When the prophet Samuel was old, he called Israel to Mizpah and presented Saul as the first king over united Israel. Saul and his successor, David, eventually overthrew their oppressors—the Philistines and other nations that controlled parts of Israel. David also stretched the limits of Israel’s power to include much of the Middle East. Under Solomon, David’s successor, Israel reached the zenith of its power and wealth. With Solomon’s death, however, the kingdom divided, and Israel never again reached political greatness. Following are photographs of places associated with Saul, David, Solomon, and their kingdoms.

“The Lands of Saul, David, and Solomon,” Ensign, June 1990, 45

1. Mizpah, or Nebi Samwil. This hill four miles north of Jerusalem was Mizpah, or Mizpeh. Nebi Samwil, another name for the hill, means the prophet Samuel. It, Gilgal, and Beth-el were the three sites on Samuel’s yearly circuit to judge Israel. (See 1 Sam. 7:16.) It was also the place where, after more than a century of straying, the Israelites gathered before Samuel to renew their covenant with the Lord. The Philistines marched against them there, but the Lord scattered the enemy with a great storm. (See 1 Sam. 7:3–12.) Years later, Samuel again summoned Israel to Mizpah and presented to them their first king, Saul. (See 1 Sam. 10:17–25.)

2. Gibeah. The hill on the right is the site of the ancient town of Gibeah, Saul’s hometown and the capital of his kingdom. Jerusalem, the Jebusite fortress, was dangerously close, two miles to the south. The first test of Saul’s kingship occurred here. The Gileadites were threatened by the Ammonites and sent to Saul for help. Hewing a yoke of oxen into pieces, he sent them by messengers throughout Israel with the words “Whosoever cometh not forth after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done unto his oxen.” (1 Sam. 11:7.) Three hundred and thirty thousand Israelites responded, and from them, he chose his army to save Gilead. (See 1 Sam. 11:1–11.)

3. Geba, Wadi Suweinit, and Michmash. The town of Geba occupies the ridge at center. Behind it, running left to right, is the valley Wadi Suweinit. The distant town on the other side of the wadi is Michmash. When Saul’s son Jonathan defeated the Philistine garrison in Geba, the Philistines stationed thirty thousand chariots and six thousand horsemen at Michmash. The Israelites gathered at Gilgal. When Israel saw the massive Philistine army, many hid. Saul,
overcome with impatience while waiting for Samuel, sacrificed a burnt offering, an ordinance restricted to the Levitical priesthood. Samuel arrived just then and told him that because he did not keep the Lord’s commandment, his kingdom would go to another. By the time Saul and Samuel arrived at Gibeah (off the bottom of the [page 45] photograph), Saul had only six hundred men. However, unknown to Saul, Jonathan and his armor-bearer crossed the valley, climbed the steep slope to Michmash, and slew about twenty men. Adding to the commotion was an earthquake. As the pandemonium at the Philistine camp increased, Saul attacked, and the Philistines fled. The Israelites in hiding joined in the pursuit, and Israel was delivered. (See 1 Sam. 13:2–14:23.)

4. Valley of Elah. The Valley of Elah lies between the high ridge and hill range in the background and the hill range in the foreground. Both Beth-lehem and Hebron are situated on the ridge, though neither is visible in the photo. The Philistine army occupied the near hilltop, and the Israelite army, the far hilltop. Goliath, a giant nearly 9 1/2 feet tall, presented himself every day for forty days, challenging any Israelite to fight him. The young man David accepted the challenge [page 46] and slung a stone into Goliath’s forehead. The Israelites then arose and chased the Philistines to Gath and Ekron. (See 1 Sam. 17:1–54.)

5. Gath. The mound in the center of this photograph is where Gath used to be. Of the five principle Philistine cities, Gath was the closest to Israel. This was Goliath’s home. (See 1 Sam. 17:4.) After slaying Goliath, David became Saul’s captain, but his popularity aroused Saul’s jealousy and fear. The king tried to kill David, and so David fled, trying to find refuge at Gath. The people were suspicious of him, however, so he feigned madness and fled to the Judean Wilderness. (See 1 Sam. 21:10–15.) After some time in the wilderness, David again approached [page 47] Achish, king of Gath, for refuge. Achish eventually gave David Ziklag, to the south, where he protected the Philistines’ southern border. (See 1 Sam. 27:1–28:2.) After David became Israel’s king, he conquered Gath and her towns. (See 1 Chr. 18:1.) Achish was still alive at the beginning of Solomon’s reign, probably ruling as a vassal king. (See 1 Kgs. 2:39.)
6. Beth-shan Valley and Mount Gilboa. Mount Gilboa overlooked a key pass between the Jezreel and Jordan valleys. Beth-shan, or Beth-shean, was a powerful Canaanite city just northeast of Gilboa. The inhabitants possessing iron chariots, and Issachar and Manasseh couldn’t dispossess them. (See Josh. 17:11–12, 16.) Mount Gilboa can be seen at the upper left, with the pass at its foot (upper center). The mound in the center is the site of Beth-shan. After one battle, the Philistines pursued Saul and his army to Mount Gilboa, where they killed Saul and three of his sons—Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchi-shua. Their bodies were hung on the wall of Beth-shan. Incensed, men from Jabesh-Gilead to the east rescued the bodies at night. They cremated them, buried the bones, and fasted seven days. (See 1 Sam. 31.) At Ziglag, David heard the news and mourned the deaths in one of the most moving passages in the Old Testament. (See 2 Sam. 1:1–4, 17–27.)

7. Ophel Ridge and David’s City. The City of David was located on the southern ridge, called Ophel, of Mount Moriah. Its boundaries were the Kidron Valley (the steep valley to the right of center) and the Tyropoeon Valley, which has been largely filled in since David’s time. The Tyropoeon ran roughly from the left corner of the wall (above center) in a wide curve to the right, ending just below center, where it joined Kidron. (The wall above center currently encloses Moslem edifices: the small dome is the El-Aksa Mosque; the large dome, the Dome of the Rock.) After the twelve tribes asked David to become king over all Israel, he captured the stronghold of Jerusalem, which had remained in Jebusite hands until that day, and made it the capital, calling it the city of [page 48] David. (See 2 Sam. 5:4–9.) The spring Gihon, near the bottom of the Kidron (straight down from the right corner of the wall), provided water, which the Jebusites had funneled into the city. Shortly before his death, David had Solomon anointed king at Gihon. (See 1 Kgs. 1:38–40.) Solomon built the temple on Mount Moriah, near where the Moslem buildings stand today. The hilltop was originally much narrower. Before Jesus’ birth, King Herod built the walls for his temple complex on the slopes, flattening the hilltop to fill in the space between the walls.
8. Dead Sea and mountains of Moab. The Dead Sea, known as the Salt Sea or sea of the plain in the Old Testament, fills the center of the photograph. Behind it are the mountains of Moab. Before it is part of the Valley of Salt. On the Israelite side, the shore could be traversed its entire length. En-gedi, where David hid for a time, is a freshwater [page 49] spring by the shore. In his conquests after becoming king, David conquered Edom, which extended south from the Dead Sea to the Gulf of Aqaba, by defeating eighteen thousand Edomites in the Valley of Salt. (See 1 Chr. 18:12–13.)

9. Ancient and modern copper mines. In the center of the photograph are copper mines that probably provided Solomon with metal. The mines have been mined continuously since his days. Furthermore, Solomon controlled the area because his port city, Ezion-geber, was nearby. The northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba (Red Sea), where the port was, is just visible in the upper right corner. The brass Solomon had cast could not be weighed because of its abundance. (See 1 Kgs. 7:13–47.) The term brass in the Old Testament could refer to copper or to either of its alloys—brass or bronze.

10. Wadi Ram. Just south of the Edomite plateau, which is off the bottom of the photograph, is this rock-filled sandy plain—Wadi Ram. The King’s Highway, a principal trade route from the north, split in the desert near the plateau. The route leading to southern Arabia ran through this wadi. The Queen of Sheba would probably have used this wadi on her trip to meet Solomon. (See 1 Kgs. 10:1–10.) It was well traveled and served to connect Solomon’s port with the King’s Highway.
Shechem. In the foreground is the excavation site for the ancient city of Shechem. Behind it, on the slope of Mount Gerizim, is part of the modern city of Nablus. The kingdom of Solomon split apart at Shechem. After Solomon’s death, all Israel gathered at Shechem. The people, led by Jeroboam, asked Rehoboam, Solomon’s son, if he would reduce taxes, but he answered that he would increase them. Ten tribes then broke off from Judah and Benjamin, and Rehoboam fled for his life. The ten tribes then made Jeroboam their king. Rehoboam was left to rule over the southern two tribes. (See 1 Kgs. 12:1–24.)

Photography by Richard Cleave and Church Educational System

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