

THE SECOND BOOK OF SAMUEL

David's rule at Hebron

1¹WHEN DAVID RETURNED from his victory over the Amalekites, he spent two days in Ziklag. ²And on the third day after Saul's death a man came from the army with his clothes rent and dust on his head. When he came into David's presence he fell to the ground in obeisance, ³and David asked him where he had come from. He answered, 'I have escaped from the army of Israel.' ⁴And David said to him, 'What news? Tell me.' 'The army has been driven from the field,' he answered, 'and many have fallen in battle. Saul and Jonathan his son are dead.' ⁵David said to the young man who brought the news, 'How do you know that Saul and Jonathan are dead?' ⁶The man answered, 'It so happened that I was on Mount Gilboa and saw Saul leaning on his spear with the chariots and horsemen closing in upon him. ⁷He turned round and, seeing me, called to me. I said, "What is it, sir?" ⁸He asked who I was, and I said, "An Amalekite." ⁹Then he said to me, "Come and stand over me and dispatch me. I still live, but the throes of death have seized me." ¹⁰So I stood over him and gave him the death-blow; for I knew that, broken as he was, he could not live. Then I took the crown from his head and the armlet from his arm, and I have brought them here to you, sir.' ¹¹At that David caught at his clothes and rent them, and so did all the men with him. ¹²They beat their breasts and wept, because Saul and Jonathan his son and the people of the LORD, the house of Israel, had fallen in battle; and they fasted till evening. ¹³David said to the young man who brought the news, 'Where do you come from?', and he answered, 'I am the son of an alien, an Amalekite.' ¹⁴'How is it', said David, 'that you were not afraid to raise your hand to slay the LORD's anointed?' ¹⁵And he summoned one of his own young men and ordered him to fall upon the man. So the young man struck him down and killed him; ¹⁶and David said, 'Your blood be on your own head; for out of your own mouth you condemned yourself when you said, "I killed the LORD's anointed."'

¹⁷David made this lament over Saul and Jonathan his son; ¹⁸and he ordered that this dirge over them should be taught to the people of Judah. It was written down and may be found in the Book of Jashar [*Or the Book of the Upright*]:

¹⁹O prince of Israel, laid low in death!
How are the men of war fallen!

²⁰Tell it not in Gath,
proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon,
lest the Philistine women rejoice,
lest the daughters of the uncircumcised exult.

²¹Hills of Gilboa, let no dew or rain fall on you,
no showers on the uplands [*showers on the uplands: prob. rdg, Heb fields of offerings*]!
For there the shields of the warriors lie tarnished,
and the shield of Saul, no longer bright with oil.

²²The bow of Jonathan never held back
from the breast of the foeman, from the blood of the slain;
the sword of Saul never returned
empty to the scabbard.

²³Delightful and dearly loved were Saul and Jonathan;
in life, in death, they were not parted.
They were swifter than eagles,
stronger than lions.

²⁴Weep for Saul, O daughters of Israel!
who clothed you in scarlet and rich embroideries,
who spangled your dress with jewels of gold.

²⁵How are the men of war fallen, fallen on the field!
O Jonathan, laid low in death!

²⁶I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother;
dear and delightful you were to me;
your love for me was wonderful,
surpassing the love of women.

²⁷Fallen, fallen are the men of war;
and their armour left on the field.

²¹After this David inquired of the LORD, 'Shall I go up into one of the cities of Judah?' The LORD answered, 'Go.' David asked, 'To which city?', and the answer came, 'To Hebron.' ²So David went to Hebron with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail widow of Nabal of Carmel. ³David also brought the men who had joined him, with their families, and they settled in the city [*prob. rdg, Heb cities*] of Hebron. ⁴The men of Judah came, and there they anointed David king over the house of Judah.

Word came to David that the men of Jabesh-gilead had buried Saul, ⁵and he sent them this message: 'The LORD bless you because you kept faith with Saul your lord and buried him. ⁶For this may the LORD keep faith and truth with you, and I for my part will show you favour too, because you have done this. ⁷Be strong, be valiant, now that Saul your lord is dead, and the people of Judah have anointed me to be king over them.'

⁸Meanwhile Saul's commander-in-chief, Abner son of Ner, had taken Saul's son Ishbosheth, brought him across the Jordan to Mahanaim, ⁹and made him king over Gilead, the Asherites, Jezreel, Ephraim, and Benjamin, and all Israel. ¹⁰Ishbosheth was forty years old when he became king over Israel, and he reigned two years. The tribe of Judah, however, followed David. ¹¹David's rule over Judah in Hebron lasted seven years and a half.

¹²Abner son of Ner, with the troops of Saul's son Ishbosheth, marched out from Mahanaim to Gibeon, ¹³and Joab son of Zeruah marched out with David's troops from Hebron. They met at the pool of Gibeon and took up their positions one on one side of the pool and the other on the other side. ¹⁴Abner said to Joab, 'Let the young men come

forward and join in single combat before us.' Joab answered, 'Yes, let them.' ¹⁵So they came up, one by one, and took their places, twelve for Benjamin and for Ishbosheth and twelve from David's men. ¹⁶Each man seized his opponent by the head and thrust his sword into his side; and thus they fell together. That is why that place, which lies in Gibeon, was called the Field of Blades.

¹⁷There ensued a fierce battle that day, and Abner and the men of Israel were defeated by David's troops. ¹⁸All three sons of Zeruah were there, Joab, Abishai and Asahel. Asahel, who was swift as a gazelle on the plains, ¹⁹ran straight after Abner, swerving neither to right nor left in his pursuit. ²⁰Abner turned and asked, 'Is it you, Asahel?' Asahel answered, 'It is.' ²¹Abner said, 'Turn aside to right or left, tackle one of the young men and win his belt for yourself.' But Asahel would not abandon the pursuit. ²²Abner again urged him to give it up. 'Why should I kill you?' he said. 'How could I look Joab your brother in the face?' ²³When he still refused to turn aside, Abner struck him in the belly with a back-thrust of his spear [a back-thrust of his spear: *prob. rdg, Heb obscure*] so that the spear came out behind him, and he fell dead in his tracks. All who came to the place where Asahel lay dead stopped there. ²⁴But Joab and Abishai kept up the pursuit of Abner, until, at sunset, they reached the hill of Ammah, opposite Giah on the road leading to the pastures of Gibeon.

²⁵The Benjamites rallied to Abner and, forming themselves into a single company, took up their stand on the top of the hill of Ammah [the hill of Ammah: *prob. rdg, cp v24; Heb a single hill*]. ²⁶Abner called to Joab, 'Must the slaughter go on for ever? Can you not see that it will be all the more bitter in the end? Will you never recall the people from the pursuit of their kinsmen?' ²⁷Joab answered, 'As God lives, if you had not spoken, the people would not have given up the pursuit till morning.' ²⁸Then Joab sounded the trumpet, and all the people abandoned the pursuit of the men of Israel and the fighting ceased. ²⁹Abner and his men moved along the Arabah all that night, crossed the Jordan and went on all the morning till they reached Mahanaim. ³⁰When Joab returned from the pursuit of Abner, he assembled his troops and found that, besides Asahel, nineteen of David's men were missing. ³¹David's forces had routed the Benjamites and the followers of Abner, killing three hundred and sixty of them. ³²They took up Asahel and buried him in his father's tomb at Bethlehem. Joab and his men marched all night, and as day broke they reached Hebron.

3¹THE WAR BETWEEN THE HOUSES of Saul and David was long drawn out, David growing steadily stronger while the house of Saul became weaker and weaker.

2 [vv2-5: *cp 1Chr. 3.1-4*] Sons were born to David at Hebron. His eldest was Amnon, whose mother was Ahinoam of Jezreel; ³his second Chileab, whose mother was Abigail widow of Nabal of Carmel; the third Absalom, whose mother was Maacah daughter of Talmai king of Geshur; ⁴the fourth Adonijah, whose mother was Haggith; the fifth Shephatiah, whose mother was Abital; ⁵and the sixth Ithream, whose mother was David's wife Eglah. These were all born to David at Hebron.

⁶As the war between the houses of Saul and David went on, Abner made his position gradually stronger in the house of Saul. ⁷Now Saul had had a concubine named Rizpah

daughter of Aiah. Ishbosheth asked Abner, 'Why have you slept with my father's concubine?' ⁸Abner was very angry at this and exclaimed, 'Am I a baboon in the pay of Judah? Up to now I have been loyal to the house of your father Saul, to his brothers and friends, and I have not betrayed you into David's hands; yet you choose this moment to charge me with disloyalty over this woman. ⁹But now, so help me God, I will do all I can to bring about what the LORD swore to do for David: ¹⁰I will set to work to bring down the house of Saul and to put David on the throne over Israel and Judah from Dan to Beersheba.' ¹¹Ishbosheth could not say another word; he was too much afraid of Abner. ¹²Then Abner, seeking to make friends where he could, instead of going to David himself sent envoys with this message: 'Let us come to terms, and I will do all I can to bring the whole of Israel over to you.' ¹³David sent answer: 'Good, I will come to terms with you, but on this one condition, that you do not come into my presence without bringing Saul's daughter Michal to me.' ¹⁴David also sent messengers to Saul's son Ishbosheth with the demand: 'Hand over to me my wife Michal to whom I was betrothed at the price of a hundred Philistine foreskins.' ¹⁵Thereupon Ishbosheth sent and took her away from her husband, Paltiel son of Laish. ¹⁶Paltiel followed her as far as Bahurim, weeping all the way, until Abner ordered him to go back home, and he went.

¹⁷Abner now approached the elders of Israel and said, 'For some time past you have wanted David for your king; ¹⁸now is the time to act, for this is the word of the LORD about David: "By the hand of my servant David I will deliver my people Israel from the Philistines and from all their enemies." ' ¹⁹Abner spoke also to the Benjamites and then went on to report to David at Hebron all that the Israelites and the Benjamites had agreed. ²⁰When Abner was admitted to David's presence, there were twenty men with him and David gave a feast for them all. ²¹Then Abner said to David, 'I shall now go and bring the whole of Israel over to your majesty, and they shall make a covenant with you. Then you will be king over a realm after your own heart.' David dismissed Abner, granting him safe conduct.

²²David's men and Joab returned from a raid bringing a great deal of plunder with them, and by this time Abner, after his dismissal, was no longer with David in Hebron. ²³So when Joab and his raiding party arrived, they were greeted with the news that Abner son of Ner had been with the king and had departed under safe conduct. ²⁴Joab went in to the king and said, 'What have you done? Here you have had Abner with you. How could you let him go? He has got clean away! ²⁵You know Abner son of Ner: he came meaning to deceive you, to learn all about your movements and to find out what you are doing.' ²⁶When he left David's presence, Joab sent messengers after Abner and they brought him back from the Pool of Sirah; but David knew nothing of all this. ²⁷On Abner's return to Hebron, Joab drew him aside in the gateway, as though to speak privately with him, and there, in revenge for his brother Asahel, he stabbed him in the belly, and he died. ²⁸When David heard the news he said, 'I and my realm are for ever innocent in the sight of the LORD of the blood of Abner son of Ner. ²⁹May it recoil upon the head of Joab and upon all his family! May the house of Joab never be free from running sore or foul disease, nor lack a son fit only to ply the distaff or doomed to die by the sword or beg his bread!' ³⁰So Joab and Abishai his brother slew Abner because he had killed their brother Asahel in battle at Gibeon. ³¹Then David ordered Joab and all the people with him to rend their clothes, put on sackcloth and beat their breasts for

Abner, and the king himself walked behind the bier. ³²They buried Abner in Hebron and the king wept aloud at the tomb, while all the people wept with him. ³³The king made this lament for Abner:

Must Abner die so base a death?

³⁴Your hands were not bound,
your feet not thrust into fetters;
you fell as one who falls at a ruffian's hands.

And the people wept for him again.

³⁵They came to persuade David to eat something; but it was still day and he swore, 'So help me God! I will not touch food of any kind before sunset.' ³⁶The people took note of this and approved; indeed, everything the king did pleased them. ³⁷Everyone throughout Israel knew on that day that the king had had no hand in the murder of Abner son of Ner. ³⁸The king said to his servants, 'Do you not know that a warrior, a great man, has fallen this day in Israel? ³⁹King though I am, I feel weak and powerless in face of these ruthless sons of Zeruiah; they are too much for me; the LORD will requite the wrongdoer as he deserves.'

4¹When Saul's son Ishbosheth heard that Abner had been killed in Hebron, his courage failed him and all Israel was dismayed. ²Now Ishbosheth had [*had: prob. rdg, Heb omitted*] two officers, who were captains of raiding parties, and whose names were Baanah and Rechab; they were Benjamites, sons of Rimmon of Beeroth, Beeroth being reckoned part of Benjamin; ³but the Beerothites had fled to Gittaim, where they have lived ever since.

⁴(Saul's son Jonathan had a son lame in both feet. He was five years old when word of the death of Saul and Jonathan came from Jezreel. His nurse had picked him up and fled, but in her hurry to get away he fell and was crippled. His name was Mephibosheth.)

⁵Rechab and Baanah, the sons of Rimmon of Beeroth, came to the house of Ishbosheth in the heat of the day and went in, while he was taking his midday rest. ⁶Now the door-keeper had been sifting wheat, but she had grown drowsy and fallen asleep, so Rechab and his brother Baanah crept in, ⁷found their way to the room where he was asleep on the bed, and struck him dead. They cut off his head and took it with them, and, making their way along the Arabah all night, ⁸came to Hebron. They brought Ishbosheth's head to David at Hebron and said to the king, 'Here is the head of Ishbosheth son of Saul, your enemy, who sought your life. The LORD has avenged your majesty today on Saul and on his family.' ⁹David answered Rechab and his brother Baanah, the sons of Rimmon of Beeroth, with an oath: 'As the LORD lives, who has rescued me from all my troubles! ¹⁰I seized the man who brought me word that Saul was dead and thought it good news; I killed him in Ziklag, and that was how I rewarded him for his news. ¹¹How much more when ruffians have killed an innocent man on his bed in his own house? Am I not to take vengeance on you now for the blood you have shed, and rid the earth of you?' ¹²David gave the word, and the young men killed them; they cut off their hands and feet and hung them up beside the pool in Hebron, but the head of Ishbosheth they took and buried in Abner's tomb at Hebron.

David king in Jerusalem

⁵¹ [vv1-3, 6-10: cp 1Chr. 11.1-9] NOW ALL THE TRIBES OF ISRAEL came to David at Hebron and said to him, 'We are your own flesh and blood. ²In the past, while Saul was still king over us, you led the forces of Israel to war and you brought them home again. And the LORD said to you, "You shall be shepherd of my people Israel; you shall be their prince." ' ³All the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron; there David made a covenant with them before the LORD, and they anointed David king over Israel. ⁴David came to the throne at the age of thirty and reigned for forty years. ⁵In Hebron he had ruled over Judah for seven years and a half, and for thirty-three years he reigned in Jerusalem over Israel and Judah together.

⁶The king and his men went to Jerusalem to attack the Jebusites, whose land it was. The Jebusites said to David, 'Never shall you come in here; not till you have disposed of the blind and the lame', meaning that David should never come in. ⁷None the less David did capture the stronghold of Zion, and it is now known as the City of David. ⁸David said on that day, 'Everyone who would kill a Jebusite, let him use his grappling-iron to reach the lame and the blind, David's bitter enemies.' That is why they say, 'No blind or lame man shall come into the LORD's house.'

⁹David took up his residence in the stronghold and called it the City of David. He built the city [the city: *prob. rdg, cp 1Chr. 11.8; Heb omitted*] round it, starting at the Millo and working inwards. ¹⁰So David steadily grew stronger, for the LORD the God of Hosts was with him.

¹¹ [vv11-25: cp 1Chr. 14.1-16] Hiram king of Tyre sent an embassy to David; he sent cedar logs, and with them carpenters and stonemasons, who built David a house. ¹²David knew by now that the LORD had confirmed him as king over Israel and had made his royal power stand higher for the sake of his people Israel.

¹³After he had moved from Hebron he took more concubines and wives from Jerusalem; and more sons and daughters were born to him. ¹⁴ [vv14-16: cp 1Chr. 3.5-8; 14.4-7] These are the names of the children born to him in Jerusalem: Shammua, Shobab, Nathan, Solomon, ¹⁵Ibhar, Elishua, Nepheg, Japhia, ¹⁶Elishama, Eliada and Eliphelet.

¹⁷When the Philistines learnt that David had been anointed king over Israel, they came up in force to seek him out. David, hearing of this, took refuge in the stronghold. ¹⁸The Philistines had come and overrun the Vale of Rephaim. ¹⁹So David inquired of the LORD, 'If I attack the Philistines, wilt thou deliver them into my hands?' And the LORD answered, 'Go, I will deliver the Philistines into your hands.' ²⁰So he went up and attacked them at Baal-perazim and defeated them there. 'The LORD has broken through my enemies' lines,' David said, 'as a river breaks its banks.' That is why the place was named Baal-perazim [*That is Baal of Break-through*]. ²¹The Philistines left their idols behind them there, and David and his men carried them off.

²²The Philistines made another attack and overran the Vale of Rephaim. ²³David inquired of the LORD, who said, 'Do not attack now but wheel round and take them in

the rear opposite the aspens. ²⁴As soon as you hear a rustling sound in the tree-tops, then act at once; for the LORD will have gone out before you to defeat the Philistine army.' ²⁵David did as the LORD had commanded, and drove the Philistines in flight all the way from Geba to Gezer.

6¹After that David again summoned the picked men of Israel, thirty thousand in all, ²*[vv2-11: cp 1Chr. 13.6-14]* and went with the whole army to Baalath-judah *[to Baalath-judah: prob. rdg, cp 1Chr. 13.6, Heb from the lords of Judah]* to fetch the Ark of God which bears the name of the LORD of Hosts, who is enthroned upon the cherubim. ³They mounted the Ark of God on a new cart and conveyed it from the house of Abinadab on the hill, with Uzzah and Ahio, sons of Abinadab, guiding the cart. ⁴They took it with the Ark of God upon it from Abinadab's house on the hill, with Ahio walking in front. ⁵David and all Israel danced for joy before the LORD without restraint to the sound of singing *[without ... singing: prob. rdg, cp 1Chr. 13.8; Heb to the beating of batons]*, of harps and lutes, of tambourines and castanets and cymbals. ⁶But when they came to a certain threshing-floor, the oxen stumbled, and Uzzah reached out to the Ark of God and took hold of it. ⁷The LORD was angry with Uzzah and struck him down there for his rash act. So he died there beside the Ark of God. ⁸David was vexed because the LORD's anger had broken out upon Uzzah, and he called the place Perez-uzzah *[That is Outbreak on Uzzah]*, the name it still bears. ⁹David was afraid of the LORD that day and said, 'How can I harbour the Ark of the LORD after this?' ¹⁰He felt he could not take the Ark of the LORD with him to the City of David, but turned aside and carried it to the house of Obed-edom the Gittite. ¹¹Thus the Ark of the LORD remained at Obed-edom's house for three months, and the LORD blessed Obed-edom and all his family.

¹²*[vv12-19: cp 1Chr. 15.25-16.3]* When they told David that the LORD had blessed Obed-edom's family and all that was his because of the Ark of God, he went and brought up the Ark of God from the house of Obed-edom to the City of David with much rejoicing. ¹³When the bearers of the Ark of the LORD had gone six steps he sacrificed an ox and a buffalo. ¹⁴David, wearing a linen ephod, danced without restraint before the LORD. ¹⁵He and all the Israelites brought up the Ark of the LORD with shouting and blowing of trumpets. ¹⁶But as the Ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Saul's daughter Michal looked down through a window and saw King David leaping and capering before the LORD, and she despised him in her heart. ¹⁷When they had brought in the Ark of the LORD, they put it in its place inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and David offered whole-offerings and shared-offerings before the LORD. ¹⁸After David had completed these sacrifices, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD of Hosts ¹⁹and gave food to all the people, a flat loaf of bread, a portion of meat, and a cake of raisins, to every man and woman in the whole gathering of the Israelites. Then all the people went home. ²⁰When David returned to greet his household, Michal, Saul's daughter, came out to meet him and said, 'What a glorious day for the king of Israel, when he exposed his person in the sight of his servants' slave-girls like any empty-headed fool!' ²¹David answered Michal, 'But it was done in the presence of the LORD, who chose me instead of your father and his family and appointed me prince over Israel, the people of the LORD. Before the LORD I will dance for joy, yes, ²²and I will earn yet more disgrace and lower myself still more in your eyes. But those girls of whom you speak, they will honour me for it.' ²³Michal, Saul's daughter, had no child to her dying

day.

7¹ [*vv1-29: cp 1Chr. 17.1-27*] As soon as the king was established in his house and the LORD had given him security from his enemies on all sides, ²he said to Nathan the prophet, 'Here I live in a house of cedar, while the Ark of God is housed in curtains.' ³Nathan answered the king, 'Very well, do whatever you have in mind, for the LORD is with you.' ⁴But that night the word of the LORD came to Nathan: ⁵'Go and say to David my servant, "This is the word of the LORD: Are you the man to build me a house to dwell in? ⁶Down to this day I have never dwelt in a house since I brought Israel up from Egypt; I made my journey in a tent and a tabernacle. ⁷Wherever I journeyed with Israel, did I ever ask any of the judges [*prob. rdg, cp 1Chr. 17.6; Heb tribes*] whom I appointed shepherds of my people Israel why they had not built me a house of cedar?" ⁸Then say this to my servant David: "This is the word of the LORD of Hosts: I took you from the pastures, and from following the sheep, to be prince over my people Israel. ⁹I have been with you wherever you have gone, and have destroyed all the enemies in your path. I will make you a great name among the great ones of the earth. ¹⁰I will assign a place for my people Israel; there I will plant them, and they shall dwell in their own land. They shall be disturbed no more, never again shall wicked men oppress them as they did in the past, ¹¹ever since the time when I appointed judges over Israel my people; and I will give you peace from all your enemies. The LORD has told you that he would build up your royal house. ¹²When your life ends. and you rest with your forefathers, I will set up one of your family, one of your own children, to succeed you and I will establish his kingdom. ¹³It is he shall build a house in honour of my name, and I will establish his royal throne for ever. ¹⁴I will be his father, and he shall be my son. When he does wrong, I will punish him as any father might, and not spare the rod. ¹⁵My love will never be withdrawn from him as I withdrew it from Saul, whom I removed from your path. ¹⁶Your family shall be established and your kingdom shall stand for all time in my sight, and your throne shall be established for ever." '

¹⁷Nathan recounted to David all that had been said to him and all that had been revealed. ¹⁸Then King David went into the presence of the LORD and took his place there and said, 'What am I, Lord GOD, and what is my family, that thou hast brought me thus far? ¹⁹It was a small thing in thy sight to have planned for thy servant's house in days long past. But such, O Lord GOD, is the lot of a man embarked on a high career [*embarked on a high career: prob. rdg, cp 1Chr. 17.17; Heb omitted*]. ²⁰And now what more can I say? for well thou knowest thy servant David, O Lord GOD. ²¹Thou hast made good thy word; it was thy purpose to spread thy servant's fame, and so thou hast raised me to this greatness. ²²Great indeed art thou, O Lord GOD; we have never heard of one like thee; there is no god but thee. ²³And thy people Israel, to whom can they be compared? Is there any other nation on earth whom thou, O God, hast set out to redeem from slavery. to be thy people? Any other for whom thou hast done great and terrible things to win fame for thyself? Any other whom thou hast redeemed for thyself from Egypt by driving out other nations and their gods to make way for them? ²⁴Thou hast established thy people Israel as thy own for ever, and thou, O LORD, hast become their God. ²⁵But now, LORD God, perform what thou hast promised for thy servant and his house, and for all time; make good what thou hast said. ²⁶May thy fame be great for evermore and let men say, "The LORD of Hosts is God over Israel." So shall the house

of thy servant David be established before thee. ²⁷O LORD of Hosts, God of Israel, thou hast shown me thy purpose, in saying to thy servant, "I will build up your house"; and therefore I have made bold to offer this prayer to thee. ²⁸Thou, O Lord GOD, art God; thou hast made these noble promises to thy servant, and thy promises come true; ²⁹be pleased now to bless thy servant's house that it may continue always before thee; thou, O Lord GOD, hast promised, and thy blessing shall rest upon thy servant's house for evermore.'

8¹ [*vv1-14: cp 1Chr. 18.1-13*] After this David defeated the Philistines and conquered them, and took from them Metheg-ha-ammah. ²He defeated the Moabites, and he made them lie along the ground and measured them off with a length of cord; for every two lengths that were to be put to death one full length was spared. The Moabites became subject to him and paid him tribute. ³David also defeated Hadadezer the Rehobite, king of Zobah, who was on his way to re-erect his monument of victory by [re-erect ... victory by: *or* recover control of the crossings of] the river Euphrates. ⁴From him David captured seventeen hundred horse and twenty thousand foot; he hamstringed all the chariot-horses, except a hundred which he retained. ⁵When the Aramaeans of Damascus came to the help of Hadadezer king of Zobah, ⁶David destroyed twenty-two thousand of them, and established garrisons among these Aramaeans; they became subject to him and paid him tribute. Thus the LORD gave David victory wherever he went. ⁷David took the gold quivers borne by Hadadezer's servants and brought them to Jerusalem; ⁸and he also took a great quantity of bronze [*Or copper*] from Hadadezer's cities, Betah and Berothai.

⁹When Toi king of Hamath heard that David had defeated the entire army of Hadadezer, ¹⁰he sent his son Joram to King David to greet him and to congratulate him on defeating Hadadezer in battle (for Hadadezer had been at war with Toi); and he brought with him vessels of silver, gold, and copper, ¹¹which King David dedicated to the LORD. He dedicated also the silver and gold taken from all the nations he had subdued, ¹²from Edom and Moab, from the Ammonites, the Philistines, and Amalek, as well as part of the spoil taken from Hadadezer the Rehobite, king of Zobah.

¹³David made a great name for himself by the slaughter of eighteen thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt, and on returning ¹⁴he stationed garrisons throughout Edom, and all the Edomites were subject to him. Thus the LORD gave victory to David wherever he went.

¹⁵ [*vv15-18: cp 20.23-26; 1Kgs. 4.2-6; 1Chr. 18.14-17*] David ruled over the whole of Israel and maintained law and justice among all his people. ¹⁶Joab son of Zeruiah was in command of the army; Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was secretary of state; ¹⁷Zadok and Abiathar son of Ahimelech, son of Ahitub [and Abiathar ... Ahitub: *prob. rdg, cp 1Sam. 22.11,20; 2Sam. 20.25; Heb son of Ahitub and Ahimelech son of Abiathar*], were priests; Seraiah was adjutant-general; ¹⁸Benaiah son of Jehoiada commanded the Kerethite and Pelethite guards. David's sons were priests.

9¹David asked, 'Is any member of Saul's family left, to whom I can show true kindness for Jonathan's sake?' ²There was a servant of Saul's family named Ziba; and he was

summoned to David. The king asked, 'Are you Ziba?', and he answered, 'Your servant, sir.' ³So the king said, 'Is no member of Saul's family still alive to whom I may show the kindness that God requires?' 'Yes,' said Ziba, 'there is a son of Jonathan still alive; he is a cripple, lame in both feet.' ⁴'Where is he?' said the king, and Ziba answered, 'He is staying with Machir son of Ammiel in Lo-debar.'

⁵So the king sent and fetched him from Lo-debar, from the house of Machir son of Ammiel, ⁶and when Mephibosheth, son of Jonathan and Saul's grandson, entered David's presence, he prostrated himself and did obeisance. David said to him, 'Mephibosheth', and he answered, 'Your servant, sir.' ⁷Then David said, 'Do not be afraid; I mean to show you kindness for your father Jonathan's sake, and I will give you back the whole estate of your grandfather Saul; you shall have a place for yourself at my table.' ⁸So Mephibosheth prostrated himself again and said, 'Who am I that you should spare a thought for a dead dog like me?' ⁹Then David summoned Saul's servant Ziba to his presence and said to him, 'I assign to your master's grandson all the property that belonged to Saul and his family. ¹⁰You and your sons and your slaves must cultivate the land and bring in the harvest to provide for your master's household, but Mephibosheth your master's grandson shall have a place at my table.' This man Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty slaves. ¹¹Then Ziba answered the king, 'I will do all that your majesty commands.' So Mephibosheth took his place in the royal household like one of the king's sons. ¹²He had a young son, named Mica; and the members of Ziba's household were all Mephibosheth's servants, ¹³while Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem and had his regular place at the king's table, crippled as he was in both feet.

10¹ [*vv1-19: cp 1Chr. 19.1-19*] Some time afterwards the king of the Ammonites died and was succeeded by his son Hanun. ²David said, 'I must keep up the same loyal friendship with Hanun son of Nahash as his father showed me', and he sent a mission to condole with him on the death of his father. But when David's envoys entered the country of the Ammonites, ³the Ammonite princes said to Hanun their lord, 'Do you suppose David means to do honour to your father when he sends you his condolences? These men of his are spies whom he has sent to find out how to overthrow the city.' ⁴So Hanun took David's servants, and he shaved off half their beards, cut off half their garments up to the buttocks, and dismissed them. ⁵When David heard how they had been treated, he sent to meet them, for they were deeply humiliated, and ordered them to wait in Jericho and not to return until their beards had grown again. ⁶The Ammonites knew that they had fallen into bad odour with David, so they hired the Aramaeans of Beth-rehob and of Zobah to come to their help with twenty thousand infantry; they also hired the king of Maacah with a thousand men, and twelve thousand men from Tob. ⁷When David heard of it, he sent out Joab and all the fighting men. ⁸The Ammonites came and took up their position at the entrance to the city, while the Aramaeans of Zobah and of Rehob and the men of Tob and Maacah took up theirs in the open country. ⁹When Joab saw that he was threatened both front and rear, he detailed some picked Israelite troops and drew them up facing the Aramaeans. ¹⁰The rest of his forces he put under his brother Abishai, who took up a position facing the Ammonites. ¹¹'If the Aramaeans prove too strong for me,' he said, 'you must come to my relief; and if the Ammonites prove too strong for you, I will come to yours. ¹²Courage! Let us fight bravely for our people and for the cities [*Or altars*] of our God. And the LORD's will be done.' ¹³But when Joab and his men came to

close quarters with the Aramaeans, they put them to flight; ¹⁴and when the Ammonites saw them in flight, they too fled before Abishai and entered the city. Then Joab returned from the battle against the Ammonites and came to Jerusalem. ¹⁵The Aramaeans saw that they had been worsted by Israel; but they rallied their forces, ¹⁶and Hadadezer sent to summon other Aramaeans from the Great Bend of the Euphrates, and they advanced to Helam under Shobach, commander of Hadadezer's army. ¹⁷Their movement was reported to David, who immediately mustered all the forces of Israel, crossed the Jordan and advanced to meet them at Helam. There the Aramaeans took up positions facing David and engaged him, ¹⁸but were put to flight by Israel. David slew seven hundred Aramaeans in chariots and forty thousand horsemen, mortally wounding Shobach, who died on the field. ¹⁹When all the vassal kings of Hadadezer saw that they had been worsted by Israel, they sued for peace and submitted to the Israelites. The Aramaeans never dared help the Ammonites again.

11¹AT THE TURN OF THE YEAR, when kings take the field, David sent Joab out with his other officers and all the Israelite forces, and they ravaged Ammon and laid siege to Rabbah, while David remained in Jerusalem. ²One evening David got up from his couch and, as he walked about on the roof of the palace, he saw from there a woman bathing, and she was very beautiful. ³He sent to inquire who she was, and the answer came, 'It must be Bathsheba daughter of Eliam and wife of Uriah the Hittite.' ⁴So he sent messengers to fetch her, and when she came to him, he had intercourse with her, though she was still being purified after her period, and then she went home. ⁵She conceived, and sent word to David that she was pregnant. ⁶David ordered Joab to send Uriah the Hittite to him. So Joab sent him to David, ⁷and when he arrived, David asked him for news of Joab and the troops and how the campaign was going; ⁸and then said to him, 'Go down to your house and wash your feet after your journey.' As he left the palace, a present from the king followed him. ⁹But Uriah did not return to his house; he lay down by the palace gate with the king's slaves. ¹⁰David heard that Uriah had not gone home, and said to him, 'You have had a long journey, why did you not go home?' ¹¹Uriah answered David, 'Israel and Judah are under canvas [under canvas: *or* at Succoth], and so is the Ark, and my lord Joab and your majesty's officers are camping in the open; how can I go home to eat and drink and to sleep with my wife? By your life, I cannot do this!' ¹²David then said to Uriah, 'Stay here another day, and tomorrow I will let you go.' So Uriah stayed in Jerusalem that day. ¹³The next day David invited him to eat and drink with him and made him drunk. But in the evening Uriah went out to lie down in his blanket [in his blanket: *or* on his pallet] among the king's slaves and did not go home.

¹⁴The following morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent Uriah with it. ¹⁵He wrote in the letter, 'Put Uriah opposite the enemy where the fighting is fiercest and then fall back, and leave him to meet his death.' ¹⁶Joab had been watching the city, and he stationed Uriah at a point where he knew they would put up a stout fight. ¹⁷The men of the city sallied out and engaged Joab, and some of David's guards fell; Uriah the Hittite was also killed. ¹⁸Joab sent David a dispatch with all the news of the battle ¹⁹and gave the messenger these instructions: 'When you have finished your report to the king, ²⁰if he is angry and asks, "Why did you go so near the city during the fight? You must have known there would be shooting from the wall. ²¹Remember who killed Abimelech son of

Jerubbesheth. It was a woman who threw down an upper millstone on to him from the wall of Thebez and killed him! Why did you go so near the wall?" – if he asks this, then tell him, "Your servant Uriah the Hittite also is dead."

²²So the messenger set out and, when he came to David, he made his report as Joab had instructed. David was angry with Joab and said to the messenger, 'Why did you go so near the city during the fight? You must have known you would be struck down from the wall. Remember who killed Abimelech son of Jerubbesheth. Was it not a woman who threw down an upper millstone on to him from the wall of Thebez and killed him? Why did you go near the wall?' ²³He answered, 'The enemy massed against us and sallied out into the open; we pressed them back as far as the gateway. ²⁴There the archers shot down at us from the wall and some of your majesty's men fell; and your servant Uriah the Hittite is dead.' ²⁵David said to the man, 'Give Joab this message: "Do not let this distress you – there is no knowing where the sword will strike; press home your attack on the city, and you will take it and raze it to the ground"; and tell him to take heart.'

²⁶When Uriah's wife heard that her husband was dead, she mourned for him; and when the period of mourning was over, ²⁷David sent for her and brought her into his house. She became his wife and bore him a son. But what David had done was wrong in the eyes of the LORD.

12¹The LORD sent Nathan the prophet to David, and when he entered his presence, he said to him, 'There were once two men in the same city, one rich and the other poor. ²The rich man had large flocks and herds, ³but the poor man had nothing of his own except one little ewe lamb. He reared it himself, and it grew up in his home with his own sons. It ate from his dish, drank from his cup and nestled in his arms; it was like a daughter to him. ⁴One day a traveller came to the rich man's house, and he, too mean to take something from his own flocks and herds to serve to his guest, took the poor man's lamb and served up that.' ⁵David was very angry, and burst out, 'As the LORD lives, the man who did this deserves to die! ⁶He shall pay for the lamb four times over, because he has done this and shown no pity.' ⁷Then Nathan said to David, 'You are the man. This is the word of the LORD the God of Israel to you: "I anointed you king over Israel, I rescued you from the power of Saul, ⁸I gave you your master's daughter [*prob. rdg, Heb* house] and his wives to be your own, I gave you the daughters of Israel and Judah; and, had this not been enough, I would have added other favours as great. ⁹Why then have you flouted the word of the LORD by doing what is wrong in my eyes? You have struck down Uriah the Hittite with the sword; the man himself you murdered by the sword of the Ammonites, and you have stolen his wife. ¹⁰Now, therefore, since you have despised me and taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be your own wife, your family shall never again have rest from the sword." ¹¹This is the word of the LORD: "I will bring trouble upon you from within your own family; I will take your wives and give them to another man before your eyes, and he will lie with them in broad daylight. ¹²What you did was done in secret; but I will do this in the light of day for all Israel to see." ' ¹³David said to Nathan, 'I have sinned against the LORD.' Nathan answered him, 'The LORD has laid on another the consequences of your sin: you shall not die, ¹⁴but, because in this you have shown your contempt for the LORD [*the LORD: prob. rdg, Heb* the enemies of the LORD], the boy that will be born to you shall die.'

¹⁵When Nathan had gone home, the LORD struck the boy whom Uriah's wife had borne to David, and he was very ill. ¹⁶David prayed to God for the child; he fasted and went in and spent the night fasting, lying on the ground. ¹⁷The older men of his household tried to get him to rise from the ground, but he refused and would eat no food with them. ¹⁸On the seventh day the boy died, and David's servants were afraid to tell him. 'While the boy was alive,' they said, 'we spoke to him, and he did not listen to us; how can we now tell him that the boy is dead? He may do something desperate.' ¹⁹But David saw his servants whispering among themselves and guessed that the boy was dead. He asked, 'Is the boy dead?', and they answered, 'He is dead.' ²⁰Then David rose from the ground, washed and anointed himself, and put on fresh clothes; he entered the house of the LORD and prostrated himself there. Then he went home, asked for food to be brought, and when it was ready, he ate it. ²¹His servants asked him, 'What is this? While the boy lived you fasted and wept for him, but now that he is dead you rise up and eat.' ²²He answered, 'While the boy was still alive I fasted and wept, thinking, "It may be that the LORD will be gracious to me, and the boy may live." ²³But now that he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again? I shall go to him; he will not come back to me.' ²⁴David consoled Bathsheba his wife; he went to her and had intercourse with her, and she gave birth to a son and called him Solomon. And because the LORD loved him, ²⁵he sent word through Nathan the prophet that for the LORD's sake he should be given the name Jedidiah [*That is Beloved of the LORD*].

²⁶ [*vv26-31: cp 1Chr. 20.1-3*] Joab attacked the Ammonite city of Rabbah and took the King's Pool. ²⁷He sent messengers to David with this report: 'I have attacked Rabbah and have taken the pool. ²⁸You had better muster the rest of the army yourself, besiege the city and take it; otherwise I shall take the city and the name to be proclaimed over it will be mine.' ²⁹David accordingly mustered his whole forces, marched to Rabbah, attacked it and took it. ³⁰He took the crown from the head of Milcom, which weighed a talent of gold and was set with a precious stone, and this he placed on his own head. He also removed a great quantity of booty from the city; ³¹he took its inhabitants and set them to work with saws and other iron tools, sharp and toothed, and made them work in the brick-kilns. David did this to all the Cities of the Ammonites; then he and all his people returned to Jerusalem.

Absalom's rebellion and other conflicts

13¹NOW DAVID'S SON ABSALOM had a beautiful sister named Tamar, and Amnon, another of David's sons, fell in love with her. ²Amnon was so distressed that he fell sick with love for his half-sister; for he thought it an impossible thing to approach her since she was a virgin. ³But he had a friend named Jonadab, son of David's brother Shimeah, who was a very shrewd man. ⁴He said to Amnon, 'Why are you so low-spirited morning after morning, my lord? Will you not tell me?' So Amnon told him that he was in love with Tamar, his brother Absalom's sister. ⁵Jonadab said to him, 'Take to your bed and pretend to be ill. When your father comes to visit you, say to him, "Please let my sister Tamar come and give me my food. Let her prepare it in front of me, so that I may watch her and then take it from her own hands." ' ⁶So Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill. When the king came to visit him, he said, 'Sir, let my sister Tamar come and

make a few cakes in front of me, and serve them to me with her own hands.' ⁷So David sent a message to Tamar in the palace: 'Go to your brother Amnon's quarters and prepare a meal for him.' ⁸Tamar came to her brother and found him lying down; she took some dough and kneaded it, made the cakes in front of him and baked them. ⁹Then she took the pan and turned them out before him. But Amnon refused to eat and ordered everyone out of the room. When they had all left, ¹⁰he said to Tamar, 'Bring the food over to the recess so that I may eat from your own hands.' Tamar took the cakes she had made and brought them to Amnon in the recess. ¹¹But when she offered them to him, he caught hold of her and said, 'Come to bed with me, sister.' ¹²But she answered, 'No, brother, do not dishonour me, we do not do such things in Israel; do not behave like a beast. ¹³Where could I go and hide my disgrace? – and you would sink as low as any beast in Israel. Why not speak to the king for me? He will not refuse you leave to marry me.' ¹⁴He would not listen, but overpowered her, dishonoured her and raped her.

¹⁵Then Amnon was filled with utter hatred for her; his hatred was stronger than the love he had felt, and he said to her, 'Get up and go.' ¹⁶She answered, 'No. It is wicked to send me away. This is harder to bear than all you have done to me.' He would not listen to her, ¹⁷but summoned the boy who attended him and said, 'Get rid of this woman, put her out and bolt the door after her.' ¹⁸She had on a long, sleeved robe, the usual dress of unmarried princesses; and the boy turned her out and bolted the door. ¹⁹Tamar threw ashes over her head, rent the long, sleeved robe that she was wearing, put her hands on her head and went away, sobbing as she went. ²⁰Her brother Absalom asked her, 'Has your brother Amnon been with you? Keep this to yourself, he is your brother; do not take it to heart.' So Tamar remained in her brother Absalom's house, desolate. ²¹When King David heard the whole story he was very angry; but he would not hurt Amnon because he was his eldest son and he loved him. ²²Absalom did not speak a single word to Amnon, friendly or unfriendly; he hated him for having dishonoured his sister Tamar.

²³Two years later Absalom invited all the king's sons to his sheep-shearing at Baal-hazor, near Ephron [*prob. rdg, Heb* Ephraim]. ²⁴He approached the king and said, 'Sir, I am shearing; will your majesty and your servants come?' ²⁵The king answered, 'No, my son, we must not all come and be a burden to you.' Absalom pressed him, but David was still unwilling to go and dismissed him with his blessing. ²⁶But Absalom said, 'If you cannot, may my brother Amnon come with us?' 'Why should he go with you?' the king asked; ²⁷but Absalom pressed him again, so he let Amnon and all the other princes go with him.

Then Absalom prepared a feast fit for a king. ²⁸He gave his servants these orders: 'Bide your time, and when Amnon is merry with wine I shall say to you, "Strike." Then kill Amnon. You have nothing to fear, these are my orders; be bold and resolute.' ²⁹Absalom's servants did as he had told them, whereupon all the king's sons mounted their mules in haste and set off for home.

³⁰While they were on their way, a rumour reached David that Absalom had murdered all the royal princes and that not one was left alive. ³¹The king stood up and rent his

clothes and then threw himself on the ground; all his servants were standing round him with their clothes rent. ³²Then Jonadab, son of David's brother Shimeah, said, 'Your majesty must not think that they have killed all the young princes; only Amnon is dead; Absalom has looked black ever since Amnon ravished his sister Tamar. ³³Your majesty must not pay attention to a mere rumour that all the princes are dead; only Amnon is dead.'

³⁴Absalom made good his escape. Meanwhile the sentry looked up and saw a crowd of people coming down the hill from the direction of Horonaim [*prob. rdg, Heb from a road behind him*]. He came and reported to the king, 'I see men coming down the hill from Horonaim.' ³⁵Then Jonadab said to the king, 'Here come the royal princes, just as I said they would.' ³⁶As he finished speaking, the princes came in and broke into loud lamentations; the king and all his servants also wept bitterly.

³⁷But Absalom went to take refuge with Talmai son of Ammihur king of Geshur; and for a long while the king mourned for Amnon. ³⁸Absalom, having escaped to Geshur, stayed there for three years; ³⁹and David's heart went out to him with longing, for he became reconciled to the death of Amnon.

14¹Joab son of Zeruiah saw that the king's heart was set on Absalom, ²so he sent to Tekoah and fetched a wise woman. He said to her, 'Pretend to be a mourner; put on mourning, go without anointing yourself, and behave like a bereaved woman who has been long in mourning. ³Then go to the king and repeat what I tell you.' He then told her exactly what she was to say.

⁴When the woman from Tekoah came into the king's presence, she threw herself, face downwards, on the ground and did obeisance, and cried, 'Help, your majesty!' ⁵The king asked, 'What is it?' She answered, 'O sir, I am a widow; my husband is dead. ⁶I had two sons; they came to blows out in the country where there was no one to part them, and one of them struck the other and killed him. ⁷Now, sir, the kinsmen have risen against me and they all cry, "Hand over the man who has killed his brother, so that we can put him to death for taking his brother's life, and so cut off the succession." If they do this, they will stamp out my last live ember and leave my husband no name and no descendant upon earth.' ⁸'Go home,' said the king to the woman, 'and I will settle your case.' ⁹But the woman continued, 'The guilt be on me, your majesty, and on my father's house; let the king and his throne be blameless.' ¹⁰The king said, 'If anyone says anything more to you, bring him to me and he shall never molest you again.' ¹¹Then the woman went on, 'Let your majesty call upon the LORD your God, to prevent his kinsmen bound to vengeance from doing their worst and destroying my son.' The king swore, 'As the LORD lives, not a hair of your son's head shall fall to the ground.'

¹²The woman then said, 'May I add one word more, your majesty?' 'Say on', said the king. ¹³So she continued, 'How then could it enter your head to do this same wrong to God's people? Out of your own mouth, your majesty, you condemn yourself: you have refused to bring back the man you have banished. ¹⁴We shall all die; we shall be like water that is spilt on the ground and lost; but God will spare the man who does not set himself to keep the outlaw in banishment. ¹⁵I came to say this to your majesty because

the people have threatened me. I thought, "If I can only speak to the king, perhaps he will attend to my case; ¹⁶for he will listen, and he will save me from the man who is seeking to cut off me and my son together from Israel, God's own possession." ¹⁷I thought too that the words of my lord the king would be a comfort to me; for your majesty is like the angel of God and can decide between right and wrong. The LORD your God be with you! ¹⁸Then the king said to the woman, 'Tell me no lies: I shall now ask you a question.' 'Speak on, your majesty', she said. ¹⁹So he asked, 'Is the hand of Joab behind you in all this?' 'Your life upon it, sir!' she answered; 'when your majesty asks a question, there is no way round it, right or left. Yes, your servant Joab did prompt me; it was he who put the whole story into my mouth. ²⁰He did it to give a new turn to this affair. Your majesty is as wise as the angel of God and knows all that goes on in the land.'

²¹The king said to Joab, 'You have my consent; go and fetch back the young man Absalom.' ²²Then Joab humbly prostrated himself, took leave of the king with a blessing and said, 'Now I know that I have found favour with your majesty, because you have granted my humble petition.' ²³Joab went at once to Geshur and brought Absalom to Jerusalem, ²⁴but the king said, 'Let him go to his own quarters; he shall not come into my presence.' So Absalom went to his own quarters and did not enter the king's presence.

²⁵No one in all Israel was so greatly admired for his beauty as Absalom; he was without flaw from the crown of his head to the sole of his foot. ²⁶His hair, when he cut his hair (as he had to do every year, for he found it heavy), weighed two hundred shekels by the royal standard. ²⁷Three sons were born to Absalom, and a daughter named Tamar, who was a very beautiful woman.

²⁸Absalom remained in Jerusalem for two whole years without entering the king's presence. ²⁹He summoned Joab to send a message by him to the king, but Joab refused to come; he sent for him a second time, but he still refused. ³⁰Then Absalom said to his servants, 'You know that Joab has a field next to mine with barley growing in it; go and set fire to it.' So Absalom's servants set fire to the field. ³¹Joab promptly came to Absalom in his own quarters and said to him, 'Why have your servants set fire to my field?' ³²Absalom answered Joab, 'I had sent for you to come here, so that I could ask you to give the king this message from me: "Why did I leave Geshur? It would be better for me if I were still there. Let me now come into your majesty's presence and, if I have done any wrong, put me to death." ' ³³When Joab went to the king and told him, he summoned Absalom, who came and prostrated himself humbly before the king; and he greeted Absalom with a kiss.

15¹AFTER THIS, ABSALOM PROVIDED himself with a chariot and horses and an escort of fifty men. ²He made it a practice to rise early and stand beside the road which runs through the city gate. He would hail every man who had a case to bring before the king for judgement and would ask him what city he came from. When he answered, 'I come, sir, from such and such a tribe of Israel', ³Absalom would say to him, 'I can see that you have a very good case, but you will get no hearing from the king.' ⁴And he would add, 'If only I were appointed judge in the land, it would be my business to see that

everyone who brought a suit or a claim got justice from me.’⁵ Whenever a man approached to prostrate himself, Absalom would stretch out his hand, take hold of him and kiss him. ⁶By behaving like this to every Israelite who sought the king’s justice, Absalom stole the affections of the Israelites.

⁷At the end of four years, Absalom said to the king, ‘May I have leave now to go to Hebron to fulfil a vow there that I made to the LORD?’⁸ For when I lived in Geshur, in Aram, I made this vow: “If the LORD brings me back to Jerusalem, I will become a worshipper of the LORD in Hebron.”⁹ The king answered, ‘Certainly you may go’; so he set off for Hebron at once. ¹⁰Absalom sent runners through all the tribes of Israel with this message: ‘As soon as you hear the sound of the trumpet, then say, “Absalom is king in Hebron.”’¹¹ Two hundred men accompanied Absalom from Jerusalem; they were invited and went in all innocence, knowing nothing of the affair. ¹²Absalom also sent to summon Ahithophel the Gilonite, David’s counsellor, from Giloh his city, where he was offering the customary sacrifices. The conspiracy gathered strength, and Absalom’s supporters increased in number.

¹³When news reached David that the men of Israel had transferred their allegiance to Absalom, ¹⁴he said to those who were with him in Jerusalem, ‘We must get away at once; or there will be no escape from Absalom for any of us. Make haste, or else he will soon be upon us and bring disaster on us, showing no mercy to anyone in the city.’¹⁵ The king’s servants said to him, ‘As your majesty thinks best; we are ready.’

¹⁶When the king departed, all his household followed him except ten concubines, whom he left in charge of the palace. ¹⁷At the Far House the king and all the people who were with him halted. ¹⁸His own servants then stood [*prob. rdg, Heb passed*] beside him, while the Kerethite and Pelethite guards and Ittai [*and Ittai: prob. rdg, Heb omitted*] with the six hundred Gittites under him marched past the king. ¹⁹The king said to Ittai the Gittite, ‘Are you here too? Why are you coming with us? Go back and stay with the new king, for you are a foreigner and, what is more, an exile from your own country. ²⁰You came only yesterday, and today must you be compelled to share my wanderings? I do not know where I am going. Go back home and take your countrymen with you; and may the LORD ever be your steadfast friend.’²¹ Ittai swore to the king, ‘As the LORD lives, your life upon it, wherever you may be, in life or in death, I, your servant, will be there.’²² David said to Ittai, ‘It is well, march on!’ So Ittai the Gittite marched on with his whole company and all the dependants who were with him. ²³The whole country-side re-echoed with their weeping. And the king remained standing [*prob. rdg, Heb passing*] while all the people crossed the gorge of the Kidron before him, by way of the olive-tree in the wilderness [*by way ... wilderness: prob. rdg, Heb obscure*].

²⁴Zadok also was there with all the Levites; they were carrying the Ark of the Covenant of God, which they set down beside Abiathar [*beside Abiathar: prob. rdg, Heb and Abiathar went up*] until all the people had passed out of the city. ²⁵But the king said to Zadok, ‘Take the Ark of God back to the city. If I find favour with the LORD, he will bring me back and will let me see the Ark and its dwelling-place again. ²⁶But if he says he does not want me, then here I am; let him do what he pleases with me.’²⁷ The king went on to say to Zadok the priest, ‘Can you make good use of your eyes? You may

safely 'go back to the city, you and Abiathar [you and Abiathar: *prob. rdg, cp v29; Heb omitted*], and take with you the two young men, Ahimaaz your son and Abiathar's son Jonathan. ²⁸Do not forget: I will linger at the Fords of the Wilderness until you can send word to me.' ²⁹Then Zadok and Abiathar took the Ark of God back to Jerusalem and stayed there.

³⁰David wept as he went up the slope of the Mount of Olives; he was bare-headed and went bare-foot. The people with him all had their heads uncovered and wept as they went. ³¹David had been told that Ahithophel was among the conspirators with Absalom, and he prayed, 'Frustrate, O LORD, the counsel of Ahithophel.'

³²As David was approaching the top of the ridge where it was the custom to prostrate oneself to God, Hushai the Archite was there to meet him with his tunic rent and earth on his head. ³³David said to him, 'If you come with me you will only be a hindrance; ³⁴but you can help me to frustrate Ahithophel's plans if you go back to the city and say to Absalom, "I will be your majesty's servant; up to now I have been your father's servant, and now I will be yours." ³⁵You will have with you, as you know: the Priests Zadok and Abiathar; tell them everything that you hear in the king's household. ³⁶They have with them Zadok's son Ahimaaz and Abiathar's son Jonathan and through them you may pass on to me everything you hear.' ³⁷So Hushai, David's friend, came to the city as Absalom was entering Jerusalem.

16¹When David had moved on a little from the top of the ridge he was met by Ziba the servant of Mephibosheth, who had with him a pair of asses saddled and loaded with two hundred loaves, a hundred clusters of raisins, a hundred bunches of summer fruit, and a flagon of wine ²The king said to him, 'What are you doing with these?' Ziba answered, 'The asses are for the king's family to ride on, the bread and the summer fruit are for the servants to eat, and the wine for anyone who becomes exhausted in the wilderness.' ³The king asked, 'Where is your master's grandson?' 'He is staying in Jerusalem,' said Ziba, 'for he thought that the Israelites might now restore to him his grandfather's throne.' ⁴The king said to Ziba; 'You shall have everything that belongs to Mephibosheth.' Ziba said: 'I am your humble servant, sir; may I continue to stand well with you.'

⁵As King David approached Bahurim, a man of Saul's family, whose name was Shimei son of Gera, came out, cursing as he came. ⁶He showered stones right and left on David and on all the king's servants and on everyone, soldiers and people alike. ⁷This is what Shimei said as he cursed him: 'Get out, get out, you scoundrel! you man of blood! ⁸The LORD has taken vengeance on you for the blood of the house of Saul whose throne you stole, and he has given the kingdom to your son Absalom. You murderer, see how your crimes have overtaken you!'

⁹Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said to the king, 'Why let this dead dog curse your majesty? I will go across and knock off his head.' ¹⁰But the king said, 'What has this to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he curses and if the LORD has told him to curse David, who can question it?' ¹¹David said to Abishai and to all his servants, 'If my son, my own son, is out to kill me, who can wonder at this Benjamite? Let him be, let him

curse; for the LORD has told him to do it. ¹²But perhaps the LORD will mark my sufferings and bestow a blessing on me in place of the curse laid on me this day.' ¹³David and his men continued on their way, and Shimei moved along the ridge of the hill parallel to David's path, cursing as he went and hurling stones across the valley at him and kicking up the dust. ¹⁴When the king and all the people with him reached the Jordan, they were worn out and they refreshed themselves there.

¹⁵By now Absalom and all his Israelites had reached Jerusalem, and Ahithophel with him. ¹⁶When Hushai the Archite, David's friend, met Absalom he said to him, 'Long live the king! Long live the king!' ¹⁷But Absalom retorted, 'Is this your loyalty to your friend? Why did you not go with him?' ¹⁸Hushai answered Absalom, 'Because I mean to attach myself to the man chosen by the LORD, by this people, and by all the men of Israel, and with him I will remain. ¹⁹After all, whom ought I to serve? Should I not serve the son? I will serve you as I have served your father.' ²⁰Then Absalom said to Ahithophel, 'Give us your advice: how shall we act?' ²¹Ahithophel answered, 'Have intercourse with your father's concubines whom he left in charge of the palace. Then all Israel will come to hear that you have given great cause of offence to your father, and this will confirm the resolution of your followers.' ²²So they set up a tent for Absalom on the roof, and he lay with his father's concubines in the sight of all Israel. ²³In those days a man would seek counsel of Ahithophel as readily as he might make an inquiry of the word of God; that was how Ahithophel's counsel was esteemed by David and Absalom.

17¹Ahithophel said to Absalom, 'Let me pick twelve thousand men, and I will pursue David tonight. ²I shall overtake him when he is tired and dispirited; I will cut him off from his people and they will all scatter; and I shall kill no one but the king. ³I will bring all the people over to you as a bride is brought to her husband. It is only one man's life that you are seeking; the rest of the people will be unharmed.' ⁴Absalom and all the elders of Israel approved of Ahithophel's advice; ⁵but Absalom said, 'Summon Hushai the Archite and let us hear what he too has to say.' ⁶Hushai came, and Absalom told him all that Ahithophel had said and asked him, 'Shall we do what he says? If not, say what you think.'

⁷Hushai said to Absalom, 'For once the counsel that Ahithophel has given is not good. ⁸You know', he went on, 'that your father and the men with him are hardened warriors and savage as a bear in the wilds robbed of her cubs. Your father is an old campaigner and will not spend the night with the main body; ⁹even now he will be lying hidden in a pit or in some such place. Then if any of your men are killed at the outset, anyone who hears the news will say, "Disaster has overtaken the followers of Absalom." ¹⁰The courage of the most resolute and lion-hearted will melt away, for all Israel knows that your father is a man of war and has determined men with him. ¹¹My advice is this. Wait until the whole of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, is gathered about you, countless as grains of sand on the sea-shore, and then you shall march with them in person. ¹²Then we shall come upon him somewhere, wherever he may be, and descend on him like dew falling on the ground, and not a man of his family or of his followers will be left alive. ¹³If he retreats into a city, all Israel will bring ropes to that city, and we will drag it into a ravine until not a stone can be found on the site.' ¹⁴Absalom and all the men of Israel said, 'Hushai the Archite gives us better advice than Ahithophel.' It was the LORD's

purpose to frustrate Ahithophel's good advice and so bring disaster upon Absalom.

¹⁵Hushai told Zadok and Abiathar the priests all the advice that Ahithophel had given to Absalom and the elders of Israel, and also his own. ¹⁶'Now send quickly to David,' he said, 'and warn him not to spend the night at the Fords of the Wilderness but to cross the river at once, before a blow can be struck at the king and his followers.' ¹⁷Jonathan and Ahimaaz were waiting at En-rogel, and a servant girl would go and tell them what happened and they would pass it on to King David; for they could not risk being seen entering the city. ¹⁸But this time a lad saw them and told Absalom; so the two of them hurried to the house of a man in Bahurim. He had a pit in his courtyard, and they climbed down into it. ¹⁹The man's wife took a covering, spread it over the mouth of the pit and strewed grain over it, and no one was any the wiser. ²⁰Absalom's servants came to the house and asked the woman, 'Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?' She answered, 'They went beyond the pool.' The men searched but could not find them; so they went back to Jerusalem. ²¹When they had gone the two climbed out of the pit and went off to report to King David and said, 'Over the water at once, make haste!', and they told him Ahithophel's plan against him. ²²So David and all his company began at once to cross the Jordan; by daybreak there was not one who had not reached the other bank.

²³When Ahithophel saw that his advice had not been taken he saddled his ass, went straight home to his own city, gave his last instructions to his household, and hanged himself. So he died and was buried in his father's grave.

²⁴By the time that Absalom had crossed the Jordan with the Israelites, David was already at Mahanaim. ²⁵Absalom had appointed Amasa as commander-in-chief instead of Joab; he was the son of a man named Ithra, an Ishmaelite, by Abigail daughter of Nahash and sister to Joab's mother Zeruah. ²⁶The Israelites and Absalom camped in the district of Gilead. ²⁷When David came to Mahanaim, he was met by Shobi son of Nahash from the Ammonite town Rabbah, Machir son of Ammiel from Lo-debar, and Barzillai the Gileadite from Rogelim, ²⁸bringing mattresses and blankets, bowls and jugs [bringing ... jugs: *prob. rdg, Heb* a couch, bowls and a potter's vessel]. They brought also wheat and barley, meal and parched grain, beans and lentils, ²⁹honey and curds, sheep and fat cattle, and offered them to David and his people to eat, knowing that the people must be hungry and thirsty and weary in the wilderness.

18¹David mustered the people who were with him, and appointed officers over units of a thousand and a hundred. ²Then he divided the army in three, one division under the command of Joab, one under Joab's brother Abishai son of Zeruah, and the third under Ittai the Gittite. The king announced to the army that he was coming out himself with them to battle. ³But they said, 'No, you must not come out; if we turn and run, no one will take any notice, nor will they, even if half of us are killed; but you are worth ten thousand of us, and it would be better now for you to remain in the city in support.' ⁴'I will do what you think best', answered the king; and he then stood beside the gate, and the army marched past in their units of a thousand and a hundred. ⁵The king gave orders to Joab, Abishai, and Ittai: 'Deal gently with the young man Absalom for my sake.' The whole army heard the king giving all his officers this order to spare Absalom.

⁶The army took the field against the Israelites and the battle was fought in the forest of Ephron [*prob. rdg, Heb Ephraim*]. ⁷There the Israelites were routed before the onslaught of David's men; so great was the rout that twenty thousand men fell that day. ⁸The fighting spread over the whole country-side, and the forest took toll of more people that day than the sword.

⁹Now some of David's men caught sight of Absalom. He was riding a mule and, as it passed beneath a great oak [*Or terebinth*], his head was caught in its boughs; he found himself in mid air and the mule went on from under him. ¹⁰One of the men who saw it went and told Joab, 'I saw Absalom hanging from an oak.' ¹¹While the man was telling him, Joab broke in, 'You saw him? Why did you not strike him to the ground then and there? I would have given you ten pieces of silver and a belt.' ¹²The man answered, 'If you were to put in my hands a thousand pieces of silver, I would not lift a finger against the king's son; for we all heard the king giving orders to you and Abishai and Ittai that whoever finds himself near the young man Absalom must take great care of him. ¹³If I had dealt him a treacherous blow, the king would soon have known, and you would have kept well out of it.' ¹⁴'That is a lie!' said Joab. 'I will make a start and show you [*I will ... show you: or I can waste no more time on you like this*].' So he picked up three stout sticks and drove them against Absalom's chest while he was held fast in the tree and still alive. ¹⁵Then ten young men who were Joab's armour-bearers closed in on Absalom, struck at him and killed him. ¹⁶Joab sounded the trumpet, and the army came back from the pursuit of Israel because he had called it off. ¹⁷They took Absalom's body and flung it into a great pit in the forest, and raised over it a huge pile of stones. The Israelites all fled to their homes.

¹⁸The pillar in the King's Vale had been set up by Absalom in his lifetime, for he said, 'I have no son to carry on my name.' He had named the pillar after himself; and to this day it is called Absalom's Monument.

¹⁹Ahimaaz son of Zadok said, 'Let me run and take the news to the king that the LORD has avenged him and delivered him from his enemies.' ²⁰But Joab replied, 'This is no day for you to be the bearer of news. Another day you may have news to carry, but not today, because the king's son is dead.' ²¹Joab told a Cushite to go and report to the king what he had seen. The Cushite bowed low before Joab and set off running. ²²Ahimaaz pleaded again with Joab, 'Come what may,' he said, 'let me run after the Cushite.' 'Why should you, my son?' asked Joab. 'You will get no reward for your news.' ²³'Come what may,' he said, 'I will run.' 'Go, then,' said Joab. So Ahimaaz ran by the road through the Plain of the Jordan and outstripped the Cushite.

²⁴David was sitting between the two gates when the watchman went up to the roof of the gatehouse by the wall and, looking out, saw a man running alone. ²⁵The watchman called to the king and told him. 'If he is alone,' said the king, 'then he has news.' The man came nearer and nearer. ²⁶Then the watchman saw another man running. He called down to the gate-keeper and said, 'Look, there is another man running alone.' The king said, 'He too brings news.' ²⁷The watchman said, 'I see by the way he runs that the first runner is Ahimaaz son of Zadok.' The king said, 'He is a good fellow and shall earn the reward for good news.' ²⁸Ahimaaz called out to the king, 'All is well!' He

bowed low before him and said, 'Blessed be the LORD your God who has given into your hands the men who rebelled against your majesty.' ²⁹The king asked, 'Is all well with the young man Absalom?' Ahimaaz answered, 'Sir, your servant Joab sent me [Sir ... sent me: *prob. rdg, Heb* At the sending of Joab the king's servant and your servant], I saw a great commotion, but I did not know what had happened.' ³⁰The king told him to stand on one side; so he turned aside and stood there. ³¹Then the Cushite came in and said, 'Good news, your majesty! The LORD has avenged you this day on all those who rebelled against you.' ³²The king said to the Cushite, 'Is all well with the young man Absalom?' The Cushite answered, 'May all the king's enemies and all rebels who would do you harm be as that young man is.' ³³The king was deeply moved and went up to the roof-chamber over the gate and wept, crying out as he went, 'O, my son! Absalom my son, my son Absalom! If only I had died instead of you! O Absalom, my son, my son.'

19¹Joab was told that the king was weeping and mourning for Absalom; ²and that day victory was turned to mourning for the whole army, because they heard how the king grieved for his son; ³they stole into the city like men ashamed to show their faces after a defeat in battle. ⁴The king hid his face and cried aloud, 'My son Absalom; O Absalom, my son, my son.' ⁵But Joab came into the king's quarters and said to him, 'You have put to shame this day all your servants, who have saved you and your sons and daughters, your wives and your concubines. ⁶You love those that hate you and hate those that love you; you have made us feel, officers and men alike, that we are nothing to you, for it is plain that if Absalom were still alive and all of us dead, you would be content. ⁷Now go at once and give your servants some encouragement; if you refuse, I swear by the LORD that not a man will stay with you tonight, and that would be a worse disaster than any you have suffered since your earliest days.' ⁸Then the king rose and took his seat in the gate; and when the army was told that the king was sitting in the gate, they all appeared before him.

Various events of David 's reign

MEANWHILE THE ISRAELITES had all scattered to their homes. ⁹Throughout all the tribes of Israel people were discussing it among themselves and saying, 'The king has saved us from our enemies and freed us from the power of the Philistines, and now he has fled the country because of Absalom. ¹⁰But Absalom, whom we anointed king, has fallen in battle; so now why have we no plans for bringing the king back?'

What all Israel was saying came to the king's ears [What ... ears: *prob. rdg, Heb has these words after* back to his palace *and adds* to his palace]. ¹¹So he sent word to Zadok and Abiathar the priests: 'Ask the elders of Judah why they should be the last to bring the king back to his palace. Tell them, ¹²"You are my brothers, my flesh and my blood; why are you last to bring me back?" ¹³And tell Amasa, "You are my own flesh and blood. You shall be my commander-in-chief, so help me God, for the rest of your life in place of Joab." ' ¹⁴David's message won all hearts in Judah, and they sent to the king, urging him to return with all his men.

¹⁵So the king came back to the Jordan; and the men of Judah came to Gilgal to meet

him and escort him across the river. ¹⁶Shimei son of Gera the Benjamite from Bahurim hastened down among the men of Judah to meet King David ¹⁷with a thousand men from Benjamin; Ziba was there too, the servant of Saul's family, with his fifteen sons and twenty servants. They rushed into the Jordan under the king's eyes ¹⁸and crossed to and fro conveying his household in order to win his favour. Shimei son of Gera, when he had crossed the river, fell down before the king ¹⁹and said to him, 'I beg your majesty not to remember how disgracefully your servant behaved when your majesty left Jerusalem; do not hold it against me or take it to heart. ²⁰For I humbly acknowledge that I did wrong, and today I am the first of all the house of Joseph to come down to meet your majesty.' ²¹But Abishai son of Zeruiah objected, 'Ought not Shimei to be put to death because he cursed the LORD's anointed prince?' ²²David answered, 'What right have you, you sons of Zeruiah, to oppose me today? Why should any man be put to death this day in Israel? I know now that I am king of Israel.' ²³Then the king said to Shimei, 'You shall not die', and confirmed it with an oath.

²⁴Saul's grandson Mephibosheth also went down to meet the king. He had not dressed his feet, combed his beard or washed his clothes, from the day the king went out until he returned victorious. ²⁵When he came from Jerusalem to meet the king, David said to him, 'Why did you not go with me, Mephibosheth?' ²⁶He answered, 'Sir, my servant deceived me; I did intend to harness my ass and ride with the king (for I am lame), ²⁷but his stories set your majesty against me. Your majesty is like the angel of God; you must do what you think right. ²⁸My father's whole family, one and all, deserved to die at your majesty's hands, but you gave me, your servant, my place at your table. What further favour can I expect of the king?' ²⁹The king answered, 'You have said enough. My decision is that you and Ziba are to share the estate.' ³⁰Mephibosheth said, 'Let him have it all, now that your majesty has come home victorious.'

³¹Barzillai the Gileadite too had come down from Rogelim, and he went as far as the Jordan with the king to send him on his way. ³²Now Barzillai was very old, eighty years of age; it was he who had provided for the king while he was at Mahanairn, for he was a man of high standing. ³³The king said to Barzillai, 'Cross over with me and I will provide for your old age in my household in Jerusalem.' ³⁴Barzillai answered, 'Your servant is far too old to go up with your majesty to Jerusalem. ³⁵I am already eighty; and I cannot tell good from bad. I cannot taste what I eat or drink; I cannot hear the voices of men and women singing. Why should I be a burden any longer on your majesty? ³⁶Your servant will attend the king for a short way across the Jordan; and why should the king reward me so handsomely? ³⁷Let me go back and end my days in my own city near the grave of my father and mother. Here is my son Kimham; let him cross over with your majesty, and do for him what you think best.' ³⁸The king answered, 'Kimham shall cross with me and I will do for him whatever you think best; and I will do for you whatever you ask.'

³⁹All the people crossed the Jordan while the king waited. The king then kissed Barzillai and gave him his blessing. Barzillai went back to his own home; ⁴⁰the king crossed over to Gilgal, Kimham with him. All the people of Judah escorted the king over the river, and so did half the people of Israel.

⁴¹The men of Israel came to the king in a body and said, 'Why should our brothers of Judah have got possession of the king's person by joining King David's own men and then escorting him and his household across the Jordan?' ⁴²The men of Judah replied, 'Because his majesty is our near kinsman. Why should you resent it? Have we eaten at the king's expense? Have we received any gifts?' ⁴³The men of Israel answered, 'We have ten times your interest in the king and, what is more, we are senior to you; why do you disparage us? Were we not the first to speak of bringing the king back?' The men of Judah used language even fiercer than the men of Israel.

20¹There happened to be a man there, a scoundrel named Sheba son of Bichri, a man of Benjamin. He blew the trumpet and cried out:

What share have we in David?

We have no lot in the son of Jesse.

Away to your homes, O Israel.

²The men of Israel all left David, to follow Sheba son of Bichri, but the men of Judah stood by their king and followed him from the Jordan to Jerusalem.

³When David came home to Jerusalem he took the ten concubines whom he had left in charge of the palace and put them under guard; he maintained them but did not have intercourse with them. They were kept in confinement to the day of their death, widowed in the prime of life.

⁴The king said to Amasa, 'Call up the men of Judah and appear before me again in three days' time.' ⁵So Amasa went to call up the men of Judah, but it took longer than the time fixed by the king. ⁶David said to Abishai, 'Sheba son of Bichri will give us more trouble than Absalom; take the royal bodyguard and follow him closely. If he has occupied some fortified cities, he may escape us.' ⁷Abishai was followed by Joab [Abishai ... Joab: *prob. rdg, Heb* Some men of Joab followed him] with the Kerethite and Pelethite guards and all the fighting men; they left Jerusalem in pursuit of Sheba son of Bichri. ⁸When they reached the great stone in Gibeon, Amasa came towards them. Joab was wearing his tunic and over it a belt supporting a sword in its scabbard. He came forward, concealing his treachery, ⁹and said to Amasa, 'I hope you are well, my brother', and with his right hand he grasped Amasa's beard to kiss him. ¹⁰Amasa was not on his guard against the sword in Joab's hand. Joab struck him with it in the belly and his entrails poured out to the ground; he did not strike a second blow, for Amasa was dead. Joab and his brother Abishai went on in pursuit of Sheba son of Bichri. ¹¹One of Joab's young men stood over Amasa and called out, 'Follow Joab, all who are for Joab and for David!' ¹²Amasa's body lay soaked in blood in the middle of the road, and when the man saw how all the people stopped, he rolled him off the road into the field and threw a cloak over him; for everyone who came by saw the body and stopped. ¹³When he had been dragged from the road, they all went on after Joab in pursuit of Sheba son of Bichri.

¹⁴Sheba passed through all the tribes of Israel until he came to Abel-beth-maacah [*prob. rdg, cp v15; Heb* Abel and Beth-maacah], and all the clan of Bichri [*prob. rdg, Heb* Beri] rallied to him and followed him into the city. ¹⁵Joab's forces came up and besieged him in Abel-beth-maacah, raised a siege-ramp against it and began undermining the wall to bring it down. ¹⁶Then a wise woman stood on the rampart

[stood ... rampart: *transposed from v15*] and called from the city, 'Listen, listen! Tell Joab to step forward and let me speak with him.' ¹⁷So he came forward and the woman said, 'Are you Joab?' He answered, 'I am.' 'Listen to what I have to say, sir', she went on, to which he replied, 'I am listening.' ¹⁸In the old days', she said, 'there was a saying, "Go to Abel for the answer", and that settled the matter. ¹⁹My city is known to be one of the most peaceable and loyal [My city ... loyal: *prob. rdg, Heb I am the required ones of the loyal ones*] in Israel; she is like a watchful mother in Israel, and you are seeking to kill her. Would you destroy the LORD's own possession?' ²⁰Joab answered, 'God forbid, far be it from me to ruin or destroy! That is not our aim; ²¹but a man from the hill-country of Ephraim named Sheba son of Bichri has raised a revolt against King David; surrender this one man, and I will retire from the city.' The woman said to Joab, 'His head shall be thrown to you over the wall.' ²²Then the woman withdrew, and her wisdom won over the assembled people; they cut off Sheba's head and threw it to Joab. Then he sounded the trumpet and the whole army left the city and dispersed to their homes, while Joab went back to the king in Jerusalem.

²³ [*vv23-26: cp 8.16-18; 1Kgs. 4.2-6; 1Chr. 18.15-17*] Joab was in command of the army [*prob. rdg, cp 8.16; Heb adds Israel*], and Benaiah son of Jehoiada commanded the Kerethite and Pelethite guards. ²⁴Adoram was in charge of the forced levy, and Jehoshaphat son of Ahilud was secretary of state. ²⁵Sheva was adjutant-general, and Zadok and Abiathar were priests; ²⁶Ira the Jairite was David's priest.

21¹IN DAVID'S REIGN there was a famine that lasted year after year for three years. So David consulted the LORD, and he answered, 'Blood-guilt rests on Saul and on his family because he put the Gibeonites to death.' ²(The Gibeonites were not of Israelite descent; they were a remnant of Amorite stock whom the Israelites had sworn that they would spare. Saul, however, had sought to exterminate them in his zeal for Israel and Judah.) King David summoned the Gibeonites, therefore, ³and said to them, 'What can be done for you? How can I make expiation, so that you may have cause to bless the LORD's own people?' ⁴The Gibeonites answered, 'Our feud with Saul and his family cannot be settled in silver and gold, and there is no one man in Israel whose death would content us.' 'Then what do you want me to do for you?' asked David. ⁵They answered, 'Let us make an end of the man who caused our undoing and ruined us, so that he shall never again have his place within the borders of Israel. ⁶Hand over to us seven of that man's sons, and we will hurl them down to their death before [*Or for*] the LORD in Gibeah of Saul, the LORD's chosen king.' The king agreed to hand them over, ⁷but he spared Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, son of Saul, because of the oath that had been taken in the LORD's name by David and Saul's son Jonathan. ⁸The king then took the two sons whom Rizpah daughter of Aiah had borne to Saul, Armoni and Mephibosheth, and the five sons whom Merab, Saul's daughter, had borne to Adriel son of Barzillai of Meholah. ⁹He handed them over to the Gibeonites, and they flung them down from the mountain before the LORD; the seven of them fell together. They were put to death in the first days of harvest at the beginning of the barley harvest. ¹⁰Rizpah daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it out as a bed for herself on the rock, from the beginning of harvest until the rains came and fell from heaven upon the bodies. She allowed no bird to set upon them by day nor any wild beast by night. ¹¹When David was told what Rizpah daughter of Aiah the concubine of Saul had done, ¹²he went and took the bones

of Saul and his son Jonathan from the citizens of Jabesh-gilead, who had stolen them from the public square at Beth-shan, where the Philistines had hung them on the day they defeated Saul at Gilboa. ¹³He removed the bones of Saul and Jonathan from there and gathered up the bones of the men who had been hurled to death. ¹⁴They buried the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan in the territory of Benjamin at Zela, in the grave of his father Kish. Everything was done as the king ordered, and thereafter the LORD was willing to accept prayers offered for the country.

¹⁵Once again war broke out between the Philistines and Israel. David and his men went down to the battle, but as he fought with the Philistines he fell exhausted. ¹⁶Then Benob, one of the race of the Rephaim, whose bronze spear weighed three hundred shekels [*shekels: prob. rdg, Heb weight*] and who wore a belt of honour, took David prisoner and was about to kill him. ¹⁷But Abishai son of Zeruah came to David's help, struck the Philistine down and killed him. Then David's officers took an oath that he should never again go out with them to war, for fear that the lamp of Israel might be extinguished.

¹⁸ [*vv18-22: cp 1Chr. 20.4-7*] Some time later war with the Philistines broke out again in Gob: it was then that Sibbechai of Hushah killed Saph, a descendant of the Rephaim. ¹⁹In another war with the Philistines in Gob, Elhanan son of Jair [*Jair: prob. rdg, cp 1Chr. 20.5; Heb Jaare-oregim*] of Bethlehem killed Goliath of Gath, whose spear had a shaft like a weaver's beam. ²⁰In yet another war in Gath there appeared a giant with six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in all. He too was descended from the Rephaim; ²¹and, when he defied Israel, Jonathan son of David's brother Shimeai killed him. ²²These four giants were the descendants of the Rephaim in Gath, and they all fell at the hands of David and his men.

22¹THESE ARE THE WORDS OF THE SONG David sang to the LORD on the day when the LORD delivered him from the power of all his enemies and from the power of Saul:

² [*vv2-51: cp Ps. 18.2-50*] The LORD is my stronghold, my fortress and my champion,

³my God, my rock where I find safety;
my shield, my mountain fastness, my strong tower,
my refuge, my deliverer, who saves me from violence.

⁴I will call on the LORD to whom all praise is due,
and I shall be delivered from my enemies.

⁵When the waves of death swept round me,
and torrents of destruction overtook me,

⁶the bonds of Sheol tightened about me,
the snares of death were set to catch me;

⁷then in anguish of heart I cried to the LORD,
I called for help to my God;
he heard me from his temple,
and my cry rang in his ears.

⁸The earth heaved and quaked,
heaven's foundations shook;
they heaved, because he was angry.

⁹Smoke rose from his nostrils,

devouring fire came out of his mouth,
glowing coals and searing heat.

¹⁰He swept the skies aside as he descended,
thick darkness lay under his feet.

¹¹He rode on a cherub, he flew through the air;
he swooped [*prob. rdg, cp Ps. 18.10; Heb was seen*] on the wings of the
wind.

¹²He curtained himself in darkness
and made dense vapour his canopy.

¹³Thick clouds came out of the radiance before him;
glowing coals burned brightly.

¹⁴The LORD thundered from the heavens
and the voice of the Most High spoke out.

¹⁵He loosed his arrows, he sped them far and wide,
his lightning shafts, and sent them echoing.

¹⁶The channels of the sea-bed were revealed,
the foundations of earth laid bare
at the LORD's rebuke,
at the blast of the breath of his nostrils.

¹⁷He reached down from the height and took me,
he drew me out of mighty waters,

¹⁸he rescued me from my enemies, strong as they were,
from my foes when they grew too powerful for me.

¹⁹They confronted me in the hour of my peril,
but the LORD was my buttress.

²⁰He brought me out into an open place,
he rescued me because he delighted in me.

²¹The LORD rewarded me as my righteousness deserved;
my hands were clean, and he requited me.

²²For I have followed the ways of the LORD
and have not turned wickedly from my God;

²³all his laws are before my eyes,
I have not failed to follow his decrees.

²⁴In his sight I was blameless
and kept myself from wilful sin;

²⁵the LORD requited me as my righteousness deserved
and my purity in his eyes.

²⁶With the loyal thou showest thyself loyal
and with the blameless man blameless.

²⁷With the savage man thou showest thyself savage,
and [*With the savage ... savage, and: or With the pure thou showest thyself
pure, but*] tortuous with the perverse.

²⁸Thou deliverest humble folk,
thou lookest with contempt upon the proud.

²⁹Thou, LORD, art my lamp,
and the LORD will lighten my darkness.

³⁰With thy help I leap over a bank,
by God's aid I spring over a wall.

³¹The way of God is perfect,
the LORD's word has stood the test;
he is the shield of all who take refuge in him.

³²What god is there but the LORD?
What rock but our God? –

³³the God who girds me [*who girds me: prob. rdg, cp Ps. 18.32; Heb my refuge or my strength*] with strength
and makes my way blameless [*and makes ... blameless: prob. rdg, cp Ps. 18.32; Heb unintelligible*],

³⁴who makes me swift as a hind
and sets me secure on the mountains;

³⁵who trains my hands for battle,
and my arms aim an arrow tipped with bronze.

³⁶Thou hast given me the shield of thy salvation,
in thy providence thou makest me great.

³⁷Thou givest me room for my steps,
my feet have not faltered.

³⁸I pursue my enemies and destroy them,
I do not return until I have made an end of them.

³⁹I make an end of them, I strike them down;
they rise no more, they fall beneath my feet.

⁴⁰Thou dost arm me with strength for the battle
and dost subdue my foes before me.

⁴¹Thou settest [*prob. rdg, cp Ps. 18.40; Heb unintelligible*] my foot on my
enemies' necks,
and I bring to nothing those that hate me.

⁴²They cry out [*cry out: prob. rdg, cp Ps. 18.41; Heb look*] and there is no
one to help them,
they cry to the LORD and he does not answer.

⁴³I will pound them fine as dust on the ground,
like mud in the streets will I trample them [*prob. rdg, cp Ps. 18.42; Heb adds will I stamp them down*].

⁴⁴Thou dost deliver me from the clamour of the people,
and makest me master of the nations.

A people I never knew shall be my subjects.

⁴⁵Foreigners shall come cringing to me;
as soon as they hear tell of me, they shall obey me.

⁴⁶Foreigners shall be brought captive to me,
and come limping from their strongholds.

⁴⁷The LORD lives, blessed is my rock,
high above all is God my rock and safe refuge.

⁴⁸O God, who grantest me vengeance,

who dost subdue peoples under me,
49who dost snatch me from my foes and set me over my enemies,
thou dost deliver me from violent men.
50Therefore, LORD, I will praise thee among the nations
and sing psalms to thy name,
51to one who gives his king great victories
and in all his acts keeps faith with his anointed king,
with David and his descendants for ever.

23¹These are the last words of David:

The very word of David son of Jesse,
the very word of the man whom the High God raised up,
the anointed prince of the God of Jacob
and the singer of Israel's psalms:

²the spirit of the LORD has spoken through me,
and his word is on my lips.

³The God of Israel spoke,
the Rock of Israel spoke of me:

'He who rules men in justice,
who rules in the fear of God,

⁴is like the light of morning at sunrise,
a morning that is cloudless after rain
and makes the grass sparkle from the earth.'

⁵Surely, surely my house is true to God;
for he has made a pact with me for all time,
its terms spelled out and faithfully kept,
my whole salvation, all my [*prob. rdg, Heb omitted*] delight.

⁶But the ungodly put forth no shoots,
they are all like briars tossed aside;
none dare put out his hand to pick them up,

⁷none touch them but [*but: prob. rdg, Heb he shall be filled*] with tool of
iron or of wood;
they are fit only for burning in the fire [*prob. rdg, Heb adds in sitting*].

8 [vv8-39: cp 1Chr. 11.10-41] THESE ARE THE NAMES OF DAVID'S HEROES. First came Ishbosheth the Hachmonite [*prob. rdg, Heb Josheb-basshebeth a Tahchemonite*], chief of the three; it was he who brandished his spear [*who ... spear: prob. rdg, cp 1Chr. 11.11; Heb unintelligible*] over eight hundred dead, all slain at one time. ⁹Next to him was Eleazar son of Dodo the Ahohite [*the Ahohite: prob. rdg, cp 1Chr. 11.12; Heb son of Ahohi*], one of the heroic three. He was with David at Pas-dammim where the Philistines [*He was ... Philistines: prob. rdg, cp 1Chr. 11.13; Heb With David when they taunted them among the Philistines*] had gathered for battle. When the Israelites fell back, ¹⁰he stood his ground and rained blows on the Philistines until, from sheer weariness, his hand stuck fast to his sword; and so the LORD brought about a great victory that day. Afterwards the people rallied behind him, but it was only to strip the dead. ¹¹Next to him was Shammah son of Agee a Hararite. The Philistines had gathered at Lehi, where there was a field with a fine crop of lentils; and, when the Philistines put

the people to flight, ¹²he stood his ground in the field, saved it [saved it: *or* cleared it of the Philistines] and defeated them. So the LORD again brought about a great victory.

¹³Three of the thirty went down towards the beginning of harvest to join David at the cave of Adullam, while a band of Philistines was encamped in the Vale of Rephaim. ¹⁴At that time David was in the stronghold and a Philistine garrison held Bethlehem. ¹⁵One day a longing came over David, and he exclaimed, 'If only I could have a drink of water from the well [*Or* cistern] by the gate of Bethlehem!' ¹⁶At this the heroic three made their way through the Philistine lines and drew water from the well by the gate of Bethlehem and brought it to David. But David refused to drink it; he poured it out to the LORD ¹⁷and said, 'God forbid that I should do such a thing! Can I drink [*I drink: prob. rdg, cp 1Chr. 11.19; Heb omitted*] the blood of these men who risked their lives for it?' So he would not drink it. Such were the exploits of the heroic three.

¹⁸Abishai the brother of Joab son of Zeruah was chief of the thirty. He once brandished his spear over three hundred dead, and he was famous among the thirty. ¹⁹Some think he even surpassed the rest of the thirty [*prob. rdg, Heb three*] in reputation, and he became their captain, but he did not rival the three. ²⁰Benaiah son of Jehoiada, from Kabzeel, was a hero of many exploits. It was he who smote the two champions of Moab, and who went down into a pit and killed a lion on a snowy day. ²¹It was he who also killed the Egyptian, a man of striking appearance armed with a spear: he went to meet him with a club, snatched the spear out of the Egyptian's hand and killed him with his own weapon. ²²Such were the exploits of Benaiah son of Jehoiada, famous among the heroic thirty [*prob. rdg, Heb three*]. ²³He was more famous than the rest of the thirty, but he did not rival the three. David appointed him to his household.

²⁴Asahel the brother of Joab was one of the thirty, and Elhanan son of Dodo from Bethlehem; ²⁵Shammah from Harod, and Elikah from Harod; ²⁶Helez from Beth-pelet [*prob. rdg, cp Josh. 15.27; Heb from Pelet*], and Ira son of Ikkesh from Tekoa; ²⁷Abiezer from Anathoth, and Mebunnai from Hushah; ²⁸Zalmon the Ahohite, and Maharai from Netophah; ²⁹Heled son of Baanah from Netophah, and Ittai son of Ribai from Gibeah of Benjamin; ³⁰Benaiah from Pirathon, and Hiddai from the ravines of Gaash; ³¹Abi-albon from Beth-arabah [*prob. rdg, cp Josh. 18.22; Heb from Arabah*], and Azmoth from Bahurim [*prob. rdg, cp 1Chr. 11.33; Heb from Barhum*]; ³²Eliabha from Shaalbon, and Hashem the Gizonite; Jonathan ³³son of [Hashem ... son of: *prob. rdg, cp 1Chr. 11.34; Heb the sons of Jashen, Jonathan*] Shammah the Hararite, and Ahiam son of Sharar the Hararite [*prob. rdg, cp 1Chr. 11. 35; Heb Ararite*]; ³⁴Eliphelet son of Ahasbai son of the Maacathite, and Eliam son of Ahithophel the Gilonite; ³⁵Hezrai from Carmel, and Paarai the Arbite; ³⁶Igal son of Nathan from Zobah, and Bani the Gadite; ³⁷Zelek the Ammonite, and Naharai from Beeroth, armour-bearer to Joab son of Zeruah; ³⁸Ira the Ithrite, Gareb the Ithrite, and ³⁹Uriah the Hittite: there were thirty-seven in all.

24¹ [*vv1-25: cp 1Chr. 21.1-27*] ONCE AGAIN THE ISRAELITES felt the LORD's anger, when he incited David against them and gave him orders that Israel and Judah should be counted. ²So he instructed Joab and the officers of the army [*Joab ... army: prob. rdg,*

cp 1Chr. 21.2; Heb Joab the officer of the army] with him to go round all the tribes of Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, and make a record of the people and report the number to him. ³Joab answered, 'Even if the LORD your God should increase the people a hundredfold and your majesty should live to see it, what pleasure would that give your majesty?' ⁴But Joab and the officers were overruled by the king and they left his presence in order to count the people. ⁵They crossed the Jordan and began at Aroer and the level land of the gorge, proceeding towards Gad [*began at ... Gad: prob. rdg, Heb* encamped in Aroer on the right of the level land of the gorge Gad] and Jazer. ⁶They came to Gilead and to the land of the Hittites, to Kadesh, and then to Dan and Iyyon [*prob. rdg, cp 1Kgs. 15.20; Heb* Yaan] and so round towards Sidon. ⁷They went as far as the walled city of Tyre and all the towns of the Hivites and Canaanites, and then went on to the Negeb of Judah at Beersheba. ⁸They covered the whole country and arrived back at Jerusalem after nine months and twenty days. ⁹Joab reported to the king the total number of people: the number of able-bodied men, capable of bearing arms, was eight hundred thousand in Israel and five hundred thousand in Judah.

¹⁰After he had counted the people David's conscience smote him, and he said to the LORD, 'I have done a very wicked thing: I pray thee, LORD, remove thy servant's guilt, for I have been very foolish.' ¹¹He rose next morning, and meanwhile the command of the LORD had come to the prophet Gad, David's seer, ¹²to go and speak to David: 'This is the word of the LORD: I have three things in store for you; choose one and I will bring it upon you.' ¹³So Gad came to David and repeated this to him and said, 'Is it to be three years of famine in your land, or three months of flight with the enemy at your heels, or three days of pestilence in your land? Consider carefully what answer I am to take back to him who sent me.' ¹⁴Thereupon David said to Gad, 'I am in a desperate plight; let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great; and let me not fall into the hands of men.' ¹⁵So the LORD sent a pestilence throughout Israel from morning till the hour of dinner, and from Dan to Beersheba seventy thousand of the people died. ¹⁶Then the angel stretched out his arm towards Jerusalem to destroy it; but the LORD repented of the evil and said to the angel who was destroying the people, 'Enough! Stay your hand.' At that moment the angel of the LORD was standing by the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite.

¹⁷When David saw the angel who was striking down the people, he said to the LORD, 'It is I who have done wrong, the sin is mine; but these poor sheep, what have they done? Let thy hand fall upon me and upon my family.' ¹⁸That same day Gad came to David and said to him, 'Go and set up an altar to the LORD on the threshing-floor of Araunah the Jebusite.' ¹⁹David did what Gad told him to do, and went up as the LORD had commanded. ²⁰When Araunah looked down and saw the king and his servants coming over towards him, he went out, prostrated himself low before the king ²¹and said, 'Why has your majesty come to visit his servant?' David answered, 'To buy the threshing-floor from you to build an altar to the LORD, so that the plague which has attacked the people may be stopped.' ²²Araunah answered David, 'I beg your majesty to take it and sacrifice what you think fit. I have here the oxen for a whole-offering, and their harness and the threshing-sledges for the fuel.' ²³Araunah [*prob. rdg, Heb* adds the king] gave it all to the king for his own use and said to him, 'May the LORD your God accept you.' ²⁴But the king said to Araunah, 'No, I will buy it from you; I will not offer to the LORD

my God whole-offerings that have cost me nothing.' So David bought the threshing-floor and the oxen for fifty shekels of silver. ²⁵He built an altar to the LORD there and offered whole-offerings and shared-offerings. Then the LORD yielded to his prayer for the land; and the plague in Israel stopped.