PARALLEL GUIDE 23
David the King

Summary:

The Judeans anoint David as king. After further conflict, Israel too covenants with David, who then captures Jerusalem, brings the ark, and builds a royal city. Israel's "golden age" arrives, but soon trouble begins, marked by David's adulterous lust for Bathsheba, the treachery of his son Absalom, and jealousy and bickering between the northern and southern tribes.

Learning Objectives

• Give a reason for the weakness of the unity between the northern tribes and Judah under David

• Cite an action by David intended to cement the loyalties of the various tribes

• State two major differences between the "everlasting covenant" and the covenant made under Moses.

• State the role of the great prophet as modeled by Nathan

Assignments to Deepen Your Understanding

1. Read over II Samuel 2-24 to sense the flow of the story of David. Skim the section several times. Prepare a timeline and note significant events. Read your timeline over several times. Write down any responses that you have. What general kind of sequence do you see? How does this parallel with contemporary persons in significant roles in public life?

2. When you look at the significant events in David's life, what parallels do you see in our own times in terms of the moral and ethical issues? How do you square the demands of public life, one's personal life, and the demands of one's office? How does this play out in your own life?

Preparing for Your Seminar

What similarities, if any, do you see between the "royal theology" that developed around the Davidic monarchy and any present-day thought about the church? Is there anything comparable to it in present-day secular life? Record your responses in your notebook.

Additional Sources

John Bright, *A History of Israel*, 3rd ed. (Westminster Press, 1981).

G. B. Caird, John C. Schroeder, and Ganse Little, "I and II Samuel," *The Interpreter's Bible*, vol. 2 (Abingdon Press, 1956).

John Gray, *I and II Kings*, The Old Testament Library series, 2nd ed. (Westminster Press, 1970).

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Chapter 23
DAVID THE KING

With the death of Saul, David sets out to gain the kingdom for himself. Sincere though his lament over Saul and Jonathan undoubtedly was, David now seems to be quite ready to take over from the dead king. And in David's hands the nation will become a monarchy in the true sense: the rustic simplicity of Saul, a man more like the judges he followed than a royal monarch, is replaced by all the splendor of a royal court in a city specifically designated as the king's capital.

The account of the reign of David is told in three major sections in II Samuel:

1) the consolidation of the kingdom—II Sam. 2-8;

2) the "Court History" of David—II Sam. 9-20; and

3) an appendix consisting of independent fragments concerning David—II Sam. 21-24.

We comment on those portions of the story which are of particular interest. The intervening passages are outlined in the paragraphs headed "Summary." If you do not have time to read the entire account, read just the passages for which comments are provided.

II Samuel 2-8 The Consolidation of the Kingdom

David consults YHWH by means of the sacred lots and is told to go to Hebron, one of the most prominent of the southern cities and a center for the tribe of Judah. Apparently David expects his stay in Hebron to be a lengthy one, for he takes along his army, each soldier with his entire household and David himself with his two wives. David has prepared the scene for his arrival. As we have seen, he has acted as protector of the southern cities while living among the Philistines and has sent them gifts. His fame is widespread, not only as a mighty warrior in Saul's army, who has slain "his ten thousands," but also as a kind of Robin Hood who has championed the cities of Judah. Even with such a background for his entry into Hebron, the readiness of the people of Judah to anoint David king (v. 4) is probably increased by the presence of David's entire personal army.

II Samuel 2:1-7 David Is Anointed King of Judah

David's political astuteness is demonstrated by the gesture that he makes toward Jabesh-gilead, the Trans-Jordan town which Saul saved at the outset of his career. "Valiant men" of Jabesh-gilead have retrieved the bodies of Saul and his sons from the Philistines and have buried them (I Sam. 31:11-13). David sends messengers to Jabesh-gilead praising them for their act. David's purpose is twofold. While expressing his own love and loyalty to Saul—David's love for Saul and his family remains an important part of his story throughout this first section of II Samuel— David also announces his anointing as king of Judah in tones that indicate he should be considered as the successor to Saul (v. 57). The message is addressed to Jabesh-gilead, but David might well assume that the news that Judah has a new king will "leak" along the messengers' route!

II Samuel 2:8-11 Ishbaal is King in the North

Saul's surviving son, called in the present text of II Samuel "Ishbosheth," remains with Saul's general, Abner (v. 8). This son is called Ishvi in I Sam. 14:49, and Eshbaal in I Chronicles 8:33. Ishvi means "man of YHWH." Eshbaal, or more probably Ishbaal, means "man of Baal" or "man of the lord"; indeed the word baal refers here probably not to the Canaanite agricultural deity so named but to YHWH as "lord." It is not, however, the word which the Israelites eventually came to use in place of the sacred name YHWH (adonai, also "Lord"). In fact, baal came to have almost exclusive reference to the Canaanite god, so that later Deuteronomic editors were incensed that an Israelite king should use the name of Baal for his son. They therefore substituted bosheth ("shame") for baal, as they did also in the case of Meribaal (Mephibosheth, see the comments on II Sam. 4:4). We dignify both men by calling them by their correct names.

Ishbaal is the king's son, but Abner is the power behind the throne. It is Abner who makes Ishbaal king, and it will be Abner who eventually overthrows him. Indeed, despite the claim of v. 10, there is reason to believe that Ishbaal may have been a minor; that would explain why he was not with his father and brothers at the Mount of Gilboah.

Verses 10-11 demonstrate part of the formula which the Deuteronomic editor uses throughout the books of Kings to summarize the reign of a king, designating the king's age at the beginning of the reign and the number of years he ruled. In the case of Ishbaal, as the footnote in the OAB states, the number of years reigned cannot be correct any more than the age is. The formula does serve to describe the situation, however: the north and the south are to have separate kings during the time of Ishbaal.

Summary

Relations between the northern and southern kingdoms are strained. There is sporadic warfare between the armies of the rival kings. At one time, soldiers led by Abner face those of David's general, Joab, and engage in what appears to have been jousting events at the pool of Gibeon. But what starts as "play" degenerates into mortal combat, with David's troops uniformly victorious. During the rout that follows, Joab's brother Asahel pursues the retreating Abner and, when he fails to heed Abner's warnings, he is killed by him. Seeking blood revenge, Joab takes up the pursuit of Abner and is restrained only by the intervention of a sizable group of Benjaminites. Joab will not forget his obligation to obtain revenge.

A list of the sons born to David in Hebron is given in II Sam. 3:2-5. The list will become significant in the account of the succession to the throne after David's death.

II Samuel 3:6-39 Abner Surrenders the North to David; Abner is Killed

Abner's position as the strong man in the north is noted in 3:6. It is he alone who has kept Ishbaal on the throne. Nevertheless, Ishbaal takes offense at Abner's having taken Saul's concubine, Rizpah, for himself. The objection is one of propriety: the custom of the time was for the successor of a king to inherit the former king's concubines. If he has taken Rizpah, Abner may be giving the impression that he regards himself, not Ishbaal, as the real successor to Saul. The text does not make it clear that this is Abner's intention, however. And when Ishbaal accuses him, he acts

as if the accusation is moral. His response is neither admission nor denial—simply anger—and a pledge to set up David as king over both Israel and Judah (vv. 7-10). If Abner has taken Rizpah, his anger seems poorly

justified; whether he has or not, Ishbaal is ill-advised to offend the man on whom he is completely dependent.

Abner offers to make a covenant with David and deliver the northern tribes to him. David's response is surprising: instead of eagerly embracing the offer, he coolly agrees to covenant with Abner—but only after his first wife, Saul's daughter, Michal, is returned to him. You will remember that Michal was given by Saul to a man named Paltiel after David fled from Saul's household (I Sam. 25:44). The marriage between David and Michal seems initially to have been one of love, and it is possible that it is from this emotion that David demands her return. Romantic love rarely played a very important part in marriage unions at that time, however, and it is more probable that David hopes that Michal will give him a male heir, the fruit of the union of the house of Saul and the house of David, whose eventual succession to the throne would ensure the continued union of north and south. Another possibility that would fit with the portrayal of David's character is that the demand for Michal's return is a straight political act. Much is made in subsequent stories about the concubines of a dead or deposed king and how their possession lends "legitimacy" to the new ruler. Having the daughter of a king wouldn't be exactly the same, but within the same "semantic range" of culture.

David not only responds with coolness to Abner, but also insults him further by sending his demand for Michal's return directly to Ishbaal, the king whom Abner has offered to betray. Surprisingly, Ishbaal gives in to David's demand: he sends Abner to take Michal from her husband. No immediate mention is made of Michal's feelings about the matter—though later she and David quarrel vehemently at her instigation—but the grief of her husband is made clear (v. 16a). Abner's total authority seals the matter: "Then Abner said to him, 'Go back home! So he went back" (v. 16b).

Abner's conference with "the elders of Israel"—apparently a consultative body—suggests that he alone urged the northern tribes to hold out against David (vv. 17-19). He is now willing to go along with their desire to have David as king of all Israel. His statement that YHWH promised to save Israel "from the hand of the Philistines, and from the hand of all their enemies" (v. 18) reflects the Deuteronomist's interpretation of history.

When Abner brings the news that the northern tribes are willing to accept him as their king, David, in contrast to his earlier coolness, holds a feast for him (vv. 20-21). Verse 21b explicitly notes that when Abner leaves the feast, he "went in peace." The custom of hospitality, by which a guest at a meal was protected from all harm, no matter what past enmity may have prevailed, is the background for the event that is to follow.

Joab, whose brother Abner killed, returns now and is incensed that David has allowed the enemy general to go free. He indicates to David that he suspects that Abner's

visit was solely for the purpose of spying on David's defenses. There is no reason to believe that this is true, or even that Joab believes it is true. David may have planned his meeting with Abner for a time that Joab would be absent, but even David cannot prevent the inevitable. Bent on blood revenge, Joab sends for Abner, has him brought back to Hebron, and kills him at the gate of the city. Hospitality has been betrayed in the most flagrant manner (vv. 22-27). And for all Joab's insistence that he suspected Abner of spying and did not believe his offer of the northern tribes, v. 27 makes it clear that the real motive for the killing is blood revenge for the death of Joab's brother.

David goes to great lengths to protest his innocence in the death of Abner. He places all the blame on Joab and brings down a terrible curse on him and his family (vv. 28-29). And he forces Joab to participate in a ceremony of grief over the slain Abner. The people accept David's innocence: "All the people took notice of it [the ceremony of grief], and it pleased them; just as everything the king did pleased all the people" (v. 36).

At this point in his career, David can do no wrong!

David leaves vengeance against Joab to the hands of YHWH (v. 39). Not only do the people accept David's protestations of innocence, apparently the D editor does also. And perhaps David is sincere. But it might be noted that Joab's act has removed the problem of how to keep the powerful Abner from becoming a constant threat. An Abner constantly at David's side, holding the key to the loyalty of the greater part of David's kingdom, would be a difficult critic to control. No mention is made of David's reminding Joab that Abner enjoyed the hospitality of his table and left under its protection. It is difficult to believe that David could have misunderstood Joab's intentions, but David seems to have done nothing to restrain him.

The relationship between David and Joab is not simple. The freedoms that Joab takes with David (vv. 24-25) show that he feels secure in his position. He seems indeed indispensable—David cannot do without him. David does not have Joab executed for the murder of Abner as he does the Amalekite who claimed to have killed Saul or as he will Rechab and Baanah for the murder of Ishbaal. It is not simply that Joab has performed him a service by killing Abner. It is, as we see increasingly, that David needs Joab at the same time he fears him as someone he cannot control. It is almost as if Joab represents David's dark side. This is convenient, for it allows much of David's darkness to be dissociated in the account from the king himself. What he does must always please.

II Samuel 4:1-12 Ishbaal is Slain

This event is reminiscent of the account of the Amalekite who came to David claiming to have slain Saul (II Sam. 1:15-16). Two men who are members of Ishbaal's army slip into the northern king's house while he is asleep and kill him. They bring Ishbaal's head to David, claiming for themselves the role of YHWH's avengers (4:8). David recalls the event of the announcement of Saul's death, and says that that—for which death was the messenger's reward—was as nothing compared to the treacherous slaying of a man asleep in his own house. Ishbaal's assassins are also killed and their mutilated bodies are put on display. Ishbaal's head is decently buried at Hebron in the tomb that has been provided for his general, Abner.

The claim that Rechab and Baanah make, that they have acted as God's agents in this matter, points out one theological danger in the Yahwism of David's time. "David and his contemporaries shared the belief of Amos in YHWH's lordship of history . . ." (G. B. Caird, "I and II Samuel," The Interpreter's Bible, vol. 2, p. 871). Do two walk together, unless they have made an appointment? Does a lion roar in the forest, when it has no prey? . . . Does a bird fall into a snare on the earth, when there is no trap for it? Does disaster befall a city, unless the Lord has done it? (Amos 3:3-6)

YHWH is not responsible only for the destruction of cities (e.g., I Sam. 27:8-9); as lord of history, God is also lord of life and death on an individual level. Thus, "[i]t is he who gives or withholds children (I Sam. 1:5), he who keeps men bound in the bundle of life or slings them out by such means as an apoplectic stroke" (I Sam. 25:29, 36) (Caird, p. 871), or—according to their own interpretation—by such men as Rechab and Baanah. David must refer to his own experience with God to refute their claim. No more than the Amalekite could be claiming to do YHWH's will when he took the credit for killing YHWH's anointed, can the sons of Rimmon think they have truly done his will by slaying a righteous man in his own bed. Such an act could not be the will of a God like YHWH.

Into this story of the assassination of Ishbaal is inserted mention of Jonathan's son (v. 4). "Mephibosheth," like "Ishbosheth," is the editor's version of the original name—in this case, Meribaal. Meribaal means "hero of Baal" or "loved by Baal." Two editorially motivated changes of the name took place. First, it was changed to Meribbaal—the insertion of the second "b" changes the meaning from "loved by Baal" to "he who opposes Baal." Finally, the D editor changed it to Mephibosheth, "he who scatters shame."

Meribaal is described as “crippled in his feet.” Reference is made to this fact at several other points in the story of David. The implication seems to be that, because Meribaal is physically imperfect, he is not an acceptable candidate for the office of king, and therefore no threat to the Davidic family as a successor to the throne. The notion that only unblemished animals were suitable as sacrificial offerings to YHWH seems to have been extended to imply that the physically deformed were not acceptable as priests or as kings. David had promised Jonathan that he would not allow the entire family of Saul to be killed. It was easier to keep this promise in the case of a crippled boy than if Meribaal had been a potential rival. The story of Meribaal is taken up in chapter 9.

David, King of Israel and Judah

When the tribes of the north come to David to anoint him king over them, they voice once again the Deuteronomic conviction: it is YHWH who has decreed that David should reign over all of Israel. In the editor’s understanding it is not simply a matter of the northern tribes deciding to accept David; they are aware of David’s selection by YHWH and are finally in a position, now that Ishbaal and Abner are dead, to acknowledge him.

II Samuel 5:1-5 Israel Makes a Covenant with David

Notice that the tribes of Israel come to Hebron, in Judah—David does not have to go to the northern area to claim his throne nor do the northern tribes and the tribe of Judah make a covenant between themselves. Israel makes a covenant with David, as Judah had done. The two groups of tribes are, in fact, united only in their common allegiance to David. David is, in a sense, a king over two peoples, rather than the king of a united nation. The unity of “all Israel” will be relatively brief, limited to the reigns of David and his son Solomon. The division of the kingdom each time following Solomon’s reign will not create a novel situation; it reflects a return to the ancient configuration.

II Samuel 5:6-10 David Takes Jerusalem as His Capital

The ancient Jebusite city of Jerusalem, contrary to the report in Judges 1:8, has not been taken by the Israelites. It is considered by its inhabitants to be impregnable (v. 6). Steep ravines on three sides and a strongly fortified wall to the north have previously proven too much for potential conquerors. The strategy by which David succeeds in overcoming Jerusalem’s defenses is not elaborated, but apparently a commando-type force—led by Joab according to the account in I Chronicles 11—makes its way through a tunnel which brought water into the city (v. 8).

Jerusalem has belonged to neither the north nor the south; therefore its use as David’s capital can arouse no feelings of rivalry in either sector. Judah may have felt some offense at the transfer of David’s capital from Hebron, but at least it could not be said that Hebron’s loss benefited the north. Jerusalem from this time on will be called “the city of David” (v. 9).

Summary

David begins a building program using artisans from Tyre, a Phoenician city on the coast north of Israel. This marks the beginning of Israel’s contacts with neighboring nations, contacts that make Israel a cosmopolitan nation, increasingly influenced by foreign fashions and outlooks. At this stage, it is with pride that the storyteller narrates David’s use of foreign builders and artists; when foreign exchange later comes to include religious infiltration, the editor’s evaluation radically changes.

The Philistines, unconcerned as long as the leader they assumed was their puppet was king only of Judah, become worried when David succeeds in uniting the Israelites behind him. They make two attempts to crush the newly reunited nation, but David routs them.

II Samuel 6:1-23. **The Ark Is Brought to Jerusalem**

In order to cement the loyalties of the various tribes to his reign, David has the ark of God brought to Jerusalem from the town where it has been kept since its return by the Philistines. (There is no reason given why the ark has remained there—in relative obscurity—for so long.) During the joyous procession to Jerusalem, one of the ark's attendants is struck dead for touching it to steady it. The power of holiness is understood here as an impersonal physical power which strikes down anyone whose approach to the ark is not cultically proper. Not until David sees that the ark does not harm the person who is left in charge of it, but on the contrary brings blessing, does David think it safe to continue the journey to Jerusalem.

David dances before the ark, almost naked. Michal, daughter of Saul and wife of David, is offended at this. David rebukes her, and "Michal the daughter of Saul had no child to the day of her death" (6:23). Whether this is the result of Michal's being barren, or of David's putting her away, we are not told. David may have hoped for a male heir by Michal to cement the ties between the house of David and the house of Saul, but this hope is not to be realized.

We discussed the ark in some detail in earlier chapters and related the theory of the German scholar Martin Dibelius. Other descriptions of the ark have been advanced, but Dibelius' has achieved the widest acceptance. The ark plays an important part in the stories of Samuel, Saul, and David—indeed it plays the hero's role in I Samuel 4:1-7:2. But then it disappears from the account and reappears here. Some of its significance is transferred to the ephod—not a garment as David wears in his dancing before the ark, but a box (see I Sam. 23:6) that contains the lots David consults. But the ark also is a sign that God is with David. Now David brings the ark to Jerusalem, at least in part to establish that God is with his rule. In taking the ark to Jerusalem, David also manages to unify northern and southern traditions. Capitalizing on the one hand on the sacred traditions of the holy city of the Jebusites and on the other on all that the ark represents for the northern and central tribes, he gains with one stroke support from both southern and northern peoples. Interestingly—even oddly—the ark will all but vanish into obscurity again. We hear almost nothing of it from now on; it is as if it is replaced in the theological imagination by the temple Solomon builds to house it.

David dances before the ark. As we have previously noted, dance was a normal and important part of Israelite worship. David here participates in a long tradition, which involved celebrating by movement as well as song, occasions of joy, such as weddings, harvest, and victory in battle.

The Everlasting Covenant with the House of David

Please read II Samuel 7:1-23

David himself wants to build a temple to YHWH immediately in his capital city. He consults with Nathan the prophet, who at first assures him that it is proper to do so. That night, however, Nathan receives a message from YHWH which reverses this counsel. The entire passage is a play on the word "house." YHWH, through Nathan, reminds David that in all the time of his relations with Israel, YHWH has never found it necessary to ask for a house to be built for him (7:5-7).

II Samuel 7 YHWH Refuses a Temple, but Builds a Dynasty

Now, YHWH will provide a safe place for his people where their enemies will no longer afflict them. And he

will make “a house” for David—that is, he will establish a royal dynasty in him. YHWH will never remove his chesed—his “steadfast love”—from David’s “house”: “your throne shall be established forever” (vv. 11-17).

David then offers a prayer to YHWH in which he gives thanks for this promise, and asks that YHWH will always remember it—that it will please YHWH “to bless the house of your servant, so that it may continue forever before you; for you, O LORD God have spoken, and with your blessing shall the house of your servant be blessed forever” (v. 29).

This “royal covenant theology” marks sharp change in the understanding of the relationship between YHWH and the people. The Mosaic covenant was between YHWH and Israel. It was conditional on Israel’s keeping its terms. And it was on the basis of this understanding of the relationship between YHWH and Israel that objection had been raised to the institution of the monarchy: to YHWH alone, not to a king, was the allegiance of Israel due. Now, YHWH has made a covenant with David and his successors, rather than with Israel. Furthermore, the covenant is unconditional. YHWH may find it necessary to chastise those among the successors of David who commit iniquity, but this will not mean a complete withdrawal of God’s favor (v. 14b-15).

The relationship between YHWH and the king will be that of a father to his son (v. 14a). Psalm 2:7 repeats this imagery: “I will tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to me, ‘You are my son, today I have begotten you.’” The psalm makes it clear that it is the king, YHWH’s anointed (v. 2), who is referred to. Three of the gospels allude to this psalm in their accounts of the baptism of Jesus: at his baptism, the voice from heaven says, “You are my Son, the Beloved; with you I am well pleased” (Mark 1:11).

It is not unusual for mythologies of ancient peoples to claim divine birth for a king. It is by their allegiance to the king, who is a “blood relative” of the god, that the people are related to the god. In the “everlasting covenant” (II Sam. 23:5) and its attendant “royal theology,” Israel comes close to this general pagan viewpoint. A distinction is maintained, however: David is not, like the king in the usual pagan mythologies, a divine or semi-divine being whose dynasty was established in primeval times. He is “son of God” not by birth, but by virtue of the covenant which YHWH made with him at a particular time in the history of the people of Israel.

This section raises in sharp relief the issue referred to in the story of the rise of Saul: what changes are permissible within the Yahwist tradition? How much can the Israelite faith be altered to meet the changing circumstances of Israel’s history without losing its heart?

YHWH had called a people and had put them on a road that was to lead—so the message to Abraham had said—to the blessing of all the nations of the earth. This was the vision of the J writer, presenting his epic history of the foundations of Israel’s life under YHWH. This writer—working, most probably, during the reign of David—saw the rise of the house of David as the fulfillment of the promise made to Abraham: the people of YHWH had inherited the land which was promised to them. Now the promises have shifted to David and his heirs. The political necessity of this is clear. The divisiveness of tribalism must give way to the unity of Israel. The king, ruling by divine right under a special covenant, the capital city of Jerusalem, and a visibly splendid temple to YHWH—these are the symbols of a unified nation. They mean a sharp break with the ancient traditions.

The theology of the “everlasting covenant” with the house of David contains an attempt to reconcile political and military necessities with the fundamental beliefs

of Yahwism. In the old tradition it was YHWH's will alone, not the power or worthiness of Israel, that had brought about the covenant in the desert. Israel's victories had, in her own view, been victories of YHWH. By God's power, often in the almost complete absence of military might, the land had been won. The royal theology maintained this belief: kings in the succession of David would be blessed because of the continuing chesed of YHWH, not because of their own wisdom or valor. Even their misdeeds would not alter the faithfulness of YHWH—God would chastise them for their iniquity, but would not forsake the everlasting covenant with the house of David. Thus, the fidelity of YHWH rather than the worth of Israel or her kings remains the basis of Israel's hope.

Although this central feature of Israel's faith is preserved in the new doctrine set forth in the "royal theology," there is nonetheless a subtle change in the tone of it. The relation of Israel to YHWH seems more remote, and loyalty to a king, rather than allegiance to the covenant with YHWH, binds the people together.

The issue of a change in the tradition emerges also in the building of the temple. In the past, YHWH and the people were constantly on the march—through the desert and throughout campaigns to settle the land and to defend it. YHWH had never dwelt in a house, but came to meet the people in a tent. Hence the prohibition against David's construction of a temple.

A central feature of the Deuteronomist's theology was that the temple in Jerusalem, which David's son Solomon was eventually to construct, was essential to keep Israel's faith in YHWH from being diluted by contact with the pagan religions of Canaan. Thus that which was needed to preserve Israel also ran counter to a characteristic strain in her religious life. Instead of being God's people on the march, Israel became the preservers of an immovable and changeless shrine. It is essential to understand 7:13 as an addition to the account. In fact, it changes the purport of the entire chapter. Scholars have generally understood this account to have been built in at least three layers.

The earliest layer can be found in portions of vv. 8-16, which in its original form may have been a poem about the eternity of the Davidic dynasty. The writer who picked up this poem chooses the word "house" to attach some comments to. These comments tell against the building of a temple. "The temple may have had its place in unifying and purifying the national religion of Israel, but it stood in the way of a more lofty and universal faith in a God who dwells with the humble and contrite and is in their midst wherever they are gathered together. Jeremiah seems to have been the first to see this" (Caird, p. 1082), and perhaps it was from Jeremiah that the writer here learned it. So this writer says that, if God is to have a house, it is not to be one made with human hands but one that God makes out of human lives—particularly the lives of David's descendants. (In the Christian story, this becomes more particular. Christ is the living temple, who, when destroyed, will be built again in three days.)

Verse 13 is a late addition, its intention to take away from the attack on the temple. This it does quite well, altering the direction of the whole piece. The word translated

"son" in the NRSV of v. 14 is probably more accurately rendered "seed." It refers to the entire house of David. But v. 13 applies it to Solomon alone.

The effect of this interference on the chapter as a whole is surprising. An eternal kingdom is promised not to the family of David but to Solomon personally; and the building of a temple, which for sound theological reasons was wrong for David, has become quite in order for his son (Caird, p. 1085).

The rest of the story of Israel under the monarchy reveals the tensions and ambiguities of the theological

shifts apparent here. Kings often fail to live up to their status of "beloved sons" of YHWH; priests preside at Jerusalem, but the people of the countryside rarely experience the "glory"—the visible presence—of YHWH at the sacred rites. Prophets, the holy "men of God," must speak the awesome word of YHWH—they are the reminders of the older state of affairs when God himself led Israel. They have little effect. Finally king, priest, and prophet are seen in a series of struggles, until eventually—in Christian interpretation—the immovable temple is destroyed so that God may build a tabernacle within the hearts of the people, and the everlasting covenant is sealed again in a greater David, a unique "beloved son." The renewed covenant, even more than the original version, stresses the fidelity of God's chesed, but it also preserves the directness of the relationship between God and the people. Jesus, unlike David, does not come between the covenanted people and their God, but is in himself the Lord of the New Covenant.

Summary

Second Samuel, chapter 8, tells of the victories of David over the neighboring peoples. In a series of campaigns, David extends the size of his realm and establishes distant garrisons for its defense. In the process, he accumulates great wealth, sufficient to allow his successor to carry on extensive building operations and to engage in ambitious business enterprises throughout the civilized world. From the small group of trusted friends with which David began his career, the royal court grows and develops an organizational pattern similar to the court in Egypt.

II Samuel 9-20 The Court History of David

In one of the fragments in the Appendix to II Samuel (21:1-14), an account is given of a famine traced to a betrayal by Saul of the people of Gibeon. Gibeon was the non-Israelite group that tricked Joshua into covenanting with them during the time of the conquest (Josh. 9:3-27). Apparently Saul had put some of the Gibeonites to death—though there is no account of this in the story of Saul as we now have it. To make amends David has agreed to hand over seven of Saul's sons—actually, five were grandsons—to be slaughtered. It is generally accepted that this event is the background for II Sam. 9.

In chapter 9, David makes partial amends to the house of Saul—and keeps covenant with Jonathan—by restoring Saul's ancestral lands to Jonathan's son, Meribaal—the lame one. Indeed he brings Meribaal to Jerusalem and admits him to the royal court. It is in the context of David's loyalty to Jonathan and the house of Saul that we read the sad story of his treatment of Uriah the Hittite.

In chapter 10, some messengers on a goodwill mission to the princes of the Ammonites are insulted, and David sends Joab with an army to avenge them. The Ammonites make an alliance with Syria, but Syria pulls back and renounces the alliance in the face of Israelite victories. The war is still going on, with Joab at the front and David staying behind in Jerusalem, when David meets Bathsheba.

II Samuel 11:1-26 David and Bathsheba

Novels and film scenarios have tried to draw out the details of this story of lust and illicit sex; the Deuteronomist, while not minimizing it, tells the story in five verses! The remainder of the story deals with the consequences of the act.

David knows who Bathsheba is. She is married, so the act in which they engage is adultery. Furthermore, she is married to one of David's elite soldiers—II Sam. 23:39, part of a list of the chief members of David's personal army, names Uriah the Hittite as one; therefore, what is involved is also the betrayal of a comrade. Uriah, though a Hittite, is a fellow Israelite, presumably by conversion—his name means "YHWH is my light." Thus the act is the betrayal of a covenant brother. Bathsheba is, moreover, the daughter of Eliam, the

son of Ahithophel. His opposition to David in the affair of Absalom (II Sam. 13-19) may have its basis here.

Bathsheba conceives a child, thereby making it inevitable that the sin will be known. This doesn't mean David won't try every means at his disposal to conceal it. David has Uriah recalled from battle, expecting him to sleep with his wife. But the zeal of a convert, if that is what Uriah is, exceeds that of most Israelites. At any rate, David's expectation is thwarted: Uriah will not violate the rule of sexual continence which soldiers are to observe and so he does not sleep with Bathsheba (vv. 8-12; cf. I Sam. 21:4). Even when David detains him another day and plies him with strong drink, he will not violate his soldier's oath (vv. 12-13).

With no easy solution to his problem, David compounds the sin of adultery with murder. He sends a message to Joab—unfeelingly by Uriah himself—with instructions for him to send Uriah to the most dangerous battle site, and then withdraw the supporting soldiers so that he will be killed. Joab seems to improve on the murder plan: so that the plot will not become obvious by the withdrawal of the soldiers, he sends Uriah with other "valiant men" to the city wall where they will all surely be killed. After Uriah's death Joab fears that David will disapprove of the battle tactics. He might say that Joab should have known better than to commit soldiers to such a dangerous place—he knew that Abimelech was killed by a woman from a city wall (Judg. 9:53). The messenger who is to carry the news to David is therefore told to conclude the account—if David is angry at the apparent blunder of his commander—with the news that Uriah was one of those killed (vv. 14-21).

When David hears the entire message, including word of the death of Uriah, he replies in a manner that would offend the feelings of any good general: "Do not let this matter trouble you, for the sword devours now one and now another" (v. 25). The two men, Joab and David, are now on the same level. Joab is consistently pictured as a man of few principles beyond complete dedication to the cause of David. He has earned even David's scorn for his murder of Abner. It is as if David's dark

side has now won out; the ideal king has sunk to the level of his commander. In stark contrast is the behavior of Uriah the Hittite himself. He is completely loyal not only to his oath of celibacy, but also to his king and his commander. David can send Uriah's own death warrant by Uriah himself, trusting that he will not open the letter—Uriah is an honest man. Joab can send him into the thick of the battle, trusting that he will go—Uriah is a brave man. He deserves better of his king, as Nathan will point out.

II Samuel 11:26-12:15 Nathan Denounces David

The prophet Samuel denounced Saul; now another prophet challenges the great King David. The role of prophecy is undergoing a change that will culminate in the great prophets whose words are preserved in the Old Testament books bearing their names: Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. Prophecy had begun with bands of ecstatics, periodically overcome with frenzy and often speaking unintelligible words. It was to evolve into a vocation for a few who were given "a word from the LORD" to speak to the nation and to its kings. Divine guidance, virtually assured when the leaders of Israel were specially chosen charismatic men and women, was now under an established, hereditary monarchy, to come as divine correction and chastisement through the prophets. Samuel, as we have seen, lived in both eras: he was a member of a band of prophets of the old style, but he also brought the word of judgment against King Saul.

Nathan more closely resembles the later prophets. At the time of the Bathsheba episode, David sits secure in his royal palace, a true monarch with a personal army to ensure the execution of his desires. No human power can prevent him from doing as he wishes, no court exists that can restrain him. His power is as nothing before the spokesman of God.

Nathan prefaces his prophetic word with the telling of a parable. He tells of a poor man whose single ewe lamb has been stolen by a rich man with large flocks. The parable is not unlike the parables of Jesus in its

form. It is a realistic story—it brings before David the kind of case that he as king would be judging regularly—and it is intended to convict the one to whom the story is told. In this case David finds himself condemning David. It is he who has stolen the poor man's ewe lamb. And when David decrees death for the offender, Nathan utters the words which have become symbolic of the prophetic office: "You are the man!" (12:7) Justice is the same for kings as it is for their subjects. Although David has acted with the same arrogance and disregard of morality that has characterized many of the world's absolute rulers, as an Israelite he must know that, before YHWH, he is as everybody else. And God's prophet—here and throughout the life of the kingdom—must be heard, even when bringing the most unwanted message.

David says, "I have sinned against the LORD" (v. 13a). The "everlasting covenant" still stands: "And Nathan said to David, 'Now the LORD has put away your sin; you shall not die. Nevertheless, because by this deed you have utterly scorned the LORD, the child that is born to you shall die" (vv. 13b-14). By present-day standards, the death of the child for the sin of the father does not represent justice. But here, the sin of David is thought of as an almost solid burden resting on the guilty man, so that

it could be removed from him only onto a scapegoat. Repentance could produce a reprieve for David, but could not undo the sin. As we have seen on many occasions, "sin has two results: it separates a man from God, and it produces evil effects in the world. The first of these can be canceled by forgiveness, but the second remains. In the second sense sin has always to be borne, but it is an obvious fact of human experience that it is not always borne or not wholly borne by the sinner" (Caird, p. 1104).

The prophecy of punishment includes more than this direct blow against David—though this section (vv. 9-12) was probably added to reflect the later history of David's reign. "Behold, I will raise up trouble against you from within your own house; and I will 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" (v. 11). "In the sight of this very sun" means, as the following verse makes clear, "in public." The story of the intrigue and rebellion that makes up most of the rest of the reign of David shows this prediction coming true.

II Samuel 12:15-25 The Death of the Child and the Birth of Solomon

This passage has brought comfort to generations of readers, with its picture of a father praying for the life of his sick child but putting away his concern when the child dies, confident that he will meet the child again. This interpretation, however, is shaped more by Christian hope of the resurrection than by the biblical text itself. David does, indeed, pray to God for his child. He fasts for the seven days during which the sick child's life is in doubt, lying on the ground in the tent before YHWH. When the child dies, he ceases his fast and his prayers. But when his servants question him about this, his reply is one of resignation rather than of hope. He had hoped that YHWH might be gracious and revoke the curse, but now that hope is shown to have been in vain, YHWH's judgment has stood; further pleading would be of no avail. The words "I shall go to him, but he will not return to me" (v. 23) do not reflect confidence that after death father and child will be reunited in a resurrection life; they bespeak the certainty that David, too, will die and descend to the lifeless shadows of Sheol, but the child will never live again. The importance of the passage to us, however, may not lie in any of this but "in its evidence for an early belief in the power of intercessory prayer," as Caird points out (p. 1106). Bathsheba is now David's wife. The graciousness of YHWH returns to David: the new son who is born to Bathsheba is loved by YHWH (v. 24). This son is Solomon, and the message of YHWH's love for the child may reflect the editor's conviction that YHWH must have loved him, since he became king over Israel.

The story of David and Bathsheba reminds us once again of one of the greatest strengths of the Hebrew Bible. Not only are the narratives "charactered" by people who are truly human, but the stories are also characterized by honesty and a high regard for the truth. From the perspective of the Old Testament writers, the united monarchy, which had its bare beginnings under Saul but rose to greatness under David, came to be

regarded as the golden age of Israel. The wanderings of the wilderness period may have been overseen by the great Moses, and the time in the wilderness under Moses may have been the time of purest faith in God. But it was

also a time of evil and chaos. The Hebrew Bible does not regard the wilderness as a golden age. Nor does it regard the period of the judges, with several leaders acting directly under the inspiration of YHWH, as a golden age. That designation is reserved for the reigns of David and Solomon, and particularly of David, who succeeds in uniting the country by both military and diplomatic means, who founds a dynasty, and who lays the groundwork for economic prosperity. David is not perfect, and there is no attempt made to whitewash him. In this story he takes Bathsheba as if he owned her. He scurries about frantically trying to cover his tracks in a manner which would be comical, were it not so tragic. When he cannot—foiled by the goodness of Uriah, who wishes only to keep covenant with his king—he sends him to his death. When the battle in which Uriah dies is lost, King David shrugs his shoulders. David's ability to rule is upset by his episode of lust, for his sins are the sins of humankind, and ultimately, though king, David is only human, one more child of YHWH, under God's judgment, as we all are. (Note that in the books of Chronicles this episode is missing. One might argue, however, that declining to retell a story already known is not the same as saying it never happened or as making excuses or as trying to explain it away.)

Summary

The point has been reached in the battle against the Ammonites—the war in which Uriah was killed—when victory is within sight. Joab sends for David, so that the king will receive the credit for the Ammonite defeat. David subjugates the Ammonites and makes them a labor force.

The next seven chapters, 13-19, are devoted to the story of David's son Absalom and of his revolt against his father. From one point of view the basis for Absalom's revolt is the unwise and unfeeling treatment which David gave his son following a series of sordid events. But this is not to say that Absalom is without excessive ambition or self-interest.

Absalom's sister, Tamar, is raped by Amnon, David's oldest son by a different wife. After raping her, Amnon casts her aside, thereby compounding his offense: Tamar is now, by the custom of the time, in a hopeless situation, neither virgin nor wife. Absalom takes his sister into his own home and bides his time for revenge. Two years later, the incident apparently forgotten, Absalom invites Amnon, with the rest of David's sons, to a sheep-shearing festival near a town some distance from Jerusalem. By Absalom's orders, Amnon is killed. Absalom, fearing retaliation from his father, flees the country for three years, staying with his grandfather, the king of a neighboring petty state. David, whose love for Absalom seems to be greater than that for any of his other sons, longs for a reconciliation, but he allows the state of virtual exile to continue rather than appear to approve of the murder that Absalom has committed.

Joab, as usual intent on serving David's wishes even when the king cannot bring himself to express them, arranges with a woman to ask the king's judgment on a family dispute. The story—pure fiction concocted by Joab—portrays the woman as a widow with two sons. One son has killed the other, and the rest of the family is

now demanding that she surrender her only remaining son to be killed in revenge. She points out that to do this would result in the extinction of the family, since her husband is now dead.

David's judgment is that the son should not be surrendered; he promises the woman protection against any who would attempt vengeance against her one remaining son. The woman then, as Nathan had done, turns the story against David: "in giving this decision the king convicts himself, inasmuch as the king does not bring his banished one home again" (14:13). David has Absalom brought back to Jerusalem. But Absalom is still not permitted to come into the presence of the king. This state of affairs continues for two years before an inconclusive reconciliation takes place.

Perhaps because he is still rankled by his father's treatment—but perhaps too because he is ambitious for himself—Absalom sets out on a campaign to undermine the people's love and respect for David. He sits at the gate of the city, the traditional place for people to come to their king for judgment on their disputes. David, increasingly occupied with the great affairs of state, no longer observes this time-consuming custom with full attention, and Absalom undertakes to hear the cases which the people bring. He declares the rightness of each person's claim with the wish that he had the authority to pass judgment! "So Absalom stole the hearts of the people of Israel" (15:6).

Certain of his popularity, Absalom goes to Hebron, on the pretext of fulfilling a vow made many years earlier while he was in exile. He brings with him some of the leading figures of Jerusalem to implicate them in his plot and to bind them to him in spite of themselves. It is at Hebron that Absalom gives the signal for revolt and is acclaimed king "throughout all the tribes of Israel" (15:10).

David flees Jerusalem, taking his personal army with him; he leaves ten of his concubines behind to keep up his household. Absalom, as a sign of disrespect and to show he has replaced his father as king, copulates with the concubines on a rooftop so that all can see. Thereby Nathan's prediction (12:11) is fulfilled. (In these events we can also hear the echo of David's rise to power against Saul, with his army of malcontents and his demand that Saul's daughter be returned to him as wife. As our folk wisdom might put it, "The acorn does not fall far from the tree.") David has ordered a friend and counselor, Hushai, to remain in Jerusalem; he is to pretend to have defected to Absalom. Hushai is also to give Absalom bad advice, countering the influence of Absalom's own counselor, Ahithophel, and to send secret messages to David apprising him of Absalom's plans.

Following Hushai's (bad) advice—and ignoring Ahithophel's good—Absalom launches a full-scale battle against David. Ahithophel knows that the hardened troops at David's disposal, given time to prepare for battle, will best Absalom's ragtag army, so he had advised sending out a select force to capture David alone. When his sound advice is rejected, Ahithophel goes home and hangs himself.

II Samuel 18:1-5 David Musters His Forces

Warned by Hushai of the coming attack, David has moved his army east of the Jordan River. He divides the army into three parts, with Joab, Joab's brother Abishai, and Ittai, a man from Gath who had proven his loyalty to David, in charge of the three sections. At the insistence of his commanders, David remains behind. They argue that it is his life that is sought, and he must be kept safe (vv. 3-4). (Their arguments serve to bolster what is already a policy of David's reign [21:17].) David instructs the three generals to "deal gently for my sake with the young man Absalom," and the point is made that all the soldiers hear this order (v. 5). Absalom may be ready to sacrifice his father's life on the altar of his ambition, but David's love for his son is stronger than his anger at the treason.

II Samuel 18:6-15 Absalom is Killed

The outcome of the battle is clear from the start. As Hushai and Ahithophel both anticipated, the personal army which David has developed over many years easily defeats the hastily assembled forces of Absalom

and puts them to rout. The brief note, “the forest claimed more victims that day than the sword,” bears testimony to the huge destruction that panic works on the inexperienced troops (vv. 6-8).

Absalom himself, riding on his mule, comes face to face with David’s experienced forces, and when he turns to flee, he is caught in the fork of a tree branch and left hanging there as his mount rushes on. One of Joab’s men sees the young man and reports it to Joab. Joab scolds the man for leaving him alive, but the soldier reminds Joab of David’s instructions. Perhaps feeling (rightly) that the only strong point in Joab’s character is his loyalty to David, the soldier remarks shrewdly that if he had harmed Absalom, Joab would not have stepped forward to take the blame.

Thereupon, Joab himself strikes Absalom dead. According to v. 15, ten of Joab’s armor-bearers complete the job, though that hardly seems necessary after three dart thrusts. This verse seems to have been added later, though to what purpose we cannot be certain.

II Samuel 18:16-18 Absalom’s Monument

Absalom is buried without dignity in a pit and a heap of stones is thrown on top of him. This is a great contrast with the monument he had built for himself near Jerusalem, which was still standing at the time of the editor (v. 18). This passage not only tells of the origin of a landmark, as biblical editors loved to do, but it also emphasizes the thoroughness of Absalom’s downfall. The comment attributed to Absalom, that he had no son, contradicts 14:27, in which it is stated, “There were born to Absalom three sons, and one daughter whose name was Tamar; she was a beautiful woman.” Perhaps the sons had died, but more likely the later editor cannot imagine that one who had the memorial of living sons would raise a monument of lifeless rock —so it is assumed that Absalom had no sons.

II Samuel 18:19-33 David Is Told of Absalom’s Death

David had twice rewarded with death the bearer of the news of the death of an adversary, first in the case of Saul and Jonathan (II Sam. 1:15-16) and then Ishbaal (II Sam. 4:9-12). The possibility that David might respond in the same manner to the news of his own son’s death may have been on Joab’s mind, for he refuses to allow Ahimaaz the son of Zadok, the priest, to carry the news (vv. 19-20, 22). It may also be true, however, that Joab simply does not think that Ahimaaz, a friend of the king, is the one to bring the bad news of Absalom’s death to David—better a stranger. It

seems possible that Ahimaaz did not know of Absalom’s death at the time he volunteered; perhaps he intended to bring only good news. At any rate, a slave—“the Cushite”—is sent instead (v. 21). Ahimaaz, however, decides to go anyway, and he runs to bring the news to David first. He follows an easier route and reaches David’s place of waiting slightly ahead of the Cushite. When he tells David of the success of the battle, he draws back from telling of Absalom’s death. Perhaps his courage fails in the face of the king’s urgent desire that all be well. The Cushite, when he arrives, responds to David’s question about his son’s fate by saying, “May the enemies of my lord the king, and all who rise up, be like that young man” (v. 32). Thereupon David weeps for his son, saying the words of grief that have moved the hearts of countless readers: “O my son Absalom, my son, my son, Absalom! Would I had died instead of you, O Absalom, my son, my son!” (v. 33) This is not the David of old, who would have struck down the bearer of such news. He is torn with greater grief than his youthful ambition to greatness. It is also true that something of the fierce spark which brought him to greatness is gone.

II Samuel 19:1-8

Joab is enraged by the spectacle of the king racked with grief for the death of his traitorous son. What should

have been celebrated as a great victory is being turned into a mournful occasion. The morale of the army is bound to suffer when its bravery is rewarded only by their king's regrets. Joab angrily warns David that, if he does not go to the troops and "speak kindly" to them, they will surely desert him "and this will be worse for you than any disaster that has come upon you from your youth until now" (v. 7). It is a critical time in the life of his kingdom. David pulls himself together and goes to address the troops.

Joab Rebukes David

It is a tribute to the honesty of the biblical writers that the picture of David preserved for us is so frank. David, the great king, the one in whom the promises to Abraham were fulfilled—for such is the message of the J writer—is treated by the D editor in a mixed manner. As the deliverer of Israel and the first true forger of Israel's national unity, he is great, but in regard to the succession, he is inept. Perhaps originally hoping for a male heir by Michal, to unite his house with the house of Saul, David has not cultivated an heir among his sons. The kingdom has been established, but, as D well knew, it would fall upon evil days before long.

Strife Between Israel and Judah

The rebellion of Absalom does not seem to have been a sectional uprising. It seems rather, as John Bright points out, "to have fed on a mass of indefinable grievances, and to have had supporters throughout the land, not least in . . . David's own household" (A History of Israel, p. 209). Ahithophel had a son in David's honor guard (23:34), while Amasa seems to have been a close relative of both Joab and David (17:25). Moreover, as Bright also points out, "the end of the revolt (which began in Hebron!) found Judah exceedingly reluctant even to approach" David (19:11-15).

II Samuel 19:9-40a David Seeks to Restore Harmony

The general picture given in these succeeding stories shows David mending fences. He calls on the Judahites to be the first to call him back as king. They are his own tribespeople and not to be superseded by the northern tribes in support of him (vv. 1-12, 14-15). He fires Joab and puts in his place Amasa, a close kinsman (I Chron. 2:17) and also leader of Absalom's rebel army, in an obvious move to appease his opposition.

He forgives Shimei, the son of Gera. Mercy is the order of the day—Shimei's blasphemy (16:5-8) is not to be punished. And he steers a middle course between the claims of Ziba and Meribaal. Though justice seems to be on the side of Meribaal—he seems to have been mourning since the day of David's departure from Jerusalem—David divides the land between them. He must play in all cases the loving and forgiving ruler, for he can at this time afford to make no enemies if he wishes to restore harmony to his realm.

II Samuel 19:40b-20:2 Sheba's Revolt

That harmony is not to be. David's policy of appeasement toward Judah (19:9ff.) is interpreted by the northern tribes as favoritism. Israel and Judah begin to squabble between themselves. The Judahites claim kinship with David as justification for their preeminence in David's eyes, but Israel counterclaims that it has "ten shares in the king" (v. 43). The ten tribes of the north form the great bulk of the kingdom, contrasted to the single tribe of Judah. Nevertheless, when a Benjaminite named Sheba, a "scoundrel" (20:1a), calls for Israel to secede from Judah, some follow, and rebellion breaks out afresh. Sheba, who may have been a kinsman of Saul, is remembered more for his battle cry than for the rebellion itself: "We have no portion in David, no share in the son of Jesse! Everyone to your tents, O Israel!" (20:1b) The ten tribes of Israel never felt close to the southern tribe of Judah; it was with David, not with Judah, that they had covenanted (II Sam. 5:3). But now, David has insulted them; therefore, they have "no portion" in David, can expect no

“inheritance” from him. He will always favor his own people. The battle cry—“everyone to your tents, O Israel!”—is less a battle cry than a call for Israel to leave David and return every man to his own home.

II Samuel 20:4-22 Sheba Is Crushed

David gives Amasa three days to mobilize an army of Judahites to pursue Sheba, but he is unable to meet the deadline (v. 5). It becomes clear just that quickly that Amasa is no substitute for the capable Joab. David then tells Joab’s brother, Abishai, to take the king’s personal army and go in pursuit of Sheba (vv. 6-7). David recognizes that Sheba’s revolt is in some ways more serious than Absalom’s, for it rests on the long-standing division between the north and the south, not simply on one person’s ambitions for the throne.

Joab, as David must have expected, accompanies his brother. And when Amasa comes to meet the advancing army, Joab, still a man of action and few scruples, murders him (vv. 8-10). The pretense of a kiss, by which Joab gets close enough to Amasa to run him through with a sword, may bring memories to Christian readers of the kiss of Judas. Joab’s unlucky replacement is dead, but the sight of his body by the side of the road halts the conscript army in its tracks. Not until it is removed do the troops continue with Joab in pursuit of Sheba (vv. 11-13).

Sheba and his followers hide in the city of Abel. When Joab lays siege to the city, an old woman shouts to him from the wall. The “old saying” which she recites to Joab makes it appear that Abel was a place to which people came for oracles (v. 18). Her “wisdom,” referred to in v. 22, and the authority which she apparently wields suggest that it is she, or perhaps a group of women of which she is a member, who give out the oracles. Joab’s reply—that he wants only one man, the one who had “lifted up

his hand against King David” (v. 21)—brings instant success. Sheba is beheaded and his head thrown over the wall of the city. So Sheba has failed, but the union of north and south will remain still precarious. (A few years later, when David’s grandson becomes king, Sheba’s cry will be repeated and the kingdom permanently divided.) With the revolt successfully crushed, Joab returns to Jerusalem—his discharge from the post of command apparently a thing of the past.

II Samuel 20:23-26

David’s Court The members of David’s royal staff are listed in these verses. The titles not only show a full-fledged court, but also suggest something of the quality of life at the height of David’s reign: “Adoram was in charge of the forced labor” (v. 24). Some scholars suggest that this does not refer to foreign slaves, but to Israelites who were forced to labor for the king. Adoram will hold the same post under David’s grandson, and this oppression of Israelites will become one of the grievances which sparks the secession of the north from the Judahite throne.

II Samuel 21-24

Appendix

Chapters 21-24 are fragments, only some of which are probably as old as the material included in the main account. Chapter 21:1-14—Gibeonite revenge on the seven “sons of Saul”—has already been discussed in connection with chapter 9, which it logically precedes. The rest of chapter 21 is a collection of stories of battles against various Philistine giants, including the account which credits Elhanan with killing Goliath (v. 19). Chapter 22 is a psalm, the “Song of Deliverance.” It is almost identical in text with Ps. 18. Its

composition is credited to David, but scholars have disagreed on the ascriptions here (22:1) and in Ps. 18 where it is assigned to the day when YHWH delivered David from Saul and all his enemies. While some have seen no reason to question David's authorship, others, acknowledging that parts of the psalm are very old, cannot believe it to have been written in its present form by David. Verses 8-16 are a masterful expression of traditional Yahwist imagery describing a divine theophany (thee-AHF-an-ee)—an appearance of the god.

Chapter 23:1-7, the "last words of David," has been discussed in connection with the "everlasting covenant" with the house of David.

Verses 8-39 list the leaders of David's "mighty men," his personal army. You will note that Uriah the Hittite is among them (v. 39).

In chapter 24, a plague is explained as being YHWH's punishment on David for taking a census of the people, and the same account is used to provide the occasion for David's purchase of the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite—the later site of Solomon's temple.

Conclusion

The story of David is now essentially over. His death belongs to the account of the rise of Solomon. With his passing, the greatness of Israel passes, too. Up until now, the history of God's people has been presented to show YHWH's fulfillment of the promise to Abraham. From this point on, instead of looking back to Abraham, the reader is led to look forward: how will God deal with the defection of the people?

Not for several centuries, after catastrophic judgment upon both Israel and Judah, will there arise the expectation of a Messiah as God's agent to redeem the people in fulfillment of the old promise. When the expectation arises, it will be the idealized figure of David that provides the pattern for the future messianic king. As in David the promises were once fulfilled, so in the new David will come a greater and final fulfillment.

End of chapter