

## CHAPTER VI

THE GOLDEN CENTURY

In the excited crowds leaving Mizpeh after the anointing of Saul, there was tremendous relief. Israel had at last a visible champion against the ever-encroaching Philistines. There was considerable worldly rejoicing also at the prospect of royal pageantry to vie with the envied city-kings of Canaan. There was glowing admiration of the tall, good looking young king. Yet some scoffed at the thought of an untested leader.

The Prophet Samuel watched the celebration with a heavy heart. Israel had embarked on the most glamorous period of her history. But she had turned her back on the protection of her God. Only the very wise could see the pitfalls that worldly pomp and power would strew in her path.

The glory of the new kingdom was not to be reached in a day. The basically democratic Israelites had no equipment for royalty. They had no palace, no chariots, and no standing army to do the king's bidding. Samuel sent Saul with a small band of loyal men back to his accustomed chores on his father's farm.

However the new king's exalted office was soon to claim him. About eighty kilometers northward and east of Jordan a vicious group of Ammonites laid siege to the Israelite city of Jabesh-Gilead. The desperate city chieftains sent an urgent cry for help to Saul.

It would take more than a call to arms to handle this emergency! Saul took his yoke of oxen. He cut them to pieces and sent those pieces throughout the land by messengers proclaiming,

Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen. (I Samuel 11:7)

The men of Israel rushed to their king's call. Backed by this mighty army, using the old Israelite tactics of moving swiftly while the enemy slept, Saul sped to Jabesh-Gilead and soundly defeated the Ammonite forces.

Saul had proved himself a worthy leader. In a great surge of triumph, the warriors gathered in Gilgal for sacrifices and peace offerings to the Lord, and to reaffirm Saul's anointing. After the festivities Samuel called the people together, and from the days of Jacob to the present victory he rehearsed the goodness of God to his people. Then he pronounced the warning which he so deeply felt was needed:

If ye will fear the Lord, and serve Him, and obey his voice,  
...then shall both ye and also the king that reigneth over you  
continue following the Lord: But if ye shall do wickedly, ye shall  
be consumed, both ye and your king. (I Samuel 12:14, 25)

To prove that the warning was divinely authentic Samuel prayed for thunder and rain. The storm which ensued brought fear of the Lord and of Samuel to the hearts of the Israelites.

The people prepared a house for their king in Gibeah. More fort than palace, the new building was simply constructed of stone. The walls nearly two and a half meters thick with stone stairs to the upper floor. The royal establishment was supported by gifts, as was the still primitive army.

The sophisticated Philistines had long used iron implements for farming and for war. They had shrewdly prevented the setting up of forges in the hills. Prices were exorbitant on the coast to any Israelite whose rare iron axe or plowshare might need repairs. Among Israel's warriors only Saul and his son Jonathan had swords and spears of iron to match those of the Philistines.

### MICHMASH

Although Israel had a king the Philistines still maintained a garrison in Gibeah. Jonathan was involved in a skirmish with this outpost. The outraged Philistines gathered at Michmash, only a short distance away. They brought chariots, horses and a multitude of soldiers.

The local Israelites scattered, terrified. They hid among the rocks, in caves and thickets. Some fled across the Jordan. Saul rallied them to him, as many as dared, in Gilgal. There he waited with them for Samuel to come. He would conduct the sacrificial ceremonies that would align Israel with the will and blessing of her God. Seven days he waited, watching his frightened army dwindle and his own self-confidence melt. In desperation he called for the sacrificial animals and he himself offered the burnt offerings. He had scarcely finished when Samuel arrived. Saul hurried out to meet him.

The prophet Samuel was in a towering rage. His dire forebodings had already come to pass. Israel's military king had usurped the spiritual duties of the servant of God! Samuel stalked out of the camp and returned to Gibeah. Saul marched his little army, of only six hundred left, up the steep road after him. In Gibeah he camped in helpless uncertainty while the Philistines raided at will.

It was Jonathan who finally broke the stalemate. "There is no restraint to the Lord to save by many or by few," he told his armor bearer. Without consulting Saul the two zealous young men slipped out of camp. The Philistines were confidently stationed on a rocky cliff protected hilltop above a narrow gorge. But Jonathan had grown up in this area. He knew the terrain. A clever test showed him that they were unwarrantedly sure of their inaccessibility.

That night the two young Israelites climbed a precarious pathway up the face of the cliff. (The path is still there, and was successfully used by a Bible studying British officer in World War I.) They fell upon the unwary Philistines in the darkness. The clashing, clattering echoes of the narrow gorge struck terror throughout the camp. The enemy warriors fought desperately with one another. The Israelites who had defected to them turned on them. Others rushed out from hiding to join the wild battle.

Across the valley Saul heard the tumult. Missing his son, he guessed what had happened. Excited and impatient of any delay he shouted to his men,

Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening, that I  
may be avenged of mine enemies. (I Samuel 14:24)

It was a rash, thoughtless oath. It forced his men to fight through the long day faint with hunger. Nevertheless it was an oath. When Jonathan, who had not heard it, ate wild honey in the forest a ripple of fear swept through the army. Later when Saul sought guidance from God for furthering the victory he received no reply. A sure sign that sin had been committed in Israel! Grimly he gathered the people together and the sacred ritual of casting lots began. Gloom stole the triumph of the day as the lot of death fell on Jonathan.

The whole army rebelled. "As the Lord liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground." Oath or no oath, through the affection and unshackled thinking of his kinsmen, Jonathan's life was spared.

For a time the defeated Philistines withdrew. Saul, with his devoted army, enlarged the borders of his kingdom at the expense of the neighboring pagan tribes. A reputation of military invincibility gradually drew its deceptive cloak about the king of Israel.

### SAUL'S DISOBEDIENCE

Again Samuel came to Saul with a message from the Lord:

Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have,  
and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and  
suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass. (I Samuel 15:3)

Obediently Saul set out for the Negeb and scored a decisive victory. Unfortunately he did not conquer his own and his people's avarice. When Samuel came for a report there was King Agag of the Amalekites with Saul. He was captive but alive. From the fields came the bleating of sheep and the lowing of cattle. Saul explained that the people had spared the best of the animals for a sacrifice to the Lord.

And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams.  
(I Samuel 15:22)

Samuel turned away but Saul, pleading, seized his robe to keep him a moment longer. The robe tore and Samuel exclaimed,

The Lord hath rent the kingdom of Israel from thee this day, and hath given it to a neighbor of thine that is better than thou.  
(I Samuel 15:28)

Samuel departed, never to see Saul again. For days he grieved bitterly. Then secretly and under divine guidance he went to Bethlehem. There he anointed a young shepherd, David, the son of Jesse, to be king of Israel.

Meanwhile Saul returned to Gibeah guilty, disappointed and discouraged. More and more often he fell into black moods of depression until at last his worried servants suggested music as a healing influence. One of them mentioned an accomplished musician, a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite. Saul sent for him. So it came about that David, the son of Jesse, secretly anointed king of Israel, was summoned to Saul's court in Gibeah. There he played with skill and compassion for his afflicted king.

### DAVID AND GOLIATH

Again the Philistines gathered their forces against Israel. This time they had with them a giant warrior nearly three meters tall. His name was Goliath. Morning and evening this fearsome creature taunted Saul and his men. He dared them to send one man against him. The fate of both armies would depend on the outcome of such an encounter.

One day David was visiting his three brothers in the Israelite camp. The giant yelled his challenge across the plain. In amazement David saw his brothers and their companions run for their tents. He asked innocently,

Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God? (I Samuel 17:26)

In his lonely work as a shepherd, facing the beasts of prey that prowled around the flock, David had learned to recognize the protective power of God. He told King Saul:

Let no man's heart fail because of him; thy servant will go out and fight with this Philistine. (I Samuel 17:32)

Refusing Saul's armor he confidently selected five round stones and put them in the leather pouch at his side. Then he raced toward the giant, his loaded sling whirling. The stone flew true, and Goliath dropped dead. Their faith and courage restored by this

seemingly impossible feat, the Israelites fell upon their demoralized foe. They forced them decisively out of the hill country. For this brave deed Saul raised David to a position of authority in his army.

David's personal charm, good looks and courage endeared him to all the people. But human loyalties are fickle. One day the women who came dancing out to meet their victorious warriors sang a new song,

Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.  
(I Samuel 18:7)

Samuel's prophecy rang in Saul's ears, "the Lord hath given the kingdom to a neighbor of thine, who is better than thou." Who but David was to occupy his throne and Jonathan's? Black rage seized him. When David came into the great stone hall to play on his lyre before the king Saul angrily hurled his javelin at him. Twice Saul tried to kill him, and David fled from Gibeah.

### DAVID AND JONATHAN

During David's days at court a strong, deep friendship had developed between him and Jonathan. Rejoicing in David's destiny Jonathan had even given him his own princely robe and weapons, for jealousy had no place in his thoughts. Now when at the feast of the new moon David's empty seat at Saul's table drew comment, Jonathan tried to reason with his father. Exasperated by his stupidity, Saul hurled his javelin at his own son and Jonathan at last realized that David was in mortal danger.

Early the next morning he hurried to a field, taking a little boy with him and pretending to practice with his bow. As the lad ran to fetch an arrow Jonathan cried out, "Is not the arrow beyond thee? Make speed, haste, stay not." (I Samuel 20:38) David, hidden by prearrangement behind a great rock, knew that the message was for him.

The lad was sent back to the city so the two friends might meet in secret one last time. Solemnly they swore in the name of the Lord: The Lord be between me and thee, and between my seed and thy seed forever. (I Samuel 20:42) Then David left, and Jonathan returned to the palace.

### DAVID THE OUTLAW

David was an outcast, fleeing for his life. Hungry, he persuaded the priest who kept the temple at nearby Nob to give him and his men the sacred shew bread. (A fact referred to a thousand years later by Jesus, demonstrating that human needs rightfully take priority over ritual.) To David's consternation, Saul misconstrued the alms as

disloyalty to himself. In revenge he ordered the annihilation of the whole company of priests at Nob. Only the priest Abiathar escaped. He joined himself to David.

Lest Saul's wrath vent itself also on his parents, David conducted them to Moab to relatives there. Ruth, the Moabitess heroine of the Biblical book by that name, was David's great-grandmother. His brothers joined him in exile and soon he became captain of a band of fugitives. They roamed the wilderness west of the Salt Sea and in the Negeb. There they hid in caves among rocks where the wild goats climbed. In payment for their protection against marauders, the shepherds and villagers of the region provided food for the wandering warriors.

However a certain wealthy sheep breeder named Nabal met David's courteous request for well-deserved provisions with a surly refusal. Impetuously, David and his men set out to teach the man a lesson. But on the way they were met by Nabal's wise wife Abigail. She brought asses laden with food: two hundred loaves, wine, sheep ready dressed, parched corn, clusters of raisins, two hundred cakes of figs. Bowing with her forehead to the ground she begged that so good a man as David should not avenge himself, nor shed blood needlessly. Touched by her wise perception of the spiritual loss he would have incurred,

David said to Abigail, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, which sent thee this day to meet me: And blessed be thy advice, and blessed be thou, which hast kept me this day from coming to shed blood, and from avenging myself with mine own hand.  
(I Samuel 25:32, 33)

The boorish Nabal (the name means "stupid") apparently suffered a stroke upon learning that the food had been delivered, and died. Soon afterward David sent envoys, with due formality of custom, to request Abigail to be his wife. With full formality she accepted and joined David and his band of outlaws.

David and his company knew no peace. Saul, obsessed with disappointment and hate, led his army fanatically among the wild wasteland gorges in dogged pursuit. Twice he blundered into David's very hiding place. On one occasion, David reached out and cut off a bit of the royal robe. Once he removed the javelin and water jar from beside Saul's head as he slept. However he refused to harm his king, or allow any of his followers to do so. Saul was still the Lord's anointed. At each proof of David's loyalty Saul wept with repentance. But the black moods returned and the threat to David and his men grew ever grimmer.

At last David sought ease from the tension by removing his band of outlaws entirely from Saul's territory. He sought refuge with Achish, king of the Philistine city of Gath. Convinced that David could harbor only hatred for his sovereign, Achish stationed him and his band as an outpost at Ziklag in the Southwestern hills of Judah. There, unknown to Achish, David and his men found opportunity to serve their Israelite kinsmen, protecting them and their flocks from the ever-present marauders. However

David's fellow officers in Gath were well aware of his unswerving fealty to his own people. When Achish naively called on him for support in a new, all-out attack on Saul, they insisted that David and his men return to Ziklag.

### SAUL'S DEATH

This new onslaught of the Philistines caught Saul unprepared. His prayers to the God of Israel went unanswered. Samuel, once his teacher and helper, was dead. In his early years Saul had banished witches and mediums from the land, as inconsistent with the worship of Israel's God. Yet in his desperation he disguised himself and with two trusted servants made his way by night to Endor. There a medium had remained. "Bring me up Samuel!" he commanded the frightened witch. The old woman plied her forbidden rites. Strange figures seemed to rise out of the earthen floor. Then one like the prophet Samuel stood before them.

However, the apparition had no friendly counsel for Saul. Why should he help if God had refused? Tomorrow, he stated harshly, Saul and his sons would be with him. Israel would be delivered into the hands of the Philistines.

The prophecy was fulfilled. With no heart left in him Saul fell in the fierce battle that raged the following day on Mount Gilboa. Israel crumbled.

What about David? Why did he not help Israel? Turning back from Achish, he had found his town of Ziklag in smoldering ruins. His two wives and all the families of his men had been taken captive by a plundering band of Amalekites. It was only after his swift pursuit and a victorious return with the rescued families that he learned of the tragedy of Mount Gilboa. An Amalekite, supposing himself to be the lucky bearer of good tidings, brought Saul's crown and royal bracelet to him. He claimed proudly to have killed King Saul with his own hands. David, in anguish and revulsion, rebuked him,

How wast thou not afraid to stretch forth thine hand to destroy the Lord's anointed? (2 Samuel 1:14)

He commanded the man be slain.

Out of deep affection and inconsolable grief, David, poet and musician, lamented the deaths of Saul and Jonathan:

The beauty of Israel is slain upon thy high places: how are the mighty fallen!... Ye mountains of Gilboa, let there be no dew, neither let there be rain, upon you, nor fields of offering: for there the shield of the mighty is vilely cast away, the shield of Saul, as though he had not been anointed with oil .... Saul and Jonathan were lovely and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. I am distressed for thee, my brother Jonathan:

very pleasant hast thou been unto me: thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women. How are the mighty fallen, and the weapons of war perished! (2 Samuel 19-27)

### DAVID'S ROYAL KINGDOM

The time had come for David, anointed long ago by the prophet Samuel, to take the throne of the kingdom of Israel. He was brought in triumph up to Hebron in Judah. This was the sacred site of Abraham's sojourn. There the people of Judah affectionately crowned him king.

However, it was only Judah that acknowledged his kingship. In Mahanaim one of Saul's surviving generals proclaimed Saul's son, Ishbosheth, king over Israel. The ten tribes north of Jebu-Salem gladly flocked to him. For seven years, the houses of David and of Ishbosheth were locked in a struggle for supremacy. It was Ishbosheth's own folly that finally alienated his loyal general. This drove him into league with David. With Abner's help, amid feasting and rejoicing, David was hailed king over the precariously united twelve tribes of Israel.

David's first task was the selection of a site for his royal residence. Hebron, in the heart of Judah, would cause jealousy in the North. Shiloh still lay in ruins. Shechem would be unacceptable to Judah. Ideally located at the border between the two factions stood the unconquered city of the Jebusites, Jebu-Salem. Its unfriendly existence, on a tongue of land falling into steep ravines and overlooking the main hill country roads, had long been a threat to traveling Israelites. David decided this should be the royal city of the Kingdom of Israel. At his urging, and for special honors, a daring and agile warrior climbed up the water shaft and opened the city gates to David's men. From that time on Jerusalem would be called the city of David, for it was conquered by his own soldiers, a neutral city immune to tribal jealousy. Archaeologists tell us that it was, at that time, about ten acres in extent.

David set up his headquarters in Jerusalem. From his friend, king Hiram of Tyre, he bought costly fragrant cedars of Lebanon. He hired skilled masons and Carpenters (for there were none in inexperienced Israel) to build his house. From Egypt he wisely took the pattern for the organization of his kingdom. He even hired supervisors from the Nile country. Then he gathered a great army under trusted captains, many of them foreigners. In businesslike fashion, he appointed court recorders to whom we owe many fragments of eyewitness accounts of his court.

Most important to him was the bringing of his people out of muddled religions concepts back to the true worship of the God of Israel. His greatest desire was that the ark of the Covenant of the Lord might be restored to its rightful central place among the children of Israel. Captured by the triumphant Philistines at the fall of Shiloh years before, it had caused them and their gods such distress that they had fearfully placed it on a new cart drawn by two milk cows and sent it away. Although their calves were tied in



the stalls at home, the two cows had plodded back to Israel. The ark had been placed in a private home, a priest appointed to keep it, and it had apparently been forgotten. David prepared in Zion (as his city was often called) an elaborate and beautiful tent-shelter for the wilderness tabernacle.

With burnt offerings, carefully planned and colorful processions, joyful singing and dancing, and with the sound of harps and trumpets, the ark was at last escorted to Jerusalem. David's dream was realized. Once more a beacon shone in Israel, the sacred symbol of God's goodness to his chosen people, and it was firmly associated with the throne. Jerusalem would forever be a holy city, and David her beloved king.

### GLORY

The Philistines had watched the intertribal battles of Israel. But with Jerusalem fallen and David becoming a power in the land they mustered their full force against him. However he had learned well their own methods of warfare. Moreover he had perfect faith in the God of Israel. Twice he defeated them, finally driving them back to their coastal towns to remain. Their strength would be broken for centuries to come. Their monopoly of iron was wrested from them. New progress and prosperity dawned in Israel.

Daring thinking and decisive action brought King David other military successes in the North, South and East. He pressed against the neighboring nations. Sometimes he proclaimed himself king. Other times he set up governors or merely demanding obedience and tribute from the conquered tribes. Eventually his rule extended from the river of Egypt to Hamath on the Orontes, a realm well over five hundred kilometers long. It straddled the main trade routes and commanding immense mineral resources. Booty and tribute were brought to Jerusalem, tremendous wealth of gold and silver, brass, weapons, horses and chariots. Assyria, in the North, was weakened at that time by the onslaught of Aramaean nomads. Egypt was beset by internal troubles. There was no equal to Israel in the known world.

The Lord made a covenant with Abraham, saying, Unto thy seed  
have I given this land, from the river of Egypt unto the great river,  
the river Euphrates. (Genesis 15:18)

So ran the ancient promise. A joyous mood of accomplishment rested on the people. Was not this the fulfillment of the promise for which they had striven for so long?

As the borders of his land became secure David, ever conscious of the source of his strength, grew dissatisfied with a mere tent for the honor of his God. With the help of King Hiram he planned a temple of surpassing beauty. But the word of the Lord came through Nathan the prophet decreeing that this should be the task, not of David the warrior, but of his son. David must content himself with gathering stores of wood and stone, gold, silver and copper for the temple which he must not build. He must find other ways to serve the Lord.

And David said, Is there yet any that is left of the house of Saul, that I may shew him kindness for Jonathan's sake? (2 Samuel 9:1)

In the turmoil of despairing household flight, on the day that Jonathan died, his five-year-old son Mephibosheth had suffered a fall that left him "lame on both his feet." In the spirit of newfound peace David commanded that Mephibosheth be brought to Jerusalem. His father's property was restored to him. From that time forth he ate at the king's table as one of David's own sons.

### SHAME

It was this same capacity for deep affection which, without divine guidance, darkened David's glorious kingdom with tragedy.

Uriah the Hittite, David's neighbor, was off to the wars. In his absence David fell madly in love with Uriah's wife, Bathsheba. He commanded that she be brought to him. Then, sinking deeper to cover his guilt, he sent a note to Uriah's captain:

Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest battle, and retire ye from him, that he may be smitten, and die. (2 Samuel 11:15)

Uriah died, and King David fetched Bathsheba to join his other wives in the palace.

He was brought to his senses, and to abject repentance, by Nathan the prophet. King though he was, as an Israelite David must suffer the consequences of disobedience to his God.

...thou has killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon. Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house;... (2 Samuel 12:9, 10)

Indeed, David's overindulgence of his own sons had paved the way for this curse. Decadence overlooked in his household uncoiled into fratricide only lightly punished. His third son, Absalom, idolized by all Israel for his beauty and winning ways, coveted his father's throne.

Very carefully Absalom laid his plans, while David trustingly disregarded his treachery. Suddenly, at a signal, trumpets blared throughout Israel and a shout went up in all the villages, "Absalom reigneth in Hebron!"

David and his loyal followers hurried headlong from Jerusalem, lest the city itself suffer damage. Priests brought the ark and followed their king but David sent them back. Though kings might rise and fall, the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord must remain in

Zion. Along the way the people wept grievously as their beloved king hurried across Jordan. One man, a relative of Saul, ran along the hillside above the road, throwing stones and cursing. David would let no one harm him. If his own son sought his life, why should not a Benjamite?

Absalom's army forded the river in pursuit and David's men met them in battle. As usual David's love took no account of the transgressions against him. He commanded Joab, his captain, to deal gently with the young rebel.

Nevertheless as the king's forces fought for victory that day Absalom died. He was stabbed by Joab when his beautiful flowing hair caught in the branches of an oak. David was inconsolable, wailing,

O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! Would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son! (2 Samuel 18:33)

So interminable was his weeping that at last Joab, loyal, clear-sighted and sincere, spoke roughly to his king:

Thou has shamed this day the faces of all thy servants, which this day have saved thy life, and the lives of thy sons and of thy daughters, and the lives of thy wives, and the lives of thy concubines; ...for this day I perceive, that if Absalom had lived, and all we had died this day, then it had pleased thee well. (2 Samuel 19:5, 6)

Through his grief, David recognized the justice of the rebuke. Putting aside his personal mourning he arose and sat on the stone bench in the city gate. There his subjects could see and talk to their king on that day of victory.

As he returned to Jerusalem his people flocked to meet him. Some came to mend their fences but most in sincere thanksgiving. A remaining rebellion was quickly quashed. Peace returned to Israel and to her chastened king.

### NUMBERING THE PEOPLE

Once more David made a human mistake. How great, he wondered, was the multitude under his rule? Whether from pride or for further organization he commanded Joab to go through all the tribes of Israel and number the people. Joab objected: with God as commander why regard numbers? But David insisted. Joab and the captains of the host traveled from Dan to Beersheba counting the men of Israel.

No sooner had they returned than a terrible epidemic struck the whole land. To David the tragedy seemed the divine punishment for his own willful sin. When he saw the angel of destruction poised on the hill above Jerusalem, sword upraised to destroy his beloved city, he implored God's mercy:

Lo, I have sinned, and I have done wickedly: but these sheep, what have they done? Let thine hand, I pray thee, be against me, and against my father's house. (2 Samuel 24:17)

His prayer was answered. Gad the seer bade him go up to the hilltop where the angel had stood and build an altar there. David and Gad went up together. In a ceremony which recalls Abraham's purchase of the cave of Machpelah, the ritual correct, the terms clearly stated and recorded for all posterity, King David purchased from Araunah the Jebusite the field and the great flat stone. (It is protected now by the ornate Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem.) David offered burnt offerings and peace offerings there to the God of Israel. The pestilence died out.

It was on or near this rock that the temple of the Lord would be built in later years by Solomon, son of David and Bathsheba.

### LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

David was old and feeble. He had reigned forty years. Adonijah could not wait to seize the throne from his aged father. With the conspiracy of Joab and Abiathar the priest, he surrounded himself with regal trappings. He had chariots, horsemen and fifty footmen to run before him. Then he called his followers to a sumptuous feast at a valley south of Jerusalem.

When word of this celebration and its purpose reached the palace Bathsheba hurried into the king's chamber.

And Bathsheba bowed, and did obeisance unto the king,... And she said unto him, My lord, thou swarest by the Lord thy God unto thine handmaid, saying, Assuredly Solomon thy son shall reign after me, and he shall sit upon my throne. And now, behold, Adonijah reigneth. (I Kings 1:16-18)

David gave swift orders and they were quickly carried out. His priest, his prophet and his trusted foreign bodyguard mounted Solomon on the king's own mule. They escorted him to the royal city. There the priest, Zadok, anointed Solomon with oil from the tabernacle. The royal trumpets sounded, and amid shouts of "God save King Solomon!" they brought him up quickly and placed him on King David's throne. The roar of shouting, the blaring of trumpets and the piping of pipes rolled down the valley to the ears of Adonijah's sated guests. A wayfarer from the city answered their puzzled questions: "Verily our lord king David hath made Solomon king." Adonijah's guests rose up and fled.

## KING SOLOMON

The early days of Solomon's reign were bloody. There was a purging of rivals to his throne and of possible seditionaries. But he followed earnestly in his father's footsteps of faith and humility. At Gibeon (still a sacred shrine even though the ark was in Jerusalem) he offered sacrifices. The Lord appeared to him in a dream. When asked, "What shall I give thee?" Solomon's dedication to his people and to his kingship dictated his humble reply:

I am but a little child: I know not how to go out or come in.  
And thy servant is in the midst of thy people which thou hast  
chosen, a great people, that cannot be numbered nor counted  
for multitude. Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart  
to judge thy people that I may discern between good and bad:  
for who is able to judge this thy so great a people? (I Kings 3:7-9)

The Lord was pleased with his prayer and answered, Because thou hast  
asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked  
riches for thyself,...lo, I have given thee a wise  
and an understanding heart;... And I have also given thee that which thou  
hast not asked, both riches, and honor: so that there shall not be any  
among the kings like unto thee all thy days.  
(I Kings 3:11-13)

King Solomon soon became known in distant countries for learning, judgment, business ability and diplomacy. His far-ranging interests encompassed all nature. He spoke authoritatively of trees and shrubs, beasts, birds, fishes. His love of music was expressed in hundreds of songs. Some are preserved, along with some of David's, in our book of Psalms. His deep understanding of human frailties is reflected in his collection of over three thousand proverbs.

An example of his deep wisdom is expressed in the story of two women who came to him with a small baby. They shouted for justice. The women lived in the same house. Each had born a son but one of the infants had died. Each passionately declared the living child to be her own. Solomon listened patiently to their quarreling then he called for a sword. He directed that the living child be divided in two, half to be given to the one, half to the other. One woman was satisfied. The other cried out in anguish,

O my lord, give her the living child, and in no wise slay it. Then  
the king answered and said, Give her the living child, and in no  
wise slay it: she is the mother thereof. And all Israel heard of  
the judgment which the king had judged; and they feared the king:  
for they saw that the wisdom of God was in him, to do judgment.  
(I Kings 3:26, 27, 28)

## THE TEMPLE

Solomon was true to his father's wishes. In the fourth year of his reign he started to build a house for the honor of the God of Israel. It was on the hilltop which David had bought from Araunah the Jebusite. It took seven years to build it, with thousands of laborers, working under the direction of skilled craftsmen lent by Hiram, king of Tyre.

In the nearby quarries they cut huge blocks of limestone. In the clay of the Jordan valley they cast two tall bronze pillars and a massive bronze bowl. This was often referred to as "the molten sea" because it was capable of holding more than 75,000 liters of water. These were carried up to Jerusalem and placed in the temple's court. The pillars were placed beside the great folding doors. The bowl, resting on the backs of twelve bronze oxen, was placed near the sacrificial altar.

Within the Holy Place of the temple the lamp stands and the ritual instruments were of pure gold. The close fitting stone blocks were completely covered with fragrant cedar of Lebanon. They were delicately carved and overlaid with gleaming gold. The patterns each had some religious significance: open blossoms, palm trees, chains and figures of cherubim. There were royal, symbolic creatures whose bodies denoted the strength and dominion of a lion, their faces the intelligence of man and their wings the swiftness of the eagle.

Israel's desert training had been strict:

Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water that is under the earth. (Exodus 20:4)

Small wonder that the children of Israel were inexperienced in the carver's art!  
Small wonder too, that the new temple looked not unlike those of the Baals of Tyre.

Yet actually there was no other temple like this in all the land. At the rear of the Holy Place a Canaanite might have expected to see a statue of a god standing, perhaps on the back of a golden bull. But here, beyond a small incense altar, steps led up to a windowless room whose equal length, breadth and height suggested perfect spatial balance. This was the Holy of Holies, into which even the high priest might enter only once a year. Faint light from the doorway might barely reveal two great-carved cherubim of olive wood, their broad wings outspread. There in the dark, perfumed silence was the all power, ever-presence and protection which formed the throne of Israel's invisible God.

Solomon prepared a splendid ceremony of dedication when the temple was finished. Before a great assembly of Israel's leaders white-robed priests carried the ark of the Covenant from Zion, the city of David. They went up to the new temple while trumpets, cymbals and harps sounded in praise and thanksgiving. Choruses sang in jubilant dialogue:

Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in. Who is this King of glory? The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle.  
(Psalms 24:7,8)

So many animals were sacrificed that day that there was no counting them. The ark, containing only the two stone tablets that Moses had placed there, was carefully deposited beneath the cherubim in the Holy of Holies. As this was done, the Shekinah, the shining manifestation of the glory of the Lord, so filled the temple that the priests could not remain.

And Solomon stood before the altar of the Lord in the presence of all the congregation of Israel, and spread forth his hands toward heaven; And he said, Lord God of Israel, there is no God like thee, in heaven above, or on earth beneath, who keepest covenant and mercy with thy servants that walk before thee with all their heart:... But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have builded? (I Kings 8:22, 23, 27)

Unlike his pagan neighbors, an Israelite never imagined for a moment that he could enclose or in any way dominate the God who had chosen Israel for his people.

There followed days of happy feasting. Then Solomon sent the people home. They rejoiced in the goodness that the Lord had shown to David, to Solomon and to all Israel.

### THE GOOD DAYS

Solomon turned then to building an elegant palace for himself. This took thirteen years. It was followed by buildings of state and palaces for his many wives. In addition he raised strong fortifications from Dan to Beersheba. It was a type far more sophisticated than Israel had ever known. Especially noteworthy was the administrative stronghold at Megiddo. It firmly controlled the overland trade from Egypt to Mesopotamia and from the Phoenician seaports of Tyre and Sidon.

In this newfound safety the land sprang into bustling prosperity. The Israelites could walk unafraid in their fields and villages. They were able to barter their wheat and barley, onions, leeks, cucumbers, beans, peas, lentils, and their olives, figs and dates for the unaccustomed luxuries of fine pottery, ivories, gems and spices brought by the foreign caravans. In the less fertile regions toward the South, whole towns devoted themselves to dyeing and weaving luxurious fabrics for trade. They bought murex shells from the Mediterranean coast for the royal crimson dye, and fine wool from the Negeb. The making of pots for the precious dyes and for other household uses gave scope to the potters' previously undeveloped creativity.

In the stifling, blazing Negeb, in safety not known since the days of Abraham, painstaking water conservation coaxed fig trees and vines into fruit. Forts which Solomon built in the Negeb were not only for protection of these agricultural ventures but also for the mining. The valley of tumbled earth and rugged cliffs from the Salt Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba, a stretch of nearly a hundred and eighty kilometers, was rich in iron and copper. These were sorely needed in his grand building program.

Families along the valley mined the metals with their simple tools. With homemade furnaces, bellows and anvils they fashioned needles and toggle pins, tweezers, awls and other small articles. These became common in every household. Solomon's forces mined the precious metals in great quantities. They hauled the ore to an elaborate smelter at the head of the Gulf of Aqaba. There slaves and captives produced ingots for foreign trade as well as for domestic use.

Solomon's ships sailed down the Red Sea to find gold and perfumes, ivory, exotic woods and precious stones. They also brought peacocks and monkeys for the entertainment of the emerging aristocracy.

The people were happy in those early days of Solomon's reign. Some of his recorders reported exultantly (though many years later, and no doubt with some exaggeration),

And the king made silver and gold at Jerusalem as plenteous as stones, and cedar trees made he as the sycamore (wild fig) trees that are in the vale for abundance. (2 Chr. 1:15)

### THE QUEEN OF SHEBA

It was probably to discuss her own endangered trade routes with this strangely powerful new king that the queen of Sheba traveled some nineteen hundred dusty kilometers with gifts of many camel loads of gold and spices. Perhaps somewhat haughtily she tested Solomon's sophistication with riddles and devious conversation, as was the custom. His wisdom and versatility astounded her, and when she beheld the splendor of his palace, his servants' elegant clothing and the luxury of his table, "there was no more spirit in her."

Happy are thy men, happy are these thy servants, which stand continually before thee, and that hear thy wisdom. Blessed be the Lord thy God, which delighted in thee, to set thee on the throne of Israel... (I Kings 10:8,9)

With this acknowledgement of the might of the God of Israel, and having received "her desire, whatsoever she asked for" from Solomon, she returned to her own country.



### WARNINGS FULFILLED

In the times to come, when Israel looked back longingly to her century of splendor and strained ahead for its return it was not the elegant reign of Solomon that they yearned for, but the simplicity of David's. King David conquered through his deep faith in Israel's God. He danced and sang and gave thanks among his people. They prayed for, wept for and cared for his beloved subjects like a father.

Samuel had warned, when Israel demanded a king:

He will take your sons, and appoint them for himself, for his chariots, and to be his horsemen;... and will set them to ear his ground and to reap his harvest, And he will take your daughters to be confectionaries, and to be cooks, and to be bakers. And he will take a tenth of your seed, and of your vineyards, and give to his officers and to his servants. He will take a tenth of your sheep, and ye shall be his servants. (I Samuel 8:11-17)

Samuel's prophecy was fulfilled. To feed his magnificent court Solomon divided his kingdom into twelve districts. He gave little regard for tribal boundaries. He commanded that each district should supply food-- fine wheat, beaten oil, fruits and animals- for one month each year. His need for thousands of laborers to fulfill his dreams had forced him to conscript his people. The burden fell especially hard on Northern Israel. His subjects became slaves. The love of independence that lay deep in Israel's soul grew restless.

Far worse than his callousness toward his subjects was his blindness to his duties to the God of Israel. He "loved many strange women." Many of his marriages were for political reasons. The foreign wives thus acquired continued to worship their native gods. Not only did Solomon build altars for them but also in his later years he himself showed interest in the superstitions of the pagan pantheon.

The rebelliousness of the Israelites found a leader in an Ephraimite foreman named Jeroboam. The insults to the God of Israel goaded the prophet Ahijah of Shiloh into action. Ahijah sought out Jeroboam in the field where there would be no witnesses. He was wearing a new cloak but with desperate hands he tore the fabric into twelve pieces.

And he said to Jeroboam, take thee ten pieces for thus saith the Lord, the God of Israel, Behold, I will rend the kingdom out of the hand of Solomon, and will give ten tribes to thee: (But he shall have one tribe for my servant David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake, the city which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel.) (I Kings 11:31,32)

The meeting became known and Jeroboam fled into Egypt. Solomon sought to kill him.

Forty years Solomon reigned over Israel. At his death he was buried with great honors in the city of David. His son Rehoboam went confidently to Shechem to be crowned king of Israel. Jeroboam, the fugitive foreman, returned quickly from Egypt and was made spokesman for his kinsmen:

Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee. (I Kings 12:4)

Rehoboam asked for three days in which to think the matter over. The elder statesman advised him to accede. But the spoiled young aristocrats with whom he had grown up put other words in his mouth. When Jeroboam returned for his answer the king announced:

I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions. (I Kings 12:11)

A cry of rage went up from the men of Northern Israel:

What portion have we in David? Neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. (I Kings 12:16)

The ten tribes proclaimed Jeroboam king of Israel. They stoned to death the tribute gatherer whom Rehoboam foolishly sent among them. Rehoboam fled back to the safety of Jerusalem. There he reigned over Judah and part of the tiny tribe of Benjamin.

The golden days of David's kingdom had passed away. The two parts of the divided kingdom would be known as Israel and Judah.