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THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE INSTITUTION OF MONARCHY IN ANCIENT ISRAEL

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Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts in Hebrew Letters and Ordination.

Hebrew Union College-Jewish Institute of Religion

1962

Referees: Professor Matityahu Tsevat

Professor Ellis Rivkin

ABSTRACT

The Children of Israel entered the Land of Canaan as a loose collection of clans and tribes. They may have begun as roving, fighting bedouin, but it was not long before they became semi-nomads, i.e., engaged in agriculture, while not yet becoming tied to their crops and to the land which they worked. They gradually became more settled and related to the land, various groups making it their home. Development included more and better agriculture, the building of permanent homes, and congregating in towns and cities. Their amphictyonic structure was not suitable to the new way of life, yet their traditions and experience told them that extended relationships and group cooperation were valuable for defense and economic stability. Some new form of organization was made necessary by the needs of settled city dwellers and by the growth of an economic surplus.

Several efforts were made to establish a centralized authority. The most notable was that of Gideon and his son Avimelech. Like other leaders of the time, often called "judges," Gideon was a brilliant and successful tactician. He continued to maintain his position and to wield authority after he had beaten the enemy, and became governor. The Bible gives us no information other than that he built a shrine at his home town and raised a large family (70 sons!). The situation had developed so that one of these sons was to inherit the position. With a bloody purge Avimelech succeeded in gaining power, establishing his

rule over Shechem. He tried to extend his authority but was killed after a few years of tyranny, trying to suppress an insurrection.

By the time of Saul, urban society had developed still further and the need for a central authority was patent. After winning his laurels in battle, Saul became king over extended territory. His career mainly involved fighting, but he had the cooperation of the whole of the people. Saul eventually lost to the Philistines and the way was left open for the brilliant David to rise to power. David was not only a good general, but a skillful statesman, and firmly consolidated Israel into a kingdom and then expanded this kingdom into an empire. Israel was now a flourishing, powerful nation, with agricultural surplus, cities, and extensive trade. The personalities and actions of the great leaders fit perfectly into the historical process.

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CHAPTER I

PERIOD OF THE JUDGES

In approximately two generations Israel progressed from a loosely related group of clans to a splendid expanded kingdom with trade outlets from Damascus to Egypt. It is true that a statement such as "In those days there was no king in Israel and every man followed his own inclination" (Ju 21:-25) was written by some apologist for the monarchy, but the disorder described in the Book of Judges was not manufactured to justify some later absolutist. There are infinite difficulties in understanding the sources for Israel's becoming established in the land, not to mention what went on before, but we can say that out of chaos, order was created in a short span of time around the turn of the 11th century B.C.

In this thesis we shall discuss the key individuals who took part in this speedy evolution, although it would be just as wrong to give them full credit for the founding of the monarchy as it would be to attribute far reaching changes in society to the skill of any individual leader, no matter how great. There were strong outside influences (notably the Philistines), which challenged the Children of Israel. We shall try to trace their effects on the situation, but it would be misleading to consider them the primary stimulus for the rise of a state. There must have been basic structural changes to allow a centralized government to come to power.

There is no king in a tribal society, which is essentially free and democratic. Here leadership is patriarchal, with elders gathering when necessary to deal with problems that may concern a given area or group of clans. In an emergency there may be outstanding leaders who organize the clans, primarily for military purposes, but their influence is not likely to be felt beyond their lifetime. Certain tribes might have chosen chieftains, like the American Indians, but these chieftains never had absolute authority, and could act only with the consent of the members of the group.

A stable settled society is required as the basis for a firm central government. Nomads are shepherds and foragers, and frequently raiders, while settling down involves agriculture and city building. Such a society is highly vulnerable to outside military domination, as well as attacks from diehards of the old nomadic order. In addition, there are social problems to be dealt with in any city, and it is to be expected that these should be more intense in a culture just beginning to accustom itself to settled life.

The old clan structure cannot cope with the problems of the new existence and is bound to break down. Even a primitive city requires a certain amount of planning and demands a definite authority. One solution is government by an aristocracy, and there seems to be evidence for such a structure in the repeated use of the term "masters of" (ba'aley . . .") in Judges, especially with reference to Schechem. It seems that these leaders had the prerogative of selecting themselves a

king, but we shall discuss this later in the case of Avimelech. There is a further reference to "masters" in connection with K'ilah, a town in the mountains of Judah. (1S 23:11-12). It is to be noted that (if "masters" refers to an aristocracy) this form persists on the local level into the period of Saul. There is also a reference to "Masters of Yavesh Gil'ad" to the east of the Jordan in the time of David (2S 21:-12), but this seems to be the last use of the term in this sense. It is probably that such a government would have broken down especially in the atmosphere of a monarchy.

Another possible reference to aristocracy is the frequent use of the term "elder" or "elders of ..." (zaqen, ziqney...). This use of the term is more frequent in the early literature than in the later prophetic writings, but there is a problem in that the term may simply be a title of respect for the elderly. Of course an "elder" need not be one who is advanced in years, but in a case such as the reference to Jesse, David's father, as a zaqen (1S 17:-12), it is difficult to determine which meaning is meant, though it is likely to be "aristocrat." We expressed some hesitency above regarding the use of the term "masters," in that there is no proof that this too was not simply an honorific title. The point is that if neither term existed, we should probably be justified in assuming some such stage in the development of settled society, given a people emerging out of a clan structure.

Another, probably more authoritarian and efficient form of government was the city king. We have references to them in the el

Amarna letters, and it may be assumed that the Canaanites, being a long settled people, developed this form very early. The story of the five kings over whom Abraham was victorious (Gen 14) though of questionable historicity, has a ring of antiquity and fits well with what was probably the political structure of the time. There is a list of kings of Edom in Gen 36:31-39, and whether these were individual city kings, or as has been suggested, the seat of rule varied with the king, the Israelites were certainly well acquainted with this institution. The most cogent piece of evidence from the period of the Israelite settlement is the extensive list of cities, each with its king, in Jos 12:9-24. The text may or may not be an exaggeration, but there is no reason to doubt that the list refers to real cities with real city kings.

There are two basic disadvantages to government by separate city kings, and these in part may explain why there is no evidence of the Israelites setting up such governments (with perhaps the exception of Avimelech, which we shall discuss below). First, the cities are disunited and hence strategically weak. Their vulnerability is illustrated by their defeat by the Israelites. Individual cities, such as Jerusalem, might be well fortified, and able to hold out longer, but they too, being cut off, must eventually fall. The second point is not so easy to pin down, but it would seem that individual city states are not suitable for the type of corporate and cooperative economy to which the Israelites had been accustomed. Israel as a whole certainly did not present a united front and there were serious tribal rivalries, but their

existence must have depended on general cooperation, no matter how loose the formal amphictiony may have been. At any rate, before long, as we noted above, a central government emerged, and possibly potential city states never developed.

At this point it will be well to examine the actual leadership the Israelites had during the period in which they were establishing themselves in the land. Mention must be made of the leadership of Moses and Joshua with whom this period begins, but in general the sources concerning them are so problematic as to render it impossible to base conclusions on their careers. It may be possible to draw them into a comprehensive understanding of the leadership of the time, and we shall make comparative references to them from time to time.

Without going into an extended analysis of the religion of the ancient Hebrews, we can recognize that they saw a direct confrontation between men and God. This is evidenced by the general belief in miracles and divine intervention in human affairs, and notably in the belief that God could communicate with His people. God could speak to an individual via dreams, as in the case of Gideon (Ju 7:9), or in some cultic fashion, perhaps with urim and tumim, as in the case of the five spies from Dan who asked Miciah's priest concerning the success of their mission. (Ju 18:5-6).

God had another way of influencing people, one that was perhaps more subtle and more easily grasped. Today we refer to divine

"inspiration." Some might speak of some supernormal state of mind or of being. The idea is that under certain circumstances an individual is led to thoughts and actions beyond what is normally expected of him. In such cases, extraordinary and external forces seem to be in evidence and this force may be ascribed to the deity, a sort of devine gift, Charisma. The Israelites had a term that meant charisma: ruah YHVH or ruah elohim, the "spirit of God" or, more anthropomorphically, "The breath of God." Probably in earliest times there was an identity between the two meanings of the word ruah.

The classical statement of charisma in Judges is made in regard to Otniel, the first judge. "The spirit of YHVH was upon him and he judged Israel and went out to war. YHVH placed Kushan Rishatayim, king of Aram, into his hands, and he triumphed over Kushan Rishatayim." (Ju 3:10). The term is used a second time with Jephtah: the spirit of YHVH was upon Jephtah...and Jephtah made an expedition to the Amonites to fight with them, and God placed them into his hands... and he smote them... and the Amonites were subjugated to the Isrealites." (Ju 11:29, 32-33). In both instances a leader rose to lead the Israelites to a decisive victory and this leadership and victory was ascribed to God. It is to be noted that charisma is here the view by which the tradition interprets what it considers extraordinary and miraculous events. We need not conclude that ruah YHVH refers to ecstasy or particular state of mind other than that which characterizes any great fighter, but such may well have been the image which the people held of their leaders.

The term appears again in Judges only in the fanciful story of Samson. There, just because the tradition is imaginative and creative, the concept of charisma is particularly instructive. We see that a gift of fantastic personal prowess is involved, and we may understand that this is part of the meaning of ruah YHVH when it is used in other instances. The next important use of the term is in describing Saul, and we shall discuss this below.

The most common title given to leaders in the period of settlement is shophet or some verbal form of the word, usually translated "judge." It is clear from the very frequent use of the word throughout the Bible that it has the meaning of the English "judge," i.e., deciding between litigants and prescribing a just reward or punishment. It is possible that this might have been one of the functions of the "judges" in this period, and evidence might be found in the case of Deborah who: "sat under the Palm of Deborah...and the Israelites came to her for judgment" (Ju 4:5). Though the argument for Deborah being a magistrate may be correct, it is never-the-less circular and inconclusive since mishpat, "judgment," is of the same root as shophet, and does not tell us any more than saying that a judge judges. Besides, arbitration was in those days taken up by elders sitting in the gates of the city. (as e.g., "...let them take him to the elders of his city, at the gate of his location." Dt. 21:19). Thus each town could have its own court, easily accessible to the people, though it is conceivable that one of the "judges" might act on a final appeal. There is, however, no evidence for this for the early periods.

We see progressive variations in the meaning of "judge" in such uses as the following. Jephtah is quoted as having said to the king of the Amonites: "I have not sinned against you and yet you do me the evil of fighting me; let YHVH, the judge, judge today between the Israelites and the Amonites." (Ju 11:27) This is not a mere pious phrase. It is a taunt and battle cry. "To judge" here means to give them their just deserts, i.e., let the Israelites defeat the Amonites in battle. A still clearer example is that of the well intentioned messenger, bringing what he thought was good news to King David, concerning the death of Absolom: "Let my lord the king hear the good news that this day YHVH has judged you from the hand of all those who would rise up against you." (1S 18:31) Here, the idea of "saving" or "protecting from evil" is indicated.

There is an interesting Semitic parallel from ancient Carthage. There, the descendants of the Phoenicians used the title "Sufetes" to refer to ministers of government, councilors.[1] Most of the Biblical evidence for this use of the word shophet comes from Judges. There is, however, an instructive verse ascribed to the scheming Absolom. The context shows him to have clear intentions of usurping his father's throne as he says, piously: "Would that I were a shophet in the land;

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[1] SUFES -- The chief magistrate of the Carthaginians, corresponding to the Roman consul; a sufet. John T. White and J. E. Riddle, Latin-English Dictionary, London, 1872.

The Suffetes were two magistrates who held office for one year. They had to be men of property. The Cambridge Ancient History, Cambirdge, vol. VII, p 666.

then every man who has a litigation or a mishpat would come before me, and I would deal justly with him." (2S 15:4) Much later, in the eighth century, the king is still referred to as Shophet as one of his titles. When his father was incapacitated by disease, Jotham takes over as shophet. (2K 15:5). Amos refers to the ruler of Moab as shophet in predicting his downfall (Am 2:3). In what is probably a still later interpolation in Isaiah, the prophet refers to the future restoration of the Davidic dynasty with the title of shophet. (Is 16:5) It is clear from these passages, that during the period of the monarchy the title was used of the king and probably referred to his role as supreme judge.[2]

The significance for us in the title shophet in the later period lies in its application to the king. It is inconceivable that the king was the only court of justice in such a sizeable state as the Israelites had in this period. Judging could occupy only a small place among a king's many affairs of state. It is likely that the title was a hold over from an earlier stage (as is probably also the case with Sufetes) when shophet referred to some sort of leader. Preservation of terminology, albeit with different significance, allows a feeling of continuity. This illusion of minimizing radical developments has proven useful to many movements, one of which was the monarchy in Israel as we shall note below.

Immediately following the narrative of the death of Joshua and his generation there is a passage which sets the theme and outlines the

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[2] Cf. Is 3:2, a list of leaders who will be destroyed: "...hero and warrier, judge and prophet, diviner and elder."

framework for the Book of Judges (Ju 3:11-23). By its orderly form and historiosophic content, the passage is clearly seen to be Deuteronomistic. The period is described in schematic cycles: the Israelites are pious for a time; then they go astray after foreign deities; God punishes them for their backsliding by letting them be defeated and subjugated by their enemies; after a time the people cry out in their distress and repent; God sends them a hero, a shophet, who leads them to victory and all is well for a time; then the judge dies and the cycle repeats itself. All this is a test period in which God wants to determine whether or not His people will really observe his commandments.

Because the book was edited in the seventh century we must be especially wary of over simplification and possible misinterpretation of the events on the part of the editors, who were after all not historians but preachers, using the past for religious instruction. Throughout the Bible we can observe the typical sermon, which invariably took the form of a brief sketch of the history of Israel and their relationship to God: how God led and protected them, and how they never-the-less were unfaithful, and how God punished them.[3] The thesis was, of course, for the hearers to cease their backsliding and worship God alone, lest they too come to grief.

Under such circumstances, one might easily conclude that the book is composed of an artificial grouping of traditions. Several

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3. Cf. the historiosophic sermon in Ps 78.

scholars have so concluded, notably Martin Noth. We quote his argument as he has condensed it in his "History of Israel."[4]

> From the very beginning Israel's specialty did not consist in a particular and unique form of worship at the central shrine, but in the fact that it was subject to a divine law which was recited at the tribal gatherings at regular intervals and to which Israel committed itself in constantly renewed acts of affirmation. This is consonant with the fact that the only office for all Israel explicitly mentioned in the oldest Old Testament tradition was not a priestly but a judicial one. In Judges 10:1-5:12:7-15 we have a list of so called 'minor judges.' They are so described to distinguish them from the 'major judges' about whom detailed records exist in the 'Book of Judges' but who, from all accounts, were not judges at all but charismatic leaders of tribes in various warlike conflicts and were only incorporated in the list of 'judges' by the author of the deuteronomistic chronicle because one of them, Jephtah, was also represented in the list of the 'minor judges.' The older tradition knew only the 'minor judges' as the judges of Israel, and to them alone does the title 'judge' properly apply, in accordance with the traditional material. In the above-mentioned list they appear as the bearers of an office which was administered by one man; and the list mentioned six such judges, who filled the office of judge in an uninterrupted sequence. In each case only the name, descent and native place is briefly mentioned, then the duration of the tenure of office is recorded and finally the place of burial briefly stated; in some cases brief anecdotal remarks are also included within this framework. Apart from these data, this traditional material appears to be based on official records. This applies especially to the references to the years during which they 'judged' Israel. ...The fact that this information was recorded officially and transmitted to posterity can probably only be explained by the fact that in the earliest period of Isreal's history dates were based

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4. Martin Noth, The History of Israel, New York, Harper, 1958, pp 101-2. In notes, Noth refers to further articles of his which are in German and thus closed to me. It may be that he brings more conclusive evidence there:
"Uberlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien" I (1943), pp 47 ff.
Festschrift Alfred Bertholet (1950), pp 404 ff.

> on the period of the judges' years of office. If that is so, it follows that this was the central office in the Israelites' twelve-tribe association and that the law played a decisive role in this association. (If the cult had been all-important, dates could have been based on the years of the high priests of the central sanctuary, insofar as such existed.)

There are fourteen individuals brought together in Judges. One is a woman, thereby presenting problems which we shall not attempt to solve here. One is a fictionalized folk hero, which fact does not preclude the possibility that there was indeed an individual named Samson who carried out exploits against the Philistines. One was not a popular hero at all: the tyranical Avimelech lived and died in violence, though the tradition does not seem entirely unsympathetic to some of his acts of cunning and daring. We shall have more to say about him shortly.

Of the fourteen, five are not specifically denoted by the term shophet: Ehud, Shamgar, Barak, Gideon, and Avimelech. The argument from silence cannot be used here to show that these were not considered judges just the same as the rest. In the first place they are grouped together with the others. In the second place there are possible explanations for three of them: the text dwells at length upon Gideon and Avimelech, and other terms for their authority are given; as for Barak, though probably a great general, his significance seems to have paled besides that of Deborah (Ju 4:9).

On the other hand, the six whom Noth refers to as judges in the older tradition are characterized in similar language as judges: "And

so-and-so judged Israel so many years." The tradition itself does not distinguish between major and minor judges; this is merely Noth's convenient terminology to refer to the judges proper -- the "minor judges," and the others -- the "major judges" -- who became attached to the book through a literary process. There is justification for seeing the series of six as a separate literary block. As Noth has observed, a simple formula of information is followed for each judge, giving the sort of details that would be expected in a dry, methodical chronicle such as the genealogical lists in the first chapters of I Chronicles, or the list of Edomite kings in Genesis 36:31-39. As Noth points out, it is noteworthy that only in these six cases are concise lengths of terms mentioned. With the others the data given tells us only that there was peace for a certain number of years, given each time in the stylistically rounded figures of twenty, forty, or eighty years. Presumably, these figures are meant as the periods of each individual's influence, if not the actual time of his term of office. No length of time is specified for Shamgar, nor for Gideon, while Avimelech is said to have "reigned" (vayasar Ju 9:22) for three years.

It would seem that a more significant distinction is that with the extreme exception of Jephtah, no military exploits are mentioned in connection with the "minor judges." It was probably this fact, though not so stated in the above quotation, which led Noth to conclude that these "minor judges" must have served in some non-military, judicial and

cultic capacity. The function of reciters of the law must then be based on an analogy with Joshua's cultic act (Jos 24) at Schechem, which takes the form of the sermon mentioned above. Also there are Moses' repeated readings of the law in the desert. Finally, there might be confirmation in Samuel, who is referred to as judge (1S 7:16) while clearly no man of arms; Samuel has several instances of preaching at convocations attributed to him (1S 7:3-6 (nt. esp. "And Samuel judged the people at Mitspah"); 8:10-22:12). Since we cannot claim to know the full significance of the Hebrew term shophet, such a usage would be entirely reasonable. It must be noted, however, that there is simply no evidence for this function in Judges. Especially not in the case of the "minor judges" for whom the only evidence is the title shophet itself, that is, of course with the exception of Jephtah.

And what about this exception, Jephtah? He was a real fighter. He seems to know quite a bit of the history of Israel, but uses it not for a sermon, but ostensibly to placate, but more likely to taunt the enemy (Ju 11:12-27). Perhaps, in addition, he did some preaching, but the only evidence of a cultic role for Jephtah is his sacrifice of his daughter! The single individual who does take an active part in the cult is Gideon, who uses part of the spoil of conquest to fashion an ephod which he places in a shrine in his home town, Ophra (Ju 8:24-27). This act raises problems which are beyond the scope of this paper, but we shall have more to say about Gideon.

It is possible to grant that the six "minor prophets" constitute a separate literary block without implying the conclusion that as leaders, these six were any different from the rest. It is true that their form indicates that they must have been part of some chronicle, and the literary process which Noth suggests is not inconceivable. The point is that there is no cogent evidence that would force us to take such a position. If we were to exclude the description of Jephtah's mighty acts (Ju 11:1-12:6), along with the stylized deuteronomistic introduction (Ju 10:6-18), we would remain with the formula sentence (12:7) characteristic of the list of "minor judges." Who is to say that similar traditions did not exist for the other "minor judges"? It may have been that these men simply held the title with whatever authority it entailed just in case some emergency should arise. The only clues we have as to their position is the meager information that two are singled out as having large families and what the Bible considers a noteworthy point, that their sons rode about on fine jackasses (Yair -- Ju 10:4; Avdon -- 12:14). These facts might indicate that these were wealthy families, natural leaders in the community, and hence suitable for the role of shophet. It is also possible that they received some sort of tribute befitting their position. In the light of Gideon's receiving a lion's share of the spoil, as mentioned above, this last does not seem unreasonable, but it remains a mere conjecture.

As for the others, not included in the six "minor judges" all that is clear is that the information regarding them was not taken from

the same source as the six. If it is true that "in the earliest period of Israel's history dates were based on the period of the judges' years of office," then an example of this dating would be found in the "Song of Deborah": "In the days of Shamgar ben Anat, in the days of Yael ..." (Ju 5:6). Shamgar was one of those who was not denoted as a judge. Yael may here refer to the wife of Hever the Kenite, who slew Sisera (Ju 4:21), but more likely, as is generally accepted, was some hitherto unmentioned leader. Similarly, who is Bedan who comes between Jerubaal and Jephtah in Samuel's list of judges (1S 12:11)? We must concede that the Bookof Judges is not a methodical and complete history of the period, even by ancient standards.

Aside from the title shophet, there are several other terms which seem to denote authority. They are even more enigmatic, due to their rarity. In the beginning of her song, Deborah addressed herself thus: "Listen, o kings, give ear o roznim (princess?)..." (Ju 5:3). Later on she refers to Hokekey yisrael (lawgivers?) (5:9); and moshchim beshevet sopher (bearers of scepters?) (Jephtah is referred to as Katsin, which seems to be related to the Arabic kadi, "judge, decision maker."[5] Jephtah is also called rosh, "chief," which term we shall take up shortly. It may be that these sundry terms refer to the same sort of leadership as may also be denoted by shophet. At any rate they must have been titles

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5. Francis Brown, S.R. Driver, C.A. Briggs, Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament, Oxford, Clarendon, 1907, p. 892.

suitable to the loose amphictyonic structure described above, i.e., clan or tribal heads, leaders with some sort of ephemeral authority. If there was any attempt to establish and expand their authority, none was apparently successful beyond the exigencies of a given emergency.

Disunity was clearly an aspect of the period. It is not clear just who comprised the armies led by Otniel, Ehud, and Shamgar. Gideon relied primarily upon members of his own tribe of Manaseh, and more specifically his own clan of Aviezer (Ju 6:34). Jephtah commanded the people of Gilead (Ju 10:18). Deborah and Barak seem to have been supported mainly by men of Zebulun and Naphtali (Ju 4:10; 5:18). Barak sent out a general call and they had the cooperation, apparently, of Ephraim, Benjamin Machir, and Issachar (Ju 5:14f). The text is extremely difficult here, but this may have been an attempt at unified action. That this was the case is driven home by Deborah's castigation of Reuben, Gilead, Dan, and Asher who refused the call to arms (5:15b-17). Judah is conspicuous by its absence in the list. Could it be that Judah was at the time not even considered part of the amphictyony? It is impossible to say.

Finally, we note three other examples of disunity, and in fact internecine battles. (a) Euphraim is bitterly insulted twice by not being called upon for military service (Ju 8:1 with Gideon, and 12:1 with Jephtah). Apparently, Ephraim was ready and willing to cooperate, but these leaders, for some reason chose not to rely upon them. In the latter case, there was bloodshed over the quarrel. (b) The bloodshed

was even greater when Benjamin was almost entirely wiped out in a tribal dispute involving vengence (Ju 20). (c) Penuel and Sucot, cities to the east of the Jordan refuse to cooperate with Gideon in his pursuit of the enemy, even though they are both of Manaseh (Ju 7). Jephtah deals severely with them upon his victorious return.

The period of the judges was indeed a time when "there was no king in Israel, and every man did that which was right in his eyes."

CHAPTER II

DEVELOPMENT TOWARDS SOLIDARITY

Let it not be thought that during the period of the judges the Israelites were primitive nomads, wandering about, living only in tents. The background of Israel before the time of the judges is unclear, but it is likely that many, if not all of the clans were roving tent dwellers. On the basis of data from the period of the patriarchs, we might say that they were seminomadic, in a stage similar to certain bedouin tribes in the modern State of Israel; their tents may be seen pitched in sparsely settled areas, while the people in their ancient garb tend their flocks of sheep, goats, and camels. So far the description would fit even the wildest desert wanderers, but these people in the State of Israel are in addition farmers. Their agriculture is most primitive, ploughing with camels and wooden ploughs, scattering seeds by hand, with no thought of fertilizing or irrigation. If the weather is just right they reap what is in their eyes abundant blessing from Allah. If not, they are not so tied to the land that they cannot pull up their stakes and move on; after all they are seminomads, proud of their freedom and mobility. Never-the-less, this is probably the first step towards actually settling down, and a certain well-to-do sheik of one of these seminomadic tribes has built himself a villa in the Negev, south of Beersheba. We recall that the patriarchs spent periods of time at places such as Shechem and Hebron, and Lot's branch of the family even became city dwellers for a time.[6]

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6. Cf. Gen 14, Lot is in Sodom.

Archaeological evidence for the period of the judges is at best tenuous and hotly debated, but the consensus is that the Israelites did not immediately settle down in cities when they entered the land of Canaan in the Late Bronze Age. In general, even where the archaeological remains indicate a total devastation at this time, cities destroyed presumably by the Israelites were not rebuilt and resettled until after varying periods of time. Of course, most of the better fortified cities, especially those in the plains were impregnable to the invaders, as is frequently attested in the books of Joshua and Judges, and consequently the people tended to settle in the more sparsely populated hills. Apparently, even when they did succeed in conquering cities, they were as yet disinclined to settle in them. It is possible that the curse uttered by Joshua against rebuilding Jericho (Jos 6:26) was typical of their feelings regarding other cities as well.

Noth concludes that the city culture of the Canaanites was repugnant to the Israelites and rejected by them. They saw as perverse such interests as industry, commerce, profit making, social stratification, chariot fighting. The Canaanites were considered morally degenerate and lustful, especially in their sensuous fertility rites.[7] This was very likely the case at first, but it probably was not long before the Israelites began building homes and villages, learning agriculture from their neighbors, and along with it, all the above mentioned interests, including

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7. Noth, op. cit., pp. 142-4.

the fertility cults, which in a later period furnish the prophets with material for condemnation.

The word for tent, ohel, apparently comes to refer to dwellings in general, especially in later times when most of the people were certainly living in permanent houses. An example would be the statement that after the dedication of Solomon's temple, the people returned "to their tents happy and in good spirits." (1K 8:66). It is sometimes difficult to distinguish between literal and literary uses of the term, but there are several clear references to tents in the period of the judges. In the Deborah passage there is the episode of Siser's fleeing to the tent of Hever the Kenite. The Kenites were closely related to the Israelites and dwelled among them. There can be no doubt that this was actually a tent as in the episode Yael kills Sisera with a tent peg (Ju 4:21; cf. also 4:11). As might be expected, some of Israel's attackers, notably the Midianites were nomadic raiders. These are extremely hard to overtake and defeat, especially for a people who are not themselves nomads. But Gideon was a clever general and succeeded: "And Gideon went up the trail of the tent dwellers, east of Novah and Yogboha..." (Ju 8:11).

The stories in the final chapters of Judges are very early in content, and hence a valuable source of information in understanding the nature of the period. One of them tells of a man from Ephraim going after his concubine who has returned to her father's house in Bethlehem in Hudah. After wining and dining him as is proper, for

three days (note the similarity to the well known bedouin protocol of three days' hospitality), and another couple of days for good measure, the father-in-law suggests that he remain yet another night and then "get up early tomorrow morning for your trip, and go to your tent." (Ju 19:9). It is possible that this is an instance of "tent" referring to a house. In view of the fact, however, that the man is simply identified as a "Levite, living in the remote parts of the Mountains of Ephriam" (19:1), with no mention of a city, it seems quite likely that he actually lived in a tent. (Maybe this is why his city-bred concubine left him.) If so, this would be an interesting illustration of the transition period when some Israeilites remained in tents while others already lived in houses in cities.

There are twenty-seven Israeilite cities mentioned in that part of Judges which follows the introduction passage (Ju 1:1-2:10).[8] The names occur in the various narratives in the book, and there is no attempt at comprehensive listing. The text gives us no indication as to their size, and archaeology is as yet of little help, even in locating some of them. Taking the above number as a bare minimum of the cities that actually existed, we see that the people have begun to be city oriented, and the process towards statehood is in motion.

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8. Ir Hatemarim (Ju 3:14); Ramah, Bethel (Ju 4:5); Kedesh of Naphtali (Ju 4:6; Ophrah (Ju 6:11); Sukkot (Ju 8:5); Penuel (Ju 8:8); Tabor (Ju 8:18); Shechem (Ju 8:31); Bet Milo (Ju 9:6); B'er (Ju 9:21); Arumah (Ju 9:41); Tevets (Ju 9:50); Shamir (Ju 10:1); Kamon (Ju 10:5); Mitspah of Gilead (Ju 10:17); Bethlehem (Ju 12;8); Ayalon in the Land of Zebulun (Ju 12:12); Piraton (Ju 12:12); Tsor'ah (Ju 13:2); Etam (Ju 15:8); Bet Lehem of Judah (Ju 17:7); Giv'ah (Ju 19:13); Beer Sheva, Mitspah (Ju 20:1); Baal Tamar (20:33); Yavesh Gilead (Ju 21:8)

One item remains to be mentioned before we move on to consider specific power structure developments. This is agriculture, and the references are scant. It is clear, however, that cities cannot exist without a basis of agricultural production with sufficient surplus to feed the non-food-producing population who must be free for other pursuits. One reference to the development of farming is that of Gideon threshing his wheat in the wine press, thus hiding from the plundering Midianites (Ju 6:11). Wheat was ordinarily threshed out in the open, just as it is to this day by the primitive Arab farmers of the Near East. Wine presses were generally outside too, frequently being cut into the living rock, as any hiker in Israel has seen, but apparently marauders would not think to check a wine press during the season of the wheat harvest.

The archaeological evidence at Megiddo seems to indicate that the events commemorated in the Song of Deborah occurred early in the eleventh century B. C.[9] The fall of Shiloh, marking the general subjugation of the land to the Philistines, is to be dated around 1050 or

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[9] Robert M. Engberg, W. F. Albright, "Historical Analysis of Archaeological Evidence: Megiddo and the Song of Deborah," BASOR #78, 1940, pp. 4-9. The argument revolves around considering Megiddo VI as Canaanite, brought to an end by the Israelites under Barak, and followed by Megiddo V, and Israelite settlement. Comparative chronology then places this battle c. 1100 BC.

shortly after. Somewhere between these events comes the episode of Gideon and his son Avimelech, a significant and instructive attempt at building a power structure.

Gideon was, as we noted above, a farmer. He felt the perrenial threat to the undefended. Farmers are a settled lot, certainly not disposed to the military life. They will, however, fight zealously to defend their land and its hard-earned yield. Through some chain of events, Gideon became a war leader and performed brilliantly to fend off the plundering Midianites.

Considerable ledgendary material has collected about the figure of Gideon. The various miracles and theophanies indicate that in the popular mentality a leader (Gideon is never referred to as "judge" in the text) was one who enjoyed direct contact and guidance from the deity, as we have noted. As for the incident of destroying the Baal shrine, such an act is conceivable. That the Israelites adopted the Baal fertility cult is attested throughout the Bible, and there are likely to have been those at all times who were YHVH purists and strongly protested. This particular story, however, seems extraneous to the narrative, an insertion of a pious deed following the message of the prophet who appears to tell the people that their misfortune is due to their unfaithfulness to their God (Ju 6:7-10). The story has a clear aetiological function in explaining the name "Jerubaal." That is is merely aetiological is driven home by the fact that this is a "folk etymology," and quite incorrect. "Jerubaal" is a typical theophoric name meaning not "Baal has a dispute with him," (Ju 6:32) but "Baal defends him, "similar to Jeroboam": "The god Am

defends him." This is not sufficient evidence to conclude, with Noth, that the equation of Jerubaal with Gideon is secondary.[10] Rather the interpretation given by Kittel seems more plausable; that Jerubaal was the original name, and Gideon, meaning "Grim warrior," was a name earned through fighting prowess.[11]

Gideon sounds the alarm and his clan of Aviezer immediately rallies. Manasahites respond to his messengers, and men of Asher, Zebulun, and Naphtali follow suit. The fantastically optimistic exaggeration of 32,000 volunteers is whittled down in the well known story to the more reasonable and feasible figure of 300 (coinciding with Abraham's legion, Gen 14:13). By a clever strategy, Gideon leads his men to rout the enemy, and in the pursuit, Israelites from Maphtali, Asher, and Manaseh join the fray (Ju 7:23, What happened to Zebulun?). He also calls upon the Ephraimites (7:24), who cooperate, but grudgingly, as mentioned above. Gideon also has his trouble with Penuel and Succot. People in this period were simply not accustomed to being ordered about. They might be glad to cooperate as equals, but they are not yet ready to submit to authority. Once he has won his laurels, Gideon exerts authority with a vengeance over the two cities (Ju 8:13-17).

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10. Noth, op. cit., p. 152, n. 1. Noth argues that the equation is possibly fairly old, and was probably based on the fact that both names are associated with Ophrah, as well as the logical connection of Avimelech with Gideon. Noth considers Avimelech to be the son of Jerubaal.

11. Rudolf Kittel, Great Men and Movements in Israel, New York, MacMillan, 1929, p. 65.

The crucial point in this passage follows the battles. "The Israelites said to Gideon: 'Rule over us, both you and your son and your son's son, for you have saved us from the Midianite oppression.'" (Ju 8:22) The term for "save" or "savior" is not uncommon. The editor uses it in the introduction: "The Lord raised up judges who saved them from their oppressors;" as well as in conjunction with Otniel, Ehud, and Tola, aside from Gideon (Ju 2:16; 3:9, 15; 10:1). What is extraordinary is that the people do not ask Gideon to "judge" them, but to "rule" them. The Hebrew root involved is M sh l, and its meaning is fairly clear, being a common word in the later writings of the Bible. Aside from the passages on Gideon and Avimelech, the only other use in Judges is in the story of Samson where the Philistines are said to rule over the Israelites (Ju 14:4; 15:11). Whether or not "rule" is the specific meaning here, definite authority is indicated.

Equally startling, though perhaps implied in m sh l, is the request for inherited leadership. The people not only want to invest Gideon with power to rule over them, but also to found a dynasty, and this is certainly not typical of the period of the judges. It might be objected that this line is an insertion leading up to Gideon's pious refusal: "I shall not rule over you, and neither will my son; YHVH will rule over you" (Ju 9:23). In view of the changing times, however, and especially of the events that follow, the people's request does not seem at all unlikely. Gideon's modesty and piety might indeed be considered little more than protocol, and it is typical of many leaders to be politely

reluctant, from Moses through the prophets, right down to Adlai St evenson.

It should further be noted that obedience to God does not take precedence over obedience to a human ruler in real politics. The European monarchies illustrate that the ruler might find it convenient to involve the church in his position, but certainly not to accede to it against his own interests. There is developed the concept of "the divine right of kings." God's will must be interpreted and made concrete in action, though the question of who is to be the interpreter might arise, as it did in the conflict between Samuel and Saul which we shall discuss below. The point is that Gideon's refusal was not a strong one, and we may safely assume that he did in fact become a ruler of sorts over at least a segment of Israel. That he built a shrine at Ophra, his home town, might be evidence in support of this position.

We have here an illustration of some sort of "social contract," with the people willing to give up part of their autonomy, in return for unified action and defense. They have seen what happens when a leader is not given full cooperation, and at their stage of settling down are coming to see the advantages of the change. The chapter closes with the cryptic statement: "They didn't deal with the House of Gideon as befits a covenental relationship, in accordance with all the good which he had done for Israel." (Ju 8:35) This may indicate that they didn't really give him all the authority that he should have had. Or

perhaps it refers to the fact that no provision was made for the orderly passing down of the rulership, leading to the disaster which befell the sons of Gideon. It is impossible to say whether it means one of these, or something else, but it must be noted that this statement is not made of any other leader of the period. What we learn is that whatever the arrangement was, it was a departure from the norm, and must not have been entirely successful.

Most instructive, is the story of Gideon's son Avimelech. For one thing, here is conclusive evidence that the social contract was in force in some measure. When Avimelech approaches his friends and relatives in Shechem for support, it is a fait accompli that they are to have a ruler, and that it is to be a son of Gideon (Ju 9:2). There seems to be no innovation involved. Gideon has died and left seventy sons. Avimelech makes the strange reference to a rule by all seventy. Does he mean some sort of family council? Or perhaps a territorial division among the sons? Surely, in either case there would have to be some sort of hierarchy among the ruling brothers. We can find no evidence to support any explanation, and it is possible that the speaker used this language merely to emphasize and exaggerate the confusion and disunity inherent in the situation following the death of the first ruler. Avimelech's argument ran: "how much more reasonable and efficient would be the rule of one man than the rule of seventy; and bear in mind that I am your own flesh and blood." The people clearly saw the advantage of having a fellow shechemite for their ruler rather than an outsider,

and gave him full support. (The Shechemites are noted for their political and economic insight, as cf. the Dinah story in Genesis, esp. 34:20-23. Both there as well as in Judges, their choice seemed well advised, but the outcome was bloody in both cases.)

Shechem, at this time is generally considered to have been an old, well established Canaanite city.[12] That the city was old can be established by archaeology, but the evidence does not prove that the population was still Canaanite. The city was in the middle of Manaseh territory. There are patriarchal traditions of Israelites settling there (Gen 33:18-20). It seems likely that there was at least a large mixture of Israelites along with the Canaanite population. At any rate, here is reference to ba'aley Shechem, which probably means government by aristocracy, as we noted above. Ordinarily, an aristocracy would not be anxious to hand over power to a single individual. They must have had little choice in the matter, and besides, in return for their support, they could expect special consideration from a Shechemite king. Perhaps they thought of Avimelech as a city king, who would have extensive influence over the surrounding territory. All the better for Shechem.

Being sensitive to these elements, Avilemelech took advantage of them and used his new support and authority to wipe out his brothers,

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12. Noth, op. cit., p. 152.
Johanan Aharoni, "A Survey of Israelite Settlements in Northern Galilee," Antiquity and Survival, vol. II, no. 2/3, The Hague, 1957, p. 140.

possible contenders for authority. He probably began as city king of the old Canaanite type, and ruled thus for several years. The text uses a new word for rule: Yasar (Ju 9:22). The akkidian equivalent of this word is shafru and clearly means "king." It is possible that a similar meaning is involved with regard to the rule of Avimelech.

Avimelech, however, was apparently more ambitious, and hoped to extend his rule over all of Manaseh, and perhaps further still. In order not to give the impression to the Manaschites that he was merely a city king, he moved his seat from Shechem to Tormah (Ju 9:30-31); Tormah has not been located. It has been suggested that we read here: Arumah, as in v. 41, a place which has been tentatively located in the territory of Ephraim.[13] In either case the situation is problematic.). He appointed a governor (here again the word sar is used) over the city and made it clear that his primary interests were not in the welfare of Shechem.

The Ba'aley Shechem must have felt betrayed, and revolted against their exploitation. Here we see an indication of the economic and commercial development that had taken place, for they set up ambushes on the roads to attack and rob travelers (Ju 9:25). It is possible that the intent was merely to cause terror and insecurity, thus weakening the kingdom. It seems more likely, however, that the ambushes were a direct blow at Avimelech (the text reads "Vayasimu lo", "they set

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13. L. H. Grollenberg, Atlas of the Bible, New York, Nelson, 1956. p. 65.

against him"), and were aimed at his trade caravans which were exploiting them. A prospering trade would be part of the economic basis upon which the kingdom stood. In fact, the kingdom would be set up largely to protect and further this development, for the benefit of the rulers, of course.

Taking advantage of the dissatisfaction, a third party enters the picture and gains the trust of the "masters of Shechem." Ga'al, son of Eved, and his brothers seem to have given the people confidence and at their harvest festival they curse Avimelech, as well they might (Ju 9:27). Ga'al had his own ambitions and machinations. Speaking to his fellow conspirators he says: "Who is Avimelech and who is Shechem that we should serve them? Didn't this son of Yerubaal, along with his appointed one, Zevul, subjugate the men of Hamor, the ancestor of Shechem? Why should we ourselves serve him?[14]

With the cooperation of the clever Zevul, Avimelech succeeds in defeating both Ga'al and Shechem, razing the latter. His troubles are not yet over for another city, Tevets, to the north revolts as well. In trying to subdue Tevets, Avimelech meets an ignominious death, and thus is brought to a close a chapter of what was probably the first rule in Israel. Local autonomy won out here, but it was only a scant generation or so before a new attempt was to meet with better success.

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14. Ju 9:28; moving the athnach away from pekido either back to na'avdenu or forward to avi Shechem. The singular suffix of the first na'avdenu must be understood as meaning "either one of them," or both collectively.

In another part of the land, the other side of the Jordan, we have another instructive episode, the story of Jephtah. The territory of Gideon and Avimelech was Manaseh, with perhaps part of Ephraim (Shechem is near the border between the two). He pursued the Midianites over the Jordan through the Yabok valley past the two cities Socot and Penuel. Chances are that whatever authority Gideon exerted over the two was restricted to them, just as the Jabok valley is isolated and virtually inaccessible to the surrounding territory of Gilead. Had Gideon held extensive power in Gilead, perhaps the troubles with Amon would not have arisen. It is impossible to determine just when the events took place. Jephtah may have been contemporary with Gideon, as their territories don't really overlap.[15]

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15. There may be a clue to the dating in the editorial introduction to the Jephtah passage. "YHVH became angry with Israel and turned them over to the Philistines and the Amonites" (Ju 10:7). Archaeological evidence indicates a period of Philistine culture in Palestine from the first decades of the twelfth century to the late eleventh century. During the early twelfth century "Sea peoples", among them the Philistines, were infiltrating and invading the eastern coast of the Mediterranean. Some penetrated as far as Egypt where they were defeated and repulsed by Ramases III. Egypt still maintained control over Canaan at this time, and a plausible theory has been advanced that the Philistines were settled by the Egyptians as garrison troops in Palestine to control their land traffic routes. (Trude Dothan, "Archaeological Evidence for the Philistine Occupation," Antiquity and Survival, vol. II, no. 2/3, The Hague, 1957, pp. 151-2.) Ramases III was a mighty pharaoh, but after his death in 1144 Egypt began a rapid decline in power. We learn from the Wen Amon story that in 1090 Egypt had completely lost her authority in northern Canaan. The Philistines must have put their military background to good advantage and set about subjugating the Israelites in their own right. Around the time of Deborah a hero, Shamgar, is noted to have struck a blow against the Philistines (Ju 3:31).

The Samson stories are cast against a background of Philistine oppression (Ju 15:11). As mentioned above, the sanctuary at Shilo was destroyed around 1050, culminating a Philistine advance. By the time of Saul, they had gone still further, and this we shall discuss shortly. The above mentioned introductory verse may therefore hint to a period around 1050 for the Jephtah passage.

Jephtah was a social outcast, being the son of a prostitute. He had gone off and made a name for himself as leader of a band of men who probably shared his situation. When the elders of Gilead were looking about for someone to lead them against the Ammonites, Jephtah was their choice. Here we meet two new and interesting titles of authority which were applied to Jephtah and to no one else in Judges. The first is "katsin." The elders ask Jephtah to "go and be our katsin, and we will fight the Ammonites" (Ju 11:6).

The term is used once in Joshua in a clearly military context. Joshua refers to a certain group of men: "ketsiney of the soldiers" (Jos 10:24), apparently military officers. The word occurs four times in Isaiah, and there the meaning is not necessarily military so much as general authority. There is the description of the time of crisis and distress when all leadership has failed and a man will seek out another and say: "Go and be a katsin for us," and the man refuses the responsibility (Is 3:6-7). Katsin is also used in the plural: "Hear the word of the Lord, ketsiney Sodom," and "All of your katsinim have wandered off together" (Is 1:10; 22:3).

As we mentioned above, katsin seems to be related to the Arabic kadi, meaning judge or decision maker. The word katsin may be derived from the usage ketsoh, "extremely, outstanding, as is suggested in the verse: "The Danites sent five of their men, miktsotam, brave men..." (Ju 18:2). Katsin may involve a number of different connotations, and in that way it would be similar to shophet.

In another eighth century passage, katsin is used in parallel with rosh, which is the second title of Jephtah. The verse reads: "Listen, roshey Jacob and katsiney of the House of Israel: Aren't you supposed to know the law?" (Mic 3:1). Rosh means "head" or "chief," andMicah addresses himself here to the oppressors, including the king and the ruling class. However loosely the terms were used in the prophet's rhetoric, this was not the case in Judges. Let us consider the passage:

> Jephtah answered the elders of Gilead: 'Haven't you despised me all this time, even driving me away from my home? Why then have you turned to me just now when you are in distress?"
>
> The elders of Gilead said to Jephtah: "We have indeed returned to you now in order that you might go with us and fight with the Ammonites and become our head (rosh), over all the inhabitants of Gilead."
>
> ..."If you bring me back with the Ammonites, and if YHVH grants me victory over them, I will become your head?"
>
> ..."With YHVH as our witness, we swear to do as you have just spoken!"
>
> So Jephtah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people set him up over themselves as head and as katsin. And Jephtah spoke all his words before YHVH at Mitspah. (Ju 11:7-11)

This passage would be worth quoting for its literary excellence alone. It is, in addition, instructive in several ways. First we note the status of the title rosh. It is more than military leader, denoted here by katsin. The people had just asked Jephtah to be their general. He hesitates, and they offer him what must have been some position of

permanent authority. There is clearly a contract here, sealed with an oath: Jephtah will fight for Gilead, and if he is successful, will be their rosh, their head. The chronicle of the "minor judges" which we spoke of before, perfunctorily states that Jephtah "judged" Israel for six years (Ju 12:7). Perhaps what we have spelled out in the above passage is what happened with the other "judges," i.e., successful military leadership being rewarded with governorship in peacetime. In any event, the events, along with the specialized terminology seems to indicate the development of a power institution. It was not yet a monarchy, but a necessary experiment in centralized authority.

If the generally accepted chronology is correct, about thirty years were to pass between the Philistine defeat and conquest at Aphek in 1050, and the rise of Saul to power. The chronicle of the "minor judges," from Jephtah on, gives us a total of 31 years, which would be fine, except that we cannot glibly assume that these men succeeded one another in such perfect order. For one thing, they "judged" in widely scattered areas, i.e., Gilead, Zebulun, and Ephraim. One thing must be noted at this point: not since the days of the first two judges, Otniel of Devir (Ju 1:11-13) and Ehud of Benjamin (Ju 3:15), are there records of any leaders from Judah or Benjamin, or southern Ephraim for that matter. (Samson is, of course, an exception, but aside from the fact that the events are impossible to date, he cannot be considered much of a leader, to judge from the account given.)

It is possible, but not likely, that there were simply no records or traditions preserved from this region. It is also possible, though there is only negative evidence, that the institutions of leadership did not become established here. Whatever the situation may have been, when we finally do arrive at the southern area in I Samuel, the Israelites are under Philistine domination.

The central figure in the south, during the period immediately preceding Saul, is Samuel. This man had a varied career and later generations embellished it further by the addition of legendary material. Since he seems to have combined functions of priest, prophet (seer), and judge, later ideological groups, if they could not find support in his statements, could easily ascribe their own words to him. We shall see an example of this.

According to the tradition, Samuel got his training at the sanctuary at Shilo before the Philistine destruction. It is interesting to note that the priest Eli is referred to in a concluding sentence as having "judged" Israel for forty years (1S 4:18). A priest might accompany troops into battle, but only to take care of cultic matters like the ark (1S4:4). Eli was surely no military leader, but, as priest, was an ish elohim, a man of God, bearing charisma, and could easily be looked upon as secular as well as cultic leader, especially where there was no other leadership. Samuel is also referred to as a "judge" (1S 7:15), although his career was different from anything we have seen in the Book of Judges.

The Philistine overlords would hardly have countenanced a moshel or a rosh among the Israelites under their control. Samuel probably gave them no cause for worry. "Every year he would travel a circuit between Bethel, Gilgal, and Mitspah, and he judged Israel in all these places. Then he would return to Ramah, for that's where he lived and judged. He built there an altar to YHVH." (1S 7:16f). As he traveled about, he was wont to make sacrifices and preach sermons. The tradition has it that his sermons dealt with faithfulness to YHVH, and the abjuring of other deities. From time to time, he might convoke an assembly at a place such as Mitspah. Such an assembly would be likely to arouse Philistine suspicion, and military action may have been taken, but was as yet unlikely that any extensive uprising took place. (1S 7)

Samuel's preaching of YHVH exclusivism had its political overtones. Religion was a unifying factor, around which the Israelites could rally, and by working together throw off the Philistine yoke. A political aspiration set in pious language might go like this: "If you would return whole heartedly to YHVH, put aside all these foreign gods, and the Astartes which you have among you. Direct your hearts to YHVH and serve Him alone, and He will save you from the Philistines" (1S 7:3).

The Israelites undoubtedly knew of the efforts of Gideon and Jephtah. They knew that an organization with central authority could deal effectively with outside oppression. They knew that other nations such as Aram, Moab, Midian, and even the Canaanites around Hazor

had kings (Ju 3:8; 3:15; 8:5; 4:2). What could be more natural than for them to come before Samuel with the request: "Give us a king to judge us (sic) like all the other nations" (1S 8:5). If this was a strange thing to ask of one who was already their leader, albeit their spiritual leader, they prefaced it with the statement paying respect to Samuel's abilities and intentions: "After all, you are old, and your sons have not followed your footsteps, therefore..."

Some of the traditions on Samuel contradict one another. At times he is pictured as supporting the aspiration for a king, and at times he opposes it. The opposition is based on the idea that a king would draft all the best of the youth for his purposes, that he would exact exorbitant taxes, that he would requisition lands and other property to give to his servants. This description does not apply to Saul, as we shall see, nor in very large measure even to David. This is the sort of opposition that would arise under such a monarch as Solomon, as we have it expressed in the words of the people to Rehoboam: "Your father gave us a heavy yoke..." (1K 12:4). The sort of opposition that might have been in the days of Samuel would have been the objection to giving up local autonomy in favor of central authority. We, therefore, see these words ascribed to Samuel as having been put into his mouth by a later generation, as we mentioned above.

Samuel probably favored the idea of a king to lead the people to victory. It is not at all unlikely that in his travels about the country he encouraged individuals to take action. Saul, the son of Kish, of Benjamin

was a good prospect...

"...a man head and shoulders above all the rest"

CHAPTER III

A KING IN ISRAEL

We have endeavored to demonstrate that a basis for a central government existed in Israel in the period approaching the turn of the first millenium B.C. First is the development, hand in hand, of a surplus producing agriculture and population concentration in cities and towns dependent upon that surplus. If this culture was to grow and prosper a centralized government was necessary for furthering and protecting economic interests. There were both internal and external threats to such a union. From without there was the constant danger of marauders and conquerers as we saw in Judges, and by now there was the well established Philistine power that controlled a large part of the land of Israel. The Philistines had a two-fold stake: first, they probably exacted tribute from the Israelites, as their predecessors had done before; and second, several important trade routes passed through Israelite territory, and whoever commanded these routes held an economic and military advantage. We can be sure that the Philistines took strong measures to maintain their position, and among these measures were the building of garrisons, as we shall note below, and the control of iron working, so as to prevent the possible production of weapons by the Israelites.

An internal threat would come from conservative tribal elements, striving for local autonomy, holdovers from semi-nomadism. Just as

there were elements in the early American west who tried to fight off the ploughing and fencing of cattle ranges, so there were elements in ancient Israel who resisted urbanization and agriculture, and the resultant development of central authority. The war between Benjamin and the other tribes (Ju 19-20) illustrates early tribal pride and its fierce vengeance. As we have seen, attempts at unity by Deborah and Gideon, while meeting with some success, ran into opposition from sectional tribal elements. Jephtah too had his troubles with Ephraim (Ju 12:1-6). David's band of outlaws roving through Judah is an example of this sort of holdover element in the time of Saul. Naval's reply to David's servants expresses the feelings of a farmer ready to accept an orderly central government, even with its demands for economic support: "Who is this David, and who is this son of Jesse? There is no lack of servants rebelling from their masters. Should I take my bread and wine and meat that I have slaughtered for my shearers and give them to people whom I don't even know where they came from?" (iS 25:10-11). People expected this sort of blackmail to come to an end under the protection of their king, and did not hesitate to aid Saul in his attempts to capture David (1S 23:19; 26:1).

The institution of monarchy is not founded purely through the efforts of individuals, no matter how adroit they may be. Certain social and economic conditions must be present, along with certain historical precedents, and these determine, largely, the events that take place. The particular abilities and careers of Saul and David are

important in that they illustrate what was going on; they fit into the historical process, and that is why they were as effective as they were. The characters, the personalities, are part and parcel of history.

The tradition preserves accounts of three instances of Saul's appointment as leader. The events are separate, each under different circumstances, and there may be reality in all three, though this is largely a matter of speculation. The first (1S 9:1; 10:16) takes place in private, between Samuel and Saul. Literary tradition is bound to be inventive and creative, and the details of a story may be extraneous as far as the actual event is concerned. Both Samuel and Saul were Benjaminites, and it is quite possible that Samuel knew the latter and his family personally, seeing leadership potential in the young man. The account of the annointing is not far fetched, nor is Saul's desire to keep the matter secret unlikely -- why make the mistake of Joseph, the boaster? Besides, undue publicity might arouse Philistine suspicion. The effect of this event, if it indeed took place, would be purely personal, giving the leader self-confidence, as well as establishing his obligation to Samuel.

The second (1S 10:17-27) is public, Samuel having assembled the people at Mizpah. This would satisfy the people's clamoring for a king. Samuel uses here the cultic method of casting lots to determine the will of God (he probably used some sort of controlled device for the purpose), and he thus makes the point that this is a divine appointment and not merely a move to attain power. This is important from Samuel's

pious point of view, as a representative of religious authority. It is also possible that a religious office would be more acceptable to the Philistines. The question of Philistine reaction casts reasonable doubt, if not on the accuracy of the account, at least upon the effectiveness of this act of establishing a king.

Albright is of the opinion that Samuel intended Saul (and similarly David) to be not king but military leader, anointing him nagid, rather than melech.[16] Nagid is explained as meaning "military commander," based upon Aramaic documents from the eighth century B.C. If this usage is correct, the problem of Samuel's contradictory opposition to monarchy is solved for Albright. As we have seen, however, this problem is merely an apparent one. Besides, the argument is weak in that, while in the first of our accounts Samuel calls Saul nagid, in the second, as well as in the third, a king (melech) is clearly referred to. Nagid may be added to our list of titles referring to functions of leadership. It may have had a special significance in the mouth of Samuel, just as shophet did in the period of the judges. However, the term is new here and cannot be assumed to exclude the meaning of kingship.

Whatever Saul's status may have been with regard to appointment or anointment, he was apparently a private citizen, farming his own land when he answers his first call to action. The city of Yavesh in Gilead is

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16. William F. Albright, "Samuel and the Beginnings of the Prophetic Movement," Cincinnati, Hebrew Union College Press, 1961, pp/ 15-16.

attacked by the Ammonites, and they send out a call for help. The text makes it clear that they did not send directly to Saul, but the latter hears the news as he is returning from working in the field (1S 11:5). Cincinnatus style, he lays aside his farming and take up the call to arms. Following what was probably an ancient custom (cf. the cutting up of the body of the concubine, JU 19:29), he cuts up his oxen and sends out messengers bearing the pieces, emphasizing the urgency in his call to battle. The tradition sees him here not as a king exercising his authority: "The spirit of the Lord siezed Saul when he heard these words, and he grew very angry" (1S 11:6). This seems more in line with the picture of the charismatic leader, rising in the hour of need.

Saul defeats the Ammonites. He has saved the day and gained the people's confidence in his military prowess. Now the people repair to Gilgal and proclaim him their king. Saul may or may not have had the support of Samuel and the people before this, but what could have been more natural for the people following the precedent of Gideon and Jephtah, to accept the triumphant hero as their king. The text speaks of "renewing" (nehadesh) the kingship (1S 11:14), but in all probability, this was the coronation that really counted.

Saul's first military action took place east of the Jordan, beyond the purview of the Philistines, who probably saw no cause for concern in what was ostensibly a settling of tribal accounts.[17] However, when the

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17. There may have been some early special relation between Saul's tribe of Benjamin and Yavesh Gilead. Cf. Ju 20.

Israelites made Saul their king, the Philistines undoubtedly took it as a threat to the status quo. It is possible that they might have been waiting to ascertain if they could accept Saul as a local ruler, loyal to their interests. At any rate they did not attack him at Gilgal.

At this point we are hampered by a difficult and corrupt text. The compiler of the Book of Kings uses a certain formula in stating the age of a king at his accession and the length of his reign (e.g. 1K 14:21; 16:11; 22:42). With regard to Saul, we have what may be a gloss: "Saul was a year old when he became king and he reigned over Israel for two years" (1S 13: 1). It is obvious that the number of years of Saul's age is missing in the expression ben -- shanah. The "two years" is frequently ammended to read "twenty-two years," but this is pure conjecture, with no supporting evidence. The idea is that history seems to require a longer period and this is the simplest way to correct the text. The emendation is, however, far fetched, and besides, we do not consider it inconceivable that the events accorded to Saul should not have taken place in the space of a couple of years, beginning with the coronation at Gilgal.

The following verse is more confusing. In it we are told that Saul selected three thousand men (or three divisions, alaphim) who stayed with him at Michmash and one thousand (or one division) were with Jonathan at Givat Benjamin. It is true that Saul and the people could not have remained very long at Gilgal. They were farmers and had to

get back to work. Certainly there was not yet a tax structure to support a king and his army at such a remote place. Gilgal was an ancient shrine and the people had held festivities for their new king. This might have gone on for as much as a week or so, with feasts on the spoils from Ammon, and speeches such as the one in chapter twelve. Soon they would return to their homes. It is clearly most unlikely that Saul would at this point move his troops up to Michmash and Givat Benjamin, right into the teeth of the Philistines. The overlords would not have countenanced such an act. The Israelites were by now intent upon revolt, but, as we learn, they did not begin the fight by moving thus into the open. Our conclusion is that this verse describes a later situation, perhaps that which followed the defeat of the Philistines. It is from a separate source that it may have been drawn into its present position by the nature of the general information about Saul, supplied in the preceding verse.

Saul's son Jonathan was his main military assistant at this period. It was Jonathan who struck the first blow in the revolt, while Saul, presumably, was still at Gilgal. "And Jonathan smote the Philistine garrison at Geva..." (1S 13:3). A digression is necessary at this point to clear up certain difficulties in the text, and at the same time to shed light on the events that took place.

In the territory of Benjamin there was a town called Givah. Already prominent in the period of the judges (Ju 19-20), commanding the main north-south watershed highway, Givah became Saul's residence and capital. There seems to be considerable variation and confusion in

the text concerning the name of the town. Givah means simply "high place," like ramah, and theoretically might refer to any outstanding hill. In fact, there are several locations mentioned, scattered over the land, which are called Givah or Ramah. The name can be made more specific in a number of ways. First, it can be called Hagivah, "the high place" (1S 10:10). Or it can be coupled in construct form to some identifying appelation, such as Givat Elohim, "the hill of elohim" (1S 10:5); Givat Benjamin, "the hill located in the territory of Benjamin (1S 13:2); or Givat Saul, being the home of Saul (1S 11:4). Judging from the narratives, the above citations probably refer to one and the same place: a prominent hill called today Tell el Ful, about three miles due north of Jerusalem.[18] There are two other place names of nearby locations based on the same word for high place. They are individualized by a grammatical change in the root: Geva (Ju 20:33, etc.) and Givon (Jos 18:25). Due to the similarity of the names and proximity of the locations, the text seems to have confused these towns in some of the narratives, and it is up to textual criticism and archaeology to determine which is which.

Excavation of Tell el Ful has revealed several early periods, with extensive pottery finds allowing fairly definite dating.[19] The

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18. For identification of Tell el Ful with Giv'ah see: W. F. Albright, "Excavations and Results at Tell el Ful," AASOR IV, 1922-23, pp. 28-33. For the definitive work on the tell, a compilation of the excavations of Dr. Albright, see: Lawrence Sinclair, "An Archaeological Study of Gibeah" AASOR XXXIV-XXXV, 1954-56, pp. 3-52.

19. Sinclair, op. cit., pp. 34-5.

first stratum, beginning on bed rock, is dated thirteenth-twelfth centuries B.C., a Late Bronze settlement, probably corresponding to the Givah of Judges 19-20. The next stratum is from the Iron Age: ca. 1020-990 B.C. This period is dominated by the remains of a large and remarkably well built watch tower which appears to have been the corner of a fortress with casemate walls. The evidence indicates that somewhere in the middle of its rather brief existence, the fortress was destroyed, burnt, and rebuilt along much the same lines. The second phase of this watchtower synchronizes with the second phase in other excavated constructions on the site.

Two theories have been advanced to explain this situation. The first, favored by Albright in 1933, holds that Saul built the first fortress at his home at Givah early in his career.[20] The destruction took place before the battle of Michmash, and Saul himself rebuilt it after winning the battle. This would fit in well with the fact that the complete reconstruction follows the lines of the original citadel so closely, but there is no textual evidence that the Philistines administered such a defeat at this point.

The second explanation is advanced by Sinclair:[21]

> Fortress I is definitely from the time of Saul, late eleventh century B.C. ... It was presumably destroyed by the Philistines after the battle of Gilboa. The fortress

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20. Albright, "A New Campaign of Excavation at Gibeah of Saul," BASOR No. 52, Dec., 1933, p. 8.

21. Sinclair, op.cit., p.6.

> was undoubtedly rebuilt (II) almost immediately afterwards, but the duration of the occupation was short and the fortress was abandoned early in the tenth century, presumably after David's unification of the Israelites.

Although the text makes no such mention, it is conceivable that following their crushing defeat of Saul in the north, the Philistines might have carried out a general destruction throughout Saul's realm. Then the question arises: who rebuilt it, and against whom? The descendents of Saul set up camp on the other side of the Jordan. David was ensconsed in Hebron. The text neither mentions such a rebuilding nor hints toward answers to who, when, and why.

Aside from the specific problems with each of the proposed answers, no explanation is advanced in either for the basic problems: (a) How could Saul have built a fortress in the middle of Philistine controlled territory? (Although Cleveland does not so state, his proposition does not exclude the possibility that Saul built the fortress after the battle at Michmash.) and (b) where would Saul get the know-how to build such an elaborate tower and citadel, with casemate walls and careful design of the tower? Such a construction would more likely have been carried out by experienced builders, who located it in a position to control an important trade route.

A cogent answer is supplied by the text with a slight and quite common correction. We must read Giv'ah in place of Geva as the name of the place where Jonathan smote the Philistine garrison. As we noted, there was some confusion regarding these names. There was indeed a

place called Geva which figures in the ensuing battle of Michmash. But this name was a mere grammatical variation of Giv'ah, and in fact in the early spelling there was probably no final he as a sign of the feminine ending, and both names were spelled alike.

We would then have a reference to the Philistine garrison at Giv'at Haelohim, or Hagiv'ah (1S 10:5-10). The militaristic Philistines could well have built the fortress excavated at Tell el Ful. The archaeological evidence is not yet extensive enough to be conclusive, but this type of fortification seems to have been a new thing in the land at this time. Casemate walls were widely used in the following generations, and it is reasonable to suspect that it was the Philistines who introduced this type of structure.

Jonathan was a brave warrier, and rather impulsive as we see in the accounts of his singlehanded acts of heroism in battle (1S 14). While his father remained with the main body of forces, Jonathan took a contingent of soldiers and attacked the Philistine outpost. He was certainly well acquainted with the terrain and probably used some of the tricky strategy at which the Israelites seem to have been so adept. He captured and destroyed the fortress, and the revolt was now in the open. The Israelites rallied around Saul at Gilgal, they marched up to positions in the mountains, and with the aid of Jonathan's feats of daring, defeated the Philistines, driving them out of their positions at Michmash, Bet Aven, and Ayalon (1S 14:23-31). Saul had proven himself twice. He

now returned to Giv'ah, rebuilt the destroyed fortress and made it his headquarters.

Saul was now some sort of king. There is a deuteronomistic type insertion following the account of the revolt. The first sentence has traditionally been translated, "And Saul took the monarchy over Israel" (1S 14:47). The word in question is lacad, referring to military conquest, in most of its contexts. Segal, in his commentary to the Book of Samuel, interprets this verse to mean that Saul siezed the monarchy and forced his way into power.[22] This understanding is based upon the widely held view that the first king of Israel must have met with great opposition from a people long accustomed to tribal and seminomadic institutions. In consolidating his power it is assumed that he would have to suppress rebellions and deal quite brutally with conservative elements unwilling to go along with the new central authority. In and of itself, this argument seems reasonable, but there is no evidence, that Saul instituted any such reign of terror over Israel. That is, none except this verse, and Segal's rendering is questionable.

The word "conquer" is in most contexts, used with a military objective, such as a city or an area. Could the author of this verse have seen Saul as approaching the institution of kingship as a general sets out to conquer a city? Such might have been the case when Cyrus

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22. Mosheh S. Segal, Siphrey Shmuel, Jerusalem, Kiryat Sepher, 1956, p. 114.

made himself king over first the Medes and then Babylonia, but this description does not seem appropriate to Saul. The verse may be understood differently.

Saul was victorious in many battles. An unprejudiced reader might see in this phrase a reference to the king's military prowess. Radak, with his usual sensitivity to the language, comments: "lacad hameluchah -- he strengthened his position in the kingship and held on to it without opposition, for all Israel saw that he was successful in his battles." Based upon what we have seen of the examples in Israel of an individual's gaining political power following military success, Radak's view seems more accurate than Segal's.

Saul does meet with certain opposition, coming from the aged Samuel. Contrasting to the opposition to the institution of kingship on economic grounds, ascribed by the tradition to Samuel (see above), the clash here involves purely cultic matters, and is directed not against the institution but against the individual, Saul. Samuel had formerly supported Saul for king, and in doing so, he undoubtedly expected to retain a certain de facto authority. In the first account of the appointment of Saul, the tradition has Samuel instructing the young man: "You will go down to Gilgal and I shall come down to meet you to make sacrifices and offerings. You will await my arrival for seven days, and then I shall tell you what you are to do" (1S 10:8). This passage is, of course, connected with the later events at Gilgal. After Jonathan struck at Givah, Saul waited impatiently with his forces at Gilgal. This was bad tactics,

but Saul felt bound to wait out the seven days. Sacrifices must be offered before going to battle, and Samuel was the one to perform them. When seven days had passed and Samuel had not yet arrived, Saul submitted to popular pressure and offered the sacrifices himself. Just as he had finished with the offerings, Samuel appeared on the scene and rebuked him bitterly for not having followed the command of the Lord, which he, Samuel, had relayed to him. Samuel did not express regrets for the institution of monarchy, but asserted that God would find another to be king, one who would be more loyal than Saul (1S 13:8-14).

Noth makes the point that the relationship between the king's sacral and secular functions was ill-defined, and the secular requirements of the monarchy conflicted with the ancient sacral institutions whose spokesman Samuel was.[23] It may have been the case that Samuel objected to a layman performing priestly duties, but we must remember that there was a precedent in that Gideon had made, even building his own shrine (Ju 8:27). Then there was the case of Miciah who set up a shrine at his home and made one of his sons the priest. When a Levite chanced by, Miciah hired him as being preferable to his son as priest, but this does not mean that the son had been unacceptable (Ju 18). Even in a later period, David's sons were made priests. (2S 8:18)

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23. Noth, op. cit., pp. 175-6.

Samuel was probably not a Levite, though Chronicles, under priestly influence, gives him a geneology going back to Levi (1Ch 6:1-13). Why should Samuel object to Saul's offering the sacrifice and preceding without him? After all, Saul had a priest with him who was a Levite, Ahiyah, who could have performed the various cultic functions including advising the king whether or not to go out to battle (1S 14:3, 18). Samuel was a man of God, and a highly respected leader in his day. One of his roles was that of the priest. It seems that Samuel had hoped to hold on to his perogatives, and clashed with Saul when he felt the latter was usurping them.

Another clash between Samuel and Saul was also over a cultic issue, though it was more specifically of an ancient amphictyonic nature. Samuel directed Saul: "Go and smite Amalek and place everything he has in herem; take no pity on him. Kill off man and woman alike, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey" (1S 15:3). Heherim is usually rendered "consecrate," and indicates total destruction with religious zeal dedicated to God. The herem was the practice followed by Joshua, and from there we learn that only objects of silver, gold, copper, and iron were to be preserved to go into the treasury (Jos 6:19). Apparently, in times of need, animals might be preserved in the booty (Jos 8:2). Saul fights and defeats the Amalekites, long time enemies of Israel. He preserves the best of the Amalekite flocks, rationalizing that the people wanted to use them for sacrifices. Possibly for political reasons, he brought Agog, king of the Amalekites, back alive.

For Samuel this act of disobedience was the last straw. In rebuking the king he utters what became an immortal accusation against shallow religious observance. (If the words do not belong to Samuel, they are certainly fitting here, never-the-less.):

What desire has the Lord in sacrifices and offerings

By comparison with following His wishes?...(1S 15:22).

Samuel, himself, takes up a sword and slays Agog. He then turns on his heel and leaves the king, intending to break off their relations for good. It should be noted that this chapter (15) figures in the saga of David, for it is here that Samuel is said to have decided to shift his allegience and support. We shall see below that this was a considerable blow to Saul.

As we said before, Saul was now some sort of king in Israel. Just what sort of king was he? What was the nature of the institution of monarchy at this time?

To begin with, Saul seems to have devoted himself mainly to fighting. The continuation of the verse: "Saul lacad the kingship over Israel" (whatever it may mean) is: "and he fought all his enemies in the surrounding territories: Moab, Ammon, Edom, the kings of Tsovah, and the Philistines, and wherever he turned he was victorious. He performed bravely and smote Amalek, and saved Israel from its oppressors" (1S 14:47f). This formidable list of victories corresponds exactly to David's list of conquests (2S 8), and this fact has led some

scholars to suspect Saul's list to be artificial. As we have seen, accounts are given of victories over the Ammonites, Philistines, and Amelekites. Moab and Edom bordered on Israel and might well have been troublemakers, but it seems unlikely that Saul launched any great offensives against them. Tsovah is far to the north. David engaged them as he expanded his kingdom, but it would be too much to expect of Saul that he should have gotten this far. It is conceivable that Saul fought and won defensive battles against these last three, and that is what is meant by "and he saved Israel from its oppressors." Undoubtedly, Saul's major threat was the Philistines, and it was they who defeated him in the end.

Saul's army was most likely made up of volunteers. This period of expansion and development of the state was a time of glory and heroism, similar to the early days of the republic in Rome. People saw and understood the need to defend their new way of life, their homes, fields, and cities. War was not a matter of long expeditions, over long periods of time. People could answer the call to arms, taking with them their own provisions, and expect to return within a few days bearing booty and covered with honor. They had confidence in the military skill of their king and his officers. Jonathan was an able fighter. Saul made his cousin Abner his general. The king had a council of men, his servants, recruited from his own tribe of Benjamin (1S 22:7). These were his trusted officers and he rewarded them with fields as well as with positions of honor. There was no standing army, but Saul had a personal

command, the ratsim, literally "runners" (1S 22:17). These were probably a sort of elite corps, supported by the king, and loyal to him. (David also had his elite corps, composed of foreign mercenaries.)

The story of David's taking food to his brothers encamped against the Philistines is instructive, but must be treated with caution as it is part of a separate saga, a sort of folk tale glorifying David (1S 17). We learn that out of eight brothers, the three oldest were in Saul's army (1S 17:13), apparently leaving enough of the family at home to take care of the farming. Even if the volunteers had to remain in camp for relatively long periods of time, they were never out of reach of their families, who could thus support them. It was customary also to send food to one's officer (1S 17:18). We also learn that an individual who performed especially well in battle might be taken into the king's service on a steady basis, as happened to David (1S 18:2).

Only one ordinance is recorded in Saul's name, that of outlawing spiritualists and necromancers in the land (1S 28:3). Saul may have introduced other laws as well; this one was preserved only by virtue of its connection with the narrative of the "Witch of Endor," and there it is more honored in the breach than in the observance! How such an ordinance came to be is another question. It was certainly not because they considered the practice a silly superstition. Possibly a YHVH purist like Samuel might have seen in it a threat to

YHVH as the sole source of information, and to the proper forms of receiving this information. Indeed, Saul only turns to the "witch" when God has failed to answer him: "neither by dreams, nor by urim (the cultic lots), nor by prophets" (1S 28:6).

This ordinance was at any rate known of at Ein Dor which is to the north of the Jesreel valley, and this gives us an idea of the northern extent of Saul's authority. We have another clue regarding this area: "The Israelites who were on the other side of the valley (the north side) and on the other side of the Jordan saw that the Israelite forces had fled and Saul and his sons were dead, therefore, they left their cities and fled, and the Philistines came and occupied the cities" (1S 31:7). Apparently the kingdom extended far to the north and over to the east of the Jordan. (By attacking in the Valley of Jezreel, the Philistines were able to cut these areas off from the main body of forces. We see that the attempt of Saul's son Ishbaal to inherit the throne took place in Gilead in the city of Mahanaim (2S 2:8). Jabesh Gilead was, of course, faithful to Saul as well.

As for the southern extent, we have the fact that people in Zif and Carmel in the Judean hills were loyal to the king (1S 23:19f). In addition, Saul's defeat of the Amalekites to the far south must have been largely for the benefit of his southern constituents.

Aside from the incidents with Samuel, there is only one hint at opposition to Saul as king, and this comes early in the narrative, following

the victory over the Ammonites. "The people said to Samuel: 'Who are they who say, Shall Saul rule over us? Bring them forth and we will kill them." and Saul said: "Let no man be killed this day, for today the Lord has caused a great victory in Israel" (1S 11:12f). Somebody of dissident opinion is referred to here, but Saul seems confident enough that it will work itself out. At any event, there is no further reference to repercussions.

This brings us to the crucial point to which we have been leading. How was it that Saul was so readily accepted by a people who were later to rebell against David and split the kingdom after his son's death? How did the Israelites view their newly founded institution of kingship? The answer should by now be clear: they considered Saul an exalted shophet, a "judge." He was no more than an extension of earlier precedents, developed and enlarged to meet the exigencies of a more settled way of life. Just as Jephtah was called "rosh (chief) over all inhabitants of Gilead" (see above), so Saul is referred to once by Samuel as "rosh of the tribes of Israel" (1S 15:17).

All of Saul's actions we have described would have been perfectly fitting for any one of the "judges." He had no national administrative capital, religious or political, but remained at his home in Givah. Saul cannot be said to have had a really centralized government, with taxes and a bureaucracy.

Saul started his career with the "spirit of God" rushing upon him, according to the tradition, and perfectly in accordance with the people's picture of the inspired leader, the "judge." He had seizures of ecstacy, rolling in the dust with the "prophets," and this must have added to the appearance of charisma (1S 10:10ff; 19:23f). His strong emotions and moodiness must also have added to the illusion. Even his bad moods, to some extent, as the Bible considers them the result of an "evil spirit of God" (1S 18:10).

The people stood by Saul through his worst days of what must have amounted to a mental breakdown. His conflicts with Samuel probably weakened his self-esteem and confidence which he had once derived from this man's encouragement and support. His jealousy of David became excessive and he spent much time and energy persuing him. He insults and threatens his son Jonathan (1S 20:30-33). He suspects his own servants (1S 22:3-8). His slaughter of the priestly city of Nov (1S 22:16-19) was an unmitigated atrocity, but through all this his followers remained loyal to their king.

Before we leave Saul and go on to David, we take note of one of Saul's acts that would have done credit to any king. It is only indirectly aluded to and seems to have been missed by most students of this period. It will be recalled that Saul rewarded his servants with fields and vinyards (1S 22:7). Where did he get these fields and vinyards that he could be so free with? (It is possible that the same

question could be asked concerning the "great wealth" promised to the man who would kill Goliath (1S 17:25). However, we must be wary of the source of this evidence.) How does any king increase his wealth without overburdening his people? If he can he goes out with his army to conquer and plunder. If this is impossible, or insufficient, he must expropriate and plunder within his own realm, preferably some defenseless but wealthy minority. Who could have been a better target than those non-Israelites, the Gibeonites, who with their ancient cities, already well established before the Israelites' arrival in the land had long been subjugated to the Israelites (Jos 9:27)? David, for one reason or another, saw fit to re-establish good relations with them. We are indebted to a glossator who inserted the information: "The Gibeonites were not of the Children of Israel, but of the remnants of the Amorites, and the Israelites had made them promises; and Saul wanted to smite them in his zeal for Israel and Judah" (2S 21:2). Zeal indeed!

"And now, behold the king whom you have chosen..."

(1S 12:13)

CHAPTER IV

DAVID THE EMPEROR

The Philistines' utter defeat of Saul and his forces at Gilboa (1S 31) not only brought an abrupt end to Saul's kingship, but left the land in just as serious a condition as it had been before the monarchy. The concern of the people at this time must have been the question of who would replace Saul in the kingship and recoup their glorious independence. This was one of those moments in history that seems to beg for a truly great man to enter the picture. Just as France verily offered a job opening to Napoleon, so the time was ripe for a man of military and administrative genius like David to take the reins in Israel. It was not long before David stepped in and not only restored independence, but built a powerful empire that must have been beyond the wildest dreams of the Isrealites.

The difference between the kingship of Saul and that of David cannot be overemphasized. Where Saul was volatile,, charismatic, impulsive; David was shrewd, rational, calculating. Where Saul was experimenting with forging unity out of a chaotic conglomeration of tribes and clans, David had the advantage of working with a people who knew they could act together as a nation to their mutual benefit under the leadership of a king. David could take up where Saul left off. It is not without good cause that David became one of the all time heros, not only in the Bible, but in all Jewish history. He founded

a dynasty that was to rule as long as the institution of kingship lasted in this nation, and in a later era the future Messianic king could be none other than a descendant of David.

An extensive historical document concerning David is preserved in the Bible. It was probably written and edited by contemporaries of David, so clear and detailed is it. We must not lose sight of the fact, however, that it is a saga of a national hero, and in part is based on folk tales and traditions glorifying him. What American child is unaware that George Washington demonstrated his honesty, when still a boy, in the cherry tree incident? Similarly, what Israelite would not recall reverently David's demonstration of faith and courage in killing the giant Goliath? Both instances cannot be demonstrated to be anything more than folk tales. Both tell us something, if not about the men, certainly about the popular images of them.

We shall not recount this marvelous story ofDavid's career, but shall be content with taking note of his steady and forceful rise to power.[24] Our aim is to show what a gifted man like David was able to accomplish under a given set of circumstances.

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24. Noth, op. cit., pp. 179-204. In Noth's history we have an excellent account of David's career based on the sources. We disagree with Noth on two points. First, he holds that Saul's kingship was unsuccessful and that this was an important factor in David's succession. We consider Saul to have been successful in his task, i.e., unifying the people under a central rule. The people were loyal to him throughout his reign, though they may have seen a sign of loss of divine grace in his final defeat by the Philistines. We may conjecture that the people, or part of them, were disappointed in Saul, and if this was the case, then David may well have taken advantage of their antipathy to his own cause. The other point of disagreement is that Noth argues that David married Michael only after he had been made king at Hebron. The textual evidence does not support this contention, and the chain of events does not seem to require it.

David's career, from both military and political standpoints, begins when he joins Saul's entourage. His military advancement was rapid, from rank to rank, till he led his own band of outlaw fighters. His political activity was based on sheer brilliance, in the best Machiavellian manner. It might be argued, and not without some justification, that things simply worked out in David's favor. After all, the urban economic and social structure of the people must have progressed by this time. The elements which brought about the first attempt at monarchy had come still further, and the leaders were probably convinced that a strong state was essential for continued development. Commerce was an important factor, now that the Israelites had a settled city culture with a suitable surplus agricultural production. David's skill consisted in his ability to take advantage of all these elements, seizing every opportunity to extend his power. David was a genius.

Saul's jealousy of David was not entirely unjustified. Saul had won his position through victories in the field, and here David was matching and even exceeding the king's record. The institution of kingship was not so well established that a contender might not have a good chance to usurp it. The temperamental Saul might well have felt insecure in the face of this strong, confident, and successful warrior (1S 18:8). If kingship itself wasn't too secure, rights of succession certainly weren't clearly fixed. A father hoping to be succeeded by his

son would have good cause for fear in the person of David (1S 20:31). It would be idle to suppose that David was innocently unaware of this rivalry. He didn't have to bring about the circumstances; all he had to do was let things run their course.

There are two similar accounts of Saul's pursuit of David in which Saul unwittingly falls into David's hands (1S 23, 26). Without going into the question of which, if either, is the original tradition, we can say that the event, or events, described is reasonable and likely, i.e., that David cavalierly spared the king's life. This would be only another example of David's cleverness. In the first place Saul still had many loyal followers, as witness the people who betrayed David's whereabouts. And then David may well have known that violence is not a secure way to found a dynasty: a reign which began with assasination is very likely to end with assasination, as was the case with the rapidly fluctuating dynasties in the later northern Kingdom of Israel. Finally, murder was simply not to David's taste. He saw a pretty good chance of succeeding Saul without bloodying his own hands. In fact, he is scrupulously and publicly indignant whenever killings do occur; "What a pious fellow," the people must have thought (2S 1:6-16; 3:31-32, 36; 4:9-12).

David's feat of becoming a Philistine vassal while retaining his Israelite loyalty is one which would bear comparison with the finest international intrigues of modern times. While Achish received reports that David was properly harassing the southern areas of Israelite territory, David was raiding Israel's enemies in the wilderness to the south,

and making sure that everyone with a mouth to speak was wiped out wherever he attacked (1S 27:8-12). Even better, when he had spoils to spare he did what was politic; he distributed them among the elders of Judah (1S 30:26).

The neutral and centrally located Jerusalem eventually becomes his national capital. We note that Saul lacked such a center so necessary for a strong and centralized government. It is here that the royal court, now become a considerable bureaucracy, sits (2S 8:16-18). Bringing the ark up to Jerusalem, thereby centralizing the cult at his own headquarters was another brilliant step, and one that had probably never entered Saul's plans (2S 6).

Three points remain to be emphasized as characterizing the nature of David's rule. One is the census he took, apparently when he was getting old and his power had had time to develop (2S 24:1-9). The census was for military purposes; David wanted to institute a draft.[25] Such a step was, of course, a far cry from tribal traditions of honorable volunteering for military service and many were bound to object. The tradition condemns David for this act, connecting it with a plague which ensued (2S 24:15), ostensibly as punishment. David must have seen, however, that the breaking down of old amphictyonic traditions and associations was a necessary step in consolidating a

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25. For a fuller treatment of this subject see: George E. Mendenhall, "The Census Lists of Numbers 1 and 26," JBL .77, 1958, pp. 52-66.

proper national state. It is quite possible and likely that tax purposes were also involved in the count.

The second point to note is David's building program that went on in Jerusalem (2S 5:11). This building was minor by comparison with what Solomon did in Jerusalem and throughout the land, but it was most significant for David in that it was part of his building a settled and permanent institution out of what had once been a seminomadic, tent-dwelling tribal confederacy. The development is stated eloquently when David speaks of building a temple: "Behold, I dwell in a house of cedar, while the ark of God rests among draperies" (2S 7:2). For one reason or another, David does not build the temple, but there is no doubt that seeing any person or thing, especially God, living in a tent disturbed David.

We have already hinted to the final point. David ruled an empire, with trade outlets from Damascus to Egypt and probably even further south. He had his governors (netsivim) in Damascus on the road to Mesopotamia (2S 8:6). He had good relations with the Phoenicians at Tyre, a most important port (2S 5:11). He subdued the Philistines, opening up land routes to Egypt. Defeating the Edomites and Amalekites gave him access to the mineral deposits of the south, as well as to the port on the Red Sea. If one were to ascribe to Providence all the amazing series of events that made David the king that he was, one would have the explanation for the further coincidence that just

at this time, and only at this time were the two great empires of the Near East at a nadir of influence. Both Egypt and Mesopotamia, the usual contenders for the area of Palestine, were weak, and David was able to take brilliant advantage of this situation.

> "I have been with you in everything you have done... and your house and kingdom are firmly established forever..."

(2S 7:9, 16)