

AN OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

From Abraham to Modern Israel

Lesson 5

Israel is a people without a country, surviving in gargantuan tent encampments out in the hostile wilderness of the Sinai Peninsula. Their only reliable source of food was the supernaturally supplied Manna which apparently rained down daily, and whatever other foods and spices they might have irregularly acquired from the hordes of caravan merchants who would have followed them around, relentlessly. There is no way that 3 million Israelites wandered around the Sinai undetected; most of the Middle East was aware of them by now and of course there would have been great business opportunities for those willing to make the trip. What would the Israelites have had to trade? The gold and silver the people of Egypt were ordered by Pharaoh to give to the departing Israelites as a sort of peace offering to their awesome God. And by the way; Egypt, to this day, wants that gold and silver returned to them and this is one of the major bones of contention between Egypt and modern Israel.

One can only imagine how sick and tired of this kind of life the Hebrews were, how disgruntled with the leadership they had become, and how hopeless most must have felt knowing that the majority of them would never live to enter the land that they had left Egypt to claim as their own. Towards the end of their 2nd year after leaving Egypt they had arrived at the oasis of Kadesh-Barnea, which lay on the southern border of Canaan, but 10 of the 12 tribal leaders balked at entering Canaan because of fear. In God's eyes, the basis of this fear was lack of trust in Him because 7 centuries earlier the Lord had promised Abraham that his offspring would have their own country. Moses was told this as well and he had passed this on to the Israelites. The result of their lack of trust was catastrophic; God ordained that no one of an age of accountability at the time of their refusal to go forward would live long enough to enter Canaan, except for Joshua and Caleb. Not even Moses would go. It would take 38 more years before that unfaithful generation died off and the Lord would again afford Israel (this time the new generation of Israel) the opportunity to choose: choose fear in what their eyes and their emotions tell them, or chose to believe what Yehoveh has guaranteed to them in the Abrahamic Covenant, and was inherent in the terms and conditions of the Mosaic Covenant.

ENTERING THE PROMISED LAND

Finally, at the appointed time, the Israelites again began their move toward Canaan, the Promised Land [Num. 20, 21, 22]. This time, they didn't hesitate to move forward and follow God. They circled around and avoided the lands of Moab (named for a son of Lot) and Edom (another name for Esau), and took on a less formidable foe in Heshbon, north of Moab. They fought, won, and used the area as a staging ground for their conquest of Canaan. Many chose to go no further, and to settle there, on the east side of the Jordan River.

It's about 1300 BC, and the Israelites are standing on the east bank of the Yarden (*Jordan*) River, ready to take possession of the Land. Mosheh dies [Deut. 34]. They mourn him for 30 days. Mosheh (*Moses*), the greatest prophet, is the only prophet to know God face to face. The Torah (the first 5 books of the Bible) makes it clear that he had audible conversation with God throughout his ministry. Y'hoshua (*Joshua*) is then anointed the new leader, and he leads God's people to their new home [Jos. 1, 2, 3]. It was spring. Led by cohanim (*priests*) carrying the Ark of the Covenant, with the Torah of God safely inside its golden enclosure, they waded across the normally overflowing Yarden (*Jordan*) River. The moment the **cohanim's** feet touched the water, God made the raging river shallow for a few hours by stopping the flow of the river upstream. Once the 2 million strong horde crossed, they fought and conquered, moved on, settled, and fought and conquered, again and again in lightning fashion, winning with relative ease.

So, Y'hoshua (*Joshua*) led Israel and took the land of Canaan. The covenant promise God made to Avraham 700 years earlier was finally realized. The land was divided up among the twelve tribes of Israel as God ordered, and Canaan became home to Yehoveh's chosen people [Jos. 13-22]. It is at this time that a 600-year-old prophecy begins to manifest itself as we find a curious transformation within the make-up of the 12 Israelite tribes. The Cross Handed Blessing that Jacob (Israel) laid upon the children of Joseph, making Ephraim virtually a son, instead of a grandson, to Jacob is at the crux of the land division.

In the biblical record of the division of the land [Num. 35 & 36], we discover a listing of 13, not 12, tribes of Israel. And, mysteriously, Joseph's name is missing from those 13. In his stead, we find two names listed as tribes of Israel that were not the natural sons of Jacob (called Israel): Ephraim and Manasseh. This anomaly is because of Jacob's cross-handed blessing; the ancient blessing by which Jacob adopted Joseph's two Egyptian sons away from him. We see that the tribe of Levi is not granted a named territory within Canaan. Rather, they are to be set apart and treated differently because God has anointed them as His personal servants; His priests. Therefore, the Levites are given cities and pasturelands within each of the territories. The Levites are no longer considered a tribe of Israel, for God has adopted Levi away from Jacob (centuries after Jacob's death, of course) just as Jacob had adopted Joseph's children away from him. The Levites are now the tribe especially devoted to God. To be clear, even though 13 tribes are listed, only 12 get territory, and the 13th tribe, Levi, does not. And, as we move through the Old Testament, we need to keep in mind that Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, in essence, carry on the tribal inheritance and authority of their father Joseph.

Various battles and wars to subdue the Canaanite peoples continued for years with the Israelite generally successful. However, not every Canaanite city was taken. Mass slaughter was the common mode of taking another nation's land from them. There is no record of mass slaughter by the Israelites. Certainly they burned many of the city-states, and hundreds, maybe a few thousands, of the enemy were killed in battle. But as was also customary for the time, often a show of force was all that was necessary to bring the opposing king to the treaty table. Apparently, Joshua decided to follow this ancient tradition; agreements, treaties, were reached with several "kings of the east", tribute paid to Israel, and the defeated kings were allowed to live and continue ruling their people usually as a vassal. This would all come back to haunt the Israelites because God had instructed them to kill or drive out all the inhabitants of Canaan from the Promised Land. Instead, the Israelites chose to do things in a way that seemed good to their own minds; and how dearly they would pay for that decision, for centuries to come.

A small pagan city-state that later would be called Yerushalayim (*Jerusalem*) was captured by the Israelite tribes of Y'hudah (*Judah*) and Shim'on (*Simeon*); but, they soon abandoned the city for reasons unknown. Shortly, the pagan Jebusites took the city and held it for quite a long time. But, Y'hudah (*Judah*) and Shim'on (*Simeon*) held on to the surrounding hill country outside the city walls. A long ridge of hills flows roughly from Yerushalayim (*Jerusalem*) to Gezer, just a few miles from the Mediterranean. This natural barrier, with its few mountain passes, also formed a natural boundary between the tribe of Y'hudah (*Judah*) and 10 other Israelite tribes that occupied the land north of it. This fact of geography would play an important role in Israel's history.

About 50 years after first entering Canaan, Y'hoshua (*Joshua*) called a meeting of all the tribal elders [**Jos. 23, 24**]. The purpose was to bring together all the tribes of Israel, along with a handful of other non-Hebrew Semitic tribes, and to unite them in a peace treaty among themselves. The meeting was also to remind them of God's laws, and to make a pact with God that He would be their Lord and King. Not too long after this meeting, Y'hoshua died and was buried in the area controlled by the tribe of Ephraim, the tribe he was born into.

THE TIME OF THE SHOFET (*JUDGES*)

After the death of Y'hoshua (*Joshua*), the 12 tribes of Israel (remember, a 13th tribe, Levi, was no longer considered as part of Israel) were a loose confederation. They had no central leadership; rather, they considered Yehoveh or Yahweh (God's name) their king. However, they didn't take God, nor the pact they made with Him, seriously. Each Israelite was loyal only to his own clan and tribe, so they soon found themselves in a state of anarchy, often battling one another while simultaneously warring with the many Canaanite peoples that Y'hoshua (*Joshua*) had foolishly allowed to stay in the Land [**Jgs. 1**].

It is important to understand that the tribal system of governance and organization hardly lends itself to centralized leadership. Witness the current situation in Afghanistan, or better yet, Iraq, where the U.S. is attempting, with limited success, to install a federal government in a country where the tribal system still exists. Virtually every Afghan and Iraqi is a member of some tribe or another, and to complicate matters further they are also loyal to some sect of Islam or another. And, in the minds of the tribal leaders, their lifetime goal, the purpose for their very existence is to build up their own tribe to achieve the most influence possible over the other tribes. They may well compromise with other tribes from time to time, but only to buy time, or as part of a plan to eventually dominate. Building up one's tribe is achieved primarily through pillaging another's property, and dominating by means of warfare. By definition even temporary co-operation among tribes is only a means to an end; the end being domination over the other rival tribes. It was like this with the tribes of Israel as they continually vied with one another to move their way up the power ladder, with no interest whatsoever in establishing a common leadership for the good of the Israelite people as a whole. One can only imagine how Moses managed to lead these people reasonably successfully for 40 years!

Because the Canaanites were allowed to remain in the land, even to become allies, the Israelites began intermarrying with them. Peace with security was the new goal of the Israelites, and it seemed to the generation that conquered the land, now so weary of war, that compromise and tolerance, generally through the making of treaties and alliances, was the solution. This quickly led to Israel accepting and even adopting the ways of their heathen neighbors, particularly worship of the many Canaanite gods. God wasted little time in taking action. Within 20 years of Y'hoshua's (*Joshua's*) death, the Israelites were in a fight for their survival [**Jgs. 2**].

God allowed many nations to attack and harass the various tribes of Israel. Moabites, Edomites, Canaanites, Midianites, Ammonites, and many other foreign tribes and peoples made their lives miserable. In response, God raised up "Judges" within each tribe, usually to save one tribe or another from oppression or destruction. These Judges, called **shofet** in Hebrew, were arbitrators and magistrates. Some were warriors and saviors. Because there was no interest in centralized rule, a shofet (*judge*) was usually only concerned with matters concerning his or her own tribe. Actually, although it may seem otherwise in reading the Bible, crises were not occurring everywhere at once in Canaan.....some tribes lived relatively peacefully, while others were fighting off various invaders. No shofet (*judge*) ever seemed to be successful at uniting all 12 tribes, primarily because unification was never really their goal: dominance over the other tribes and their neighbors was their underlying mission. Various shofet (*judges*) came and went for about 250 years until the people longed for unity and so Sha'ul (*Saul*) was made king over all the tribes.

It's now about 1050 BC. At the same time, King Sha'ul was consolidating his power among the reluctant Israelite tribal leaders, down in Egypt, Pharaoh Rameses III was fighting-off an invading group of seafaring warriors called the Sea People. We know these Sea People as the Philistines, and they were a formidable foe for the Israelites as well.

Prior to Sha'ul (*Saul*), there were a total of 12 male and female shofet (*judges*) identified in the Bible. Jewish tradition sometimes doesn't agree with Christian doctrine on who qualified as a shofet, and who didn't. Some ruled as short a period of time as 3 years, and others as long as about 80 years. Although Sh'mu'el (*Samuel*) is called a judge in the Bible, he is generally considered to be in a unique classification. He was more a prophet than a judge, and perhaps the closest thing of that time to a centralized leader. Samuel was sort of a link and a facilitator, transitioning the Israelites from the era of the Judges into the era of the Kings by being the one with the authority to anoint Sha'ul (*Saul*) as the first King of Israel.

Among the more famous shofet (*judges*) were names we are fairly familiar with: D'vorah (*Deborah*), of the tribe of Ephraim; Gid'on (*Gideon*), of the tribe of Manasseh; and Shimshon (*Samson*) of the tribe of Dan. D'vorah (*Deborah*) saved her tribe from the Canaanites (about 50 years after Y'hoshua's death) by maneuvering the enemy into a wash that suddenly became a death trap when a torrent of water and rocks drowned them in a supernaturally timed flash flood [**Jgs. 4, 5**].

Bands of marauding Midianites, Amalekites, and Arabians (Arabians were descendants of Yishma'el, *Ishmael*) ravaged the northern tribes of Israel, including Gid'on's (*Gideon's*) tribe of Manasseh, for years. These nomads would always come at harvest time and worked in concert to pillage and steal the food supply of God's people. Gid'on (*Gideon*), using only 300 men, put a stop to it when his small band of Israelites concealed torches in clay pots, sneaked up on these tent-dwellers at night, and set their encampments afire. In the confusion Gid'on's (*Gideon's*) men put many of the enemy to the sword; others died in the fire or killed one another, and still more simply fled for their lives [**Jgs. 6, 7, 8**].

The Israelites generally held their own and were able to hold in check all the invaders save one.....the Philistines. It was these same Philistines that were also bedeviling Egypt. The Philistines were superb warriors as excellent in warfare on land as sea. They had a real technological advantage over most of their opponents.....iron. Using iron chariots and iron swords they terrorized Y'hudah (*Judah*) in the south and the tribes of central Israel. They captured and controlled the Mediterranean Sea shipping routes and all the important land trade routes. The Israelites were overmatched, and the various Israelite tribes made treaties with the Philistines to survive. The central theme of these treaties always involved the Israelites paying enormous taxes. Shimshon (*Samson*) was a shofet (*judge*) God raised up to fight the Philistines.

Shimshon (*Samson*) generally regarded as the last of shofetim (*judges*), was anointed by God prior to his birth [**Jgs. 13-16**]. Samson was unique among the Judges as being also designated as a Nazarite. Nazarenes and Nazarites are sometimes confused as being one and the same; not so. A Nazarene was a Jewish religious sect in the time of Christ and thereafter, as opposed to a Nazarite who is one who made a special type of vow to God.

The term Nazarite comes from the Hebrew word *nezer* which means 'to separate'. And, that well describes the focus of the Nazarite, which is to separate or set himself apart from normal life, and be totally consecrated to God. The notion of the Nazarite vow appears to have originated around the time of Moses and can involve making vows of either a positive or a negative nature. That is, a vow 'to do' something, over and against a vow to 'not to do' something.

A Nazarite has three obligations he must fulfill, in addition to whatever the exact purpose of his vow. First, he must never cut his hair. Second, he cannot become defiled by touching a dead body, even that of his parents or siblings. Third, he can drink no wine. Sometimes this prohibition extends to unfermented grape juice, even to any grape product at all. The result of violating any of these prohibitions is that after a time of very specific purification procedures, the period of the vow must begin all over again.

There are two types of Nazarites: a 'perpetual' Nazarite, and a Nazarite for life. Interestingly, the 'perpetual' Nazarite's term of a vow can be for any length of time, but no less than 30 days; one lunar cycle. A Nazarite for life is apparently rare, and the Bible mentions only three of these, Samson, Samuel, and John the Baptist, though certainly there must have been more.

Shimshon's tribe of Dan endured the misfortune of sharing a border with the Philistines; so they were constantly harassed by these pagan warriors with their advanced weaponry. Endowed with superhuman strength, but little self-control, Shimshon (*Samson*) indulged himself with prostitutes, partied with pagans, and even married a Philistine woman. No matter, God used him, flaws and all, to punish the Philistines in all manner of way, including demolishing their temple of worship to their chief god Dagon. His final undoing was consorting with a beautiful woman named Delilah. He died never having fully succeeded in defeating the Philistines.

Around 1040 BC, the Israelite tribes put aside their differences and attempted to make a united stand against the Philistines, but still, they tolerated no central leader. The Philistines and the Israelites met in battle a couple of miles from Jaffa; the fighting was brutal and the Israelite tribes' forces were annihilated. But, in a worse humiliation, they lost their treasured Ark of the Covenant to their enemy, when they brought it from its resting place in Shiloh to the field of battle, using it like a good luck charm, in hopes God would help them in combat [**I Sam. 4, 5,**

6]. Facing little choice, the tribes decided they either had to give up their tribal independence to achieve a unified Israel or lose their freedom to pagans.

Sh'mu'el (*Samuel*), a prophet from the tribe of Benjamin, in reluctant agreement with the elders of other tribes, anointed Sha'ul (*Saul*), also of the tribe of Benjamin, as the first King of Israel.

THE TIME OF THE KINGS

Though anointed as a king, Sha'ul (*Saul*) is at first seen more as a centralized Judge by the tribes [**I Sam. 11-15**]. This, apparently, was a little easier for some of the larger and more fiercely independent tribes to swallow than the idea of bowing down to a monarch. But soon it became apparent that a central Judge **was** a king. This immediately created a loyalty problem with the tribal elders and they cooled to the whole idea. However, an opportunity soon arose for Sha'ul (*Saul*) to show his merit. The dreaded Ammonites (descended from Lot's son Ammon) attacked the city of Jabesh-Gilead. Sha'ul responds by calling the tribes and clans to arms and leads them in an attempt to rescue the city from the pagans. Victory ensues, and within days, the anointed and charismatic Saul is acknowledged throughout the land as a true king; the first King of Israel.

Sha'ul (*Saul*) was a busy warrior/king. He spent his entire reign in battle. But, it was an army of militia that he commanded; there was no standing army. Each soldier had to equip himself with food and weapons. This meant it was an untrained army of peasants and craftsmen, who had much more responsibility than just fighting the enemy. They had to provide a living and leadership for their families, as well as vanquishing the enemy when called upon. So, after every battle campaign, the warriors went home to plow fields or watch over flocks or engage in their special tradecrafts.

There seemed to be no end to the hordes of pagan tribes that attacked Israel. Years of war dragged on, and Sha'ul was becoming moody, depressed, and short-tempered as he realized he would likely never see peace. For the people, the bloom was off. The man they at first

hailed as a charismatic savior was now seen as a failure. At the foot of Mt. Gilboa, Sha'ul (*Saul*), with his Israelite army completely outwitted, outgunned, and being decimated by the Philistines, lost 3 of his sons in battle in a single day. He could take no more, and so impaled himself upon his own sword. It is just before 1000 BC, the first King of Israel is dead, and the 12 tribes are in disarray **[I Sam. 28-31]**. The Philistines rule the land.

All that remained of the tribal armies was a small band of 600 men, who wandered and hid in guerilla fashion in the hilly area of southern Y'hudah (*Judah*). The group was led by a man who was made an outcast by the mentally deranged Sha'ul; his name was David.

God had only given the Israelites their king, Saul, because they cried out to be led as their pagan neighbors were led; by a human king instead of God Himself. So, God gave them a man who He warned would turn out to be a curse to them. Yet, in His mercy, God was readying another to be king that He would later refer to as 'a man after mine own heart'.

When God decided to reveal this king that was to replace Saul, it had to be done in secret. Knowing Sha'ul (*Saul*) would never stand for it, Sh'mu'el (*Samuel*) was sent by God to the house of Yishai (*Jesse*), where he was to anoint one of Yishai's (*Jesse's*) sons as king. Yishai paraded his sons by Sh'mu'el, one by one, until the youngest, David, was chosen **[I Sam. 16]**.

The Bible describes David as short, of ruddy complexion, red hair, and overall, quite handsome. David was also extremely gifted as a poet, a musician, and eventually, as a warrior leader.

It was his musical prowess that brought him into initial service to King Sha'ul. Playing a lyre and singing songs, it is David's job to soothe the always brooding king. He is a musician and poet for now, but in time he will become Sha'ul's armor-bearer, bringing David into constant contact with the king and all his court, and putting him in front of the people.

After serving Saul for a time, David, still a boy, returns to his hometown of Beit-Lechem (*Bethlehem*). Sometime later, after David has slain the giant Philistine warrior named Goliath using only a leather sling and some smooth stones, he enters the service of King Sha'ul (*Saul*) again. But, this time, as an officer of troops. These are not the typical tribal militia however. These are hardened mercenaries and they win encounter after encounter against the Philistines. The people are impressed. At the same time, David forms a close friendship with Y'honatan (*Jonathan*), one of Sha'ul's (*Saul's*) sons. The outcome of these events produces a paranoid reaction from Sha'ul, who is now convinced David is out to take his kingdom away from him; and worse, he believes the people of Israel support the notion. Sha'ul decides he cannot allow David to live.

The king tried a number of ways to have David done away with, but each time the plan went as awry as his battle campaigns. Y'honatan (*Jonathan*), the legitimate heir to the throne, finds out David has been anointed by God to be the next king. In what must have been one of the most difficult acts of faith, and in a magnanimous show of friendship, Y'honatan graciously submits to God's will, gives up his right to succeed his father, and vows to support God's choice of David as the next King of Israel. Sha'ul makes another attempt on David's life, and this time David takes his 600 loyal troops and flees. It is a desperate time for David. Absolutely loyal to Sha'ul, doing everything he asks and more, risking his life constantly for the King, David and his men must now live in caves, foraging for food, and moving around to avoid the mentally unstable Saul [**I Sam. 21-27**]. Many of the Psalms that we read and pray today were composed by David during his personal wilderness experience.

After Sha'ul's death on the battlefield, David is devastated. He truly loved Sha'ul, despite the King's resolve to send him to an early grave. The tribal elders of Y'hudah (*Judah*) agree to make David king over the southern tribal territories [**II Sam. 1-6**]. In the north, however, Saul's lone remaining son Ishbosheth is named king by Sha'ul's former military commander, Abner. The northern tribes were in disarray, generally didn't agree with Abner's choice, and Ishbosheth was poor king material. Many in the north remembered David and his victories and were loyal to him. Civil war broke out in the north for 2 years; brothers fighting against brothers, clans against clans.

The bad blood that grew among the 10 northern tribes during the period of civil war led to a series of revenge killings that, in the end, paved the way for unification. At the age of 30, having reigned over Y'hudah (*Judah*) for 7 years, David becomes king over all of Israel. For the first time in history the tribes of the north and the south reluctantly agree to become one nation, Israel, under one king, David.

It's 1000 BC. China has discovered refrigeration by using cut blocks of winter ice stored for use in the summer. In Greece, Troy has been conquered, the Dorians have invaded and toppled the culture, and the Greeks enter their dark age. The use of iron is becoming widespread throughout the Middle and Far-East, its technology transported via the extensive land and sea trade networks that criss-cross the region.

David has a politically divisive problem on his hands. There may have been only one King, but there were two capital cities: Hebron in the south, and Mahanaim in the north. The solution? A new but neutral site; and a city name Yerushalayim (*Jerusalem*) fit the bill. This already ancient city, briefly held by the Israelites hundreds of years earlier then abandoned, was still in the hands of the Jebusites. Only about 12 acres in size, the city controlled the mountain passes and it had thick walls for defense. David made quick work of acquiring it by sneaking troops in through a water tunnel and surprising the occupants. Yerushalayim (*Jerusalem*) was his. He named it the City of David, and from there ruled his nation.

David, God's choice as King, was set. He had a powerful and confident army, a capital city, and the support of the 12 tribes. He was immediately victorious in subduing the Philistines, Moabites, Syrians, Edomites, Ammonites, and other neighboring nations. Controlling now the all-important trade routes, he taxed their use to fund his battle campaigns to expand his empire. This was a unique time of opportunity for Israel. They had no opposition from other large nations: Egypt, in decline, was in internal turmoil and lost its strong influence over the region in and around Canaan; Assyria had its empire-building temporarily short-circuited by the Arameans. In quick fashion, David constructed the greatest empire in the Middle East region of the world.

David now asked Natan (*Nathan*) the prophet if he thought God would allow him to build a temple to house the Ark of the Covenant. It's a good news, bad news reply. No, God says, it will not be David, but his offspring that will construct the temple. However, David's line shall inherit Israel's throne eternally. David, proving his humility before God, asks why he should be so blessed [**II Sam. 7**].

But, David is not without flaws. Wandering the parapets of his palace one evening, he looks in lust upon a beautiful Bathsheba while she is bathing, and decides he must have her. Bathsheba was a married woman. What ensues is the darkest spot on David's life: adultery, and murder to cover it up. Perhaps remembering one of Sha'ul's many attempts to kill him by sending him on a suicide mission, he does the same with Bathsheba's husband, who is a military officer. The plan works to perfection for David. Bathsheba is his, and she becomes pregnant from the sordid affair. The baby, a treasured son, dies **[II Sam. 11, 12]**.

David, confronted by Natan (*Nathan*), admits his sin; tearfully and full of remorse he begs God for forgiveness. God shows him mercy, but His Holiness cannot allow rebellion to go unpunished. God sentences David by saying, ".....the sword shall never depart from your house". It never did. A series of tragedies within his family will ensue that plague a brokenhearted King David all the way to his deathbed.

A little later Bathsheba gives birth to a second son, Shlomo (*Solomon*). David also has more children by other women. His oldest son, Amnon, rapes his own half-sister, Tamar. Another brother, Absalom, has Amnon killed for his detestable act and then flees to his mother's hometown. God's punishment upon David is most evident, and David knows it.

David is on the throne of a united Israel; the sovereign nation of Israel. Israel is growing and prospering, but the tribal leaders are once again becoming unhappy. Their people have given loyalty to a king, so their personal tribal authority and autonomy has suffered. Bitter clan leaders meet secretly to plot rebellion against King David. Absalom, suspecting that his father David intended on turning the throne over to Shlomo (*Solomon*) in time, spent the next 4 years gaining the confidence of many of the disgruntled tribal leaders and plotting an overthrow. At a carefully calculated point in time, he marched an army into Jerusalem and attacked, much to the surprise of his aging father, David. Unprepared for the coup attempt by his son, David fled, but later regained full possession of his throne. He wept bitter tears over his beloved son Absalom who was killed in the process **[II Sam. 13-21]**.

A few years later, a shriveled and bedridden David had not declared a successor. Even though the nation was well-fortified and firmly under control, the 12 tribes divided into 12 prospering districts, there was disagreement among those close to the throne concerning the all-important question of who should be the next king. Finally, at the prophet Natan's (*Nathan's*) urging,

David officially declared his son Shlomo (*Solomon*) as his successor.

It's 965 BC. At the age of 70, David dies. Shlomo takes the throne of a nation of 1 ½ million fighting men, and about 6 million total population; just about the same as Israel is today, almost 3000 years later.

Shlomo (*Solomon*) inherited an empire built by his father; but, as is common among fathers and sons, these were very different kinds of men [**I Kgs. 1,2**]. David was a warrior; Shlomo (*Solomon*) was a builder. David, commanding an army, conquered peoples and nations, and expanded Israel's borders. Shlomo built political coalitions and made treaties; quite often accomplished by marrying a member of a hoped-for ally's royal family (a common method of creating alliances well before and after this era). His harem swelled to over 700 wives and 300 concubines as a result. David spent his reign securing and protecting the empire. Shlomo spent his reign pursuing the trappings of royalty: wealth, culture, and unmatched luxury.

Shlomo (*Solomon*) was an astute businessman. He collected commissions for arranging business deals and collected tolls for the use of the trade routes under his control. With the wealth piling up, he used the money to expand Jerusalem and to build the first Temple as God had promised David.

Shlomo was also a prolific writer, scientist, and scholar. He wrote over 3000 proverbs, composed over 1000 songs, and studied plants and animals. He authored 3 books that would become part of the Scriptures that Jesus would study and quote: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Shlomo (*Solomon*); they are still part of our modern Bible [**I Kgs. 4**].

Yerushalayim (*Jerusalem*) became world-renowned for its magnificence and sophistication; it was a truly international city. Wealthy men and royalty came from every nation just to behold its stunning beauty, and to listen to Shlomo's (*Solomon's*) already legendary wisdom. But, such opulence comes at a price. Shlomo's grandiose lifestyle and insatiable appetite for building projects began to run the treasury out of money. At one point, he actually ceded land from Israel to the King of Tyre to pay for some construction material [**I Kgs. 9, 10**]. This act was

utterly repugnant to the people. He simply shrugged at their outrage and reacted to the shortage of funds by resorting to forced labor for his building projects and increasing the already burdensome taxes. Israel had been turned into his personal playground, an edifice to himself, and the tribal elders seethed.

In the end, his attraction to the pagan world was his undoing. As wise as he purported himself to be (and was in many ways), he was an even greater fool. He had married literally hundreds of pagan women who were permitted to continue worshipping their idols and gods, with his blessing [**I Kgs. 11**]. This was an abomination to the God of Israel and was another distinct difference between Shlomo and his father, David. After a reign of 40 years, Shlomo (*Solomon*) died in 925 BC. The dream of Israel as a dominating empire and world power went to the grave with him.

We'll continue with this journey next week.