

From: *Makers of the Western Tradition*, ed. J. Kelley  
Sowards, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., vol. 1 (New York: St. Martin's,  
1979), pp. 20–37.



## King David: “The Lord’s Anointed”

In dealing with Akhenaton we noted the fact—on which there is some degree of consensus—that he is the earliest “individual” we can find in human history. If we take “history” in a slightly broader sense and view the Bible as a species of history, this is not quite true. The Hebrew religion was, from an early time, a religion moving through history and seeing history as the record of God’s relationship with his special people, “the sons of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.”

The history that the Hebrews recorded is admittedly a parochial one, dealing almost exclusively with its own subject and touching only in the most superficial fashion the histories of the “great peoples” of the ancient Near East with whom the Hebrews came in contact. But it does reveal a series of strongly marked protohistorical, even mythohistorical, figures; we find not only Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob but also—at the point where myth and protohistory edge into history—the most interesting and fully rounded personality in the Old Testament, King David.

## The Biblical David

*The story of David is found in the Old Testament books of I and II Samuel and the opening verses of I Kings. The story is very old, preserved in the religiohistorical tradition from the time of the events themselves, shortly after the year 1000 B.C., and probably first written down when the monarchy had finally fallen and the kingdom itself had been swept away, Israel caught up in the advance of the brutal Assyrians in 722 B.C. and Judah "carried away captive" to Babylon in 586 B.C. It was a time of despair, a time when the Hebrew priests and scribes looked back with longing to the age of their hero-king David, when God had been gracious to them. David thus took on a special significance in Hebrew history, which he was never to lose. And it is in terms of this special significance and unique character of David, as well as against the backdrop of historic events, that we must examine the story of the founder of Israel's holy monarchy.*

*The story of David is rich in anecdote and detail. One need only recall his single combat with the Philistine champion Goliath, or his coming by night to Saul's camp, standing by the head of the sleeping king, and sparing his life. The character of David is developed with equal richness. David's response when he heard that Saul and Jonathan had died in battle against the Philistines on Mount Gilboa is described in II Samuel 1:17-27, from the Revised Standard Version Bible.*

DAVID LAMENTED with this lamentation over Saul and Jonathan his son, and he said it should be taught to the people of Judah; behold, it is written in the Book of Jashar. He said:

"Thy glory, O Israel, is slain upon thy high places!

How are the mighty fallen!

Tell it not in Gath,

publish it not in the streets of Ash'kelon;

lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice,

lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult.

"Ye mountains of Gilbo'a,

let there be no dew or rain upon you,

nor uprising of the deep!

For there the shield of the mighty was defiled,

the shield of Saul, not anointed with oil.

"From the blood of the slain,  
from the fat of the mighty,  
the bow of Jonathan turned not back,  
and the sword of Saul returned not empty.

"Saul and Jonathan, beloved and lovely!  
In life and in death they were not divided;  
they were swifter than eagles,  
they were stronger than lions.

"Ye daughters of Israel, weep over Saul,  
who clothed you daintily in scarlet,  
who put ornaments of gold upon your apparel.

"How are the mighty fallen  
in the midst of the battle!

"Jonathan lies slain upon thy high places.  
I am distressed for you, my brother Jonathan;  
very pleasant have you been to me;  
your love to me was wonderful,  
passing the love of women.

"How are the mighty fallen,  
and the weapons of war perished!"

*The preceding passage, one of the finest lyric passages of the Old Testament, reveals David the singer, the lyre-player, the psalmist. But the passage contrasts sharply with the account of how David ordered the execution of the messenger who had come to report that he had helped Saul end his life on the battlefield, even though the man pleaded that he acted only out of mercy for the old, wounded king. But that did not matter to David, "for your mouth has testified against you, saying 'I have slain the Lord's anointed.'" (II Sam. 1:16). Nor is this the only such contradiction of character in the story of David. The incident of Uriah the Hittite and David's desire for his handsome wife Bathsheba is an account of the king's human weakness. In another instance, we hear the plaint for David's dead rebel son Absalom that his battle commander, the rough and outspoken Joab, finds so hard to understand.*

*Despite the rich and varied detail that makes David live so vividly for us, the emphasis in the account of II Samuel is less upon the man than upon his special relationship—and the special relationship of the monarchy—with God. David stood very close to the beginning of the monarchy itself. It was, after all, less than a generation since the scattered*

tribes of Hebrews, presided over by their "judges" and halted in their uneven conquest of their promised land, had turned to the aged prophet Samuel and asked him to "appoint for us a king to govern us like all the nations," "to go out before us and fight our battles." (1 Sam. 8:4-6). Samuel had appointed Saul, to be succeeded by David. But the choice both of Saul and of David had not been Samuel's; he was simply the vehicle of God's will. As a learned, modern German critic has put it, ". . . the king set over the people of God must be a man of God's grace, called by him and a real instrument in his hand. . . . Only the man 'on whom the spirit of the Lord shall rest' (Isa. 11:2) can really be the king in Israel. . . . Only he who allows God to be wholly king, and who is therefore himself completely obedient, can be king over the people of God."<sup>1</sup>

The special character of David as the instrument of God's will is stressed from the beginning of the biblical narrative. When, following God's direction, Samuel hesitated to choose the young shepherd boy David, God told him, "The Lord sees not as man sees. Anoint him; for this is he." (1 Sam. 16:12).

David brought his people together in victory over the Philistines; he captured Jerusalem and established his capital there, calling it "the city of David."

. . . David became greater and greater, for the LORD, the God of hosts, was with him.

And Hiram king of Tyre sent messengers to David, and cedar trees, also carpenters and masons who built David a house. And David perceived that the LORD had established him king over Israel, and that he had exalted his kingdom for the sake of his people Israel. . . .

Now when the king dwelt in his house, and the LORD had given him rest from all his enemies round about, the king said to Nathan the prophet, "See now, I dwell in a house of cedar, but the ark of God dwells in a tent." And Nathan said to the king, "Go, do all that is in your heart; for the LORD is with you."

But that same night the word of the LORD came to Nathan, "Go and tell my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD: Would you build me a house to dwell in? I have not dwelt in a house since the day I brought up the people of Israel from Egypt to this day, but I have been moving about in a tent for my dwelling. In all places where I have moved with all the people of Israel, did I speak a word with any of the judges of Israel, whom I commanded to shepherd my people Israel, saying, "Why have you not built me a house of cedar?"' Now therefore thus you shall say to my servant David, 'Thus says the LORD of hosts, I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, that you should be prince over my people Israel; and I have been

<sup>1</sup> Hans Wilhelm Herzberg, *I & II Samuel, A Commentary*, J. S. Bowden, trans. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1964), pp. 133-134.

with you wherever you went, and have cut off all your enemies from before you; and I will make for you a great name, like the name of the great ones of the earth. And I will appoint a place for my people Israel, and will plant them, that they may dwell in their own place, and be disturbed no more; and violent men shall afflict them no more, as formerly, from the time that I appointed judges over my people Israel; and I will give you rest from all your enemies. Moreover the LORD declares to you that the LORD will make you a house. When your days are fulfilled and you lie down with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring after you, who shall come forth from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for my name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom for ever. I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he commits iniquity, I will chasten him with the rod of men, with the stripes of the sons of men; but I will not take my steadfast love from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away from before you. And your house and your kingdom shall be made sure for ever before me; your throne shall be established for ever.' " In accordance with all this vision, Nathan spoke to David.

Then King David went in and sat before the LORD, and said, "Who am I, O Lord GOD, and what is my house, that thou hast brought me thus far? And yet this was a small thing in thy eyes, O Lord GOD; thou hast spoken also of thy servant's house for a great while to come, and hast shown me future generations, O Lord GOD! And what more can David say to thee? For thou knowest thy servant, O Lord GOD! Because of thy promise, and according to thy own heart, thou has wrought all this greatness, to make thy servant know it. Therefore thou art great, O LORD God; for there is none like thee, and there is no God besides thee, according to all that we have heard with our ears. What other nation on earth is like thy people Israel, whom God went to redeem to be his people, making himself a name, and doing for them great and terrible things, by driving out before his people a nation and its Gods? And thou didst establish for thyself thy people Israel to be thy people for ever; and thou, O LORD, didst become their God. And now, O LORD God, confirm for ever the word which thou has spoken concerning thy servant and concerning his house, and do as thou hast spoken; and thy name will be magnified for ever, saying, 'The LORD of hosts is God over Israel,' and the house of thy servant David will be established before thee. For thou, O LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, hast made this revelation to thy servant, saying, 'I will build you a house'; therefore thy servant has found courage to pray this prayer to thee. And now, O Lord God, thou art God, and thy words are true, and thou hast promised this good thing to thy servant; now therefore may it please thee to bless the house of thy servant, that it may continue for ever before thee; for thou, O Lord GOD, hast spoken, and with thy blessing shall the house of thy servant be blessed for ever."

*As David grew "old and advanced in years," his servants sought of him, "who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?"*

Then King David answered, "Call Bathshe'ba to me." So she came into the king's presence, and stood before the king. And the king swore, saying, "As the LORD lives, who has redeemed my soul out of every adversity, as I swore to you by the LORD, the God of Israel, saying, 'Solomon your son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne in my stead'; even so will I do this day." Then Bathshe'ba bowed with her face to the ground, and did obeisance to the king, and said, "May my lord King David live for ever!"

King David said, "Call to me Zadok the priest, Nathan the prophet, and Benai'ah the son of Jehoi'ada." So they came before the king. And the king said to them, "Take with you the servants of your lord, and cause Solomon my son to ride on my own mule, and bring him down to Gihon; and let Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet there anoint him king over Israel; then blow the trumpet, and say, 'Long live King Solomon!'

You shall then come up after him, and he shall come and sit upon my throne; for he shall be king in my stead; and I have appointed him to be ruler over Israel and over Judah." And Benai'ah the son of Jehoi'ada answered the king, "Amen! May the LORD, the God of my lord the king, say so. As the LORD has been with my lord the king, even so may he be with Solomon, and make his throne greater than the throne of my lord King David."

## Kingship and the Gods

HENRI FRANKFORT

*We turn now from the ancient scriptural account of King David to modern scholarship and the work of one of the most eminent of Near Eastern scholars, Henri Frankfort (d. 1954). Although Frankfort was European-born and trained, he spent most of his career at the University of Chicago as Field Director and Research Professor of Oriental Archaeology. But Henri Frankfort's real talent was his ability to move beyond the stones and shards of ancient material culture to speculate—as his great Chicago predecessor James H. Breasted had done—on the nature of ancient Near Eastern thought, ancient philosophical and religious beliefs, and the substance they gave to the forms of ancient institutions such as kingship.*

*One of Frankfort's most provocative books in this respect is Kingship*

and the Gods. *In this book he argues that the ancient Near Eastern peoples considered kingship to be the very basis of civilization. "Only savages could live without a king" to bring security, peace, and justice. And yet the ancient Egyptians and Mesopotamians regarded kingship as a religious, rather than a political, institution. These peoples "experienced human life as part of a widely spreading network of connections that reached beyond the local and the national communities into the hidden depths of nature, the powers that rule nature."*<sup>2</sup> *The king was the necessary link between the dangerous and potentially destructive power of nature—that is, the gods—and human survival. As either chief priest (as he was in Mesopotamia) or fellow god of the gods themselves (as he was in Egypt), it was the king who maintained the rituals necessary to secure the continued benefactions of the gods. The maintenance of life itself was in the hands of the king.*

*At first glance this view would seem to concur, to a large extent, with what we have already seen of David and the ancient Hebrew monarchy. But Henri Frankfort does not agree.*

THE ANCIENT Near East knew a third kind of king. In addition to the god incarnate who was Pharaoh and the chosen servant of the gods who ruled Mesopotamia, we find a hereditary leader whose authority derived from descent and was originally coextensive with kinship. This is a more primitive kind of monarchy, a product rather of nature than of man, based on the facts of consanguinity, not on any conception of man's place in the universe. Yet it was the equal of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian institutions in that it formed an integral part of the civilizations in which it occurred. For the type of rulership we are now to discuss is found among people who acknowledged kinship above every other bond of loyalty and whose coherence derived from a shared nomadic past rather than from what they had achieved as a settled community. It is found, significantly, in the peripheral regions of the ancient Near East where autochthonous civilization was feeble. Palestine and Syria, Anatolia and Persia, were overrun by foreign peoples on many occasions, and, furthermore, the newcomers succeeded in taking charge. In this respect the contrast between the peripheral regions and the centers of the ancient Near East is striking. Foreigners could rise to power in Egypt, but on condition that they were completely assimilated. When large groups of immigrants—Amorites, Kassites, Aramaeans—were absorbed by Mesopotamia, they insinuated themselves in the traditional fabric of Mesopotamian culture which henceforth determined their behavior. But the peripheral regions lacked cultural individuality, and once immigrants had asserted their power their mastery

<sup>2</sup> Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods, A Study of Ancient Near Eastern Religion as the Integration of Society and Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), p. 3.

was complete. The Philistines and Hebrews put their stamp on Palestine; Hittites, Mitanni, Medes, and Persians on other peripheral regions.

The position of these new arrivals was anomalous. They brought with them hereditary tribal institutions, such as rulership based on descent. But settling in civilized lands, they faced problems for which their nomadic existence had not prepared them. . . .

Our knowledge of Hittite, Syrian, and Persian kingship is so incomplete that we cannot pass beyond generalities. But we know more about the Hebrew monarchy. This was also based upon descent but possessed a peculiar character of its own which makes it an effective foil for the material we have discussed in this book; for the Hebrews, though in the Near East, were only partly of it. Much is made nowadays of Canaanite and other Near Eastern elements in Hebrew culture. . . . But it should be plain that the borrowed features in Hebrew culture, and those which have foreign analogies, are least significant. In the case of kingship they are externalities, the less important since they did not affect the basic oddness of the Hebrew institution. If kingship counted in Egypt as a function of the gods, and in Mesopotamia as a divinely ordained political order, the Hebrews knew that they had introduced it on their own initiative, in imitation of others and under the strain of an emergency. When Ammonite oppression was added to the Philistine menace, the people said: "Nay; but we will have a king over us; that we also may be like all the nations; and that our king may judge us, and go out before us, and fight our battles" (I Sam. 8:19-20).

If the Hebrews, like the Mesopotamians, remembered a kingless period, they never thought that "kingship descended from heaven." Hence the Hebrew king did not become a necessary bond between the people and the divine powers. On the contrary, it was in the kingless period that the people had been singled out by Yahweh and that they had been bound, as a whole, by the Covenant of Sinai. It was said in the Law: "Ye are the children of the Lord your God: . . . and the Lord hath chosen thee to be a peculiar people unto himself, above all the nations that are upon earth" (Deut. 14:1-2). Moses said to Pharaoh: "Thus saith the Lord, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: and I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me" (Exod. 4:22-23). For the service of God was part of the Covenant, which the people must keep even though it imposes a moral obligation which man's inadequacy makes forever incapable of fulfilment: "Now therefore, if you will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation" (Exod. 19:5-6).

The conviction of the Hebrews that they were a chosen people is the one permanent, as it is the most significant, feature in their history. The tenacity of the Hebrew struggle for existence in the sordid turmoil of the Levant was rooted in the consciousness of their election. This animated them to resist rather than to imitate kings like David and Hezekiah.

or prophets opposing kings in whom belief in the unique destiny of Israel had been compromised. But this intimate relationship between the Hebrew people and their god ignored the existence of an earthly ruler altogether. Hebrew tradition, vigorously defended by the great prophets and the post-Exilic leaders, recognized as the formative phase of Hebrew culture the sojourn in the desert when Moses, the man of God, led the people and gave them the law. Kingship never achieved a standing equal to that of institutions which were claimed—rightly or wrongly—to have originated during the Exodus and the desert wandering.

The antecedents of Saul's kingship were known. The settlement in Canaan left the tribal divisions intact, and the Book of Judges shows the varying ranges of power to which individual chieftains might aspire. . . .

The tribesmen recognized the bond of blood alone, and it was exceedingly difficult to envisage a loyalty surpassing the scope of kinship. Nevertheless, when the separate tribes were threatened with extinction or enslavement, Saul was made king over all. Samuel anointed Saul, thereby expressing Yahweh's approval of the initiative of the people who had in any case sought advice from the seer. But royalty received little sanctity from this involvement. It is true that David shrank from buying personal immunity at the price of laying hands "upon the Lord's anointed" (I Sam. 24:10); but such scruples are perhaps more revealing for David's character than for the esteem in which kingship was held among the Hebrews. And the tragic sequel of Saul's history proves how little Yahweh's initial approval protected office and officeholder. In fact, once kingship had been established, it conformed to the tribal laws which treat relatives as one, for better or for worse. Saul's "house" was exterminated by David (II Sam., chap. 21) on Yahweh's orders. David's "house" was promised lasting dominion by Yahweh through the mouth of the prophet Nathan (see below). It is very significant that in actual fact the Davidian dynasty was never dethroned in Judah. But David belonged to Judah; and when Solomon died and his son Rehoboam was ill advised and refused to alleviate the burdens imposed by Solomon's splendor, ten of the tribes refused to acknowledge him: "So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither have we an heritage in the son of Jesse: to your tents O Israel: now see to thine own house, David" (I Kings 12:16). No voice was raised to decry the rejection of David's grandson as an impious act. On the contrary, even David, Yahweh's favorite, had been confirmed in his rulership by the elders of all the tribes who, in accepting him, began by acknowledging their consanguinity:

Then came all the tribes of Israel to David unto Hebron, and spake, saying, Behold we are thy bone and thy flesh. . . . So all the elders of Israel came to the king to Hebron, and King David made a league with them in Hebron before the Lord: and they anointed David king of Israel (II Sam. 5:1, 31)

In the light of Egyptian, and even Mesopotamian, kingship, that of the Hebrews lacks sanctity. The relation between the Hebrew monarch and his people was as nearly secular as is possible in a society wherein religion is a living force. The unparalleled feature in this situation is the independence, the almost complete separation, of the bonds which existed between Yahweh and the Hebrew people, on the one hand, and between Yahweh and the House of David, on the other. Yahweh's covenant with the people antedated kingship. His covenant with David concerned the king and his descendants, but not the people. Through Nathan, Yahweh promised David:

I will set up thy seed after thee. . . . I will be his father, and he shall be my son. If he commits iniquity, I shall chasten him with the rod of men, and with the stripes of the children of men: But my mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I put away before thee. And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever [II Sam. 7:12-16].

Only in later times, when this promise was made the foundation of Messianic expectations, did the people claim a share in it. As it was made, it was as simple and direct a pledge to David as the earlier divine promises had been to the Patriarchs (e.g., Gen. 15:18-21). It committed Yahweh solely to maintain the greatness of the House of David. It can be argued that this implied the greatness of the Hebrew people, or at least of Judah; but the conclusion is not inevitable. Nowhere else in the Near East do we find this dissociation of a people from its leader in relation to the divine; with the Hebrews we find parallelism while everywhere else we find coincidence. In the meager information about Hebrew ritual it has been attempted to find indications that the king fulfilled a function not unlike that of contemporary rulers. But even if we take an exceptional and apparently simple phrase, "[Solomon] sat on the throne of the Lord as king, instead of David, his father" (I Chron. 29:23), we need only compare this with the corresponding phrases "throne of Horus" or "throne of Atum" to realize that the Hebrew expression can only mean "throne favored by the Lord," or something similar. The phrase confirms what the account of Saul's elevation and David's scruples showed in the first place—namely, that there is interplay between the king's person and sanctity, as there was a connection between the king's fate and the national destiny. But these relations were not the nerve center of the monarchy, as they were in Egypt and Mesopotamia, but rather cross-currents due to the religious orientation of Hebrew society; and their secondary nature stands out most clearly when we consider the functions of the Hebrew king.

The Hebrew king normally functioned in the profane sphere, not in the sacred sphere. He was the arbiter in disputes and the leader in war. He was emphatically not the leader in the cult. The king created the conditions which made a given form of worship possible: David's power allowed him to bring the Ark to Jerusalem; Solomon's riches enabled him to build

the temple; Jeroboam, Ahab, Manasseh, and others had idols made and arranged for "groves" and "high places" for the cult of the gods of fertility. But the king played little part in the cult. He did not, as a rule, sacrifice; that was the task of the priests. He did not interpret the divine will; that, again, was the task of the priests, who cast lots for an oracle. Moreover, the divine intentions were sometimes made known in a more dramatic way when prophets—men possessed—cried, "Thus saith the Lord." These prophets were often in open conflict with the king precisely because the secular character of the king entitled them to censor him.

The predominant accusation of the prophets against the kings was faithlessness to Yahweh, a "seduction" of his chosen people (e.g., II Kings 21:9-11) so that they followed the ways of the gentiles. Said the prophet Jehu in the name of Yahweh to Baasha, king of Israel: "Forasmuch as I exalted thee out of the dust, and made thee prince over my people Israel; and thou hast walked in the way of Jeroboam, and hast made my people Israel to sin, to provoke me to anger with their sins" (I Kings 16:2). Such accusations recur with monotonous regularity throughout the Books of Kings. Most rulers "did evil in the sight of the Lord"; and we cannot discuss Hebrew kingship without considering this evil which seems to have attached to it. If the kings seduced the people, we must admit, in the light of the Egyptian and Mesopotamian evidence, that they offered the people something eminently desirable. The keeping of Yahweh's covenant meant relinquishing a great deal. It meant, in a word, sacrificing the greatest good ancient Near Eastern religion could bestow—the harmonious integration of man's life with the life of nature. The biblical accounts stress the orgiastic joys of the Canaanite cult of natural powers; we must remember that this cult also offered the serene awareness of being at one with the universe. In this experience ancient oriental religion rewarded its devotees with the peace of fulfilment. But the boon was available only for those who believed that the divine was immanent in nature, and Hebrew religion rejected precisely this doctrine. The absolute transcendence of God is the foundation of Hebrew religious thought. God is absolute, unqualified, ineffable, transcending every phenomenon, the one and only cause of all existence. God, moreover, is holy, which means that all values are ultimately his. Consequently, every concrete phenomenon is devaluated. We have discussed elsewhere this austere transcendentalism of Hebrew thought, which denied the greatest values and the most cherished potentialities of contemporary creeds, and have offered an explanation of its origin. Here we must point out that it bereft kingship of a function which it exercised all through the Near East, where its principal task lay in the maintenance of the harmony with the gods in nature. And so we observe—now for the third time—the inner logic and consistency of ancient Near Eastern thought. We have described the peculiar nature of Hebrew kingship, starting from its relation to the people and their past; it would have appeared with the same characteristics if we had taken our stand on Hebrew theology. The transcendentalism of Hebrew religion prevented kingship from

assuming the profound significance which it possessed in Egypt and Mesopotamia. It excluded, in particular, the king's being instrumental in the integration of society and nature. It denied the possibility of such an integration. It protested vehemently—in the persons of the great prophets—that attempts by king and people to experience that integration were incompatible with their avowed faithfulness to Yahweh. To Hebrew thought nature appeared void of divinity, and it was worse than futile to seek a harmony with created life when only obedience to the will of the Creator could bring peace and salvation. God was not in sun and stars, rain and wind; they were his creatures and served him (Deut. 4:19; Psalm 19). Every alleviation of the stern belief in God's transcendence was corruption. In Hebrew religion—and in Hebrew religion alone—the ancient bond between man and nature was destroyed. Those who served Yahweh must forego the richness, the fulfilment, and the consolation of a life which moves in tune with the great rhythms of earth and sky. There were no festivals to celebrate it. No act of the king could promote it. Man remained outside nature, exploiting it for a livelihood, offering its first-fruits as a sacrifice to Yahweh, using its imagery for the expression of his moods; but never sharing its mysterious life, never an actor in the perennial cosmic pageant in which the sun is made “to rise on the evil and on the good” and the rain is sent “on the just and the unjust.”

Kingship, too, was not, for the Hebrews, anchored in the cosmos. Except by way of contrast, it has no place in a “study of ancient Near Eastern religion as an integration of society and nature.” The Hebrew king, as every other Hebrew, stood under the judgment of God in an alien world, which—as the dying David knew (II Sam. 23:3–4)—seems friendly only on those rare occasions when man proves not inadequate: “He that ruleth over men must be just, ruling in the fear of God. And he shall be as the light of the morning, when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; as the tender grass, springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain.”

## The Evidence of Archaeology

KATHLEEN M. KENYON

*The most significant omission in the biblical account of the Davidic monarchy and even in Frankfort's brilliant conceptualization, is the*

*setting in which the events of David's reign occurred. The scriptural record mentions some peoples, like the Ammonites, the Amalekites, and the Moabites, about whom we have virtually no other records, and others, like the Philistines and the Hittites, for whom we are only now beginning to gain substantial information. It cites battles and events and persons with an easy familiarity that seems to reflect an accurate history. But in the parallel records, admittedly fragmentary, of the other contemporary peoples, there is not a shred of evidence to verify any of the events that loom so large in the narrative of Samuel, nor is there mention of any name that could be equated to Saul or David or even Solomon. To fill the gap we must turn to another kind of reconstruction, that of modern archaeology, to see what we can tell about the setting of the Hebrew monarchy, the contemporary physical and political world, the other peoples of Palestine, and the way men lived.*

*For that purpose we sample the work of one of the foremost contemporary Near Eastern archaeologists, Dr. Kathleen M. Kenyon, who won such well-deserved acclaim for the excavations at Jericho. The following excerpts are from her Archaeology in the Holy Land.*

. . . ARCHAEOLOGY HAS NOT yet given us a clear picture of the Philistines, for none of their important cities has as yet been sufficiently excavated for any generalisations as to Philistine or non-Philistine traits to be made. . . .

Such exact evidence as there is suggests that an initial settlement on the coast was followed by a more gradual conquest of towns farther inland, up to the edge of the central ridge, which they never settled, though in the 11th century B.C. they exercised some degree of suzerainty over the Israelites there. The evidence comes from the relation of the appearance of the Philistine pottery to the termination of the 13th century Cypriot and Mycenaean imports, which has been described above and which must be ascribed to the disruption of trade caused by the movements of the Peoples of the Sea. . . .

Thus the area of Philistine occupation was a limited one, though ultimately their political control extended considerably beyond this. For a hundred years or so they lived side by side with their Canaanite and Israelite predecessors. As has already been said, there is no archaeological evidence to decide which sites belong to which of these two groups. It is only on historical grounds, for instance the mention of the people Israel by Merneptah, that we know in fact that the Israelites were by now firmly established in the land, in two groups, divided by the Canaanite wedge round Jerusalem.

Our fullest evidence concerning non-Philistine areas at this period does, however, come from sites which were certainly not Israelite. notably



Megiddo. There is actually no mention in the Bible of when this important city came to be part of Israel. It is included in the list of those that remained under the Canaanites in the initial conquest, while it was Israelite by the time of Solomon. It may well be that it came under Israelite control during the 11th century, during much of which period the site was unoccupied, and therefore no particular importance was attached to the fact. . . .

All the sites so far described lie outside the area at this period occupied by the Israelites. It must in fact be admitted that we know tantalisingly little about the early Israelite settlements. The reason for this is partly owing to the limitations of archaeological evidence, partly owing to the limitations of the culture of the Israelites themselves.

The archaeological limitations arise from the fact that the area in which these settlements lie is the hill country. Sites in such districts do not present the same thick deposits of successive strata as do the sites in the plains. The buildings are naturally constructed of stone, which is readily available all over the area. As a result, when buildings of one period decay, their walls are apt to be dismantled and the stones re-used in their successors. Thus instead of the ruins being buried intact beneath a mass of collapsed mud-brick, the usual material for the superstructure in the plains, they are disturbed and destroyed to the very base of the walls. The story of the successive phases is thus very much more difficult to deduce. The excavation of the great site of Gezer, for instance, carried out before modern refinements of archaeological technique had been introduced, did little to give us a detailed picture of its history, since the buildings could not be ascribed to definite periods. The same drawback applies to the results of the excavation of many other sites in the hill country.

The character of the settlements is the second factor which limits our information. The period is undoubtedly that in which the national consciousness of the Israelites is developing greatly. The biblical narrative shows how the groups were gradually combining together, with tentative efforts at temporal unification under the Judges and the stronger spiritual link of a national religion, with the high priest at times exercising temporal power. It is during these centuries that the groups allied by race, but differing in the manner and time of their settlement in Palestine, . . . must have come to combine their ancestral traditions together under the influence of the Yahwehistic religion, and to believe that all their ancestors took part in the Exodus. The nation was thus emerging, but its culture was as yet primitive. Its settlements were villages, its art crude, and the objects of everyday use homely and utilitarian. . . .

For something like a hundred years the Philistines and the Israelites lived side by side, the Philistines in the rich coastal plain, the Israelites in the more barren hill country. About 1080 B.C. the Philistines began trying to extend their control over the hill country, and this is the period of oppression by the Philistines of which the Bible gives such a vivid account. The period was one of oppression, but it was also one that gave a stimulus

towards nationhood. Saul, leading a revolt which started about 1030 B.C., became the acknowledged leader of the whole country in the struggle, and though his success was varying, and marred by quarrels with the religious leaders and with David, and terminated by defeat on Mount Gilboa, it was on the foundations of the unity that he achieved that David was able to establish the free and united kingdom of Israel. . . .

The united kingdom of Israel had a life span of only three-quarters of a century. It was the only time in which the Jews were an important political power in western Asia. Its glories are triumphantly recorded in the Bible, and the recollection of them profoundly affected Jewish thought and aspirations. Yet the archaeological evidence for the period is meagre in the extreme.

After the disaster on Mount Gilboa, when the bodies of Saul and Jonathan were exhibited as trophies at Beth-shan, the Philistines set up two vassal kingdoms, with David as ruler at Hebron and Ishbaal in the north. In between the two lay Jerusalem, still occupied by the Canaanite tribe of Jebusites. But David, though he had taken refuge with the Philistines when Saul had turned against him, was not prepared to continue as a vassal now that his old leader was dead. He succeeded in defeating Ishbaal, apparently without intervention by the Philistines, thus reuniting the kingdom of Saul, and he threw off the Philistine overlordship. He then achieved the crucial success of capturing Jerusalem.

The control of Jerusalem was essential to the control of a united Palestine, as it lies on the central ridge which is the only convenient route north and south through the hill country. . . .

The previous lack of cohesion among the Israelites is well illustrated by the fact that this Canaanite enclave had been allowed to persist in their midst for centuries. Without its possession, political unity was impossible. Once it was secured, the great period of Israelite history begins. But the effect of the long division of the Israelites into two groups, added to that of probable difference of origin between the northern and southern tribes, was permanent and contributed to the renewed division into Israel and Judah at the end of the 10th century B.C. . . .

The capture of Jerusalem is to be dated c.995 B.C. By it, David's position was assured. His growing power inevitably aroused the hostility of the Philistines. Their defeats at Baal-Perazim and Rephaim caused their withdrawal once more to the coastal plain, and they ceased to be a permanent menace. But though David now started on a policy of expansion, he never annexed Philistia. It may be conjectured that Egypt, in spite of its weakness at this time, gave sufficient support to deter him. The coastal plain in fact never became part of the Israelite domain, and the Philistines reappear in the 8th and 7th centuries B.C. as an independent group.

David followed up his success against the Philistines by attacking other ancient enemies. The various "oppressors" were now oppressed in their turn. Moab. Ammon. Edom. were all subjugated, and the most surprising



expansion is the defeat of the Aramaeans and the annexation of Damascus. The Israelites thus controlled a large part of the country from the Euphrates to the borders of Egypt, though the Phoenician towns on the Syrian coast remained independent.

This unification and expansion inevitably brought about a revolution in the culture of the country. The people of simple hill villages, united in reality only by religious ties, became part of an organised kingdom. The transfer of the religious centre to Jerusalem established a combined political and religious focus, and strengthened the monarch at the expense of the priesthood. The international contacts of the Israelites were opened up for the first time. Instead of being circumscribed within their limited area, they were brought into touch with the main currents of civilisation of the period. In particular, they were brought into touch with the Phoenicians. Recent archaeological research in Syria and the adjacent countries has shown that Phoenicia at this time had a highly developed civilisation, manifesting itself in fine buildings and a distinctive (though eclectic rather than original) art, and a remarkable development in literature, as well as in the trading and colonising ventures for which they have long been famous. Research in Palestine is beginning to show how strong Phoenician influence was in the process which began under David, which was in fact the civilising of Israel.

This process was indeed begun under David, but he only provided the groundwork for the great developments under Solomon. There is little in the record, either literary or archaeological, to show that much progress towards civilisation was made during David's reign. For Solomon's reign there is considerable literary evidence, but not much archaeological. Many attempts have been made to reconstruct on paper the Temple Solomon built at Jerusalem on the hill north of Ophel. Finds on other sites make it easier to understand the description and to visualise some of the details, but the area of the Temple and that of the extension of the city under the Israelites lie beneath modern Jerusalem, beyond the reach of the archaeologist's spade.

## Suggestions for Further Reading

THE PRIMARY account of King David is, of course, I and II Samuel and the first part of I Kings in the Old Testament, and students are encour-

aged to read the entire story. There are many versions and editions of the Bible, but students will find particularly attractive *The Bible Designed To Be Read as Living Literature*, ed. Ernest S. Bates (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1937) and *The Modern Reader's Bible*, ed. Richard G. Moulton (New York: Macmillan, 1924) because of their organization and format. *The Dartmouth Bible*, ed. R. B. Chamberlain and Herman Feldman (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1950), *The Oxford Annotated Bible*, and the appropriate sections of vols. 2 and 3 of *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York and Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953–1954) have exhaustive and useful notes. Useful too is the brief section on the David monarchy in Harold H. Watts, *The Modern Reader's Guide to the Bible* (New York: Harper, 1949), with its emphasis upon literary rather than biblical criticism. There is also an attractive, solidly researched historical novel by Laurence Chambers Chinn, *The Unanointed* (New York: Crown, 1959), featuring as its central character David's friend Joab.

The greatest modern authority on the history and archaeology of Palestine is William Foxwell Albright. His most famous book is *From the Stone Age to Christianity, Monotheism and the Historical Process* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1940), reprinted in a revised second edition by Anchor, 1957; chs. 4 and 5 are especially useful for the early monarchy. More recent and popular is his *The Biblical Period from Abraham to Ezra, an Historical Survey* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1963 [1949]), chs. 3–6. Somewhat more specialized but still very readable is his revised edition of *Archaeology and the Religion of Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1968), ch. 4. For one of the neighboring people of the ancient Hebrews, students should find useful John Gray, *The Canaanites* (New York: Praeger, 1964), a first-class popularization and updating of scholarship, an attractive book in an attractive and authoritative series. Students may also wish to read any of the several specialized essays in *The Biblical Archaeologist Reader*, vol. 3, ed. E. F. Campbell, Jr., and David N. Freedman (New York: Doubleday Anchor, 1970). H. and H. A. Frankfort, John A. Wilson, Thorkild Jacobsen, and William A. Irwin, *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man, An Essay on Speculative Thought in the Ancient Near East* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946), is a famous book, a pioneering work in the intellectual history of the ancient Near East; students should see especially chs. 10–12.

Recommended finally is *The Cambridge History of the Bible*, vol. I, *From the Beginnings to Jerome*, ed. P. R. Ackroyd and C. F. Evans (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1970), a fascinating book about the Bible as a book.