CHAPTER II

Bondage, Exodus,

and the National Covenant

THE second important epoch in the career of ancient Israel began with the descent of a group of Hebrews into Egypt sometime around the late seventeenth or early sixteenth century B.C. By the time their descendants had found their way back to Canaan, several centuries later, they were on the verge of nationhood. The Egyptian experience was a decisive factor in the development of Israel as a people. Here the Hebrew families grew in number, and their conception of God and His covenant with them was extended to cover the entire Hebrew folk. Here also they continued to oppose state autocracy, in contrast to the abject submission of the Egyptian people at large. The ancient custom of deifying kings, nowhere more elaborately developed than in Egypt, left them fundamentally untouched. In this great episode, the heroic figure of Moses stands out in epic grandeur.

Eisodus: Egypt and the Hyksos

Whenever a drought and famine desolated the region of Palestine, it was common for whole tribes to pick up their
belongings and seek refuge in Egypt. There the periodic overflow of the Nile gave life to the land, as it does today, and helped to regulate the agriculture of the country. The Egyptians learned early to dig channels for the seasonal flood and to irrigate the grain-producing land. Migration into Egypt was therefore an ancient expedient.

In Palestine, on the other hand, the rains did not always come when needed. A late-thirteenth-century Egyptian document, for example, tells how the seminomadic inhabitants of Edom, south of Palestine, left their homes in time of drought to come to Egypt “to keep themselves alive and to keep their cattle alive.” It was famine, too, as the Bible says, which compelled Abraham and Isaac in an earlier period to go south (Genesis 12 and 26), and the same reason is given for Jacob’s sending his sons to Egypt, where grain could still be procured even in a time of general drought (Genesis 42 ff.). As a result of this mission, the entire family finally settled there.

At the same time, this Eisosus—the “going into,” as distinguished from the Exodus, the “going out of”—may also have been encouraged by certain ethnic disturbances which for a period disrupted Egyptian suzerainty in Canaan and reduced the sovereignty of the Egyptian homeland as well. Following upon the increasing disintegration of the Egyptian state, a mixed group of Asiatics, apparently mostly Semites, and known generally as Hyksos (literally, “rulers of foreign countries”), appeared in the north and swarmed down through Syria and Palestine. By about 1720 B.C. they had crossed the land bridge into Africa and conquered much of Egypt, a domination that was not to be completely broken until about 1550.
Between the Hyksos and the Hebrews there appear to be a number of points of contact. It is known, for instance, that a certain Hyksos chieftain in Egypt bore the name Jacob-el, or perhaps Jacob-har, which means “May El, or Har [the mountain god] Give Protection.” Another Hyksos leader was called Jacob-baal, “May Baal Protect.” The verbal element, Jacob, which means “protect,” is identical with the name of the Hebrew patriarch Jacob who settled in Egypt. Again, the historical kernel which resides in the dramatic story of the career of Joseph in Egypt, of the coming to power of a Hebrew in the Egyptian court, could well have derived from the period of the Hyksos, when Semites, and in all probability Habiru among them, were prominent among the new rulers of Egypt. For it was not Egyptian habit to nourish the ambitions of strangers in their midst. Furthermore, it would seem to be more than a mere coincidence that the Hebrews, according to the Bible, settled in Goshen in the Delta, the very area which the Hyksos built up around their new capital Avaris, the later Tanis.

In this connection it is also interesting to note that Josephus, the Jewish historian of the first century A.D., quotes the Egyptian historian Manetho (about 275 B.C.), to the effect that a large number of Hyksos made their way from Avaris to Canaan and there built Jerusalem. These Hyksos, according to Manetho, were “not fewer in number than 240,000,” a figure which recalls the Biblical statement (Numbers 1:46) that 603,550 Hebrew males, exclusive of Levites, women, and children, participated in the Exodus from Egypt.

All these facts suggest that the Hebrews and the Hyksos
may have been on terms of considerable intimacy; so that the entry of the Hebrews into Egypt would have been facilitated by the presence of Hyksos in positions of power, and the Bondage accounted for by the enslavement of foreign elements after the fall of the Hyksos invaders. If this hypothesis be accepted, it provides evidence that the Biblical version of the Hebrew sojourn in Egypt (Genesis 39–50; Exodus 1 ff.) derives from the same period as the events which it describes. For the Egyptians themselves, humiliated by their conquest at the hands of the Hyksos, avoided and suppressed any reference to the events of the period, and it would have been well-nigh impossible for anyone to learn the historical details very much later.

The Sojourn

The Bible itself elaborates only on the final period of the Bondage in Egypt. But what was there to say? After the Egyptians had overthrown the Hyksos, they enslaved those foreigners who had not fled, thus reversing the status of the non-Egyptians in the land as the Bible records: “And a new king arose in Egypt who did not know Joseph. . . . And they [the Egyptians] set taskmasters over them [the Hebrews] to oppress them with forced labor. And they built for Pharaoh store-cities, Pithom and Ramses” (Exodus 1:8–11).

Under the Hyksos domination, Egyptian culture had sunk so low that the period has been described as “The Great Humiliation.” But the successful war of liberation against the Hyksos led to an Egyptian revival on such a grand scale that the period of the New Kingdom which followed, especially during the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Dynasties (about 1550–1150), has been called the Golden Age and was the subject of a recent book which bore the suggestive
title, *When Egypt Ruled the East.* The development of literature, art, and building, the inculcation of individual physical prowess in sport and in battle, the marked extension of the influence of women in the royal court and in upper-class circles generally—all of these manifested a new cosmopolitanism, and even secularism, brought on by imperial expansion abroad and urbanization at home.

There was much in the Egyptian environment that the Hebrews could emulate. But the kind of life which they and others led in the Egyptian slave camps did not encourage cultural apprenticeship. "Slave troops on a government building project," as one authority puts it, "have no opportunity for discussion with priests and scribes. Their simple desert souls would see and shrink from some of the abominations of the effete civilization and long to escape dreary enslavement rather than admire the cultural triumph of the land of bondage."

*Moses, Leader of the Exodus*

It was probably sometime in the thirteenth century that a group of Hebrews and others united under the leadership of Moses, of the tribe of Levi, to escape from Egypt. This tribe was foremost in organizing those state slaves who were willing to chance the break for freedom. Several outstanding Levites bore Egyptian names, for example, Moses, Miriam, Hophni, Phinehas, Merari, Puti-el, and perhaps Aaron. This alone indicates a considerable period of residence in Egypt; also a surprising degree of resistance and determination to be free, despite a long period of slavery.

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The Bible makes it amply clear that some non-Hebrew elements, "the mixed multitude" of Exodus (12:38) and Numbers (11:4), accompanied Moses and the Hebrews out of Egypt. The Egyptian sources, in turn, provide a very clear background for this circumstance. Tens of thousands of workers, natives of many countries and members of different ethnic groups, labored for the Egyptian state. Already in the fifteenth century, as a result of the military conquests of Amenhotep II in Syria and Palestine, large numbers of Semitic and non-Semitic captives of war, including 3,600 Apiru (Habiru), were brought to Egypt as state slaves. The military campaigns of other Egyptian kings, from the fourteenth to the twelfth centuries, produced similar results. The great building projects of Ramses II (about 1301–1234), at such places as Pithom and Ramses, employed these "mixed multitudes," many of whom were eager to escape from slavery.

Scholars have long been troubled by the fact that Egyptian records make no mention of Moses and the Exodus, and some have expressed the belief that a document or two may yet turn up with reference to them. Yet the modern student of ancient Egyptian history should share neither this worry nor this optimism. First, when the Egyptians lost a battle, they customarily either recorded it as a victory or else passed over it in silence. Thus the prolonged Hyksos rule was not mentioned in contemporaneous Egyptian sources until the Hyksos were expelled, and even the victory over them was apparently not officially recorded. And second, the scope of the Exodus and significance of it for the Egyptian government were so meager as not to merit any documentary mention.
The Wandering in the Wilderness

The peninsula of Sinai is a smaller replica of the Arabian peninsula, which lies farther east and south of it. On the west, Sinai is bounded by a deep-reaching arm of the Red Sea, and on the east by the Gulf of Aqabah, as the Persian Gulf forms the eastern boundary of the Arabian peninsula. It was into this burning desert upland that Moses led the way.

Here, in the wilderness of Sinai, Israel was forged, hammered into shape amid appalling hardship. The weak and weary perished, leaving the young and strong to drift yet another mile toward the Land of Promise, the ancestral home.

There was endless and violent struggle for power within this group that Moses had led from Egypt. Korah and his faction of Levites and Reubenites challenged the authority of Moses himself (Numbers 16). Aaron, in the incident of the Golden Calf, was used by another faction in a similar struggle (Exodus 32). There was the additional difficulty that the “mixed multitude” reminded themselves in the wilderness of Sinai of “the fish which we used to eat in Egypt free; the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; but now our appetite is starved!” (Numbers 11:4–5). Only a man of iron will could have endured this endless bickering, scheming, and backsliding. Moses was that man.

It was in the wilderness of Sinai, and not in Egypt or Canaan, that this struggle for power took place, and the subsequent welding together of a heterogeneous, inexperienced, and uncultured mass of individuals into something of a unified force and social group. That about a generation
— the traditional “forty years” of wandering— should have elapsed before the goal was approached is not only reasonable, but also accounts for the fact that virtually none of the leaders of the Exodus, such as Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, lived to enter the Promised Land.

Until recently the Bible has been virtually the only source for the history of the wandering in the Wilderness. As a result, the significance of this stage in Israel’s history has been minimized, when its very authenticity has not been questioned.

A central feature of the Biblical account is the movable Tabernacle, or Tent of Meeting, around which the political and religious life of the wandering Hebrews revolved. This institution used to be regarded as a late fiction, projected back into the past. Recently, however, archaeological and literary parallels have been accumulating which not only explain the origin of this structure and institution in the wilderness of Sinai, but also clarify its history as the “Tent of the Lord” at Shiloh, following the conquest of Canaan. It was ultimately replaced by the Temple which David planned and Solomon built.

Much the same thing happened in the case of the Ark, the acacia chest in which, according to tradition, Moses placed and kept the two stone tablets recording the Ten Commandments. Furthermore, the traditional route of the Wandering, as described in the books of Exodus and Numbers, accords well with the topography of Sinai and with what has been learned of the location of the copper and turquoise mines which were being worked and garrisoned in the thirteenth century B.C. These garrisoned sites, in the hands of the Egyptians, appear to have been situated at just
those points which the Hebrews were careful to avoid in their trek through Sinai.

Moses and the Covenant

The Covenant between God and the new nation, a factor of fundamental importance in Israel's career, came into being during this period. The relationship between the patriarchs and their God had begun, according to the social patterns of seminomadic family life, as a personal arrangement. In Moses' first experience with the Deity, at the theophany in the burning bush (Exodus 3), the relationship was also personal; and in accord with the patriarchal tradition, the Deity Himself acquired a new personal name, YHWH, which is usually rendered "Lord" or "Jehovah."  

The experiences of the Exodus and the Wandering gradually forged the more individualistic elements into the new tribal or national unit. The purpose of the Exodus was not merely to free a group of slaves for their own sakes, but for something far greater in scope and significance, the creation

3 The Hebrew term consists of four letters, YHWH, and hence is called the Tetragrammaton. Some time after about the fifth century B.C., the original pronunciation of the name ceased to be employed for ordinary purposes, and the term Adonai, "Lord," came to be substituted for it. The term Jehovah is a relatively recent creation (about fourteenth century A.D.), by a Christian who erroneously read the vowels of Adonai together with the consonants of YHWH. The Revised Standard Version (New York, 1952) follows the tradition of the King James (so-called Authorized) Version, the Revised Version, and the Jewish Publication Society Translation in rejecting the term Jehovah, usually in favor of Lord.

Many scholars believe that the original pronunciation of YHWH was Yahweh. The evidence for this belief, however, is not decisive, and there are also very considerable differences of opinion as to what the term meant originally.
of a new nation. The direct relationship between God and the Nation was the new element created by the forces of history and circumstance. From that point on, and throughout the entire Bible henceforth, the new Covenant, a national pact between God and His people, sealed by the act of the Exodus, replaced the older, individual covenants between God and the patriarchal leaders.

The personality of Moses so dominated Israel's formative years that later centuries came to credit him with authorship of the Pentateuch. This honor is more than justified in a figurative sense, and perhaps even in a factual sense as well. Research has now shown that an important part of the legal code of ancient Israel clearly derives from the pre-Canaanite period which coincides with the Hebrew wandering in the Wilderness (see below in Chapter III). And the Sinaitic origin of the Tabernacle, noted above, implies the development of numerous religious and cultic regulations under the leadership of Moses.

Great intelligence and character were required to solve the many vexing problems, to take advantage fully and wisely of the new and changing circumstances, to know when to follow and when to lead the unorganized Hebrews and their fellow travelers. When the mixed tribal following had emerged from the wilderness, they were all bound to one God. Moses alone provided that essential leadership, and he well deserves his traditional reputation of having brought Israel into being as a nation.

The question of who would succeed Moses in authority was of prime importance; there appears to have been no opposition to Moses' selection of Joshua of the tribe of Ephraim as his successor.
Moses and the Atonism of Akh-en-aton

According to a much-quoted theory, Moses could have acquired the concept of monotheism which he introduced to the Hebrews only from the Egyptian environment in which he had grown up, specifically from the so-called monotheism of the Aton. This worship of the round disk of the sun, while known previously in Egypt, found an ardent devotee in Amenhotep IV (Akh-en-aton; about 1380–1362 B.C.).

Two important facts, however, each independent of the other, disprove this theory. First, Moses could hardly have been affected by Atonism, since this worship was limited to Akh-en-aton and his family and was crushed immediately after Akh-en-aton’s death. Indeed, Akh-en-aton’s own couriers had worshiped Akh-en-aton himself; and Atonism itself was not truly monotheistic. Second, in sponsoring monotheism, Moses was actually not introducing a new concept to the Hebrews. He had a familiar, developable Hebraic idea of monotheism to work with, and even the Covenant of Sinai represented not so much a change in kind as a change in degree from the old way of binding oneself to the Deity.

Finally, the Bible makes it clear that the Hebrews brought with them from Egypt little or no cultural baggage.
CHAPTER III

Israel in Canaan:
The Period of the Judges

Canaan was the home of the patriarchs, and it was with this land that the God of the patriarchs was associated. Moses and all later leaders recognized this fundamental fact, and it was to Canaan that they led the Hebrews through the wilderness. During the period of the Judges, in the twelfth and eleventh centuries, when the term "Israelites" replaced that of "Hebrews," the relationship of God, Israel, and the Land of Israel became intertwined and indissoluble, as it has remained ever after. In the view of the Biblical writers there could have been no Israel without God and the Holy Land.

The Geography of the Land of Israel

Palestine covers approximately 10,000 square miles spread over an area that stretches from Dan in the north, at the foot of the Anti-Lebanon mountain range, to below Beersheba in the south, and from the Mediterranean Sea in the west to the desert fringes of Transjordan in the east. (See Map II.) The whole territory, of which about three-fifths lies west of the Jordan, resembles in size and shape the state
II. Israel in the period of the judges and kings (about 1200-600 B.C.).
of New Hampshire. This little country is broken up into some eight natural geographical units.

First there is the coastal plain along the Mediterranean, about ten miles wide and divided in half approximately at Joppa, near modern Tel Aviv. The Plain of Sharon lies to the north as far as the Carmel range near modern Haifa, and the more important Philistine plain, Philistia, lies to the south. The Plain of Acco extends north of Sharon, from the Carmel mountains to Acco and somewhat beyond. Further along the coast lay Phoenicia, separated from Acco and the rest of western Palestine by mountains of the region.

To the east of and paralleling Philistia rises the Shefelah, the second principal area, which is separated by longitudinal valleys from the central Hill Country and forms the transition to it. The Hill Country begins in southern Syria and in the form of hills and mountains extends down the length of Palestine until it begins to peter out in the extreme south.

The third part, the northern Hill Country, is called Galilee, and is usually subdivided into Upper and Lower Galilee. The fourth unit is the Valley of Jezreel, or Esdraelon (or simply “The Valley”), which cuts right across Galilee and constitutes the easy road for traders and invaders to reach Transjordan. Central Palestine, the fifth part, consisted of Samaria in the north, with the southern sector constituting Judah. The sixth division, formed by the rest of western Palestine, was the vast semiarid area in the south, the Negeb.

The territory west of the Jordan, the seventh section, was separated from Transjordan by a geologically marvelous “rift valley,” the corollary of the long range of hills which forms the Hill Country. This rift begins in Syria, separates
and forms Mount Lebanon and Mount Anti-Lebanon (Biblical Hermon), and continues south in the form of the Jordan Valley and the Arabah, to the Gulf of Aqabah and the Red Sea—indeed, as far as Mozambique and into the great depressions filled by the African lakes. The Jordan River runs through the valley, pooled en route in Lake Huleh and the Sea of Galilee (or Chinnereth), and terminates to the south in the cul-de-sac which is the Dead, or Salt, Sea. The last two bodies of water fill below-sea-level troughs in the valley floor. The Dead Sea, about 1,275 feet below the Mediterranean, is the lowest depression in the world.

Finally, eastern Palestine, or Transjordan, is essentially a plateau, and is divided up by four rivers into five main regions. The Yarmuk River, flowing into the Jordan just south of the Sea of Galilee, made up the dividing line between Bashan and Gilead. The Jabbok, or Wadi Zerqa, emptying into the Jordan about two-thirds of the way down, constituted the boundary between Gilead and Ammon. The Arnon, or Wadi Mojib, in turn, sometimes served as the natural barrier between Ammon and Moab, at the middle of the Dead Sea. The boundary between the two countries varied during Biblical times, usually lying north of the Arnon. Finally, at the southern end of the Dead Sea, the Zered, or Wadi Hesa, separated Moab from Edom. When it rained, these wadis became real streams. Otherwise they were mostly dry riverbeds.

The Climate of the Holy Land

Small as it is, Palestine has always had the advantages of many kinds of climate, owing in part to the variety of the terrain. In general, the land resembles the drier parts of
Southern California, but everything is on a much smaller scale. Mount Hermon in the north, which is over 9,000 feet high, tends to be cold, whereas just over one hundred miles to the south, in the Jordan Valley, Jericho swelters in tropical heat. Jerusalem, although less than fifteen miles to the southwest of Jericho, is almost 4,000 feet higher, and its inhabitants have usually found its climate temperate.

From Jerusalem to the coast the distance is just over thirty miles, and the descent from about 2,600 feet to sea level. The coastal climate is of course much warmer, although never so unbearable in summer as the Jordan Valley. The temperatures in the Transjordan plateau approximate those of Jerusalem.

There is another important element, the winds. The winds from the east are usually hot and dry, coming as they do from the desert. Those from the north, on the other hand, and especially from the west across the Mediterranean, are much more gentle, bringing with them cool air and rain. The all-important rainy season usually begins in October and ends in March or April. One of God's greatest blessings to Israel was His promise: "I will give the rain of your land in its season, the former rain and the latter rain, that you may gather in your new grain, wine, and oil" (Deuteronomy 11:14; 28:12). The threat of drought was a curse and a disaster (28:23–24).

Geography and Economy

A network of valleys provided avenues of settlement as well as commercial and military traffic. This made for the historical interplay between hill and valley peoples that figures so prominently in the books of Joshua, Judges, and Samuel.
Geography made Biblical Israel primarily an agricultural, and only secondarily a commercial, society. The coastal plains of Sharon and Philistia, the Jezreel and Jordan valleys, and a considerable part of the Hill Country of Samaria and Judah lent themselves to successful farming. Even the nearly waterless Negeb was tilled profitably when the inhabitants diligently exploited the available supply of water by terracing and irrigating the land.

Ancient Israel, with its few and inadequate harbors, derived slight commercial advantage from its Mediterranean coast. Even Dor and Joppa, the nation’s best ports, could be used only when the sea was calm. Such better harbors as were to be found along the coast, Byblos, Sidon, Tyre, and usually even Acco, were in Phoenician hands. In the days of Solomon, considerable maritime trade centered about Ezion-geber and Elath on the Gulf of Aqabah and continued at least sporadically for some time after his reign.

It was as the bridge between Asia and Africa that the land of Israel acquired commercial significance. Its plains and valleys, notably Jezreel and the Mediterranean coast, were commercial and military highways from time immemorial; and this fact explains why the sites which guarded and controlled these routes played so important a role in Biblical history. Beth-shan, Megiddo, Shechem, Gaza, and Beersheba were among the better-known cities in the west, and in Transjordan such sites as Ashtaroth, Ramoth-gilead, Rabbath-ammon, Heshbon, and Kir-hareseth dominated the main road from Damascus through Bashan, Gilead, Ammon, and Moab, to Edom in the south.

Israel was not rich in natural resources. The copper and iron ores in the south were exploited by the Israelites only when Edom was under their control. Limited both in area
and water supply, the country could not support a large population; but in spite of that the Israelites might well have succeeded in turning their domain into “a land flowing with milk and honey” (Exodus 3:8) if it had not fallen directly across the path of invasion and conquest followed by the expanding empires of western Asia and Egypt.

Joshua and the Conquest of Canaan: The Ideal and the Reality

According to the traditional understanding of the Biblical account, the taking of Canaan was accomplished in a single spectacularly successful invasion, with Joshua smiting one-and-thirty kings. In this picture, the Hebrew tribes, led by Joshua, crossed the Jordan near the Dead Sea and took the key point of Jericho, “whose walls came tumbling down.” The next objective was Ai, up in the Hill Country, just over ten miles west of Jericho as the crow flies, but twice as far by foot. This fortified place Joshua took by stratagem.

Thereafter, in a series of forays down the valleys—on one occasion, the lost Book of Jashar tells us (Joshua 10:12–14), he commanded the sun in Gibeon and the moon in the valley of Ajalon to stand still, so that he could mop up remnants of Canaanite resistance—Joshua took and razed a series of fortified towns, Libnah, Lachish, Eglon, Hebron, and Debir. This done, he conquered all the highland of southern Canaan, a section of the coastal strip as far as Gaza, and then in the north by the Waters of Merom, a hundred miles more or less from his base at Gilgal, he routed a Canaanite army.

Reuben, Gad, and half of the tribe of Manasseh occupied Transjordan; the other half of Manasseh settled on the
Plain of Sharon just south of Esdraelon. The tribe of Levi, consisting entirely of religious functionaries, received no single fixed territory. The rest of the tribes shared in the partition of Canaan according to their population.

The author of Chapters 10–11 in the Book of Joshua provides the basis for this traditional view. Joshua, he recounts,

defeated all the land, the hill country, and the Negeb, and the Shefelah, and the slopes, and all their kings; he left none remaining, but utterly destroyed all that breathed. . . . So Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord said to Moses; and Joshua gave it for an inheritance to Israel according to their divisions by their tribes. And the land had rest from war.

Chapters 15–19 in Joshua and Chapter 1 in Judges, however, give a different picture both of the conquest and of the role of Joshua therein. This version describes the conquest as a slow piecemeal affair, accomplished largely after Joshua and his generation were gone, by individual tribes and clans seldom acting even in partial unison. Thus Judges 1:1 would indicate that the land was not at rest from war, in fact was never pacified: "After the death of Joshua, the Israelites asked of the Lord, 'Who shall lead us in battle against the Canaanites?'"

The latter picture of the conquest was generally taken by scholars to be correct and the former thrown into discard, together with Joshua's traditional career, as myth. The truth of the matter, however, appears to comprehend both versions. Excavations at Lachish, Tell Beit Mirsim (= Kiriat-sepher?), Gibeon, Hazor, Eglon, Beth-shemesh, Gibeah, Bethel, Shiloh, Megiddo, and Beth-shan, indicate that these places were destroyed or occupied, then were some-
times retaken and rebuilt by the Canaanites, only to change hands again, during the thirteenth, twelfth, and eleventh centuries B.C. The Biblical version of the Joshuan conquest would seem to be

a collection of miscellaneous fragments of varying dates and of varying reliability. . . . There was a campaign by Joshua which achieved an amazing success in attacking certain key Canaanite royal cities but . . . there was also a long period of struggle for possession which continued after Joshua's death.\(^1\)

Biblical authors tended to telescope accounts of long campaigns—a device by no means abandoned even today—and to give all the credit for victory to well-established military heroes such as Joshua. Their purpose, after all, was not merely to chronicle but to dramatize the past and to edify their readers. To achieve this end they naturally tended to lump weary details under one splendid name. Thus Joshua acquires once again an association with the conquest of Canaan no less deserving and prominent in its way than that of Moses with the Exodus and the Wandering.

*The Canaanite Civilization*

When the Hebrews and Israelites entered Canaan, they found there a highly developed and sophisticated society. Thanks to recent discoveries of inscriptions and other archaeological evidence, part of this highly significant culture has been recovered. Indeed, the Canaanite civilization was so advanced that it nearly absorbed the desert

\(^1\) Quoted from G. E. Wright, in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, V (1946), 105-114. Joshua's capture of Ai was probably confused with that of Bethel. The archaeological story of Jericho is not clear.
invaders. Thus it was when the Semitic Akkadians swept into the non-Semitic society of Sumer. Thus, too, when Rome conquered Greece, the victors were in turn conquered by the superior culture of their victims.

There can be no doubt that the Israelites of Joshua and Judges were quite unable to match the material techniques of Canaan, at least until the period of Solomon in the tenth century. Israelite fortifications, Saul’s strong point at Gibeah for example, did not compare with those of contemporary Canaan. The foundations and masonry found in Canaanite towns are clearly superior to Israelite remains. Canaanite Bethel had a drainage system, which was unknown in Israelite towns. Canaanite pottery of the Middle and Late Bronze Ages (about 2000–1200 B.C.) compared with the best, but the products of Israel were crude.

The origin of the alphabet cannot as yet be determined with precision. But it is the Canaanites, who may well have been associated with its invention, who gave this great cultural force to the world at large. It is likewise uncertain exactly what Semitic language or languages the Hebrews and Israelites spoke in the patriarchal period; but after they settled in Canaan, they adopted a variety of Canaanite alphabets and dialects. For good reason, then, the Bible itself calls the Hebrew language “the tongue of Canaan” (Isaiah 19:18), recognizing Biblical Hebrew as originally a dialect of Canaanite.

Canaanite literature was notable for its mythological and religious compositions. The Greeks and Romans owed much more than their alphabet to the Canaanites, whom the Greeks began to call Phoenicians after 1000 B.C.; they derived also considerable and important elements in their mythologies from them.
The religious system was a highly organized and central element in every aspect of the daily life of the Canaanites, and its influence extended widely into the economic, political, and social spheres. The priests constituted an important and powerful group in the upper class of Canaanite society. They were landowners, slaveowners, and money-lenders on a large scale, operating within the temples and under the protection of the gods. In Canaan, though on a smaller scale than in Mesopotamia and Egypt, the temples "were heavily endowed with landed properties and received a tremendous income. At certain periods they probably owned nearly all the land of the country and acquired almost an economic stranglehold over the people." ²

The religious beliefs and practices of the Canaanites revolved about the predominantly agricultural character of their economy. The Canaanites were polytheists, regarding the forces of nature as divine beings and giving to them personal names. These deities personified the heavenly bodies—the sun, moon, stars, and planets—and such manifestations of nature as rain, thunder, lightning, vegetation, death, and wisdom—the last mentioned including the arts and inventions.

Mythological stories and qualities were woven about the careers of the gods, and much of the ritual at the shrines of Canaanite cults was intended primarily to ensure the fertility of the soil. Foremost among the gods was Baal, to whom there is so much derogatory reference in the Bible. The Canaanite Baal was a god of rain, prime mover of the agricultural world. Periodically Baal was killed by the

forces of Mot, the god of drought and death, so that the rains and vegetation ceased. However, Baal came to life in the fall, and the all-important rains came down again. In the spring Baal and his half-sister Anath, goddess of fertility and war, cohabited, so that fecundity came to the land and its inhabitants. The Canaanite worship of their gods was characterized by idolatry and sexual rites.

Israel and Canaan

The manner in which the Israelites reacted to the Canaanite civilization forms one of the vivid periods in their dramatic career. It will be remembered that not all the Hebrews left Canaan for Egypt in the days of Jacob and Joseph. The stay-at-homes inclined to feel indifferent about a Bondage and Exodus in which their own ancestors had not participated. While their kinsmen had been off adventuring and finding God, they themselves had acquired land, herds, and status. And to this end they had compromised, in great measure or small, with the culture and religion of Canaan. Not for them the harsh dedications of the Law, the admonition from on high,

Be very strong and courageous, being mindful to do according to all the Law which Moses My servant commanded you. . . . This book of the Law shall not depart out of your mouth, but you shall meditate on it day and night . . . for then you shall make your way prosperous, and you shall have good success [Joshua 1:7–8].

These people had already feathered their nests without the assistance of the national Covenant.

Among the new settlers too there developed different points of view. Some of those fresh from the Mosaic scene, once they were comfortably ensconced, found it desirable
to wink an eye and look away from the Law. On several occasions the tribes of Reuben and Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh had to be ordered to help their fellow tribesmen secure their allotments in western Palestine (Joshua 1:12–18). When the crucial struggle between the Israelites and the Canaanites came to a head in the battle near Taanach in the valley of Jezreel (about 1125 B.C.), an event made famous by the triumphal Song of Deborah (Judges 5), several tribes refused to join in the battle and accordingly were cursed. A whole century of indecision and wavering passed before the reluctant tribes, faced with a common danger, were able to bring themselves to make a common cause. The individualism and desert ways of these tribes died hard.

The same process is reflected in the religious picture painted in the Book of Judges. The complete devotion to the Lord advocated by Moses and Joshua ran into dire opposition. The Israelite population at large, even the newcomers in the land, conveniently adapted their way of life to the Canaanite practices, especially those which were aimed at the maintenance and improvement of their well-being. Local shrines, presided over by guilds of priests and seers, sprang up everywhere. While they did not go so far as to produce idols to represent the Lord, many Israelites did acquire figurines of the Canaanite goddess of fertility. They also added to the worship of the Lord ritualistic features from the cults of Baal, Asherah, Ash-toreth, and the other gods of Canaan. In spite of this, the God of Israel survived through thick and thin, even when His influence was diluted by alien admixture. Such heroes as Saul and David (about 1000 B.C.), it should be noted,
gave some of their children names which included the element “Baal.”

But some, the Gideons of Israel, would not take the pagan bait. At the behest of the Lord, the Bible tells us in Judges 6, Gideon risked his life in the dark of the night by smashing a Baal altar and cutting down the Asherah beside it for firewood for burning an Israelite sacrificial bull. “And when the men of the town rose early in the morning,” the account continues, “behold, the altar of Baal was torn down, the sacred pole that was beside it was cut down, and the second bull was offered [to the Lord] upon the altar which had been built” (verse 28).

The authors of the Book of Judges openly blamed Israel’s misfortunes during the period of settlement upon this widespread religious defection. When Midianite camel raiders and the better-organized forces of Ammon and Moab overran Israelite communities, their depredations were explained as punishment for Israel’s desertion of the Lord. Israel would not have experienced these sufferings, the Biblical writers maintained (Judges 2:13 ff.), if she had held together under the Covenant. Israel’s strength lay in united devotion to the Lord, and the worship of Baal was the most divisive and destructive force that Israel had to face. It threatened to destroy the Covenant between God and His chosen people.

The “Judges”

The period from Joshua to King Saul is described in the Bible as “the days when the judges ruled.” These “judges” were primarily local military heroes and dominated Israel during the period of pacification and adjustment. When an
alien force attacked a segment of Israel, men of uncommon mettle frequently stepped forward from among the people to rally and lead their fellows. Such natural leaders, if they proved successful, became chieftains and were accepted as rulers within the area of resistance (Judges 2:14 ff.).

The Bible records some twelve judges in all, some of them contemporaries, as in the case of Ehud and Shamgar. The most famous judges were Ehud, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson. These successful military chieftains acquired judicial authority, alongside the priests of the local sanctuaries, but only secondarily, and they held it only so long as "the land had rest" from the enemy. Unlike the judges of the later monarchy, these "judges" were brought into being by external, military needs.

Not more than three leaders in the Period of the Judges really adjudicated; they were Deborah, Eli, and Samuel. Eli, however, was specifically a priest. And Deborah and Samuel, unlike the others, are described as "prophets"; indeed, neither one ever served as military leader for any of the tribes.

Tribal Structure of Israel and her Neighbors

Except for occasional brief emergency alliances, the Israelite tribes maintained complete autonomy during the Period of the Judges and recognized no central capital or shrine for all Israel. "In those days there was no king in Israel, every man did what was right in his own eyes" (Judges 17:6, 21:25). The hilly terrain, netted by a maze of valleys and wadies, made for political disjunction. Since no enemy was powerful enough to threaten more than a small part of Israel at any one time, the pressure from without was not great enough to produce any effective integra-
tion. Dwellers on the plains ignored the plight of the hill people, who returned the compliment. An intertribal warfare itself was not unknown, despite a common religion (Judges 12:19–21).

Israelite Economy and Government

The Israelites, meanwhile, raised cattle, sheep, and goats and tilled the soil. Artisans organized guilds, practiced weaving, dyeing, tanning, smithing, pottery making, and other crafts, even though on a very small scale. Private ownership of land, including wells, gradually replaced the communal ownership of patriarchal days.

Even though there was a concentration of wealth among the Canaanites, rich families among the Israelites did not appear to dominate the communities in the time of the judges. Imposing palaces and elaborate fortifications discovered in the Canaanite levels of Palestinian mounds are not equaled in the Israelite levels until the days of Solomon. The lack of concentrated wealth also helped hold back the development of a nationally conscious leadership. This circumstance accounts also for the absence from Israel, at least up to the time of David, of the corvée, or forced labor.

During the Period of the Judges there does not appear to have been any centralized authority within the tribal unit capable of dominating the rest of the population. The heads of wealthy and important families constituted a group of "elders," and they met—usually in the town gate, the common meeting place in those days—whenever the occasion demanded. In conjunction with the elders, although the precise relationship remains obscure, there also functioned a public assembly of all the free adult males of the community. The elders and the assembly made their authority
felt in every aspect of the community’s activities, the military, political, religious, economic, legal, and social. In Israelite society it was not easy to separate the religious from the secular aspects of these activities.

*Israel’s Legal Codes*

During the Period of the Judges the legal system of Israel began to take on definite shape. It is now generally agreed that the legal enactments in the Pentateuch fall into two main groups. Numerous laws are introduced by a direct command or prohibition of the Lord, “You shall (or, shall not). . . .” The Ten Commandments (Exodus 20:1–17) are a case in point, e.g., “You shall have no other gods beside Me,” etc. Laws expressed so dogmatically and directly are called *apodictic*.

The second major group of laws, called *casuistic*, is characterized by a conditional clause (“if; provided that”). The Book of the Covenant (Exodus 20:22–23:33; 24:7) is a good example of this formulation, e.g., “If a thief is found breaking in, and he is struck and dies, there shall be no bloodguilt for him” (22:1). Or,

If a foreigner resides with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. The foreigner who resides with you shall be to you as one of your own native born; you shall love him as one of your own; for you were foreigners in the land of Egypt. I am the Lord your God [Leviticus 19:33–4].

In general, Israelite civil law was expressed casuistically, and the ritual law apodictically.

It would seem that the Israelites borrowed to some extent from the legal codes of the Babylonians, Hurrians, and Canaanites. This is apparent especially in the casuistic group of laws. The apodictic group derived primarily from their
own experiences in their nomadic wanderings in Canaan and in the wilderness of Sinai. By and large, the Israelites made and compiled their own laws to suit their own way of life, and what they did borrow from others they adapted to their own needs.

The Philistines

About 1175 B.C. a number of Aegean peoples were driven by northern invaders from their homes on Crete and the shores of Asia Minor and took to the sea. They failed to penetrate Egypt, but they did gain a hold on the Palestinian coast. These “sea peoples,” as the Egyptians called them, had a superior military and political organization. Despite their lack of numbers, they gradually got a grip on the coastal plain. Among these migrant sea peoples were the Philistines. Indeed, it is from them that the name “Palestine” derives, by way of the Latinized Greek word “Palaestina,” as finally impressed on the whole region by the Roman conquerors of Judah over a thousand years later.

Their closely knit political structure, coupled with the need for mercantile expansion, brought the Philistines into the hinterland. Philistine society was divided up into five important city-states, with a “tyrant,” or chieftain, at the head of each. These city-states knew how to combine for military attack. Moreover, the Philistines had a virtual monopoly on the important new metal, iron, and used it for swords, ax heads, and chariots, as well as for plough tips and sickles.

The Israelites were squarely in the path of the Philistine drive to the east. Various Israelite tribes were badly hit by the systematic depredations of the strangers from the coast. Eventually the situation reached such a pass that the tribes
most seriously affected were driven to submit to a central authority. This novelty, however, was not introduced without bitter resistance from dichards who maintained an extremely literal interpretation of the meaning of the Sinaiic Covenant. The man chosen to be “king” was Saul; the opposition to him was led by Samuel, the priestly seer.

**King Saul**

Speaking before the elders and assembled freemen, Samuel argued that if they elected Saul to be their king they would be flouting the primacy of God. It was not his own judgeship that he was worrying about, Samuel insisted, but the judgeship of the Lord. In addition he warned the Israelites that a king would take their sons and daughters, the best of their fields, and one-tenth of their seed and flocks. The Israelites, he said, would become the king’s servants, which, in effect, meant his slaves. “And you shall cry out on that day,” he said, “because of your king whom you chose for yourself, but the Lord will not answer you on that day” (I Samuel 8:18).

The Israelite assembly rejected this Catonian warning, and chose Saul, of the tribe of Benjamin, to be their first king. Saul was a striking figure, a man among men. “There was not among the Israelites a better person than he,” we are told, “from his shoulders and upward he was taller than any of the people” (I Samuel 9:2). When Samuel saw that further protest was useless, he anointed Saul, and thus the kingship over Israel was sanctified.

**Trials of King Saul**

Almost at once Saul’s royal authority was tested; shortly after assuming office, he summoned all Israel to raise the
Ammonite siege of Jabesh-gilead in Transjordan. Saul threatened to destroy the herds of every able-bodied Israelite who failed to answer the call. He raised a force large enough to beat off the Ammonites, but the response of the tribes was still far from unanimous. Saul’s close followers proposed that he destroy the slackers, but he refused. Again, in battle against the Philistines at Michmash, part of Saul’s army deserted, and but for a clever stratagem devised by Jonathan, the crown prince, the day would have been lost.

Then, after another victory, this time over the Amalekites, Saul’s political star began to fade. The conservative element led by Samuel consistently undercut the king. Their support was grudging; they gave him little credit when he won and loudly condemned him when he lost. And meanwhile Saul was the prey of his own tempestuous and moody nature.

On one occasion Saul suddenly lost confidence in himself, when he was faced, in the Shefelah foothills near Azekah, by a Philistine army led by the giant Goliath. The once-powerful monarch was “dismayed and greatly afraid” (I Samuel 17:11). The opportunity presented itself for an unknown lad, David, son of Jesse of Bethlehem, to step into the breach. Slaying the monster Goliath, he became the boy hero of all Israel. Thereafter his rise was meteoric.

Having achieved military distinction at a very early age, David began to assume the stature of a legendary figure almost before his mature life was well begun. He is credited with having killed a lion and a bear even before his dramatic conquest of the Philistine Goliath. Because of these precocious triumphs, he won extraordinary popularity among the people.
The King Comes to Grief

Saul at first made David his protégé, married him to his daughter Michal, and acknowledged him favorite of the court. He soon realized, however, that David was becoming the center of popular favor and was threatening to reap the political rewards of fame. “Saul has slain his thousands,” the people sang, “but David—his ten thousands!” Even Jonathan, the king’s son, regarded David as his bosom friend. Saul tried several times to kill his younger rival. The jealous idea became fixed in Saul’s head, the Biblical authors tell us (I Samuel 18–30), that if he could only rid himself of the upstart, David, all would go well with him. Finally, he drove David from the court.

David maintained his place in the hearts of the people by his gallant and resourceful acts. He sent his parents to Moab for safety, while he himself sought refuge, now at the sanctuary of Nob near Jerusalem, now at the court of Achish, the Philistine king of Gath and enemy of Saul. For a time, too, he led a band of several hundred outlaws in the Shefelah foothills in the region of Adullam. And again he proved his mettle by serving as border guard in the south for the Philistines (I Samuel 21–30). Several times during his banishment he could have killed Saul, but his deep nobility of character—and perhaps also his reverence for Saul as God’s anointed one—prevented this final desperate act.

Saul died where he had first made his name, on the field of battle. Against Philistines assembled in the valley of Jezreel, Saul and his forces took up counterpositions at nearby Mount Gilboa. In the ensuing engagement the Philistines overwhelmed the Israelites, and Saul “took the
sword and fell upon it," rather than fall into the hands of his enemies. His was a heroic and tragic role in a crucial period in Israel's career. It was his hard lot to bear the brunt, not only of Philistine aggression, but also of the inevitable reaction of his own people to the decisive change represented by his anointment as king. His sick nature, furthermore, aggravated and dramatized the difficulties of his position. In spite of all, however, Saul laid the foundation for an effective opposition to the Philistine advance, for an attack on their valuable monopoly of iron, and, perhaps most important, for a measurable degree of unification among the individualistic tribes of Israel.
CHAPTER IV

The Israelite Empire

under David and Solomon

ANCIENT Israel’s Golden Era came during the tenth century B.C., when David and Solomon ruled Israel and Israel dominated western Asia. It was this period that the prophets had in mind, later, when they urged the restoration of a united Israel and called for vengeance on the foes about them. And it was among the descendants of David that they assumed the leader would be found who could make possible this achievement. Thus Isaiah affirmed:

And there shall come forth a shoot out of the stock of Jesse [the father of David]. . . . And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him. . . . And it shall come to pass in that day that the root of Jesse, that stands for an ensign of the peoples, to him shall the nations seek, and his resting-place shall be glorious [11:1–10].

Recent discoveries have greatly enhanced the historical value of the Biblical account, and even enriched its three-thousand-year-old story with considerable new material. The Queen of Sheba, after she met Solomon, is reported to have exclaimed,