

## CHAPTER 4

# David's Rise to Power

**T**HEIR victory at the battle of Gilboa (c. 1000 B.C.) left the Philistines for the moment very much in control of the situation. Indeed, it must have seemed to many an Israelite that the whole reign of Saul had been nullified; the enemy were back in the position they had held when Saul first took office. Once again the Philistines sent their garrisons into the heart of the hill country, and virtually dominated the territory west of the Jordan. They had no desire to push the Israelites out — they were not numerous enough to take over for their own use all this territory. Nor did they capture all the cities; they contented themselves with stationing their garrisons.

Meanwhile there were two Israelites who tried to pick up the pieces. One of them was David, who was back at Ziklag, south-west of Judah, when news of the battle reached him. The other was Saul's close relative (cousin, probably) Abner, who had served as the commander-in-chief of Saul's armies. One son of Saul survived the battle, and Abner determined to make him the next king of Israel. The young man's name was Eshbaal,<sup>1</sup> and he was acclaimed king by the northern and Transjordanian tribes. Abner no doubt had every intention of being the power behind the throne, and in making Eshbaal king seems to have acted on his own account. There was no religious support for this move, but it was natural enough that Saul's son should succeed to the throne; the hereditary principle was common all around Israel if there was as yet no real precedent in Israel (if we exclude Abimelech from consideration). The majority of the tribes acquiesced, therefore; but it is noteworthy that the royal

1. This, the original form of the name, occurs in 1 Chronicles 8:33; the usual biblical form is Ish-bosheth, a later modification designed to avoid the use of the name "Baal".

headquarters was located not in Benjamin, but across the Jordan, at Mahanaim, out of Philistine reach. It is doubtful if Eshbaal's kingship ever meant much in practice to the Israelites west of the river.

Meanwhile, far from Eshbaal's capital, David was acting with rare skill and diplomacy. To an impartial observer, his chances of ever taking Saul's place as king of all Israel must have seemed thin indeed. His recent position as a Philistine vassal might easily have stamped him as a traitor in the eyes of Judah; Saul's persistent hostility to him in recent years might well have established him as a *persona non grata* in the eyes of Benjamin and all who had supported Saul; and whatever he did now, he must not offend his powerful overlords, against whom he had no River Jordan to serve as a natural defence. The fact that David succeeded in establishing good relations with all the tribes of Israel, without forfeiting Philistine goodwill until he was ready to do battle with them, is a clear indication of his diplomatic genius.

As far as Judah was concerned, he had already succeeded in part in offsetting his defection to the Philistines, by his policy of attacking the enemies of Israel to the south, notably the Amalekites. In the last few days of Saul's life, the Amalekites gave him a fresh opportunity to achieve a reputation at their expense; as soon as the Philistine armies, David and his men with them, had marched north, the Amalekites had descended upon the now unprotected settled peoples in the south — upon the territory of Judah and the Philistines alike, and in particular upon David's own city of Ziklag. But David's men, dismissed by the Philistines, returned to Ziklag much more rapidly than the Amalekites could have expected, and the upshot was that the Amalekites were caught unawares and suffered heavy casualties. This speedy and effective punitive action against the Amalekites will have made David popular with Judah and the Philistines equally; but David proceeded to share out the plunder with a number of cities of Judah, thus underlining his kinship with them.

Having thus paved the way, he returned to the centre of Judah. In the city of Hebron he was anointed king over his own tribe, and so began his long reign. Presumably by now the tribe of Judah was used to a monarchy, and wanted a king; Saul, however, had proved a disillusionment, and his son's rule was centred too far away to be of any use to them. David, on the other hand, was one of themselves; he was known as a soldier of ability, and his earlier popularity was not forgotten; and he was on the spot. The Philistines, for their part, must have been persuaded that David was still their vassal; and in any case it will have pleased them well enough to see an opposition kingdom to that of Eshbaal. A divided Israel, at war with itself, will have suited them admirably. So they

permitted David to rule Judah for them. They were thus relieved of the necessity of placing garrisons in Judah; and this in turn must have pleased the men of Judah admirably.

David thus gained political support from both Judah and the Philistines; nor must we forget that he had considerable religious support from his own people, whereas Eshbaal had none. Abiathar and some of the priesthood had long accompanied him in exile, and David was careful to consult the sacred oracle before making important decisions. So now, before making for Hebron, he "inquired of the LORD" (2 Samuel 2:1), and was directed to that city. Hebron was only two miles south of the shrine of Mamre, and here no doubt the anointing ceremony took place — a religious rather than a political ceremony. We read of no prophet or priest taking part in this coronation,<sup>2</sup> to be sure, but Samuel's designation of David was no doubt recalled. Later on, at any rate, David not only showed great concern for religious proprieties, but also emphasized the religious aspects of his royal position; it is therefore more than likely that he did so from the first.

In his dealings with the other tribes of Israel, he was careful to show no disrespect for Saul, but he tacitly assumed that he was the proper successor to Saul, ignoring Eshbaal as far as he could. The man who brought him word of Saul's defeat and death related that he had actually given the wounded king the *coup de grâce*; this temerity earned him execution from David, who could thus claim to have avenged, in some measure, the death of Saul. There was not the least exultation in David's camp at the death of a rival and persecutor; David led his whole people in genuine lamentation at the death of a champion of Israel. The elegy he composed remains a testimony to his sincerity, recorded for posterity in 2 Samuel 1:19ff.

When further news reached him, to the effect that Saul's body had been retrieved and given decent burial by the people of Jabesh-gilead, David sent them a warm message of commendation (2 Samuel 2:5ff.). In this message he also conveyed the fact that he was king over Judah, and made promises to "do good" to the citizens of Jabesh. By such means he ensured that he would not appear as the leader of a rebel faction, hostile to Saul and all he stood for. But of course Eshbaal cannot have regarded David as anything but an interloper, and David was obliged to view him as an enemy.

It is doubtful whether David took much direct action against Eshbaal; only one clash between the two opposing armies is recorded, and it is not clear who precipitated it. It took place at Gibeon, on Benjaminite soil, so it is clear that the men of Judah had left their home territory; on the other hand, Eshbaal's men were a

2. It is this fact that leads Noth to maintain that this coronation was "a purely political act" (*op. cit.*, p.183).

very long way from their base in Transjordan. This single encounter, in which David's men came off best, was a fight between selected champions, so little bloodshed resulted; the victory will have increased David's prestige, without giving him the reputation of massacring Israelites. Indeed, any bitterness resulting from the fight seems to have been on the victor's side, for Joab, soon to be if not already David's chief general, lost a brother in the Gibeon encounter, killed by Abner in person, and he never forgave his counterpart at Eshbaal's court. The opportunity for revenge soon arrived.

Conceivably David tried to put pressure on Eshbaal by surrounding his territory with enemies. He must have been on good terms with the Moabites, for he had placed his parents there for safe-keeping during the days of Saul's persecution. At some period, too, he made a treaty with the king of Ammon (cf. 2 Samuel 10:1f.). And one of his wives at Hebron was the daughter of the king of Geshur, a Syrian city not far north of the Transjordanian tribes, which presumably must also have been an ally of David. It is no wonder that Eshbaal, hedged about by Philistines, Syrians, Ammonites and Moabites, not to mention Judah itself, found his cause crumbling.

It may well be that Abner saw which way the wind was blowing, and sought an excuse to desert his protégé. At any rate, he acted in a way that could only imply that he planned to displace Eshbaal as king of Israel, and when Eshbaal challenged him, took the greatest offence, and immediately began to treat with David. Since Abner was Saul's cousin, his defection to David meant that David was now receiving support from the house of Saul itself. David demanded, moreover, that Abner should bring with him Saul's daughter Michal, whom Saul had long ago betrothed to David.

Abner's arrival in Hebron might well have signalled an Israelite landslide in support of David, had not Joab chosen this singularly unfortunate moment to take his personal revenge. With the murder of Abner, Joab not only avenged his brother, he also ensured that Abner should not be made commander-in-chief of David's armies in preference to himself; but his personal gain might well have been David's loss, for Abner's death would scarcely have given any confidence to supporters or relatives of Saul who were thinking of bringing their support to David. It is clear that David was dismayed at Abner's death, and he did all in his power to clear himself of any complicity in the assassination. He roundly cursed Joab, and insisted on full court mourning for Abner; he himself acted as chief mourner at the burial.

But Eshbaal's cause was by now doomed, in any event. The end came swiftly: two of his own army officers treacherously murdered him, and brought his head to David at Hebron, fully expecting to be praised and rewarded. David once again made it clear to all that the

enemies of Saul and his family were his own enemies, and the two assassins were summarily executed. But their deed could not be undone, and the northern tribes found themselves without a leader; the figurehead had gone, and so had the able general who had been the power behind the throne. Few of Saul's family remained alive — the nearest in line to the throne was but a seven-year-old boy, and a cripple at that. There was only one man to whom they could turn if they wanted a king, and his name was David. Without further delay, a deputation of all the tribes came to Hebron, and David was once again anointed king, this time over the whole of Israel.

David's position at this stage of his career was remarkably similar to that of Saul at the beginning of his reign. Both men found themselves enthroned over a united Israel, receiving wholehearted support in some quarters, accepted as a necessary evil in others. Both faced the immediate prospect of fierce and prolonged warfare with the Philistines. An early defeat by this formidable enemy would have brought about the downfall of either man. Saul had one advantage over David; he came from a small tribe, and so occupied a neutral position in inter-tribal rivalries, whereas David came from the powerful Judah, and must therefore have been viewed with not a little suspicion by Ephraim in particular, the most important northern tribe. But potential jealousies were no immediate problem to David, for all the tribes were in perfect agreement as to the necessity of defeating the Philistines once and for all. In two respects David was better off than his predecessor: he himself was already an able and experienced soldier, whereas Saul had had no battle experience at all when he became king; and he commanded a professional army, well trained and well equipped, as against the tribal levies which Saul had led.

Warfare with the Philistines was inevitable; the phase of diplomacy was over. As an opposition force to Eshbaal, David had served the Philistine cause well; but as king of a united Israel he stood between them and their objective, full control over Palestine west of the Jordan. 2 Samuel 5 does not say when their attack came,<sup>3</sup> but we can scarcely doubt that it took place very quickly after David's acclamation by all the tribes. The Philistine strategy is plain; they marched in force inland towards the city of Jerusalem, which, with several other non-Israelite cities, separated Judah from Benjamin and the northern tribes. In other words, they aimed to prevent a united Israel becoming a practical reality; if his kingdom was not to fall apart again, David was forced to dislodge them from their vantage point in the valley of Rephaim, just south of Jerusalem. Here they had found level ground in the mountains, and were able

3. The chapter gives the impression that David's capture of Jerusalem took place before the Philistine attack but it is almost certain that the writer was not following chronological order.

to deploy their forces, and await David's attack on terrain of their own choosing. But this advantage was offset by the fact that David was thoroughly conversant with their battle methods, and had a well-trained and flexible army (whereas Saul had been obliged to rely on sheer weight of numbers). It appears that in the first battle David attempted no ruses, but met them in a head-on clash, and defeated them; but 2 Samuel 5:20 gives all too few details.

A single reverse did not deter the Philistines, whose strategy had been sound enough, and in due course they re-grouped, presumably in greater strength, and reoccupied the valley of Rephaim. At some stage they even captured Bethlehem, as 2 Samuel 23:14 reveals. This time David decided to employ a stratagem, making use of his better knowledge of the locality. All the Philistines' attention was concentrated towards the south, naturally enough; but David was able to lead his army round their rear, and attack from the north. A second victory resulted, and this one was much more decisive than the first had been. The Israelite forces followed up their success by driving the Philistines headlong from the hills once again. The pursuit was not halted till the very borders of the Philistines' own territory.

We are not told whether the Philistines made any further attempts to march into the hills of Judah; if they did, they must have been driven back equally competently. More probably they reverted to their earlier tactics of harassing Israelite towns in the foothills, such as Keilah, which David had relieved when in exile from Saul.<sup>4</sup> Later on David carried the war into their own camp, but for the moment he was no doubt content to have repulsed them. The Philistine threat was permanently broken.

One effect of the Philistine strategy in occupying the valley of Rephaim was to underline the fact that geographically (not to mention any other respects) David's kingdom was not a unity. The piece of Canaanite territory lying between the tribal areas of Benjamin and Judah had long created a barrier between Judah and the northern tribes, and David's administration of the northern territories was bound to suffer so long as this state of affairs remained. Now that the Philistine threat was removed, David determined to eliminate this hindrance to the internal security of his realm. Mustering his army, he marched on Jerusalem, the most important Canaanite city in this region.

Jerusalem already had a long history. Signs of occupation of the site date from the third millennium B.C.<sup>5</sup> Egyptian records as early as the nineteenth century B.C. mention the city by the name of Urushalim; so it is clear that the name "Jerusalem" belonged to the city long before it came into Israelite hands. Through most of the

4. See above p. 33.

5. It is reported that newly discovered documents from Ebla mention Jerusalem as early as the twenty-fifth century but relevant texts have yet to be published.

second millenium B.C. Jerusalem was a city-state, ruled by its own kings, like many other Palestinian cities. Genesis 14 introduces us to one of these kings, Melchizedek, a contemporary of Abraham. In about 1500 B.C., Egypt assumed control of Palestine, and the petty kings there became vassal rulers. One of the kings of Jerusalem of this period, by name 'Abdu-Kheba, wrote to his Egyptian overlord, asking for assistance against invaders. His letters are still extant, among the Tell el-Amarna Letters.<sup>6</sup>

The next king of Jerusalem whose name we know was Adonizedek, who led a confederacy of Canaanite<sup>7</sup> kings against Joshua (Joshua 10:1ff.). By now Jerusalem was in the hands of a Canaanite tribe called Jebusites (cf. Genesis 10:15f.), and despite Joshua's victory over Adoni-zedek, it remained in Jebusite hands, and was apparently called "Jebus" after its occupants. Judges 1 relates that at one time Judah defeated the Jebusites (verse 8) and that the Benjaminites lived for years side by side with the Jebusites here (verse 21); but evidently the Canaanite tribe maintained the actual fortress of the city; strongly fortified against attack.

It was therefore no easy task that awaited David's men; the city lay on a well-fortified hill, and the Jebusite garrison obviously considered it impregnable, taunting David with the words "Never shall you come in here; not till you have disposed of the blind and the lame" (2 Samuel 5:6). Perhaps their over-confidence contributed to their downfall; Joab found a way into the city, and the fortress was in Israelite hands before the Jebusites realized what was happening. This route may well have been a water-shaft; the perennial problem of Jerusalem was its lack of a good water supply within the city walls. But the precise meaning of 2 Samuel 5:8 is uncertain as a comparison of the Revised Standard Version with the New English Bible will show; the parallel in 1 Chronicles 11:6 says nothing of the means by which the capture was achieved.

The capture of Jerusalem was but the first step in David's plans for consolidating his realm and uniting his people. He had at one stroke eliminated the Canaanite barrier cutting Judah off from the other tribes; now he proceeded to turn this hitherto alien territory into the very centre of his kingdom. In the first place, he no doubt recognised its strategic value; just as it had served as a major barrier to the full unity of the tribes of Israel, so now it should serve as Israel's most easily defensible stronghold. The deep ravines which

6. El-Amarna is the modern name of ancient Akhetaton, the capital of Egypt during the reign of Akh-en-aton (mid-fourteenth century B.C.). The Amarna tablets, first discovered in 1887; consist of diplomatic correspondence of his reign and that of his predecessor.

7. In this book the term "Canaanite" is used in its wider sense, of the pre-Israelite indigenous inhabitants of Canaan". More strictly the Jebusites and their neighbours were Amorites. See now also J. A. Soggin in J. H. Hayes and J. M. Miller, *Israelite and Judaeon History* (OTL: London, 1977) pp. 353-356.

enclose the city on three sides give it admirable natural protection; but there were some weak links in the defences, obviously, or Joab's men would not have captured it so swiftly, and David soon gave some attention to strengthening the fortifications (cf. 2 Samuel 5:9).

Jerusalem not only replaced Adullam as David's stronghold, it also replaced Hebron as David's capital. The jealousy of the northern tribes towards Judah has already been mentioned, and it was a shrewd diplomatic move to transfer the capital out of the territory of Judah. Jerusalem lay on the border between Judah and Benjamin, without ever having been incorporated into either tribal territory. It is widely believed nowadays that David's realm was never an integrated kingdom, but a joint kingdom linked only in the person of the king;<sup>8</sup> one might perhaps compare the union of England and Scotland in the person of James I (James VI of Scotland). If that view of the matter is correct, there will have been all the more reason for David to find a neutral capital. David did all he could to preserve its neutrality, moreover, taking care not to flood the city with Judaeans retainers. He made it the royal city, "the city of David". His palace builders were neither Judaeans nor Israelite, but Phoenicians, and his personal bodyguard was largely drawn from Philistine ranks. Many Jebusites probably continued to live in Jerusalem, too; it was a Jebusite, Araunah by name, who owned the site of the future temple (2 Samuel 24:16).

David's Jerusalem, therefore, was from the purely secular point of view a very different capital from Saul's Gibeon.<sup>9</sup> But it is not the secular advantages of Jerusalem which have made it the most sacred city on earth to Jew and Christian alike, and the third most holy city in Muslim eyes. David was king in Zion — a name which came to symbolize all the spiritual and religious aspects of the city. The original meaning and application of the name Zion are no longer known for certain, but before long the name became used for the temple hill, and signified the religious capital and centre of Judah, and indeed of all Israel till the kingdom broke into two. It would appear that Zion was the name of the stronghold, the fortified part of the city, at the time of David's capture; but it was not long before David transformed his capture into the holy city, the city of the sanctuary.

Jerusalem had had sacred associations long before David's time.

8. This view was first put forward by A. Alt in 1930 and has since gained wide currency; but see G. Buccellati, *Cities and Nations of Ancient Syria* (*Studi Semitici*, 26: Rome, 1967) pp. 48-154, for persuasive counter-arguments and useful bibliography. The present writer is even more doubtful about Alt's arguments for viewing the kingdom of Judah itself as a twin kingdom (Jerusalem over against the rest of Judah), and the Northern Kingdom as yet another twin unit (the city of Samaria over against "Israel").

9. It is possible that Saul made the important city of Gibeon his capital at one time; the evidence is not really conclusive, however. Cf. J. Blenkinsopp, *Gibeon and Israel* (*The Society for O. T. Study Monograph Series*, 2): Cambridge 1972, pp. 63f.



It has sometimes been doubted whether the Salem of Genesis 14:18 is identical with Jerusalem,<sup>10</sup> but there is good reason to think they were indeed one and the same. Jerusalem had a long history of devotion, then, to 'El 'Elyon, "God Most High", whom the Canaanites worshipped and whom Israel recognised to be none other than Yahweh (cf. Genesis 14:22). No Israelite could reasonably object to David's choice of Jerusalem to be his religious capital, since it contained the shrine where Abraham had welcomed and received the blessing of God Most High.

But David was not content merely to take over the Jebusites' sanctuary as it stood. While his people undoubtedly venerated the ancient shrine where their ancestors had worshipped, they possessed a sacred object which probably meant even more to them, linked as it was with their constitution as a nation under Moses — the ark of the covenant. The ark seems to have been virtually neglected during Saul's reign, and it still lay in the obscurity of a little town on the borders of Judah and Benjamin called Kiriath-jearim (1 Samuel 7:1f.) or Baale-judah (2 Samuel 6:2);<sup>11</sup> it could not have been restored to Shiloh, in any case, if indeed that lay in ruins. David accordingly made due preparations, and brought back the ark to Jerusalem, where he installed it in a tent especially pitched for it. 2 Samuel 6 emphasizes the fact that all Israel joined with David in thus setting up a new central sanctuary for the nation, and describes the joy with which everyone, from the king down, celebrated this event. Only the memory of Uzzah's carelessness and death and the boorish attitude of Saul's daughter Michal to her husband David marred the occasion in any way.

To have charge of the shrine David appointed two priests, Abiathar and Zadok. The former had supported David in times of adversity, and we may see his appointment as a just reward for his loyalties; but it was also only proper that the continuity with the old Shiloh priesthood should be preserved. Abiathar was the obvious choice. Zadok's name is the more famous, since he was the father of the line of Jerusalem high-priests for many generations; not until 174 B.C. was the high-priesthood finally removed from the house of Zadok.<sup>12</sup> Nevertheless, the reason why David appointed him to serve alongside Abiathar is something of a mystery. One suggestion is that he was already functioning there, as the Jebusites' chief priest, and that David merely confirmed him in office. To have done so would have helped to cement relationships with the Jebusites, it is true, but it seems improbable that David, diplomat though he was, can have

10. An alternative possibility is to link it with the "Salim" of John 3:23; but the Salem of Psalm 76:2 is undoubtedly Jerusalem.

11. Or perhaps Baalath-judah (= NEB), for which the Baalah of 1 Chronicles 13:6 would be a natural abbreviation in Hebrew.

12. Cf. F. F. Bruce, *Israel and the Nations* (Exeter, 1963), p. 137.

felt any urgent need to give the Jebusites equal treatment in such a fashion. It seems much more probable that Zadok was already a well-known priest in Israel; he may have acted for a time as Saul's priest, or he may have been in charge of the important sanctuary at Gibeon.<sup>13</sup>

But even if Zadok had no previous links with Jerusalem, David by no means neglected the earlier traditions of worship in that city. There is a striking difference between 1 Samuel 13 and 2 Samuel 6; King Saul had offered sacrifice at Gilgal and been sternly rebuked for it by Samuel, but King David did no less in Jerusalem without any word of censure arising. The reason for the contrast is that Saul had no priestly rights in Gilgal, and had usurped Samuel's prerogative by seizing them; but David, far from usurping anyone else's rights, was merely exercising the age-old prerogatives of the king of Jerusalem. To David and his line the oracle ran as follows: "You are a priest for ever, in the succession of Melchizedek" (Psalm 110:4). Melchizedek had been king and priest in Jerusalem; David similarly appears to have exercised both functions, although he may well have delegated some of his priestly duties to his sons (cf. 2 Samuel 8:18).<sup>14</sup> It appears from 1 Chronicles 15f. that David's own chief services to the shrine lay in the realm of organization of the sacred personnel, and especially of the musical enrichment of the order of worship.

The capture of Jerusalem was thus a most significant event in Israel's history, and indeed in the history of civilization and of faith. It was the genius and insight of one man that brought this about. From a purely military point of view, the city's capture was but one step in the process of mastering and consolidating David's kingdom. Though the Bible nowhere records the fact, David must have gone on to take possession of all the non-Israelite cities within the confines of Israel. The Jerusalem enclave had been one Canaanite obstacle to Israelite unity; Israel's other major defensive weakness, which the Philistines had so recently exploited with great success, was the Plain of Jezreel. Such cities as Megiddo and Beth-shan had been independent too long for Israel's good, and there is no doubt that David made them part of his kingdom; they were certainly in Solomon's hands at the start of his reign (cf. 1 Kings 4:12). Possibly some of these cities tried to oppose David, but it is probable that most were shrewd enough to realize that if even the Philistines were no match for David's armies, they themselves had no choice but to

13. See the discussion by J. Mauchline, "Aaronite and Zadokite priests", *GUOST* 21(1965-6), pp. 1-11. A point to be borne in mind is that Zadok was of Levitical stock, according to 1 Chronicles 24:1-6.

14. The Hebrew text of 2 Samuel 8:18 states unequivocally that they were "priests" (there are no adequate grounds for alternative renderings), but it has been argued that originally the text read "administrators". Cf. G. J. Wenham, *Were David's sons priests?* *ZAW* 87 (1975) pp. 79-82.

submit. Megiddo suffered destruction at about this period, so it would seem that it was one city which did try to resist David.<sup>15</sup>

As for the Philistines, David evidently believed in the adage that the best form of defence is attack, and he asserted his supremacy over them in further victories. He temporarily wrested one of their five major cities, Gath, from their control, according to 1 Chronicles 18:1. But for the most part he was satisfied that they should pay him tribute (cf. 2 Samuel 8:11f.).

In the three centuries or so that separated Moses from Solomon, no major power was in a position to impede either the Israelite occupation of Palestine or her rise to power. In this fact the Jew and Christian alike may well see the hand of God overruling in history. The nearest potential enemies of any size were Assyria and Egypt — the Hittite empire, based on eastern Asia Minor, had collapsed about 1200 B.C. Assyria, however, was at a low ebb throughout this period, due to pressures from the mountain peoples to the north and east of Assyria, and more particularly from the Aramaeans, to the west of them, who swarmed into what we know as Syria. The Assyrians were thus far too busy keeping their own territory intact to pose any threat to Israel as yet. Egypt, which had previously dominated Syria-Palestine, grew weak about 1200 B.C., due very largely to internal problems and pressures, and by David's time its kings were only too glad to seek alliances and friendships with smaller Palestinian states. Thus the small states of Syria-Palestine were left free to pursue their own policies, and David made the best possible use of his opportunities. We do not know what precipitated most of his campaigns, but the details provided in 2 Samuel 10 regarding the outbreak of David's war with the Ammonites give us some insight into the general picture. The Philistines, the Aramaeans, and the Israelites were engaged in a power struggle; and smaller states no doubt formed alliances with one or another of these. Ammon at one time supported Israel (cf. 2 Samuel 10:2), but the day came — probably after the Philistines were defeated — when her king, Hanun, began to suspect David's intentions. He therefore gratuitously insulted David's envoys, and at the same time took the precaution of making alliance with several Aramaean kingdoms. The result was that David became involved in a war of considerable dimensions, from which he eventually emerged the victor. Ammon was captured, and the Aramaeans subdued and forced to pay tribute.

The campaigns against Moab and Edom may have started in somewhat similar fashion. During Saul's reign, David had been on

15. Cf. Y. Yadin, *BA* 33 (1970), p. 95. We may further note the very plausible suggestion that David implemented the instructions of Joshua 21 regarding Levitical cities, many of which were now frontier cities or places of strategic importance; cf. J. Gray, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth* (NCB: London, 1967) pp. 174f.

good terms with the king of Moab, for he had sent his parents there (1 Samuel 22:3f.). David's own great-grandmother, Ruth, had been a Moabitess (Ruth 4:13ff.). So his conquest of Moab and his subsequent savage treatment of the Moabites (2 Samuel 8:2) suggest that they must have broken faith with him in some particularly treacherous fashion. We can only guess, but it is at least conceivable that they took the opportunity to attack him when he was engaged in the life-and-death struggle with the major foe, the Philistines.

The casual reader of the Bible no doubt gets the impression that the Philistines were a single political unity, and that the Syrians (or Aramaeans) were too. We have already noted that on the contrary the Philistines were divided into five major units; but it is at least true that the Philistines seem to have co-ordinated well, and for practical purposes may be viewed as a political entity. The Aramaeans were more fragmented; a century or two later, the Aramaean state which played a continuous part in Israel's affairs was the kingdom of Damascus, and when the Old Testament speaks of "the Syrians" without further definition, it is nearly always Damascus that is intended. In David's reign, several small Aramaean kingdoms were drawn into alliance with the Ammonites, and yet another, Damascus, came to the aid of one of its neighbours, Zobah (2 Samuel 8:5f.). All were alike defeated by David. But one Aramaean kingdom, Geshur, is not mentioned in this connection. Earlier in his career, David had married a princess of Geshur, who bore him Absalom (cf. 2 Samuel 3:3). This will have been a "diplomatic" marriage, and it probably served to keep Geshur neutral during David's wars with the Aramaean states. There is no evidence that David indulged in wanton aggression on all his weaker neighbours. For all we know to the contrary, some provocation lay behind all his campaigns. Nevertheless one can see why the courtiers of the Ammonite king had their suspicions of David's motives.

At any rate, the result of David's wars was that he dominated an area, to the east of his own territory, which extended from the Red Sea (the Gulf of Aqaba) in the south up as far as the Euphrates. In the semi-wilderness south of Judah the Amalekites and other nomadic tribes were subdued (cf. 2 Samuel 8:12), and on Judah's west flank the Philistines were submissive. To the north-west lay the territory of the Phoenicians, centred round the cities of Tyre and Sidon. With them, David entered into a treaty relationship, apparently on a friendly basis, although it is clear that it was David who dictated the terms. The Phoenicians were great maritime traders, and they were content to expand by colonization overseas; otherwise this survivor of the old Canaanite civilization might well have proved troublesome to Israel in later years.