I WILL BE, I CAUSE TO BE WHAT IS. Each translation has strong arguments in its favor.

Moses' Objection

When God called Moses, Moses was told that this was the God of the patriarchs (3:6). Moses was awestruck, but he was not so awed that he could not argue, especially when the LORD said, "I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the sons of Israel, out of Egypt." Moses immediately began to make excuses: (1) The excuse: "Who am I that I should go?" (3:11); the answer: "You will have the LORD's presence with you, and He will bring the people to this mountain (3:12); (2) the excuse: "Who are you that you are sending me?" (3:13); the answer: "You shall say, 'YHWH {the LORD}, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob has sent me'" (3:14–22); (3) the excuse: "But they will not believe me" (4:1); the answer: "I will give you signs—a rod changed to a snake, a leprous hand healed" (4:2–9); (4) the final excuse: "LORD, I cannot talk!" (4:10); the answer: "I will give you your eloquent brother **Aaron** to be your spokesman" (4:14–17).

On the Road to Egypt (Exod. 4:18–31)

His excuses in tatters by the divine answers, Moses set out for Egypt, with the blessing of Jethro. The story of the return to Egypt contains a strange incident (4:24–26), somewhat like Jacob's wrestling match in Genesis 32. At a lodging place in the wilderness, it is said that the LORD attempted to kill Moses. He was saved when Zipporah, his wife, **circumcised** their son and touched Moses with the bloody foreskin, saying, "Truly, you are a bridegroom of blood to me!" Although the meaning of this ancient story is unclear, it probably indicated that Moses was not properly circumcised. Furthermore, in much of the Old Testament, the LORD is looked upon as the cause of everything. This is reflected in the saying of the prophet Amos: "Can disaster befall the city, unless the LORD has done it?" (Amos 3:8). The idea of an evil force in the world outside of God's control that caused bad things to happen did not come into prominence until the post-Exilic

period of Israel's history. The Hebrews did believe in demons, but the demons were under divine control. This may reflect the idea of a demonic attack on Moses. Why it is included here is uncertain.⁶

Aaron, hearing that Moses was returning to Egypt, met him on the way. Moses briefed him on what they were to do. As soon as the brothers arrived in Egypt, Aaron, in turn, told the Hebrews what was to happen.

MOSES: THE STRUGGLE WITH THE PHARAOH

The Struggle Begins: Moses and Aaron before the Pharaoh (Exod. 5:1–6:1)

The task before Moses and Aaron was not an easy one. As an excuse to get the people out of Egypt, they asked the Pharaoh to let the people take a three-day journey into the wilderness to worship. The Pharaoh's reaction was an outright rejection of the request and an increase in the workload on the Hebrews (5:1–9). They, in turn, vented their anger on Moses and Aaron, calling down the LORD's judgment upon them (5:20–21). Moses complained to the LORD, who assured him that there would soon be action.⁷

Moses' Call, the Covenant, and a Genealogy (Exod. 6:2–7:7)

Ancient covenants were of at least two types: (1) The *suzerainty treaty* was an agreement or contract between a superior party and an inferior party. The superior party (in this case, God) set forth the terms of the agreement, because he had the power to do so. The superior party could obligate himself only if he chose to do so; the inferior party had no choice. Divine mercy and honor obligated God to meet the terms set forth. (2) The *parity treaty* was an agreement between equals in which both parties contributed to the agreement and both bore equal obligations to see that it was preserved.⁸

Another version of the call of Moses is given here, with a strong emphasis on the suzerainty covenant made with the patriarchs.

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob knew God as *El Shaddai* (God Almighty) and not as YHWH (the LORD) (6:2–3). The people were to be reminded of the earlier covenant to assure them that God would (1) deliver them from Egypt, (2) make them God's people, (3) be their God, and (4) give them their own land. As usual, when Moses told the people, they ignored him. When he complained to God, he was told to keep telling them (6:9–13).

This priestly version of the call of Moses and Aaron includes a genealogy to establish their credentials. Perhaps of greater significance here is the statement in 7:1 concerning Aaron's role in relation to Moses. In the account of Moses' call in 3:1–4:17, Moses had complained of his speech problems. Here, Moses voices the same complaint (6:30) and is told, "See, I have made you like God to Pharaoh, and your brother Aaron shall be your prophet" (7:1). This word *prophet* was the same term used to describe the great prophets of Israel. Just as Aaron spoke for Moses, the prophets spoke for God.

The Plagues (Exod. 7:8–11:10)

The stage was set for the struggle to free the Hebrews. It was not just a struggle between human powers; rather, it was a struggle between the LORD and the gods of Egypt in the person of their earthly representative, the divine Pharaoh. Because the gods of Egypt were associated with the Nile, Moses chose to challenge them on their home court, so to speak.

After an opening round in which the Egyptian magicians duplicated the actions of Moses and Aaron (the use of serpent magic, the reddening of the Nile, and the **plague** of the frogs), the Egyptian magicians surrendered, saying, “This is the finger of God” (8:19). From that point on, the plagues increased in intensity until the climax was reached with the death of the Egyptian firstborn and the escape from Egypt.

The number of plagues varies according to the source. Psalms 78:43–51 lists eight plagues, a number believed to be based on an old epic source (or J, according to the Documentary Hypothesis) and emphasizes the role of Moses in Exodus. Psalm 105:27–36 seemingly is based on the priestly tradition that magnifies Aaron’s role. The book of Exodus shows evidence of both traditions.⁹

The plagues were evidence for later Israel that the LORD had been at work on their behalf, using divine power over nature to convince the Pharaoh that he must free them from bondage. Israel’s later retelling of the events did not have as its primary purpose recording history for twentieth-century readers, but rather “as a celebration of God’s great victory whereby he is glorified and acknowledged as sole sovereign and power.”¹⁰ This is not to deny that the accounts of the plagues grew out of actual events, but rather that Israel was more concerned about praising God than it was about writing history.

THE PLAGUES AS MIRACLE. *Miracle* is a term often used in religious circles. A rather common element in many definitions of *miracle* is that it is something that cannot be explained by ordinary means. A believer in God would say that it is evidence of God’s power. But any definition of the miraculous that requires that the happening must not be explainable in human terms means that, once it can be explained, it will no longer be a miracle. Our great-great-grandfathers would say that television is a miracle, but to us it is a common, everyday fact of life. We do not look at it as a miracle. One’s inability to explain an event, therefore, is not a reliable standard for judging whether or not it is miraculous.

All definitions of *miracle* start with the basic idea that it is a religious interpretation of an event. If this is true, then whether an event is miraculous depends, to a certain extent, on the person who views that event. It has been illustrated in this fashion: A bear was chasing a man through Yellowstone Park. The man ran across the site of the Old Faithful geyser, which erupts every sixty minutes or so. The bear, close behind, crossed the geyser the split second it erupted, throwing him high into the air and killing him. To the onlookers, it was a spectacular event; to the man, it was a miracle; to the bear, it was a catastrophe.¹¹

To develop a workable definition of *miracle*, it is necessary to examine the Israelite view of God’s relationship to the world. According to the Creation story in Genesis 1–2, the world was created through God’s power. It is God’s world, and He is active in it, bringing both judgment (as in the case of Sodom and Gomorrah) and blessing (the promise to Abraham). Nothing happens in the world except as God wills it to happen. To the Israelites, there was no such thing as a natural event. God was in everything—whether it was a storm, a drought, or a baby’s birth. In short, the biblical writers—especially the Old Testament writers—did not make the distinction between natural and supernatural that we make.

The biblical writers used miracles to “call attention to something else which was going on that was even more important than the miracle.” For example, the importance of the burning bush (Exodus 3:2–5) was that it directed Moses’ attention to God rather than to the bush itself.¹²

In this light, the plagues were viewed by the Israelites as the activity of God because God is active in everything. Two things characterized them as miraculous for Israel: (1) Moses predicted them, and (2) their timing was right for Israel’s needs. Had these same events happened at a

different time or under different circumstances, Israel might well have interpreted them in an entirely different light. A miracle, then, could be defined as any event that, when seen through the eyes of faith, strengthens the faith of the believer.

THE PHARAOH'S COMPROMISE OFFER AND THE EIGHTH AND NINTH PLAGUES (EXOD. 10:1–11:10). The Pharaoh's advisers urged him to give in to the demands of Moses and Aaron, but the proud ruler did not want to admit complete defeat. Calling the Hebrew leaders in, he offered a series of compromises. He asked Moses who was to go. Moses replied that all of their families and flocks had to go. The Pharaoh offered his first compromise: "Go, but take only the men."

The LORD's reply through Moses was a plague of locusts. These insects, a variety of grasshopper, have been a plague of Africa and the Eastern countries throughout recorded history. Their devastation is chillingly described by the prophet Joel (1:4, 7, 10):

What the cutting locust left,
the swarming locust has eaten.
What the swarming locust left,
the hopping locust has eaten.
What the hopping locust left,
the destroying locust has eaten.
It (the locust) has laid waste my vines,
and splintered my fig trees;
it has stripped off their bark and thrown it down;
their branches have turned white.
The fields are devastated,
the ground mourns;
for the grain is destroyed,
the wine dries up,
the oil fails.

The locusts were blown into the land by a strong east wind, the dread *sirocco*, which blew in from the Sinai Desert. Another wind, called a "strong sea breeze" by the Hebrew text and thus a north wind in Egypt, caused the plague to be lifted when Moses prayed (10:18–20). But when the pressure let up, the Pharaoh was back to his old ways.

The ninth plague (10:21–29), "a darkness that can be felt" (10:21), was in some ways the most disturbing of all. The probable cause was the blinding sandstorms that come with the March winds from the Sahara. The darkness blotted out the sun, or Amun Re, the chief deity among the Egyptian gods. Amun Re's daily march across the heavens was the greatest constant in Egyptian life and as such was a symbol of life itself. For the LORD to prevent Amun Re from rising for three days was a clear demonstration that the LORD was more powerful than Amun Re.

Because the pharaohs also were thought to be divine, the statement "the LORD hardened Pharaoh's heart" also had a religious connotation. One of the three words translated as *hardened* (*kaved*, 10:1) literally means "to make heavy." The Egyptian notion of the final judgment was that one's heart was weighed on a balance with a feather as a counterweight. If one's heart was pure, there was a balance and the person gained eternal life. If, however, one's heart outweighed the feather, the person was devoured by the goddess Amenit. To say that the Pharaoh had a hard (heavy) heart meant that he was no deity. Instead, he was no more than an ordinary mortal whose heavy heart would lead to his destruction at the hands of the LORD of all creation.¹³



The Plagues as Attack Against Egyptian Deities

Plague	Deity or Deities Against Whom the Plague Was Directed
1. Nile turned to blood	Khnum—creator of water and life; or Hapi—the Nile God; or Osiris—the Nile was his bloodstream
2. Frogs	Heket—goddess of childbirth, whose symbol was the frog
3. Lice	No known deity
4. Flies	No known deity
5. Pestilence in cattle	Hathor—mother and sky goddess, whose symbol was the cow; or Apis—the bull god
6. Boils	No known deity
7. Hail	Seth—god of wind and storms
8. Locusts	Isis—goddess of life; or Min—goddess of fertility and vegetation
9. Darkness	The sun deities, Amun-Re, Atum, or Horus
10. Death of the firstborn	Osiris—judge of the dead and patron deity of the Pharaoh



Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron to deal with them again. This time he offered to let them take their families, but they had to leave their herds. Moses quickly rejected any compromise: “Not a hoof shall be left behind,” he declared (10:24–25). After all, one could not have a sacrifice without a victim. With that rejection, Moses was ordered from the presence of the Pharaoh.

THE FINAL PLAGUE: THE DEATH OF THE FIRSTBORN (EXOD. 11:1–10, 12:29–32). Although timing was the significant factor in the first nine plagues, causing them to be wonders in the eyes of the Hebrews, both the timing and the selective nature of the tenth plague made it the climactic event for Israel. The firstborn son was the most important child, especially from a practical standpoint. This was illustrated by Jacob’s devious actions designed to secure the rights of the firstborn for himself. To lose the firstborn was (and still is) a devastating psychological blow to a family, and was even more so in ancient days if the firstborn was a son. For the firstborn son of the Pharaoh, who considered himself to be divine, this would be the crowning blow in the struggle between the LORD and the gods of Egypt.

THE MEANING OF THE PLAGUES. How are the plagues to be interpreted? A basic assumption is that whatever one’s understanding of what actually happened and how it happened, for Israel the plagues were a manifestation of the power of God, the mighty act that the LORD had done in Egypt (Exod. 14:31). Beyond that basic assumption, two interpretations have been proposed: (1) that they were attacks against the deities of Egypt (Num. 33:4) and (2) that they were meant to teach Israel that the God of Creation was the God who had delivered them from Egypt. The latter interpretation is suggested by the Sabbath commandment as found in Deuteronomy 5:15.

This way of interpreting the plagues views them as a reversal of Creation intended to make Israel aware of God’s power. He who had brought order out of chaos in Creation had now turned the orderly life of Egypt back to chaos. The climactic act was the drowning of the Egyptian army in the waters of chaos at the Red Sea.¹⁴



FIGURE 4-1 “The Pharaoh said to (Moses), ‘Get away from me . . . do not see my face again’” (Exod. 10:28). This statue is a representation of Ramses II, believed to be the Pharaoh of the Exodus.

THE EXODUS EVENT

Passover and Departure

Exodus 12–13 tell the story of the Israelite departure from Egypt and are dominated by the *Passover* tradition. Instructions for both the immediate Passover event, which will protect the Israelites from the effect of the final plague, and the perpetual observation of Passover, which will provide for a remembrance of the event, are given by God to Moses and Aaron in 12:1–21. Moses then passes on a much briefer set of instructions to the Israelite elders in 12:1–27, and the Israelite performance of the ritual is reported very briefly in 12:28. After telling the story of the departure from Egypt, the narrator returns, in 12:43–13:16, to instructions about the observation of Passover, interwoven with instructions for the consecration of the Israelite firstborn, those whose lives were spared by the first observance of **Passover**. The escape from Egypt and Passover become inseparable ideas, and the remainder of the Old Testament will continue to link them together.

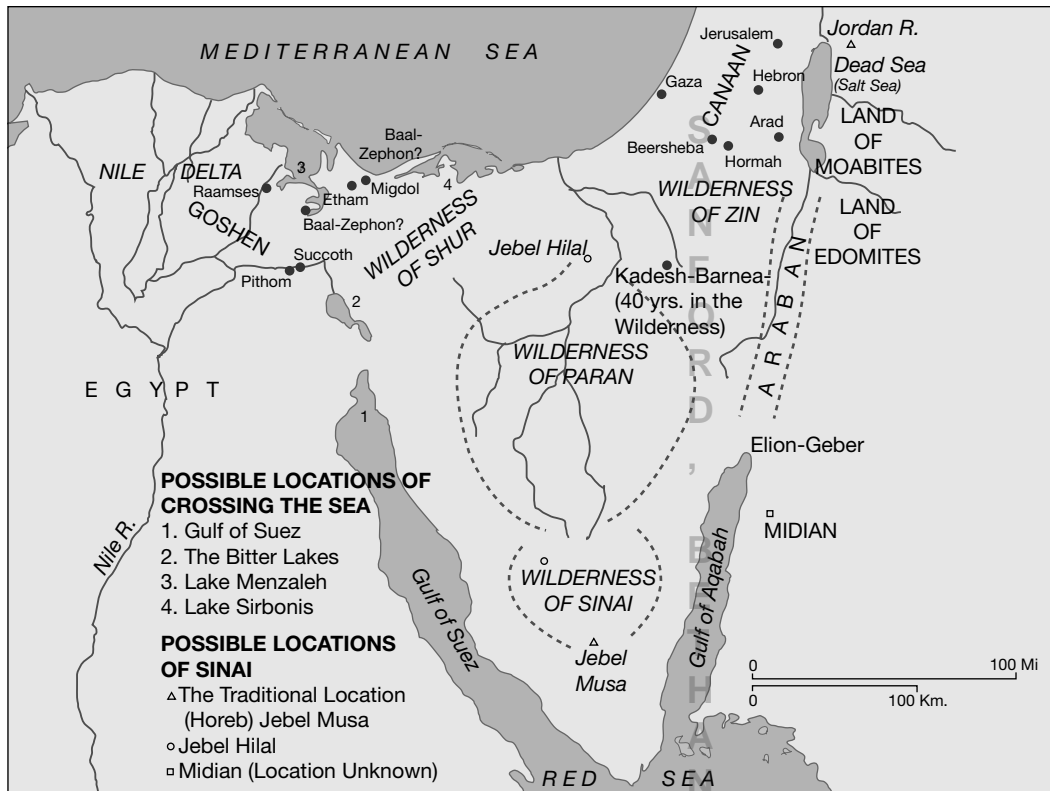


FIGURE 4-2 The Exodus and Sinai.

The Initial Wilderness Period

CONFRONTATION AT THE RED SEA (EXOD. 14–15:21). Exodus 14 and 15:1–21 provide a rare opportunity within the Old Testament. These two passages provide a narrative account of the crossing of the Red Sea, followed by a poem that sings about the same event. The only other instance like this occurs in Judges 4–5, which provide a narrative and a poetic account of an Israelite battle. The narrative account in Exodus 14 provides more of the background for the story, reporting Pharaoh's change of heart about letting the Israelites go. It also frames the event as the first in a series of *complaint* stories, in which the Israelites face hardship and accuse Moses of having led them into the wilderness to die. The familiar parts of the story are also present, including the parting of the water, the Israelites crossing the sea on dry land, and the drowning of the Egyptian army. The song in Exodus 15 includes these familiar components, using significantly different language, and adds a celebration of the effect this great event will have on the occupants of the Promised Land, whom the Israelites will have to face in future battles. The opening line in the Song of the Sea (15:1–18) is revealed in 15:20–21 to be taken from a briefer Song of Miriam, sung by Moses' sister.

TROUBLE ON THE WAY (EXOD. 15:22–17:7). The Sinai Desert very quickly put to the test the leadership skills of Moses. Egypt, even with its slavery, did provide at least a minimum of food

and plenty of water to drink. In contrast, the Sinai made Egypt look like the Garden of Eden. First, the stagnant pools of water the Israelites found at Marah caused complaint. Moses threw the bark or leaves of a desert shrub into the water to make it drinkable (15:22–26). Soon they found an oasis at Elim that had plenty of fresh water (15:27).

The next complaint was about food. The supplies they brought from Egypt began to run low, and the complaints increased (16:1–12). Again the LORD, through nature, met the needs of the people with (1) manna and (2) quail. Manna was the secretion of a tiny scale insect, still eaten today by the Bedouin. Quail, similar to the American bird, often fall exhausted in the northern Sinai after migratory flights over the Mediterranean. They can be captured easily by hand during this time (16:13–36).

Water again became a problem. Moses' experience as a desert shepherd once more stood him in good stead, for he found a water-bearing rock that satisfied the thirst of the people (17:1–7).

THE AMALEKITE RAID (EXOD. 17:8–16). An even greater danger lay ahead. At Rephedim, the people were attacked by the Amalekites, a fierce tribe of desert dwellers. The task of leading the people to battle was given to Joshua, the son of Nun, who one day would become the leader. While Moses held up his rod, the battle favored the Israelites; but when his arms fell down, the tide of the battle changed. The effect of the rod was psychological, because it reminded the people how the LORD had defeated the Pharaoh, who was much more powerful than the Amalekites (17:8–16). The Israelites won the battle, and Moses found a general.

A FATHER-IN-LAW'S ADVICE (EXOD. 18:17–27). The people came at last to Sinai. Soon afterward, Moses' family—accompanied by his father-in-law, Jethro—joined him there. It did not take the older man long to see that Moses was overworking himself, trying to do everything for the people. Calling Moses aside, Jethro advised him to set up a system whereby the people would be divided into groups of 10, 50, 100, and 1000. A leader would be responsible for handling all problems that arose in his group. If he could not handle them, he would consult the leader of the larger unit of which his smaller group was a part. That way, only the most pressing problems would reach Moses. This allowed Moses to devote his time to the more important work of interceding with God for the people and teaching them God's laws (18:17–27).

This tradition of the influence of Jethro on Moses may be evidence of other influences. Some have suggested that even the personal name for God (YHWH) may have originated with Jethro's clan. At present, however, there is no conclusive proof of that.

The Exodus and History

The relationship between the events recorded in the book of Exodus and a contemporary understanding of *history* has been a subject of intense debate. The question could be posed this way: If someone wished to write a complete history of the world, which was as objective as possible, in what way would the events of the Exodus be included? These events could not be entirely ignored, because there is no dispute that a group of people called the Israelites formed themselves into a small nation that eventually had a massive impact on Western civilization, and this set of stories in the book of Exodus played an essential role in that group's understanding of itself and its place in the world. The difficulty arises when examining the events themselves, because there is no direct evidence outside of the Bible that any of this occurred, and the events as described seem highly unlikely. The huge array of questions may be organized under the categories of Who?, When?, and Where?

Perhaps the center of the problem is the traditional understanding of the number of people involved. Exodus 12:37 reports that about 600,000 adult men left Egypt and took part in the

Exodus. A number of this magnitude is also confirmed by the census reports in Numbers 1. Multiplying this number conservatively, to include women and children, would produce a total number of at least 2 million people. We live in a world with a population exceeding 6 billion people, in which perhaps 200 metropolitan areas have populations at least this large, so this may not immediately strike the modern reader as too large a number. Common estimates of the population of the entire world at the time these events would have occurred, however, are 50 million or less. This would mean that the Exodus included 4 or 5 percent of the world's entire population. Add to this the logistical problems of moving such a massive number of people through the wilderness for an extended period of time and this traditional number begins to appear far beyond the realm of possibility. Even many of the scenes in the biblical story—for example, Moses gathering the entire group for a proclamation of the Sabbath regulations in Exodus 35:1–2—cannot be imagined with such a large group. Some interpreters have used the identification of two midwives in Exodus 1:15 to estimate the size of the Israelite population in Egypt. How large a population could two midwives reasonably serve? Even if they both delivered one baby every day, this would only suffice for a population in the tens of thousands, but such calculations ignore many problems. These two midwives could have had responsibilities besides delivering Hebrew children, so the population could have been smaller than this. There could have been many more midwives, but the story only names two of them for the sake of economy or some other reason; thus, the population could have been larger. The incidental naming of two midwives in this kind of narrative is simply not the kind of datum that can be reliably used to make judgments about the size of an ancient population. Perhaps the simplest solution involves the observation that the Bible has a tendency to magnify numbers by adding zeroes. For example, II Chronicles 7:4–5 reports that at the dedication of the temple in Jerusalem, Solomon sacrificed 142,000 animals, an impossibly large number. Whatever may have happened, it certainly involved a significantly smaller number of people than the traditional 2 million, but would a smaller number really make the events less significant or even less miraculous?

There is no direct evidence, outside the Bible, of Israelites living and working as slaves in Egypt during the second millennium B.C.E., but this is one place where some indirect evidence does exist. There are various kinds of evidence among Egyptian records and artifacts that persons like the family of Jacob traveled to Egypt to escape famines and that slaves were used in Egypt to perform various tasks related to construction.¹⁵ Of course, this only proves that a story like the one found in Exodus is plausible, not that this one happened as recorded.

This situation regarding the “Who?” of the Exodus leads to the attempt to place a possible date on such events. Again, evidence outside the Bible is of limited help and the Bible itself provides little assistance, because all of its chronology is only relative, even if taken literally. The Bible, for example, offers two different lengths of time for the period of bondage in Egypt, 400 years in Genesis 15:13 and 430 years in Exodus 12:40, but it has no way of providing a fixed date for the beginning or end of this period. I Kings does attach the Exodus to another event by claiming that Solomon began building the temple 480 years after the Israelites left Egypt. Still, it is not possible to fix an absolute date on any part of Solomon's reign, and 480, which is 12×40 , looks suspiciously like a symbolic number rather than a precise arithmetic value. Egyptian records do not help much, because the Bible does not name any of the Pharaohs involved in the Exodus story. The traditional assumption has been that the Pharaoh of the Exodus story was named Ramses, because that is the name of one of the cities named in Exodus 1:11. There was more than one Pharaoh with this name in Egypt, but the most common assumption is that the Pharaoh in the Exodus story was Ramses II, who ruled Egypt in the thirteenth century. Although such a date seems reasonable within the biblical chronology, this guess is still based upon numerous speculations.

The final category of questions involves locations. According to the biblical narrative, the Israelites left Egypt, traveled in the wilderness for forty years, and made significant stops at many places, including the Red Sea (or “Sea of Reeds”), **Mount Sinai**, and Kadesh–Barnea. One would think that such locations would have held great importance in Israelite tradition, but they have been largely forgotten, if they were ever known for certain. The location of Mount Sinai is probably the most significant example. Determining its location is linked to the attempt to determine the route the Israelites might have taken through the wilderness from Egypt to Canaan. Several possible locations for Mount Sinai have been proposed. The most prominent is a mountain in the southern Sinai Peninsula called Jebel Musa. Christian tradition, including the building of a prominent monastery there, connects this site with the Mount Sinai of the biblical story, but such an identification presents at least two major problems. First, the location near the southern tip of the peninsula puts this mountain far away from any reasonable path from Egypt to Canaan. Second, many readers understand the description of the conditions on Mount Sinai in Exodus 19 as volcanic activity, and Jebel Musa was not volcanic during the period of time when the Exodus could have happened. Another possible location for Sinai is a mountain called Jebel Halal in the northern Sinai Peninsula. The location makes more sense, but this is not a very imposing mountain, and it would also not have been volcanic. The nearest volcanic mountain would have been in Midian, a region that Exodus 2–3 associates with Moses, but the location is far to the east of a reasonable route to Canaan, and Israelite tradition has not identified this location with Mount Sinai. Again, this is a category of questions that modern historians cannot answer.

The events of the Exodus are beyond the investigative powers of modern historians for two reasons. First, the kind of evidence that historians typically use to reconstruct past events is too sparse to aid such an attempt in this case. Second, the story itself claims much of its own content to be a miracle, a category that lies outside the boundaries of historical investigation. This part of the biblical text is a good place to observe that questions of faith and literary genre can become seriously entangled. What kind of literature is the book of Exodus? For many modern readers of the Bible, the only kind of literature that can be true is that which reports past events precisely as they happened. For the Bible to be true, a proposition that these readers accept on faith, this story must have happened just as the Bible records it. For other readers, the truth of the story may lie in the impact that it had in unifying the people of ancient Israel around a common tradition. The genre of the book of Exodus may be something other than what we would call history in a modern sense, so how it relates to actual events in the past is of little importance. These readers would contend that God can inspire various kinds of literature and that nobody insists on a literal, historical reading of all the material in a book like Psalms. Both of these positions of faith hold the text to be sacred, although “true” in very different ways. To those for whom the Bible is not a sacred text, the book of Exodus might look very much like the kind of legendary material that many cultures construct to explain their identity and origins; thus, it may be of sociological, anthropological, or literary interest, but neither of historical nor religious value. This is an issue individual readers must decide for themselves, and it involves assumptions about how faith relates to the development of literature that cannot be adequately tested.

SINAI AND THE GIVING OF THE LAW

Israel’s Initial Encounter with God at Sinai (Exod. 19–24)

Moses finally achieved one of his major goals: He brought the people to Sinai. It was there that the constitution of the Israelite people was made and ratified. Through Moses, the people were told, “If you will obey my voice and keep my covenant, you shall be a treasured possession out of

all peoples.” If they met the conditions, they were to be a “priestly kingdom and a holy nation” (19:5–6). To be a holy people meant to be a people set apart for special service for the LORD, as holiness carries with it the idea of separation.

When he came down from the mountain, Moses called the leaders of the people and told them the conditions of the covenant. They agreed to do as the LORD commanded (19:7–8). Then instructions were given for the all-important covenant-making ceremony. Elaborate preparations relating to cleanliness and sexual abstinence had to be made (19:10–11, 14–15). Boundaries were established around the holy mountain so that the people would not come too close. The ancient belief in the power and awesomeness of the Holy was evidenced by the threats of death by stoning to anyone who violated the boundaries around the sacred mountain (19:12–13).

On the great day came thunder and lightning from the cloud-shrouded mountain, accompanied by the loud blast of the *shophar*, a trumpet made of ram’s horn. Descriptions of the appearance of God (theophany) in the setting of the thunderstorm are common in the Old Testament (Judg. 5:4–5; Ps. 18:8–15; 29:3–9). The summons came for Moses to go up the mountain. At the LORD’s command, Moses then descended and brought Aaron back up the mountain with him (19:16–25).

THE TEN WORDS (EXOD. 20:1–17; SEE ALSO DEUT. 5:6–21). As they now stand, the Ten Commandments (known as the *Ten Words* in Judaism) are expanded from the earliest form, which is believed to have consisted of ten concise statements:

1. You shall have no other gods (*elohim*) before me.
2. You shall not make for yourself a graven image.
3. You shall not take the name of the LORD your God in vain.
4. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.



FIGURE 4-3 “On the third new moon after the Israelites had gone out of . . . Egypt . . . they came into the wilderness of Sinai” (Exod. 19:1). Jebel Musa, the traditional site of Mount Sinai, is located in this range of mountains.

5. Honor your father and your mother.
6. You shall not murder.
7. You shall not commit adultery.
8. You shall not steal.
9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.
10. You shall not covet.

As evidence that the Commandments in their longer form represent an expansion, one needs to compare the version found in Deuteronomy 5:6–21 and, more particularly, the Fourth, Fifth, and Tenth Commandments, with the version in Exodus. The Fifth Commandment says:

Exodus 20:12

Honor your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in land that the LORD your God is giving you.

Deuteronomy 5:16

Honor your father and your mother, *as the LORD your God commanded you*, that your days may be long *and that it may go well with you* in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

A more important difference is to be found in the Tenth Commandment:

Exodus 20:17

You shall not covet your neighbor's house; you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

Deuteronomy 5:21

Neither shall you covet your neighbor's *wife*, Neither shall you desire your neighbor's *house or field*, or male or female slave, or ox, or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.

These differences suggest a changing view of the Commandments in their applications to specific situations. The Tenth Commandment, in particular, reflects either a change in the status of women or, possibly, a difference in their status (in a later time) from one section of the country to another.

For Israel, the Ten Commandments were the Constitution, the laying down of the basic principles from which a legal system would develop. A common way of looking at the Commandments sees them as reflecting the two poles of Israel's existence as a people. (1) Commandments 1 to 4 are concerned with Israel's relationship to God: absolute loyalty, imageless worship, reverence for the Name (YHWH), and regular worship. (2) Commandments 5 to 10 deal with the Israelites' relationship to the social order: family solidarity, reverence for life, respect for property, truthfulness in speech, and a proper attitude toward others and their property. No other set of moral principles has been so influential in Western legal systems.

ABSOLUTE LAW AND CASE LAW. The Ten Commandments were also unique in their form. They are stated as absolutes; that is, they allow for no contradictions. This kind of law is known as **apodictic law** and rarely was found in the ancient Near East outside of the Israelite law codes. A second type of law is **casuistic law**, or case law. It, too, was found in Israel but also was common in other law codes. Case law stated a condition and told what the penalty was if the condition existed.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AND COVENANT CEREMONIES. When the covenant ceremony in which Israel accepted the obligations of the Ten Commandments as the basic law of its existence

is compared with covenant ceremonies of other peoples, some interesting parallels appear. Among the Hittites, a fourteenth-century B.C.E. people from Asia Minor, there were suzerainty treaties (covenants involving a stronger and a weaker party) that had six major elements: (1) a prologue identifying the maker of the covenant; (2) a historical record stating why the suzerain or LORD had a right to make the covenant; (3) the conditions of the covenant; (4) the requirement for the preservation and the periodic public reading of the text; (5) a list of the gods who were witnesses to the covenant; and (6) curses and blessings on those who kept and those who neglected the covenant.¹⁶

THE COVENANT AND ISRAELITE LIFE. Two covenants competed for Israel's attention during its history—the Sinai covenant and the Davidic covenant. The latter covenant would not come into existence for another three centuries. Although there might not be universal agreement on what happened at Sinai, most would attest that something of supreme importance for Israel as a people did happen by the persistence of the covenant idea in Israelite life. Israel became the people of the LORD through divine grace, and the LORD became its God—Ruler, Patriarch, Savior, and Judge.

Exodus 20:2

Prologue

“I am the LORD your God.”

Historical record:

“who brought you up out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage.”

Exodus 20:3–17

Stipulations:

The Ten Commandments

Exodus 24:4, 7

Preservation and public readings:

“And Moses wrote down all the words of the Lord. . . . Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, ‘All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.’”

List of gods as witnesses:

These obviously would not appear in light of the First Commandment.

Blessings and curses:

These do not appear in connection with the Ten Commandments, but Deuteronomy 27:11–26 preserves a cursing ceremony, which may have originated in a covenant-renewal festival during which each generation accepted the obligations of the Ten Commandments and the laws that grew out of them.

The covenant was kept alive by a reenactment of the covenant ceremony, at times in a systematic fashion, at other times sporadically. Joshua 24 is an example of what must have happened in such ceremonies. Nehemiah 8 describes the revival of such a ceremony after what appears to have been a long period when no such reenactment had taken place. Perhaps a major stumbling block for the Sinai covenant was that it was supplanted by the Davidic covenant during the period of David's monarchy. Although the two covenants were of a different nature—David's covenant having to do with the continuation of his line on the throne of the kingdom, whereas the Sinai covenant was of a more moral and ethical nature—David's covenant offered a kind of security that did not make moral demands on the people and thus was more readily accepted. Another

problem was the assimilation of a large non-Israelite population into the kingdom as the result of David's conquests. Consequently, a large part of the population neither knew nor cared about Sinai. The Ten Commandments' demand for absolute loyalty to the LORD and the expectation that every Israelite would treat every other follower of the LORD as a family member were lost in the vast changes that took place during that time. An additional factor was the change in Israel's economic circumstances. Society became more stratified with the passing years, with more and more power being concentrated in the hands of fewer and fewer people. As a result, the old family ideal fell by the wayside.

Yet, in spite of the difficulties it faced over the years, the Sinai covenant would not die, but continued to come alive at opportune times in Israel's history. Some even see it as the glue that held Israel together.¹⁷

The Principles Made Practical: The Law Codes

Just as the United States Constitution was the beginning of America's legal system, the Ten Commandments were the beginning of law for Israel. The principles took the form of laws. These laws are found in three major codes, or groups, in the Old Testament: the Covenant Code (Exod. 20:22–23:33), the Deuteronomistic Code (Deut. 5:1–28:68), and the Priestly Code (principally in the book of Leviticus but with some laws in Exodus and Numbers). The narratives present the laws as if all of them were given directly to Moses, but closer examination reveals that they developed over a long period of time. Moses was the lawgiver in the sense that the basic principles from which all the laws of Israel were to come were given through him.

THE COVENANT CODE (EXOD. 20:22–23:33). The **Covenant Code** probably was the oldest Israelite code but not the oldest Near Eastern code. There were a number of older Near Eastern codes, the best known being the Code of Hammurabi, which dates from the nineteenth century B.C.E. There are laws from Hammurabi's Code that are very similar to laws in Israelite codes. Compare, for example, the laws concerning dangerous oxen:

Hammurabi's Code

If a seignior's ox was a gorer and . . . [it was] . . . made . . . known to him that it was a gorer, but he did not pad its horns (or) tie up his ox, and it gored to death a member of the aristocracy, he shall give one-half mina of silver.¹⁸

Covenant Code

If the ox has been accustomed to gore in the past, and the owner has been warned but has not restrained it, and it kills a man or a woman, the ox shall be stoned, and its owner shall be put to death. If a ransom is imposed on the owner then the owner shall pay whatever is imposed for the redemption of the victim's life (Exod. 12:29–30).

The Covenant Code contains laws designed for a society in which agriculture was the major means of earning a living—a condition that did not exist for Israel until it entered the land of Canaan. The Code also contains laws that are classed as civil or criminal laws, but religion was such a basic part of the Israeli lifestyle that religious offenses were subject to criminal penalties. A brief summary of the contents is as follows:

- | | |
|----------|---|
| 20:22–23 | A repetition of the commandment concerning idols |
| 20:24–26 | A demand for only earthen altars or altars of uncut stones, in contrast to the elaborate altars of the Canaanites |
| 21:1–11 | Regulations concerning slaves, both male and female |

21:12–32	Crimes against fellow Israelites and their penalties
21:33–22:17	Laws governing property
22:18–23:9	Miscellaneous laws, many of which relate to the treatment of the weak and defenseless—that is, (1) the treatment of strangers, widows, and orphans (22:21–24); (2) the lending of money to the poor (22:25–27); and (3) another warning against oppressing the weak (23:9)
23:10–19	The sabbatical year, the sabbath, and the three major feasts
23:20–33	A promise of success in the conquest if the law is faithfully kept

THE PRIESTLY CODE. Unlike the Covenant Code and the Deuteronomic Code, the Priestly Code is much more complex and scattered. For this reason, only some outstanding sections of this Code will be mentioned. Although it follows the Covenant Code in the biblical order, it actually came later than either of the other codes, probably reaching its final form sometime during or immediately after the Babylonian Exile. Like the other two codes, it is composed of a mixture of earlier and later laws. A major difference, though, is that the Priestly Code is concerned primarily with proper worship. For example, in Exodus 25–31, a detailed description of (1) the Ark and (2) the **Tabernacle** is given. The Ark (described in Exodus 25) was a rather elaborate wooden box carried on two long staves or poles that passed through rings on the corners of the box. It was approximately 45 inches long, 27 inches wide, and 27 inches high, overlaid with gold and with a **mercy seat** on top and winged figures on either end. The seat represented the throne of God, and as such, symbolized the presence of God among the people. It was thought to be effective especially when carried with the people as they fought their enemies.

The Tabernacle (Exod. 26–27) was a tent of skins in which the Ark was kept. The tent was surrounded by a fence of skins that formed a sort of courtyard. Inside the tent were two rooms. The larger room was the Holy Place. Its furnishings were (1) a table for the “bread of the Presence” (25:23–30), which was one of the sacrificial offerings; (2) a seven-branched lamp called the *menorah* (25:31–40); and (3) the altar for burning incense (3:1–10). The priests entered the Holy Place daily in carrying out their duties.

The smaller room, separated from the Holy Place by a curtain, was the Most Holy Place or Holy of Holies. Here, the Ark of the Covenant was kept. Only the High Priest could enter the Holy of Holies, and that happened on only one day in the year: *Yom Kippur*, the Day of Atonement. His activity on that day was for the purpose of securing forgiveness of the people’s sins.¹⁹

Much attention is devoted in the Priestly Code to the priests and their activities. An example of this is Exodus 28:1–29:46, which provides a description of the priestly garments and the ordination of Aaron and his sons. Leviticus 6:1–9:24 discusses the function of the priest in sacrifices and then turns again to the dedication of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood.

These examples should serve to emphasize the important role the priest played in ancient Israel. In the patriarchal days, the patriarch himself functioned as the priest. When Israel became a distinct people, the priesthood became a separate group of men whose sole job was to function as priests. The descriptions found in the law codes may well reflect a later, more developed priestly establishment, but there can be little doubt that the priesthood played a role in Israelite life in the wilderness.

The power of the priest lay in the belief that he controlled access to God. He was the expert in communicating with the awesome Deity who brought Israel out of Egypt. The power controlled by the priest carried with it the temptation to corruption; but the continued existence and positive influence of Israelite religion over many centuries must be credited, in part, to the integrity of many of the priests.



The Literary Structure of Leviticus

There is no denying that, for most modern readers, Leviticus is a dull and tedious book to read. Sensitivity to literary development in the book can hardly transform it into a page turner, but it is important to ask whether Leviticus is more than just a listing of laws.

There is general agreement concerning certain structural features of this book. Chapter 16, which concerns the Day of Atonement, stands out in the center of Leviticus. The material immediately following this, Chapters 17–26, is almost universally understood as a cohesive body of law known as the Holiness Code. This body of law attempts to define and regulate for the people of Israel what makes them holy, what distinguishes or separates them from those who are not holy. The material in the first fifteen chapters is primarily concerned with the lives and duties of priests. The recognition of these broad generalities and the transitional character of Chapter 16 leads to a way of reading and perceiving the whole book of Leviticus.

Leviticus 1–7 provides careful instructions concerning aspects of the institution of sacrifice. This is the primary duty of the priests. Chapters 8–10 develop the process of ordination, both in general, legal terms and in the more specific narrative about Aaron and his sons. Chapters 10–15 then address other duties of priests in relation to various aspects of the lives of the people of Israel. Attention is already turning here from the priesthood itself to the interaction of priests and other Israelites. The Day of Atonement ceremony in Leviticus 16 specifically delineates the ritual for atoning for the sins of the priesthood and then for all the people. This second act of atonement points to the **Holiness Code** and its discussion of purity for all Israelites. The Holiness Code makes little distinction between priest and nonpriest. All people are expected to be holy.

The book of Leviticus is set within the larger context of the Torah, with the Israelites encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai. It propounds an understanding of holiness that flows from God to Moses to the priests to the people. The literary structure of the book and its changing modes of address match this understanding of the dynamic nature of holiness.



One of the main functions of the priest was to carry out the sacrifices described in the laws. Because most of the people were illiterate, sacrifice was a visual aid to worship. Its effectiveness as an aid to worship depended, in large measure, upon how it was viewed. Three basic views of sacrifice prevailed in ancient societies: (1) that sacrifice was made to appease an angry deity—in short, to bribe him; (2) that sacrifice was an act of communion whereby the worshiper had fellowship with the deity; (3) that sacrifice was a gift to the deity as an act of praise. The sacrifice of an animal was regarded as substituting for the life of a human being, but it had a deeper meaning than mere substitution.

What then, did it mean when an Israelite had sinned and brought a sacrifice to be offered at the altar? Basic to any understanding of this question is the conception of one's relatedness to all that he had, including family and possessions. One's land and possessions were bound up with his life because they were the means of sustaining life. Naboth's reluctance to surrender his land to Ahab, even for a fair price, is a vivid illustration of this feeling of oneness that the Israelite had for land and possessions (1 Kings 21:3). It is also illustrated by the destruction of Achan, his family, and all of his possessions, because he had sinned (Joshua 7:25). All that he had was contaminated by his sin because it was thought of as being a part of him. When one brought

an animal to sacrifice it, it was his possession and therefore was a part of himself. He laid his hands on its head to symbolize his identity (oneness) with it (Leviticus 1:4). When its blood was shed in the ritual, the life that was given was symbolically his own. It was not a substitute; it was the offerer giving of himself.²⁰

The major kinds of sacrifice are described in Leviticus 1:1–6:7.²¹ (1) The whole **burnt offering** was the major daily sacrifice and had as its purpose making the people right with God, that is, atoning for sin (1:1–17). (2) Cereal offerings were peace offerings, expressing thanks for the produce of the land (2:1–16). (3) In contrast to the whole burnt offering was the peace offering. The animal was slain, its blood was thrown against the altar, the fat and internal organs were burned, and the meat was eaten by the priests and the worshipers in an act of communion (3:1–17). (4) The sin offering for “anyone [who] sins unwittingly” was a whole burnt offering (4:1–5:13). (5) The guilt offering involved not only a sacrifice, but also an act of restoring any loss that had resulted from sin (5:14–6:7).

HOLIDAYS AND HOLY DAYS (LEV. 23:1–44). (1) Passover—Unleavened Bread, which came in March or April, was to celebrate the Exodus events. (2) The Feast of Weeks celebrated the grain harvest and came fifty days after Passover, which is why it is called Pentecost (Greek for *fiftieth*) in the New Testament (Acts 2:1). (3) The Feast of Booths (Tabernacles) came in the early fall and celebrated the fruit harvest. (4) The most solemn day of the year was the Day of Atonement, when the High Priest entered the Holy of Holies in the Tabernacle to make atonement for the sins of the people (Lev. 16:1–34).

THE HOLINESS CODE (LEV. 17–26). Mention needs to be made of one other major section of the Priestly Code. Chapters 17–26 of Leviticus constitutes a major section containing many ancient traditions grouped around the theme of Israel’s need to be a holy people, set apart and dedicated to the service of God. Chapter 19, in particular, highlights the idea of holiness as embodied in the famous line “You shall love your neighbor as yourself” (19:18).

THE DEUTERONOMIC CODE. The Deuteronomic Code, found in the Book of Deuteronomy, was first discovered during the reign of Josiah in Judah in 621 B.C.E., many centuries after the Exodus. But, like the Covenant Code and the Priestly Code that came after it, it contained many ancient laws, as well as laws brought into being much nearer to the time of its discovery. It, too, had a version of the Ten Commandments (5:6–27). As its title, *Deuteronomy* (“second law”), suggests, it was a restatement of the law—in short, a sort of updating, or modernizing, of the law to fit a changed situation. For this reason, old laws still usable were kept, while new laws, suitable for new conditions that had arisen, were added. It may be summarized as follows:

5:1–11:32	The Ten Commandments and exhortations to keep them
12:1–32	The command to have all worship in one central sanctuary
13:1–18	The awfulness of idolatry
14:1–15:23	Regulations for a holy people: warnings against pagan customs, regulations about clean and unclean animals, the law of the tithe, the sabbatical year as related to debts and slavery of Hebrews, offering of firstborn animals

16:1–17	The major festivals: Passover—Unleavened Bread; Festival of Weeks (Pentecost in the New Testament) or grain harvest festival; and Festival of Booths or Tabernacles, which celebrated the fruit harvest
16:18–17:20	Rules for the administration of justice
18:1–22	How to worship God in a proper manner
19:1–21	Legal problems: manslaughter, property fraud, proper evidence for determining guilt in a crime
20:1–20	How to conduct a holy war
21:1–23:14	Various laws concerning unsolved murder, treatment of captive women, disrespect for parental authority, rules for hanging a man, responsibilities for a man's lost property, a woman's use of a man's clothes, protection of bird life, building codes, the mixing of unlike things, relations between the sexes, relations to outcasts and other people, proper sanitary procedures
23:15–25:19	Humanitarian and religious laws: runaway slaves, cult prostitutes, taking of interest on loans, making vows to God, respect for property, divorce procedures, the newly married, taking security for debts, stealing, rules for the leper, extending credit, relation to the poor and needy, individual responsibility, the sojourner and the widow, law of punishment, just payment for services, law of the Levirate marriage, dirty fighting, false weights and measures, relations with the Amalekites
26:1–19, 28:1–68	Rules for worship: the service of first fruits, the tithing ceremony, a plea to observe the law and the consequences for failing to do so

The Ten Commandments and the Codes

By taking one of the Commandments and showing how it was used in the codes, perhaps one can see the differences that the passage of time brought in the interpretation of the Commandments. The Sixth Commandment is “You shall not murder.” See how the three codes treat this Commandment in the following comparison:

Covenant Code
(*Exod. 21:12–14*)

Whoever strikes a person mortally shall be put to death. If it was not premeditated, but came about by an act of God,

Deuteronomic Code
(*Deut. 19:4–6; 11–13*)

Now this is the case of a homicide . . . who might flee there and live, that is, someone who has killed another person unintentionally when the two had not been

Priestly Code
(*Num. 35:11–12; 16–25a*)

Then you shall select cities . . . of refuge for you, so that a slayer who kills a person without intent may flee there. The cities shall be for you a refuge from the avenger, so that the slayer, may not die

then I will appoint for you a place to which the killer may flee. But if someone willfully attacks and kills another by treachery, you shall take the killer from my altar for execution.

at enmity before: Suppose someone goes into the forest with another to cut wood, and when one swings the ax to cut down a tree, the head slips from the handle and strikes the other person, who then dies; the killer may flee to one of these cities and live. But if the distance is too great, the avenger of blood . . . might pursue and overtake and put the killer to death, although the death sentence was not deserved, since the two had not been at enmity before. . . .

But if someone at enmity with another lies in wait and attacks and takes the life of that person, and flees into one of these cities, then the elders of the killer's city shall send to have the culprit taken from there and handed over to the avenger of blood to be put to death. Show no pity; you shall purge the guilt of innocent blood from Israel, so that it may go well with you.

until there is a trial before the congregation.

But anyone who strikes another with an iron object, and death ensues, is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death.

Or anyone who strikes another with a stone in hand that could cause death, and death ensues, is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death. Or anyone who strikes another with a weapon of wood in hand that could cause death, and death ensues, is a murderer; the murderer shall be put to death. The avenger of blood is the one who shall put the murderer to death; when they meet, the avenger of blood shall execute the sentence.

Likewise, if someone pushes another from hatred, or hurls something at another, lying in wait, and death ensues, or in enmity strikes another with the hand, and death ensues, then the one who struck the blow shall be put to death; that person is a murderer; the avenger of blood shall put the murderer to death when they meet.

But if someone pushes another suddenly without enmity, or hurls any object without lying in wait, or, while handling a stone that could cause death, unintentionally drops it on another and death ensues, though they were not enemies, and no harm was intended, then the congregation shall judge between the slayer and the avenger of blood, in accordance with these ordinances; and the congregation shall rescue the slayer from the avenger of blood.

The Golden Calf Incident (Exod. 32)

The people's commitment to the covenant did not erase their proneness to rebellion. When Moses delayed coming down from the mountain, they assumed that the worst had happened and demanded that Aaron make images for them to serve as gods. Aaron did as they requested, trying still to point them to the LORD (32:1–6). This incident reflects a theme common throughout Israel's history—that is, the temptation to dilute the religion of the God of Sinai with the popular religions of the time. Moses' magnificent prayer of intercession following the LORD's threat to destroy the rebels revealed the depth of the man's commitment to his people (32:7–14). That love for the people did not keep him from a wrathful explosion when he came down from the mountain and found the people dancing around a **golden calf**. In a fit of temper, he threw down the tablets on which the Commandments were written, literally breaking the Ten Commandments! The calf, probably a gold-covered wooden frame, was destroyed (32:15–20).



The Literary Structure of Numbers

The fourth book of the Bible is traditionally called *In the Wilderness* in the Hebrew Bible. The Greek title, *arithmoi*, provides the basis for the commonly used English title, Numbers. Careful consideration of these two titles may provide a key to the book's literary design. Twice in the book of Numbers, Moses is ordered to conduct a **census** of the people of Israel, to "number" them. The first census is in Numbers 1 and the second is in Numbers 26. The two numberings take place while the Israelites are in the wilderness, and they perform a combined purpose.

The book of Numbers opens with the Israelites still encamped at Mount Sinai. The first census identifies all of the adults who were present at that time. In Numbers 10 the Israelites finally set out from this place, where they have been since Exodus 19. The two census reports thus surround a very significant event in Israel's history. The departure from Sinai is followed by a collection of stories about Israel's adventures in the wilderness. The collection of wilderness stories in Numbers 10–25 is a much larger reflection of the similar collection of stories in Exodus 14–18. Together these two collections form what is often called the *murmuring tradition* because of the murmuring, or complaining, of the Israelites during their journey.

The second census confirms that all of the adults counted in the first census, except for Joshua and Caleb (26:65), are dead. With the disobedient generation gone, the Israelites are ready to move on toward the Promised Land. This second census, like the first, is followed immediately by a section of legislation and then a travel narrative. This provides the book of Numbers with a parallel structure, which is set up by the census reports. These two parallel sections are Chapters 1–25 and 26–36. The end of the book of Numbers, which reports the arrival of the Israelites on the plains of Moab, prepares the way for the book of Deuteronomy that follows.

It is obvious that the book of Numbers, like many other books of the Bible, is composed of a large number of originally independent stories, traditions, and documents. A careful survey of its structure, however, reveals that these components have not simply been thrown together, but have been artistically woven together into a literary work that has a sense of unity and purpose surpassing the sum of its parts.



Moses then turned to Aaron, whose excuse sounded as pathetic as that of a small boy caught with his hand in the cookie jar. There followed a violent purge of the rebels led by the Levites. Moses again interceded for the people and received the command to be on the road toward the Promised Land again (32:21–35). The covenant was renewed, and the promise was repeated (34:1–16).

AFTER MOUNT SINAI

On the Road to Kadesh–Barnea (Num. 10:11–12:16)

Following the report of a census (Num 1:1–4:9)—giving the book its name, based on the Latin *numeri* (Hebrew *bemidbar*, “in the wilderness”)—another section of the Priestly Code (5:1–6:27) and narratives concerning the Tabernacle, the account of the journey resumes.²² A song that was sung on the march is preserved in 10:35–36:

Arise, O LORD, and let your enemies be scattered,
and your foes flee before you. . . .
Return, O LORD of the ten thousand thousands of Israel.

But the songs did not muffle the complaints, whether they were about food (11:4–35) or Aaron and Miriam’s complaint about Moses’ Cushite wife. It seems that even Moses had to deal with racial prejudice.

Spying Out the Land (Num. 13:1–33)

A second major time of decision had arrived. The march had brought the people to the southern reaches of the Negev, Palestine’s southernmost habitable region. This was the most logical place from which to launch an invasion of the land.

Choosing twelve men (a representative from each tribe), Moses sent them north into the hill country to estimate the chances of a successful invasion (13:1–24). The returning spies gave a glowing report of the richness of the land, especially when compared with the barren territory through which they had come. But for ten of the men, the minuses in the form of walled cities far outweighed the pluses. In view of the disadvantages, they gave a majority report that counseled against an invasion (13:28–29, 32–33). Caleb and Joshua gave a strong minority report recommending an invasion (13:30–31).

The Invasion Nobody Believed Would Succeed— and It Didn’t (Num 14:1–45)

Rebellion flared once again, coming almost to the stoning of Moses and Aaron by the people (14:1–10a). Moses, in turn, had to plead with the LORD to keep the people from being destroyed, appealing to the LORD’s sense of honor (14:10b–19). The rebellion condemned that generation to the wilderness, except Caleb and Joshua (14:20–38).

A plague convinced the people that an invasion was imperative, although Moses warned that it was doomed to failure. He was right; the Israelites suffered defeat at the hands of the Amalekites and Canaanites (14:39–45). Some Israelites probably stayed in the northern Negev, however, joining forces with the Joshua-led group some forty years later when it invaded from

east of the Jordan. After this failure, Kadesh–Barnea became the base of operations for the main body of Israelites for the next generation.

The Kadesh Years and More Priestly Laws (Num. 15–19:22)

The Israelite storyteller gave little attention to what happened in the years at Kadesh–Barnea. Chapter 15 contains laws concerning offerings and an incident about a man who violated the Sabbath law on work (15:1–41). The major headline was the rebellion led by a quartet of men named Korah, Dathan, Abiram, and On (16:1–19). Their subsequent punishment, as well as that of their whole families, illustrates the concept of *corporate responsibility*, a commonly held view in biblical times. It held that a man’s actions affected his whole family, either for good or ill. They shared his guilt and his glory (16:20–50).

There follows another section of the Priestly Code that deals with priestly stories and duties, as well as the ritual for purifying a person made unclean by contact with a corpse (17:1–13).

Bound for the Promised Land (Num. 20:1–21:9)

The passage of time brought the passing of the older generation, including Miriam and Aaron. Miriam died before Israel left Kadesh–Barnea (20:1). Time did not lessen the rebelliousness of the people, however. As they moved away from the oasis at Kadesh–Barnea to continue their movement toward the land promised to them, lack of water—an ever-present problem when they were on the move (see Exodus 15)—brought still another crisis. Moses, commanded by the LORD to speak to a rock to find water, seems to have struck it in anger, bringing the LORD’s judgment that Moses, too, would die on the trail and would never enter Canaan (20:2–13).

Trouble came not only from within, but also from external forces. Failing in attempts to invade Canaan from the south, Moses then proposed to cross the Arabah, the continuation of the great Rift Valley south of the Dead Sea, and to follow the King’s Highway north through the territories of Edom and Moab. Contacting the king of Edom, Moses promised to pass through the land peaceably, paying for any water used. The Edomites refused passage, however, and threatened to attack Israel (20:14–21).

Aaron died and was buried on Mount Hor. This left only Moses of the first-generation leaders (20:22–29). Eventually, the people set out in the direction of the Gulf of Aqabah (called the Red Sea) in an attempt to circumvent Edom. They encountered numerous poisonous snakes on the way. Moses was instructed to make a bronze serpent and to make people look at it to be healed when they were bitten (21:4–9). In this same general area in a Midianite archaeological site, a bronze snake was found. This suggests that such a technique was used among the Midianites in the case of a snakebite. Furthermore, it is evidence of a possible ancient relationship between Israel and Midian.²³

The Moabites and Balaam (Num. 21:10–24:25)

Unable to circumvent Edom, the Israelites turned north along the Arabah, coming at last to the southern end of the Dead Sea. Passing through the valley of the Brook Zered, which served as the border between Edom and Moab, they finally reached the major caravan road, the King’s Highway (21:10–20). Not wanting trouble with the Moabites, Moses asked permission to pass through the territory peaceably. When the king refused, Israel attacked, took control of much of the Moabite kingdom, and even took some Ammonite territory north of Moab (21:21–35).

At this point, the prophet Balaam entered. He was one of those characters about whom the Israelites spoke for many generations. As a matter of fact, not only did the Israelites talk about



FIGURE 4-4 Exodus 15:27 reports the arrival of the Israelites at an oasis called Elim. This photograph shows a modern oasis in the Sinai region of Egypt.

this famous prophet, but others did also. We now know of Balaam apart from the biblical text through inscriptions that have been found in Transjordan. That this is the same prophet spoken of in Numbers 22–24 is shown by the fact that he is identified in these inscriptions as “Balaam, the son of Beor” (cf. Num. 22:5). The inscriptions also speak of him receiving his oracles at night, as in Numbers 22:8, 19f. Unlike in the Bible, however, he is further described as “seer of the gods,” who speak to him at night. This would indicate that he was by no means an Israelite prophet or a follower of YHWH (the LORD). There is mention also of goddesses, another idea foreign to Israelite religion. As in the biblical account, he is pictured as one who pronounces curses.²⁴ It is in light of these texts, then, that the Balaam stories in Numbers will be examined.

Desperate for a way to stop the marauding Israelites, Moab’s King Balak sent for the famous Balaam, a Mesopotamian holy man. Balak wanted Balaam to curse the Israelites so that they could not defeat his armies (22:1–6). Taking money with them, Balak’s messengers came to Balaam, who told them he would give them an answer in the morning. The next morning, Balaam told the messengers that the LORD would not let him go (22:7–14). After reporting to Balak, the messengers came back with a much larger sum of money. This time Balaam agreed to go, under the instructions to do as God told him (22:15–21).

At this point, the text seems to contradict itself. After saying that Balaam went on God’s command (22:20), it says that God was angry with him for going (22:22). It must be remembered that God was believed to cause everything. Thus, for Him to cause a person to commit an action and then be angry with him for doing it was not viewed as an inconsistency on God’s part. If we were telling the story, we probably would say that the large sum of money offered to Balaam was what changed his mind. This resulted in God’s being angry with him for going with the Moabites.

Then follows the most famous part of the story. Saddling his donkey, Balaam set out for Moab. On the way, strange things began to happen. The donkey, seeing things that Balaam did not see, ran off the road and crushed Balaam's foot against a stone wall. Finally, the donkey lay down in the road. Balaam, who had been beating the donkey for its seeming stubbornness, suddenly heard the donkey speak up in its own defense (22:22–30). To top it off, the LORD spoke out in defense of the donkey, telling Balaam that he had been trying to get his attention through the donkey. Balaam was told that he was to go with the Moabites (22:31–35). Did anyone else hear what the donkey and God said to Balaam? The text is silent on this point.

When Balaam came to the Moabites, he made preparations to carry out the request of Balak. But, try as he might, each time he started to pronounce a curse, a blessing was pronounced on Israel. Needless to say, Balak was most unhappy. He soon sent Balaam back the way he came (22:36–24:25).

Trouble at Peor (Num. 25:1–18)

While the Israelites were in Moabite territory, they encountered the worship of fertility gods. These were nature deities believed to have the power to make the crops grow. This type of worship, which was to be a major problem for Israel throughout much of the pre-Exilic period, involved so-called holy women, who played the role of goddesses in sacred prostitution. The Israelite men were attracted to the worship, so much so that one man brought a Moabite prostitute into the camp. An epidemic, probably a venereal disease, broke out in the camp. Again, radical action was taken; Moses ordered the execution of anyone who had patronized the fertility cult. In this way, the disease was checked.

Miscellaneous Materials (Num. 26–36)

The latter part of the book of Numbers contains a variety of materials: a census (26:1–65); an incident concerning the inheritance of property by women (27:1–11); the appointment of Joshua as Moses' successor (17:12–23); rules concerning offerings for the major holidays—the Sabbath, the New Moon, Passover—Unleavened Bread, the Feast of Weeks or Grain Harvest, the New Year's Festival, the Day of Atonement, and the Feast of Booths or Fruit Harvest (28:1–29:40); the law of vows (30:1–6); holy war against Midian (31:1–54); the story of assigning territory east of the Jordan to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh (32:1–42); a summary of the journey from Egypt to Moab (33:1–56); a discussion of the territorial boundaries of the people in Canaan (34:1–29); a discussion of the Levitical cities and the cities of refuge (35:1–34); and finally, a discussion of a married woman's inheritance (36:1–13).

Two things are important here: holy war (Num. 31), which will be dealt with later, and the route of the march, described in Numbers 33. Some archaeologists argue that the cities mentioned—Iyyim, Dibon, Almon-Diblathaim, and Abel-Shittim—did not exist when the Exodus is thought to have taken place. Yet, Egyptian temple lists from this period cite most of them as existing cities in the same order that Numbers lists them.²⁵

Deuteronomy's Contribution to the Wilderness Story

The name *Deuteronomy* comes from the Greek name of the book and means “the second law.” The Hebrew title means “These are the words,” based on the first verse of the book. The word *Deuteronomy* is very descriptive of the contents of this book, because 1:1–4:49 is a summary statement of the wilderness wanderings of Israel, presented in the form of an address to the people on the plains of Moab.²⁶

The second major section (5:1–26:19; 28:1–68) has already been discussed in the section on the law codes. Two major themes in this section deserve more lengthy comment: (1) the command for a single place for worship and (2) the concept of *holy war*.

The command to have a single place of worship is found in 12:5, 11, 18, 26. In its original time and context, it probably referred to either Shiloh or Shechem. Both seem to have served as the major worship center at one time or another. When the essentials of what is known today as Deuteronomy were discovered, or rediscovered, in the time of King Josiah (621 B.C.E.), the references to a single place of worship were taken to mean Jerusalem. By this time, Jerusalem was the capital of all that remained of the Israelite kingdoms. Even more important was that the Temple was located there and was controlled by a powerful and influential priesthood.

The second important theme was the holy war. The Hebrew word is *cherem*, sometimes translated as “the ban.” The key passage is Deuteronomy 20:16–18:

But as for the towns of the peoples the LORD your God is giving you as an inheritance, you must not let anything that breathes remain alive. You shall annihilate them—the Hittites and the Amorites, the Canaanites and the Perizzites, the Hivites and the Jebusites—just as the LORD your God has commanded, so that they may not teach you to do all the abhorrent things to do for their gods, and you thus sin against the LORD your God.

The justification for such an action is found in 20:18, which says, in effect, that the people of the land were like an infection in the body. It must be gotten rid of, even though the solution is a radical one. Similarly, today the amputation of a limb is viewed as a radical solution to a physical ailment. Yet, at times, it is the only solution to the problem.

But the question arises, “How does one justify such actions?” The simple answer is that there is no way it can be justified. The best one can do is to understand that the Israelites practiced holy war in a time when many nations did so. They justified their actions in the same manner as those who slaughter their neighbors in religious and ethnic wars do today. We can only try to understand why it was the way it was without giving our approval.²⁷

Deuteronomy’s Place in the Canon

It has long been recognized that Deuteronomy stands at a crucial juncture in the canon. Although tradition has numbered it with Genesis through Numbers as part of the Torah or Pentateuch, it also has marked affinities with the books that follow it—Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings. Because themes from Deuteronomy play a prominent role in these latter books, scholars call it the *Deuteronomistic History*. At the same time, Deuteronomy recapitulates Exodus through Numbers and answers questions about the fate of Moses. Thus, it serves as a bridge between the Pentateuch and the books that follow it.

The Old Passes—the New Comes (Deut. 29:1–34:12)

Like other Pentateuchal materials, Deuteronomy has a strong emphasis on the covenant. The description of a covenant ceremony in Moab is found in 29:1–29. This was part of the third major section of Deuteronomy and is followed by an exhortation that could be titled *The Two Ways* (30:1–20). In it, the people were given the choice of blessing or curse, depending on whether they chose the good way of obedience to the LORD or the way of disobedience.

After Deuteronomy’s version of the choosing of Moses’ successor (31:1–8), there is a command to have a ceremony of covenant renewal every seven years at the time of the Feast of Booths (31:9–29). Much debate has taken place among Old Testament scholars about whether this ceremony



The Literary Structure of Deuteronomy

Because Deuteronomy is a more obviously self-contained work of literature, its literary structure has received more attention than that of other books around it. The book is presented as a sequence of words or sermons of Moses, which he spoke to the Israelites while they were encamped on the plains of Moab. Four introductory phrases mark off the major sections of the book:

- 1:1 These are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel . . .
- 4:44 This is the law that Moses set before the Israelites.
- 29:1 These are the words of the covenant that the LORD commanded Moses to make . . .
- 32:1 This is the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, blessed the Israelites . . .

The first section is largely Moses' recounting of the days in the wilderness after leaving Horeb/Sinai. Together with the brief narrative of Moses' death in Deuteronomy 34, this section forms a narrative framework for the rest of the book. The long second section is filled with legal material, much of which appears to be a reformulation of that found in earlier parts of the Torah. It is this section that provides the book with its Greek and subsequent English name, which means "second" (*deutero-*) "law" (*nomos*). The third and fourth sections begin the move toward the death of Moses. In the third section a covenant is enacted, based upon the law laid out in the second section. In the fourth section, Moses speaks his final words to the Israelites in blessing and song.

Deuteronomy is, therefore, a true book of Moses. It highlights his career as leader, lawgiver, and man of God on Israel's behalf, and it brings his life to a close on the top of Mount Nebo. Deuteronomy begins with Moses' recollection of the departure from one mountain, Sinai/Horeb, and ends with his final departure from another. His final gaze upon the Promised Land in 34:1–3 points forward to the remainder of Israel's story and brings the Torah to a fitting close.

Several aspects of the book of Deuteronomy help it to function as an introduction to the books that follow it. Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings are often referred to by scholars as the Deuteronomistic History. Themes that emerge in Deuteronomy, such as land, holy war, blessing and curse, and God's decision to make God's name dwell in a specific place (Jerusalem), are worked out in great detail in these books that follow the Pentateuch.



in early Israel was like the New Year's festival celebrated by the Babylonians. There is little direct evidence for such a festival in Israel; therefore, drawing a definite conclusion from parallels is not possible. The important point is that such a ceremony of covenant renewal was designed to make the covenant meaningful for each generation.

Deuteronomy concludes with two songs: (1) a song not unlike those found in the book of Psalms, seemingly used in celebrations of the Exodus events (32:1–43), and (2) a deathbed blessing similar to the blessing of Jacob in Genesis 49 (33:1–29).

Moses, the servant of the LORD, saw the land of promise; but he died on Mount Nebo. The final words of the book of Deuteronomy serve as his epitaph:

Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face. He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

THEMES IN THE PENTATEUCH

Even if one grants that the Pentateuch has been developed from many sources over several hundred years, two questions remain: “What is the ruling purpose behind its final form?” and “What major themes are used to enunciate this purpose?”

As for the first question, the obvious answer is that the Pentateuch gave Israel an explanation for its existence as a people. The themes used to enunciate this purpose include the following:

1. The LORD is Creator of the heavens and the earth, including humankind, to whom He has given lordship over the earth both to use and to preserve.
2. Humankind violated the LORD’s trust by rebellion and thus sinned, provoking the LORD’s judgment.
3. Israel’s connection to the LORD, creation, humankind, and sin was through the patriarchs.
4. The LORD made a covenant with Abraham, the first patriarch, that demanded loyalty to the LORD on Abraham’s part. The LORD, in turn, promised that Abraham’s descendants would become a people who would receive a land if they kept the covenant.
5. The material from Exodus through Deuteronomy describes the fulfillment of the first part of the promise—the creation of a people and how their story is intertwined with the Law.
6. The Pentateuch ends with the anticipation of the fulfillment of the second part of the covenant—the giving of the land.

Key Terms

Aaron, 65	Covenant Code, 79	Passover, 71
Apodictic Law, 77	Golden Calf, 85	Plague, 68
Burnt Offering, 83	Holiness Code, 82	Tabernacle/Tent of Meeting, 80
Casuistic Law, 77	Mercy Seat, 80	YHWH, 66
Census, 85	Miriam, 66	
Circumcision, 66	Mount Sinai, 75	

Study Questions

1. What major events in Israel’s story are described in the book of Exodus?
2. What forms of evidence are cited for dating the Exodus to the 1300–1200 B.C.E. time period?
3. From the perspective of the book of Exodus, what was the LORD’s role in the events it portrays?
4. How did Moses’ life experiences, up to and including his call on Mount Horeb, prepare him for his leadership role?
5. What meanings might the name YHWH have?
6. Compare Aaron’s role as described in Exodus 4:10–31 to that in 6:2–7:7. What differences, if any, do you detect? How can they be explained?
7. What is the distinction between a suzerainty treaty or covenant and a parity treaty or covenant?
8. Define *miracle* and describe the function of the miraculous.
9. What are some of the natural phenomena that seem to correspond to the descriptions of the plagues in Exodus?
10. In what two ways did the ninth plague strike at the Pharaoh’s power?
11. What are two ways to interpret the plagues?
12. Although they are now associated with the Exodus, what were the probable origins of the festivals of Passover and Unleavened Bread?
13. What problems are presented by the claim that at least 2 million people were involved in the Exodus?
14. Where are the four possible places for the crossing of the Red Sea?

15. Where was Sinai?
16. What is the relationship between the Song of Moses (Exodus 15: 1–18) and the Song of Miriam (15:21)?
17. How did Jethro assist Moses?
18. Explain the relationship between apodictic and casuistic law.
19. Look up *covenant* in a Bible dictionary and determine its role in Israelite religion.
20. What are the characteristics of the three major law codes in the Pentateuch, and how are they related to the Ten Commandments?
21. Why is Moses called the *lawgiver*?
22. What seems to have been the intent of sacrifice in early Israel, and how did that intent change over the years?
23. Why did Israel fail in its attempt to invade Canaan from the south?
24. What extrabiblical evidence is there for the prophet Balaam?
25. How do the Balaam stories illustrate the ancient belief in the power of the spoken word?
26. How is one to understand Deuteronomy's humanitarian strain in light of the instructions for holy war?
27. Why is Deuteronomy's place in the canon unique?
28. What are the major themes of the Pentateuch?
29. Define *Elohim*, *El Shaddai*, *Amalakites*, *prophet*, *Yam Suph*, and *Yom Kippur*.

Endnotes

1. For a succinct introduction to Exodus, see John I. Durham, "Exodus," in *MCB*, 127–129.
2. Although some who would minimize the historical value of the biblical narratives concerning the Exodus and the conquest of the land are able to marshal some convincing arguments for a different scenario of the formation of Israel as a people, their greatest weakness in every case is how to account for the development of the worship of Yahweh as the God of Israel, whatever Israel's roots. Someone or something had to be responsible, and the personality of Moses and the events described in Exodus are much better than whatever alternatives have been proposed to this point.
3. For an excellent work on the life of Moses, see Dewey Beegle, *Moses, the Servant of Yahweh* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1972).
4. Tikva Frymer-Kensky, "Forgotten Heroines of the Exodus: The Exclusion of Women from Moses' Vision," *BR*, XIII, 6 (December 1997), 38–44, points out how the patriarchal system obscured the important roles women played in important events of biblical history.
5. J. B. Pritchard, ed., *ANET* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 85.
6. See Durham, "Exodus," *MCB*, 135, for a "reasonable guess" as to the meaning of this incident.
7. On conditions during the oppression, see Nahum Sarna, "Exploring Exodus: The Oppression," *BA*, 49, 2 (June 1986), 69–79. See also Hershel Shanks, "An Ancient Israelite House in Egypt?" *BAR*, 19, 4 (July–August 1993), 44–45.
8. On covenants, see John H. Hayes, "Covenant," *MCB*, 178–181; George E. Mendenhall and Gary A. Herion, "Covenant," *ABD*, I, 1179–1202.
9. See Bernhard W. Anderson, *Understanding the Old Testament*, 4th ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1986), 70, for a chart comparing the different traditions.
10. L. Mihelic and G. Ernest Wright, "Plagues in Exodus," *IDB*, III, 822. Also see Karen B. Joines, "Plagues," *MDB*, 692.
11. From Chester Warren Quimby, "Straight from the Classroom," *JBR*, XXI, 1 (1953), 62.
12. I am indebted to David Noel Freedman, "Did God Play a Dirty Trick on Jonah at the End?" *BR*, VI, 4 (August 1990), 27, for this insight.
13. On the Egyptian background of this material, see John E. Currid, "Why Did God Harden Pharaoh's Heart?" *BR*, XI, 6 (December 1993), 46–51, esp. 49–50.
14. This is based on Zion Zevit, "Three Ways to Look at the Plagues," *BR*, VI, 3 (June 1990), 16–23, 42.
15. James K. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 112–115.
16. Mendenhall and Herion, "Covenant," *ABD*, I, 1179–1194.
17. Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., trans. J. A. Baker (Louisville, KY: Westminster—John Knox Press, 1961, 1967), sees the covenant as the dominant idea in Israel's history.
18. Pritchard, *ANET*, 165.
19. Some have argued that the Tabernacle is an invention of the Exilic times, but see Kenneth Kitchen,

- “The Desert Tabernacle: Pure Fiction or Plausible Account?” *BR*, XVII, 6 (December 2000), 14–21, and Michael H. Homan, “The Divine Warrior in His Tent: A Military Model for Yahweh’s Tabernacle,” *BR*, XVIII, 6 (December 2000), 22–23, 55, both of whom argue that there were similar structures in Egypt in the second millennium that could have served as models for the Tabernacle.
20. John H. Tullock, *Blood-Vengeance Among the Israelites in the Light of Its Near Eastern Background* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1966), 165.
 21. On the nature of Leviticus, “the priestly book,” (LXX), or *wayylqra* “and he called,” (Hebrew Bible), see W. H. Bellinger, Jr., “Leviticus, Book of,” *MDB*, 511f.
 22. See Claude Mariottini, “Numbers, Book of,” *MDB*, 621.
 23. Suzanne Singer, “From These Hills,” *BAR*, IV (June 1978), 16–27.
 24. Andrew Lemaire, “Fragments of the Book of Balaam Found at Deir Alla,” *BAR*, XI, 5 (September–October 1985), 26–39. See also Jacob Hoftijzer, “The Prophet Balaam in a 6th Century Aramaic Inscription,” *BA*, 39, 1 (March 1976), 11–17. Lemaire would date the texts to the eighth century B.C.E.
 25. For a fuller discussion, see Charles R. Krahmalkov, “Exodus Itinerary Confirmed by Egyptian Evidence,” *BAR*, XX, 5 (September–October 1994), 54–62.
 26. John H. Tullock, “Deuteronomy,” *MCB*, 201.
 27. See extensive discussions of this issue in Millard C. Lind, *Yahweh Is a Warrior: The Theology of Warfare in Ancient Israel* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1980), Susan Niditch, *War in the Hebrew Bible: A Study in the Ethics of Violence* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), and Gerhard von Rad, *Holy War in Ancient Israel*, trans. Marva J. Dawn and John H. Yoder (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1991). This final work was published in German in 1958.

BIBLICAL ETHANYS 1353TS

CHAPTER

5

Israel Gains a Home
Joshua and Judges

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Timeline

- 1250 B.C.E. Frequent guess for Israelite entrance into the Promised Land
- 1200 B.C.E. Beginning of the Iron Age and the first reference to Israel on the Merneptah Stele
- 1100 B.C.E. Philistine settlement in Palestine
- 1020 B.C.E. Frequent guess for the end of the period of the Judges
- 900 B.C.E. End of Iron Age I and beginning of Iron Age II

Chapter Outline

- I. Moving into the Promised Land
- II. Continuing the Story of Occupation
- III. Proposed Models for the Israelite Occupation of Canaan

CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The book of Deuteronomy ended with the Israelites in Moab while Moses spent his last moments on a mountain gazing at the Promised Land. By the beginning of the book of 1 Samuel, the Israelites will appear to be reasonably settled in their land, ready to make some important political and national decisions. The books of Joshua and Judges attempt to portray the process that connects these two positions, but it is not an easy portrait. A vast array of images are presented of a people moving into a land, attempting to take control of it, and trying to find a way to exist in this new place. The book of Joshua will primarily present a picture of a military campaign that carves out a place where the Israelites can settle, although plenty of difficulties with a straightforward process of invasion will emerge. The book of Judges will portray a people struggling to stay free of the powers and influences that surround them, while looking for sustainable patterns of organization and leadership.

MOVING INTO THE PROMISED LAND

In many places, the books of the Pentateuch present the idea that Israel is to go to the land of Canaan, displace or exterminate the people living in the region, and take control of the land that God had promised them since the days of Abraham and Sarah. This course of action presents obvious moral problems, of course, and there are also enormous practical difficulties associated with such an effort. The writers of the books of Joshua and Judges, who tell the stories of this part of Israel's experience, are well aware that Israel's attempt to conquer the Promised Land was a complicated process that had mixed results. These two books are often understood as two opposing views of how the conquest worked, and many efforts have been made to use the material in Joshua and Judges, along with archaeological evidence, to reconstruct an account of "what really happened" in Canaan in the early centuries of the **Iron Age**. The results of these attempts have varied widely and have proved to be problematic, indicating that the evidence from the Bible and other sources of information are not sufficient for such a reconstruction. Description of the literary structure of the books of Joshua and Judges will appear in this chapter and will demonstrate that each of these books has a literary and theological purpose that determines its contents and shape in a way that makes them unsuitable for such historical reconstruction. We know that a political, ethnic, and territorial entity called Israel eventually existed in the land that had been known as Canaan, although the nature and extent of this entity varied significantly over time. How it came into existence is a process that we cannot explain with any precision.

The International Scene

Conditions in Palestine in the period 1300 to 1100 B.C.E. had changed considerably from those of previous centuries. Canaan, later known as Palestine, had been dominated by the Egyptians for a long time. By the time of Joshua's entry into the land, however, Egypt and the Hittites of Asia Minor, the two contenders for control of the vital land bridge between Asia and Africa, had fought an exhausting war. Egypt was possibly the winner, but it was left weakened. This was during the reign of Ramses II, around 1285 B.C.E. The Exodus may have taken place about that time.

Another problem facing Egypt was an invasion by the "Sea Peoples," invaders who seem to have come from the area of modern Greece. Merneptah (1224–1211 B.C.E.), the son of Ramses II, succeeded in driving the invaders off, but after his death, the Egyptian Empire went into a rapid decline. As noted earlier, Merneptah mentions the Israelites in a monument for a battle fought in 1220 B.C.E.

The Sea Peoples, driven out of Egypt, settled on the southern coast of Canaan and became known as the Philistines. It was from them that Canaan got the name Palestine. Israel's major

problem was to fight the people of the land, because the Egyptians, the Hittites of Asia Minor, and the Assyrians of the Mesopotamian region were too weak to interfere in Canaan in the twelfth century B.C.E.

POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION. Historical and archaeological information about the period in which Israel came into existence as a political and territorial entity is scarce, but there is enough evidence to draw a broad, general picture of the time and place in which this happened.



The Literary Structure of Joshua

The book of Joshua tends to fall fairly naturally into two halves, with the first half dominated by narrative material and the second half by nonnarrative. Such a structure is reminiscent of the book of Exodus, and this may be no accident. The story of the crossing of the Jordan in Joshua 3 recalls the crossing of the sea in Exodus 14–15. Other elements in the early part of Joshua, such as the sending of spies into Jericho, serve to portray Joshua as a character similar to Moses. The conquest of the Promised Land in Joshua 1–12, therefore, has much in common with Exodus 1–18, which tells the story of Moses' triumph over the Pharaoh and the departure of the Israelites from Egypt. The somewhat tedious apportionment of the land in Joshua 13–21 resembles the legal material that fills most of Exodus 19–40.

Two stories, the Battle of Jericho (Ch. 6) and the Battle of Ai (Chs. 7–8), form the center of the first half of the book of Joshua and function as ideal models of victory and defeat. Stories of specific battles continue in Joshua 9, but they generally diminish in length and detail until Joshua 12 presents simply a list of defeated kings. This list is bounded by two remarkable statements in 11:23 and 13:1. The first of these statements, in 11:23 says, "Joshua took all of the land, according to all which YHWH spoke unto Moses, and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their tribes, by their allotments. Then the land rested from war." The second statement, in 13:1b, says, "And very much of the land remains to take." A discerning reader will want to ask which of these two statements is true. Their contradictory nature, however, reveals much about the purpose of the book of Joshua. The book of Judges, which follows Joshua, will reveal that the second statement portrays the actual situation in Israel's story. The taking of the land is an ongoing struggle that will never fully end.

The second half of the book of Joshua is filled with descriptions of the allotment of land, and this reveals the purpose of the statement in Joshua 11:23. In order for Joshua to allot the land to the tribes, it must be at least imagined as fully possessed by Israel. This statement then serves as an act of imagination that allows the land allotment to proceed. One by one the tribes receive their share and the boundaries are delineated. This portion of the book stands in some tension to the first half. Joshua 12:16–23 states that the land was fully conquered by Joshua and that a time of peace was achieved. Joshua 13:1–7, on the other hand, acknowledges that the conquest was far from complete and much land remained to be taken.

The book of Joshua concludes with stories of Joshua's farewell address (Ch. 23) and a covenant renewal ceremony (Ch. 24). These grand scenes reflect the book of Deuteronomy and reinforce the Moses-like portrayal of Joshua as his life comes to an end. The end of the book of Joshua performs one more literary function in relation to the Pentateuch. In Joshua 24:32, the bones of Joseph are buried, concluding a theme that began in Genesis 50:24–26 when Joseph made his brothers promise to bury him in the Promised Land and continued as the Israelites carried Joseph's bones throughout their journey in the wilderness (Exodus 13:19). Thus the Book of Joshua is the end of the story of how the Israelites came to be a people living in the land of Canaan.



At the beginning of the Iron Age in 1200 B.C.E., the land of Canaan was occupied and controlled by a collection of **city-states**. The portrait presented indirectly in the book of Joshua, of a fairly large number of walled cities, each with its own “king” (see the list in Joshua 12), fits the evidence from other sources. Likewise, the portrait of this region two or three centuries later, presented in the biblical books of 1 and 2 Kings, of a smaller number of comparatively large territorial kingdoms, such as Israel, Syria, Moab, and Ammon, seems to match the general picture provided by information from outside the Bible. The emergence of Israel as a political and territorial kingdom took place within this larger matrix of transformation, but the precise process of Israel’s emergence and of the region’s general political transformation is largely beyond our ability to know.

The Invasion of Canaan

PREPARATIONS FOR THE INVASION (JOSH. 1–2:24). Israel’s new leader was no newcomer to responsibility. As a soldier, Joshua had proven his ability as a leader in the battle against the Amalekites (Exod. 17:8–16). As one of the twelve spies, he had already gotten a firsthand look at the territory to be invaded. He had come away firmly convinced that it could be conquered, despite the fact that only one other of the twelve (Caleb) agreed with him (Num. 13:1–33). Assured of the LORD’s presence and leadership (1:1–18), he began the preparations for the invasion.

First, he ordered the people who were to cross the Jordan to prepare themselves. Then, he placed them under strict orders of obedience to his authority (1:10–18). Next, he sent two spies to Jericho to bring back information about the enemy. To provide a cover-up, they went to the house of a prostitute named Rahab. The ruse did not work, because the king of Jericho sent men to Rahab’s house to try to find them. She had hidden them, however, and was able to convince the king’s men that they were not in the house. Because her house was located on the city wall, she was able to let them down by a rope on the outside of the wall. Returning to Joshua, the spies gave their report (2:1–14).

THE WATERS PART AGAIN (JOSH. 3:1–5:1). There followed another of the remarkable series of timely events that Israel saw as the “wonder” of God. Several miles above Jericho stood the city of Adam, or Adamah. At the site, the Jordan follows its twisting path between high clay banks. At times, the river undercuts the banks so that they fall into it, forming a natural dam that holds it in check for several hours. When Israel needed it to happen, it did. As the biblical writer describes it:

When the people set out from their tents to cross the Jordan, the priests bearing the ark of the covenant were in front of the people. Now the Jordan overflows all its banks throughout the time of harvest. So when those who bore the ark had come to the Jordan, and the feet of the priests bearing the ark were dipped in the edge of the water, the waters flowing down from above stood still, rising up in a single heap far off at Adam, the city that is beside Zarethan, while those flowing toward the sea of the Arabah, the Dead Sea, were wholly cut off. Then the people crossed over opposite Jericho. (3:14–16)

The Ark of the Covenant, the symbol of the LORD’s presence with the Israelites, was carried to the midst of the riverbed to remind them that it was the LORD’s doing that was enabling them to cross the flooded river (3:17).

The passage through the Jordan was commemorated by a pile of stones set up as a memorial to the event to serve as a teaching aid, so that when children of future generations asked, “What do these stones mean?” the elders would tell them of the LORD God’s deliverance of the people (4:1–5:1).

AND THE WALLS CAME TUMBLING DOWN (JOSH. 5:2–6:27). After crossing the Jordan, all the men and boys underwent circumcision as an act of consecration to the LORD (5:2–12). When they had recovered, preparations got underway for the attack on Jericho. In a vision, Joshua saw “the commander of the army of the LORD.” There are elements here that parallel Moses’ vision on the mountain (Exod. 3). Joshua was assured of divine leadership in the days ahead (5:13–6:7).

Jericho, the first major target of the Israelites after they crossed the Jordan, is one of the world’s oldest continuously existing cities. Located just north of the Dead Sea, this well-watered oasis was settled at least as early as 7000 B.C.E. Much archaeological effort has been spent in excavating Jericho, and interpretations of the results have run the gamut. An early excavator, John Garstang, interpreted the evidence as supporting the biblical account. Then Dame Kathleen Kenyon concluded that Jericho was not even a city when Joshua was supposed to have conquered it. Now a new assessment of Kenyon’s excavations by Bryant Wood, an American archaeologist, has led him to conclude that Jericho was indeed conquered in the manner described in the book of Joshua, aided by an earthquake. The major problem arises in relating this to Joshua’s conquest. Wood dates this fall at 1400 B.C.E., too early for Joshua by most estimates. The whole question of the nature of the Exodus and the conquest is in such a state of flux, however, that it is difficult to reach any firm conclusions at this time.¹

In the description of the fall of the city, there are some significant features. For one thing, the religious nature of Israelite warfare can be seen in the act of carrying the Ark of the Covenant around the walls of the besieged city, accompanied by the raucous blaring of the ram’s horn trumpets (Heb. *Shopharim*) (6:1–11). In the second place, the prominent role that the number 7 plays in the story shows the importance of numerology in Hebrew thought. In addition to 7, the numbers 1, 3, 4, 10, and 12 and their multiples had significance other than their numerical value—7 symbolized completeness, 10 perfection, and 12 Israel (6:12–16).

Of great significance is that this was a **holy war**. Everything was to be destroyed as an act of dedication to God. Only the prostitute, Rahab, who had helped the spies, was to be spared (6:17–25). Finally, when the city was conquered, a curse was pronounced on it to prevent its rebuilding (6:26–27). These reports of holy wars are troubling to many modern readers. It is important to notice that the ancient writers may have shared some of this uneasiness. Careful readers will notice that the battle of Jericho is actually described three times in Joshua 6. The first description is in God’s instructions to Joshua in 6:2–5. The second and third descriptions, in Joshua’s instructions to the Israelites and the actual narration of the event, are intertwined in 6:6–27. Each successive description becomes more detailed and more violent. At the same time, the presence of God becomes more removed in this progression. God is first present as a speaking character, giving Joshua instruction. As the scene progresses, God is represented symbolically by the Ark, which is carried around the city. Once the Israelites enter Jericho to slaughter the inhabitants, even the symbolic representation of the Ark is not mentioned. The writer of this story seems to want to keep God at a distance from the actual bloodshed. Although these observations do not negate the assertion that God commanded the destruction of Jericho, they may indicate a sense of discomfort concerning God’s involvement in brutality that extends back into ancient times.²

TROUBLE IN THE CAMP (JOSH. 7:1–26). As harsh as the requirements of the holy war were, an incident involving an Israelite would make them seem even more harsh. Strict rules governed the disposal of goods captured in the holy war. A violation of the **ban** on the taking of spoils for personal use was punishable by death to the offender. In the battle for Ai, a stronghold in the hill

country west of Jericho, the Israelites were driven back. Unknown to Joshua, Achan, one of the warriors, had taken certain banned objects at Jericho (7:1): a beautiful robe, a large number of silver coins, and a bar of gold. Unfortunately for Achan, the word of his crime was—in modern parlance—“leaked” to Joshua, although at first the name of the culprit was not revealed. Knowledge that someone had gotten by with violating the ban seems to have had a divisive effect on the army, resulting in a stinging defeat at Ai (7:2–5).

Joshua was perplexed, feeling that the LORD had let him down (7:6–9). Then Joshua became aware that this was not the case: rather, someone had violated the ban (7:10–15). An investigation revealed Achan as the culprit, and in due course, he confessed his sin (7:16–26).

By our standards of justice, what followed would seem to be unjust, for the text says:

And Joshua and all Israel took Achan . . . with the silver, the mantle, and the bar of gold, with his sons and daughters, with his oxen, donkeys, and sheep, and his tent and all that he had . . . and all Israel stoned him to death; they burned them with fire, cast stones on them. (7:24–25)

Why did his family have to suffer the consequences of his sin? Because of a view that is best described by the term *corporate personality*. In this view, a person was not seen as an individual, but as part of a larger unit—the family, the tribe, or the clan. Our society emphasizes the importance of the individual. Early Israelite society emphasized the importance of the group. Because of this, whatever action a person took was thought to affect not only himself, but the group as a whole, either positively or negatively. For this reason, Achan’s guilt had to be shared by the group of which he was a part. It affected not only those related to him, but also whatever he possessed. The destruction of Achan, his family, and his possessions was looked upon as the only way to clear the larger group, the people as a whole, of Achan’s sin. When the punishment was carried out, the battle was renewed and was won (8:1–29). There follows an account of building an altar on Mount Ebal in the Shechem area. It may possibly belong with Joshua 23–24, in which an account of a covenant ceremony is given. It will be discussed later (8:30–35).³

THOSE TRICKY GIBEONITES (JOSH. 9:1–27). Gibeon, some six to seven miles northeast of the present city of Jerusalem, was typical of the small Canaanite villages of the time. Having heard of the brutal Israelite conquest of the nearby towns, the Gibeonites decided that they would rather not have to face such a fate. They put on their most ragged clothes and worn-out sandals, took stale bread and wineskins that were brittle with age, and set out for the Israelite camp. When they arrived, they told the Israelites a fanciful tale, designed to appeal to the Israelite ego, about how they had heard of the greatness of the Israelites, but more especially of the greatness of their God (9:3–10). As a result, they said they had set out to find these people who worshiped the LORD to make a covenant with them.

The Israelites were completely taken in by their story. Without any investigation, they made a covenant with the Gibeonites. They confirmed the covenant with a covenant meal and by taking a solemn oath. Under the terms of the covenant, the Gibeonites were to be spared and thus would become part of Israel (9:11–15).

After the covenant was made, the truth came out. Their word having been given, the Israelites could not change the terms, except to make the Gibeonites “hewers of wood and drawers of water for the congregation and for the altar of the LORD” (9:27). This is one of the few breaks in the idealized picture of the conquest, and it reveals an important fact—namely, that many of the people who later became part of Israel never came from Egypt and were joined to Israel by covenant in the worship of the LORD.

THE FIVE KINGS OF THE SOUTH (JOSH. 10:1–27). The local kings, more like self-appointed rulers of small towns of a few hundred people, became alarmed over the Israelite successes. Five of them joined forces, including the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Eglon, Lachish, and Jarmuth (10:3). The battle took place in the Valley of Aijalon, one of the few routes from the coastal plain up into the southern section of the central hill country. The attack, which probably came at dawn, was aided by a violent hailstorm that lasted into the day. The great hailstones killed many of the enemy and caused the Israelite minstrels to sing a song about the sun standing still at Gibeon (10:1–14).

The kings were captured, and a symbolic ceremony was conducted in which the Israelite leaders placed their feet on the kings' necks. As they did, Joshua charged the leaders to be strong. He promised that the LORD would lead them to be just as successful against all of Israel's enemies if they remained faithful to the LORD (10:15–27).

SUMMARY OF JOSHUA'S CONQUESTS (JOSH. 10:28–12:24) Although the first twelve chapters of the book of Joshua may give the impression of a rapid march through the land of Canaan and a fairly thorough destruction or defeat of its major cities, this simple picture will just as quickly be qualified by the negative assessment in 13:1. The book of Joshua is determined to present a fulfillment of the great work of Moses under the leadership of Joshua. Joshua 11:20, among other verses, provides echoes of the earlier stories of the Exodus and Moses' leadership. A careful examination of the summation of Joshua's "conquests" in 10:28–43 and 11:16–12:24 reveals that this activity is limited to a fairly small region often known as the *central hill country*.

A few moments of reflection are enough to show that the complete extermination or displacement of hundreds of thousands of people from an area the size of Canaan is not feasible, regardless of how we understand the divine assistance the Israelites received. Even the most brutal genocides in human history have all fallen short of their ultimate goal. Nevertheless, the military reports of Joshua 1–12 provide an adequate introduction to the land apportionment in the second half of the book. The book of Judges will continue exploring the complexities of Israel's existence in the midst of the other inhabitants of Canaan.

Dividing the Land and Renewing the Covenant 1

THE DIVIDING OF THE LAND (JOSH. 13:1–21:45). Joshua speaks as though the land is already conquered, but the boundaries described in 13–21, in reality, represented the territory that each tribe was responsible for conquering, not what it had already captured.

Of special interest are the cities assigned to the Levites (21:1–42). They had no territorial boundaries, but the Levites were to receive cities within each of the territories, centrally located to provide (1) accessible worship centers and (2) centers for the administration of justice, including refuge centers where an accused killer could stay until some disposition could be made of the case. Otherwise, the killer would be at the mercy of the *avenger of blood*, a member of the family against whom the crime had been committed. Under the family law of custom, the avenger was judge, jury, and executioner when there was no ruling state to carry out punishment for a crime against a family member.

THE ALTAR THAT WAS NOT AN ALTAR. An insight into how the early Israelites dealt with problems that arose between tribes can be seen in the story of an altar built by the tribes east of the Jordan. When word came back to the tribes in the west, an alarm was raised. Such an altar would seem to violate a ban on worshipping anywhere except at one central shrine, which in those days probably was Shechem or Shiloh (22:12). In a tribal assembly, it was decided to send Phineas, a

priest, accompanied by ten tribal representatives, to investigate the situation. When they inquired of the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, they were told that the altar was a memorial, “a witness between us and you . . . that we do perform the service of the LORD in his presence with our burnt offerings and sacrifices and offerings of well-being” (22:27). Satisfied about the purpose of the altar, the tribal representatives returned, and the planned attack was averted (22:30–34).

JOSHUA’S FAREWELL AND A COVENANT-RENEWAL CEREMONY (JOSH. 23:1–24:28; SEE ALSO JOSH. 8:30–35 AND DEUT. 27:1–26). A recognition that Joshua’s conquest was not complete appears in Joshua’s farewell address to the Israelite leaders. The LORD God had given them the land from the Jordan to the “Great Sea in the west,” and he would enable them to conquer the people who still occupied the land, provided that Israel was faithful to God’s law as given to Moses (23:1–13). Unfaithfulness would lead to loss of life and land (23:14–16).

The climax of Joshua’s story is the covenant-renewal ceremony described in Joshua 24:1–28. The site of the ceremony was Shechem, an ancient religious center (Gen. 34) located at the head of a pass between Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal in the central section of the hill country. Shechem is not mentioned among the cities conquered by Joshua, possibly because the natives of the area were somehow related to the Israelites and had joined Israel by a covenant in which they agreed to worship the LORD.

Deuteronomy 27:1–8 contains a command for the people to set up a memorial on Mount Ebal when they entered the land. Joshua 8:30–35 describes the fulfillment of this command and goes on to describe briefly a covenant-renewal ceremony. An altar was built, sacrifices were offered, a copy of the law was written and read to the people, and a ceremony of blessing and cursing was carried out, with half of the Levites standing on Mount Gerizim and the other half standing on Mount Ebal (Josh. 8:33; but see Deut. 27:12–13, in which all the tribes are mentioned, with Levi as a secular tribe).

Shechem, then, obviously had strong traditions connecting it to the early days of Israel’s history. The covenant-renewal ceremony at Shechem described in Joshua 24 has many of the same elements as the suzerainty (superior–inferior) treaty. The important men of Israel gathered at the sanctuary (24:1). Joshua recounted the LORD’s call to the patriarchs, and how the people were brought out of Egypt under the leadership of Moses and Aaron and into the land of Canaan (24:2–13). After reminding them of the LORD’s blessing, Joshua called on them to accept the obligations of the covenant. Joshua 24:14–15 indicates that not all the people present were descendants of those who came out of Egypt, for he spoke of those who were worshipping “the gods your ancestors served . . . beyond the River or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you dwell.” A careful reading of this passage suggests that at least four groups were present: (1) the Joshua-led Israelites; (2) Israelites who had filtered into the land apart from those led by Joshua; (3) Semitic peoples who had never been to Egypt but who shared the patriarchal traditions of Israel; and (4) non-Semitic peoples who joined Israel by covenant. The most numerous among these undoubtedly were the Canaanites.

THE INFLUENCE OF CANAANITE RELIGION. That Canaanite religious practices were much more influential in the development of Israelite religion than was formerly thought is becoming more widely recognized today. This is because (1) the number of people entering Palestine from the outside is now believed to have been much fewer than once was thought, and consequently (2) the Canaanite population was much larger than was earlier thought, especially because the views of the nature of the conquest have changed substantially. Among those elements adapted from Canaanite religion by the Israelites would have been the divine name *El* as the equivalent to *YHWH* and three festivals that originally were agricultural in nature—Tabernacles, Weeks, and Unleavened Bread. Outside the religious sphere, Israel’s adoption of the kingship undoubtedly was influenced by the Canaanites (1 Sam. 8:20; Psa. 110:4).⁴



FIGURE 5-1 The division of the land (Josh. 13:1–19:51). Artwork by Margaret Jordan Brown, from *Mercer Dictionary of the Bible*. © 1990, courtesy of Mercer University Press.

Among the negative effects on Israelite religion were those practices adopted from the worship of Baal, the Canaanite god of the storm. Baalism was based on the wet–dry cycle of the year, common in Palestine. According to the Baal myth, Baal and Anat were brother and sister but also lovers. Baal was killed by his enemy, Mot, the god of death. Mot devoured Baal. Because Baal made the earth productive, his death caused vegetation to die (the dry season). Anat, or Asherah as the Old Testament calls her (1 Kings 16:33), went looking for Baal. When Mot bragged that he had killed Baal, Anat seized Mot, killed him, and made chopped meat of him, scattering the bits of his flesh on the fields as food for the birds. When Mot died, Baal came back alive. Sexual union between the lovers followed, and fertility returned with the rainy season.⁵ A poor Israelite farmer had a hard time countering his Canaanite neighbor’s argument that, although YHWH might be a god of war, Baal was the god who knew how to make the crops grow.

CONTINUING THE STORY OF OCCUPATION

Once the territory had been assigned to the tribes, the hard part began. Warfare lasted for many years. In reality, the boundaries described in Joshua were not achieved until the time of David. Judah asked the tribe of Simeon to join with it in the conquest of southern Palestine. The impres-



The Literary Structure of Judges

The book of Judges has a very distinct literary design, which moves from a halting introduction to a carefully ordered body to a chaotic conclusion. Judges begins with the death of Joshua, the character for whom the previous book is named. This creates an immediate problem, however, because Joshua has not appointed a successor before his death. Moses appointed Joshua in Deuteronomy 34, but there is no parallel action on Joshua’s part at the end of the book of Joshua. With no new leader present, the book of Judges poses a question in its first verse: “Who will go up for us against the Canaanites at the beginning to fight them in it?” The remainder of Chapter 1 presents a failed pattern of tribe-by-tribe warfare. Notice that at the beginning of Chapter 2, Joshua is alive again. It is apparent that the writer of the book of Judges struggled to write a story without a larger-than-life heroic figure, like Moses or Joshua. Judges 2:11–23 establishes a pattern for telling a different kind of story, though. This cycle of disobedience, oppression, crying out, deliverance, and temporary peace serves as a template on which the stories of the major judges can be placed. But although this repeated cycle dominates Judges 3–16, some linear patterns in the successive reports of Othniel, Ehud, Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson should be noticed. First, the stories of these six judges generally increase in length, but the duration of the periods of peace they achieve for Israel generally decreases. Second, the character of these six judges generally declines, until Samson is hardly recognizable as a deliverer, but is little more than a vengeful marauder. These trends lead into the final section of the book, where the cyclical pattern breaks down entirely. In Judges 17–21, total chaos reigns in Israel. The function of this collection of chaotic stories is to support the repeated refrain that frames them in 17:6, 18:1, 19:1, and 21:25. “In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes.” This statement might appear to be neutral by itself, but the horrifying nature of the stories it surrounds points in a negative direction. Israel is out of control, and the book of Judges ends by promoting the monarchy as the solution to this problem.



sion is given (1:8) that they conquered Jerusalem, but in a later account, David is named as its conqueror. There is also the mention of the capture of three cities of the Philistines: Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron. The LXX, however, specifically says that these cities were not captured. As a whole, this section is a record of the failure of the majority of the tribes to conquer the territory assigned to them. For the biblical historian, the military failure was brought on by the failure to keep the LORD's Covenant. Failure would continue to haunt them as long as they were unfaithful to the Covenant.

Establishing a Pattern for the Judges (Judg. 2:6–3:6)

After a description of the death and burial of Joshua comes a verse reminiscent of Exodus 1:1: “Now a new king arose . . . who did not know Joseph.” Judges 2:10 says in part, “Another generation grew up after them, who did not know the LORD or the work he had done for Israel.”

The basic pattern of the book of Judges starts with this theme and is based on a four-part sermon, a concise form of which is found in Judges 3:7–11: (1) “The Israelites did what was evil in the sight of the LORD” (3:7); (2) “the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel” and an enemy oppressed them (3:8); (3) “when the Israelites cried out to the LORD, (4) the LORD raised up a deliverer for the Israelites” (3:9).

First of all, the theme of sin–punishment–repentance–deliverance is the Deuteronomic theme. It is so named because scholars believe that the books beginning with Joshua and extending through 2 Kings (with the exception of Ruth) were put in their present form during the Babylonian Exile by Jewish historians who had been influenced by the book of Deuteronomy. In 621 B.C.E., during the reign of Josiah, a major portion of Deuteronomy, with its strong emphasis upon the necessity of Israel's faithfulness to the Covenant, had been found during a major repair of the Jerusalem Temple. Its discovery had led to a strong religious revival for a time, but after Josiah's death, the revival quickly died. A few years later, the Babylonians invaded and carried many of the Israelites into captivity. The historians of Israel concluded that their troubles stemmed from the failure to be faithful to the Covenant. Furthermore, the whole history of the people from the time of their entry into the land had been marred by this same unfaithfulness to the Covenant. Thus, the historians' version of the history of Israel was interpreted in the light of this conviction.

In the second place, it is in this section of the book that the judges are first mentioned. From the description in 2:16, “Then the LORD raised up judges who delivered them out of the power of those who plundered them,” one can discover the major function of the judges of the book of Judges, namely, that they were military leaders. They have been described as “charismatic military leaders,” meaning that they were persons who had qualities that inspired others to follow wherever they led.

Because Israel was composed of twelve tribes, however, not one of the judges was able to get all the people to follow his or her leadership. At this time, the tribe was more important than the people as a whole. There was little, if any, national unity. It was not until the monarchy of David that tribal feeling began to take second place to national feeling. Even then, tribal feelings were not completely dead.

The Major Judges

OTHNIEL. The first specific example of a judge is a man named Othniel. The brief story of this judge repeats the basic steps in the cycle demonstrated above, with a minimum of added detail. The “evil in the sight of the LORD” is described as “serving the Baals and the Asherahs,” Canaanite divinities; the king who oppresses them is named Cushan-Rishathaim of Aram; the oppression from which the Israelites cry out lasts for eight years; and Othniel's deliverance of the Israelites leads to forty years of peace before he dies.

EHUD (JUDG. 3:12–30). The oppressor was Eglon, king of Moab. Ehud, of the tribe of Benjamin, was chosen to take an annual payment to Eglon to keep him from attacking the Israelites. In preparation for his visit, Ehud strapped a short sword to the inside of his right thigh. After the money had been paid, he sought a private conference with the king. When they were alone, Ehud drew his sword and stabbed Eglon in the belly:

the hilt also went in after the blade, and the fat closed over the blade, for he did not draw the sword out of his belly; and the dirt came out. (3:22)

Ehud's bold assassination of Eglon rallied the Ephraimites around him, and the Moabite oppression was ended (3:26–30).

DEBORAH (JUDG. 4:1–5:31). Much has been written about the low status of women in ancient times, but the story of **Deborah** is an indication that outstanding women had a way of making their mark. Two versions are given of Deborah's story: a later prose version appears in Judges 4:1–24, and the original poetic version is found in 5:1–31.

The two accounts differ somewhat. The prose story speaks of Jabin, the king of Hazor, as Israel's oppressor (4:2). According to Joshua 11, Joshua defeated Jabin and destroyed Hazor some years earlier. The poetic account does not name Jabin, nor does it mention Hazor. Only Sisera, a general, is mentioned.

Deborah, described as a prophetess (4:4), was judging Israel near Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim (4:5). She seems to have functioned as an adviser on personal matters and in settling disputes between contending parties. The oppression was so bad that

In the days of Shamgar son of Anath,
in the days of Jael, caravans ceased
and travelers kept to the byways.
The peasantry prospered in Israel,
they grew fat on plunder,
because you arose, Deborah,
arose as a mother in Israel. (5:6–7)

Deborah's role was to rally the people to fight against the enemy. Barak served as her general, but he refused to go unless she went with him. She agreed, but she told him that a woman would get the glory for winning the battle (4:6–10).

The poetic version calls the roll of the tribes who joined in the battle fought on Mount Tabor, located at the apex of the triangular plain of Megiddo or Esdralon. After speaking of Ephraim, Benjamin, Machir, Zebulun, and Issachar as tribes that contributed soldiers to the cause, the poet speaks of those who refused to join:

Among the clans of Reuben
there were great searchings of heart.
Why did you tarry among the sheepfolds,
to hear the piping for the flocks?
...
Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan;
and Dan, why did he abide with the ships?
Asher sat still at the coast of the sea,
settling down by his landings. (5:15d–17).⁶



FIGURE 5-2 In Judges 4:6, Deborah sends Barak to prepare his army on Mount Tabor. This photograph shows Mount Tabor today.

The Canaanites, equipped with heavy war chariots (4:3), were drawn up on the level plain, while the ill-equipped Israelites were on the slopes of Mount Tabor. A heavy storm broke. The Kishon River, usually no more than a trickle of water, became a raging torrent. It flooded the plain and turned it into a muddy swamp. The heavy iron chariots, so fearsome on solid ground, became liabilities instead of assets. The Israelites rushed down the mountain and cut the enemy to pieces (4:13–16; 5:19–21).

When he saw how the battle tide had turned, Sisera decided to take care of the most important person he knew—himself. He fled on foot from the battlefield. After some time, he came to the tent of a Kenite named Heber. Jael, Heber's wife, was at home. When Sisera asked for refuge in her tent, Jael, true to the law of custom, invited him in and gave him refreshments. While he was eating and drinking, she killed him by driving a tent peg through his skull. Like the gunfighter in the western movie,

He sank, he fell,
 he lay still at her feet,
 at her feet, he sank, he fell;
 where he sank, there he fell dead. (5:27)

The poetic version ends with a picture of Sisera's mother looking for him, not knowing that he is dead. The closing line is

So perish all your enemies, O LORD (5:31)

GIDEON (JUDG. 6:1–8:35). More stories are told about **Gideon** than about any other judge except Samson. The oppressors were the Midianites, who were aided by the hated Amalekites and “the people from the East” (6:3). In their raids, they (like the locusts) destroyed crops, bringing famine on the land (6:1–6).

The people cried to the LORD, who reminded them through a prophet that they had been unfaithful to Him (6:7–10).

Deliverance began when Gideon, a member of the tribe of Manasseh, received a divine visitor who told him that he was chosen to lead the war against the Midianites (6:11–24).

The first thing Gideon did was destroy his own father's altar to Baal, the chief deity of the Canaanite fertility cult. In its place, he built an altar to the LORD and made a sacrifice on it (6:25–32).

Next, he prepared to attack the Midianites. First, he sent messengers through the country calling for volunteers to fight. Then he asked God for a sign to show that He approved of what Gideon was doing. When the sign was positive, Gideon prepared his forces for battle (6:33–40).

Because there were too many volunteers, Gideon gave them a series of tests to reduce the number. Only 300 were left when the testing was over (7:1–8). These 300 men gathered in the hills surrounding the main Midianite camp, located in a valley. Gideon divided his small army into three parts, giving each soldier a torch, a pitcher to cover it with, and a ram's horn trumpet (7:9–18).

He stationed his men at strategic places, where they waited until the Midianites were asleep. When the signal was given, they raced down from the hills, waving their torches and yelling, “A sword for the LORD and for Gideon” (7:20). The Midianites, awakened from their sleep, probably thought all the Israelites in the world were attacking them. They fled in terror and confusion. Gideon's men were then joined by the others in pursuit of the disorganized Midianites (7:19–8:3).

As the battle ended, Gideon captured two Midianite chieftains, Zeba and Zalmunna, who had killed two of his brothers. Gideon tried to disgrace them by telling his teenage son to kill them. This deeply offended Zeba and Zalmunna. They said to Gideon, “You come and kill us; for as a man is, so is his strength” (8:21). What this meant was, “Kill us yourself. A man has a right to be killed by one who is his equal.” This sense of rank and honor was common in ancient societies and is still strong in many Eastern societies today. The fear of disgrace was greater than the fear of death (8:4–21).

Returning home from the defeat of the Midianites, Gideon was so popular that the people tried to make him king. He refused; but he made a religious image, called an **ephod**, possibly to

commemorate the victory, and urged the people to follow the LORD. Instead, the image he made became an idol that the people worshiped. He died, shunned by the people he had rescued (8:22–35).

ABIMELECH (JUDG. 9:1–25). Abimelech, Gideon’s son by a slave wife, was his father’s opposite, a “mock judge.” Although Gideon did not seek power, Abimelech did; God called Gideon, but Abimelech called himself; Gideon acted with honor; Abimelech died in disgrace.⁷ After skillfully manipulating the leaders of Shechem into supporting him financially and otherwise, he hired a group of thugs and slaughtered all his brothers except one. Then he had himself proclaimed king (9:1–6).

The brother who had escaped Abimelech’s thugs was Jotham, Gideon’s youngest son. Climbing to the top of Mount Ebal, Jotham shouted down to the Shechemites and told them “The **Fable** of the Trees.” The moral was this: When good men fail to act, evil men will act with evil results. Their response to Gideon’s leadership had been to choose the worst of his sons to rule over them simply because he was related to them. Jotham further warned that the results of their foolishness would soon be obvious (9:7–21).

Rebellion, led by Gaal, the son of Ebed, was not long in coming. Gaal stirred up the Shechemites against Abimelech, but Abimelech’s supporters in the city betrayed Gaal, causing his defeat (9:22–41). Abimelech then burned the city of Shechem, including a large number of people who had taken refuge in the Tower of Shechem (9:42–49). Abimelech’s victory was short-lived, however. In his attempt to capture a tower at Thebez, a woman dropped a millstone on his head. To avoid the disgrace of being killed by a woman, he asked his armor bearer to kill him, which he did (9:50–57).⁸

JEPHTHAH (JUDG. 10:6–12:7). Two minor judges, Tola (10:1–2) and Jair (10:3–5), are mentioned before Jephthah is introduced. Israel had been unfaithful again, and Gilead, a Transjordan tribe, had fallen under the heel of the Ammonites, who also crossed the Jordan to raid southern Palestine (10:6–9).

Repenting of their unfaithfulness, the people pleaded for deliverance, promising to support anyone who would lead them (10:10–18). For a leader, they chose an unlikely prospect. Jephthah was the son of a harlot, cast out by his half-brothers because of his illegitimate birth. He became an outlaw, probably raiding caravans on the King’s Highway (11:1–3).

The Gileadites, desperate for someone to lead them, went to Jephthah and pleaded with him to become their leader. He agreed on the condition that, should he succeed, he would become the permanent head of the tribe. This done, Jephthah rallied the people around him and prepared for war. Before he began the battle, he vowed that if he were successful, he would sacrifice to the LORD the first thing he saw when he returned from the battle.

He was successful. When he returned, the first thing he saw was his daughter. He kept his **vow**, thus giving the only clear example in the Old Testament of an Israelite practicing human sacrifice to the LORD (11:29–40). This practice was strongly denounced by all the great prophets of Israel.

Not all battles were fought against non-Israelites. The Ephraimites again became jealous (as they did in the case of Gideon) because they had not shared in the glory of Jephthah’s victory. They decided, therefore, to attack Jephthah and the Gileadites—but they got the worst of the battle. As the fugitives from the battle tried to slip back across the Jordan, the Gileadites, who controlled the crossing places, made each person prove where he was from by giving a password. If he said “Shibboleth,” he was released, for he was not an Ephraimite. If, however, he said “Sibboleth,” he

The Daughter of Jephthah

Jephthah is the fifth of the six characters often designated as *major judges* in the book of Judges. According to Judges 11:1–3, Jephthah is the son of a prostitute who is driven away from his father’s house by his half-brothers and given no inheritance. When the Ammonites begin to oppress the Israelites, the elders of Gilead go to Jephthah to request his help in fighting them. Jephthah demands that he be made the head of the Gileadites if he leads them to victory. The deal is made and Jephthah becomes their leader. After some communication with the Ammonite king, Jephthah takes his army to fight the Ammonites. It is not clear here to what extent all of the Israelite tribes are involved in this action.



When the time of the battle comes, Judges 11:30–31 reports that Jephthah makes a vow to God. He promises that if he is victorious, he will sacrifice the first person who comes out of his house when he returns home. Some interpreters attempt to dodge the difficulty of this text by insisting that Jephthah’s intent is to sacrifice an animal, but the clear sense of the text is that a person is intended. It is not clear, however, who Jephthah thinks this might be. After the victory Jephthah returns home and is greeted by his daughter, his only child, running from the house. Even though this seems unexpected, Jephthah is determined to complete the vow. He tells his daughter about it, and she agrees to participate if she is allowed two months to go to the mountains with her friends to grieve because she has no children to maintain her memory. It is tragic that the biblical text neglects to tell us the name of this young woman, yet Judges 11:39–40 reports that a tradition of remembering her each year developed among young women in Israel. Jephthah completes his vow and kills his daughter. The book of Judges makes no evaluation of his action, even though human sacrifice was forbidden in Israel. No angel descends to stop Jephthah, as the angel did to stop Abraham from sacrificing Isaac in Genesis 22. Other places in the Bible, like Hebrew 11:32, remember Jephthah as a faithful hero. This reveals a typical pattern in the Bible, and in religion generally, in which women and children suffer so that men may be considered faithful.

was seized and killed, for only those who spoke the Ephraimite dialect pronounced the Hebrew *sh* sound as an *s* (12:1–7).

SAMSON (JUDG. 13:1–16:31). Three other minor judges—Ibzan (12:8–10), Elon (12:11–12), and Abdon (12:13–15)—are mentioned before Samson is introduced. The most important thing about any of them was the large size of their families.

The **Samson** stories are introduced with a familiar theme: “The Israelites again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.” Oppression came from the Philistines, who would be Israel’s mortal enemies until David conquered them.

The Philistines controlled the southern Palestinian coast from five strong cities: Gaza, Ashdod, Ashkelon, Ekron, and Gath. They came to Palestine around 1200 B.C.E. and, religion aside, theirs was a much more highly developed society than that of the Israelites. Their pottery was a buff-colored, white-slipped decorated ware that has been found in a number of Philistine archaeological sites. In contrast, Israelite pottery from the same period (the early Iron Age) was

very crude and rough. More importantly, the Philistines possessed the secret of smelting iron, giving them weapons for war far superior to the stone and bronze weapons of the Israelites. Israel did not possess such weapons—at least not until after the time of David.

The pressure begun in Samson’s time would mount until it did what none of the judges had been able to do—namely, to drive the twelve stubbornly independent Israelite tribes to unite under a single leader. Samson had a flair for the dramatic. This trait might have made him a leader, but unfortunately, he possessed neither the will nor the character to be one.

The story of Samson has the familiar theme of the barren wife, who, after many years, bears a son. Because of the pledge made by his mother before his birth, Samson was a Nazirite. The Nazirite vow required that a person (1) not cut his hair, (2) not drink wine, and (3) not touch a dead body (13:1–25).

Samson’s home was in the foothill country, bordering on the Philistine territory. His mother’s pledge that he would be a **Nazirite** did not keep him from growing up as a domineering and arrogant young man, one who was accustomed to having what he wanted. The first thing he wanted was to marry a Philistine woman, an unthinkable thing for a well-brought-up young Israelite man. But Samson knew what he wanted, so his browbeaten parents gave in. The Israelite storyteller interpreted it as the LORD’s way of providing an excuse for Samson to strike a blow at the Philistines (14:1–4).

On the way to see the girl, a young lion attacked Samson. Samson killed the lion and left the carcass by the roadside. Later, as he came back, he found a swarm of bees in the body of the lion. When the wedding festivities were taking place, Samson made a bet with the Philistine men that he could give them a riddle they could not solve. If they solved it within the seven-day period of the feast, he would give them thirty linen garments and thirty festal garments. The riddle was:

Out of the eater came something to eat,
Out of the strong came something sweet. (14:14)

Unsuccessful at first, the young men threatened Samson’s bride, telling her that they would kill her if she did not get the answer from Samson and tell them. She used a number of ways to try to get the answer. Finally she used the ultimate weapon—tears—and he told her.

When the Philistines gave Samson the correct answer, he immediately knew his wife had told them.

Then the Spirit of the LORD rushed on him, and he went down to Ashkelon. He killed thirty men of the town, took their spoil, and gave the festal garments to those who explained the riddle.

Note that Samson’s great strength is said to have existed because “the Spirit of the LORD rushed on him,” in keeping with the idea that all things were from the LORD (14:5–20).

Thus began a series of conflicts between Samson and the Philistines. His wife was given to another man, causing Samson to gain vengeance by setting the grain fields on fire by tying torches to foxes’ tails and loosing them in the fields. (Today, a fox with a torch tied to its tail is the Israeli roadside warning against carelessness with fire.) In revenge, the Philistines burned his ex-wife and her father to death (15:1–8).

Next, they put pressure on the men of Judah to capture Samson for them; otherwise, they would make war against Judah. Samson allowed himself to be captured, only once he was handed over to the Philistines, he broke the ropes that bound him. Seizing the jawbone of an ass, he cut a deadly swath with it, leaving dead Philistines in his path (15:9–20).

His passions kept getting him in trouble. A harlot in Gaza almost caused him to be captured (16:1–3). Then came Delilah, a woman from the Vale of Sorek, who would finally lay him low.

Completely under Philistine control, she set out to lead Samson to his downfall. Some lines from the book of Proverbs describe his response:

With much seductive speech she persuades him;
 with her smooth talk she compels him.
 Right away he follows her,
 and goes like an ox to the slaughter,
 or bounds like a stag toward a trap
 until an arrow pierces its entrails.
 He is like a bird rushing into a snare,
 not knowing it will cost him his life. (Prov. 7:21–23)

She began a campaign to find the secret of his strength. He played along with her, giving her misleading answers each time. Each failure on her part frustrated her even more. Finally, her tears flowed and the secret was told—his strength lay in his hair. All that was left was for her to tell the Philistines and then lull Samson to sleep so that she could cut his hair (16:4–19).

The magic was gone for Samson. When he awoke, the Spirit of the LORD was gone. He had abused the power, and he had lost it. He was blinded and put to doing menial work in a prison (16:20–22).

Finally, Samson was ready to die. When he was brought out to entertain Philistine notables in the shrine of the Philistine god Dagon, his strength returned long enough for him to pull the temple down on himself and the worshipers (16:23–31). His epitaph could well have been “So those he killed at his death were more than those he had killed during his life” (16:30c).

The Minor Judges

The six *major* judges in the book of Judges are properly labeled this way for two reasons. First, there is a large amount of material about them, although the size of their stories varies tremendously from the five verses dedicated to Othniel to four chapters about Samson. More importantly, the stories about them follow the plot line established in Judges 2:11–23 and display all of its major elements. Six other judges are mentioned by name in the book for whom there are not complete stories following this plotline. Therefore, they are often called the *minor* judges. Shamgar appears alone in a single verse in 3:31. The others appear in two groups: Tola and Jair in 10:1–5 and Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon in 12:8–15. These six characters participate in the general movement of the book of Judges in at least two ways. First, their increasing number, from one to two to three, contributes to the general sense of growing disorder in the book; second, the shorter periods of time for which they rule are part of the general decline in these numbers.

There Was No King in Israel: Three Stories

MICAH AND THE LEVITE (JUDG. 17:1–13). The final chapters of Judges illustrate the troubled and confused times preceding the establishment of the monarchy. Religious confusion is illustrated by the story of a man named Micah, who confessed to his mother that he had stolen 1100 silver coins from her. When he confessed, she gave the coins to him. He, in turn, had an idol made to worship (17:1–6). A traveling Levite passed through, and Micah hired him to be his priest on the assumption that a Levite would make his worship legitimate (17:7–13).

THE MOVE OF THE TRIBE OF DAN (JUDG. 18:1–31). The pressure exerted by the Philistines is illustrated by Judges 18. The tribe of Dan had been assigned a territory lying between those of Judah and Ephraim, Israel’s two most powerful tribes, and the dreaded Philistines. They sent out spies to locate a new place to settle. Eventually, they came to a place in northern Palestine, where the sources of the Jordan River arose at the base of Mount Hermon. On their return, they discovered Micah, the Levite, and his idol. When the tribe moved north, they took Micah’s idol and his priest and set up a shrine in the new territory that they captured (18:1–31).

THE LEVITE AND THE SIN OF BENJAMIN (JUDG. 19:1–21:25). A strange but fascinating story closes the book of Judges. A Levite living in the territory of Ephraim had to bring back his slave wife after she ran away to her father’s home (19:1–9). On the way back, they thought of stopping at Jebus (Jerusalem) for the night but decided against it, because it was not an Israelite city. Instead, they went on to Gibeah, a Benjaminite city near Jerusalem. They were invited into the home of an elderly Ephraimite who lived in Gibeah after no Benjaminite extended hospitality to them (19:10–22).

During the night, some local men demanded that their host give up the Levite so that they could have sex with him. This was a *nabalah*, the vilest offense imaginable (19:23). When they threatened violence, the Levite finally gave them his slave wife, whom they raped repeatedly. The next morning, her dead body was found at the door (19:22–28).

Taking her body home, he cut it into twelve pieces and sent one piece to each tribe (19:29–30). This seems to have been the signal for an emergency meeting for all the tribes. Saul, in later years, cut up a team of oxen to call the people to war against the Ammonites (1 Sam. 11:7).

The tribal leaders, along with their soldiers, assembled at Mizpah. The Levite told them what had happened. A decision was made to attack Gibeah to punish its people for allowing such a crime to happen there (20:1–11). First, however, they gave the tribe of Benjamin (in whose territory Gibeah was located) a chance to surrender the men who had committed the crime. Instead, the Benjaminites took up arms against the other tribes in defense of Gibeah (20:12–17).

At first, the battle favored the Benjaminites (20:18–28). Finally, however, they were soundly defeated, and their towns were burned to the ground (20:29–48).

The victory turned to ashes when the other tribes realized that they had practically wiped out one of the twelve tribes. Another assembly was called at Bethel to deal with the situation. What was needed were wives for the surviving Benjaminite men so that they could raise families. Yet a vow had been taken that none of the other tribes would permit their women to marry a Benjaminite.

What could be done? A two-part solution was advanced. First, the city of Jabesh-Gilead in Transjordan had not supported the war against Benjamin. Because of this, the city was attacked and 400 young girls were taken and given to the Benjaminites for wives (21:1–15).

When this did not fill the need, a second solution was put into effect. Each year at Shiloh there was a dance for the grape harvest. The men who needed wives were told to hide in the vineyards so that when the young girls came dancing through them, each man could grab a girl and carry her away. This solved the problem, allowing Benjamin to survive as a tribe of Israel (21:16–24).

Summary of the Book of Judges

The book of Judges is summarized quite well by its final verse: “In those days there was no king in Israel; all the people did what was right in their own eyes” (21:25).

The final chapters illustrate that theme, but they also say some important things about the times and the ways in which the tribes functioned in emergencies. It was a time of developing crisis, as the Philistines began to exert more pressure on the Israelite territories. The Israelites were poorly organized and were not really prepared to respond to the Philistine threat.

Yet, as the story of the Levite and his concubine shows, there seems to have been a kind of organization among the tribes. The term *amphictyony*, referring to a league of tribes in Greece, has been used to describe it. That such a league existed in Israel before the time of the monarchy has been increasingly questioned. If so, its purpose would have been twofold: (1) to bring the tribes together for major religious ceremonies, such as the covenant-renewal ceremony (Josh. 24), and (2) to call the tribes together for war when a situation arose that demanded it. In this latter sense, the chief priest functioned like one of the judges, because war was also a matter of religion. The opening chapters of 1 Samuel show two such priest-judges in action—Eli and Samuel. Just as in our present world, religion was used to justify violence. Such claims ought to be questioned and resisted.

PROPOSED MODELS FOR THE ISRAELITE OCCUPATION OF CANAAN

The conquest of Palestine (Canaan) is one of the most widely discussed subjects in biblical studies. As has already been seen, Joshua and Judges seem to give two different views of the Palestinian conquest. Added to this, the archaeological evidence, like most archaeological data, suffers from two major limitations: (1) Most excavations cover only a small fraction of the total area of any given site, thus limiting what we can know about the site, and (2) most of what is found is nonverbal (that is, pottery,



The Judges and the Length of Their Rule

Othniel	Forty years
Ehud	Eighty years
Shamgar	No number provided
Deborah	Forty years
Gideon	Forty years
Tola	Twenty-three years
Jair	Twenty-two years
Jephthah	Six years
Ibzan	Seven years
Elon	Ten years
Abdon	Eight years
Samson	Twenty years
Eli (recorded in 1 Samuel)	Forty years

If added together, these numbers total 336 years. When combined with the periods attributed to the rule of Eli and Samuel, the period of Joshua, and the forty years in the wilderness, and placed before the traditional date of the beginning of the monarchy at about 1000 B.C.E., such a scheme would push the Exodus and the entry into the Promised Land back into the fifteenth and fourteenth centuries (see the discussion of the date of the Exodus in Chapter 4). On the other hand, many of these numbers appear to be figurative, particularly in their relationship to the metaphorical value of forty, and the characters named as judges often appear to be merely regional figures whose periods of rule could have overlapped. Therefore, these numbers are not very useful in attempting to reconstruct a precise chronology of Israelite history.



wall and house foundations, animal bones, the village garbage, etc.) and must be interpreted. As a result, different scholars take much the same evidence and reach widely differing conclusions from it. Nowhere is this more evident than in views of the conquest. They follow at least four major models.

AN INVASION. There are those who see the evidence as basically supporting the biblical picture in Joshua, with a violent attack on the land from the eastern desert region. They point out Lachish, Bethel, and Hazor as cities destroyed in the second half of the thirteenth century B.C.E.⁹

A PEACEFUL INFILTRATION. Others propose that the Israelites were clans or clan groups of sheep and goat herders who moved into the cultivated areas, especially in the central hill country, when vegetation was too scarce on the desert fringes. Gradually, they began to settle in unoccupied areas and became farmers. It was only later, when they came into conflict with the Canaanites, that they captured the larger cities.¹⁰

A PEASANTS' REVOLT. Others theorize that most of the Israelites were Canaanite peasant farmers for whom herding was a secondary occupation. Mixed in with them were a few people of desert origin who had the Exodus–wilderness stories as part of their tradition. These lower-class people gained power by revolting against their Canaanite overlords. In addition, they used treaties, intermarriage, settlement on unoccupied land, and a commitment to Yahwism to unite them and give them identity. This theory sees the lower-class people moving from the cities on the coast into the scarcely populated hill country.¹¹

CANAANITES TURNED ISRAELITES. Although, in a sense, this is a variation of the peasants' revolt, it rests on seemingly sounder archaeological foundations. Based on surveys in Transjordan and the central hill country indicating that there was an east-to-west movement in the development believed to be the first Israelite settlements, it has been proposed that the Israelites really were Canaanite farmers who, centuries earlier, were forced by changing social and economic conditions to become herdsmen living on the desert fringe in Transjordan and southern Palestine. Then, around 1250 B.C.E., the Palestinian coastal cities declined, depriving the herdsmen of their markets. They then gradually moved back into the hill country, established villages, and became farmers, becoming what we know as Israelites. Because this proposal only deals with the economic and social aspects of the settlement, the question of religious development is left open.¹²

Yet, for the biblical interpreter, the religious question is the crucial question. The questions concerning the nature of the conquest probably never will be resolved to everyone's satisfaction. It certainly was more complicated than a superficial reading of Joshua and Judges suggests. Elements of all the major theories may have actually been present. That question aside, the religion of Israel started somewhere, somehow, and under the leadership of someone. No nonbiblical evidence can cancel the imprint of Moses on the people who became known as the Israelites.

Key Terms and Names

Ban, 99

City-state, 98

Deborah, 106

Ephod, 108

Fable, 109

Gideon, 108

Holy War, 99

Iron Age, 96

Jericho, 99

Nazirite, 111

Samson, 110

Vow, 109

Study Questions

1. Why does a careful reading of both Joshua and Judges provide a more balanced view of the conquest?
2. Who were the Sea Peoples, and what role did they play in the story of Israel?
3. How do the stories of Jericho, Achan, and Ai illustrate the religious aspects of the Israelite understanding of war?
4. How does the story of the Gibeonites illustrate the importance of a covenant?
5. What kind of leaders were the judges?
6. What does the story of the covenant-renewal ceremony at Shechem tell us about the makeup of the people of Israel?
7. What was the value of covenant-renewal ceremonies?
8. What elements of Israel's religion may have been borrowed from the Canaanites? Was all such borrowing necessarily bad?
9. What is the Deuteronomic theme, and why is it so named?
10. What is meant by saying that the judges were "charismatic leaders"?
11. What role did women play in the defeat of Sisera?
12. What was the basis of Gideon's strategy against the Midianites?
13. What is the meaning of Jotham's fable (Judges 9:7–15)?
14. In light of the story in Genesis 22, how do you interpret Jephthah's vow that resulted in the sacrifice of his daughter?
15. How does Samson's activity compare to that of the other leaders portrayed in the book of Judges?
16. What set of circumstances finally served to unite the Israelite tribes?
17. In the current debate over the nature of the Exodus and the Palestinian conquest, identify and summarize the major theories.

Endnotes

1. Bryant G. Wood, "Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho? A New Look at the Evidence," *BAR*, XVI, 2 (March–April 1990), 44–57. For another view of the Joshua conquest stories, see Yigael Yadin, "Is the Biblical Account of the Israelite Conquest Historically Reliable?" *BAR*, VIII, 2 (March–April 1982), 22.
2. See the discussion of this literary pattern in Mark McEntire, *The Blood of Abel: The Violent Plot in the Hebrew Bible* (Macon, GA: Mercer University Press, 1999), 64–74.
3. J. W. Rogerson, "Corporate Personality," *ABD*, I, 1156–1157.
4. John Day, "Canaan, Religion of," *ABD*, I, 831–837.
5. Along with many other stories about Baal, this is part of the Ugaritic materials from the fourteenth century B.C.E. Translations may be found in Pritchard, *ANE*, 92–118.
6. Lawrence E. Stager, "The Song of Deborah: Why Some Tribes Answered the Call and Others Did Not," *BAR*, XV, 1 (January–February 1989), 51–64, points out that the tribes that followed Deborah were farmers, while those that did not were seafarers whose living depended upon a good relationship with the Canaanites.
7. This insight into the story of Abimelech is from Wesley A. Kort, *Story, Text and Scripture* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1988), 32.
8. For a look at archaeological evidence from Shechem during the period of the judges, see Gaalyah Cornfeld and David Noel Freedman, eds., *Archaeology of the Bible: Book by Book* (New York: Harper and Row, 1976), 77–79.
9. Strong advocates of this view were Yadin, "Is the Biblical Account of the Israelite Conquest Reliable?" 16–23, and Abraham Malamat, "How Inferior Israelite Forces Conquered Fortified Canaanite Cities," *BAR*, VIII, 2 (March–April 1982), 24f.
10. First proposed by Albrecht Alt, it is summarized by Manfred Weippert, *The Settlement of the Tribes in Palestine: A Summary of Recent Scholarly Debate*, trans. James D. Martin (Naperville, IL: Alec R. Allenson, 1970).
11. Advocated by Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1979).
12. First propounded by Israel Finkelstein, the most recent expression of this theory is by Neil Asher Silberman, "Who Were the Israelites?" *ARCH*, 45, 2 (March–April 1992), 22–30. He also gives a summary of the other positions.

CHAPTER

6

The Beginning of the Monarchy

Samuel, Saul, and David

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Timeline

- 1200 B.C.E. Frequent guess for the beginning of the period of the judges
- 1050 B.C.E. Approximate time of the fall of Shiloh
- 1020 B.C.E. Approximate time of Samuel and Saul and the end of the judges
- 1000 B.C.E. Approximate time of the beginning of David's reign

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Chapter Outline

- I. The Sources for the Story of the Israelite Kingdoms
- II. The Story of Samuel
- III. The Establishment of Saul's Kingship (1020–1 B.C.E.)
- IV. The Appearance of David
- V. Samuel, Saul, and David: A Summary
- VI. David: King Over Judah
- VII. David: King Over All Israel
- VIII. The Court History of David

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CHAPTER OVERVIEW

The book of Judges ends on an ominous note, indicating the failure of the existing pattern of leadership and pointing toward monarchy as a new form of government for Israel. So, it is a little surprising when 1 Samuel opens with the miraculous birth and rise of a new judge. The surprise does not last long, however, as Samuel turns out to be a transitional figure who helps bring about kingship in Israel. The books called 1 and 2 Samuel will tell the story of the emergence of the Israelite monarchy. The story is dominated by three great characters: Samuel, Saul, and David. These books begin with the birth of Samuel, and conclude with David's reign approaching its end. Their stories are made complex by the rapidly changing world around Israel and the ongoing struggle of Israel to determine what it means for them to be God's people.

THE SOURCES FOR THE STORY OF THE ISRAELITE KINGDOMS

The four books traditionally called Joshua, Judges, Samuel, and Kings form the collection Jewish tradition refers to as the Former Prophets. The Christian canons all divide Samuel and Kings into two books each. The resulting six books form a story of Israel from the entry into the Promised Land until the Babylonian Exile, which is typically referred to as the **Deuteronomistic History** in academic contexts. The books called 1 and 2 Samuel are dominated by Samuel, Saul, and David, while 1 and 2 Kings proved the story of a long succession of monarchs.

The Deuteronomistic History is the final product of a long process of writing, which utilized a wide variety of sources. 2 Kings 25:27–30 tells of the release of King Jehoiachin from a Babylonian prison in 560 B.C.E., so this is the earliest date at which the final composition could have taken place. This means that the full sweep of these books covers about seven centuries.

Some of the sources are mentioned directly: The Book of Jashar (2 Samuel 1:18), The Book of the Acts of Solomon (1 Kings 11:41), the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Israel (1 Kings 14:19), and the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah (1 Kings 22:45). In addition to these sources from which materials were taken to write the biblical books of Samuel and Kings, readers have also tried to identify earlier stages in the composition. One such possible source is found in 2 Samuel 9–20 and 1 Kings 1–2, a sequence that some have called the *Court History of David* or the *Succession Narrative*, an intimate inner look at the palace with all of its plots and intrigues, which is quite different from the other parts of these books. One of the remarkable things about the books of Samuel and Kings is that the final composition presents such a variety of perspectives on the story of Israel's **monarchy**, both positive and negative.

There is another version of the history that is different from the version found in 1,2 Samuel and 1,2 Kings. This version is found in 1,2 Chronicles, a history of Israel written sometime after the Babylonian Exile. Many passages in Chronicles are lifted word for word from the Samuel to Kings history, yet there are important differences. David's weaknesses are glossed over in Chronicles, as are the weaknesses of other Judean kings, such as Manasseh. Much attention is given to genealogies and to the activities of the priests and of other Temple officials. There is also a different theological viewpoint. Whereas 2 Samuel 24:1 says, "the LORD caused David to number the people," 1 Chronicles 21:1 says, "Satan" caused David to number them. Even with these differences, 1,2 Chronicles preserves valuable supplemental information about Israel's history. The presence of the books of Chronicles in the canon indicates that there was more than one version of Israel's story. These parallel histories present alternative visions of Israel's story and identity, and they should help the reader to realize that history is always told from a particular point of view.

THE STORY OF SAMUEL

Birth and Dedication (1 Sam. 1:1–2:10)

Hannah, the favorite wife of Elkanah (an Ephraimite), bore one of the heaviest burdens an Israelite woman could bear—she was childless. Peninah, the other wife, was fruitful and lorded her success in childbearing over Hannah. It was a bitter pill for Hannah to swallow (1:1–8).

On an annual trip to **Shiloh** for one of the major festivals, Hannah was so distraught and earnest in prayer that **Eli**, the head of the shrine, thought she was drunk. When he started to scold her for her supposed drunkenness, Hannah told him of her distress. Eli, in turn, assured her that her prayer would be answered (1:9–18).

Eli must have known something, for Hannah was soon pregnant. In due time, the promised son was born. Hannah did not go to the festival until **Samuel** was able to eat solid foods. Then she took him, offered a sacrifice, and dedicated him to serve the LORD at the Shiloh shrine (1:19–28). As part of the description of that service, there is a beautiful psalm of thanksgiving called the *Song of Hannah*. Later, parts of this poem are quoted in the Song of Mary in Luke 1:46–55 (2:1–10), in which Mary expresses her joy at the promise of the birth of Jesus.

As the book called 1 Samuel opens, Israel's archenemy, the **Philistines**, has already been introduced in the previous book. The charismatic military leaders called *judges* had not been successful in overthrowing this enemy. The opening of 1 Samuel ignores this national story line for a while and focuses instead on a single family and the birth of a child. As soon as Samuel is raised to adulthood, however, in the first few chapters, the Philistine army reappears with a vengeance and routs the Israelites, even going so far as to capture the Ark of the Covenant in 1 Samuel 4. This defeat convinces the Israelites that they can no longer compete in Canaan with amateur leadership and leads to their demand to be ruled by a king "like the other nations." Samuel becomes the transitional figure who reluctantly brokers this political transition, becoming the last of the judges and the first prophet in Israel to anoint a king.

Training and Call to Service (1 Sam. 2:11–4:1)

Samuel was left with Eli, who was to train him for the priesthood (2:11). Unfortunately, Eli's sons, who served as priests at the shrine, were poor examples. The Hebrew text calls them the *sons of Belial*, a term of cursing and condemnation (2:12). They were greedy, irreverent, and immoral (2:13–17, 22). Because of this situation, a prophet (a man of God) came to Eli and told him that his family would lose the privilege of serving at the shrine because his sons had abused their offices as priests and leaders (2:22–36). Despite the bad examples before him, Samuel grew "both in stature and in favor with the LORD and with the people" (2:26).

The corruption at the Shiloh shrine was a symptom of the times. "The word of the LORD was rare in those days; visions were not widespread" (3:1). The Deuteronomic historian saw the lack of moral integrity in the family of Eli, Israel's most important leader, as contributing to a state of religious apathy throughout the country. Few people were in a spiritual condition to receive a revelation from God.

Then came Samuel's call from the LORD. He was still a young boy when he heard the LORD speak to him in the night. Thinking Eli was calling him, he awakened the old man to ask what he wanted. Eli told him that he had not called. Samuel heard the voice once again, and once more went to Eli with the same result. The third time, Eli told him that the LORD must have been calling. Then Samuel answered and was told that he eventually would replace Eli. Eli's family, furthermore, would meet with disaster (3:2–14).



The Literary Structure of Samuel

How one perceives the literary structure of Samuel depends a great deal upon certain initial assumptions. Samuel appears originally to have been a single book that was later divided into 1 Samuel and 2 Samuel, as they now appear in most Bibles. Should this division influence our understanding of the literary design of the book? The book of Samuel is connected to other books in the Bible. It is part of the Genesis–Kings complex, often referred to as the *Primary History*, which tells the grand story of Israel from creation to the Exile. Was Samuel originally an independent work that was later integrated into this larger work, or was there a grand, undivided epic that has now been pulled apart into nine (or eleven) separate books? Samuel is also part of the set of books from Joshua through Kings called the *Deuteronomistic History*. What is Samuel's relationship to this set of books, and how is it complicated by the observation that David lives through the end of 2 Samuel and dies in 1 Kings? The answers to these questions determine the extent to which we understand the present boundaries of the book or books of Samuel as beginnings and endings of stories. This discussion will treat Samuel as one book and attempt to balance the influences that the canon imposes on it. Samuel is a distinct book that is also part of a cohesive sequence of books.

The book of Samuel is generally considered the most artfully composed piece of narrative literature in the Old Testament. When we gaze upon its story from a distance, it is impossible to miss the imposing figures of its three major characters. The lives of Samuel, Saul, and David, and the relationships between them, form the contours of the book. The end of the book of Judges clearly points toward the monarchy, and the birth of the Davidic **dynasty** is the primary subject matter of the book of Samuel.

These three major characters are not just treated sequentially. Their lives are intimately intertwined. Samuel is the main character in 1 Samuel 1–8 as the story moves inevitably toward the establishment of the monarchy. Once Samuel anoints Saul in 1 Samuel 9, Saul becomes the main character, but Samuel remains an important presence. The story becomes significantly more complicated when Samuel anoints David in 1 Samuel 16. A struggle for power then ensues in the narrative between Saul and David, with Samuel in the background. The death of Samuel in 1 Samuel 25 and the death of Saul in 1 Samuel 31 clear the way for David to become the sole focus of the story. Those who divided the book of Samuel into two books at some point chose the death of Saul as a significant dividing line. Still, Saul does not disappear from the narrative, as his sons continue to vie for the throne in the early chapters of 2 Samuel. In fact, Saul's presence is not fully put to rest until David kills his remaining heirs in 2 Samuel 20. The final chapters of 2 Samuel constitute an appendix with a variety of materials. Although David is not quite dead at the end of the book, his story is finished. The foundation is established for the story of the House of David in the book of Kings, beginning with Solomon. Solomon is not prominent in the book of Samuel, but the conflict in the House of David, which begins with the Bathsheba affair and culminates in the deaths of Amnon and Absalom, seems to be preparing his path to the throne.

The picture of the book of Samuel presented here is that of a grand, sweeping story carried along by interlocking characters. Through the development of this story, this book answers important questions. How did Israel get to be a monarchy and why? How did the monarchy become the Davidic dynasty and why?



When Samuel arose in the morning, he tried to avoid telling Eli what had happened. When Eli insisted on being told, however, Samuel related his vision. Gradually, the word spread that Samuel was a prophet in Israel (3:15–4:1a). As a prophet, he was looked upon as one who had direct access to God and who acted as God’s earthly spokesman. For this reason, the prophets introduced their messages not with “I say” but rather “Thus says the LORD.” A fuller discussion of prophets and prophecy will come later.

The Battle of Ebenezer (1 Sam. 4:1–22)

Israel’s internal confusion, coupled with the increasing Philistine strength, finally led to a full-scale attack by the Philistines. The Philistine army massed at Aphek, where the great international trade road was forced inland by the swamps caused by the slow-flowing Yarkon River. From Aphek, the hill country was only a short distance away. The Israelites were camped at Ebenezer on the edge of the hills.

The Philistine war plan was to cut the country in half by driving through the mountains to the Jordan. Because the Philistines had iron weapons that were far superior to anything the Israelites had, the prospects for Israel looked bleak.

The first day’s battle ended with heavy losses for the Israelites. In desperation, they decided to invoke the memories of the holy war the next day by carrying the Ark of the Covenant before them into battle. But as the holy object was borne by Eli’s two unholy sons, Hophni and Phineas, even the Ark could not change the tide of the battle (4:1–5).

The result was a disaster for Israel. The Philistines were inspired to fight harder. Not only did they defeat the Israelites, but they killed Hophni and Phineas and captured the Ark (4:6–11).



FIGURE 6–1 “[The Israelites] encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek” (1 Sam. 4:1d). Aphek was a strategic point on the great coastal highway. The remains of a sixteenth-century Turkish fort now occupy much of the site.

When a messenger took the word to Eli, the shock was so great that it killed him also (4:12–18). Last of all, the wife of Phineas died as she gave birth to a son. Before she died, she gave him the name Ichabod, symbolic of the disastrous day. The child’s name meant “the glory (the presence of God) has departed” (4:19–22).

That Troublesome Ark (1 Sam. 5:1–6:21)

The Philistines carried the Ark, symbol of the presence of Israel’s God, home in triumph. Before long, however, they wished they had never seen it. First, they put it in the temple of their chief deity, Dagon, as a symbol of Dagon’s superiority to the LORD. The next morning, Dagon’s image was found lying facedown on the floor (5:1–5).

Next, a plague struck Ashdod. People began to develop skin tumors. The people of Ashdod decided that the people of Gath had a right to keep the battle prize for a while, so they sent the Ark there. The Gathites, too, broke out in sores. They decided that the people of Ekron would surely want to see the famous Ark. The disaster was repeated. Panic mounted in the Philistine towns (5:6–12).

They then decided that the Ark was bad luck and that the only thing to do was to send it back where it belonged. Because no one volunteered to carry it back home, they decided on a plan. They hitched two cows to a cart, placed the Ark on the cart, put an offering of gold with the Ark to appease the Israelite God, and turned the cows loose, heading them toward Beth–Shemesh in Israelite territory (6:1–13).

When the Ark was found by the Israelites, the cart was broken up and the cattle were sacrificed. A number of Israelites died, however, perhaps because the holy Ark was not handled properly. Ancient people feared holy things so much that such fear could actually cause death. A similar thing happens today among people who believe in voodoo, macumba, or similar rites of black magic (6:14–20).

The text is silent about the matter, but Shiloh must have fallen while the Ark was held by the Philistines. The Ark was taken to a private home in Kiriath–Jearim after being returned to the Israelites (6:21–7:2). It was to remain there until David became king and had it moved to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:2; 1 Chron. 15:1–29).

The Roles Samuel Played

The career of Samuel, as presented to us in the Old Testament, embodies the powerful changes taking place in the life of Israel at this point in the story. In one way, it is odd that the books we most often refer to as 1 and 2 Samuel carry his name, because he essentially vanishes from the story after 1 Samuel 16. Samuel reappears briefly in a passive role in 1 Samuel 18:19–24, his death is noted in 25:1, and his ghost is conjured up in a séance in 28:3–28, but his name never even appears in the book we now call 2 Samuel. Still, the rapidly developing national institutions in place in Israel by the time of the great Davidic–Solomonic Kingdom all flow out of this profound figure.

SAMUEL, THE JUDGE (1 SAM. 7:3–17). Samuel was a judge with a difference. He was, first of all, a spiritual leader who reminded the people of their obligation to live by the Covenant (7:3–4). 1 Samuel 7:12–14 describes significant military success during the time of Samuel, but there is no description of any direct participation of Samuel in these military efforts. He was a judge in the modern sense of the term. He is portrayed traveling a circuit of four cities (Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpah, and Ramah) adjudicating legal cases (7:15–17).

SAMUEL, THE PROPHET (1 SAM. 8:1–9:14). In ancient Israel, one of the tasks of a **prophet** was to speak the word of God to the people, warning them of the consequences of their decisions and of the responsibilities that came when decisions were made. Chapter 8 reflects the strong resistance that existed among some in Israel to the idea of the kingship. This feeling continued to exist long after the monarchy was established. In some ways, certain of the prophets reflected this attitude with their condemnation of the reigning monarch.¹ Thus, 1 Samuel 8:4–22 has Samuel telling the people of the dangers that they would face if they had a king. The people did not listen, but insisted that a king be chosen for them. Finally, the LORD and Samuel gave in (8:22).

It was in his role as prophet that Samuel first met Saul, the son of Kish. Like the hero in a romantic movie, Saul was tall and charismatic. He was the kind of person who stood out in a crowd:

There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he; he stood head and shoulders above everyone else. (9:2)

Saul was sent out by his father to find some donkeys that had strayed. After searching for some time without success, Saul, at his servant's suggestion, went to consult the famous prophet Samuel at his home in Ramah.

Samuel seemingly had what is called *second sight*, or the power of clairvoyance. Hence, he was called *the seer* (9:9), a term used to describe many of the early prophets, who functioned more as fortune-tellers than as critics on the moral issues of the time. As a prophet, Samuel seemed to function in both roles: (1) as a moral critic and (2) as a clairvoyant who could help find lost objects. It was, then, as a clairvoyant that Samuel first met Saul (9:3–14).

SAMUEL, THE KING MAKER (1 SAM. 9:15–10:27). Saul was so impressive on first sight that Samuel was convinced that he was the LORD's choice to be the king. Saul's journey to find his father's donkeys, then, brought a rather shocking result. Samuel told Saul that the donkeys were already at home. Then he invited Saul to a banquet at the shrine. When Saul arrived, thirty persons were present. He, an obscure young man from one of Israel's smallest and weakest tribes, was given the seat of honor and was served the choicest portion of the meat (9:15–24).

Undoubtedly, Saul was mystified by all this. But the greatest surprise was yet to come. After spending the night in Ramah as Samuel's guest, Saul prepared to return home. Samuel, going with him to the outskirts of the village, asked Saul to send his servant on ahead so that the two of them could be alone. When the servant had gone, Samuel took a vial of olive oil, poured it on Saul's head, and told him he was to be Israel's first king (9:25–10:1).

The Meaning of Anointing

Samuel's act of **anointing** Saul marked the king as God's choice. It was an act separate and apart from the actual installation of the king, especially in the early monarchy. Saul was not crowned for a week after he was anointed (10:8). David, who succeeded Saul, was anointed by Samuel several years before he actually became king. Later on, anointing was probably a part of the coronation of the king; at most, it came only a short time earlier.

When Israel had no king, the terms *to anoint* and *the anointed one*² took on a new meaning. Israel looked back at its days of glory. David, its greatest king, became the example of the kind of king Israel wanted in a future time of glory, which it believed the LORD would bring. Because of that hope the term *mashiach*, "the anointed one," was used to speak of a hoped-for king. When *mashiach* was translated into Greek, it became *Messias*, which, in turn, became *Messiah* in English. Furthermore, when *mashiach* was translated into Greek by Christian writers, it became

Christos, which becomes *Christ* in English. Thus, the title *the Christ*, which was applied to Jesus of Nazareth by early Christians, came to mean “God’s chosen one” or “God’s anointed one.”

After Samuel had anointed Saul, he told him to return home for seven days. On the way, certain signs would be given to him that he was the LORD’s choice as king. One of them would be that he would meet a group of ecstatic prophets. When he did, he would be overwhelmed by the “Spirit of the LORD,” which would cause him to prophesy with them. These prophets represented another kind of prophet—one who went around in groups and whose prophesying was accompanied by various expressions of extreme emotionalism, such as trances, mass hysteria, and emotional frenzy (10:2–8).

When things happened as Samuel had said, some people began ridiculing Saul. The question “Is Saul also among the prophets?” (10:11) was asked in a mocking tone rather than a tone of approval (10:9–13). When his uncle asked him where he had been, Saul told of his visit to Samuel, but said nothing about being anointed to be king (10:14–16). This basic shyness would be a major problem for Saul throughout his life.

Even when Samuel called the tribal league together at Mizpah to approve his selection of Saul as king, Saul showed the same kind of shyness. When he finally was confirmed and certified by Samuel as the LORD’s choice, the people had to search for him. He was found hiding among the baggage, an act that certainly caused many to be slow in following him as king. Others, however, gave him their wholehearted support (10:17–27).

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF SAUL’S KINGSHIP (1020–1000 B.C.E.)³

Transition from Samuel to Saul

Saul made no move to exert his authority as king, even though he had been crowned in a public ceremony. Instead, he went on leading the life of an Israelite farmer until circumstances forced him to take action. Jabesh–Gilead, a town located just east of the Jordan River and about twenty-five miles south of the Lake of Chinnereth (Sea of Galilee), came under attack by the Ammonites, led by King Nahash (the “Snake”).⁴ Finding themselves in dire straits, the men of Jabesh–Gilead asked for terms of peace to avoid wholesale slaughter by the superior Ammonite forces. The Ammonites agreed, but only on the condition that they could gouge out the right eyes of all the men of the town.⁵ After asking for seven days to consider the proposition, the elders managed to send messengers to Saul at Gibeah to seek his help (11:1–4).

On hearing their predicament, Saul reacted strongly, for “the Spirit of God came upon Saul in power” (11:6). Taking the team of oxen with which he had been plowing, he killed them, cut them into twelve parts, and sent one piece to the leaders of each of the tribes. This was the signal to mobilize for war. Men responded quickly to his call, especially from the tribe of Judah (11:8; cf. Judg. 19:29). Dividing his forces into three groups, Saul attacked the Ammonites early in the morning and routed them. His successful troops, inspired by his leadership, were ready to turn their wrath upon those Israelites who had refused to support Saul, but he would not let them do so. Saul was confirmed as king in a service of celebration (11:5–15).

The version of Samuel’s farewell address in 1 Samuel 12:1–25 contains familiar themes. First, the sense of honor and honesty characteristic of the themes of Israel’s great prophets can be seen in Samuel’s demand for the people to testify against him if they knew of an act of fraud or dishonesty that he had committed (12:1–5).

A second theme that appears throughout the Old Testament is a recounting of the wonderful works the LORD had done on Israel’s behalf in the Exodus and the conquest; in the exploits of

the judges [note that Samuel is mentioned in the past tense (12:1), which suggests the influence of a later hand]; and Saul's victory over the Ammonites (12:6–12). Woven into this account is the Deuteronomic theme—sin, punishment, repentance, and deliverance (12:9–11). The qualms about the kingship are reflected in the warning that no king could lead the Israelites to success if they were not faithful to the LORD (12:13–17).

A thunderstorm added emphasis to Samuel's warning and gave occasion to repeat the warning that "righteousness brings blessing—sin brings punishment" (12:18–25). This idea, commonly called *retribution theology*, underlies much of the Old Testament. Other parts of the Old Testament, such as Job and Eclesiastes, will call it into question.

The Nature of Saul's Kingship

Saul was not a king in the usual sense of the word. He might be described as a more powerful judge, who, because of the circumstances, was able to gain the majority support of the people. More important, he seems to have gained at least the qualified support of the establishment—tribal chieftains, chief priests, and prophets.⁶ Part of that support grew out of the fact that Saul was an impressive man physically, and obviously he had certain personality traits that, on first impression, caused people to follow him. Still, he remained a man of the people who never became arrogant. The fact that he was from a small tribe and not from one of the two dominant tribes, Ephraim or Judah, may have added to his support from all the other tribes.

His residence, the remains of which have been uncovered at Gibeah (Tell en-Nashbeh), was not elaborate. It was a rough stone fortress designed not for luxury, but as a stronghold for defense against an enemy attack.

This fear of an attack from the Philistines was itself a major element in Saul's support. The Israelites faced the real possibility of being destroyed by the Philistines unless they united, and, at that time, Saul offered the best hope for rescue from the Philistine danger.

But an even more important factor than Saul's abilities or the Philistine threat was the influence of Samuel. He was old, but he was still a man of great influence, and Saul was pliable enough for Samuel to manipulate to his own ends. Samuel had been influential enough to put an obscure Benjaminite on the throne of Israel, but in the long run, he was not able to make Saul successful because of Saul's personal flaws, which hindered him from the beginning. The withdrawal of Samuel's support, the increasing popularity of his son-in-law David (encouraged by Jonathan), and his deep sense of insecurity growing out of his family background would eventually destroy Saul. Some see him as a tragic figure; others agree with the assessment that he was "a bungler from the beginning."⁷

The length of Saul's reign is uncertain, because a number is missing in the Hebrew text, which simply says, "he reigned . . . and two years over Israel" (13:1). Most scholars would say that he ruled about twenty-two years. If one takes the biblical evidence, twelve years might be more logical. The Ark was captured by the Philistines some time before Saul began to reign. According to 1 Samuel 7:2, it was kept in Kirath-Jearim "some twenty years." It was taken to Jerusalem in the early part of David's reign (2 Sam. 6:1–15), but David reigned for over seven years at Hebron before Jerusalem was captured (2 Sam. 5:5). If this twenty years is to be taken literally or even as meaning around twenty years, it would seem to limit Saul's reign to no more than twelve years.

Saul's Kingship Undermined

Saul gained some support through some early victories over the Philistines. Much of his success came from the courage and skilled leadership of his son Jonathan, who led the army to victory at

Geba (located about five miles northeast of Gibeah). The reference to the battle for Geba shows how the Philistines had penetrated the central hill country as part of their strategy to cut the country in two (13:2–4).

Samuel's support of Saul began to erode rather quickly. Like an elderly person who insists that someone should take his place and then resents it when someone does, Samuel had made his farewell speech, but he was not about to give up all his power. He insisted, as chief religious official of the kingdom, that no battle should take place without the proper religious ceremonies.

Things came to a head when Saul gathered his army at Gilgal for an attack on the Philistines. He was impatient to get started. But although Saul waited seven days for Samuel to come, Samuel did not appear. With his troops scattering, Saul decided to take matters into his own hands. He offered the burnt offering himself, only to have Samuel appear just as he finished (13:5–10).

When Samuel asked Saul why he had not waited, Saul said that the people were getting impatient. Samuel rebuked him, saying that he had disobeyed God and, as a result, his kingdom would not continue (13:11–15a).

Saul had only 600 soldiers at Gilgal (near Jericho) to face the large Philistine force encamped at Michmash, about ten to twelve miles west. The problem was compounded by the fact that the Philistines had far superior weapons, because only Saul and Jonathan among the Israelites had iron swords (13:22). The narrative makes the problem more vivid by telling how any Israelite who had an iron tool or weapon had to take it to the Philistines to have it sharpened. Imagine what would happen if an Israelite went to the Philistines and said, "I want to start a war with you tomorrow. Would you sharpen my sword?" (13:15b–23).

Courage and ingenuity saved the day for Israel. Jonathan and his armor bearer crept up a narrow pass overlooking the Philistine camp, then stood up, and called to the Philistines to get their attention. They had already agreed that if the Philistines came up to challenge them, it would be a sign that the LORD would give them victory. They fought the Philistines in the narrow pass, so that they had only to fight a few at a time. Jonathan would knock them down, and his servant would finish them off. The Philistines became so demoralized by Jonathan's success that they fled in fear. An earth tremor added to the Philistine panic (14:1–15).

Word got back to the camp about the uproar Jonathan was causing among the Philistines. Although Saul started to consult the priest, so many of his men were rushing to join the battle that he went on without the required religious ceremony being performed. Before he went, however, he did a rash thing by ordering that no one was to eat anything until the Philistines were defeated. To do so would bring death by execution (14:16–24).

Jonathan, unaware of the order, came upon some honey in the forest. After he had eaten some of it, one of the men following him told him of Saul's oath to kill anyone who ate before the battle was won. Jonathan openly criticized his father for taking a foolish oath, because the people were weak with exhaustion. As a result of their hunger, when the battle was over, they seized cattle and killed them, eating blood with the meat (14:25–32). This was in direct violation of an ancient taboo among the Israelites. Leviticus 17:14 says:

For the life of every creature—its blood is its life; therefore I have said to the people of Israel: You shall not eat the blood of any creature, for the life of every creature is its blood; whoever eats it shall be cut off.

This principle led to the development of rules in Israel and, later, in Judaism about the proper way to kill animals for food. Such rules are still observed by many Jews today.

Saul ordered the people to stop what they were doing. He took it upon himself to make an altar to offer a sacrifice for them. He also saw to it that they were fed properly (14:33–35).

Afterward, Saul wanted to continue the battle on into the night, but the priest suggested that he ask for a sign from God. When no sign was forthcoming, Saul took it to mean that someone had violated the oath. To find the culprit, he consulted the Urim and Thummim. These probably were two marked stones thrown to get “yes” or “no” answers to questions. In our day, this would be considered a game of chance, but it was not thought to be such in Saul’s time. The LORD controlled the way the holy stones fell, and in this manner God’s will was revealed. The first question was “Did some of the people violate the oath?” The Urim and Thummim signaled “No.” When the question related to Saul and Jonathan, the answer pointed to Jonathan (14:36–42).

Saul would have killed Jonathan had the people not overruled him. Jonathan was a hero to them, and it was unthinkable that he should be killed for his father’s foolish vow. Either an animal was sacrificed in his place or someone may have volunteered to die for him. Either way, Saul lost the people’s confidence because of his bad judgment (14:43–46).

After a summary statement about Saul’s military activities (14:47–52), the story of Saul’s final break with Samuel is told. Samuel brought a message from the LORD telling Saul to wage a holy war against the Amalekites. He was to “utterly destroy all that they have; do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey” (15:3).

The Amalekites, who lived in the Negev and the upper Sinai, had attacked the Israelites when Israel came out of Egypt. As a result, there seems to have been a long-standing hatred between the two groups. On the other hand, the Kenites, who had been friendly to Israel and lived in this same territory, were given warning of the attack so that they could move out of the area of the battle (15:1–6).

When the attack took place, Saul did not keep all of the holy war provisions. For one thing, he did not kill Agag, the Amalekite king. Nor did he destroy the Amalekite herds. Instead, he took them as spoils of war (15:7–9).

When Samuel found out about Saul’s disobedience, he rebuked Saul. Saul argued that he had only taken the best of the animals for a sacrifice to the LORD. Saul’s motive may have been to win the favor of his soldiers, whose faith in him was already badly shaken. Sacrifices other than the whole burnt offering allowed the offerers the rare chance to eat all the meat they wanted. Sacrifice days literally were feast days, and they were anticipated with delight by the average person. Samuel’s rebuke, however, was based on the principle that Israel was to live in total commitment to the LORD, including carrying out the rules of the holy war (15:10–20).

Saul tried to excuse himself by saying that the people had taken the animals to offer a sacrifice. Samuel’s reply was perhaps the best-remembered statement in the Saul stories:

Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices,
as in obeying the voice of the LORD?
Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice,
and to heed than the fat of rams.

The questioning of the meaning of sacrifice without the proper attitude was to be repeated with even stronger emphasis by Israel’s great prophets. Some would even go so far as to question the need for sacrifice⁸ (15:21–23).

The Old Testament provides a conflicted portrait of King Saul. The book of 1 Samuel begins with the birth story of Samuel, the judge/prophet/priest, but elements of Saul’s birth story seem to be embedded within it at 1:27–28 and 2:10. It is clear from the beginning that the idea of kingship does not have Samuel’s support, and although he appears to warm to Saul in the beginning, he quickly returns to his antimonarchy position. Stories of Saul’s early victories over the Ammonites

and the Philistines look promising, but this wave of success fades in the face of the events portrayed as Saul's sins. When examined more closely, these mistakes look relatively minor or even appear to be set up by Samuel, like the story of Saul's improper sacrifice in 13:1–15. Even Saul's pursuit of and attempts to kill David look mild in comparison to the brutal purge of potential rivals carried out by David and Solomon at later points. The essence of this ambivalence about Saul is captured in the strange little interaction between God and Samuel in 15:34–16:1. The problems involved in translating and interpreting this text make it difficult to determine exactly why God and Samuel are angry and grieving, but the outcome is the decision to anoint David as the next king, even though David is apparently still young and King Saul is far from dead.

THE APPEARANCE OF DAVID

Early Encounters of David with Samuel and Saul

Samuel's work was not done. Having told Saul that he would be the last of his family to rule Israel, he set out to find the LORD's next choice to be king.

This time he went to Bethlehem in Judah to find the future king. He was led to the family of Jesse, a shepherd. Here, Samuel called for Jesse to parade all his sons before him so that he could select the one the LORD had chosen. Several young men appeared before him, but he did not feel that any of them was the correct choice. He asked if there were others and was told that only the youngest, who was watching the sheep, was missing. When David was brought, Samuel knew that he was the one and proceeded to anoint him (16:1–13).

The damage to Saul's ego inflicted by Samuel's rejection was too much for his weak personality. He was thrown into a deep depression, caused by an "evil spirit from the LORD." His servants thought that music might help him, so they suggested that someone be found to play the harp for him. David's reputation as a musician had reached Saul's court, with the result that David was brought in to play for Saul (16:14–23).

The story of David and Goliath is well known, but it has problems.⁹ One of the chief ones is that 2 Samuel 21:19 says:

Elhanan, the son of Jaareoregim, the Bethlehemite, slew Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam.

The passage in which this verse appears (2 Sam. 21:18–22), however, may suggest a possible solution, because it speaks of four giant Philistine soldiers. Thus, the most logical solution is that both Elhanan and David slew giants but that the name of one of them has been lost from the Samuel tradition. Furthermore, 1 Chronicles 20:5 tries to deal with the inconsistency by saying that Elhanan slew "Lahmi the brother of Goliath the Gittite."

Another problem seen by scholars is that the passage 17:55–58 seems to suggest that Saul did not know David. One explanation given is that the story of David's playing the harp for Saul is based on a different tradition from that of the Goliath story and that there were two different versions of how David met Saul. Another possible explanation is that Saul's unbalanced mental state would account for his failure to recognize David as the one who played for him.

The story itself is a familiar one. Things were going badly for Israel in a battle with the Philistines in the Valley of Elah. This valley was located in southern Judah and was one of four such valleys that provided access to the hill country from the coastal plain. Without the access these valleys provided, going from the coast to the hills would have been virtually impossible. The control of the valleys, then, was essential to the defense of the Israelite positions in the hills.

The two armies had taken up positions opposite each other with the Valley of Elah in between. The Philistines challenged the Israelites to send someone to fight their champion, the giant Goliath, who was said to be ten feet tall. No one from Israel dared to take up the challenge, even though Saul had offered his daughter in marriage to anyone who would fight Goliath and win (17:1–10, 25).

David, who had come to the battlefield to bring supplies to his brothers who were serving in the army, was astounded to find that no Israelite was willing to risk his life for the honor of his people (17:11–27). As a result, David, despite the sneering of his brother Eliab (17:28–30), volunteered to fight Goliath.

Saul, relieved to have someone to meet Goliath's challenge, offered David his armor. David refused, however, choosing not to sacrifice his mobility for whatever protection Saul's armor might offer. After all, a ten-foot-tall giant would be considerably less agile than the much smaller David (17:31–39). Instead, he chose to use his favorite weapon, the sling, to fell his victim (17:40).

The sling consisted of a leather pouch to which two leather strings were attached. A stone weighing several ounces was placed in the pouch. The strings were held in such a way that when the slinger whirled the sling rapidly, he could turn loose one string and send the rock toward the target. One practiced in the use of the sling could be quite accurate and deadly. Ancient armies regularly used the sling as a weapon.

David's well-aimed rock hit the giant between the eyes, knocking him to the ground unconscious. It was then a simple matter to take Goliath's sword and finish the job by beheading him. David's success led to an Israelite rout of the Philistines (17:41–58).

When David entered the king's court, things changed radically for the Bethlehem shepherd boy. First, he gained a friend. Jonathan, Saul's son and general, was instantly attracted to David (18:1–5). David's success as a warrior preceded him, for the women of the village were dancing in the streets and singing his praises. Saul, insecure as he was, became jealous of David. Slipping again into a period of mental disturbance, he attempted to kill David while David was playing music for him (18:6–11).

Saul then attempted to get rid of David by putting him in charge of an army squadron, hoping David would be killed in battle. Instead, this gave David further opportunity to add to his exploits and to gain more admiration from the people (18:12–16).

After renegeing on the promise to give David his older daughter's hand in marriage, Saul then proposed that David marry Michal, his younger daughter. To earn this right, however, he had to kill 100 Philistines and bring their foreskins as proof of what he had done. David believed in doing the job right: he brought back 200 foreskins (18:20–30)!

After a while, David began to feel Saul's rejection of him, especially after Jonathan told him of Saul's order that he be killed (19:1–7). Continued attempts were made on David's life (19:8–17), causing him finally to flee to Samuel at Ramah. When Saul sent messengers to capture David, the awesome sense of God's presence with Samuel made them unable to carry out Saul's orders. Finally, Saul himself went. But he, too, was overcome, just as he had been after his anointing by Samuel (19:18–24).

Finally, David saw that the situation was impossible and decided to separate himself from Saul's household. Jonathan agreed to tell Saul that David had gone to Bethlehem for a feast day (20:1–6). Jonathan, furthermore, was to note Saul's reaction to David's absence and then give David a signal indicating whether it was safe for David to return. When David remained absent, Saul became violent, showing Jonathan that it was unsafe for David to return. By a prearranged signal, therefore, Jonathan let David know that Saul was determined to kill him (20:7–42).

In his flight from Saul, David came to Nob, just east of Jerusalem. Pretending he was on a mission for the king, he persuaded the priest Ahimelech to give him some of the leftover holy bread, usually only eaten by the priests. He also persuaded Ahimelech to give him the sword of Goliath that was kept at the shrine. Leaving Nob, he went to Philistine territory, but he was recognized there. To avoid being killed, he pretended to be a madman (21:1–15).

David, the Outlaw

The years following his escape from Saul saw David in the rather questionable position of being an ally to the Philistines while, at the same time, proclaiming his loyalty to his own people. His power base was Judah, whose rough terrain furnished an abundance of hiding places for his forces, which were continually being reinforced by people who were becoming disillusioned with Saul.

Word that David had broken with Saul brought many discontented men to David's side (22:1–2). As a precaution against an attack on his family, David took his father and mother to the kingdom of Moab and asked him to protect them (22:3–5).

In the meantime, Saul was intensifying his efforts to kill David. Unfortunately, he heard that the priests at Nob had aided David. As a result, he ordered their deaths. But he did not stop with the priests. He also ordered that Nob be treated as an enemy city in the holy war; it was to be

Michal and David

Once David is secretly anointed by Samuel as the next king, he quickly attaches himself to Saul's family in a number of ways. In 1 Samuel 16, David is brought into the royal court to play the lyre to drive away the evil spirit that torments Saul. David quickly becomes a close friend of Saul's son, Jonathan, and 1 Samuel 18:20 reports that Saul's daughter, Michal, falls in love with David. At first, Saul decides to give his oldest daughter, Merab, to David as a wife, but then Saul withdraws this offer and gives her to another man. Then Saul gives Michal to David, and David becomes the son-in-law of the king. Michal, in 1 Samuel 19:8–17, helps save David's life when Saul plots to kill him. Michal is not mentioned again until 1 Samuel 25:44, when she is given to another man in marriage, even though David has circumcised 200 Philistines and brought their fore-skins to Saul as a bride price for Michal.

Michal becomes a point of contention between the houses of David and Saul. David, in 2 Samuel 3:12–16, gets Michal back in a deal he makes with Abner, Saul's former military commander. In 2 Samuel 6:20–23, Michal objects to David's behavior during the procession that brings the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem. The final verse in this text reports that Michal never had any children. It does not state specifically that this is a punishment for her opposition to David, but this idea may be implied. A child who would have been heir to both the dynasty of Saul and the dynasty of David would have been a powerful figure and would have further complicated this story. Mysteriously, 2 Samuel 21:8 reports that Michal had five sons. Most biblical translations understand this as a mistake and replace Michal's name with Merab, her older sister, whom she originally replaced as David's wife in 1 Samuel 18. Michal stands out as a striking figure who dares to stand up to David. The Old Testament reports her life in a fragmented way, making it difficult to piece together. This is one more aspect of the immensely complicated relationship between Israel's first two kings.



completely wiped out. When the Israelite soldiers refused, he hired mercenaries led by Doeg, an Edomite, to do the dirty work. The only survivor, Abiathar, a priest, escaped to tell David what had happened (22:6–23).

David and his men attacked the Philistines, who were about to seize Keilah, a Judean village. Instead of being grateful for David's help, however, the villagers were ready to surrender him to Saul's wrath (23:1–14).

David fled, with Saul in pursuit, to the area south of Hebron. There, Jonathan found David, but assured him that he would keep David's whereabouts a secret from Saul. They reaffirmed their personal friendship by a covenant (23:15–18). In the meantime, spies brought word of David's hiding place, causing Saul to set out after him. Just as he was closing in on David in the rough, hilly country of the Arabah, word came of a Philistine attack, drawing Saul away (23:19–29).

Next, Saul heard that David was at Engedi, an oasis on the western side of the Dead Sea. While he pursued David, Saul stopped in a cave "to relieve himself" (24:3), not knowing that David was hiding there. When Saul was there, David crept up and cut off a piece of the robe that Saul probably had taken off. He resisted the temptation to kill Saul, however.

When Saul left the cave, David called to him and told him that he had not taken the opportunity to kill him. Saul was so shaken by the event that he admitted he had wronged David. Saul exacted a promise from David not to kill his family after David became king (24:1–22).

If one translated a description of David's activity into our modern idiom, it could be said that he was president and chairman of the board of the South Judah Protection Agency. He protected the Judean villages and the more nomadic Israelites of the area from raids by the Amalekites and other non-Israelite groups who also traveled about in the area. For this service he expected gratitude in the form of food and other provisions for his rather sizable personal army. Some contributed willingly, if not cheerfully; others were more difficult to convince of their need for David's services. One such attempt to collect eventually ended rather surprisingly.

That the biblical storytellers had a great sense of humor is often reflected in the names they give certain characters. Like our nicknames, such as "Slim" or "Stone Face," the names they used were part of the meaning they wished to convey in the story. Such a name was given to a shepherd from Carmel in the Judean wilderness near the Dead Sea. The narrator calls him Nabal, meaning "vile thing." Although this could have been his name, it is more likely that it is just a term used to describe his nasty personality.

Nabal had large herds of sheep and goats—3000 sheep and 1000 goats—that David had protected from raiders. When he sent word to Nabal that he would appreciate a nice gift in gratitude for his services, all he got was an insulting message that Nabal had nothing to give a renegade who had broken away from his master (25:1–13).

David, proud and hot tempered, immediately set out to pay back the insult with a show of force. At this point in the story, Nabal's wife, Abigail, a woman of intelligence as well as beauty (25:3), decided that something had to be done to head off David. She was wise enough to realize that David's request was reasonable and that he would not stand such an insult without retaliation (25:14–17).

Unknown to her husband, who probably was busy counting his sheep, Abigail prepared a generous gift of food and drink and set out with her servants to head off David before he descended in fury upon their camp.

Abigail had figured correctly. When she met David, she used an unbeatable combination of flattery, food, and an appeal to his religious instincts. She convinced David that what he was about to do was foolish. Because he had received the supplies he had originally sought, he returned to his headquarters (25:18–35).

When Abigail returned, she found Nabal on a drinking binge. The next morning, when his hangover was upon him, she told him what had happened. The shock caused a sudden attack in the form of a paralytic stroke. The text says, “He became like a stone” (25:37). He died ten days later (25:36–38).

When David heard of Nabal’s death, he thanked the LORD for keeping him from a foolish attack on a fellow Judean. Such a thing would have given his detractors a weapon and would have alienated others who looked upon him as a hero.

Abigail, now a widow with 3000 sheep and 1000 goats, was so attractive that David felt he must marry her to show his gratitude for her thoughtful action on his behalf. Abigail was willing, so the marriage was carried out. David also married Abinoam from Jezreel but lost Saul’s daughter Michal, whom Saul had given to another man when David fled. This was an act designed to insult David, because to invade a man’s harem could cost one his life.¹⁰ At the time, David could do little about the insult (25:39–44).

This story has many parallels to the one in 24:1–22, but it differs in important details. David and two of his men slipped into Saul’s camp and took Saul’s spear and water jug. As in the previous story, David refused to kill Saul. David went to the top of a nearby mountain and shouted down to Abner, Saul’s general, accusing him of being careless in protecting Saul. Saul answered and admitted that he had wronged David.

This story, telling of David’s alliance with the king of Gath, takes care to put David’s action in as good a light as possible. It shows how David walked a fine line in claiming to have the interest of his people at heart while acting as the bodyguard for the Philistine king. In addition, it did keep him safe from Saul.

The End of Saul’s Reign

Saul was desperate. The Philistines had moved from Aphek, in the central coastal plain, to Shunem, near Mount Gilboa, where Saul’s troops were assembled. There was an air of doom about Saul as the Philistine army gathered for the battle that would come the next day. Samuel was dead, David was in the camp of the enemy, and Saul was overwhelmed by his lifelong sense of inadequacy. When he tried to get some sort of leadership from the religious officials, no word came. He could not dream up a solution, the Urim and Thummim would not fall right, and his prophets claimed that the LORD had nothing to say (28:3–6).

Saul sought a **medium** (or witch) who supposedly could call up the dead. Finding a medium was difficult, because most of them had been banished by Saul’s own order (28:3). Finally, a medium was found in the nearby village of Endor. He sought her out at night and asked her to call up Samuel for him. She claimed to be in contact with Samuel, but the message she gave Saul was one of doom. He was reminded of his failures as a king and was told that he and his sons would die the next day (28:7–19).¹¹ Saul was terrified and fell to the ground. Finally, the woman persuaded him to eat. After resting for a time, he left (28:20–25).

Instead of proceeding immediately to the story of the battle for Mount Gilboa, the narrative switches back to David, probably to make it clear that he had no part in the death of Saul. David had been asked by Achish, the king of Gath, to go with him to fight Saul. David had consented. The other Philistine kings, knowing of David’s background and his popularity among the Judeans, objected vigorously. As a result, David and his forces were sent back to their base.

While David was away, there was an Amalekite raid on his camp at Ziklag in the Judean foothills (30:1–6). David set out to pursue the raiders. When he returned from a successful attack



FIGURE 6-2 “They put [Saul’s] armor in the temple of Astarte, and they fastened his body to the wall of Beth-Shan” (1 Sam. 31:10). Tell Beth-Shan, in the valley of Jezreel, was the site of an ancient city that guarded an important crossing of the Jordan.

on them, some of his men did not want to share any of the spoils of battle with those who had stayed behind to guard the camp. David ruled that every man should receive an equal share. Furthermore, he shared the spoils with the elders of Judah (30:7–31).

Saul and his sons died in the battle on Mount Gilboa. Saul, mortally wounded, committed suicide. The Philistines hanged the bodies of Saul and some of his sons on the wall of Beth-Shan. The people of Jabesh–Gilead stole the bodies during the night and disposed of them properly.

SAMUEL, SAUL, AND DAVID: A SUMMARY

The book of 1 Samuel presents three enormous and fascinating personalities in Samuel, Saul, and David. The transformation of Israel from a loosely knit band of clans and tribes, beset by their surrounding enemies and often at war among themselves, into a unified nation, ruled by a king and defended by a professional army, is no easy process. Samuel and Saul are necessary figures in this drama. Samuel brings the old traditions of judge, prophet, and deliverer, which date back to Moses, and hands them to a new kind of leader, a king. Israel’s reluctance to have a king is on full display in 1 Samuel, but Saul, as the first king, serves to carry away most of that negativity. Both Samuel and Saul pave the way and clear the stage for David to emerge as a heroic, fresh-faced force of nature. The transformation of Israel into a nation that can develop into a regional power is not yet complete, but all of the background work is accomplished, and David is prepared to be the great, ideal king who can take credit for this national transformation.

DAVID: KING OVER JUDAH

David Responds to Saul's Death and Assumes Control of Judah (2 Sam. 1:1–2:11)

David was at Ziklag when the news of Saul's death on Mount Gilboa arrived. The messenger told David that he had found Saul still alive, but that he had killed Saul as Saul had asked him to do. He had brought Saul's crown and armband as proof that Saul was dead.

David's reaction to the story was severe. He ordered the messenger's death because he had claimed to have killed Saul, the "LORD's anointed" (1:14). The messenger was not helped by the fact that he was an Amalekite. In view of the different story told in 1 Samuel 31, it would seem that this story either (1) is from another tradition or (2) that the Amalekite made up his role in Saul's death to gain David's reward for eliminating the last barrier to David's becoming king (1:1–16).

David's **lament** over Saul and Jonathan came from the Book of Jashar (quoted in Joshua 10:13). This book, which now is lost, seems to have been a collection of traditional songs used by biblical writers. The lament speaks of both Saul and Jonathan, but the feeling expressed for Jonathan was in keeping with the accounts of their strong bond of friendship (1:17–27).

By popular consent, David was anointed king of Judah at Hebron (2:1–4a). David commended the people of Jabesh–Gilead for their bravery in stealing the bodies of Saul and Jonathan from Beth Shan and giving them an honorable burial (2:4b–7).

In the meantime, Abner (Saul's general) had placed Saul's son, Ishbaal (1 Chr. 8:33), on the throne. The Israelite narrators, however, changed Ishbaal's name to Ishbosheth to show their contempt for him, because Ishbaal ("Baal's man") was a Baal worshiper. Because of this, they called him "man of shame" (Ishbosheth). He ruled from Transjordan over the northern tribes (2:8–11).

Civil War between Judah and Israel (2 Sam. 2:12–4:12)

Before long, a civil war broke out at the "pool of Gibeon." The battle started when the forces of Abner and of Joab, David's general, met there. A wrestling match was proposed for twelve men from each side, but it turned deadly when swords were used instead. Asahel, Joab's brother, ran after Abner as he fled from the scene. Abner warned Asahel to stop, but when he failed to do so, Abner killed him. Joab pursued Abner's forces until they took a stand, causing Joab to withdraw (2:12–32).

Abner soon became disillusioned with Ishbosheth, who had committed treason by taking a woman from Saul's harem as his slave wife. Ishbosheth, who by custom had inherited his father's harem, was too weak to do anything about it (3:1–11). Abner went to David and offered to surrender the rest of the country to him. He wanted to make a covenant with David, but David first demanded that Michal, his former wife, be given back to him. Abner did this, and the covenant was made (3:12–21).

As Abner was leaving the meeting with David, Joab met him. Calling him aside as if to have a conversation, Joab stabbed and killed Abner. His justification was that Abner had killed his brother and he was acting as Asahel's avenger. This was a violation of customary law, however, because killing in war was not subject to the rule of blood vengeance. Abner and David had a covenant that made David responsible for avenging Abner's murder. Although he lamented Abner, David's excuse was that Joab and his brother were too strong to fight. It may well be that he also felt that he needed their support to accomplish his goals (3:39).

With Abner dead, Ishbosheth's kingdom fell apart. Two men murdered him as he slept. They cut off his head and carried their gory trophy to David at Hebron. David reacted as he had to the report of Saul's death—he had the murderers executed.

DAVID: KING OVER ALL ISRAEL

David Consolidates His Kingdom in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:1–7:29)

David ruled for another five and one-half years from Hebron (5:1–5) before he captured Jerusalem. This heavily fortified Jebusite city, according to tradition, was built on the site where Abraham attempted to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22). The invaders got into the city by entering a tunnel that carried the waters of a spring under its walls. A shaft was cut down to the tunnel so that people could reach the water without going outside the walls. David's men got inside the city and then opened the gate so that others could enter.

The choice of Jerusalem was one of a number of shrewd political moves that David made. While he was still a fugitive from Saul, David drew people to him who were unhappy with Saul. He also was careful to present himself as champion and protector of the common folk of Judah. In addition, he wooed the village chiefs with presents when he took spoils in battle (1 Sam. 30:26–31).

David never raised his hand against Saul. Even when opportunists tried to gain his favor by claiming to have killed Saul and Ishbosheth, David had acted correctly—he had put the admitted murderers to death.

The choice of Jerusalem as the capital was a good move because it was a neutral site. It had never been held permanently by Israel and thus belonged to no tribe. To have made Hebron, a city of Judah, the permanent capital would have stirred up considerable resentment, especially from the Ephraim, Judah's rival for first place among the tribes.

More importantly, David appeared as a man of integrity, whose dedication to the LORD, the God of Israel, was without question. His leadership fulfilled the ideal of the possession of the land promised to the patriarchs. David's success was so impressive that it caused the covenant at Sinai to fade into the background. It was replaced with the concept of the covenant with David, which said that David's descendants would sit on the throne of Israel during the ages to come.

After mentioning (1) David's alliance with Hiram, king of Tyre, who furnished builders and materials for David's projects (5:11–12), and (2) David's wives and children (5:13–16), the narrator of Samuel turns to the Philistine threat, the first major problem that faced David when he became king. How he dealt with the Philistines would determine his success as king over all of Israel. Saul's lack of success against the Philistines had been his chief failure.

The Philistines did not wait long to test David. Twice they attacked Israel in the Rephaim Valley, and David, after consulting the LORD, defeated them both times (5:17–25).

The Ark, the sacred symbol of the LORD's presence with Israel, had been kept in a private home for over twenty years. David was determined to bring it to Jerusalem. The first attempt ended in tragedy when Uzzah, one of the men who was moving it by cart, died when he touched the Ark. The text says, "and God smote him because he reached out his hand to the ark" (6:7). Awe of the holy object caused an immediate halt to David's plan for three months (6:1–11).

During the three-month period, Obed-edom (in whose house the Ark was kept) had evidence of God's blessing on him. David concluded that it would be safe to try again to move the Ark. This time, a sacrifice was made after the Ark was moved only six steps. David played the role of priest, wearing the priestly garment and dancing before the Ark as it was brought into the city (6:12–17).

Michal, who had been returned against her will to David's harem as a condition of the covenant with Abner (3:13), watched the events from her window. The next time she saw David, she told him that he had acted like a dirty old man. David argued that he was dancing to honor the LORD. Because of her criticism (6:16–23), she was demoted in the harem.

After David's palace was complete, the question arose about building a temple to the LORD in which the Ark could be housed permanently. At first, Nathan the prophet, who functioned as

David's spiritual advisor, encouraged him. Later, however, he told David that he had had a vision in which (1) the LORD had always dwelt in the Tabernacle from the Exodus until the present time (7:4–7), (2) the LORD had made David what he was (7:8–11), and (3) future rulers of Israel would be David's descendants (7:12–17). David praised the LORD and prayed that the promise spoken by Nathan would be fulfilled (7:18–29).

David's Military Success (2 Sam. 8:1–18)

Israel controlled more territory during David's reign than at any other time in its history. Beginning with the defeat of the Philistines, David led his armies to conquer the territory east of the Jordan (8:2, 12–14); north to the upper reaches of the Euphrates River, including all of Syria (8:3–11); and south to the borders of Egypt (8:15–18).

He ruled his kingdom well. One reason for this may have been that, when he captured Jerusalem, he captured people who had been trained in Egypt to run the government. Instead of killing them, he put them to work organizing and running his empire.¹²



FIGURE 6-3 This inscription, found at Tell Dan in northern Israel, was part of a victory stele or column erected by an Aramean (Syrian) ruler to brag about his success in a battle against the house of David.

THE COURT HISTORY OF DAVID

A Brief Period of Calm (2 Sam. 9–10)

The book of 2 Samuel provides a fairly continuous narrative of David's reign as king of Israel, but the list of David's administrative officers at 8:15–18 brings the period of intense consolidation to an end, and the surprising question asked by David in 9:1 opens a different kind of scene. Irony abounds when David asks, "Is there still anyone left from the house of Saul, that I might act with kindness to him in the passing of Jonathan?" David, of course, had killed or ordered the deaths of all of the male descendants of Saul to eliminate rivals for the throne. The only remaining male heir of Saul is Jonathan's son, Mephibosheth, whom the text describes as "crippled." Whatever this physical disability was, it must have been the reason he was not considered a threat to David and was not killed. When David brings Mephibosheth into his own house, along with all of the inheritance of Saul's family, the matter of **succession** to the throne is fully settled. In 2 Samuel 10, David can then go out on the military exploits befitting a great king, and his bold activity in these accounts serves as a pointed contrast to the troubling sequence of stories to come.

The Bathsheba Affair and Its Repercussions (2 Sam. 11:1–15:6)

During the Ammonite wars, David stopped going to battle with his men. There may have been two reasons for this: (1) With the enlarged kingdom, David probably felt that he had to pay more attention to matters of government, and (2) his advisors may have insisted that he no longer go to battle with them because, had he been killed, it would have been an irreplaceable loss to the kingdom. In any case, he stayed home (11:1).

During this time, as he was taking a stroll on his roof in the evening, he saw a beautiful woman taking a bath. Shortly thereafter, **Bathsheba** made a command appearance in the palace, with the result that she became pregnant with David's child (11:2–5).

What followed is a vivid example of how a deeply religious man can be so concerned with protecting his image that he can forget his religious principles. First, David tried by various means to make it possible for Bathsheba's husband, Uriah, to believe that he was the father-to-be. But Uriah, a loyal soldier in David's army, would not cooperate. He felt it was unpatriotic to enjoy the pleasures of wife and home while his friends were still fighting. Finally, in desperation, David sent Uriah back to the battle, carrying a secret order to Joab to put him in the front lines so that he would be killed (11:6–21). Soon, the word came back that Uriah was indeed dead. After a proper period of mourning, Bathsheba entered the king's harem (11:22–27).

David must have breathed a sigh of relief, but it was not for long. Nathan, prophet and spiritual advisor to the king, confronted David with what he had done. In that confrontation, some of the character of the king was revealed. Instead of banishing or even killing Nathan for his audacity, David faced his guilt and admitted his wrong (12:1–15).

From the time of its birth, the baby was ill and David mourned. When told of the baby's death, David, having prayed for the child to live, ceased mourning (12:16–23). Not long afterward, a second child, Solomon, was born (12:24–25). After Solomon's birth, David returned to battle against the Ammonites and defeated them (12:26–31).

David's moral failures, coupled with his failure to control his children, brought a bitter harvest. **Absalom** and Tamar were the children of one of David's wives, while Amnon was the son of another wife. Amnon fell in love with Tamar, his beautiful half-sister, but there seemed to be no

Tamar, Amnon, and Absalom

After David's affair with Bathsheba, he is punished in two ways. First, the illegitimate child produced by the affair dies in 2 Samuel 12:15–19. The prophet Nathan also declares to David in 2 Samuel 12:11 that God will "raise up trouble against you from within your own house." This prediction begins to be fulfilled in 2 Samuel 13 when a strange story unfolds among David's children. It is interesting to note that David's "punishments" always involve the suffering of people other than himself.

David's oldest son, Amnon, is smitten with Tamar, his half-sister. Tamar is the daughter of David by a different wife. Amnon concocts a ruse in order to be alone with Tamar and he rapes her; then he sends Tamar away in shame despite her offer to be married to him. This story contains a number of fascinating connections to the story of David and Bathsheba, and raises further questions about whether that earlier story is best understood as a romantic affair or a sexual assault. Conflict arises from this incident as David takes no action, while Tamar's full brother, Absalom, quietly plots revenge. Absalom demonstrates amazing patience as he waits two years, carefully plotting the assassination of Amnon. Once he has committed the act, however, he flees from the land for three years while David and his remaining sons mourn the loss of Amnon. It is easy to think that Absalom's motives may have been mixed, though. Although he is justly angry over the attack on his sister, the killing of Amnon removes David's apparent firstborn from the line of succession to the throne and opens the way for Absalom himself.

Absalom's royal ambitions emerge when he returns to Jerusalem and is forgiven and accepted by David. 2 Samuel 15–18 tells the story of Absalom's rebellion. The prince gains enormous popularity, drives his father out of Jerusalem, and assumes the position of king in the palace. Nathan's statement to David in 2 Samuel 12:11, that God would "take your wives before your eyes, and give them to your neighbor, and he shall lie with your wives in the sight of this very sun," is fulfilled in 2 Samuel 16:21–22 when Absalom has sexual relations with David's concubines on the roof of the palace. Eventually, David's army recovers and defeats the forces of Absalom. Absalom is killed in a bizarre scene in which his hair gets caught in a tree while he is riding a mule, and he is left hanging where he can be easily murdered. Despite his son's rebellion, David mourns the loss of Absalom bitterly. David regains the throne, but he seems a weak and pathetic figure for the remainder of his life. Many layers of irony are revealed as all of this trouble in David's family, which is portrayed as punishment for his actions toward Bathsheba, prepares the way for Bathsheba's son, Solomon, to assume the throne after the death of David.



way he could marry her. At the suggestion of a cousin, the lovesick Amnon persuaded David to send Tamar to his house to cook for him while he pretended to be ill. While she was there, he raped her and then refused to marry her (13:1–19). This meant that Tamar would never be able to marry, because virginity was considered essential for marriage. David took no action against Amnon for his abuse of Tamar.

Two years later, after all seemed to be forgotten, Absalom invited Amnon to a party. Under orders from Absalom, his servants waited until Amnon was drunk and then stabbed him to death. Absalom, with Joab's help, fled to his mother's homeland of Geshur (13:38), where he stayed for two years.¹³

Joab, knowing that David wanted an excuse to let Absalom return home, took an old woman from Tekoa to David. She told him a sad story of her two sons. According to this story, one of the widow's sons had murdered the other. Her relatives were ready to kill the surviving son

to avenge the death of the dead son. Because this would leave no living male to carry on the family name, she was appealing to the king for protection for the murderer. David ruled that the need for an heir to carry his father's name was more important than punishing a murderer.¹⁴

When David had so ruled, the grieving mother suddenly turned and rebuked him for not allowing Absalom to come home. David immediately suspected that Joab had planned the performance of the “widow.” Even so, he commanded Joab to bring Absalom home, but on the condition that he not be allowed to see David (14:18–24).

Absalom was not content with being allowed to return to Jerusalem. He asked Joab to see him, but twice Joab refused. To get Joab's attention, he set Joab's barley field on fire. Joab then agreed to persuade David to allow Absalom to return to court. David agreed (14:25–33).

Then Absalom began a systematic campaign to undermine his father. He would stand at the palace gate, and when a man came to bring a problem before the king, Absalom would call him aside and tell him that it was a waste of time to try to see the king, even though his complaint was a just one. Absalom would then assure the man that should *he* be king, he would give justice. He would allow no man to give the traditional bow of respect, but would warmly embrace him like a brother.

Thus Absalom did to every Israelite who came to the king for judgment; so Absalom stole the hearts of the people of Israel. (15:6)

Absalom's Rebellion (2 Sam. 15:7–19:8)

After four years, Absalom made his move. He sent word to his supporters to gather at Hebron, David's first capital. He told David that he was going to celebrate a feast and received David's blessing on the trip. Once there, however, he had himself proclaimed king. Among those who joined him was Ahithophel, one of David's court advisors (15:7–12).

On hearing the news, David chose to run away rather than fight his own son. He made plans to leave Jerusalem. He instructed ten of his wives to stay behind to take care of his house, but all of his servants and his personal bodyguards went with him. Most of them were foreigners who were more loyal to David than to the nation of Israel. Typical of this was the servant Ittai, a Philistine from Gath (15:13–23).

David was not without eyes and ears in Jerusalem, however. Zadok and Abiathar started to take the Ark of the Covenant with David, but he sent them back and told them to stay in Jerusalem. Hushai, one of David's counselors, also agreed to be a spy in Absalom's camp. Among the three of them, they managed to keep David informed of Absalom's moves (15:24–37).

Leaving Jerusalem, David went across the Kidron Valley, which separates the eastern boundary of the city from the Mount of Olives (15:30). As he crossed the mountain, he was joined by Ziba, the servant of Mephibosheth (Jonathan's son), who brought an offering of food and drink, as well as donkeys for David and his household to ride. Mephibosheth had gone over to Absalom's side (16:1–4).

Further on, David was roundly cursed and stoned by Shimei, a supporter of Saul's family. When one of his men offered to kill Shimei, David prevented him. Instead, he continued on toward the Jordan River (16:5–14).

Meanwhile, Absalom entered Jerusalem. Hushai greeted Absalom and convinced him that he had deserted David. One of Absalom's first acts was to have sexual relations with one of David's concubines in full view of the people. This was meant to show that he had taken over his father's kingdom (16:15–23).

Conflicting advice was given to Absalom by Hushai and Ahithophel. Ahithophel advised immediate pursuit of David, but Hushai suggested that they wait. He stated, furthermore, that

Absalom could prove his leadership ability to the people by personally leading the pursuit (17:1–14). Absalom took Hushai’s advice. When he did so, Hushai got word to Zadok and Abiathar, who, after some difficulty, managed to inform David (17:15–22). In the meantime, when Ahithophel saw that Absalom would no longer listen to him, he committed suicide (17:23).

David stopped when he reached Mahanaim in Transjordan. Mahanaim was located near Penuel, where Jacob was said to have wrestled with the angel (Gen. 32:22–23). Loyal followers in the area brought necessary supplies (17:24–29).

In preparation for the battle, David split his army into three parts, appointing a commander over each. David wanted to lead, but his commanders refused to let him go. As they left, David asked that they “deal gently” with Absalom (18:1–5).

The battle raged in the forest of Ephraim. A patrol spotted Absalom and gave chase. As Absalom’s mule ran under an oak, Absalom was caught by the head in a tree branch and left hanging. When Joab heard, he ordered his men to kill Absalom. When they refused, Joab personally killed him, had his body thrown into a pit, and covered it with stones (18:6–18).

When the messengers brought the news to David, he wept loudly, lamenting Absalom’s death (18:19–23). When the people heard him lamenting, their shouts over the hard-won victory turned to shamed silence. Joab’s power over David was never more vividly illustrated than when he told David that if he wanted the support of those who had saved his life, he should stop crying and praise the people for what they had done. “For,” Joab said,

you have made it clear today that commanders and officers are nothing to you; for I perceive that if Absalom were alive and all of us were dead today, then you would be pleased. (19–6)

David arose and did as he was told to do (19:1–8b).

Repairing the Nation (2 Sam. 19:8c–43)

As David returned to Jerusalem, those who had supported Absalom either fled or tried to get back into David’s good graces. Shimei, for example, who had cursed David as he left, met him and begged forgiveness. David promised not to kill Shimei, but he did not promise that someone else might not do it (19:8c–23).

Mephibosheth, Jonathan’s son, came begging; but David divided his property, giving half of it to Ziba, Mephibosheth’s servant, who had brought food to David’s men (19:24–40). David offered a place of honor to Brazilli, the Gileadite who had also brought supplies to him. Brazilli asked David to give it to his servant instead (19:31–40).

When David arrived in Jerusalem, the elders of the northern tribes and the elders of Judah got into a dispute over who had the right to bring him back to the city. The Judeans claimed it was their right by kingship, while the northerners claimed it was their right by majority rule. The Judeans seem to have won (19:41–43).

Taking advantage of the friction between the northern tribes and the Judeans, Sheba started another revolt against David, which gained a number of followers. David put Amasa in charge of the army, replacing Joab after he killed Absalom. Amasa was given orders to put down the rebellion. Before he could get organized, Amasa was murdered by Joab (20:1–10c). Joab took over the army and soon had the rebellion under control (20:10d–26). The ultimate effect of this rebellion would be to allow **Solomon** to establish the Israelite monarchy more on the order of the other eastern kings. In other words, Solomon was a more autocratic ruler than either Saul or David had been.¹⁵

An Odd Collection of Materials Concerning David's Reign (Sam. 21–24:25)

The last three chapters of 2 Samuel do not fit into the story of the ins and outs of David's court. First, there is the story of a famine that lasted for three years. Through prayer, David became convinced that an atrocity that Saul had committed against the Gibeonites (Josh. 9) had not been forgiven by the LORD. He went to the Gibeonites and asked them if there was anything he could do to make things right with them for the harm Saul had done. They replied that the only thing he could do was to turn over to them seven of Saul's sons. He did as they asked, and the Gibeonites hanged the men. Rizpah, the mother of two of the victims, kept their bodies from being attacked by birds of prey until only the bones were left. Then David had Saul's and Jonathan's bones returned to Jerusalem from Jabesh–Gilead and buried Saul and his sons together.

The point of this story is that the ancient Israelites believed that murder (in this case, Saul's unjust killing of the Gibeonites) had to be punished by the death of the murderer. Because Saul was dead already, his sons had to bear the blame. When justice was not done, the whole land suffered. One way that suffering came was through such natural disasters as drought and famine. The only way to bring such natural disasters to an end was to see that justice was done (21:10–14).

The next block of material mentioned the giants who might be described as the heavy-weight champions among the Philistines. The Israelites who defeated them are listed (21:15–22).

Chapters 22 and 23:1–7 are what are known as *orphan psalms*—that is, psalms found outside the book of Psalms. Both are said to have come from David, and both are hymns of praise. Following the psalms is a series of episodes describing exploits of David's mighty men, his personal bodyguards, who were fiercely loyal to him. As a matter of fact, David's army was largely a private army, recruited and paid by him (28:8–38).

Chapter 24 describes a census by David, probably for the purpose of taxation. Then, as now, the power to tax was the power to control. The LORD was said to have told David to take the census. The story in 1 Chronicles 21:1 provides a different understanding of this event, saying that “Satan” caused David to take the census. A plague came. To ease the plague, David bought Araunah's threshing floor on top of the mountain overlooking Jerusalem. Later, the Temple was built there. The large rock that formed the threshing floor would become a sacred spot for three great religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. When David bought the site and made sacrifices, the plague was lifted (24:1–25).

An Evaluation of David

David's accomplishments as king caused him to be ranked with Moses in importance in Israelite tradition. It is true that there were no major challenges to David's rule from Egypt, Asia Minor, or Mesopotamia, but the fact that he could take a rather disorganized and divided people and achieve what he did in the short span of forty years marked the man as a genius in military organization and administrative skill. Although Solomon's kingdom would be more spectacular in its display of wealth and power, it was only because David's conquests were complete. Solomon had a period of peace in which to develop the kingdom economically.

Beyond the period of the united monarchy, David's influence was felt in three areas. First, in his choice of Jerusalem as his capital, he gave the world its most revered city. To Jew and Christian alike, it would become the earthly version of God's heavenly city. That is why the writer of the New Testament book of Revelation spoke of the ideal age as beginning when “the holy city, the new Jerusalem,” would come down from heaven to earth (Rev. 21:2). Because the Dome of the

Rock supposedly is built over the site from which Mohammed ascended to heaven on his white horse, for Muslims it ranks second only to Mecca in importance.

Now, some 3000 years later, Jews, Christians, and Muslims make their way to a city whose influence far outweighs any importance it should have. Many cities are larger, more influential economically, and have more to offer in culture, education, and the arts, but none have the special quality and drawing power of Jerusalem.

Secondly, the monarchy, referred to biblically as the *house of David*, was established. Until recent years, no known contemporary references to the Davidic monarchy had been discovered by archaeologists. As a result, some scholars have argued from this silence that the Davidic rule was a figment of the biblical writer's imagination. Now the phrase *house of David* has been discovered in an **inscription** at Tell Dan in northern Israel.¹⁶

The Davidic monarchy would last for more than 400 years, but its influence would extend even further. Part of its longevity lay in the conviction that the LORD made a covenant with David, saying that his descendants would rule Israel. That covenant replaced the Sinai covenant in the thinking of the average Israelite, especially the Judeans. Essentially, a covenant based on moral demands was replaced by one that primarily emphasized family continuity in the monarchy. Following David's time, when the covenant was mentioned, it was assumed that the reference was to the covenant with David.

When the monarchy ended with the Babylonian Exile, the hope for its restoration lived on, especially as it was and had been proclaimed by the great prophets (Isa. 9, 11; Mic. 5:2–4). In the midst of the post-Exilic period, the hope for the ideal king who exemplified the best qualities of David grew into the doctrine of God's Anointed One, the Messiah. Jesus' disciples saw him as the fulfillment of that ideal, while Jewish interpreters continued to look for the new David who would rescue his persecuted people.

In the third place, David left his mark on the poetic literature of Israel. How many of the psalms he actually wrote is subject to vigorous debate. That he wrote some of them seems certain enough for him to be looked upon as the father of Israelite hymns. The psalms are different from other biblical literature because they are people's deepest emotions addressed to God. Because David is represented as a deeply emotional man, it is fitting that he was connected with the most emotional literary form in the Old Testament.

Overall, Israelite kingship differed from that of other Near Eastern societies. Both in Egypt and in Babylonia, the king was regarded as divine, although somewhat more so in Egypt, where the king was worshiped as a god. In Israel, there was a strong belief that the LORD was king, while the earthly king was the LORD's representative but was still human. This is why, especially during the early monarchy, the prophets dared to call the kings to account if they did not follow the LORD's will (cf. Nathan and David, Elijah and Ahab). It also is illustrated by the fact that Samuel, in his role as prophet, could choose David as king and have him accepted by the people.¹⁷

Key Terms and Names

Absalom, 137

Anoint, 123

Bathsheba, 137

Deuteronomistic History, 118

Dynasty, 120

Eli, 119

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Medium, 132

Monarchy, 118

Philistines, 119

Prophet, 123

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Saul, 123

Shiloh, 119

Solomon, 140

Succession, 137

Study Questions

1. What attitudes toward the monarchy are present in the books of Samuel and Kings?
2. What was the Court History of David? How did it differ from usual accounts of the reigns of ancient kings?
3. In what ways are the birth stories of Samuel (1 Sam. 1:1–2:11) and Isaac (Gen. 18:9–11; 21:1–8) similar?
4. Why was Samuel turned over to Eli at such an early age?
5. In what ways did Samuel act as judge, prophet, and priest?
6. What series of events caused Israel to unite and eventually choose a king?
7. What was the significance of the ceremony of anointing?
8. Why should Samuel be described as a *king maker* and a *king breaker*?
9. Why was Saul chosen as king over Israel?
10. What were Saul's strengths and weaknesses as a king?
11. Why did Samuel turn against Saul?
12. How many times was David anointed, and when did he actually become king?
13. What are the two different versions of how Saul and David met? What does this seem to say about the sources used in writing the Deuteronomistic History?
14. What was David's relationship to Saul and his family?
15. Why did David not kill Saul and take over the kingdom?
16. What does the story of David and Abigail indicate about David's relations to the people during his outlaw period?
17. Why did David join forces with the Philistines?
18. How did David react to the deaths of Saul and Jonathan, and what motivations may have caused his behavior?
19. How did David eventually become king over all of Israel?
20. In the process of becoming king over all of Israel, what did David do to allay the suspicions of the supporters of Saul and his family?
21. What made Jerusalem the logical choice for the capital?
22. What were the long-term effects of David's affair with Bathsheba?
23. What events led to Absalom's estrangement from David?
24. What seemed to be Nathan's role in David's court?
25. How did Absalom undermine David, and what were the results of his rebellion?

Endnotes

1. See Jeremiah 22:10–30; see also Amos 6:1–14, in which criticism is directed toward the ruling class.
2. One of the earliest uses of this title was to refer to King Cyrus of Persia (Isaiah 45:1, LXX). For a description of anointing the king, see Sigmund Mowinckel, *He That Cometh* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1954), 63f.
3. This date, as well as the dates for David and Solomon, is approximate and may vary as much as ten years in the different chronologies. Dates are more accurate for later kings.
4. Because the term is insulting, this probably was given to him by the Israelites. See Larry G. Herr, "Whatever Happened to the Ammonites?" *BAR*, XIX, 6 (November–December 1993), 28.
5. For an explanation of such mutilation, see Victor H. Matthews, *Manners and Customs in the Bible* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1988), 66.
6. Richard Elliott Friedman, *Who Wrote the Bible?* (New York: Harper & Row, 1987), 37, points out that Israel's kingship was dependent upon the consent of these three groups.
7. Kenneth I. Cohen, "King Saul: A Bungler from the Beginning," *BAR*, X, 5 (October 1994), 34–39, 52, argues that not only Saul's personality but also his background condemned him from the start.
8. Isaiah 1:12–17.
9. On these stories, see Emanuel Tov, "The David and Goliath Saga," *BR*, II, 4 (Winter 1986), 34–41.
10. See Solomon's treatment of his brother Adonijah when Adonijah asked permission to marry Abishag, David's wife, who became part of Solomon's harem (1 Kings 2:19–25).
11. For a discussion of Israelite views of the afterlife, see Bernhard Lang, "Afterlife," *BR*, V, 1 (February 1988), 12–23.
12. For an elaboration of this theory, see George E. Mendenhall, "The Monarchy," *INT*, XXIX, 2 (April 1975), 155–170.

13. On the location of Geshur, see Moshe Kochavi et al., “Rediscovered! The Land of Geshur,” *BAR*, XVIII, 4 (July–August 1992), 30–44, 84.
14. For a fuller discussion, see John H. Tullock, *Blood Vengeance Among the Israelites in the Light of Its Near Eastern Background* (Ann Arbor, MI: University Microfilms, 1966), 44.
15. So argues Rainer Albertz, *A History of Israelite Religion* (Louisville, KY: Westminster–John Knox Press, 1994), I, 123.
16. “David Found at Dan,” *BAR*, XX, 2 (March–April 1994), 26–39. The Tell Dan inscription seems to commemorate a victory over the kings of both Israel and Judah. See also André Lemaire, “House of David Restored in Moabite Inscription,” *BAR*, XX, 3 (May–June 1994), 30–37, who suggests that the Moabite Stone also refers to the house of David.
17. Carol Stuart Grizzard and Marvin E. Tate, “Kingship,” *MDB*, 1990, 490–491.

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