

David

“God testified concerning him: ‘I have found David son of Jesse a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do’ . . . When David had served God’s purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep.”

Acts 13:22, 36

In seven years Israel, under the command of Joshua, conquered almost the whole land of Canaan. The territory covered by the conquest extended from Kadesh-barnea in the Negev, in the south, to the valley of Lebanon below Mount Hermon, in the north, and included the defeat of thirty-one kings. Although the prominent ruling occupants of Canaan had been defeated, and a period of peace followed, there still remained many areas unoccupied by the Israelites.

In the pursuit of their selfish tribal and personal interests the Israelites forgot or ignored the commands of God: *“I will give you every place where you set your foot”*—implying total God-believing occupation of the land. The ambitions of the twelve Israelite tribes, and the greed of the families, constrained them to limit their occupation to less than God had outlined for them. The cities of the Philistines were taken, but the inhabitants were not exterminated.

The Israelite tribes who settled in the north were divided from the others in central Canaan by a line of Canaanite walled cities from the River Jordan to the Great Sea, not occupied by the tribal descendants of Ishmael and Esau. The few scattered Israelite tribes in central Canaan were separated from Judah in the south by the formidable Jebusite stronghold of Jerusalem. The Tabernacle was set up in Shiloh, isolated in the centre of the land, in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin to which Joshua belonged. It was from Shiloh that Joshua eventually called on the Israelites to possess the remaining territories promised by God. They never did. Before he died, Joshua called on the Israelites to meet at Shechem, and there he reminded them of their obligations as God's people in the Promised Land. Once again they declared their willingness to serve their God alone, but this was evident only in their words and not in their actions.

With the death of Joshua the Israelites lapsed into idolatry, apostasy, and, eventually, rebellion. Because of their self-centred pursuits the Israelite tribes lost their unity as well as their faith, and the formerly defeated Canaanites rose up and harried them unmercifully. At the same time, Egypt was attempting to re-conquer Canaan; the Hittites and Assyrians opposed Egypt; and the Philistines increased their hold on the coastal regions.

The only unifying factor among the Israelites was the isolated inter-tribal Tabernacle in Shiloh, staffed and attended by the priesthood. But it could only function effectively when loyalty to God was strong, and this gradually disappeared, until it was recorded:

"After that whole generation had been gathered to their fathers, another generation grew up, who knew neither the Lord nor what he had done for Israel. Then the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord and served the Baals. They forsook the Lord, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of Egypt. They followed and worshipped various gods of the peoples around them. They provoked the Lord to anger because they forsook him and followed Baal and the Ashtoreths. In his anger against Israel the Lord handed them over to raiders who plundered them. He sold them to their enemies all around, whom they were no longer able to resist. Whenever Israel went out to fight the hand of the Lord was against them to defeat

them, just as he had sworn to them. They were in great distress."³⁹

The period of deterioration to that point, from the entry into Canaan, was about three centuries. Because they had neglected God's command to consolidate their occupation of the promised territory, and to exterminate the inhabitants, the Israelites had become fragmented and vulnerable in their dispersion, and had no centralizing or unifying capability to enable them to withstand their enemies. In these approximately two centuries there emerged from among them eleven local leaders, who were known as "Judges". These ten men and one woman were tribal, not national, deliverers, and their influence was local, temporary and limited.

With the death of the last of these Judges, the volatile Samson, Israel was left at the mercy of the Philistines to the south-west, the Moabites to the south-east, the Edomites to the south, the Phoenicians to the north-west, and the Syrians to the north-east. Worst of all, they had no desire for a national destiny with their unique God, especially when it involved the demanding holiness of life. Even their Levitical priesthood had become corrupted, and the contemporary high priest, Eli, and his two sons, were despised for their profaning of the holy offerings and for encouraging "sacred" prostitution.

When it looked as if things could get no worse, they did. A young boy called Samuel had been consecrated to God's service in the Tabernacle by his devout mother. In time Samuel became the greatest servant of God since Moses as he fought the deterioration of the nation single-handedly, and tried to regain the vision of their divine destiny. But it was in his day that the Israelites rejected being ruled by God and instead demanded a monarchy:

*"They said to him (Samuel), 'You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have'."*⁴⁰

Samuel had ruled Israel as a Judge for almost forty years when this happened. He had been responsible for God agreeing to return in the *Shekinah* Cloud of Presence in the Tabernacle in Shiloh to

³⁹ Judges 2 vv 10-15

⁴⁰ I Samuel 8 v 5

demonstrate His support for Samuel. Yet the Israelites declared that they did not want God, they did not want a Judge, and they wanted “*a king to lead us like the other nations.*” Their reason for their existence as a nation was that they should be *unlike* other nations. This “*unlikeness*” was that they had a demonstrable God as sovereign. Therefore, God said to Samuel, “*They have rejected me that I should reign over them*”. But that was not a possible option for them. They could reject God, and take the consequences. What they could not do was dethrone him, or deflect him from His purpose. What the Israelites had not comprehended was the nature of the kingdom of God they were rejecting.

They had understood, and had accepted under public oath, the *Covenant of God* - the theocratic kingdom established at Sinai intended by God to be the means of blessing to all nations of the world. This was a mediated kingdom administered through divinely appointed leaders like Moses and Aaron, Joshua and the Judges, who were directly responsible to God for their actions. The visible symbol of God’s approval was the *Shekinah Cloud of Glory* over the Tabernacle. God accepted Israel’s rejection of himself as God, but he did not accept their substitution of himself by “*a king like other nations.*” He reserved to himself the right to choose their king, just as he also reserved the right to choose the individual who spoke in his Name—the prophet.

Moses had acted as a prophet and a ruler in Israel, and even on occasions as a priest, but had never been formally appointed as any of them. Now, for the first time in history, Samuel was formally approved as a prophet. From the time that the Israelites rejected the divinely established medium of the priesthood as communicators of God’s purpose, God ordained that the prophets should be his spokesmen. He never communicated his will through kings—even David, “*the man after God’s own heart*”, had to find God’s will through high priests, the ephod, *Urim and Thummim* and prophets. God would not abdicate His right to rule over His creation.

With Samuel acknowledged as the authentic and authoritative voice of God for the people of God, Samuel as prophet was king-maker: first finding Saul, “*the people’s choice*”, and anointing

him; and then finding David, “*God’s choice*”, and anointing him. From Samuel onward, the prophets became the mediators, the messengers, the interpreters of the *Law* and will of God for Israel and the world.

God’s words to and through Moses was that the divinely anointed prophet would “*come from the midst of you*”, Israel, and that the proof of his divine appointment would be that what he said “*will come to pass*.” That would distinguish the genuine prophet from the false. When the people of Israel were disobedient, and the priesthood corrupted, God instituted the prophet to continue the unfolding of the divine mysteries. This divine endowment was accomplished by “*clothing the prophet with the Spirit*” for the purpose of God in his time. When the prophet was silent, it meant that God had withdrawn from his chosen people and the world, leaving them to reap the consequences of their choice. When the prophet spoke for God, it did not just mean that the Spirit had taken temporary control of his intellect, but that the Spirit had imbued his whole personality—he “*became another man, with another spirit*.”⁴¹

These Spirit-filled men, after Samuel proclaimed the founding of the nation-state of Israel through God’s choice of David, became the “*watchmen to the theocracy*” established by David.⁴²

This office of “*watchman*” was to be exercised both toward the nation in general and the holders of the theocratic offices in particular; especially the king, whose theocratic principles were not to be determined by the people but only by the divinely appointed representatives of God. The prophet was God’s final arbiter on earth on any issue affecting the king and the nation, even to the extent of personally killing a guilty culprit.⁴³

The first choice, Saul of the tribe of Benjamin, was removed by God from being king of Israel, not only because he was personally disobedient to God’s commands, but because he sought to rule Israel as a democracy instead of a theocracy. His explanation to Samuel for his disobeying God’s explicit commands was “*the soldiers did it*”, and “*I was afraid of the people and gave in to them*.”⁴⁴ That was a corrupted system in God’s sight, when “*the voice of the people is the voice of God*” as a primary “*will of the people*” and not

⁴¹ 1 Samuel 10 vv 6-9

⁴² Jeremiah 6 v 17

⁴³ 1 Samuel 15 v 33

⁴⁴ 1 Samuel 15 vv 21, 24

affirming element of the will of God.

It was in these circumstances that God declared to Samuel His preference for David over Saul. When David was given the message of Samuel's presence in Bethlehem, and in his father's house, and that he had been particularly requested to be present, he was not unduly surprised. Certainly, it was a great occasion for the revered prophet to appear in any place or home, but once there it was an accepted practice that all members of the family should be present. His own personal excitement sprang from his deep love for the school of the prophets, which had been Samuel's greatest gift to the people of Israel, and the source of all David's musical inspiration. The historical folk-songs of the Twelve Tribes, and the spiritual songs of the Tabernacle, had flooded David's whole being with their beauty, and had provided him with the inspiration for his own attempts at composition of words and music.

Meanwhile, waiting for the arrival of David, Samuel spent the time asking penetrating questions about him from the obviously reluctant father, Jesse. Samuel was intrigued, for it appeared as if Jesse was loathe to lose a favourite son, even to be king of Israel; and that, even with David's reportedly strange and unpredictable ways, he was greatly loved by his family.

When David finally arrived the aged Prophet, burdened with a lifetime of public disillusionment and private suffering, found himself strangely stirred as he gazed with surprise at the tall, broad-shouldered, strikingly handsome youth, with the long auburn hair curling to his shoulders, and clear intelligent blue-grey eyes. He must have inherited his great-grandmother's the Moabite Ruth colouring and beauty, Samuel thought; for it was uncommon among the Israelis.

David was dressed in the customary loose shepherd's tunic, but not of the usual goat's hair, Samuel noted with sharpening interest. His tunic was of lion's skin, caught at the waist with a woven girdle and embroidered with a border of blue threaded tassels. On his lustrous auburn hair was the normal head-cloth, held in place by a twisted cord. But, another surprise, in his hand he held a flute with the usual shepherd's staff, and in his girdle there was a short

hand-sword as well as the sling. David stood with quiet confidence as Samuel gazed at him, waiting for the Prophet to speak.

“Play something for me”, Samuel said suddenly and unexpectedly, and David smiled in acknowledgment. Then, as he lifted the flute to his lips, he hesitated at a thought and asked Samuel if he could use the harp instead. Samuel nodded agreement, wondering anew at this youthful shepherd who could play both flute and harp, and yet who wore a sword with his sling and dressed in lion’s skin.

David returned immediately with a hand-shaped harp and, sitting on a low stool, he lightly ran his fingers over the strings. Then he began playing, and Samuel responded with undisguised surprise and pleasure as the liquid notes danced in complicated measures from David’s skilled fingers.

David, however, was oblivious to Samuel’s engrossed interest, and he now sang and played a recent composition of his own:

*“The heavens God’s glory do declare,
the skies His skills unfold;
The days articulate what night’s
most secret dreams behold.
No speech exists where they’re not heard,
their voice informs the world . . .”*⁴⁵

When he had finished David’s voice and music died away into silence, and Samuel made no attempt to hide the emotion he felt. The voice of Jehovah in his ear only confirmed what he already knew: *“This is the one; anoint him”*.

Rising to his feet Samuel signalled to one of his acolytes to bring him his horn of anointing oil. He then cleared the room and, alone with David, told him of the words of God and His choice of David to be the future king of Israel. With David kneeling before him he anointed him as Jehovah’s chosen king of Israel. Samuel then took the scroll of Scriptures and read from the *Book of Moses* the prophetic words concerning the role of the future king of Israel:

*“A Star shall come out of Jacob;
A Sceptre shall arise out of Israel,
And batter the brow of Moab,*

⁴⁵Psalm 19

*And destroy all the sons of tumult . . .
Out of Jacob One shall have dominion,
And destroy the remains of a city . . .”*

He read the earlier words of prophecy, which showed that God’s true king would come from the royal Tribe of Judah:

*“The Sceptre shall not depart from Judah,
Nor the Ruler’s staff from between his feet,
Until He comes to whom it belongs and the
obedience of the nations is His . . .”*

The grim old prophet spelled out the divine vision and divine responsibilities of the man who would be anointed king over the chosen people of God; and his words were harsh from the memories of his own pain at the disappointment over the divine rejection of the disobedient Saul, and the destruction of the high-priestly house of Eli. This handsome, gifted shepherd must learn quickly and unforgettably to recognize the awesome, frightening majesty and jealousy of Israel’s God, Jehovah. The path of God’s true servant—prophet, priest, king or ordinary individual—was inestimably illustrious; but it was also indescribably painful. God’s *Divine Covenants* to His Chosen People originated from His love, mercy and grace; but they involved a total and unquestioning commitment to the Creator.

Samuel lifted the kneeling David to his feet and, seeing the fleeting emotions passing across his expressive countenance, he gently asked him to play for him again before he left. David picked up the harp, and plucked at the strings thoughtfully. Then, his face still alight with the wonder of Samuel’s message, he sang:

*“Give to the Lord your God Almighty,
glory and power.
In the splendour of his holiness
worship and adore.
The voice of the Lord,
it thunders
with echoing sound.*

*The voice of the Lord
is powerful,
with majesty abounds.
The voice of the Lord
transcends all
the joys of Lebanon.
Like lightning flash
All hearts respond
like lightning flash
In praise to God . . ."*

*"The voice of the Lord
shakes deserts.
The voice of the Lord
It strips the forests bare.
In the temple of God
all His glory declare.
The Lord sits on His throne as king;
The Lord gives His people everything;
The Lord blesses His people with peace".⁴⁶*

There were tears in Samuel's eyes as David finished. The words and music had carried him back over the lonely visionary years of his solitary walk with God, among a people apparently determined to forget everything about their divine destiny and unique God. He remembered his early experience of God speaking to him. He recalled how twenty years before, the Philistines had been forced by God to return the captured *Ark of the Covenant* with which God had led His chosen people to the Promised Land; yet it had remained in forgotten isolation in Kirjath-jearim, while the so-called people of God accepted their political subjection to the Philistines in this land promised to them by God, their spiritual Tabernacle Feasts and Priesthood neglected, and their angry God absent.

Now, here before him in the person of the youthful shepherd, David ben Jesse, there was the evidence of Jehovah's purpose for His chosen people. Here, in this handsome, gifted visionary, with his

⁴⁶Psalm 29

physical promise and inspirational words and thrilling music, was the embodiment of all that had been written and promised in the divinely provided Scriptures. Jehovah had not forgotten, nor neglected, nor rejected, His chosen people. Now, once again God had spoken. All that Samuel had hoped for in Saul would be fulfilled in David. So Samuel blessed the family of Jesse in words which none of them would ever forget, lingering over David as he sought with all his remaining fervour and passion to leave with the young man something of his own vision and that of their mutual God.

Meanwhile, the Twelve Tribes of Israel were deteriorating as the increasingly moody Saul became incapacitated through despair at his divinely-ordained loss of the monarchy. His consequent loss of confidence in his destiny halted his run of victorious military campaigns; and the defeats, with army desertions, led the Tribes of Israel to cut or refuse to pay the levies needed to maintain a powerful army fighting for their interests. So Saul, Israel's reigning king, remained immobilized in his military headquarters in Gibeah, only a half-day's journey from David in Bethlehem.

It was over two hundred years since the death of Moses' heir, Joshua, who had divided out the divinely Promised Land of Canaan among the twelve tribes of Israel for their inheritance as His Chosen People. But since that time, on various occasions, the people of Israel through wilful disobedience and rebellion, had experienced slavery under the Cushites, slavery under the Moabites, slavery under the Midianites, slavery under the Ammonites, and, recently, slavery under the Philistines. They had been defeated and humiliated also at various times by their traditional enemies the Amalekites and Edomites and other tribes of Canaan.

The most warlike tribe in Israel, Benjamin, from which Saul had come and which provided the best soldiers and skilled archers, had become a haunt for the lawless, with the fearsome Jebusites in the Benjamite territory holding the fortified city of Jerusalem, and the Philistines holding armed garrisons in some of their cities. Simeon had become absorbed in Judah to the south. To the north, Zebulun, Issachar, Naphtali and Asher, had overcome the

Phoenicians and occupied the garrisons dominating the great trading routes from Tyre and Sidon into Chaldea, Arabia and Egypt. The Tribe of Dan, made famous by the exploits of the national heroes Shamgar and Samson, had subjugated the northern Sidonian colony of Laish, and had steadily expanded their possessions in border warfare in the region. The tribe of Reuben, rent by internal jealousies, divisions and fighting, had fallen back on the far side of the River Jordan and had declined in influence.

The priests of the tribe of Levi had divided into two streams: one from Eleazar, Aaron's third son, who succeeded his father as high priest; and one from Ithamar, his younger brother, who had fought against the older ones. By the time of Samuel, the family of Ithamar was in the ascendant in the person of Eli and his infamous sons. The Levites were more hated in Israel than the Benjamites, because of the way in which they oppressed the people. Only the tribes of Ephraim and Judah retained any semblance of cohesion and strength. The tribe of Manasseh had become absorbed in the tribe of Ephraim, despite the temporary successes of the Manasseh hero, Gideon. Ephraim had produced several of the great Israeli leaders Joshua, Deborah, Tala and had the influential religious centres of Bethel, Shiloh, Nob and Nioth.

Saul's physicians had persuaded him that his increasing depressions were a form of sickness, but those close to him argued that it was a distressing spirit from God which was troubling him. They recommended that he permit them to seek out someone who was skilled in playing the harp, and that this be used to drive out the distressing spirit. This was a practice . . ."singers to the harp" which was said to be very effective in other nations, especially among the people of Ionia to the north.

One of Saul's servants reported that he had heard of a young Bethlehemite, David ben Jesse, who was said to be remarkably gifted in playing musical instruments; he was intelligent, handsome, and greatly favoured by God. With Saul's approval the servant went to Bethlehem to fetch David to Gibeah to play for Saul. David was provided by his father with the customary gift of bread and wine and a young goat, and sent on his way with them loaded on a

donkey. He also took with him his favourite flute and harp.

The meeting between David and Saul was immediately successful. As David played with serene virtuosity, many of his own compositions derived from his reflections on nature and God, he was able to anticipate and play sympathetically to the distraught Saul, and to help his manic depressions. Because of his pleasure with David's services, Saul appointed him to one of the favourite positions for ambitious youths, that of armour-bearer, or personal aide.

When not required in attendance on Saul, or at home by his father, David spent his time talking with Saul's captains and commanders, as well as with the ordinary soldiers. He was endlessly interested in the disposition and administration of the royal military court, in order to understand how the recruiting, maintaining and training of Saul's army or what remained of it was carried out. Despite Saul's recent lapses, he had been able for many years to mobilize an effective professional army for Israel for the first time since Joshua entered Canaan over two hundred years before.

David's three fighting brothers Eliab, Abinadab and Shammah found his presence in the military camp a constant source of irritation. The persistent, wide ranging, curiosity he had displayed as a growing child at home, which had so exasperated them at the time, was now magnified as he sought explanations for military practices and strategies in the tents and beside the camp-fires of Gibeah. Also, the nature of his enquiries, as he related them to the experiences of other nations, could be interpreted as being from someone who knew better answers to the situations; and the taunting of the older soldiers, which David shrugged off with smiling good nature, was annoying and embarrassing to his older brothers. So they were relieved when David left the military headquarters to attend to his family's seasonal responsibilities when required in Bethlehem, as had been agreed between Saul and Jesse, their father.

It was during David's absence from Gibeah that news was brought to the military camp of the approach of a large Philistine

force to attack Saul. They had already entered the tribal lands of Judah and had reached a place called Ephes-Dammim, between Shochoh and Asekah. The southern territory which the Philistine nation occupied encompassed the south east corner of Canaan, on the coast of the Great Sea, contiguous with the tribes of Judah, Benjamin, Simeon and Dan from south to north. There their chief cities were Gaza, Ashdod, Gath and Ekron in the interior of their territory, each located on top of a prominent spur on the western side of the mountains of Judah; the other cities of Askelon and Joppa were located by the sea. The plains of Philistia were composed of sloping moorlands broken up into ridges of chalk and limestone hills, surrounded by vast corn and barley fields, vineyards and gardens, with great groves of sycamore and palm trees.

The Philistines, it was said, had come originally from Crete, from the same ancestry as the armies which had not too long before besieged Troy; and their raiding parties had attempted to invade and conquer Egypt. Three centuries earlier Moses, in order to avoid confrontation with them when coming out of Egypt, had by-passed the territory they had carved out for themselves from south-west Canaan; and even Joshua had made no attempt to conquer them during his later conquest of the Promised Land. They were a fierce, martial race, whose trading abilities had made them rich, and whose metal-working skills had made them able to build and use weapons, armour and war chariots with devastatingly terrifying effect on their enemies.

Their secret of tempering swords gave them a formidable advantage in warfare, and they forbade the Tribes of Israel under their vassalage to have any blacksmiths of their own to produce edged weapons. The edged peaceful tools, such as sickles or plough shares had to be taken to the Philistine blacksmiths for sharpening. This meant that the armies of Saul and Jonathan were primitively equipped against a massively superior Philistine force of formidable weapons and skilled troops.

The Philistines also had the advantage of a standing army, constantly engaged in fighting battles in some part of their frontiers; while Saul only had a small nucleus of a few thousand regulars,

which was supplemented by levied and reluctant recruits from among the Tribes of Israel when required. These were recruited by their tribal princes and rulers and heads of families, who were expected to provide them with food and arms of some sort; and who, in turn, expected to share in command. Standard set-piece battles were beyond the capacity of the Tribes of Israel, and their victories in the past had been gained either through their own passionate commitment to the cause of the particular engagement, or to the command and presence of their God. When there was no immediate cause for battle they returned to their fields, their herds and their families.

During the period of rule by Israel's Judges, the Philistines had successfully encroached on many parts of Israel's newly acquired Promised Land, and after the Battle of Aphek when they had captured Israel's Ark of the Covenant they had set up garrisons in strategic places in the territories of Judah and Benjamin. They were fiercely dedicated to the worship of their fertility fish-god, Dagon, an idol with the body of a fish and the head and hands of a man.

Where they were encamped now for the planned attack on Saul's army, at Ephes-Dammim—or "Boundary of Blood", because of the many battles fought there—was not far from their city of Ekron, about a day's journey south west from Gibeah and only eleven miles from Bethlehem. There they were camped on the northern heights, where the mountains dropped down steeply to the valley floor; and the hurrying and defending army of Saul was forced to occupy the exposed southern ridges on the opposite side of the valley, which, although about the same height, because of the configuration of the hills and valleys left them at a tactical disadvantage. Between the two gathered armies, winding and sparkling in the sun, was a rocky stream of no great depth.

Then, for the first time in its many engagements with the Israelis, the Philistines introduced a new tactic of breaking a stalemate by sending out a single champion to challenge a selected champion of Israel. This was not an uncommon practice in the regional set piece battles at the time, when sometimes both sides became bogged down in situations in which no satisfactory military solution could be

found. And their recollections of Samson, Israel's former colourful champion, was still fresh in the memories of the Philistines as well as in Israel. Saul and his locally armed forces encamped on the eastern side of the Valley opposite, not far from Bethlehem, and the three soldier sons of Jesse were with Saul at this armed camp.

The Philistine champion was a giant of a man, standing some nine feet tall, who, roaring out his defiance of Israel, declared his name to be "Goliath of Gath". Gath was formerly the home of the legendary colossal "sons of Anak", living in Rephaim, "the Valley of the Giants". Goliath, as a descendant of those monstrous creatures recorded by Moses, was viewed as being more supernatural than human by the transfixed Israeli army. The Israelites believed that those creatures were fallen angels, cast out of heaven in the rebellion of Satan, who had copulated with human women to produce the enormous mutants.

To make him even more fearsome, Goliath was covered from head to feet with the metal armour of over-lapping brass scales intricately woven by the Philistines; from the brass helmet, cuirass and body armour, to the greaves for legs and ankles. On his helmet were plumes of feathers increasing his height, and coloured streamers were attached to his enormous javelin with its twenty pound metal head. His great sword was almost the height of a normal man; and his massive shield of ox hide, with bosses of iron, was carried by an armour-bearer walking behind him.

Each day he came out to the valley floor between the two armies and issued his challenge to the Israeli army: "Why have you come out to line up for battle?" he taunted them. "Am I not a Philistine, and you are the servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us. I defy the armies of Israel this day; give me a man that we may fight together".

As day followed day without response to the giant Goliath's challenge, the morale of the Israelite army deteriorated. The Philistines cunningly delayed any attack in order to further frustrate and discompose the Israelis. Saul was desperate, and sought for a

willing hero among his many able commanders and captains, but none - not even his daring son, Jonathan - were willing to risk the consequences of defeat and humiliation of Israel in single combat with Goliath. Saul even promised great wealth, and marriage to one of his daughters, with exemption from all levies for the family, to any individual who could get rid of the giant, but no-one took up the offer.

It was at this point that David was asked by his father to go to the place of battle with food for his brothers and the captain of their troop. Like all the members of his family and town he had been following with mixed feelings the reports of what was happening at the battle-front, so close to Bethlehem. They would be among the first to fall before any Philistine advance, and David especially was concerned with what the situation meant for him and his divinely declared destiny. Surely God and Samuel were not to be made so foolish so quickly? But what was the alternative?

It was early morning when David left Bethlehem for the Israelite battle-front, and the sun had risen when he approached the small town of Shochoh by the Valley of Elah, or Wadi-es-Sumt, along a path winding through the olive groves, and he saw the black tents of the Philistine army on the far side of the ridge across the valley. The Israelis were in tents encircled with wagons on the southern slope of the Wadi, and he made his way through these to where his brothers were located under the lion embroidered tribal standard of Judah.

David had only begun talking to them when Goliath appeared for his morning mocking challenge to the Israeli army. As his voice died away there was silence in the Israeli camp, until the men around David complained angrily that no Israeli champion could be found to get rid of the sneering giant from Gath, despite the great rewards. David asked with interest what rewards were being offered, as he had not heard, and on being told of Saul's promise he declared that he was prepared to get rid of the daily reproach to Israel: "For who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?", he demanded with assurance.

His oldest brother Eliab rounded on him swiftly, and rebuked him. "Why did you come down then?" he said roughly. "Who is

watching the sheep? I know your pride and arrogance, for you have just come down here to view the battle".

David gazed at him in surprise. He was accustomed to being put down by his older brothers, but he thought it strange in this instance that Eliab should say what he did when it was obvious he had brought them their necessary food and it was equally obvious that there was no battle to be seen! Perhaps Eliab was just sensitive with frustration. "What have I done wrong?" he asked Eliab mildly. "Is there not a cause?" In the discussion and argument which ensued one of the soldiers slipped away to inform the commanders gathered around Saul that someone was offering to fight Goliath. Saul sent for the willing volunteer immediately.

It had been over a year since David had been to play his harp at Saul's court in Gibeah, and in that time he had changed a great deal. He had grown taller and broader, his former long hair was shorter, in keeping with this position as court musician and armour-bearer to Saul, but he was still wearing his usual lion-skin shepherd's clothes. David was not surprised that Saul did not recognize him, for he had been only one of the many palace aides; and on the occasions when he was called to play to Saul it was usually when the king was in one of his black depressions and paying little attention to anybody.

Saul, eager and anxious for someone, anyone, to commit himself against the giant, was urgent in his questioning of David. He noted he was only a youth, and he stated that he did not think David was able to go against someone like Goliath who had been a man of war from his youth. David replied by telling Saul that he had experience in dealing with wild animals, such as the lion and bear, and he added confidently, "This uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, seeing he has defied the armies of the living God. Jehovah, who delivered me from the lion and the bear, will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine".

Saul looked from the confident David in his lion-skin tunic to the sceptical faces of the commanders. He could see they were thinking: What sort of fanatic had they here? All God-talk and no ability. But they remained silent, and Saul shrugged in resignation. So be it. At

least, he thought, the offer to fight by this youth might well shame some other more effective volunteer.

"Go!" he said without enthusiasm, then added hastily, "and Jehovah be with you". But, so that he might not be accused later by some grieving family or interfering priest for pushing such a innocent into the unequal contest, he insisted that David be clothed with his own helmet and coat-of-mail for the encounter, with David's preferred short sword attached to the girdle. He was vaguely surprised to see that his armour almost fitted the apparently slim youth.

But when David, who had been unhappy about accepting the offer, turned to walk away he found his movements so restricted that he made the sudden decision not to wear the armour, whatever the disbelieving Saul and his commanders thought. He stripped it off without a word, and in the silence he picked up his staff and adjusted his sling and short sword in his girdle. With a parting smile and salute to Saul he walked towards the valley where Goliath was waiting on the far side of the shallow stream.

Saul watched David go, and something jogged his memory. Turning to his commander-in-chief, Abner, he asked, "Whose son is this youth?". Abner, who had never met David during his visits to Gibeah, replied with a wondering shake of his head, "As your soul lives, O king, I do not know".

"Find out whose son this is", Saul said slowly, still thinking of the possible consequences of being answerable for the youth's untimely death. He would need to know anyway, if he had to send the appropriate condolences to the family. If, by the greatest stretch of the imagination, the youth was successful, he would also need to know the family who would be claiming his publicly proclaimed rewards of wealth and marriage to his daughter.

David meanwhile was picking his way through the shrubs and acacias which gave the valley its name, hearing the shouts of encouragement from the Israeli soldiers behind him. He was still carrying his shepherd's staff in his hand as he walked towards Goliath, and he now stopped to bend down and place it on the ground while he unsung his sling from his girdle. It was the

standard shepherd's sling, consisting of a leather pad attached to two leather thongs; the pad used to hold the stone directed at any target. The leather was supple with constant use and fitted his hand familiarly, and he smiled to himself as he calmly measured the distance between him and the giant.

At the sight of the unarmed and apparently unperturbed shepherd youth approaching him on the far side of the brook, Goliath raised his huge javelin above his head and gestured menacingly. David ignored the implied threat, guessing that the giant would not want the reputation of being unwilling for hand to hand combat with an apparently unarmed stripling.

"Am I a dog", Goliath roared in rage, "that you come against me only with staves?" He had seen lay down his shepherd's staff and, ignoring the sling, he cursed David and the Israelis in the name of his gods. "Come and I will feed you to the dogs and vultures".

David looked at the huge figure clad in the scaled mail weighing over two hundred pounds, the massive shield and javelin, the fearsome sword, and the empurpled face scarcely visible under the metal helmet. There was hardly any vulnerable flesh to be seen—except, he noted with sudden interest, for the brow above the eyes and beneath the prow of the helmet.

Reaching the stream which divided the space between him and Goliath, David bent down and, after weighing them carefully, he selected five smooth stones; recalling, as he chose them with fleeting mental images, the occasions when he had to kill wolves and other animals come to kill his sheep. He was now ready, but he had to get still closer to the giant. He shouted mockingly to Goliath, jumping the stream and moving across the valley floor nearer to the shallow gully where the giant had taken his position;

"You come to me with a sword and a spear and a shield but I come to you in the name of Jehovah, the Lord of the hosts of heaven, and of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. This day Jehovah will deliver you into my hands, and I will kill you, and cut off your head, and feed the carcasses of your army to carrion and wild animals, and you and all others will know that there is a God in Israel".

He had to get closer still, he noted. The giant had been sitting on

a boulder to ease the great weight of his armour, as was his custom apparently; but he was now shifting his position restlessly as he watched David's approach in puzzlement.

"Another thing", shouted David, casually selecting the first of the stones and fitting it into the pouch of the sling. He was now ready when the distance was right. "Another thing", he repeated, "all those watching will learn that Jehovah does not depend on sword or spear for victory". His voice rose in a triumphant shout. "The battle is Jehovah's, and he will give you into our hands".

He ran forward a few steps to the spot he had already fixed in his mind, snapped the sling tight in his hands, and, as Goliath struggled to his feet to face him with raised sword, he swung the sling in a rapid series of circles, steadied himself, and with a whipping movement of arm and body let the stone go. It left the sling with explosive force, and with deadly accuracy struck Goliath beneath the helmet in the exposed centre of the forehead, killing him instantly. The giant's armour-bearer, now defenceless, dropped the huge shield and ran for the Philistine lines.

David leaped over the gully, took the giant's huge sword and cut off his head. As he held it up in triumph for all to see there was a roar from the watching army of Israel, shouted commands from the captains, and they poured across the valley to vent their long-suppressed fury and slaughter the unprepared and stunned Philistines.

When David's brothers finally reached him through the crowding, excited troops, they hugged him delightedly; and with their help he stripped Goliath of his armour and weapons and loaded them on an army cart. Then David returned through the swarming, cheering army to the tent of Saul, carrying Goliath's head and his huge sword in triumph. Abner met him as he approached Saul's tent and, after congratulating him on his victory, he escorted David inside the tent. David went forward and placed Goliath's head in front of Saul, with the giant's sword placed beside it, then bowed his head to Saul in acknowledgment.

Saul rose to his feet and gave David a soldierly salute as he praised him for his spectacular feat.

"Whose son are you?" he asked suddenly.

"I am David ben Jesse of Bethlehem, of the tribe of Judah", David replied, only mildly surprised at the question, for Saul would want to know to whom he was now under obligation.

"David!", Saul exclaimed in surprise; then a shadow passed across his eyes as his ever-present suspicion and jealousy recalled vague rumours of another king in Israel and from Judah. But there had been many rumours, and nothing had been discovered by his spies. This David was simply a gifted youth, from a good family in Judah, who had taken the opportunity to gain favour in palace and battlefield like any ambitious Israelite. Saul could use someone like that, and meanwhile would watch how he conducted himself while waiting for his promised rewards.

With a signal to David to follow him and his commanders they left the tent to join the army, now pursuing the routed and fleeing Philistines. Pushing his way through the officers was Jonathan, Saul's greatly admired soldier son, and he joined David, smiling with approbation and excitement. They had met a few times while David was Saul's aide at Gibeah, and David had enjoyed their occasional chat. Jonathan had been impressed by David's great skills in music and songs, and his wide knowledge of affairs beyond the boundaries of the Twelve Tribes; and now with the friendly manner which had made him so beloved of the army and people he sought out David to talk with him. The obscure Judean musician had emerged to show as great skill and daring as himself in taking on the giant Philistine champion feared by everyone, and Jonathan wanted to know more about him.

David married King Saul's daughter as part of Saul's promised reward for killing Goliath, but Saul himself became increasingly mentally disturbed because of impetuous actions which involved disobeying God's explicit commands. He developed a manic jealousy as David's popularity increased with a number of military victories, and became the greatest threat to his own popularity and rule. This was intensified when David became the celebrated subject of a nationwide song:

"Saul has slain his thousand and David his tens of thousands"

After two or three very public attempts at trying to kill David personally by hurling a javelin at him, David decided his life was no longer safe near Saul and, helped by his wife, Michel, he secretly fled from Saul's military headquarters. It was at this point David made contact with his nephews, Joab, Abishai and Asahel, to meet him secretly at the Cave of Adullam, a place they had often visited in their youth but several miles away to the south from Bethlehem. The Cave of Adullam was infamous far and wide as a refuge for outlaws from all the Tribes of Israel.

It was situated on the side of a deep ravine on the cliffs overlooking the savage mountains and deserts to the south-east, and could only be approached by a single pathway through wild shrubs and vines interspersed with great boulders. The Cave branched out into a long, winding passage with small dark openings on either side. This opened into a large chamber, with towering natural arches of great height disappearing into the darkness above. From this huge chamber other passages led off at angles in all directions, about the height of a man stooping and the width of a man's body. The air was clean and indicated a through draught of some kind.

David had chosen this rendezvous because he was certain that the first places Saul, or his spies, would search were the homes of David's family and relatives. The next places would be Ramah and Nioth, where Samuel had established schools of prophets and David had fled there before from Saul. But these were now out as places of refuge for him, if for no other reason than the danger his presence would bring to the prophets living there. Whatever he did, or wherever he went, he would need some persons he could trust as messengers to link him with family, friends and supporters when necessary, and he had decided to ask his three trusted nephews and former youthful companions. He stated firmly that, although he was God's anointed king by Samuel he had agreed with the respected Prophet that he would never harm Saul because, he, too, had been chosen by God and only God would remove him in His time. But his own time had come, he believed, to start preparing for his kingship with a loyal band of followers.

Meanwhile, he reckoned he had less than a day's advantage now

in which to hide himself from the murderous King Saul. The possible solution which had suddenly occurred to him was so preposterous that at first he had thrust it quickly out of his mind; namely, to go over the nearby border of Judah into the territory of the Moabites where there were relatives of his grandmother, Ruth, and then slip over the Moabite border into Philistine territory, where Saul would never think of looking for him. Once the present hysteria of Saul had died away with David's disappearance, David wanted to know if his nephews were willing to join him in his own personal preparations to become king when God removed Saul and, if so, would they meet here in the Cave again, say, in about four months' time. They agreed, and quickly drew up contingency plans to visit the Cave daily and secretly in the weeks prior to and after the four months with necessary supplies of food, followers and weapons.

Four months later David arrived at the Cave, and he brought with him a large number of followers from his four months of exile to add to the hundred or more gathered in the Cave.

First, David had to establish Adullam as a viable headquarters in Judah, as well as impregnable fortress while he was building up the nucleus of an army for Israel. It was no use being unapproachable if they all starved. But it was also unrealistic to trumpet their presence to all, and so attract the attention of Saul and his spies. They needed the understanding, cooperation and willing support of the local people of Judah while they prepared themselves for the tasks ahead. So David arranged that this was to be his nephew Joab's responsibility, with Joab's two brothers,

Abishai and Asahel, to organise the food supplies and liaison with local peoples, their secret cooperation and chaneling of sympathizers to Adullam while screening out suspect strangers.

They would all have to learn new tactics. They would have to be trained to move, strike and retreat quickly; to be like fish in the sea of the people of Israel, so that Saul and his superior forces could not find them before or after the raids. And, above all, they would have to be better in every way than Saul's battle-hardened troops, captains and commanders, whom they would one day replace. They

would be the nucleus of a standing army which, on Saul's death, would be the uniting force of the Twelve Tribes of Israel, making the people into a single nation as God intended. It was an awesome vision but David's quiet confidence was infectious.

To fulfil this vision Abiathar was put in charge of organizing defecting priests into re consecrated forms of service, and he would be recognized by them and the band of outlaws as official high priest until such time as the nation was united, when he would be confirmed or another appointed. Gad and Nathan of the school of the prophets would be responsible for recruiting and training schools of the prophets among them, and also for keeping records of their activities, and giving spiritual guidance and instruction in association with the priests.

Regarding the fighters, from the start there would be an orderly system of small groups being under appointed individuals and captains of experience and known skills, until there were enough of them to appoint commanders; promotion would be swift, and based on acts of courage, leadership and character. For those who excelled in acts of courage or daring there would be a special metal belt to girdle the military tunic, to show they were "mighty men of valour", a category of distinction.

Finally, David himself would be in command of all training, and all operations. He would also take ultimate responsibility for directing all spiritual exercises. Regarding the latter, he went on to explain, it was his intention that every soldier in his command might learn to know God in a personal way, as the people of Israel had done under Moses and Joshua in their good years. If Israel was to fulfil its divine destiny as a chosen people of God, as a kingdom of priests to enlighten the world, then the process would have to begin with them, with each member of the small band of outlaws in Adullam. Then, as they grew into a larger force, they would be able to communicate the vision to others. With this in view there would be regular Scripture study for all, with time for devotional periods, so that all might conform to the same high divine standards.

They were all familiar with the similar experience required at home by God and Moses, but no doubt many if not all of them had

forgotten or neglected the practice through cynicism or carelessness because of their personal circumstances. That attitude must change, for they would now be participators in, and moulders of, their circumstances, with no excuses to blame God for non performance. Jehovah had said that those who honoured Him He would honour; and He had given specific promises in return for commandments observed.

David informed them that he had composed a series of songs, based on their own Hebrew alphabet, in which each letter in a sequence led to some form of moral or spiritual exercise, to be learned and applied in their lives each day. He had set these to music so they could be sung, either marching or at rest; and it would be the responsibilities of the priests and prophets to lead them in the songs of worship.

He spent a good part of each day writing; sometimes making notes for discussions, and sometimes composing songs and music. To celebrate his deliverance from his recent dangerous circumstances in Philistine territory he wrote:

"I will bless my God at all times,
my lips express his praise;
May those with many sorrows
Find him with lifted gaze.
I sought the Lord, He answered
and delivered me from fears;

Those who hand their lives to Him
he satisfies and cheers.
This poor man cried, God saved
from all who wished him ill;
The angel of the Lord provides,
The triumph of God's will..."

When David had finished his proposals and thrown them open for discussion some of the more hardened outlaws were openly scornful, but the majority were either interested or enthusiastic at the thought of a crusade for a renewed nation, or were cautiously

willing to give it a try. There was certainly no attractive alternative on offer. The one who was presenting the electrifying challenge with such passion and vision was no effete priest; but David, the Hero of Israel, slayer of Goliath and victor of scores of battles based on the same spiritual convictions. When David followed up his daily devotional sessions with skilled military exercises and martial hand-to-hand techniques which they had never known, even the earlier sceptics joined them.

Almost every day now there were new recruits, many of them already persons of renown in Israel who had been dissatisfied with Saul as national leader, and who were impressed with David's exploits and conduct. They were recruited by people whom David trusted in the various Tribes, and came to Adullam recommended by those friends. Among them were eleven eminent officers of Saul's army, the lowest in rank being a captain over a hundred men, and the others captains over thousands.

As their first major battle engagement David called the men together to instruct them in his unique military *modus operandi* of going into battle with God. He was accustomed to talk with God daily regarding his own personal guidance for the day, but in anticipation of his future as king of Israel it was necessary to get those following him, whether in battle or administration, to get their guidance from God in order to fulfil God's Covenant commands to Noah, Abraham and Moses regarding Israel's unique destiny.

So, in the face of the reluctant objections of his followers, and to strengthen their faith in him and God, David called for Abiathar, the runaway high priest who had joined him, and asked him to consult the ephod for a decision. The ephod was the breastplate worn by Israel's high priest, with the names of the Twelve Tribes of Israel inscribed on twelve inset jewels. But this was supplemented by a pouch known as the "Urim and Thummim", containing a white and a black stone, which was attached to the ephod. If for some reason an individual was reluctant or fearful to approach God directly he could ask the priest to phrase the request for a negative or positive response from God. If the priest withdrew a white stone it was "Yes", and the black stone was "No". Abiathar returned with the divinely

positive response: "Go and smite the Philistines, and save Keilah, for I am going to give them into your hand".

Unfortunately, David's victory at Keilah, despite its speed and completeness, was reported to Saul almost as soon as the battle ended. The report that David was actually inside the city of Keilah only a few miles away greatly pleased Saul, and he rapidly force marched his troops to Keilah. David had his spies, too, and he had anticipated that Saul would hear of his exploit and come after him. But he was now cut off by Saul and his advancing army from the Forest of Horeth and the Cave of Adullam, with the other Philistine cities and armies to his rear. He called for Abiathar to bring the ephod again and, after the high priest had offered a sacrifice, David laid the situation before Jehovah.

"O Lord God of Israel your servant has heard definitely that Saul has plans to come to Keilah and destroy the town on account of me. Will the citizens of Keilah surrender to him? Will Saul come down as your servant has heard?"

"Yes", was the reply.

David, incredulous, could not believe the response after what he had just done for the city, and he repeated the question: "Will the citizens of Keilah surrender me and my men to Saul?" "Yes", the reply was unambiguous.

Without further delay he rounded up his six hundred men and force marched them in a flanking movement around Saul's advancing army past Hebron, and set up camp about four miles to the south of Hebron in Horesh, in the desert of Ziph. It was a spot known to one of his captains, and was on a mountain ridge known as Hakilah, and said to be virtually unassailable.

Over the next year or more Saul and David played cat-and-mouse with each other's forces as Saul pursued David implacably, and David retreated because of his promise not to harm Saul or his household. At other times David engaged some of the outlying tribes to increase his followers' experience and also to introduce spheres of his own forms of administration according to God's Covenant.

In the south of the country, as David and his men brought greater security the people willingly provided the supplies he needed for

his growing army. Unlike Saul, however, David established new procedures in the territories under his supervision, removing and punishing corrupt officials, exploiting Levites, oppressive landlords and moneylenders, and replacing them with others committed to obeying the Law of Moses. He insisted that one of the chief provisions of the Law regarding those who ruled in Israel was that they were to be "without covetousness", and this meant getting rid of all corrupt practices.

So it was not only the tales of individual acts of daring that were being carried across the land by excited travellers, but also the reports of David's new forms of administration. The feudal rule of the traditional princes and elders of Israel, and the despotic and corrupt practices of the priestly Levites, were both under attack by the innovations of David. The talk of the market places and weddings and festivals, of village and town and city councils, of tribal gatherings and private discussions, was of David's declared ambitions to build a holy nation of priests for God in the world, and a permanent Temple of worship for God. Almost all his songs, now being sung by the schools of the prophets everywhere, were either about this central Sanctuary, or written with a view to being sung there in the future. His army not only supported it; his soldiers even sang about it!

But then once again David astonished his men with a surprising decision; he was going to leave Judah for Philistia. To be exact, he was going to the Philistine city of Gath, and he would like to take as many of them with him as were prepared to offer their services to the Governor of Gath, Achish. He explained his strategy to them. There was no way they could return to their small-group raiding of the past now that they were three thousand strong, and under constant spying of Saul. The logistics had been difficult before, but manageable; they would be impossible from now on as their force increased to be greater than Saul's. He would not consider any rebellion against Saul. Saul, in turn, could neither ignore nor tolerate David building up a rival army in Judah. If their army had no place in Judah, they certainly would have none among the other Tribes of Israel. So they had no alternative but to leave Israel for

Philistine-occupied territory in Canaan. Far-fetched as it might seem, their only alternative was to establish a base of some kind on the southern borders of Philistine-occupied Canaan, and the only way they could do that was to persuade Achish that they were prepared to fight as mercenaries for the Philistines against their mutual enemies on Canaan's southern frontiers. However, what they would not tell the Philistines would be the scale of their activities in that region.

Six hundred men chose to follow David to Gath, where Achish was still suspicious over David's earlier visit, and his apparent madness, but was willing to forget it in the light of what he saw as great advantages to the Philistine ambitions to forge a greater empire in Canaan. He gave David permission to live and operate in the distant city of Ziklag, and David took with him his two wives, Ahinoam and Abigail.

David was not left in peace for long in Ziklag. It was a small, sparsely inhabited city located on the frontiers of the Arabian desert to the extreme west of Judah. As with Adullam and his other strongholds as soon as David was resident, and news of his battle successes against the Canaanite tribes spread, the best of Israel's fighting men joined him, until once again he had a small army. In order to keep them occupied and fed David led them regularly in attacks on the Canaanites scattered in the south the Geshurites, the Gezrites, and Israel's old enemies, the Amalekites. From these successful engagements David's troops took considerable spoil, and David was careful to send a proportion of all they plundered to Achish at Gath. At the same time he sent ambiguously worded reports vaguely referring to being successful against "the Governor's enemies", which made it seem as if they were fighting on Achish's behalf.

But in order to safeguard their extremely precarious situation in Ziklag David ordered that every man and woman of the tribes they fought had to be put to death, so that Achish would not learn the true identity of the victorious attackers. If David had kept them alive he would have had to send some of them to Achish as part of the spoils. The ruthlessness of the policy bothered him, but he confessed

grimly that it was Jehovah who had given him no alternative, and had placed him in these circumstances rather than just removing Saul. Again, if Saul had done what God had told him there would have been no Amalekites for David to kill.

So David's reputation took on a new dimension, when romantic admiration became tinged with realistic fear. Unlike Saul, he would not be a king who would excuse his actions by claiming "the people made me do it". But it also gave David a new fear of Jehovah: what kind of God was this whose holiness demanded such ferocity, whose majesty required such obedience? Why did this God of Israel leave His people so often to walk in darkness? Why not reveal His wishes in every problem of every day? These thoughts were evident from the songs which he wrote at various times.

As David pondered the mysteries of Jehovah he knew that in his heart he was really only seeking to be absolved from the weight of personal responsibility and guilt; from the wracking decisions he had to make as he was being forged into a king after God's own heart. It was not the dangers of battle that troubled him; it was not even the merciless decisions involved; but, ultimately, it was the loneliness which his destiny forced upon him in making these decisions. The companionship of his officers, the empathies of poets and musicians, the understanding of priests and prophets, were all denied to him in the final lonely decisions. Then he stood alone in the dark with God, waiting for the sound of the voice that was beyond instinct and nature, waiting for the illumination that made all clear and which made everything else alien.

For more than a year David fought all over the south—between Philistia, Canaan, Egypt and the Great Sea until his small but formidable army was more feared than the larger armies of the Philistines and Saul. Reports of their fighting qualities "swift as gazelles, fierce as lions" reached from Egypt to Syria and beyond, as David's military ability to move his men quickly from one spot to another was discussed by military leaders everywhere.

What David was doing was experimenting with the strategic use of chariots and wagons in support of cavalry beyond traditional usage, in anticipation of the time in the future when he and his men

would have to face the skilled armies of the great nations to the north and south. In all his fighting in Philistia, however, David was careful to avoid the five principal cities and communities of the Philistines. But, unknown to David, during that year the Philistines were preparing for a major invasion of Israel's territory to defeat their unruly vassal state under Saul. They had noted the increasing madness and instability of Saul, the deterioration of his military energy and the failure of his power as he became obsessed with the rivalry of David.

So while David was busy with his fighting, composing and building in Ziklag, Achish of Gath and the other four Philistine Governors in their Confederation were preparing their plans to destroy Israel. They had decided to split the Israeli Tribes by sending a strong army northwards along the coast of the Great Sea; then, turning inland to the Plain of Esdraelon, they would cut off half the Israeli Tribes in the north from the south where Achish was ready to move when the northern army was in place against the Tribes in the south.

Hearing of yet another battle success by David gave Achish an idea: why not invite David to fight with the Philistines against his old enemy, Saul of Israel? It appeared he was very successful against the border Canaanite tribes in the southern desert, and if he could be persuaded to do the same against Israel's Tribes in the north it would have a devastating effect on Saul's army.

He summoned David to Gath, and when he appeared he put his proposals to him, adding: "You understand that your men will accompany me in the army?"

David nodded and said ambiguously, "Then you will see for yourself what your servant can do".

Achish responded enthusiastically, "Very well, I will make you my bodyguard for life".

David had no intention of fighting against Saul's army, but he had no idea of how he was going to avoid it either in the circumstances. All he could do was leave the situation to God, and the inspiration of the moment. Fortunately, his men trusted him completely and were confident that his agreement to go with Achish

meant that he had some secret daring strategy as so often in the past. But David was still unaware of the Philistine plans to destroy Israel completely until after his agreement to help Achish. It was only when news of the Philistine army's successful pincer movement against Saul, isolating the Israeli tribes to the north, was brought to Gath, with orders for Achish to move north to close the gap to the south that he saw the threat.

The Philistine rulers had chosen to launch the final critical battle when the southern army under Achish closed the jaws of the pincer, in Jezreel, where the great plain of Esdraelon sloped down to the River Jordan, split in the east by the two mountain ranges, Moreh and Gilboa. On the south side of the valley, which was about three miles wide, lay Mount Gilboa, on the spur of which was Jezreel. On its northern side were Hermon and Endor and, a few miles beyond, lay Nazareth. The contours of the plains were ideal for the Philistines to make use of their cavalry and war chariots; and they were already lined up in formidable array, with the foot soldiers in the hills of Shunem behind them facing Gilboa.

David and his men had had no alternative but to join Achish at Gath as requested, and march with Achish and his troops to join the main southern Philistine army. However, when the other Philistine commanders saw David's men they were astounded and angered at Achish's decision. It was not only the fact of David's troops being there at all which infuriated the Philistine leaders, but the unexpected size and professionalism of his army. Their armour, swords and spears were the equal of the Philistines; and David had designed a distinctive insignia for his men to wear on their tunics and shields. Arrayed in disciplined ranks behind their captains, with David and his chief commanders on chariots in front, they were a threatening and formidable sight.

It had been customary for the Israelites when they went into battle to do so behind their distinctive Tribal banners. But when Hebrews from other Tribes joined David in his exile, in order to distinguish each other and unify them in battle with their many enemies, David had devised the single insignia which had become known as "the Star of David". When the Philistine leaders, therefore, saw David's

formidable army of seasoned and disciplined warriors, dressed in their distinctive insignia, they demanded of Achish that David be dismissed. They would not go into battle with David's army among them; tactically, they argued, it would be disastrous. With his known record David might even turn against them during the fighting. After all, he was not known as the Hero of Israel for nothing.

David, relieved that God had chosen to intervene on his behalf at the last moment, returned with his men to Ziklag, while the Philistine southern army went on to the battlefield of Jezreel at Mount Gilboa. David had not been able to anticipate what Jehovah might do, and he had been preparing in his mind for the possibility of engaging the Philistine army from his strategic position within their ranks — much as Gideon had done with the Midianites over a hundred years before.

David was genuinely concerned for Saul and Jonathan and Israel's army in the face of what he knew of the Philistines' intentions at Gilboa. This was no isolated battle for a small piece of tribal territory, but a major engagement to eliminate Israel on the way to establishing a Philistine empire in the region. Only with the help of Jehovah could Saul emerge victorious from such an encounter — yet here was he, David, with the best fighting force in Israel, marching away from the battle. Even with such odds against them, if either Saul or Jonathan sent for him he would turn his men around and join them in the battle; but he did not expect any such request.

Soon after David's return to Ziklag he heard the news of Saul's defeat at the hands of the Philistines at Gilboa. It was brought to Ziklag by the mercenary son of an Amalekite serf, in rent clothes of mourning with dust on his head, and carrying the distinctive royal helmet and golden armlet of Saul. He had come direct from the battle, he said, where he had been serving with Saul's army, and he gave details of that tragic day for Israel.

The Philistines had been far too strong for Israel's soldiers from the start, and they had been thrown back across the Plain of Jezreel to Mount Gilboa with great losses. Saul, with his remaining corps of commanders and captains, and his three sons, especially the

magnificent Jonathan, had prepared to make a stand on Gilboa. There, by the end of the day, the slain of Israel had covered the slopes of the mountain, finally including the dead bodies of Jonathan and his brothers, until only Saul had remained alive—bloodied, wounded and exhausted with his armour-bearer beside him. Unwilling to face a humiliating death at the hands of the Philistines, Saul had asked his armour-bearer to deliver the stroke to kill him, but he had refused to use his sword against the Lord's anointed, he said. Then Saul had turned to the Amalekite mercenary now talking to David, and ordered him to kill him.

"So I stood over him", the Amalekite said with glib regret, "and killed him, because I was sure he could not live after he had fallen. And I took the crown that was on his head, and the bracelet that was on his arm, and have brought them here to my lord".

At these words David stood up and rent his clothes in expression of his deep grief, followed by his warriors. They mourned for Saul and Jonathan, their former comrades, who had died as bravely as they had lived; and they mourned for the people of Israel because of the loss. Then David called again for the Amalekite to be brought to him. There was a matter to be settled, which David had postponed until he demonstrated his grief for Saul and Jonathan's death.

"Where are you from?" David asked when he appeared

"I am the son of an alien, an Amalekite", the serf-mercenary stammered in expectant fear.

"How was it that you were not afraid to lift your hand against Jehovah's anointed king?" David probed relentlessly. The man had testified against himself, with Saul's crown and bracelet in his hand. No Israeli would have dared to do such a thing, as the devoted armour-bearer had shown. David suspected that the Amalekite had been glad to do the deed, among other things hoping that he might be treated favourably by either Philistines or Israelis, whoever was the most grateful.

David signalled to one of his captains. "Take him and strike him down", he commanded, pointing to the now grovelling Amalekite. The officer stepped forward and killed him on the spot.

"Your blood be on your own head", David said grimly. "Your own

mouth testified against you when you said, 'I killed the Lord's anointed'".

Over the next several days David ordered mourning ceremonies to be held for the dead Saul and Jonathan, and he composed a lament to be sung for them, "The Song of the Bow". Saul the magnificent, and Jonathan the incomparable, were dead. Between them they had formed the dreams of his youth, and those of all Israel. Saul, so tragically flawed, and Jonathan, the paragon of daring and generosity, had been torn out of his life, and David was inconsolable. He had hoped, despite Saul's pursuit of him, that one day Saul would get rid of his obsessive fear of a rival and that together they could bring greatness to Israel and now they were gone and all Israel was bereft. Jonathan the unequalled bowman in a tribe of great archers, would never again stand laughingly at his shoulder in battle, or smilingly acknowledge the adulation of the young maidens in the royal court. Jonathan had been closer to him than any woman he had known; he had looked forward to having Jonathan at his right hand when Saul died and he was king, and now his world was an even lonelier place.

With the king and his heir-apparent both dead, Israel was left without an official ruler once more. David knew that he would have to make some move before the nation became divided over rival claimants to the throne, or was exploited by conniving cliques of tribal princes or priests. He had been equipped by God to rule over the people of Israel—from his youth. He had celebrated what he owed to God in every way in his many songs "By my God I jump over a wall . . . I run through a troop . . . my hands make war . . . I bend a bow of steel . . . A thousand fall at my left hand, and ten thousand on my right, and death does not come near me . . ."

So David sent for the ephod and enquired of Jehovah what his next step should be: should he go north to one of the cities of the tribe of Judah? David did not need the ephod for his own personal approach to God, but it was necessary as a public symbol to convince the army, priests and people of Israel that he was really speaking with God when God replied through the priest and ephod.

On this occasion God confirmed that he should go to Hebron. The

tribal princes and elders in Hebron proposed that they accept Samuel the Prophet's nomination of David as the divinely appointed king of Judah, until such time as the whole of Israel recognized him as God's chosen king of the nation.

David was happy to agree with this further step forward, and he expanded and consolidated his divinely distinctive administration in the territory of Judah. David was thirty years of age when he was made king in Hebron, and it seemed as if he had lived double the time. It was only just over twelve years since Goliath and Gibeah, then Nob and Gath, Adullam, Hakilah, Moab, Ziklag, and all the other fighting in between. And he still had a long way to go, and much to do.

He appointed Joab as his army commander in chief; Gad and Nathan, of the school of the prophets, he appointed as heads of the civil administration and moral law respectively; and Abiathar as high priest over the Tabernacle services and ceremonies. They had already been functioning as such in a minor way during their enforced exile in Philistine Ziklag; but David now instructed them to develop a more structured framework for their responsibilities in the territory of Judah which could later be expanded into a national system for the united Israel of the future.

The military, civil and religious administrations, David believed, had to be integrated into a unified inter-related system through which God could reach into the lives of every individual Israeli and they could be personally responsible to God. To fulfil their unique destiny there could be no single elite body of any kind – princes, nobles, Levites, elders or army – interposed between Jehovah and His people, or between the people and God. They were a people chosen by God to be a kingdom of priests, with a divine destiny to be an instrument of enlightenment regarding the nature of God to all the nations of the world. To be the mediators of a perfect Covenant between God and the nations they had to strive to fulfil the vision of being a perfect people satisfying a perfect God in administering a perfect world. No other religion or philosophy like this existed in the whole world, and it must not be tarnished by compromise or expediency.

Meanwhile, he used the time and freedom from warfare to consolidate his own position in various ways. His aborted marriage to Michal, Saul's daughter, and his ongoing marriages to Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail of Carmel, had resulted in useful tribal alliances, as well as considerable wealth and influence. He concluded, therefore, that he could usefully extend his authority further by taking four more wives in marriage. He had now six sons: Amnon, the eldest, to Ahinoam; Chileab, to Abigail; Absalom, to Maacah, daughter of the king of Geshur; Adonijah, to Haggith; Shephateah, to Abitar; and Ithream, to Eglah.

David was inwardly concerned about entering into these marriages of convenience, for he was conscious that it was violating what the Scriptures had commanded: the king of Israel, they declared, was not to multiply wives. Faced with a guilty conscience in the matter, he had sought to excuse himself by arguing that the Scriptures also said the king should not multiply horses and yet, because of military necessity, he had acquired thousands of them for his cavalry and chariots. So, he suppressed his sensitive conscience; he was not adding to his wives because of lust, he argued to himself, but in order to unite the nation of Israel as God intended. But in the quietness of his meditations, when the discussions with Gad and Nathan were stilled, he enjoyed the variety of women and their submission to his desires. Nevertheless, he was perceptive enough to see trouble ahead in the various claims to succession in the kingdom, for already there were domestic squabbles of precedence over the time and interest he allotted to the various wives and families.

At just over thirty seven years of age David was king over the largest army between Egypt and Syria, 334,400 armed Israelites with experienced commanders, plus variety of weapons and chariots, and was now ready to engage the Philistines in battle. But, first, he had two more important actions to take: he wanted a national administrative centre, a capital city of the kingdom of Israel; and he wanted the Ark of the Covenant returned to its proper central place in the nation's Tabernacle and worship.

More than the defeat of the Philistines in their imperial ambitions

David had dreamed of a worthy city of God for the chosen people of God in the Promised Land of God. And he had decided that he wanted it to be Jerusalem. Jerusalem was "the City of Peace", where the father of Israel, Abraham, had met and been blessed by the Most High Priest of God and King of Jerusalem, the legendary Melchizedek. It was said of Jerusalem in those days that it was to be the earthly model of the divine administrative centre of God in the heavens "Jerusalem above, the mother of us all". Abraham had recognized the superior spiritual authority of Melchizedek, and had presented him with tithes of his possessions in recognition of this divine empowerment. Jerusalem originally was called Salem, "Peace", but after Melchizedek it had been captured and turned into a fortress by the fierce Canaanite tribe of Jebusites. It lay to the north of Hebron, and to the west of where the River Jordan flowed into the Dead Sea.

It was only about five miles from Bethlehem, and was regarded as the greatest fortress in Canaan, like Jericho. It was located on a dominant hill, and girded on the eastern and southern sides by steep lateral valleys. Inside the walled outer city was "the stronghold of Zion", the hallowed spot on the north west of Mount Moriah, where Abraham had been called by God to offer up his son, Isaac, as a sacrifice to establish his obedience to God. Joshua and his army had conquered part of the city, and razed it, but the Jebusites had held out in the stronghold of Zion and eventually had recaptured the whole city and defended it against all subsequent attempts at capture. Although it was in Saul's tribal territory he had never been able to take it. David had demonstrated his own extravagant gesture when he took the spear with Goliath's severed head on it and drove it against the wooden gate of the city to the shouts of his comrades and the taunts of the Jebusites in the city. He was now ready to vindicate that youthful gesture and capture the city, making it his own for God.

When the Jebusites in the city saw David's army outside their walls they mocked him by placing the city's deaf, dumb and cripples on the walls, shouting, "You will never get in here; even the blind and lame can ward you off" But David was better prepared

than Saul and his predecessors for the siege, for his army was under the command of his original legendary commanders and captains. The years he had spent studying and using the war techniques of other nations, and in training his already highly skilled warriors, were now directed to the attack on Jerusalem. He had constructed models of the military apparatus used by the Assyrians, the Trojans and the Heraclidae, and he wheeled them into position on the prepared ramps on the plateau of Rephaim to the north-east of the city. In no time at all the fabled walls of the city were breached, and his formidable fighting men were inside, cleaving their way through the now panic-stricken Jebusites. But the fortress of Zion on the ridge above the city remained impregnable, and David had no direct access to use his engines of war to batter it into submission. It required a different strategy.

As he watched his magnificent fighting commanders destroy the Jebusites with their usual skill David had a sudden idea. He had withheld appointing the commander in chief of the combined Tribal armies of Israel to Joab as a sign of his displeasure over his insubordination in the murder of Abner. In the circumstances it must have gone to either Joab or Abner because of their military abilities. But there were now other men, such as Benaiah, who were noted for their skills and courage, so David decided to provide them all with a challenge: whoever was able to capture the stronghold of Zion would be made commander-in-chief of the army of Israel.

David outlined his assessment of the situation. Zion was impregnable from every position except one. The city of Jerusalem was sited at a point where the central ridge formed a small plateau set among higher mountains. The plateau divided into two spurs: the south-eastern spur was known as Ophel; and, to the west and south, the Valley of Hinnom, and, on the east, the Valley of Kidron, separated Ophel from the Mount of Olives. On all sides of Ophel, except the north, the ground fell away steeply. Joab and the others followed David's outline closely, nodding agreement because they had also noted these features. What, they really needed to know, was the one weakness which no-one had not detected. David drew a diagram for them.

The fortress needed water, and the main supply of water came from a spring called Gihon, situated on the eastern slope of Ophel in the Kidron Valley. There must be a connection, therefore, between the spring and the water supply within the walls of the Zion fortress, a natural channel or a constructed aqueduct. Joab devised a scheme to use scaling hooks on ropes, fitted to the feet of his troop of soldiers, so that they were able to climb up the steep and slimy water course of the L shaped underground channel. When they reached the top, and were able to steal unobserved into the stronghold, and struck with deadly ferocity at the unsuspecting Jebusites, taking the fortress from the inside. There was now no further doubt about Joab's fitness for the post, so David appointed him commander-in-chief of Israel's united army.

David now threw all his considerable energy into making Jerusalem a worthy capital city of his integrated nation of Israel. He did not just build on the existing city; he re-constructed the whole area on which it was built. He brought in vast numbers of labourers to fill in the intervening valleys between Zion and Mount Moriah with a sloping ramp. He had terraces built on the slopes of the valleys to make spaces for streets and large buildings.

Until that time Jerusalem was only a jumble of small flat-roofed dwellings of mud and stones. David had most of them destroyed, and he brought in Phoenician architects and builders to help him rebuild the city. The Phoenician king of Tyre, Hiram, had helped the Philistines with their impressive buildings, and David sent an embassy to him requesting his help to build the new cities of Israel. He gave Hiram no details, but let him know that he intended to make Israel a greater nation than that of Philistia. Hiram was happy to enter into an agreement with David, and he sent architects, artisans and supplies to him to build a royal palace for a start.

But David's ambitious building program and vision for the future of Israel required huge sums of money. Until he could win really large battles against wealthy nations his only source of income, it seemed to him, was to enter into alliances through marriage with rich tributary kings and tribal chiefs. There was also the possibility of finding precious metals from the earth; but there

again he would need to find foreign specialists from other nations to teach them how to mine for them in Israel.

These marriages of convenience continued to trouble David, for he was aware they were adversely affecting his relationship with God, also his expanding family. They created domestic quarrels, and were a disturbing element to the children of different mothers and religions and customs; and, most of all, the compromises and expediencies increasingly enmeshed him. In all his other activities he felt free and clear before God, easy in the companionship, and unpressured in the guidance for direction. But it seemed he was reluctant to bring the matter of his increasing wives and concubines to God because he suspected that God would disapprove, and he was too enamoured of the variety and excitement of having willing women of many kinds.

Then there was the matter of the Ark of the Covenant. It was still in Kirjath-jearim, after being brought there following its capture, and subsequent return, by the superstitious Philistines some thirty years before. Its location had been the subject of great acrimony among the priests, since it could not be returned to the destroyed city of Shiloh; and some had wanted it at Bethel, some at Mizpeh, and some at Nob. Saul's destruction of Nob, and the massacre of the high priestly family and other priests at Nob, had only exacerbated the problem.

It had been David's greatest wish to return the Ark to the centrality of the life and worship of Israel. God had said to Moses that He would speak and reveal Himself to the High Priest of His people in front of the Ark, from between the two golden cherubim with arching wings sculptured on its lid, or "mercy-seat". It was where the high priest was supposed to present himself once every year at the great Feast of Atonement to seek God's forgiveness for the nation's sins. It was a standing rebuke to Israel that it was now neglected except for one priest in a small border town.

But any attempt to move the Ark of the Covenant was a dangerous and complex action. Not only would the Philistines see it as a provocative gesture of defiance, of a significant returning confidence in the nation's God and destiny, but the Levites would

create endless trouble as they fought over its most advantageous location. Then there would be resistance to many, if not all, of the other eleven Tribes over the Ark's possible location, and from those who were already persuaded to worship Canaanite idols and marry pagan women. There was also the unknown final matter as to how Jehovah would view it, and the risk in drawing down His jealous wrath, such as the Philistines and the people of Beth-shemesh had experienced.

But with the capture of Jerusalem and its subsequent construction as Israel's capital, the city of God, David decided that the time had come to bring the Ark of the Covenant there. He knew it would be a climactic act, tantamount to a declaration of war against the imperially ambitious Philistines, and a declaration of a new era of nationhood in Israel. For Israel's God, Jehovah, was not like the gods of other nations. He was not just a nature god, a mountain god, a sun-god, or fertility god, such as they worshipped, but was seen by the true Israeli as a Supreme Being with power over nature, not just deriving power from its existence. Jehovah, to the believing Israelis, was not just a deity reflected by nature's recurring cycles, but an awesome Creator Presence who controlled and even interfered at times with those cycles. He was a God of power over historical events, power over national actions, power over personal decisions. All the surrounding nations knew of the words and acts of Moses in Egypt, and of the later acts of Moses and Joshua in the wilderness and land of Canaan. When Israel was united with their God there was no power on earth could withstand them.

But David also had a personal problem with the apparent inconstancy in his relationship with Israel's God. As his rule expanded, and his ambitions and responsibilities increased, he found their demands and complexities left him with less and less time and opportunities for his former simplicity of walk with God. Instead of meditation and reflection he was forced to make rapid decisions as the multiplying problems presented themselves for immediate solution. When the inevitable crises arose he would make a hurried resort to the high priest's ephod and the Urim and Thummim. The nearness of companionship with God, and the

illumination and inspiration which flamed from this, were diminishingly experienced. They had not disappeared; they were just rarer, more difficult to cultivate, and harder to renew.

David reasoned that if this was his experience, surrounded as he was with sympathetic counsellors, how much more difficult it must be for the people of Israel. But the gap between Jehovah and His people, the breach in daily personal communion, had to be narrowed and bridged. David's vision of a royal throne and nation state could unite them as a people, but only the centrality of the Ark and Tabernacle services could make them instruments of God's purpose in the world.

But it also seemed to him that the Tabernacle as a "Tent of Meeting" was now out dated by history. The movable structures and wilderness Shekinah Cloud presence of the past was no longer relevant to a settled people in Canaan. The three commanded annual Feasts of pilgrimage had not been observed by most of the nation for some time; and this had not helped the daily spiritual life of the people, nor had it reflected the purpose of God in instructing them in his divine provision for their moral and civil behaviour. Something more permanent, more immediate, more all pervasive in its daily impact on the lives of the people, was necessary. In other words, a Temple, a permanent House of God, in which the people could meet regularly with their God as He commanded, and then go out as God's representatives to all the nations of the world.

To David it was a greater vision and task than setting out as a shepherd to be king and forging a nation, and he responded to it with a renewed enthusiasm and commitment. He had been finding that his earlier fine edged creative and intellectual stimulation of music and song composition had become blunted and superseded to a great extent by the rougher excitements of the military strategies and dangers of his exile. These, in turn, had been set aside temporarily as he addressed himself to the new thrills of responding to the challenges of exploring new forms of nation administration and building. The restoring of the Ark and the Tabernacle services in a national House of God in Jerusalem, and the providing of a whole new moral and spiritual framework for Israel as an instrument of

God's purpose according to His instructions to Moses, was something unique in history and would involve all his experiences of the past.

First, then, the Philistines and their defeat must be accomplished. David called together his commanders and captains and set out before them his thinking and strategy. This was not just to be another engagement, a localized attack, as in the past; it was to be a decisive major battle in which the Philistines must be effectively destroyed and their influence in Canaan wiped out from the land. This was Israel's land, the Promised Land of God, and had to be seen as such. He had been given specific directions from God that the coming battle was to be fought in the Valley of Rephaim. The word from God had been, "Go, for I will surely hand the Philistines over to you".

This assurance was of great comfort to the leaders of Israel, for reports had been pouring in that the Philistines were steadily reinforcing their already great armies with mercenaries from Syria, Phoenicia and other nations. As a sign of his confidence in his already legendary core "six hundred" warriors from his outlaw days, David now put the strategic execution of the whole Israeli army in their hands. These six hundred would be known as "the Gibborim", or "mighty men of valour". Joab would be the overall commander in chief of the army, while Abishai, his brother, would be commander of the Gibborim division. The Gibborim themselves would be divided into three companies of two hundred men; each company would be divided into ten platoons. Each platoon would have a captain in charge, and three company commanders Jeshobeam, Eleazar and Shammah, the three commanders who had slipped through the Philistines at Bethlehem to get David a jug of his favourite water. David himself would have a special royal bodyguard of personally chosen Gibborim, placed under the command of the mighty Benaiah.

From his long study of the Philistines and their military strategies David anticipated that their military goal would be to repeat the victorious tactics used against Saul at Gilboa. That is, they would try to cut him off from Israel's northern Tribes at what was

the most vulnerable point, in the Plains of Jezreel. At the same time they would attack from the south to keep him distracted on two fronts.

That would mean the key battle would take place, as God had indicated, in the Valley of Rephaim. This valley lay to the north of Jerusalem, at the end of the Valley of Hinnom. Two well used roads crossed the plateau: one, from the sea port of Joppa which joined the road to Philistia near Ekron, went past Jericho to the fords of Jordan; the other, the route from Egypt, came from Hebron and Bethlehem and ran towards Gibeon, Shechem and Aram. The favourite strategy of the Philistines was to use a flat plain for their chariots and cavalry, and then bring in their massed infantry hidden in the valleys behind. Their left flank would be supported by the ridge above the Jerusalem to Gibeon road; and their right flank would be protected by the Valley and steep, balsam covered hillside on the south west of the plain.

As David had anticipated, with the battle imminent the Philistine northern army moved into position north of Jerusalem, and the southern army moved out of Ekron through the territory of Adullam so familiar to David. Using the fast moving, quick striking guerrilla tactics they had perfected in the time of their exile David, from familiar hideouts, drove deep wedges into the cumbersome Philistine southern forces; then poured his reinforcements of chariots, cavalry and supporting infantry through the breaches. The Philistine southern army disintegrated into desperate pockets of resistance scattered throughout Judah, to be destroyed methodically by David's army over the new few months. It was such a devastating victory that the initial place of engagement became famous afterwards as Baale Perazim, "the breaches of Baal", in honour of David's total destruction of the Baal worshipping Philistines.

With the Philistine southern army smashed, and his rear secured, David now turned to the more powerful Philistine northern army in its entrenched position in the Valley of Rephaim threatening Jerusalem. His own army had been weakened by the necessary cleaning up operations in the south; also, he could get no

reinforcements from the Israeli Tribes in the north through the besieging Philistines.

Once more David consulted God regarding the coming battle. The divine command was: "Do not go straight up against the Philistines but encircle them and come from behind to attack, in front of the balsam trees". The intervention by God would be evident when He sent a wind which would stir the leaves of the balsam trees. When the Israeli military commanders heard the wind in the balsam trees, they were to strike immediately at the waiting Philistines.

It was a rout. The Philistines, surprised by David's tactics, were thrown into utter confusion. Informed by their spies of David's concentration on developing an army with chariots and cavalry, and lulled into complacency by David's ruse of sending a force with trumpets and banners from the front as a seeming vanguard of his main forces, they concentrated on a frontal set piece battle. When David's experienced foot soldiers with their highly skilled archers, javelin throwers, slingers and swordsmen, struck them from the rear and the unprotected right flank of the Philistines, chaos ensued. David, and his chosen commanders, driving through the confused and scattering Philistine main force, reached the south western slope of the plain, then turned northwards and again struck the Philistines from their rear. The Philistines were demoralized and routed, and they poured along the roads into Philistia in a disorganized rabble.

David returned to Jerusalem a conquering hero once again and spent the following months pondering over what should be done about the Ark of the Covenant. He had made a mess of his first attempt because he overlooked God's commands to Moses that the Ark was to be carried on the shoulders of the Levite priests and he used a cart the same as the Philistines had done. The consequence was when the oxen pulling the cart stumbled and an attendant, Uzzah, caught the Ark as it started to slide off the cart he was killed immediately by God. If God could show His displeasure and judgment on Uzzah and the overtly curious Beth shemesh town people and Philistine escorts for demeaning the majesty of the Ark of the Covenant David would have to be very certain that what he was contemplating was God's will. The Ark was only one piece of

Tabernacle furniture and he was considering the replacement of the Tabernacle with a Temple!

So he consulted Nathan, who was becoming more a successor of Samuel the Prophet than just a counsellor-companion. If the two of them consulted Jehovah independently, David reasoned, it would be a more certain confirmation of God's true will. Nathan returned with his acquired divine assurance: "Whatever you have in mind, go ahead and do it, for the Lord is with you". And he described to David exactly what God had revealed to him to say to David:

"Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men of the earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel, and will plant them so that they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people shall not oppress them any more, as they did at the beginning and as they have done ever since I appointed leaders over my people Israel. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.

"Jehovah himself declares to you that He will establish a house for you. When your days are over and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a House for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever...Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever".

David now felt free to proceed with his desire to bring the Ark to Jerusalem especially when he heard how the family of Obed edom had been blessed in many ways since taking the Ark into their home as guardians. But he still took the greatest precautions by offering sacrificial bulls and cows before he began his journey from Jerusalem. He also ensured that the Kohath clan of Levite priests carried the Ark on their shoulders. As before, the representative heads of the families of all the Tribes of Israel, princes, nobles, and council elders, all formed part of the procession.

The thousand priests at the head of the procession were clothed in fine white linen, together with the musicians and singers as on the previous occasion. In front, David, harp in hand, dressed only in a short linen garment, joined with them in the song he had

composed for the occasion to be sung responsively with the people along the way. By the time they began the ascent to Mount Zion many of the people in the procession, exalted and transformed by the music, singing and excitement, were dancing in the ecstasy of the spirit. At the head of the procession David exultant, triumphant, swept by joy and a spirit of transcendence danced uninhibitedly with the others. When they reached the temporary tent prepared for the Ark in Zion David and the priests offered seven bullocks and seven rams in another sacrifice. Then the musicians and singers led the procession and gathered people in another of David's songs. As the crowds roared a responsive "Amen" and "Praise the Lord", David went among them with his close companions, distributing to the people a free gift of a fresh flat loaf and raisin cake.

David now began preparations for altering and uniting the priesthood functions in anticipation of the promise of God that a Temple was to be built by his son, if not by himself. The historic Aaronic priesthood had become divided into two warring sects: one now represented by Abiathar, who was a descendant from Ithamar, the third son of Aaron; and the other, that of Zadok, who was a descendant of Eleazar, the eldest of Aaron's children. When Abiathar fled to join David at Adullam, Zadok continued with the Tabernacle services with Saul in Gibeah. David now brought them together by officially confirming Zadok, as the senior descendant, and his fellow-priests in their offices at Gibeah, where the Tabernacle still remained. But he also appointed Abiathar as official guardian of the Ark of the Covenant and the religious services in the temporary Tent quarters in Jerusalem. With the help of Abiathar, Gad and Nathan, he prepared a new form of worship which could be integrated into a permanent Temple when it was built, not based on the instructions of Moses but on fresh instructions from God to him.

"All this," David said, "I have in writing from the hand of the Lord upon me, and he gave me understanding in all the details of the plan."⁴⁷

For David knew that while God did not intend him to build the Temple because he was "a man of blood", he was to make preparations for it. It had been revealed to him by the Spirit of God

⁴⁷I Chronicles 28 v 19

since Nathan's earlier revelation to him that he was to take a pen and write down all God told him regarding the new building for His Presence. In addition, David prepared songs for the Temple worship, invented musical instruments for the musicians, and organized the priests for their new responsibilities. The Levites originally had been divided between three families Kohath, Gershon and Merari divided into twenty-four courses, or sections. David retained these, but divided them into three classes presided over by three "chief priests". The first class had responsibility for everything connected with the services; the second class was responsible for the composing and presenting the sacred songs of the sanctuary; and the third class was responsible for monitoring the entrance gates of the Temple, to ensure that all who entered were properly sanctified according to the commands of Jehovah. David appointed sixteen of these courses to Zadok, and eight to Abiathar, as their responsibilities.

With the army and the priesthood re-structured, David turned to the establishing of a national form of government. Gad, Nathan and Jehoshaphat were appointed as keepers of the records, or historians of the nation. Adoram was placed in charge of all revenue collecting, Seriah was made secretary of state with responsibility for political affairs. Jehial was royal tutor in charge of education. Shimei was minister of agriculture, in charge of vineyards, olive oil reserves, as well as grain crops. David's personal council of advisers comprised Ahithopel, Hushai, David's uncle Jonathan, and Sheva the scribe.

While David was re-organizing the nation to give it stability and unity he restrained the army from military adventures. The spoils obtained from the twin defeats of the Philistine armies were so great that they were still being assessed and apportioned. Huge sums were needed and supplied for the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the other cities of Israel, and to provide adequate supervision and control for the many projects and workers involved.

The boundaries of Israel's new kingdom were already extended well beyond what had been conquered under Joshua. They held this expanded territory, David was convinced, not because he had won

most of it in war, nor by the natural right of possession by conquest, nor by national agreements with other nations, but by the direct promise and gift of God. The "Promised Land" as described by God was not confined to the territory usually called Canaan, but extended far beyond it. The country lying to the east of Canaan, and between it and the River Euphrates, was also included by God, although now occupied by several powerful nations, more or less in agreement with each other and likely to draw closer together now that Israel was emerging a regional threat to them. Then, to the south, Egypt, their self-serving understanding with the Philistines now shattered by their defeat, saw their own frontier territories at risk.

David decided that the time had now come to finish off the Philistines, and then these other tribes and nations, to remove the final major obstacles to the unity and consolidation of Israel in their Promised Land. The Philistines had been desperately re-grouping since their catastrophic defeat, recruiting help from Egypt and other nations. It was now over seven years since David had captured Zion, and five years since he had defeated the Philistines at Baale Perazim and the Valley of Rephaim.

It was time, David decided, to go to war once again. He had taken time during the past five years of peace and construction to study the situations north and south of Israel, for, in the event of war, he wished to be sufficiently informed of what opposition to expect from the nations there. During the previous two hundred years the circumstances in Mesopotamia to the north had changed frequently. The Hittite empire had vanished, to be replaced by Assyria; and Assyria in turn was overshadowed by Babylon. Then the Arameans took over and dominated the Fertile Crescent, Syria and Mesopotamia, with a series of small states such as Sham'al, Carchemish, Beth eden and Damascus.

To the south, there was the delicate diplomatic situation where Egypt claimed suzerainty over the Philistines. It was this more than any other consideration which had made David restrain his troops from capturing and reducing the Philistine cities of Ashdod, Askelon and Gaza when the Philistine army was routed at the Valley of

Rephaim. He was certain he could have smashed Philistia at the time, but he was not then ready for confrontation with Egypt. He had been content to let the Philistines acknowledge his supremacy in southern Canaan, while he was aware that they were secretly rebuilding their shattered army with Egyptian help. But now he was ready, and David sent word to all the Tribes of Israel that he needed warriors to go to war against their enemies, and to push forward the destiny of the chosen people of God.

David was now ready for the final encounter with the Philistines, and a confrontation of wills and ambitions with Egypt. He marched his army south to launch his attack at Gath. Gath was the Philistine fortress city of David's former protector Achish, but it was also the Philistine frontier city responsible for holding the Israeli southern tribes in vassalage. In a choice between Gath and God this situation had to be reversed, and David had never been in doubt about what he would do.

With the fall of Gath, and the surrender of Achish, David swung westwards in a swift conquering campaign, until all the Philistine territory to the west of Jordan, and to the southern borders of Judah and Beersheba, were completely under Israeli power and authority. David's next target of conquest was Moab, lying to the east of Jordan. Again the issue facing him was whether to choose sentimental friendship because the king of Moab had provided sanctuary to his parents, or obedience to God who had said centuries before that Moab was to be subject to Israel. He recalled that Saul had lost the monarchy because of his sentimental attachment to the wishes of his soldiers, and he had made his own decisions in the lonely years of his exile to conquer all that God had decreed for Israel.

The south east and east of Jordan were the territories of the tributary kings of Edom, Amalek, Moab and Ammon, who had all harassed the Israelis in the days of their wanderings in Sinai, and later occupation of Canaan. Saul and David between them had made considerable inroads into their territories and wealth during the time of David's exile, but they were still a great threat, especially when they were united in a confederation against Israel as they would be if they saw David engaged with one of the neighbouring great

nations to the south or north. But David's army quickly conquered the Edomites and Amalekites, and he placed garrisons at strategic points throughout their territories to keep the peace and collect the taxes.

By the time he had worked his way north-eastwards to Moab the king in desperation had appealed for help to the tributary king of Zobah, a vassal of the spreading Aramean empire to the north. He was too late. David's fast moving troops swooped out of the mountains of Moab, and before the reinforcements from the north could arrive Moab had been defeated.

During David's series of wars the king of the Ammonites died and, as he had befriended David in his exile, David now sent an embassy to express his sympathy to his family, and to discuss the possibility of an agreement. But the new king's advisers were suspicious of David's motives, saying that the embassy was only a ruse to spy out the royal city of Rabah's defenses. So the king ill-treated David's embassy, shaving off half of each man's beard and cutting off their robes to expose their genitals as a gesture of contempt.

When the new king of the Ammonites, Hamun, heard that David in reprisal was marching to make war on his territory he feared David's fury, and sent for urgent help from their northern neighbours in Syria. He offered seventy thousand pounds of silver to the king of Zobah, and in desperation also sought help from other tribes Beth rahab, Maachah (the father of Achish of Gath), and Tob, from the north east of the Jordan. Between them they sent a formidable army to help Hamun of Ammon fight David.

When news was brought to David of the huge build-up of Ammonite reinforcements, especially the aid from Syria, his first reaction was pessimism: there was no way the large Ammonite force, with its possibilities of vast recruitment from Mesopotamia, could be defeated. The capital city of the Ammonites, Rabah, was like Jerusalem and Jericho situated in an impregnable position and could hold out for years of siege. Yet if he retreated now it would demonstrate to the world and worse, to Israel that he was unable to establish the Tribes of Israel in their own divinely provided Promised Land.

The trouble now was that his former confidence in God and His direction was being undermined by his multiplying family and domestic pressures, and the consequent guilt he experienced from his deteriorating family relationships. He now had seventeen wives, not counting the dead king Saul's wives and sixteen concubines, which he had inherited according to the custom of the neighbouring nations. He had at least sixteen grown children Amnon, Chileab, Absalom, Tamar, Adonijah, Shephatiah, Ithream, Ibhah, Elishuah, Nagah, Japhia, Elishama, Eliada, Eliphelet, Nathan and Teminath all competing for his attention in a sly mixture of personal selfishness, maternal influence, envy and naked ambition.

Moses in the Law had given as the reason for not multiplying wives "that the king's heart may not be turned away"; and now, in the quietness of the nights before the critical battle ahead, David acknowledged that his lust for women was corrupting his great love for God. It was the reverse side of the same coin, it seemed to him. For what had begun as an apparently inconsequential indulgence was now an entangling bondage, and was seriously at war with his fundamental aspirations to be an ideal servant of God. Philosophically, he could rationalize his marital situation; physically, each night found him with a different woman. Moses had been right about "the king's heart being turned away". Then Nathan's prophecy concerning a future son who would be his true heir, and God's designated successor to the throne of Israel, complicated the situation beyond comprehension— which son from which wife?

So his former unquestioning faith was now shot through with doubts regarding God's view of his conduct; his daily and nightly sins of omission and commission among his extended family, which was so at variance with his visionary aspirations for himself and the nation. When he was away from the tensions and quarrels of the family in the palace, and with his friends and comrades on the battlefield, everything was so much simpler and he felt once again like the servant of God he was in his youth and that he still wanted so passionately to be. Would God punish him with defeat in this coming battle for his sins? It was these thoughts which crowded in on him on the eve of the battle with the Ammonites, and which

brought the unaccustomed dread rather than the joyous excitement he had known in the past.

The Ammonite army was drawn up in front of the great fortress-city of Rabbah, with the foreign contingents from the north deployed in the plains of Merdebe around it. David divided his forces into two companies: Joab to confront the Aramean mercenaries, and Abishai to attack the native Ammonites. Joab's instructions from David were clear:

"If the Arameans are too strong for me, then you are to come to my rescue; but if the Ammonites are too strong for you, then I will come to rescue you. Be strong and fight bravely for our people and the cities of our God. The Lord will do what is good in His sight".

Joab's troops struck with their usual ruthless savagery at the Arameans, using the speed and skills acquired in former battles to such devastating effect that the northern mercenary army was scattered in disorderly retreat. When the Ammonites engaged with Abishai's army heard of the rout of the Arameans they rapidly retreated within the walls of their city and closed the gates for a siege. David recalled the two commanders and their armies from the siege, for he had received reports that the Arameans to the north, worried by the successful actions of the Israelis, were re-grouping for a major battle at a place called Helam. There, Hadadezer, king of Syria, with his commander-in-chief, Shobach, were reinforcing a huge army from beyond the River Euphrates.

It would be David's first battle outside the borders of Canaan, and it was of great importance to Israel for, beyond the River Euphrates, lay the legendary nations of Mesopotamia and the world. King Hadadezer had established a kingdom extending from Hamath on the River Orontes to the banks of the Euphrates, and had conquered several dependencies in Mesopotamia. He was allied with the king of Damascus, who was also sending troops to help defeat the ambitious king of Israel. They were determined to put of stop to the man whose declared aspirations were said to be the divine enlightenment of the whole world—which, in their opinion, meant building an Israeli empire.

But they had never faced an army like David's, which once again

displayed the speed, mobility, ferocity and innovation of tactics perfected over years of fighting in Canaan. Instead of ponderous face-to-face mammoth engagements, the Arameans were confronted by several forces at once, under independent and confident commanders using unknown battle intelligence and skills in rapidly changing circumstances, creating confusion among the orthodox Aramean military strategists with murderous effect.

The Arameans, thrown into disorganized retreat, lost 40,000 cavalry and infantry in dead and wounded, with 700 of their war chariots captured. Their commander-in-chief, Shobach, was killed. David's victorious army swept forward to the banks of the Euphrates, and on to the city of Damascus. In the subsequent siege Damascus lost 22,000 defenders, and its great wealth was confiscated. King Hadadezer, and the tributary kings of his powerful confederation, were reduced to accepting vassalage from Israel, and their territories placed under the supervision of Israeli garrisons.

But in the battle David had come dangerously close to losing his life. As was his custom he had been directing the battle from the front, surrounded by his hand-picked royal guards led by Benaiah. In the chaos of battle, as the Arameans fell back in confusion from the varied Israeli assaults on all sides, David and his guards had become isolated from the main force of Israeli troops. David had not been unduly concerned. He called on his guards to form a defensive circle, with himself shoulder-to-shoulder in the centre with Benaiah. Outside their defensive perimeter the bodies of the Arameans piled up in a rising wall of death. But slowly David's guards were also being killed off and the group of desperately fighting men was growing smaller. The hard pressed Arameans, fighting furiously as they felt defeat approaching, poured over the royal guards, and David and Benaiah were carried aside in a wave of struggling bodies fighting for their lives.

The joy of battle was with David now. He had been in dangerous personal situations before, although never on such a scale with such high stakes. But this was still Jehovah's battle, and he was still Jehovah's king of Jehovah's people. Benaiah beside David was also

in his element, bloodied, but cool and seemingly invincible. David had Goliath's great sword in his hand to remind him how impossible odds could be overcome. His shield slashed with sword-cuts, his face beneath his battered helmet covered with blood and sweat, his giant sword swinging and thrusting, parrying and striking, David was suddenly confronted by a fearsome sight.

It was like the fight with Goliath all over again, but this time not at a distance with a sling. Surrounded by the bloody carnage of battle and the screams of wounded men and horses, a monstrous Gittite mercenary brushed aside the smaller soldiers in front of him to face David, teeth bared in a ferocious grin of expectation. The giant Gittite was without a shield, obviously because he preferred both hands to be free to swing his terrible sword, longer even than David's. This he was swinging in a tireless arc, decapitating or severing men in two with each single stroke. As David circled cautiously in the confined body-strewn place, his mind raced as he sought an effective defence. His shield was useless against such murderous swings from the Gittite's huge double-bladed sword, so all he had was his agility and quickness of eye and sword.

The giant was a killing machine, but cumbersome, with his single, two handed technique, and David was able to time his body swings to take him out of immediate range, but each time moving in closer to strike at the giant. Then, suddenly, he saw an opening as the unsettled giant hesitated in frustration, and David lunged forward, his sword leaving a gaping, fatal wound in the giant's severed neck.

The trumpets of Israel were sounding victory all over the battlefield, and David and Benaiah were quickly reinforced. But his commanders and advisers, shaken by the near death of David, insisted that there was now too much at stake for Israel to permit David to take such risks again. This was the third or fourth occasion when his life had been in jeopardy in battle. So much territory had been conquered in the recent fighting, and so much plunder accumulated, that it was more important for David to be in Jerusalem to consolidate the victories than to continue in the frontline with the troops. From Gaza to Damascus, from almost the Nile to the Euphrates, from beyond Jordan to the Great Sea, the land

now belonged to Israel by right of conquest as well as by the will and promise of God. And David was still only just over forty years of age. The whole world was waiting to be conquered, and all Israel adored him.

Now that he was freed from participating in the demands of fighting battles David was eager to begin the preparations for the building of the House of God in Jerusalem. He was forbidden by God to do the actual building, but he was responsible for all the preparations. This, in turn, raised the intriguing question never far from his thoughts: who was the son to be his heir, and who was the mother of that son? He was now over forty years of age, and by the time any divinely approved son was ready to rule an extended kingdom of Israel, even if he were born next year, David would be nearing the human lifespan of seventy. However, this was God's problem, and no doubt it would be revealed in God's time.

One of the things he liked to do most at the end of the day in Jerusalem was to go up to the roof of the palace. There, as the heat of the day died and the sun set in a blaze of indescribable colours, he could gaze over the growing city of God beneath him. Each day it seemed to change as the army of architects, builders and workers of all kinds pushed ahead with their work of constructing houses for the newly rich citizens of Israel, and official buildings for the expanding administrations. As well as new furnaces and smelters for gold and silver, bronze and iron, he had sought out artistic stone-masons and timber-workers from foreign lands, with their fascinating ideas of construction. In his palace, and other places, there were wind-driven and hand-operated fans to disturb the air into cooling movement, water from underground sources and brought by aqueducts to cool the walls, splashing water in ornamental private pools and public fountains. Trees and flowers that he had never seen before were now gracing the wide streets, parks and gardens. With its natural golden stone and imported marbles Jerusalem was becoming a breath-taking beautiful city, worthy to be known as the habitation of God.

This was the time, dreaming and gazing at the growing city, when he felt closest to God. His stacks of papyrus and pens were at

hand in the flowering arbour on the roof, and whether composing words or music, or writing down some new idea regarding the city, or Temple, or country, he was always lifted above the pressures of the day. It was here he liked to compose his poetry and songs.

It was while he was walking on the roof, gazing over the low battlement at the city beneath, that David became conscious of a naked woman having a bath in an open courtyard of a nearby house. The fact of being able to see such a sight in itself was unusual, for it was not the custom in Hebrew communities to have houses where they could overlook the courtyards of neighbours. But David's palace occupied a high point on the slope of the mountain, and the city had been terraced to accommodate the pressing demand for buildings. It was also unusual in that being publicly overlooked in the crowded surroundings a Hebrew woman would choose to bathe naked in an open courtyard.

David wondered whether she knew she might be watched from the palace, might even know that it was his custom to pace the roof in the evenings. He could see quite clearly that she was a woman of extraordinary beauty, full breasted, with pale alabaster-like skin and long dark hair. David's slumbering guilt regarding his own sexual indulgences, and many wives and concubines, was swept away in a rush of desire for the unknown woman. When she finally left the courtyard he called for a servant and asked who lived in the house he pointed to beneath the wall of the palace.

"Isn't that the house of Bathsheba", the servant answered, "the daughter of Eliam, the wife of Uriah the Hittite". She was the wife of one of his own Gibborim, his legendary fighting men, a mercenary Hittite warrior who had been with him since Adullam days. But David had no doubt that Uriah would be with Joab at the siege of Rabbah; or it could be that he was in one of the outlying occupation garrisons. That could be the reason for his wife disporting herself so carelessly. With a husband in the house she would not have been permitted to do it. And the husband was a Hittite, a mercenary who had chosen to fight for Israel, but who did not have to observe Israel's strict ceremonial laws. If she had married a Hittite then she, too, might not be too committed to the laws of her

people. That would explain her conduct in the courtyard. David told the waiting servant to go and bring Bathsheba to the palace.

While David and Bathsheba pursued their fateful relationship, Joab and the army were getting rid of the last of Israel's native enemies, the Ammonites, in the siege of Rabbah. The city was divided into two, lower and upper, sections; the former being the reservoir which formed a large lake around which the houses of the rulers and nobles were built, while the bulk of the remaining population lived in the fortress-city on the slopes above. Once the lower part of the city with its water supply was captured, it was only a matter of time before the hitherto impregnable upper city fell into their hands. Seeing this, Joab sent word to David, urging him to come now and lead the final assault himself that he might have the honour of capturing the redoubtable capital "lest", he added, "I take the city, and it is called after my name".

The message from Joab arrived at the same time as one from Bathsheba to David. She was pregnant with David's child; what should be done? The idyll was shattered at last; now the reality of the consequences had to be faced. As David considered the two messages an idea presented itself to him. He could send a message to Joab saying that he would come to Rabbah shortly, as soon as he had attended to some important matters; but, meanwhile, would Joab send Uriah the Hittite back to Jerusalem, and report to him immediately on his arrival?

When Uriah arrived at the palace and reported to David, the king asked him how the battle was progressing. Uriah replied with what he knew, but he was obviously puzzled. It made no sense that as a lower-rank commander he should be sent for by David to give a report not authorized by Joab. But he was even more confused by David's next instruction, when he was told to go home and "wash his feet" a vernacular expression for having sexual intercourse. Finally, David gave him an award "for service" before sending him home. But next day Bathsheba sent David word that Uriah had not come home, and that she had heard he had slept among David's servants at the palace. David sent for Uriah, and had his worst fears confirmed when he questioned him

Uriah was reluctant to answer David; because he found his situation inexplicable and distasteful. David, of all people, the people's "Singer of Spiritual Songs", the moral leader of Israel, should know why he could not go home from battle and have sexual intercourse with his wife. He replied steadily:

"The Ark and Israel and Judah are staying in tents, and my master Joab and my lord's men are camped in open fields. How could I go to my home to eat and drink and lie with my wife? As surely as you live, I will not do such a thing".

At another time, and in different circumstances, David would have been proud of Uriah, the loyal commander. This was the standard that David himself had set for the young men of Israel, and Uriah was an exemplary product. But now his loyalty to David and Jehovah's Law was likely to destroy David and, Israel, David thought belatedly.

"Stay here one more day", he ordered Uriah, "and tomorrow I will send you back". He invited Uriah to eat an evening meal with him to talk further about the Rabbah situation, and to bring his wife with him. That evening, during the meal, David plied Uriah with large amounts of food and wine; and, when he was too drunk to carry on, David called for his servants to escort Uriah and Bathsheba back to their home. When they returned David's servants reported that Uriah, drunk as he was, had refused to go home and was insisting on sleeping with the servants in the palace.

David now faced a critical dilemma. When his affair with Bathsheba became known, as it must be when the time of her pregnancy was calculated, and it was remembered that Uriah had so publicly refused to lie with her as an honourable Israeli soldier, Uriah's actions would be approved as being according to the Law of Moses and of God, and David's would be condemned with contempt. The wave of disillusion and revulsion which would follow the knowledge of his conduct could easily sweep away the new-found faith of the people of Israel, and their joyous commitment to follow God in war and peace. David's family, the royal line, the House of God to be built, the heir of God yet to be born, the State of Israel as an instrument of God for cosmic purposes,

would all disappear when it was revealed that Bathsheba was with child by David and that he had tried to deceive Uriah into a pretence of fatherhood to hide his own adultery.

After a sleepless night, in the early hours of dawn, David sent for Uriah and gave him a letter to take to Joab. In the letter he had given instructions to Joab:

"Put Uriah in the front line of battle where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so that he will be struck down and die".

Several days later Joab sent messengers to David with a report to say that Uriah was dead in a battle near the walls of the city. Joab also gave David a full report of the progress of the battle, in which he said nothing of his previous urging that David should come quickly to take command for the sake of his honour. But Joab had instructed the messengers carrying the report to the king that, if David should become angry on hearing how Joab had stormed the city without due regard for the lives of the soldiers, they should say: "Uriah the Hittite is dead". David would understand the oblique message Joab had sent with its silent implication that David need no longer be "honoured" with leading the capture of Rabbah and having the city named after him. The price for David's sin was already starting to be paid.

When the messengers completed their report David said to them:

"Say to Joab: 'Don't let this upset you. The sword devours one as well as the other. Press the attack against the city, and destroy it. Say this to encourage Joab'".

With Uriah dead, David now prepared himself to face the consequences in limiting the damage of his passion for Bathsheba. Whatever rumours might surface in the palace, and whatever speculations there might be amongst his commanders and advisers and families of the people, he was going to marry Bathsheba. It was not only a matter of preserving her reputation – an ambiguous action in the circumstances but was also something he desired passionately. In all his circumstances David was confronted with the unassailable fact that he had not consulted God, nor the ephod, nor his advisers; and he had stubbornly pushed ahead with a relationship which, in

its early stages at least, involved commitment to sexual indulgence whatever gloss he put it on it later continued in adultery, and ended in murder. Jehovah would not, could not, ignore such a situation, and divine judgment lay ahead for both of them. That was as certain as tonight's moon and tomorrow's sunrise.

When Bathsheba's period of formal mourning for her dead husband was ended David sent for her and, against the advice of his friends and counsellors, he added her officially to his wives. In all the national celebrations following on the capture and destruction of Rabbah, with its considerable plunder, the royal marriage made very little impact among the people.

It was over a year from the time he had first set eyes on Bathsheba, and her child by David was almost a year old. It was a sickly child, and Bathsheba had a difficult delivery. David, again racked by guilt, in the child's chronically weak state suspected the hand of God. But there was no-one with whom he could share his soul agony. His sin, and desire for mercy and forgiveness from God was beyond the comprehension of his closest friends, and even Bathsheba could not understand how he felt before God. It was not his own life he feared how could he when he was the chosen king of Israel for God's destined purpose? but for the lives of Bathsheba and the child. He had never agonized for any of his wives, or his children by them, as he now prayed for Bathsheba and her child—except in the guilt-wracked instance of the adult Absalom. Their continuing to live, it seemed to him, was the only sign of possible divine acceptance of him and them. In their death lay his rejection by God.

In his time of isolation in mental and spiritual torment David was visited by Nathan, who demanded to see him urgently on a matter of justice. When they had exchanged greetings David asked about the matter that needed his quick decision.

Nathan replied: "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, but the poor man had nothing but one little ewe lamb that he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup, and even slept in his arms. It

was like a daughter to him. One day a traveller came to the rich man. Instead of taking one of his own sheep or cattle to prepare a meal for the traveller, he took the one ewe lamb that belonged to the poor man, and used it for a meal for the traveller".

As David listened to Nathan's account he became very angry, and he declared firmly: "As surely as the Lord lives, the man who did this deserves to die! He must pay for that lamb four times over, because he did such a thing and had no pity".

Nathan looked directly at David, his gaze sombre. "You are the man", he accused the startled king in words from God. "Now, therefore, the sword shall never depart from your own house, because you despised me, and took the wife of Uriah to be your own".

David bowed his head before Nathan's scathing rebuke. "I have sinned against the Lord", he admitted quietly. The words of Nathan were just, and not unexpected; but hearing them made him realize anew how heinous an offence he had committed in the eyes of Israel and of God.

"The Lord has taken away your sin", Nathan continued to the chastened king. "You are not going to die. But because by doing this you have made the enemies of the Lord show utter contempt, the son born to you will die".

David dropped to his knees before Nathan, and pled with him on behalf of the child, but Nathan was unmoved. The decision was not his to alter, and he was not prepared to intercede with God. David should be grateful that Jehovah had spared him the judgment that his actions deserved. Why the child had to die, and David and Bathsheba to live, was hidden from him in the mind of God. The child's sickness worsened immediately, and David was torn between his own guilt, Bathsheba's suffering, and his knowledge of Nathan's words from God.

But all David's entreaties and prayers to God on behalf of his child by Bathsheba were of no avail. He fasted, he wept, and spent all nights in prayer. His council of advisers became concerned for his health, and they tried to persuade him to eat some food at least, but he refused. When the child eventually died a few days later they were afraid to tell him. If he had been inconsolable during the child's

sickness, they wondered, was he not likely to be worse when he heard of its death?

David, however, guessed what had happened from their expressions, and he asked them outright if the child was dead, and they told him the truth. To their surprise David rose from his penitential abasement, went into his chambers, washed and anointed himself, and dressed normally again. Then he led the way to the tent where the Ark of the Covenant was kept, and spent some time there in silent communion with God.

When David returned to the palace he called for food to be served. As his counsellors saw that he was once more at peace with himself and God, they ventured to ask him wonderingly: "Why are you acting in this way? While the child was alive, you fasted and wept; but now that the child is dead, you get up and eat!"

David smiled sadly. "While the child was alive I fasted and wept. I thought: 'Who knows? The Lord may be gracious to me, and let the child live'. And I owed it to the child and its mother to intercede with God. But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I will go to him, but he will not return to me".

For the first time in his hectic life David took time to be with a wife, Bathsheba—no doubt to the great jealousy of his other wives, and their children and in the passing of time she had another son. David, now conscious that this child was given with the approval of God in such extraordinary circumstances must even be the appointed heir gave him the name Solomon. He and Bathsheba agreed that he should be committed to the care of Nathan, the prophet, who had been God's voice of rebuke to David. Nathan, on instructions from God, named him Jedidiah, meaning "Beloved of Jehovah".

The people of Israel continued to love David. They had a king, a leader, flawed like themselves. One who not only sinned, but who could acknowledge his sin without hypocrisy. He had brought them material wealth beyond their dreams; and he had given them spiritual riches such as they had never known. He had taught them to make victorious warfare; and bestowed upon them the benefits of peace. If there was injustice anywhere they had direct access to

him, or one of his accountable and incorruptible officials, with effective retribution.

It was only in his own family that he was hated. The marriage with Bathsheba, the birth of Solomon, and his preference for them above his other wives and children, intensified the jealousies and resentments that were already there. David's neglect of his duties as husband and father in the past were now producing the deadly family circumstances which had done so much damage to Eli, Samuel and Israel. The sins of the father were being visited on the children.

David's marriages of convenience were modelled on the customs of other kings in the region, as were the related practices of keeping the wives and concubines in the harem. The harem of women and eunuchs in the isolation and jealousies was dominated by sensuality and vanity, and riddled with quarrelling and conspiracies, as each sought the preference of the king for herself and her children. The children themselves, infected with the atmosphere of scented and sensual indulgence and profligacy, became arrogant and intolerant of others including the king. For, in the existing circumstances created by his own self-indulgent domestic actions, David only further spoiled them during the short spells he was with them.

Amnon, as the eldest son of David's first wife, Ahinoam of Jezreel, claimed precedence over the others by right of primogeniture. This had always been Hebrew custom, but on many occasions it had been ignored or set aside by special circumstances as in the case of Esau and Jacob, Joseph and Reuben, Ephraim and Manasseh, and even Moses and Aaron. David himself had been chosen by God and Samuel before his older brothers. The situation was further complicated, as far as the succession to the throne of Israel was concerned among the quarrelling aspirants, for the eldest among them had been born while David was in Hebron and before he was king of Israel. Chileab, who had been born to Abigail of Caleb, had died.

As David was absorbed with his new-found love for Bathsheba and Solomon, a situation was building up in the palace that would bring him more sorrow and horror than the incident of Uriah and

was already implied in Nathan's divine judgment on him. David's next eldest living son, Amnon was an effete degenerate, who was only exceeded in calculated and practiced evil by his cousin, Jonadab, a cunning and wanton profligate. They were notorious in the palace and the city for their perverse indulgences. David's wife, Maccah's, daughter, Tamar, was a beautiful young woman, and Amnon became infatuated with his half-sister and laid plans to debauch her. Eventually he was successful, but threw her out on the street and, when Absalom heard about it, he vowed to kill Amnon.

He would gladly have gone and killed him right away for the shame he had brought on his sister and family, but Absalom probably wanted it to be such that it would effectively remove Amnon from the succession to the throne of David, leaving him, Absalom, unquestionably the next in line. But, whatever the punishment, he wanted it to be left to him alone to exploit for his own advantage. He suspected the king, his father, would not want to take too public a stance because of his difficult relationships in the family, and because of his own very recent and public sins with Bathsheba and Uriah. So Absalom escorted Tamar to his own home, and he kept her there, earning the approval of both his doting mother and relieved David.

When the scandal had subsided Absalom made plans to get rid of Amnon during a family party he arranged without Amnon having a suspicion. When Amnon was drunk Absalom's friends killed him during the celebration and then all of them scattered. The reports of Amnon's murder became exaggerated in the panic until all sorts of reports reached Jerusalem by the rapidly fleeing guests; especially a rumour that Absalom had murdered all the king's sons, and not one had escaped with his life.

When David heard what had happened he was enraged that such a thing should happen in his own household. This sort of behaviour was what had curtailed the usefulness of Eli and Samuel in Israel. But he found himself in an insoluble quandary; or, rather, faced with a decision that he was reluctant to take in his current domestic circumstances. The Law of Moses was absolutely clear on the matter: the penalty for what Amnon had done, stating explicitly:

"Do not have sexual relations with your sister, either your father's daughter, or your mother's daughter, whether she was born in the same house or elsewhere. Anyone who does any of these detestable things such persons must be cut off from their people . . ."

But the same Law had been equally categorical with regard to adultery, such as David's with Bathsheba, and with his actions in regard to complicity in Uriah's murder, and he had escaped the penalty. But, David probably reasoned, how could he invoke the full rigour of Moses' Law against his own son considering his own guilt? Also, he had preferred Amnon, as his first-born still living, above all the others except for the youngest, Solomon, of course and David had always found it difficult to rebuke or discipline any of them.

Solomon came into a different category. He, like David himself, was preferred by God above the others. Solomon, David was convinced, was God's choice as his true heir, whatever he himself might feel for his first-born or any of the others. He suspected that God, as well as the people of Israel, did not approve of the other sons in the family. So he delayed in taking any decision regarding Amnon's murder, although he was conscious of the irreparable damage this unexplained neglect might do to his reputation.

Already reports were coming in that Absalom was fleeing to take refuge with his maternal grandfather, Talmai of Geshur. Talmai was only a tributary king of a small part of David's empire, and he could not have helped Absalom, or withheld him from David, had he demanded it. But David, as hesitant in family relationships as he was confident in political or military strategies, chose not to demand Absalom's return, but to pronounce a sentence of banishment for an indefinite period.

This weak decision, again ignoring the Law of Moses, fooled nobody in Israel, least of all David's friends and close companions. David had used the casuistical contention that the Law stated "cut off" as punishment, and that this could mean expulsion, exile, but not necessarily death for Absalom. It had been accepted for a long time among David's friends that he was unwilling or unable, for possibly many complex reasons, to discipline the members of his extensive family. Many of them even sympathized with the first

wives and children of David, whose reasonable claims to inherit, it seemed to them, were being usurped by the new wife, Bathsheba, and her late-born son, Solomon.

Absalom was three years in Geshur until he became tired of a tedious and forgotten exile in the limitations of a small desert kingdom. He was now almost twenty-five years of age, and David was almost sixty. He had kept in touch with Joab through friends, and Joab kept David informed of his health. Then Absalom asked Joab outright to arrange for his return to Jerusalem, so, without saying anything to David, Joab took it on himself to create the restoration of Absalom's return by sending a message to a woman well-known for her "wise sayings", who lived in Tekoah, in the hill country of Judah ten miles to the south of Jerusalem, and brought her to see him.

"Pretend you are in mourning", he instructed her, when she had agreed to Joab's proposal and payment. "Dress in mourning clothes, and don't use any embellishment of face or hair. Act like a woman who has spent many days in grieving for the dead. Then go to the king and speak these words to him".

The "wise woman of Tekoah", clad in widow's mourning, sought a private audience with David, and when she came before him she threw herself on her face in front of him, crying for help. David listened sympathetically to her supposed problem, and proposed a solution. He was surprised to see that the woman was still not satisfied, as she pressed him further: "Let your servant speak a word to my lord the king", she pleaded.

"Speak", he said curtly, irritated now by her importuning.

The woman from Tekoah saw that she was now on very dangerous ground with the king, and she hurried to give him the crux of Joab's schooled message.

"Why have you devised a thing like this against the people of God?" she blurted, to the astonishment and anger of David. She pressed on, committed to delivering the whole of Joab's prepared message.

"When the king says this, does he not convict himself, for the king has not brought back his banished son? Like water spilled on the

ground, which cannot be recovered, so we must die. But God does not take away life: instead he devises ways so that a banished person may not be estranged from Him".

Only the memory of his recent experience with Nathan restrained David's wrath at this woman's extraordinary impertinence in addressing him as she did, as Joab had anticipated.

David frowned, but signalled to her to proceed. In a sense he was hemmed in by his own blurring of the meaning of "cut off"; if it did not mean death, just what did it mean?

The woman was obviously scared, and, unlike Nathan, was not claiming divine authority for her words, but was expressing an opinion of someone else who had briefed her - Joab. David gazed at the woman intently, then said slowly and significantly, "Is not the hand of Joab with you in all this?"

The woman was silent. Joab had not prepared her for this, and David's direct question demanded an unequivocal answer. She decided to ease her own situation through flattery:

"As surely as you live, my lord the king, no one can turn to the left or to the right from anything my lord the king says. Yes, it was your servant, Joab, who instructed me to do this, and who put all the words into the mouth of your servant. Your servant Joab did this to change the present situation. My lord has wisdom like that of an angel of God - he knows everything that happens in the land".

David dismissed the woman, after assuring her that she would not be punished for her deception and impertinence. Then he sent for Joab. The strained relations that had existed between them since David's denunciation of Abner's murder had been eased over the years of close association in the battles they had been fighting together, helped by Joab's silent compliance in the removal of Uriah. When he came before David and was challenged regarding the part he played in sending the woman of Tekoah to David Joab was unrepentant, although he apologized for the necessity of the deception. It was necessary, he protested, in order to break the chain of circumstances around the father and son.

David shook his head negatively, but was secretly relieved that he was free from responsibility in bringing back Absalom to Jerusalem.

"Very well", he agreed eventually, "I will do it. Go, bring back the young man, Absalom". But David added conditions to his approval. Absalom could return to Jerusalem, but not to the palace. He was forbidden permission to visit there, and would not be received nor visited by David at any time.

Absalom at first was pleased with the royal pardon, but as time passed and his murder of Amnon and his father's official displeasure kept him from public view and acceptability, his arrogant nature reasserted itself and he chafed at the discipline. He had been the darling of the royal court before, with his strikingly handsome appearance, his intelligence and articulate charm, and to be socially ostracized in Jerusalem was worse than being exiled in Geshur.

Absalom had been two years in Jerusalem when he decided that he must take some further action if he was ever to recover status and influence. He was almost thirty years of age, he had three sons and a daughter named after his beautiful and tragic sister, Tamar and if he wished to further his claims to the throne of David it would have to be done soon. Bathsheba had had the previous five years to consolidate her royal position with three more children, and without opposition to the claims of Solomon, her ten-year old son. All that Absalom had to show for years of effort was a reputation for charm, good looks and luxuriant hair!

So once again Absalom sent word to Joab requesting him to make representation to David on his behalf. Joab ignored the message. He had been fortunate on the previous occasion to get away with only a reprimand from David, and he had no intention of jeopardizing his own career just to please the spoiled and arrogant Absalom. But Absalom sent a second, more urgent, message to him asking Joab to visit him, and again he ignored it. Then, incredibly, Absalom set one of Joab's fields on fire and had his servants tell Joab's that he had done it. Joab knew if he tried to ignore the arrogant upstart that something worse would happen, so he went to see him.

Absalom just smiled and shrugged his shoulders and said insolently:

"I sent word to you to ask you to go to the king and enquire from

him why he brought me from Geshur, and to let him know that it would be better for me to be still there. What I want is acceptance at the palace, and to see his face. If I am guilty of anything let him have me put to death!"

Joab was furious at Absalom's attitude and words, but he had already involved himself with him and so he swallowed his anger and said only he would see what he could do. When he spoke with David and told him frankly what Absalom had said, he was quite prepared to have David send the arrogant youth back to Geshur, but was not surprised when David made yet more excuses for him and gave him access to the palace and favour of the king.

Joab was not surprised by reports of the public posturing of the restored Absalom. Instead of riding the ass or mule of royal custom, Absalom chose to go around with prancing horses and a fifty-man escort riding ahead of him. He was up at dawn to be at the city gate in order to meet with the people coming into Jerusalem to market or to make their complaints known to the king or city elders. At these meetings Absalom was overtly undermining the authority and reputation of his father. He would ask the complainant's name and where he came from; and, on being told, Absalom would say subversively, "Your claims are valid and proper, but the king has no representative to hear or speak for you. If I were appointed judge in Israel then I would see to it that you, and all others like you, received justice".

When anyone responded to Absalom's overtures he would embrace the complainant with enthusiasm. Before long, with these tactics, he had gained a considerable following in all the Tribes of Israel. He followed this up over the next three or four years with visits to the Tribal regions, and by insinuating that he was king designate he increased his personal support throughout the land at the expense of his father.

In four years from his return to Jerusalem Absalom assiduously prepared the ground for his personal revolt against his father's rule. He now had a large following from among the young and restless who had never known David's early battles, and to whom David was only an aging legend. They were dazzled by Absalom's

contrived magnificence, and by his hints of benefits to come when he was king. David, absorbed with the daily routines of government and his preparations for the Temple to be built, only gave them spiritual songs of moral admonition.

David had now reigned over Israel for thirty years, and the pressures were taking their toll. The tireless vigour of his youth, the light-hearted enthusiasm and daring spirit of adventure, his songs of love and beauty and aspiration, which had so won over the people's affection, had been replaced by the caution of maturity, by the slow-moving wisdom of reflection and anticipation, by the demands of building for posterity. Above all, his responsibility to his young son, Solomon, was greatest, because, according to the words of God, as a "king of peace" and not a "king of war" like David, he had to be taught to rule and build for God in all the things that David had been unable or had failed to do and be.

In these circumstances David was encouraged when one day Absalom came to him with a request to be excused from his duties in Jerusalem for a time. Absalom went on to explain that, while he was in Geshur, he had made a vow to Jehovah: "If the Lord takes me back to Jerusalem, I will worship the Lord in Hebron." There was nothing surprising in the proposal to David, for Hebron was Absalom's birthplace. Nor was it suspicious to him that two hundred of Absalom's friends known to David should accompany him to participate in the sacrificial vow, since this, too, was customary although rarely on Absalom's typically grandiloquent scale.

Soon afterwards a messenger brought the dramatic news of Absalom's public declaration from Hebron that he had called for a nationwide rebellion to a stunned David. He had no time to grieve, however, for as each report came in it showed Absalom's comprehensive support from among the Twelve Tribes. David swiftly called together his council and military commanders, especially those who had been with him in earlier exile, and he was relieved to find that very few of them, if any, had gone over to Absalom.

After the first paralyzing blow at the news of Absalom's

insurrection, which brought David's whole world in ruins about him at one stroke, he quickly recovered. Pushing away all thoughts of recrimination or analysis, he adjusted his thinking to the crisis demands of the moment and he urged his counsellors, with a bitter certainty,

"We must agree or none of us will escape from Absalom. We must all leave immediately, or he will overtake us here and put the city to the sword".

David's natural instincts as an experienced guerrilla commander were still sound, despite his years as king, statesman and administrator. After fleeing from Jerusalem with his family and loyal followers he had instinctively selected the eastern districts of Jordan, beyond the borders of the Twelve Tribes, as a temporary refuge for his small company. The fortress-city of Mahanaim, used as a refuge by Ishbosheth and Abner after the death of Saul and Jonathan, was located in East Jordan, and the inhabitants were well-disposed towards David who had taken no reprisals against them for harbouring Ishbosheth and Abner. The approach to Mahanaim lay between the small rivers, Jabbok and Yarmuk. The steep sides of the valley and ridges were covered by forests with pleasant glades, and the surrounding fertile fields were well-cultivated by the farmers. The area was rich in fragrant herbs which were highly valued as medicines; and this was another advantage for David, because the increased wealth of the people was largely due to the commercial arrangements with the Phoenicians which had been introduced by him, and they had carried the local produce across the world. On the far side of Mahanaim lay the barren deserts and mountains of Moab and Ammon, so strategically useful to David. Food for his family and troops, and space for his battle-hardened Gibborim, were the conditions in which he had survived and triumphed in the past.

Meanwhile Absalom had been proclaimed king in Jerusalem by his supporters, and had used his authority to call on all the Tribes of Israel to battle on his behalf against the rejected David. Over his large untrained army, bereft of its best commanders and captains, he appointed Joab's cousin, Amasa, an Ishmaelite relative, whose mother was Abigail, Joab's aunt. Amasa was a skilled commander,

and he proceeded to give some form to his huge unwieldy army, recruited from suborned deserters.

After two or three months the impatient Absalom ordered Amasa to attack David at Mahanaim, placing himself ridiculously in an ostentatious position at the head of the troops on a flamboyantly caparisoned white mule; a gold circlet crowning his long, flowing hair, of which he was inordinately proud. It was obvious he imagined himself leading a romantic concept of military conflict and not the reality of a bloody carnage.

But David was not to be drawn into a set-piece battle. While Absalom's troops were still several miles to the south of Mahanaim, at a place known as the Forest of Ephraim, a thickly wooded area, David's men were already moving swiftly to meet them. David had appointed a third of his available troops under Joab, a third under Abishai, and a third under the loyal Gittite mercenary, Ittai. Each of these commanders was capable of winning a war on his own, out of experience gained with David in hundreds of battles. David said would go out as before to lead them, but his counsellors argued with him against this. Their reasons, in addition to a genuine concern for his safety and importance, included their suspicions that his military decisions might be compromised when confronted with Absalom on the battle field. As the troops marched through the gates of Mahanaim on their way to the spot picked by the commanders to confront Absalom near the Forest of Ephraim, David spoke his fears to the top commanders standing beside him: "Be gentle with the young man, Absalom, for my sake", he pleaded. They were hard, ruthless men, feared from Mesopotamia to Egypt for their personal and fighting qualities, but their hearts were with the despairing David in his tragic dilemma.

The place chosen by David and his commanders at which they would engage the army of Absalom was where the mountain forests were thickest. Absalom was undoubtedly anticipating a siege of the walled city of Mahanaim, with set-piece battles outside and, hopefully, inside the city, and had brought with him chariots, and cavalry and war engines. David had none of these to use, only his foot-soldiers under the command of the Gibborim, dressed and

prepared as they had been in the days of their legendary youth when they had struck with such deadly effect at the mighty armies of their enemies.

Absalom never had a chance. With the cream of his army strung out along the narrow forested valley, they were suddenly hit by an unending stream of deadly arrows coming from unseen archers hidden in the impenetrable trees. As men and horses were mown down, and others panicked in the bloody chaos, David's men, with their distinctive "Star of David" symbol prominently displayed, were among them in disciplined killing wedges and squares, cutting and thrusting with murderously practiced ease at the most vulnerable sections of the line of Absalom's troops. It was not battle; it was slaughter. Wounded and dying men and horses, moaning and screaming, lay waist-high along the narrow trails as they fell on those already fallen. The others, leaderless, fled into the security of the forest, to die later from wild animals and hunger.

Absalom drove his heels into his mule's sides and, shouting with berserk panic, he struggled through his scattering royal guards into the safe blackness of the forest. Riding madly along the trail, dodging fallen bodies and whipping branches, he suddenly rode into a group of troops. Before they could recover from their surprise at his unexpected appearance he whirled his mule round and was off again among the trees. But off the trail the trees were more dense and, even as David's following troops watched, Absalom's streaming hair caught on an overhanging branch and he was swept off his mule, kicking feet dangling in space, and his hands clutching desperately at the tangled hair and branches.

One of the soldiers came quickly to inform Joab of what had happened, and when he had finished his report Joab said to him angrily, "Why didn't you strike him to the ground right there? Then I would have given you four ounces of silver and a warrior's belt of honour".

The soldier protested: "Even if twenty five pounds of silver were weighed into my hands I would not lift up my hand against the king's son. In our hearing the king commanded you and Abishai and Ittai, 'Protect the young man Absalom for my sake'".

Joab glared at the outspoken soldier who could not be punished, because he had just spoken the truth, and all who heard him knew it. But without any hesitation Joab grabbed three short javelins from a soldier near him and, without speaking a word, rode to the forest where Absalom still swung on the tree, thrust the three javelins into his body then commanded the ten watching soldiers to do likewise. He knew that no-one would strike down Absalom unless he did it first, and he was determined that it would be a combined action to deflect the expected criticism from the king.

With Absalom dead Joab called for the trumpets to sound victory and the end of the fighting. Then he ordered the soldiers to bury Absalom's body in a nearby hole, and piled stones on top of it. When David or any in Israel heard of what had happened, they would know that this was the punishment ordained by God for what Absalom had done. They had the authority of Moses' Law for it:

"If a man has a stubborn or rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother, and will not listen when they discipline him, his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. Then they shall say to the elders, 'This son of our is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a profligate and drunkard'. Then all the men of the town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid".

That was the strict Law that David should have observed from the beginning. In everything except his relations with his wives and children David had kept the Law, so he would know when he heard of the action what it meant. With the ending of the battle, and the burial of Absalom, Ahimaaz the son of Zadok the high priest, asked Joab for permission to carry the news to David. Joab refused, not certain how David would react to a family friend bringing him the news, but he called on a Cushite mercenary to take the report and said Ahimaaz could give details to David later.

"Is the young man Absalom safe?" David asked him quietly.

The Cushite replied, "May the enemies of my lord the king and all who rise up against him be like that young man".

The king went white, and almost fell. Weeping, he was helped

into a room over the gateway, calling out in agony as he went: "O my son, Absalom! My son, my son, Absalom! If only I had died instead of you. O Absalom, my son, my son!" Even when he was escorted by his officials through the streets back to his family, David continued mourning for his dead son; and the sounds of rejoicing for the spectacular victory died away before the inconsolable sorrow of the grieving king.

When word was brought to Joab that the returning soldiers were entering the city of Mahanaim like a defeated army in deference to the sorrowing king he became very angry. He was a disciplined and loyal soldier, an admirer of David from his youth, but while he was a sceptically detached realist he thought David too often was too colourful romantic. He had sympathized with David and even in killing Absalom against the king's wishes he was looking after the king's interests but this was not just a personal private danger from which David had been delivered; it had been a national catastrophe which the king himself had been partly at fault for precipitating.

He strode into the king's presence without ceremony, and addressed David respectfully but reprovngly in scarcely repressed anger.

"Today, you have humiliated all your men, who have just saved your life, and the lives of your sons and daughters, and the lives of your wives and concubines. You love those who hate you, and hate those who love you. You have made it clear today that the commanders and their men mean nothing to you. I can see that you would be pleased if Absalom were alive today, and all the loyal men were dead".

Joab steeled himself to his thankless task as the king lifted his grief-stricken face to listen in astonishment and mounting anger at Joab's raging tirade. But Joab also saw, to his great relief, that the shock of his words was getting home to David, and his mind was reaching to grasp what was being said by Joab. This was the David loved and admired by all, rising above all circumstances; not the weeping and maudlin sentimentalist on the couch. Joab concluded harshly:

"Now go out and encourage your men. I swear by the Lord that

if you don't go out, not a man will be left to you by nightfall This will be worse for you than all the calamities that have come upon you from your youth till now".

Joab's anger died as rapidly as it had arisen. He had not cared what happened to himself. He had risked everything for the sake of David and his men. His anger and passion had exhausted him now into numbness.

David stood up, shocked out of his grief and self-absorption by Joab's words and passion and he touched his cousin's shoulder, smiling bleakly in acknowledgement of his actions and words, and they went out together into the streets of the city. David went to the gate and took his seat among the city elders; and when his men saw him there dispensing justice as usual they came to him to express their sincere regrets over Absalom, and to offer him congratulations over the victory. David thanked them with the sincerity he felt, and which in the past had made the men so willing to die for him.

Shortly afterwards David sent for Joab and informed him that he was replacing him as commander-in-chief. He was going to rebuild Israel from the ashes of his family disaster and while Joab was a brilliant commander, a relative and friend, he had publicly disobeyed God's anointed king in the matter of Absalom. The army, down to the last soldier, knew that he had knowingly and deliberately disobeyed David's command by deliberately killing the defenceless Absalom and Abner. Joab was not fit for the highest command in God's army.

David acknowledged the rebuke of his own conscience that he, too, was not fit to lead the nation. But he had no alternative. He was anointed by God to do it. Failures had to be repented, not excused. Not to fulfil his divine destiny would be the worst disobedience, however inadequate he felt now. He had not asked to be king, had not wanted to be king; he wished above all to be a servant of God. He had no desire to be remembered as a king great or successful or failed. He only wished to be remembered, if at all, as an ordinary servant of Jehovah trying to follow and understand an extraordinary God.

But he was destined to be king over the chosen people of God for

reasons that lay in the future, and that were hidden from him in the present. As a king he had to heal the wounds of the nation he was responsible for causing. That was why he was replacing Joab with Amasa. Israel had to learn, as David himself was having to learn, that they only had one king, one leader, now and for eternity Jehovah Himself. They had no identity or destiny outside Him.

With the rebellion of Absalom eliminated the people of Israel had peace at last. Fortunately, the uprising had been of short duration, and although it had drawn in all the Tribes in terms of rivalry of support this had been mostly confined to the recruitment of troops for the rival armies. The basic administrative structure of the nation initiated by David had not been adversely affected, so recovery from the military consequences of the rebellions was rapid. Neighbouring nations had not had the time to take advantage of Israel's internal disruptions, for by the time they heard the news of what was happening the nation had been brought back under control, and David was once more securely established on the throne. But they, as well as David, now knew that a precedent had been set in the new nation, in which an ambitious member of David's own household could attempt what Absalom had almost been successful in doing. David was acutely aware that it would be only a matter of time before his other sons once more would be squabbling over who was to succeed him.

He was now sixty-five years of age, and although in good health he knew his great physical and mental powers were beginning to fail. He knew that Solomon was God's choice for the succession, but there had been no further indication from God regarding this other than David's own deepening conviction. He and Bathsheba had brought up their eldest son with this in view, and David had taken great care personally to prepare him for the responsibilities of kingship over Israel, God's chosen people. The close family life he had not had with his other marriages of convenience had been jealously cultivated and cherished by Bathsheba and himself with Solomon, providing him with a stable environment in which to learn and apply the commands and precepts of God.

The Promised Land was now occupied by the people of God, and

at peace, up to and even beyond the boundaries outlined by God. The people were enterprising and industrious in agriculture, livestock, metal-working and building; life and property were safe, justice for all was practiced. There was respect and admiration from the surrounding nations; and Israel was now the most powerful monarchy in Western Asia, and the only true democratic theocracy in the world. He reigned in the city of God, Jerusalem, a growing metropolis of fame and wealth and splendour, the centre of civil and religious power with the approval of God, recognized by all the Tribes of Israel, and her neighbours. And already, through the great Phoenician sea-port of his ally, the king of Tyre, and the other growing sea-ports of Israel, he not only imported and exported but, with his own increasing number of ships, he was beginning to influence the most distant nations of the world with the important example of Israel. The whole world was ready for Solomon, his son, God's appointed king, to rule in God-ordained peace and prosperity, based on obedience to God's divinely revealed Law.

As the costs of the preparations for the Temple multiplied David decided that he would take a census of the people of Israel in order to find out just how many taxable families and individuals there were in the land. The only tax for them so far had been for the religious purposes of atonement money, for the support of the Levites, and for the Tabernacle services. But when he suggested this to his advisers he was strenuously opposed – mostly by Joab, whose soldiers were to be responsible. Joab's objection was based on the clear command of God to Moses.

"May the Lord multiply the king's troops a hundred times over. Are they not all my lord's subjects? Why does my lord want to do this? Why should he bring guilt on Israel"?

The numbering of the people in itself was not sinful, David argued. Had not Moses done so on at least two occasions? And had not Joshua numbered his men for war in Canaan? The words of Moses he said were:

"When you take a census of the people of Israel to count them, each one must pay a ransom for his life at the time he is counted. Then no plague will come on them when you number them"

He, David, was only suggesting numbering them, and was not demanding a ransom for each life. What he had in mind was something different; something like a state tax to help pay for the Temple. Other nations did it in order to raise money.

Joab said no more, but in his task he limited the census to the fighting men only, as had Moses and Joshua. So strongly did Joab feel about it that, without mentioning it to David, he also left out the numbering of the priestly Tribe of Levi.

Joab still had not numbered the Tribe of Benjamin when disaster struck the nation. He had begun the census on the east of Jordan, and then proceeded northward to Gilead through Dan, westward to Tyre and Sidon, and then through Naphtali, Zebulun and Issachar, to the south at Beersheba, taking ten months to do it. The Tribe of Levi was scattered across Israel, and the Tribe of Benjamin was still viewed with considerable resentment because of the heinous crime they had committed against the Levite priest. Without them, however, Joab now knew that there were nine hundred thousand fighting men in the other Tribes of Israel, with four hundred thousand fighting men in Judah alone. Surely that should satisfy David.

But before he had reported to David he had received word from him to stop the census immediately, and to return to Jerusalem. The prophets had been opposed to the census from the first, and then David's old friend, Gad the Seer, had been sent by God to denounce David's action and to express the divine displeasure, giving David an ultimatum from God as punishment for disobedience:

"This is what the Lord says: 'I am giving you three options. Choose one of them for me to carry out against you: three years of famine; three months of being defeated by your foes, with the sword of your enemy slaughtering you; or three days of the plague, at the hand of the destroying angel of the Lord'. Choose, and consider which answer I take back to God who sent me".

David, shocked into desolation by the implacable demands of a Jehovah angered by his neglect or disobedience, had replied through Gad, the Seer: "I have been very foolish and sinned greatly, and now I am in great distress. But let me fall into the hand of Jehovah, for

His mercies are great, and not into the hand of men". Unbridled war, he felt, would damage irreparably the nation so painstakingly built, and so recently disunited by Absalom's rebellion; and famine would afflict others but not himself. So he chose the three-day plague, and the mercy of God, as the least damaging.

David watched helplessly, and with mounting horror, as the plague swept the land, creeping ever closer to Jerusalem as the third day approached, with tens of thousands dying. He and his advisers never left the roof of the palace as he watched the thick dark smoke and red glow in the skies from the thousands of fires burning plague-ridden houses and bodies. He was tormented most of all by the thoughtless manner in which, after all the years spent in serving God, he could be so careless in not observing His commands. How could he not remember that the God who could make Israel numerous could destroy them at a stroke? How could he be so unaware that a God who exacted punishment by death for mixing the wrong ingredients in the sacred incense would be likely to ignore the flouting of a command not to number the people without proper safeguards? And, finally, why must it be the nation which was punished and not himself, the sole perpetrator?

And the answer confronted him: because God held the nation responsible for not stopping the king they had chosen and anointed as being from God. They, as much as David, were responsible to God for each individual decision, and especially for those decisions collectively affecting the nation. If their king disobeyed God, they were held accountable for not dealing with him. Joab was also guilty in that he should not just have expressed disapproval; he should have refused to obey the king. The prophets should not just have protested; they should have called on the people to refuse to be numbered. David should have been isolated in his disobedience. Now all were guilty. Jehovah was that kind of God of His chosen people.

As all Jerusalem agonized over the devastating catastrophe, in the clouds overhead there appeared the form of an angel of God with a drawn sword in his hand. The vision drew closer to the doomed city, then the feet of the avenging angel touched the earth a short

distance from the palace, on the crown of Mount Moriah. David and his counsellors fell on their faces at this divine vision and David raised his voice to address God in passionate pleading on behalf of his people:

"Was it not I who ordered the fighting men to be counted? I am the one who sinned and did wrong. These are but sheep. What have they done? O Lord my God, let your hand fall upon me and my family, but do not let this plague remain on your people".

God accepted David's prayer. The avenging angel was ordered to cease punishment, and Gad the Seer was instructed to inform David that the spot where the angel stopped on Mount Moriah was to be the place where the Temple, the House of God, was to be built by Solomon. David noted that it was on the property owned by Araunah, the king of the Jebusites, the former ruler of Jerusalem, whom David had spared and allowed to remain outside the city, on Mount Moriah. Araunah had repaid David's generous gesture by learning the Hebrew religion and becoming a friend of David.

David told Araunah what had happened, and the cause of the angel's appearance, and went on to explain about the Temple, and God's command that it should be built where the angel stopped God's punishment the threshing-floor of Araunah. Araunah's land on Mount Moriah occupied the legendary site where the father of the nation of Israel, Abraham, was said to have been asked by God to offer up his only son, Isaac, as a sacrifice to God; only being stopped at the last minute on that occasion by an angel because of God's pleasure in his great obedience. The "Mount" was actually only a raised promontory, or rocky high plateau, with steeply sloping sides. It was the centre of three hills on which Jerusalem was built: on the south was Mount Zion, where David had his palace; on the north-west, Mount Acra; and on the east, Mount Moriah. It was the most prominent of the three hills, a commanding location outside the walls of the city, overlooking the Mount of Olives and the Valley of Jehoshophat. David asked Araunah:

"Let me have the site of your threshing-floor so that I can build an altar to the Lord, that the plague on the people may be stopped. Sell it to me at the full price".

Araunah inclined his head in agreement with David's request and added:

"Let my lord the king take whatever pleases him and offer it up to God. Here are oxen for the burnt-offering, and here are threshing-sledges and ox-yokes for the wood, and wheat for the grain-offering. I will give all as a king to my lord the king. May Jehovah your God bless you".

But David courteously refused the generous offer. "No", he said firmly, "I insist on paying the full price. I will not take of what is yours, or sacrifice a burnt-offering that costs me nothing".

They agreed on a price of a pound and half of silver for the threshing-floor for the altar and the oxen; and fifteen pounds of gold in weight for the whole site on top of the of the mountain, for the Temple. To consecrate it, David built a temporary altar of earth, and offered burnt-offerings and peace-offerings on it. These were consumed miraculously by fire sent by God from heaven as a sign of His approval, and David finally went to his palace in peace that God's anger was appeased. But an estimated toll of deaths by the plague was 75,000 people, and it seemed to age David further.

With the site of the Temple now clearly chosen by God, David knew that his life was drawing to a close. He was not to build the Temple, God had said, but his son would build it, and he, David, was becoming increasingly aware of his advancing age and deteriorating health. It was evident to all of the advisers, too, who were also concerned about the succession. Solomon was now about twenty years of age, and if his was to be a reign of peace as God had indicated then his lack of military skills and battle experience was no handicap. He was already exceptionally intelligent, with balanced judgment and pleasant disposition. With Bathsheba and David's counsellors to advise him he would make a good king of Israel.

David's decision regarding Solomon was communicated quickly to the other members of his family, and Adonijah, the fourth and now eldest living son, was angered at being officially by-passed for the succession. It was true that he had anticipated it for some time, and had been quietly seeking to create support for himself, but without being subversive like Absalom. Like Absalom, he had been

spoiled from birth by both his father and mother, and at thirty five years of age his one consuming ambition was to be king of Israel.

Soon after his official announcement of preferred succession David became ill with a mysterious feverish illness, which left him exhausted, chilled and sleepless. Eventually, as his condition worsened, his family, advisers and physicians decided, in accordance with custom in such circumstances, that a young maiden should be employed as companion and nurse, sleeping in his bed at night to warm him, but not having sexual intercourse with him. They found a beautiful young woman, Abigail of Shunem, willing to be his nurse-companion.

During this time of David's declining health Adonijah used the opportunity to step up his campaign for support in an attempt to head off the official public appointment of Solomon as successor to David. When it looked as if David might die of his illness without officially confirming Solomon before the nation it gave Adonijah's activities a degree of legitimacy. The king could nominally announce whoever he wished, but if he did not formally and officially designate a successor approved by all then it was legitimate for his eldest son to claim the succession, if the nation's representatives agreed.

It was at this point Joab was approached by Adonijah to support him in his claim to the succession, and he agreed, also his brother, Abishai. Between them they recruited Abiathar as alternative high priest to Zadok, who had shared the temporary high priesthood with Zadok until David decided the true line of Aaronic succession. Abiathar had been increasingly jealous of Zadok's influence over David, and he now responded to persuasion that David was too ill to make the necessary arrangements for the succession to Solomon, and that Adonijah's appointment would be less contentious for the nation.

Then Adonijah called a special convocation and feast, to which he invited all his known supporters and those who were undecided, at the Stone of Zoheleth "the Fountain of the King's Paradise" near Enrogel in the Valley of Kidron, opposite the Pool of Siloam, to make the public announcement of his succession. But while on their way

to the Stone of Zoheleth they heard that there was a crisis meeting being held at the royal palace with Bathsheba, Nathan the prophet and the royal advisers.

Nathan the prophet had heard of the secret meeting, from which he, Benaiah and Solomon had been conspicuously excluded, and, knowing David's failing mental as well as physical condition, he went to Bathsheba and said to her:

"Have you not heard that Adonijah, the son of Haggith, has become king and David our lord does not know it? Now then, let me advise you how you can save your own life, and the life of your son Solomon. Go into King David and say to him, 'My lord the king, did you not swear to me, your servant, that Solomon your son would be king after you? Why, then, has Adonijah become king?'. While you are still there talking to the king, I will come in and confirm what you have said".

Bathsheba went immediately to the king, hoping with Nathan that the double impact of their appearance and message would be sufficient to jolt him out of his comatose condition. Abishaig, the nurse-companion was with him when she entered his chamber.

"What is it you want?" David asked mildly, noting Bathsheba's anxiety.

Bathsheba, knowing his strength and interest were feeble, speaking quickly and urgently, informed David that Nathan the prophet had brought her news that Adonijah was publicly declaring himself king of Israel. She was still speaking with David when Nathan the prophet was announced as wanting to see the king urgently on an important matter. David signalled to Bathsheba to withdraw for the present, and gave permission for Nathan to be admitted right away.

Nathan greeted the king respectfully, and asked David:

"Have you, my lord the king, declared that Adonijah shall be king after you, and that he will sit on your throne? Today he has gone down and sacrificed great numbers of cattle, fattened calves and sheep. He has invited all the king's sons, the commanders of the army, and Abiathar the priest. Right now they are eating and

drinking with him, saying, 'Long live King Adonijah!'. But me, your servant, and Zadok the priest, and Benaiah of Jehoida, and your servant Solomon, he did not invite. Is this something my lord the king has done without letting his servants know who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?"

Only Nathan could have spoken to David with such bluntness, but he was doing it deliberately to shock David into action. Nathan could see him struggling to emerge out of his weakness to meet this new crisis.

"Call in Bathsheba", David ordered; and, when she had appeared, he said to her: "As surely as Jehovah lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble, I will surely carry out today what I swore to you by Jehovah, God of Israel, that 'Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne in my place'".

Bathsheba bowed low before David then, kneeling, said, "May my lord King David live for ever!". David said with visible effort, "Call Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benaiah son of Jehoida".

Nathan had already anticipated David's response before coming to the palace, and had both Zadok and Benaiah waiting for his summons. When they were all gathered before him David said:

"Take your lord's servants with you and set Solomon my son on my own mule, and take him down to Gihon on the opposite side of the city. There let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anoint him king over Israel. Blow the trumpets, and shout 'Long live King Solomon!'. Then you will go up with him, and he is to come and sit on my throne and reign in my place. I have appointed him ruler over Israel and Judah".

Benaiah said softly, "Amen! May the Lord, the God of my lord the king, so declare it. As Jehovah was with my lord the king, so may he be with Solomon to make his throne even greater than the throne of my lord King David!".

He saluted David, and went out swiftly to summon the royal bodyguard and the Gibborim, while Nathan and Zadok gathered the priests and the prophets to assemble at Gihon. When they arrived there Zadok had brought with him the horn of oil from the Tabernacle; and in the sight of the rapidly gathering inhabitants of

Jerusalem, who were in a ferment by the public clash of royal claimants for the throne, he anointed Solomon king of Israel and Judah.

Then, as David had commanded, they sounded a loud fanfare of trumpets, shouting 'Long live King Solomon!', and formed a long procession to escort the new king back to Jerusalem and the palace. When they reached the palace the leaders escorted Solomon to David's chamber; and there David, too weak to rise from his bed, bowed his head before Solomon in acknowledgement of his abdication of the throne.

Meanwhile, the sound of the trumpets and shouts of acclamation had carried to the royal gardens at Enrogel, where Adonijah and his followers were gathered, and Joab, ears ever attuned for signs of possible trouble, enquired about the cause. Even as he was speaking the son of Abiathar the priest, Jonathan, arrived with the devastating news:

"Our lord, King David, has made Solomon king! The king has sent with him Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah son of Jehoida, and the Gibborim. They have put him on the king's mule, and Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet have anointed him king at Gihon. From there they have gone up to Jerusalem in cheering procession, and the city resounds with it. That is the noise you hear. Moreover, Solomon has taken his seat on the royal throne. Also, the royal officials have come to congratulate our lord King David, saying, 'May your God make Solomon's name more famous than your own!'. And the king bowed on the bed, and said, 'Blessed be the God of Israel, who has allowed my eyes to see a successor on my throne today'".

When Jonathan ended his report to Joab and the stunned followers of Adonijah there was pandemonium among them as they shouted denunciations at him and his conspirators for putting them in this catastrophic situation. Then there was a rush for the exits as they sought to be back in the city quickly before it became known that they were part of Adonijah's conspiracy.

Adonijah himself rushed to the Tabernacle altar normally presided over by Abiathar, and there he laid hold on the horns of the altar corners in the hope that the sacredness of the spot would

shield him from the consequences of his treason which he knew must follow. The Law of Moses was clear:

"Anyone who attacks his father or mother must be put to death. If a man schemes and kills another man deliberately, take him away from the altar and put him to death".

But Adonijah hoped that his desperate gesture would move the king his father to help him. When they brought the news of Adonijah's action to Solomon he reflected for a few moments, then said quickly, "If Adonijah shows himself to be a worthy man, not a hair of his head will fall to the ground; but if evil is found in him he will die".

David had one more task. He sent for Solomon, and said to him quietly:

"I am about to go the way of all the earth, so be strong, show yourself a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires. Walk in His ways, and keep His decrees and commands, His laws and requirements, as written in the Law of Moses, so that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you go, and that the Lord may keep His promise to me: 'If your descendants watch how they live, and if they walk faithfully before me with all their heart and soul, you will never fail to have a man on the throne of Israel'".

David, King of Israel, "the man after God's own heart," went to be with the God he loved and served to the end.

Chapter 6

will be available on this site on the 1st July 2011