

THE STORY
OF THE BIBLE

VOLUME SIX

Herbert W. Armstrong led the Worldwide Church of God (formerly The Radio Church of God until 1968) until his death in 1986. Hundreds of millions heard his voice and read his literature. God called him in the fall of 1926 and he was converted in the spring of 1927. Over the course of Mr. Armstrong's ministry, God revealed through him a great many true biblical doctrines, which had been lost to the Church through the centuries. After his death, his successors ceased to believe and teach these doctrines. Although copyright law prohibits The Restored Church of God from reproducing and distributing literature produced while he led the Worldwide Church of God, we are committed to the preservation and teaching of all of these truths!

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VOLUME SIX

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INTRODUCTION

by David C. Pack

This is the sixth volume of a special series. These books truly represent “THE STORY OF THE BIBLE.” Many have attempted to write various kinds of “Bible Story Books,” but they are usually written only for children, and are primarily designed to entertain instead of *educate* or *inspire*. The reader will see that the wonderful style and artwork of this series capture the spirit of God’s Word, with its intended lessons and vital meaning.

Most children’s versions of the Bible terribly misrepresent important stories that it contains—and they are written with wrong emphasis—and wrong *meaning*! Instead of leading children to the true God, and to the true doctrines of His Word, children are left with the impression that the Bible only contains a *few* stories, and is mostly a book about war, violence, blood, thunder and death.

This is terribly wrong!

In keeping with the modern generation’s obsession with graphic violence, most efforts to reflect the teachings of the Bible “play” to this interest. Youth are given what they *want* to read, not what they *need* to understand. The many stories of the Bible are intended to teach VITAL LESSONS to people of *all* ages. Modern writers miss the mark when they *cater to* children, rather than properly *teach* them what God intends.

If young people learn the Bible in a *wrong* way—with emphasis on the *wrong* things, while ignoring the enormous number of lessons that the Bible contains—at least two bad things result.

First, all these wrong concepts and approaches must be unlearned and replaced by right knowledge and understanding of what the Bible *really* says. Unlearning error is a most difficult thing to do, and is actually far harder than learning the truth correctly the first time, leaving no need to sweep the mind clean of what has been wrong or misunderstood.

Second, young people will later find the stories of the Bible have been trivialized and made irrelevant, and they may find themselves turned off by its message rather than being excited and thrilled about what they are learning.

The modern system of education is morally and spiritually bankrupt! Deluded educators have been biased against God and His Word by the

atheistic teaching of evolution poured into them from childhood. They have taught young people for decades that there are “no absolutes” and that they must follow “situation ethics.” They have led the world into a kind of secular humanism—where people are driven by how they *feel* rather than clear definitions of *right* and *wrong*! But there is right and wrong in life—and those who are teaching the children of this world have cut themselves off from this knowledge (Isaiah 59:1-2). They cannot teach what they were never taught!

Also, this world’s churches keep young people steeped in traditional pagan philosophies and teachings that have deceived the world for millennia. They have ignored the great spiritual principle of CAUSE and EFFECT that governs *every* aspect of life. They have neglected to teach true *spiritual* values. They have defaulted their responsibility in all the critical areas of leadership—and have utterly failed in their greatest responsibility, which should have been to instill in young minds the marvelous truths of God’s Word—to teach youth how to live, not just how to earn a living.

This is a tragic state of affairs!

Many who attempt to study the Bible become confused, frustrated and disillusioned, believing that it is too difficult to understand. As a result, many who *would* seek to teach their children true Christian standards and values, either give up altogether or leave such education to the *many* theological “experts,” who offer no end of differing—and conflicting—views.

Such an approach only serves to further confuse young people about the Bible, thus, in many cases, alienating them from it. But those who truly seek to understand God’s Word, without adding their own interpretation (II Peter 1:20), will find that there *is* simplicity in it (II Corinthians 11:3).

Children need to be taught this simplicity! They need to know who and what they are—and why they were born—that they are future sons of God in the making!

You were born for a *reason*. Your life has a SUPREME PURPOSE! The Bible reveals how to be in harmony with the true God—and His purpose for life. The world is ignorant of this. So are most parents. They have no idea how or what to teach their children. No one is guiding parents, because no one knows *how* to guide them. Sadly, though the Bible is a gripping, interesting—even *fascinating*—book of true stories (all part of one great story), most find it dull, dry and boring.

This series is written to completely change this misconception in the minds of people of all ages! It uses language designed to expand your mind through the use of word pictures. Our goal has been to make the

Bible *real*—to make it talk directly to parents and children. With only a little explanation, parents will be able to read these volumes to children as young as age three.

In today's world, youth are universally misguided, abused, neglected and ignored and this fuels a variety of rampant, escalating social problems. This is because society as a whole has rejected the SOURCE of true happiness, success, peace and fulfillment—GOD'S WORD. As King Solomon admonished, "Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it" (Proverbs 22:6).

How many are even *attempting* to do this today?

Many true doctrines of God were restored to His Church in the middle of the 20th century. By the 1990s, they had largely been discarded by its new leaders. Part of our commission is to once again "restore what was restored" and to continue to "turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers" (Malachi 4:6). The Restored Church of God *has* completely restored *all* God's doctrines to the Church!

Under the faithful leadership of Herbert W. Armstrong (1892-1986), various Church youth programs were established as part of the fulfillment of this important responsibility. These included the Y.O.U. program (Youth Opportunities United—for teens), and the Y.E.S. program (Youth Educational Services—for young children). There was also a *Summer Educational Program* (S.E.P.), providing teenagers with the opportunity to fellowship with other teens and develop many skills and talents in a camp environment.

There was also much youth-oriented *literature*, offered to the young people of God's Church. These included a *Youth* magazine for teenagers, *Youth Bible Lessons* for children from kindergarten through sixth grade—and *The Bible Story* series.

Children are far too precious to ignore or neglect. While parents *must utilize* the tools that are available to them, they cannot do this if these tools have not been created.

As the only true extension of Mr. Armstrong's ministry, The Restored Church of God is re-creating these same written tools—as well as the magazines, books, booklets, articles and letters that once taught the full truth of God to millions around the world.

This series is being rewritten—with new volumes to appear on a regular basis—to once again make the Bible *simple*, so that the stories in it come to life! But these volumes are *not* just for children! It is our hope that parents and children alike will enjoy and benefit from them. Its forerunner was a six-volume work, once described as "written for children 5 to 105." The original series is no longer available—but this new one is!

CHAPTER EIGHTY-ONE

LEARNING FROM CORRECTION

Our story thus far: With God on his side, instructing and guiding him, David had become a great and powerful king. And as long as he continued to obey God and put His will first, David was blessed with success. God delivered Jerusalem—which had been controlled by the idol-worshipping Jebusites—into David’s hand, and the city became the capital of Israel. God also helped His servant defeat the invading army of the Philistines. David and his men chased the enemy for miles, all the way back to Philistine territory (II Samuel 5:4-25).

Bringing the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem

With things going so well for him, David did not forget that God was the true source of all his successes. The king also knew that he could not successfully rule over Israel unless he continued to seek God’s will. So David counseled with the leaders of Israel and proposed that the Ark of the Covenant be brought to Israel’s new capital. The leaders agreed to the king’s plan.

David and 30,000 of Israel’s finest troops, along with a team of priests and Levites, marched to the town of Kiriath-Jearim, about ten miles west of Jerusalem. During Saul’s reign, the Ark had been kept there in the home of Abinadab (I Samuel 7:1-2).

The sacred Ark was put on a cart pulled by oxen, with Uzzah and Ahio, Abinadab’s sons, guiding it. Meanwhile, the Israelites celebrated, playing harps, tambourines, trumpets and other musical instruments. Other people danced with all their might to show God how much they appreciated Him guiding and protecting Israel.

But as the cart came down a steep hill, the oxen stumbled. Afraid that the Ark of the Covenant would fall out, Uzzah reached out and took hold of it.

Suddenly, the people stopped dancing, and the music stopped playing. All eyes were on the lifeless body of Uzzah, for God had struck him dead!

God was angry, for even though they had meant well, Uzzah and the

other Israelites were not careful to obey the specific instructions God had given long ago regarding His Ark. God had commanded that the Ark of the Covenant be carried only by Levites who descended from the family of Kohath. But the Kohathites were forbidden to touch the Ark. Instead, they were supposed to carry it on their shoulders, with staves or long poles going through the golden rings on the sides of the Ark. (See Numbers 3:30-31, 4:15, 7:9 and Exodus 25:2-15).

Carrying the Ark of the Covenant—which symbolized God’s heavenly throne—on a cart was disrespectful. But God knew that His people had not carefully studied His laws and statutes, so He chose to be patient and merciful. Yet, when Uzzah touched the sacred Ark, the symbol of God’s power and supreme rulership, Israel had gone too far. God had to punish Uzzah and get His people’s attention.

Uzzah’s sudden death made King David and all the Israelites stop and consider. The king was both upset and afraid. “How can we take the Ark to Jerusalem?” he wondered.

Wanting to avoid more of God’s wrath, David decided to leave the Ark at the home of Obed Edom, who lived in a Levite town called Gath Rimmon (Joshua 21:24-25). David intended that the Ark stay there until God revealed what He wanted him to do (II Samuel 6:1-9; I Chronicles 13:1-13).

Studying God’s Law

Taking Uzzah’s life might seem harsh, especially when he, in his mind, was trying to do something good. But God’s will and overall plan is greater and better than the good intentions of human beings. Like a caring parent, God sometimes has to “spank” His people so that they will obey Him. He knows that only by following His perfect laws will people be truly happy and prosperous.

David studied God’s Law to see where Israel went wrong. Three months later, he assembled the leaders of Israel and told them what he had discovered.

“No man is to carry the Ark of the Covenant except for the Levites. Long ago, God had chosen the Kohathites of Levi to transport His Ark on poles, but they must not touch it.”

He then ordered that Zadok and Abiathar the priests and six of the head Levites sanctify—set themselves apart—before setting out to bring back the Ark. “This is why God had to correct us, because we failed to study His laws and seek His counsel about the proper way to do things.”

God’s punishment worked, causing David to seek to do things God’s way. And though Uzzah was not there to see this, in the future

he will be resurrected and given a chance to be born into the kingdom of God.

Now that he had learned God's lesson, David assembled the priests and the Levites and went to get the Ark the right way. Meanwhile, during the three months that the Ark had been at Obed Odom's house, God had blessed the Levite, his family and everything that belonged to him.

A Lesson of Respect

David, the elders of Israel and his military officers, along with singers, musicians and dancers, came to Obed Odom's home filled with joy. As the people celebrated, animal sacrifices were offered to God. As the Ark was triumphantly brought into the City of David, the king, led by the Holy Spirit, was so overjoyed that he danced before God with all his might. David wanted his Creator to know how much he appreciated Him.

Meanwhile, Michal, David's first wife, looked down from her window and watched as the Ark was being carried into the city. When she saw David leaping and dancing among the citizens, wearing just an ephod of fine linen, she was not pleased. Michal did not appreciate the importance of this special event; she only focused on her husband's behavior, which embarrassed her.

The Ark was placed inside a tabernacle, which David had specially set up for it. Then the king worshipped God by having peace offerings burnt on an altar. Next, the people were blessed, with each man and woman receiving a small loaf of bread, some meat and a cake of raisins. Then everyone returned to their homes.

When David returned to his home, he was met by Michal, who was angry and upset. Using sarcasm, she said, "Look how glorious the king of Israel behaved today! You acted shamelessly, dancing around half-naked in front of all the maidservants! You should have been wearing your royal robes!"

David stared at her. Though Michal was a beautiful woman, at that moment her attitude was hostile and ugly. He knew that she was only thinking about herself.

He said to her, "The Eternal chose me to be king, instead of your father or anyone else in your family. Today, I celebrated to honor God—not the maidservants. If you think that my dancing before God was undignified, then I will show you just how undignified I can be, and humble myself. As for the maidservants, they will still honor me."



Michal was not pleased to watch her husband David dance and leap during the celebration.

The Bible reveals that Michal never bore any children. Possibly, God had punished her for being proud and disrespectful toward His anointed leader. This punishment also prevented her from providing a successor to David's throne from the family of Saul (II Samuel 6:1-23).

Military Conquests

To strengthen Israel and tighten his kingdom's security, David set out to attack his enemies who were causing his people trouble. He defeated the Philistines, even conquering Gath, their chief city, and the towns and villages surrounding it. Israel was now free from the Philistines' control.

Then David took on the Moabites, slaying the older adults while sparing the young Moabites. The people of Moab were then forced to become David's servants and pay tribute to him.

Next, David set out for the Euphrates River to recover lost territory that had been promised to Abraham and his descendants (Gen. 15:18-21; Deuteronomy 1:7; 11:24; Joshua 1:4). On the way there, he crushed the army of Hadadezer, the king of Zobah, a Syrian kingdom that lay north. David and his troops captured 1,000 chariots, 7,000 horse soldiers and 20,000 troops! (The king wrote about this great victory, recorded in Psalm 60).

He followed God's command not to gather for himself war horses and chariots to rely upon for victory in battle. David had all but 100 of the chariot horses disabled, by hamstringing them (cutting the sinews of their hind legs).

A Syrian army from Damascus came to King Hadadezer's aid, but David destroyed them, killing 22,000 troops. David left garrisons of his soldiers in Damascus, forcing the Syrians to be his servants and pay him tribute.

Hadadezer's officers had carried into battle shields of gold, which were decorated with impressive insignias, symbolizing power and might. These became David's spoils of war, and were brought back to Jerusalem, along with bronze from Bethah and Berothai, cities that had belonged to King Hadadezer.

When Toi, the king of Hamath, learned that David had defeated Hadadezer, their common enemy, Toi sent his son Joram to congratulate the king of Israel. Hamath was another Syrian kingdom, located about 100 miles north of Damascus, and was at war with King Hadadezer.

Wanting to establish good relations with David, King Toi made sure that his son honored the king with gifts of gold, silver and

bronze. This also showed David that Toi was voluntarily submitting to him.

Always mindful that it was God who blessed him in battle, David dedicated these gifts to the Eternal, just as he had done with the other spoils of war from his previous conquests.

David also fought against the army of Edom south of the Red Sea, in the Valley of Salt. Again, God delivered victory into His servant's hand, and 18,000 enemy troops were slain. David then left garrisons throughout the land of Edom, forcing the citizens to serve him and pay tribute.

Wherever David went, God blessed him with great success (II Samuel 8:1-14).

David Builds His Government

Though David was king, he understood that he could not possibly take care of every single detail in his kingdom. So he appointed certain men to key government positions to ensure that his commands were carried out. His nephew Joab was the chief commander of his army. Jehoshaphat was the recorder, who kept the key records of important political events and various administrative functions within David's government. Zadok and Abiathar were the priests. Seraiah was David's secretary, or scribe. Benaiah was captain of David's elite team of bodyguards, the Cherathites and Pelethites. And David's sons served as chief ministers.

One of the reasons this was recorded in the Bible is to give an example of how Jesus Christ will govern in the world tomorrow. In the near future, Christ will rule the earth with Spirit-born servants—those who have obeyed Him and built holy, righteous character during their human lifetimes—making up His government. They will diligently carry out His commands and take care of the people's needs, seeing to it that everyone around the world live in peace and happiness. (See Isaiah 9:7, Jeremiah 23:5 and 33:15).

An Unusual Act of Kindness

While he enjoyed the great blessings God had showered upon him, something gnawed at the back of David's mind. He thought about his promise to Jonathan, his best friend, and wondered if any of Saul's family members were still alive. Years earlier, David and Jonathan had promised to be kind to each other's descendants (I Samuel 20:15, 42; 18:3, 20). Since Jonathan was no longer alive, David wanted to fulfill his oath.

There were still descendants of Saul who were alive, but they wanted to stay out of David's sight. They feared that David would hunt them down, thinking that they posed a threat to his throne. But they did not understand that David thought no such thing. He only wanted to do good.

The king had Ziba, one of Saul's former chief servants, come before him, and asked if there were any survivors among Saul's family line.

Ziba answered, "Yes, one of Jonathan's sons is still alive—but he can't walk. His feet are disabled."

"Really?" David said. "Where is this man? What is his name?"

"His name is Mephibosheth. He's in Lo Debar, on the other side of the Jordan River. He lives with Machir, a man of considerable wealth."

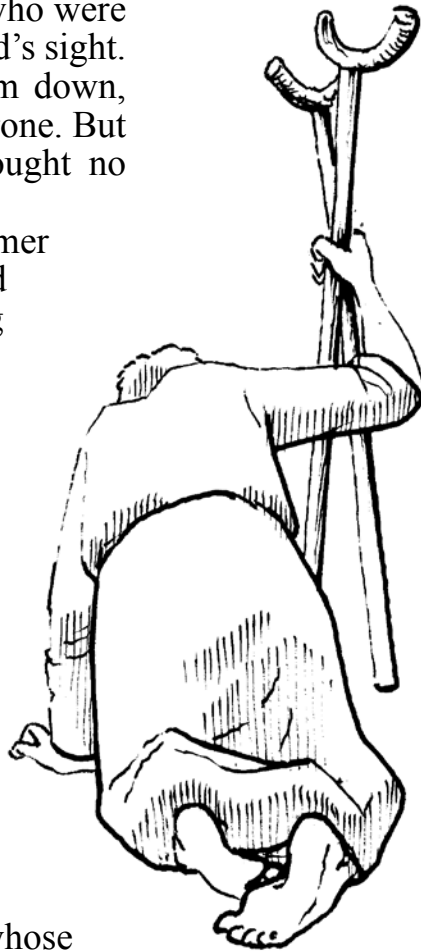
Excited, David sent servants to Lo Debar to bring Jonathan's son to Jerusalem. When Mephibosheth was brought before the king, he feared for his life.

David looked down on the man, whose face was bent down to the ground. The king said, "Don't be afraid. Before he died in battle, your father Jonathan was my closest friend. Because of his kindness and respect toward me, I will show kindness and respect toward you. For your father's sake, I am restoring to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul. Also, from this moment on, you shall always be welcome to eat dinner with me at my table."

Mephibosheth could scarcely believe his ears. He did not expect to receive such unusual honor from the king. "Is this some kind of cruel joke?" he wondered.

He bowed, and said to David, "What am I to you, my lord? I'm nothing more than a dead dog." Mephibosheth felt that he was useless, especially since his feet were lame. He did not expect such kindness from David, and knew that he had no way to repay him.

As king, David could have kept the land for himself. Instead, he chose



**Mephibosheth,
Jonathan's son,
had lame feet.**

to keep his word to Jonathan, even though he was dead. Only a man of true character would do such a thing.

Saul's property was so big, it needed a team of servants to manage and care for it. So David called for Ziba—who, with his 15 sons and 20 servants, had acquired a certain measure of power and influence—and told him that everything that had belonged to Saul would now go back to his grandson. "Since you were once Saul's chief servant, you will become chief steward of Saul's estate. You and your sons and servants will work for Mephibosheth. You will farm his land and harvest his crops, and provide food for him and his servants."

Ziba obeyed. He and his family and servants worked the land for Mephibosheth, while Jonathan's son ate at David's table every night. David treated him like his own son (II Samuel 9:1-13).

Listening to Bad Advice

The death of King Nahash of Ammon concerned David, for he had been an ally. When he heard that Hanun, Nahash's son, was crowned king, David wanted to maintain friendly relations with the Ammonite kingdom. So he sent a team of his royal representatives to Ammon to offer his condolences, and to show loyalty and support to the new king.

The representatives went to Rabbah, Ammon's capital, about 24 miles east of the Jordan River, opposite of Jericho.

But King Hanun listened to his court of advisors, who told him not to trust David. "Do you really believe he cares about honoring your father? These men aren't here to comfort you—they are probably spies. They want to spy out the city and look for weaknesses so that David's army can overthrow it!"

Hanun was not used to being a ruler. His inexperience caused him to rely on bad advice instead of wise counsel. He had David's men arrested. But that was not enough. King Hanun and his officials wanted to send David a "message"—so they humiliated the Israelite men by shaving off their beard on one side of their faces, and by cutting off their robes at just below the waist. This was one of the many shameful practices done to prisoners of war (Isaiah 20:4).

When King David heard what had happened, Hanun's "message" was clear to him: The kingdom of Ammon had become Israel's enemy!

David sent word to his representatives to stay in Jericho until their beards grew back. He wanted to spare them the further disgrace of being seen in Jerusalem.

A Humiliating Defeat

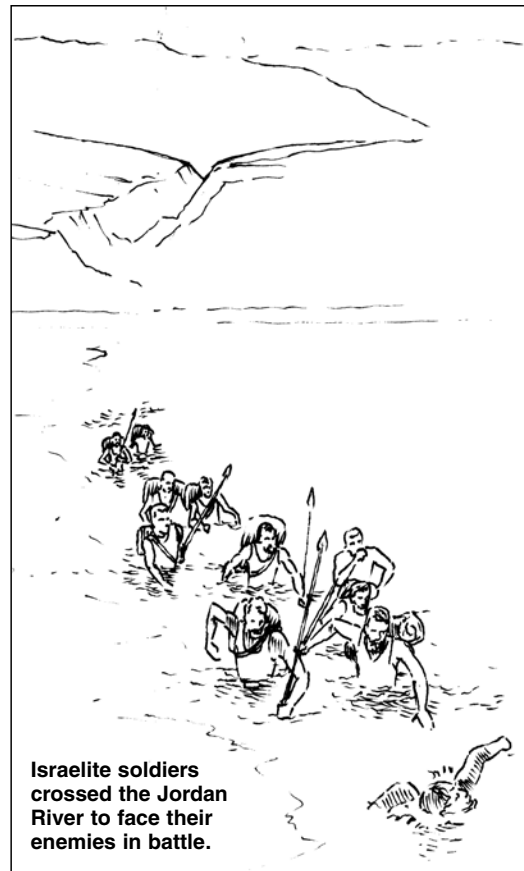
The people of Ammon knew they had made David furious, so they took 1,000 talents of silver (I Chronicles 19:6) and hired mercenaries—professional soldiers who went from kingdom to kingdom, looking to fight for whoever paid them the most money. About 20,000 Syrian troops from Beth Rehob and Zobah, along with 1,000 soldiers from King Maacah and 1,200 from the region of Ish Tob, joined up with Ammon's army. These mercenaries wanted more than just money—they also sought revenge for David's conquests of their cities.

David heard that these troops had assembled, and he sent Joab, the commander of Israel's army, to head off the new threat. Joab and his men marched to Rabbah. While the Ammonite army readied the capital for Israel's attack, the Syrian mercenaries encamped in nearby fields around the city. Seeing what he was up against, Joab divided his troops to take on both forces. He led one division, while his brother Abishai led the other one. Joab and his men attacked the mercenaries and ran them off. When the Ammonites saw this, they withdrew from the battlefield and barricaded themselves in the city.

Joab and his men joined up with Abishai's forces. But instead of attacking the city, Joab decided to wait. He knew that besieging the city would cost time, so he decided to wait for spring, when weather conditions would be to his advantage, and there would be plenty of food for his troops, due to the spring harvest. So Joab and his men returned to Jerusalem.

The Syrians could not bear to live with their defeat, so they called for more troops from other Syrian kingdoms to join against Israel. Soldiers from as far as the other side of the Euphrates River answered the call.

But David and his men found out about this. The whole army



of Israel crossed the Jordan River and marched to the town of Helam, which was close to the northern border of Gilead. There, they met the assembling Syrian armies. 700 enemy chariots and 40,000 horse soldiers were destroyed, while the survivors ran for their lives. Once again, God fought David's battles for him.

The kings who had made war against David realized that they could not defeat him, so they made peace with him, and became his servants.

All that was left for Israel's army to do was to wait until spring, and attack the city of Rabbah (II Samuel 10:1-19).

CHAPTER EIGHTY-TWO

A LONG, HARD FALL INTO THE SNARE OF SIN!

Spring had finally come. The weather was warmer, travel was easier, and there was an abundance of crops throughout the land. David ordered Joab to take Israel's massive army to Rabbah and attack the city. He soon received word that Joab's troops had met the Ammonites on the battlefield and defeated them. However, just like what had happened months earlier, the enemy ran back into Rabbah, ready to defend the city to the death.

David was accustomed to waging warfare, and he wanted to be there with his troops. But he was getting older, and he knew that his nephew Joab was a capable army commander. Still, it frustrated David to stay home in Jerusalem while his men fought (II Samuel 11:1).

A Disgraceful Sin

One evening, David could not get to sleep, so he went outside, thinking that the fresh, cool air would relax him. As he paced on the flat of his roof, which was a custom in those days, he looked down into his neighbor's courtyard and saw a beautiful young woman bathing herself.

Right then and there, David should have turned away. But he didn't. He stared down at the woman, and allowed his mind to entertain wrong thoughts. "I wonder who she is?" he thought. "It couldn't hurt to simply ask about her," he reasoned. David thought that he was in control of his thoughts, but he was being misled by Satan the Devil, whom the Bible calls "the god of this world" (II Cor. 4:4). Satan was tempting David to desire what did not belong to him. Sadly, David gave in to this temptation and broke the Tenth Commandment: "You shall not covet your neighbor's house, you shall not covet your neighbor's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor anything that is your neighbor's" (Exodus 20:17).

The king was so attracted to this young woman that he asked one of his servants to find out her identity. The servant said, "Her

name is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite.”

The fact that she was another man’s wife should have told David to drop the matter. But the king allowed his feelings to guide him, instead of allowing God’s Spirit to steer him in the right direction. David kept trying to get as close to sin as possible. He sent some messengers to bring Bathsheba back to his home.

Then he and Bathsheba broke the Seventh Commandment: “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14). Their sin disgraced Uriah and Eliam, who had trusted and served their king. It was also a disgrace to Israel—and most of all, to God (II Samuel 11:2-4).

From Adultery and Betrayal to Deception

Some time later, Bathsheba found out that she was with child—and the unborn son was David’s! When the king found out about this, he knew that his sin would be known throughout Israel. Uriah, who was out in battle fighting against the city of Rabbah, would learn that his king had betrayed him. All of Israel would discover that David had abused the power God had entrusted to him to shepherd His people. David could not bear to let this happen.

He sent a message to Joab, commanding him to send Uriah home. When Uriah returned from battle and came before the king, David asked him about Israel’s progress against the enemy. He wanted Uriah to be comfortable and at ease.

Then the king told him, “Go home, Uriah, and clean up. I’m sure that you would like to be with your wife.” David even had dinner sent to Uriah’s home so that the married couple would enjoy an intimate evening together.

David’s plan was to deceive Uriah into thinking that the baby Bathsheba was carrying was his. In doing so, David was committing another sin to cover up his sin of adultery.

The next morning, David found out that his plan had backfired. Uriah did not go home, but stayed the night in the guards’ barracks. When the king asked him why, Uriah said, “How can I go home to my wife and sleep in a warm, comfortable bed while my fellow soldiers are camping out in tents? I couldn’t do such a thing.”

Uriah wanted to be a loyal example to his men.

But David was not about to give up his plan of deception. The next day, he invited Uriah to have dinner with him. The king made sure that Uriah had plenty of wine to drink—in fact, he drank so much that he became drunk! David then sent Uriah home, knowing that he would

not remember whether he was intimate with his wife that night. In this way, David thought he could fool Uriah into accepting the unborn child as his own.

But once again, David's scheme did not go as planned, for Uriah had spent the night sleeping on a mat near the palace guards.

When David discovered this, he had two paths to choose from: Repent, ask God for His forgiveness and face the consequences of his actions—or continue trying to work things out on his own.

Unfortunately, David decided to rely upon himself. Most likely, he reasoned that it was easier (and less humiliating) to try to “fix” the consequences of his sins than to admit he did wrong and face the potential wrath of Bathsheba's husband (II Samuel 11:5-13).

From Deception to Murder

Early the next morning, the king wrote a letter to Joab and told Uriah to deliver it. Being a loyal and dedicated soldier, Uriah obeyed and marched off to the frontline.

When he arrived, Uriah handed Joab the king's letter. Joab opened it, and was surprised by its message. David had written, “Set Uriah at the forefront of the battle, where the fighting is heaviest. Then pull your troops away from him so that he will be struck down and die.”

Joab looked up from the letter and stared into Uriah's eyes, and realized that David had used Uriah to deliver his own death warrant.

Joab did as he was commanded. Uriah courageously went out into the thick of battle, fighting for his king and countrymen, unaware that David was using the Ammonites to murder him. When the enemy came out of the city with its fiercest soldiers, Uriah fought valiantly against them—but he and several other Israelite soldiers were slain.

Joab sent word back to David. When Bathsheba was told that her husband was dead, she mourned for him, according to the customary length of time. (This lasted at least seven days, perhaps longer – see Genesis 50:10 and I Samuel 31:13.) Then David married her.

The Bible does not mention that David mourned over Uriah's death. This is probably because he justified his wrong actions, for sin is like drunkenness—when one gives himself over to the way of sin, he can no longer make right judgments (II Samuel 11:14-27).

You may be wondering why David, a righteous man, fell into the snare of sin. Remember that he had everything going his way. He had many wives and concubines and lived in a grand palace, and God had blessed him with many victories in battle. But, as is typical when people are physically content and satisfied, and are not struggling

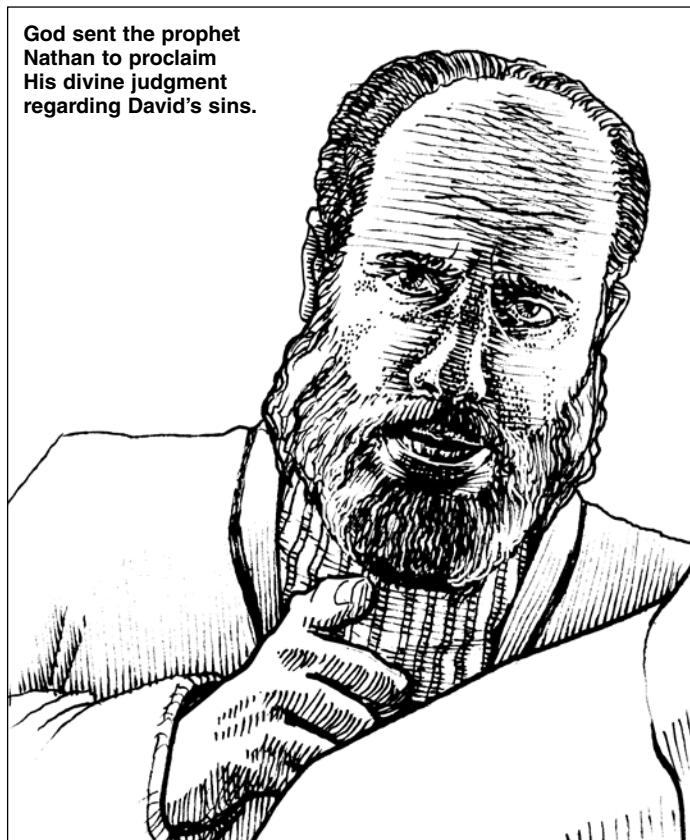
with trials, they tend to forget God and rely on themselves. It becomes easier to justify sinning “just a little.” But “little” sins easily snowball into bigger sins and people soon find themselves trapped in a cycle of breaking God’s Law—ultimately leading to pain, suffering and death.

But God is very patient and gives His people time to repent—to change their minds and ways and to turn back to Him.

“You Are the Man!”

David had committed adultery, murdered a loyal friend, and coveted another man’s wife—breaking the seventh, sixth and tenth commandments. But in reality, he had broken ALL of God’s commandments! The apostle James was inspired to write, “If you fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you do well...For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, *he is guilty of all*. For He that said, ‘Do not commit adultery,’ said also, ‘Do not kill.’ Now if you commit no adultery, yet if you kill, *you are become a transgressor of the law*” (James 2:8, 10-11)!

God was fully aware of the sins that David was piling up, and He was not pleased. It grieved God to see that the young, humble shepherd



God sent the prophet Nathan to proclaim His divine judgment regarding David’s sins.

boy who had grown to trust and rely on Him was now relying upon himself, deciding for himself how to live. God knew that something had to be done—otherwise, David would be spiritually ruined, hardened to the point of no longer feeling guilty for sinning. (Notice I Timothy 4:2.)

As king of Israel, David continued to handle the normal business of deciding legal matters and disputes among his citizens. And yet something was gnawing at

his conscience. Even though Bathsheba was now his wife, and their baby son had been born to them—and even though Israel was safe from its enemies and the people adored their king—David was not content. He would never be fully satisfied until he was right with God.

It was then that the prophet Nathan approached David's throne and addressed the king:

“My lord, I am here to tell you about two men who lived in the same city. One man was rich and had need of nothing, while the other was poor. The rich man owned many flocks of sheep and herds of cattle, yet the poor man owned nothing, except for one little lamb. The poor man took special care of this little lamb, feeding and protecting her, as it grew up with his children. He even let her eat from his own plate and drink from his cup and sleep on his lap. She was a part of his family.”

David leaned forward as Nathan continued his story.

“But one day a traveler visited the rich man. The rich man did not want to take a sheep or ox from his many possessions and hold a feast for his guest—so he stole the poor man's lamb and served it to his guest instead.”

Furious, David slammed his fist on the arm of his throne, and thundered, “What?!! As surely as the Eternal God of Israel lives, the rich man deserves to die! Since he did not have pity for the poor man, I will make him pay four times what the lamb was worth! Who is this man who did such a cruel thing? Tell me his name!”

God's prophet looked straight into David's eyes, pointed his finger at the king, and declared, “*You are that man!*”

David sat back in his seat, stunned. He did not know what to say. He had unwittingly condemned himself.

King David was stunned by Nathan's news.



Nathan continued, “Thus says the Eternal God of Israel: ‘I anointed you king over Israel, and I delivered you out of the hand of Saul, your former master. I gave you your master’s possessions, as well as the whole house of Israel and Judah. And if these were not enough, I would have given you much more. Why, then, have you despised My commandments and done evil in My sight? You have conspired against and murdered Uriah the Hittite, using the Ammonites as your weapon, and you have stolen his wife and made her to be your wife. From this moment forward, the sword of violence shall never depart from your house. Because you have despised Me, and have stolen the wife of Uriah to be your wife, I will raise up evil and trouble against you from your own household. And I will take your wives and give them to another man, and he shall be intimate with your wives for all to see. The sins you committed were done in secret—but I will do this thing before all Israel!’”

David had done much evil to another man’s home, so God judged that evil be done to David’s household.

God’s word rang in David’s ears. It sobered him. It caused the king to see that he had followed the path of sin so deeply that he was no longer close to God. David did not justify himself; he did not reason away or excuse himself for his misdeeds. He took responsibility and admitted his sin.

Feeling guilty and defeated, he said to Nathan, “I have sinned against the Eternal, and have broken His Law.”

“Yes, you have,” the prophet said. “And although you have sinned and thus earned the penalty of death, God forgives you. You will not die.”

David was relieved, but he knew that Nathan had more to say. He nodded, and listened to the prophet, who said, “Your evil actions have given reasons for God’s enemies to blaspheme His name. They can now point to your sins and mock God for choosing you to be His king.”

David had not considered that his actions would give God’s enemies reasons to gloat.

“Again, David, your sins have been forgiven, so you will not die,” Nathan said. “But your newborn son shall surely die” (II Samuel 12:1-14).

A Psalm of Repentance

David deeply repented of his sins, which is recorded in Psalm 51. He poured his heart out to his Creator, and asked for forgiveness. He cried out, “Have mercy upon me, O God, according to Your lovingkindness:

according to the multitude of your tender mercies blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin. For I acknowledge my transgressions: and my sin is ever before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned, and done this evil in Your sight: that You might be justified when You speak, and be clear when You judge...Hide Your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Your presence; and take not Your Holy Spirit from me...For You desire not sacrifice; else would I give it: You delight not in burnt offering. The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise.”

Though God had mercy on His servant and forgave David for sinning against Him and removed the death penalty (Romans 6:23), He did not remove the other consequences of sin. God wanted to teach David—and us today—a vital lesson: Sin DESTROYS lives, while righteousness (keeping God’s commandments – Psalm 119:172) BUILDS happy, productive lives, and ultimately leads to eternal life.

Fasting to Seek God’s Will

Not long after Nathan had departed from the king’s presence, David and Bathsheba’s newborn son suddenly grew deathly ill. David knew that God had struck the child with a fatal sickness. The king humbled himself, going without food and drink, so that he could draw close to God and beg Him to have mercy on the baby. All night long, David lay on the floor and cried out to the Eternal, clinging to the slim hope that God would change His mind and intervene.

The palace officials stood watch over their king and tried to convince him to get up and eat with them. But David refused. Day after day, he turned to God—and when the seventh day came, David’s baby boy died.

The palace officials were afraid to tell their king of the bad news. They feared that if they told David that the boy was dead, he might do more than just stop eating and drinking. “The king might do something drastic,” they reasoned.

But when he saw the men whispering among themselves, David concluded that his son was dead. He called for his servants, and asked, “What about the boy? Is my son dead?”

“Yes,” they said. “He is dead.”

The men wondered what would happen next. Would David let out an agonizing scream? Would he become like an uncontrollable wild-man, thrashing about? Would he seethe in rage and even curse God?

To their surprise, King David quietly got up from the floor, bathed himself, combed his hair, put on fresh clothes, and went to the tabernacle to worship God. Afterward, he returned home and asked his servants to bring food to eat.

As the king ate, his servants said, “My lord, we don’t understand what you are doing. When your son was sick, yet alive, you fasted and wept for him, sleeping on the ground night after night. But now that he is dead, you rose up from the ground and are eating—why?”

David replied, “When the child was still alive, I fasted and cried out to God. I thought, ‘Who can tell whether God will be gracious to me, and allow my boy to live?’ But now that he is dead, there is no reason to fast. God has made His decision, and I have accepted it. Can I bring my son back to life? No! Someday, I will join him in death, but he cannot return to me” (II Samuel 12:15-23).

Throughout history, people who have not known God and His truth have fasted to make political statements, to bring attention to themselves—to force their will upon others. But David fasted in order to seek God’s will. Making himself physically weak helped him to see more clearly that the Almighty Creator was the ultimate source of his life, happiness and success. And though he pleaded for God to spare his son, fasting helped David to yearn for and accept God’s final decision. Fasting *the right way* helps people to recognize that the Supreme God of the universe knows all and sees all—and therefore His divine will is superior to the limited and often faulty reasoning of human beings.

Some time later, David and Bathsheba had another child, whom they named Solomon. David taught Solomon to trust in God and to obey His laws. And God loved the little boy, and decided to use in him to determine the course of Israel’s future. He sent the prophet Nathan to tell David that God decided to call the boy Jedidiah, which means “Beloved of the Eternal” (II Samuel 12:24-25).

CHAPTER EIGHTY-THREE

TROUBLE FROM WITHIN

Joab sent word to David that, in their latest attack against Rabbah, his forces had captured a heavily guarded fortress that protected the city's precious water supply. Now that Rabbah was without fresh water, the capital of Ammon could not survive for very long.

"Come gather all the troops of Israel," the message went, "and personally lead them in surrounding the city and capturing it. Years from now, everyone will remember that you were the one who struck your enemy with the fatal blow. But if you do not come, everyone will remember that I captured the city."

The king agreed with Joab's plan. He gathered the rest of Israel's army, and then marched to Rabbah.

From atop the city walls, the Ammonites saw David's mass of troops swarm around them, like a sea of insects surrounding a dying animal. The Ammonites and their king quickly realized that their end was near.

After the city of Rabbah was finally captured, David took King Hanun's crown from him, which was made of gold and the finest jewels, and placed it on his own head. David and his men also took away everything else of value and carried it off to Israel.

David also made the Ammonites take up saws, axes and picks and had them tear down the walls of Rabbah and of all the cities in Ammon. David knew that, without walls to hide behind to defend themselves, the Ammonites would think twice before rebelling against Israel.

Back in Jerusalem, after Israel's army had returned home from its victorious mission, David thought about God's prophecy that trouble would erupt from within his own family. The king knew that God always kept His word, so he did not doubt that the prophecy would come to pass—he only wondered *how* and *when* it would happen (II Samuel 12:26-31; I Chronicles 20:1-3).

Ammon and Tamar

David had a lovely daughter named Tamar, who was the sister of Absalom. Absalom and Tamar's mother was Maacah, princess daughter of Talmai, king of Geshur, a region in Syria (II Samuel 3:3).

Amnon, David's firstborn son who was in line to become king, was lovesick for Tamar, his half-sister. In reality, his intense feelings for her were *lust* disguised as love. Amnon's desire was based on satisfying himself; he did not worry about wanting to please Tamar. When he could not find a way to be alone with her, he became upset and fell sick.

Jonadab, a cousin and close friend, advised Amnon with an evil plan to fulfill his selfish desires.

The Bible warns us not to listen to so-called friends who devise evil plans (Proverbs 1:10-19), and that we should avoid ungodly counsel (Psalm 1:1-2) and delight in God's Law.

Sadly, Amnon followed Jonadab's wicked counsel, and took advantage of Tamar. He relied solely on his emotions, which led him to justify his wrong actions.

Abused and rejected, Tamar tore the royal multicolored robe she wore and put ashes on her head. Then she covered her face with her hands and wept.

Absalom soon learned what had happened to his sister and did his best to comfort her. He told Tamar not to discuss what happened with anyone, fearing a public scandal. Absalom also wanted time to think of a way to get revenge.

Tamar moved into Absalom's house, living the rest of her life sad and lonely. She never married nor had children.



Tamar, a daughter of King David, was a beautiful Israelite princess.

When the king heard about how Tamar had been horribly treated, he was furious. However, David did what parents should never do—favor one child over another. And so, not wanting to do anything to make Amnon, his favorite son, unhappy, David failed to punish him. This lack of swift and righteous justice sent a wrong message to all Israel.

Amnon expected Absalom to defend his sister's honor and attack—but Absalom acted as though nothing had happened. Yet, inwardly, he hated Amnon for what he had done to Tamar. But Absalom knew that he was under the watchful eyes of his father and Amnon's friends and supporters. Therefore, he decided to wait for the right moment to strike (II Samuel 13:1-22).

Absalom Gets His Revenge

The opportunity came two years later. One day, Absalom's servants were cutting wool from his sheep in Baal-Hazor, a Benjamite village (Nehemiah 11:31-33) that was about 12 miles northeast of Jerusalem. Absalom invited David and all of the king's sons to attend a grand feast he was holding there.

David replied, "No, my son. It would be too much of a burden for you."

Absalom tried to change his mind, but the king continued to say no, saying that he hoped they would have a good time.

Then Absalom said, "If you will not go, at least let Amnon come with us."

David leaned forward and thought for a moment. "Why should he go with you?" he asked.

"All of the king's sons should feast together. Are we not family?" At Absalom's insistence, David eventually gave in and allowed Amnon to attend.

Once the feast was underway, David's sons ate and drank and had a good time. But unknown to them, Absalom had secretly hatched an evil plan to be unleashed as his brothers let down their guard. Amnon, feeling safe among his many brothers and confident that Absalom would not harm him, drank too much wine and became drunk. That's when Absalom signaled his servants to kill Amnon. David's other sons were shocked to see their eldest brother slain before their eyes. Surprise gave way to panic as they ran to their mules and rode off, fearing that Absalom would do them in as well.

Word of what had happened made it back to King David—but the news was horribly exaggerated. "Absalom has murdered every one of your sons!" someone told him. "Not one is left alive!"



(When tragic events occur, rumor and gossip often twist fact into fiction. This is why people should always get all the facts on a matter and not jump to wild conclusions.)

King David rose from his seat, tore his clothes and lay down on the ground, expressing great sorrow. His servants joined him, tearing their clothes also.

David's nephew Jonadab came to him and told him the truth. "My lord, not all of your sons are dead—only Amnon! Absalom must have plotted for this day to come ever since Amnon abused Tamar. And now that Amnon is dead, Absalom has run away" (II Samuel 13:23-34).

Absalom Flees to Geshur

Just then, one of the king's guards reported that he saw some men approaching.

Jonadab said, "Look, my lord! Here come your sons now, just as I had said."

The surviving sons came before the king, joining him and the officials in bitter weeping. David mourned for quite a long time over Amnon's death.

Meanwhile, Absalom ran away to the kingdom of Geshur, where he stayed for three years with his grandfather, King Talmai. David felt so unhappy over the loss of Amnon that he wanted to take his

army to Geshur and bring Absalom back home. David had lost two sons—Amnon to death, and Absalom to exile (and the death penalty, if captured and brought to justice). David wanted to reconcile with his son, but wondered if the people of Israel would demand Absalom’s execution (II Samuel 13:34-39).

Absalom Returns to Jerusalem

Joab knew that David continually thought about Absalom, so he thought of a way for the king and his son to reconcile. Joab arranged for a woman from Tekoa, about ten miles south of Jerusalem, to wear funeral clothes and pretend to have spent a long time mourning the death of a loved one. According to his plan, the woman was brought before the king. She bowed low, saying, “My lord, please help me!”

Like a good shepherd, David gave her his undivided attention and asked what was wrong.

She said, “My husband is dead, leaving me a widow. My two sons fought each other out in a field, and, because no one was around to pull them apart, one son killed the other. Now all of my relatives have risen against me, demanding that I hand over my son in order to execute him for killing his brother. They claim to want justice, but what they really want is to get rid of him so that they can take possession of our land. Please don’t let them put out my only flame of hope, my only surviving son! Else there will be no one left to carry on my husband’s name.”

The thought of a helpless old woman being taking advantage of by family members—who should have been looking out for her welfare—made the king furious. He looked into the woman’s eyes and said, “Go on home. I will take care of this matter for you.”

She said, “If your decision causes any problems for you, let the guilt fall on me and my father’s house so that you and your throne are blameless.”

He said, “If anyone gives you any trouble, bring them to me. I will see to it that it never happens again!”

“Please, my lord,” she answered, “promise me that no one will be allowed to take my son’s life!”

David gave his word.

Then the woman said, “My lord, may I say something?”

“Yes.”

She said, “If you are generous to pardon a son who is not yours, why do you not forgive your own son, who has exiled himself, and

bring him back home? Everyone dies, and death is like water spilled on the ground—it cannot be reversed. God would rather preserve life than take it. Shouldn't you follow His merciful example?"

David grew suspicious of the woman's motives. He leaned forward and said, "Now I have a question for you—and don't try to hide the truth from me! Did Joab put you up to this?"

The woman answered, "Yes, my lord, he did—but only to help you see the other side of this problem."

David turned to Joab and said, "It seems that I have already given my decision. Go to Geshur and bring Absalom back home."

Joab bowed low and said, "My lord, thank you for giving your permission. It shows that I have found favor in your sight." It seemed like Joab was looking to do the right thing and reconcile a father and son together. However, Joab's motives were selfish, a political move to get into David's favor in order to gain more power and influence.

Joab marched out to the kingdom of Geshur and brought Absalom back to Jerusalem. Absalom was excited to finally reconcile with his father—but was hurt when he learned that David had given orders for him to be kept from the king's presence. Absalom lived in his own house without seeing his father's face (II Samuel 14:1-24).

The King Forgives His Son

Absalom was the most handsome and well-built man in all Israel. From head to toe, he had no blemish. He got his hair cut once a year, and when the hair was weighed, it came to about five pounds. Absalom had three sons, as well as a beautiful daughter, who was named after his sister Tamar.

Like Saul, Absalom looked kingly. His beautiful appearance led him to be popular among the people. (Yet God judges people by their character and what is in their heart.) In the eyes of the people, Absalom seemed destined to inherit David's throne.

Two years passed without Absalom being allowed to see his father. He decided to get Joab to talk to David for him, so he sent a message asking Joab to come visit him. But Joab refused. Absalom sent another message, but Joab still said no.

Like Joab, Absalom also knew how to play politics, and he created a situation that forced Joab to talk to him. He told his servants to set Joab's barley field on fire, which was next to Absalom's field. This got Joab's attention. He marched over to Absalom's house and demanded, "Why did your servants set my field on fire?"

Absalom said, “Because you have refused to see me. Now that I have your attention, I want you to ask my father why he had me brought back to Jerusalem. I was better off in Geshur.”

In the two years Absalom had been home, he showed no sign of remorse or repentance for killing Amnon. He demanded, “Tell my father: ‘Either accept me or kill me, but don’t ignore me!’”

Reluctantly, Joab delivered Absalom’s message to the king. David was so touched by his son’s plea for acceptance, he sent for Absalom to come before him. When father and son finally met, Absalom bowed low to the ground. David leaned over and kissed him; father and son were reunited (II Samuel 14:25-33).



Prince Absalom was very proud of his long, flowing hair.

The Prince Rises to Power

As time passed, being reconciled with his father was no longer enough—Absalom wanted power. And he craved the attention of the people. He routinely rode around in his royal chariot pulled by a team of horses, and had 50 men run before him. The people of Jerusalem quickly took notice of Absalom’s impressive display of royalty, power and influence.

Public hearings were held every morning in a court outside the city gates. King David, who was getting old and was busy with many important matters, could not resolve all the legal complaints that came to him. Many people left court, their cases unresolved, feeling bitter and resentful. Absalom saw this as his chance to gain influence among the masses.

Early each morning, the prince waited by the side of the road that led to the city gate, and sought out visitors who came to Jerusalem bringing legal complaints

to the king. Whenever he met someone visiting from the northern tribes of the house of Israel, Absalom would tell them, “You deserve to win your case. It’s unfortunate that my father the king doesn’t have someone to listen to complaints like yours. If only someone would make me a judge—I would be fair to everyone!”

For many ears, this sounded humble, meek and caring—but in reality, Absalom was self-seeking. He caused the people of the northern tribes to distrust David, implying that the king would show legal favor to those of Judah and Benjamin.

Absalom set himself up as “the defender of the little people,” someone who would fight for their cause wherever government failed to do so. By siding with them before even hearing the whole matter of their legal complaints, he used their thirst for justice to win their favor. Soon everyone in Israel liked Absalom more than they did David!

But four years of gaining the affection and loyalty of the people was no longer enough. Absalom still wanted more power.

One day, he asked his father permission to go to Hebron, the town in which Absalom was born (II Samuel 3:1-3). It was also the place where David was anointed king over Judah and then over all Israel (II Samuel 2:4; 5:3).

“When I was living in Geshur, I promised God that, if He would bring me back to live in Jerusalem, I would worship Him in Hebron. I must keep my promise.”

David said, “Of course, my son. You may go.” Absalom took with him 200 men who did not know what he was secretly planning to do.

At Hebron, Absalom offered sacrifices. Meanwhile, as throngs of people came to town to support his move for more power, Absalom secretly sent a messenger to Giloh, a town in the hill country of Judah, not far from Hebron, to invite Ahithophel, David’s advisor, to join him. His counsel was so accurate that people regarded his words as being from God. Ahithophel was the grandfather of Bathsheba (II Samuel 11:3; 23:34). He may have wanted to get revenge on David for committing adultery with his granddaughter and for murdering her husband Uriah.

The prince also sent spies throughout all the northern tribes of Israel, who told everyone, “When you hear the sound of the trumpets, you must shout, ‘Absalom now rules as king in Hebron!’” (II Samuel 15:1-12).

CHAPTER EIGHTY-FOUR

ABSALOM'S REBELLION

King David stood in stony silence as he digested the news that a messenger had just delivered.

“My lord, Prince Absalom has betrayed you,” the young man said. “He has secretly plotted against you, and now every citizen in Israel follows after Absalom.”

Fear gripped everyone in the royal court. They turned to their king to tell them what to do.

David said, “We must leave Jerusalem at once! We either leave now, or none of us will escape from Absalom’s rush for power.”

“But my lord,” said one official, “what will the people think? They expect you to stand your ground and fight.”

David stared into the man’s eyes and said, “And we will fight—but not here, not now. At the moment, my son has the element of surprise to his advantage. If he and his troops move fast, they could overtake us while we’re still here—and they will certainly kill us and everyone else in the city.”

The king wanted to preserve Jerusalem, which he feared would suffer much destruction if he decided to fend off Absalom’s invading forces there. And, just as he had done in his youth when Saul pursued him through the wilderness, David felt that he could rally greater support among the people in the countryside.

David’s officials remained loyal to him. Despite being outnumbered and the fear of not knowing whom to trust, they did not give in to the temptation to switch sides (II Samuel 15:13-15).

A Surprising Show of Loyalty

The king gathered all his wives and children, along with his loyal officials, soldiers and personal bodyguards, and fled Jerusalem. Meanwhile, the citizens wept and moaned at the sight of David’s sad retreat. When the royal caravan came to the last home at the edge of the city, the king stood and watched as his soldiers and bodyguards marched past. The last group consisted of 600 mercenaries, who had come from the town of Gath.

David said to Ittai, their commander, “Tell your men that there’s no need for them to come with us. None of you are Israelites, so this is not your battle. Return and join the new king. You haven’t been with me very long, so I do not expect you to follow me. Besides, I don’t even know where we will go.”

But Ittai respectfully disagreed. “As surely as you and the Eternal live, I will go wherever you go—even if it costs my life. And my men and their families will follow my lead.”

David was surprised to see such loyalty from these men, foreigners in his country. Normally, soldiers-for-hire were loyal to whoever paid them the most. But these 600 mercenaries had come to respect David’s leadership. They knew firsthand that he was a fair and just ruler, which made him stand out from the many ruthless and selfish kings that ruled in foreign lands.

“Very well,” the king said. “Come with us” (II Samuel 15:17-23).

David’s Spy Network

David’s caravan crossed over the Brook Kidron, which separated Jerusalem from the Mount of Olives, and traveled across the Kidron Valley, east of the city, taking a road leading into the wilderness.

Traveling with the caravan were the priests Zadok and Abiathar, along with the Levites who carried with them the Ark of the Covenant. They had brought the Ark to comfort the king, but David ordered Zadok to send it back. He knew that possessing God’s Ark did not automatically guarantee success, and understood that God blesses those who obey and please Him, who put His will first. David also recognized that God had the authority to either keep him on Israel’s throne, or remove him from it. Therefore, he calmly left his fate in God’s hands.

In returning to Jerusalem, Zadok and his son Ahimaaz, and Abiathar and his son Jonathan, became the eyes and ears for the king. Their mission was to set up a secret spy network and quietly take note of Absalom’s activities in the city.

As King David stood atop the Mount of Olives and gazed down upon Jerusalem, one of his counselors, Hushai the Archite, approached him. Hushai felt just as miserable as the king, and wanted to join David’s caravan.

But the king said, “No, I have something better in mind.”

David gave Hushai a secret mission: to return to Jerusalem and pretend to offer his counseling services to Absalom. With Zadok and Abiathar’s help, Hushai was to steer Absalom away from listening to



King David and his caravan depart from Jerusalem to escape Absalom's army.

Ahithophel's wise and sound advice. And Ahimaaz and Jonathan were to report to David everything Hushai would learn.

Hushai agreed, and slipped back into the city just as Absalom and his troops approached the capital (II Samuel 15:24-37).

Betrayed Yet Again?

Starting down the other side of the Mount of Olives, David was met by Ziba, Mephibosheth's chief servant. He brought with him two donkeys carrying 200 loaves of bread, 100 cakes of raisins, 100 figs and a goat's skin of wine.

"What is all this?" David asked.

Ziba said, "I brought these donkeys for your family to ride as you make your escape, and the food supplies are for when your people get hungry and tired."

"And where is Mephibosheth, your new master?"

Ziba slowly shook his head. "He stayed behind in Jerusalem, in hopes that the people would make him king. He believes that, in our current climate of troubles, now is the perfect time for the house of Saul to retake the throne."

"So...Saul's grandson repays my kindness with treachery," David thought. "Is there no one who has not betrayed me?"

With Absalom's revolt so widespread and loyalties uncertain, David had to know who he could and could not trust. This led him to jump to conclusions and assume the worst—that, like Ahithophel, Saul's grandson had betrayed him.

The king said to Ziba, "From this moment forth, everything that belonged to Mephibosheth now belongs to you."

Ziba bowed, hiding his sly, self-satisfied smirk. He said, "Thank you, my lord. My humble services are at your command" (II Samuel 16:1-4).

Choosing Not to Strike Back

David's caravan approached the town of Bahurim, and was met by a man named Shimei, a distant relative of Saul. Shimei was happy to see David and his people flee for their lives. He threw rocks at him and at his soldiers and bodyguards, screaming, "Get out of here, David! Get out, you son of Belial! How does it feel to have the Eternal pay you back for spilling the blood of Saul's house? You stole Saul's kingdom, and now God has given it to your son! You're a bloodthirsty man, and that's why your own evil has caught up with you!"

Abishai, David's nephew, wanted to chop off Shimei's head for say-

ing such horrible things. But the king said, “Let him be. If God has told Shimei to curse me, then who are we to question God’s will?”

Then David turned to face all of his men, and said, “Listen to me. My own son seeks to take my life! So why shouldn’t this man, who comes from Saul’s family? Let no one lay a hand on Shimei. Perhaps God is using him to curse me—if so, then perhaps God will have mercy upon me as I suffer these humiliating insults.”

King David decided to humble himself and to leave the matter in God’s hands. He wrote about these troubling events in Psalm 3.

David’s men agreed to leave Shimei alone. As the caravan traveled down the road, Shimei followed along the nearby hillside, cursing and throwing stones at them. It was hard for the soldiers not to strike back, but they kept their emotions in check for David’s sake (II Samuel 16:5-13).

David’s Punishment Continues

Absalom and his soldiers were now in control of Jerusalem. They were in the middle of making plans for their next move when Hushai



Shimei hurls rocks and insults at King David and his men.

came to greet David's son. "Long live the king," he said. "Long live the king!"

Absalom eyed Hushai with suspicion. "Why are you so quick to betray my father? Why didn't you flee with him when you had the chance?"

Hushai replied, "Whomever God and the people of Israel choose to be king, him will I serve. As I have served your father with my counsel, so shall I serve you."

Absalom liked what he heard, though he was not quite ready to lean on Hushai's advice. He turned to Ahithophel and asked him what he should do next. The old man said, "In his haste to flee from our forces, your father left behind ten of his concubines to care for the palace."

"What about them?" Absalom asked. "They're harmless."

"Yes, but they symbolize your father's strength and importance. I advise you to be intimate with them, just as David has done—only do so in the sight of the people. This will publicly disgrace your father, and make you and your followers even more powerful."

Absalom did not hesitate to follow Ahithophel's wicked counsel. God, through the prophet Nathan, had told David that this evil would come upon him: "And I will take your wives and give them to another man, and he shall be intimate with your wives for all to see. The sins you committed were done in secret—but I will do this thing before all Israel!" (II Samuel 15:16; 16:15-22).

Choosing Which Plan to Follow

Next, Ahithophel advised Absalom to let him pick 12,000 soldiers and attack David that very night, while the king was tired and discouraged. "I will strike his caravan with fear and cause all his mighty men to run away. But I will kill only David, no one else. Then you will not have to worry about your father reclaiming the throne. And, without his leadership, David's followers would be more inclined to submit to you. Showing mercy upon them and sparing their lives would keep Israel from erupting into a civil war. Your kingdom would thrive in peace."

Absalom and all the elders of the tribes of Israel—many of whom had called upon David to be their king years earlier (II Samuel 5:1-3)—were pleased by Ahithophel's plan. And the old, gray-haired counselor was confident that Absalom would follow it.

However, he was surprised (and somewhat annoyed) when Absalom called for Hushai to attend their meeting.

After telling Hushai about Ahithophel's plan, Absalom said to him, "You are a counselor—counsel me. Should we do what Ahithophel

advises—and if not, do you have a better plan?”

This was the opportunity Hushai had been waiting for. He said, “Ahithophel is indeed wise and experienced. However, in this case, his advice is not so good. You all know that David and his mighty men are as fierce as a mother bear that has been robbed of her cubs. They have no room in their hearts for fear. Besides this, your father is an experienced man of war. You will not find him camping out in the open among his family and servants. No, David will be hiding in a cave or some other secret place, waiting to pounce on your troops. And as soon as some of your men are slain, rumors will spread across the countryside, claiming that your army is being slaughtered. Even the hearts of your most valiant soldiers will melt, for everyone in Israel knows how courageous and fierce David and his mighty men are.”

These words sobered every man in the room. “Perhaps Hushai has a point,” some whispered.

Absalom leaned closer, and said, “Then what is your advice?”

Hushai said, “I advise you to gather every warrior throughout Israel, from Dan up north to Beersheba down in the south. Then your troops would be as numerous as sand on the seashore—more than enough to crush David and his men. And no one should lead your army into battle but you. Why should someone else get the glory? When you have assembled your army, we shall fall upon David and his followers like dew falls on the ground and covers it. There will be no way for them to cheat death. And if they try to escape into a walled town, every soldier will bring rope with him; together, we will pull down the walls and even drag the city into the river. Not one stone will remain.”

Absalom liked what he heard. In his eyes, Hushai’s plan looked promising because it ensured that David and his troops would be easily outnumbered and defeated. The plan also appealed to Absalom’s vanity; he liked the idea of leading his army into a victorious battle, one that he was virtually guaranteed to win, despite the fact that he lacked hands-on military experience. The elders also liked Hushai’s plan better than Ahithophel’s.

This was because God had intervened. He turned Absalom and his men away from Ahithophel’s shrewd counsel by inspiring Hushai’s advice to sound better (II Samuel 17:1-14).

A Hasty Escape!

David’s secret spy network sprang into action. First, Hushai told Zadok and Abiathar everything that took place at the meeting, adding, “We must warn David before it’s too late!”

Absalom leans forward as he listens to Hushai's advice.



Next, the two priests sent a servant girl to En Rogel, a spring in the Kidron Valley just outside of Jerusalem. People who saw her leave the city assumed that she was fetching water for her masters—but little did they know that she carried with her a secret message!

Then, careful not to draw attention to herself, the servant girl delivered Hushai's message to Jonathan and Ahimaaz. They had been waiting in En Rogel, for they dared not to be seen going into Jerusalem, else Absalom's followers would suspect them of being spies.

Unfortunately, a young man, who noticed the servant girl talking with the two young men, quickly told Absalom what he had seen. Absalom suspected the worst: “Something tells me that Jonathan and Ahimaaz are up to no good.” He ordered his men to assemble and rush out to En Rogel.

But Jonathan and Ahimaaz had already fled to the town of Bahurim, just east of Jerusalem. There, they went to the home of one of David’s loyal followers and hid in the man’s well, while the wife covered its mouth with ground corn.

Meanwhile, Absalom’s soldiers were hot on their trail! They came to the home and looked around. Fortunately, they did not discover Jonathan and Ahimaaz’s hiding place, and the soldiers departed empty-handed.

Then the two young men left the well and delivered the secret message to David that night. The king heeded Hushai’s warning to cross over the Jordan River, just in case Absalom changed his mind and followed Ahithophel’s advice instead (II Samuel 17:15-22).

CHAPTER EIGHTY-FIVE

THE AFFECTION OF THE KING

After receiving Hushai's message, King David and his troops made their escape over the Jordan River. By sunrise, everyone was safely on the other side.

Meanwhile, Ahithophel quietly saddled his donkey, departed from Jerusalem and headed back to his home in Gilo. He thought about the shrewd counsel he had given Absalom and how it was rejected. The old man knew that David now had enough time to safely escape—enough time to gather more troops, weapons and necessary supplies—enough time to rally help and support from among loyal citizens in other parts of the nation. And Ahithophel knew that time had run out for Absalom and all those who betrayed David, their king.

When he finally arrived home, the white-haired counselor made arrangements for his family members, servants and property. And then, rather than going through the certain humiliation of facing the king he betrayed and possibly being executed, Ahithophel hanged himself (II Samuel 17:22-23).

Preparing for Combat

Absalom soon learned that his father was in Gilead, in the city of Mahanaim. David chose this as his field headquarters because Mahanaim had been heavily fortified many years earlier, when Ishbosheth, son of Saul, had claimed rulership over Israel.

Absalom decided to mount an attack. With his cousin Amasa in charge of his army, Absalom and his soldiers crossed the Jordan River in pursuit of the king.

David was ready to make his stand. He organized his soldiers into three major groups, with Joab, Abishai (Joab's brother) and Ittai, leader of the 600 foreign mercenaries, each commanding a division.

Then the king, grabbing for his sword and shield, said to his men, "I'm going into battle with you."

But his officers said, "No, my lord! We can't let you risk your life in battle! You're too valuable to us! Suppose Absalom's army forced us to retreat—they wouldn't care about killing us! Even if half of our men

were lying dead on the field, Absalom and his soldiers would only care about taking *your* life! You are worth more to us than 10,000 soldiers. For all our sakes, it would be better for you to stay in town. From there, you can send us help if we need it.”

The king did not want to stay behind, but he knew that his men had a good point. His death meant their sure defeat, and Absalom would be able to secure the throne. Reluctantly, David agreed to remain in Mahanaim.

Then, David stood at the city gate and watched as his loyal soldiers marched by in groups of hundreds and thousands, exiting the city. The king turned to his three commanders, Joab, Abishai and Ittai, and said loud enough for everyone to hear, “Make sure that you deal gently with Absalom, for my sake. I want my son to be captured unharmed.”

Some of the men, especially Joab, did not understand why David would want Absalom unharmed. Despite all the grief, trouble and shame Absalom had caused for David, the king still loved his son. He wanted so much to reconcile with him (II Samuel 17:25-26; 18:1-5).

A Tragic End

The armies of David and Absalom clashed in the dense woods of Ephraim. The forest was so thick with trees, bushes, underbrush and jagged rocks that more soldiers died from the rugged terrain than from waging combat.

Even so, David’s three-pronged attack was working. His troops gained the upper hand, slaying thousands of enemy soldiers. In the end, 20,000 troops had perished.

Absalom’s men were now on the run. Even the young prince himself retreated for safety, riding his mule through the dense forest, doing his best to avoid crashing into trees and rocks.

But his mad race to escape capture came to a sudden end—Absalom found himself hanging in midair, his head caught in the branches of a terebinth tree! Apparently, Absalom’s long, flowing hair—the symbol of his vanity—had gotten tangled and twisted in the tree. His own pride and arrogance had led him to be snared!

To make matters worse, one of David’s soldiers discovered Absalom hanging in the tree, struggling back and forth to get free. The man rushed to tell Joab what he had just seen.

Amazed, Joab said, “What? You just stood there and did nothing? Why didn’t you kill him? I would have given you ten pieces of silver and a belt of honor for that man’s death!”



Trying to escape capture, Absalom gets his head caught in a tree.

The soldier could scarcely believe what he was hearing. He said, “How could I raise a hand against David’s son when the king himself, in the hearing of all his men, ordered you, your brother and Ittai not to harm Absalom? As for your money—I wouldn’t slay Absalom even if you offered me 10,000 pieces of silver! I wouldn’t dare risk my life killing him. I know full well that the king would find out, and if that happened, I also know that you would have me take all the blame!”

“I’m not going to waste any more time on you!” Joab huffed. Then he walked off, taking with him three spears.

When Joab and ten of his armor bearers came to where Absalom was last seen, the prince was still hanging in the air. Without hesitation, Joab defied David’s orders and thrust his spears into Absalom’s heart. Rather than obey his king, Joab did what seemed to be politically in his favor: to kill the rebellious son so that he would not get another chance to seize the throne.

The armor bearers, following their master’s evil example, surrounded Absalom and finished him off with their weapons. Absalom was dead.

Then Joab blew a trumpet that blasted throughout the woods of Ephraim. This was the signal to David’s men that the battle was over.

Years earlier, Absalom had a monument built in his own honor so that he would be remembered after his death, even calling it after himself. He built it because he had worried that, since his three sons had died early in life (II Samuel 14:27), he did not have a male heir to keep his name alive.

Joab and his men took Absalom’s body, threw it into a deep pit and covered it with rocks and stones. Joab may have done this to mock Absalom’s monument (II Samuel 18:6-18).

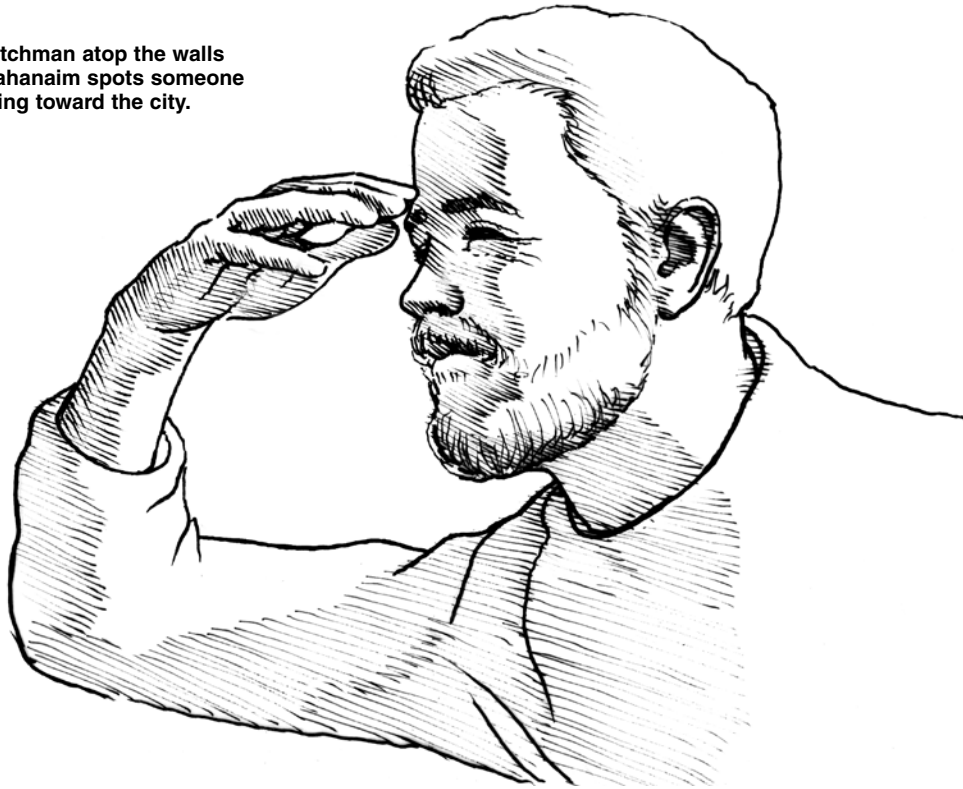
Bearer of Good News...and Bad

The battle was over, and David’s army had won. Someone had to tell the king. Ahimaaz, like everyone else, was excited over their recent victory. Knowing that Joab was going to send a message back to David, Ahimaaz volunteered to deliver it.

But Joab said, “If you tell David about our victory, he will ask you about Absalom. Why should you be the one to tell the king that his son is dead? David is used to you giving him good news. I would rather have someone else deliver the message.”

So Joab ordered an Ethiopian servant to deliver the news to the king. The servant bowed, and then raced off to Mahanaim.

A watchman atop the walls of Mahanaim spots someone running toward the city.



Ahimaaz was not willing to accept “no” for an answer. “No matter what happens, I still want to run.”

“What for?” Joab said. “The message is already on its way. By the time you get there, the king will have already heard the news.”

But the young man insisted. Finally, Joab gave in, and Ahimaaz raced off after the Ethiopian. He ran so fast, he even passed him on the road.

At Mahanaim, a watchman standing guard atop the city’s walls, saw something moving off in the distance. It took him a few moments to realize that it was a man. The watchman shouted to David, who was sitting at the gate, and said, “A man is running toward the city! He must be bringing back news from the frontlines!”

David anxious thoughts raced through his mind.

As the runner drew closer to the city gate, the watchman looked out into the countryside and saw another figure emerge from the horizon. “My lord,” he shouted to the king, “I see another man! Another man is approaching! The first man runs like Ahimaaz, Zadok’s son.”

David thought about this. “Ahimaaz? He’s a good man. He must be bringing good news.”

Ahimaaz entered the city and sprinted toward David. “My lord, we won! We won! The war is over!” Then he bowed before the king,



The watchman tells King David that two messengers are racing toward the city gate.

and said, “Praise God—He’s the one who delivered your rebellious enemies into your hand.”

Then David asked if Absalom was safe.

Ahimaaz did not want to answer this directly, so he said, “When Joab sent your servant and me, I saw a commotion, but I don’t know what it was about.”

Just then, the Ethiopian servant entered the city and approached the king. “Good news, my lord! The Eternal has taken revenge against the rebels who rose up against you!”

But David wanted to know about his son. “What of Absalom—is he safe?”

“My lord, may all your enemies and those who rebel against you end up like that young man!”

For David, the world seemed to stand still. All he could think about was the death of the son he had so desperately wanted to be reconciled with. Guards and servants stared as the king stood there, trembling. Then, as he headed for his quarters to be alone, he cried out, “Absalom, Absalom! If only I had died in your place!” (II Samuel 18:19-33).

The Affection of the King

News of David’s grief over the loss of his rebellious son spread among all the troops. Everyone expected their king to be filled with joy now that his rulership was no longer endangered. In better times, David’s army would have returned to the city praising God and cheering, “Long live the king!” Instead, they quietly headed back to Mahanaim as though they had been sorely defeated in battle. Their day of victory had been turned into a day of mourning.

But Joab was not about to let this happen. He went into David’s quarters and approached the king, who was on the floor, still weeping after Absalom.

Joab said to him, “Thanks to you, your followers are hanging their heads in shame. All of your servants have put their lives on the line to save you, your wives, your children and even your concubines. Yet your mourning shows that you love your enemies and hate your loyal friends. It’s obvious that you have no respect for either your officers or your servants. In fact, if Absalom had lived and all of us had died, I don’t doubt that you would have been pleased.

“Now get up and address your servants! As surely as the Eternal lives, if you don’t comfort and encourage them, every one of your followers will leave you. Not one will be left by tomorrow. The trials and hardships you’ve gone through since your youth will be

nothing compared to the trouble that will fall on you—unless you act now!”

David knew that Joab was a carnal-minded man who always did what seemed right in his own eyes. He understood that his nephew was not a faithful servant of God, filled with the Holy Spirit. But David also knew that Joab was a shrewd thinker—and that, in this case, Joab was right. The people needed to be reassured that they had their king’s affection.

So David got up, dried his eyes, and sat beside the city gates. All the people saw that their king had returned to exercise his royal authority. David’s calm presence put everyone at ease. And after all the troops had come before their king to show their allegiance, everyone returned to their homes, feeling safe and secure once again (II Samuel 19:1-8).

CHAPTER EIGHTY-SIX

SOWING THE SEEDS OF TROUBLE

A great debate arose throughout Israel. David's supporters were upset that some of their countrymen, who were so quick to rebel against the king and had chosen Absalom to be their ruler, were doing nothing to formally escort the king back to Jerusalem so that he could officially resume power. "Time and again, David has rescued us from the Philistines and our other enemies—and this is how we should treat him?"

News of this debate reached the king's ears. Since Absalom's rebellion had started in Hebron, in the territory of Judah, David wanted to give Judah a chance to officially restore him back to the throne. So he sent a message to Zadok and Abiathar, the priests: "Tell the elders and leaders of Judah, 'Why are you the last tribe to think about bringing your king back to Jerusalem? David is your brother—your own kinsmen! Why have you failed to do anything to bring him back to Jerusalem?'"

David also ordered the priests to deliver a message to Amasa: "Tell him that he is still my nephew, and that, as surely as the Eternal lives, I will make him commander of my army, in place of Joab." This was startling news. Joab had acquired much power and influence; Zadok and Abiathar suspected that he would not take this setback quietly.

Yet, they also understood that David had no other choice. This was a shrewd move for two reasons: (1) Joab's defiant disobedience proved that the king could no longer trust him; and (2) by setting Amasa as Israel's top military commander, David would secure the trust of the soldiers who had followed Absalom.

The people of Judah warmly received David's message and became his followers again. They even sent him a message: "Please come home, and bring your soldiers with you."

Hearing this, David and his caravan of family, staff and soldiers headed back to Jerusalem. By the time they reached the Jordan River, throngs of happy, smiling people were there to greet their king (II Samuel 19:9-16).

Reflecting God's Mercy

David was surprised to see a certain face among the greeters. It belonged to Shimei, the man who had cursed David and thrown rocks

at him when the king was fleeing for his life! Shimei trembled like a wet dog standing in the cold. When he had heard that King David and his mighty men were headed back to Jerusalem, fear had gripped Shimei's heart like a vise. He had gambled that Absalom would destroy David—and he lost.

With David back in power, Shimei knew that his days were coming to an end, so he rushed out from Bahurim, his hometown, to greet David and seek his mercy. With his head hanging low, Shimei approached the king and bowed down before him.

“My lord,” he said, “Please do not punish me—I beg you! Forget about what I did and said when you were leaving Jerusalem. Please, don't even think about it. I know I sinned—this is why I wanted to be the first one from all the house of Joseph to meet my lord the king.”

Abishai looked down on the sniveling little man and said, “Why should this man live when he cursed the Eternal's anointed king? Shimei should taste death!”

But David said, “Abishai, what will I ever do with you and your brother Joab? Are you the one to decide who should be put to death, or the king? Am I not the ruler of all Israel today?”

Then David looked down at Shimei. The king thought about the mercy God had given him. He considered all times God had been patient with him and had forgiven his sins. Then David concluded that he should follow God's example and show mercy to Shimei, though he certainly deserved to die. Shimei was relieved.

Among the other familiar faces in the crowd was Ziba, the chief servant of Saul's family. He and his 15 sons and 20 servants waded across the river to meet David. Then, a ferryboat was sent to carry the royal family and David's servants to the other side of the river. (II Samuel 19:17-23).

Barzillai the Rich Man

Another familiar face was a man named Barzillai. He was from the town of Rogelim in Gilead. At 80 years of age, Barzillai was very wealthy and influential. After the king had chosen Mahanaim for his temporary headquarters, Barzillai, along with Shobi, brother of Hanun, the Ammonite king, supplied David and his troops with food and much-needed supplies: beds, wash basins, utensils, flour, grain, beans, lentils, seed, honey and curds, sheep and cheese (II Samuel 17:27-29).

David appreciated Barzillai's help. The king was thrilled to see him among the greeters, and even asked him to accompany him to

Shimei seeks mercy for the horrible way he had treated King David.



Jerusalem: “I will provide for your every need while you are there.”

Barzillai replied, “My lord, I’m 80 years old and my body is almost numb. I don’t have much longer to live. Why should I go to Jerusalem? I can no longer taste my food or hear the sound of singing, and I would be nothing but a burden.

“However, I’ll cross the river with you, and just go a little way with you on the other side. There’s no need to reward me with kindness. Just let me return to my hometown, where I can die and be buried near the graves of my parents. Here is my servant Chimham; he will go to Jerusalem with you, and you can treat him as your own.”

David agreed. He wanted so much to shower Barzillai with the same favor that the old man had freely given him. The king said, “I will do for Chimham whatever seems good for you! And if there’s anything else that you want, I’ll do that too!”

The king’s soldiers crossed the river as David said farewell to Barzillai and wished him well. Then Barzillai returned home (II Samuel 19:31-39).

Sowing the Seeds of Trouble

All of the troops of Judah and half of Israel’s troops had assembled to officially greet David and escort him across the river. As the king headed for Gilgal, all of the soldiers from the house of Israel came to him, saying, “Why did our brothers from Judah get to escort you and your caravan across the Jordan?”

The warriors of Judah responded, “Why are you so angry? The king is our close relative. Yet we never took advantage of this. Has David ever showed us special favor over you or given us a gift?”

Those from the house of Israel said, “Together, our tribes are ten times bigger than yours; King David belongs to us ten times more than he belongs to you. Why didn’t you think we were good enough to help you escort him over the river? After all, we were the first ones to think of bringing our king back to Jerusalem!”

Judah responded with even harsher words. Little did anyone know that the seeds of trouble had been sown, and would be reaped years later (II Samuel 19:40-43).

Deciding an Unsettled Matter

David’s arrival in Jerusalem brought another surprise for the king. Mephibosheth had come to greet him. David did not know it, but Mephibosheth had missed him so much that he had not taken a bath or

trimmed his beard or washed his clothes the whole time the king was gone. These were the traditional signs of someone deeply mourning the loss of a loved one.

But David remembered what Ziba had said about Saul's grandson—that he was plotting to seek the throne for himself. Suspicious, David said, "When Absalom and his men invaded the city, why didn't you leave with me, Mephibosheth?"

"My lord, Ziba, my servant, deceived me! I told him to saddle a donkey for me so I could go with you, but Ziba left without me. Even worse, he lied about me and slandered my name before the king. My lord, I know that you are wise like an angel of God. Therefore, decide what you think is best. After all, you could have had my whole family and me killed, but instead, you let me eat at your own table. What right do I have to complain?"

David was not sure who was telling the truth—Ziba or Mephibosheth. "I've already given Mephibosheth's entire estate to Ziba," the king thought. "What if I was deceived? How can I be sure?"

Since there were no witnesses to back up what either man claimed had happened, David decided to err on the side of mercy. "You've said enough! I've decided to divide the estate between you and Ziba."

Mephibosheth, showing his loyalty to the king, said, "Ziba can have it all! I'm just glad you've returned home safely" (II Samuel 19:24-30).

Another Act of Treachery

Among these arguing troops was a Benjamite troublemaker named Sheba. Seeing that Israel was still suffering from unhealed emotional wounds and sore feelings, Sheba plotted to take advantage of the situation. Apparently, he was a man of considerable influence, for, at the blowing of a trumpet, he was able to assemble a mob of dissatisfied soldiers. He said to them, "People of Israel, listen to me. We have no share in David, the son of Jesse. This king does not belong to us! Let every man return home."

So they deserted David and followed after Sheba. But the soldiers of Judah stayed close to David, escorting him all the way from the Jordan to Jerusalem. Once David arrived safely in the city, he ordered Amasa, his new army commander, to gather all of Judah's army and have them assemble at the capital. "Sheba will soon attack. But this time, we will strike first. You have three days to bring Judah's entire army here."

Amasa did as commanded, but it took him more than three days to do so. Instead of turning to Joab, David said to Abishai, "Sheba will

do more harm to us than Absalom ever did. Take my finest warriors and go after Sheba, before he manages to take over any fortified cities and escape us.”

Abishai departed from Jerusalem in hot pursuit. Accompanying him and his soldiers was his brother Joab, David’s bodyguards and the king’s mighty men.

When they reached the big rock at Gibeon, Amasa caught up with them. Joab resented being removed from leading Israel’s army, and was deeply bitter toward the man who replaced him, Amasa. Seeing his replacement in action was too much for Joab’s carnal mind to bear. He dismounted from his horse and, pretending to be friendly, walked over to Amasa.

“How are you, cousin?” Joab asked, and then drew in close to greet him with a kiss, as was the custom of the time. Amasa must have known how treacherous Joab could be, but he probably thought that Joab would not dare to harm him in front of so many witnesses.

But Amasa was wrong! With his right hand, Joab took hold of his cousin’s beard and, taking out a dagger that was strapped around his waist, plunged it into Amasa’s belly. His inner parts spilled out. Amasa dropped to the ground, dying in a pool of blood.

Then, without showing remorse for committing cold-blooded murder, Joab and his brother Abishai raced off to capture Sheba.

Meanwhile, one of Joab’s soldiers stood near Amasa and shouted to the troops, “If you favor Joab, and if you are for David, then follow Joab!”

Seeing Amasa lying in the middle of the road, wallowing in pain, the troops stood where they were, shocked that their new commander had been slain by his own cousin. The soldier who had shouted dragged Amasa off the road and covered him with a piece of garment. Only then did the troops move to help Joab capture Sheba (II Samuel 20:1-13).

A Rebel’s End

Sheba had journeyed through all of the tribes of Israel before coming to the town of Abel and Beth Maacah, about four miles west of the northern city of Dan. There, he assembled Israel’s best fighters.

Joab and his troops soon arrived, surrounding the town so that no one could enter or leave. Then they made a siege mound—a ramp made of dirt—up to the town wall, and used a battering ram to knock the wall down.

Just then, a woman, one who was known for her wisdom, shouted down from atop the wall, and called for Joab to come near.

Pretending to be friendly, Joab grabs Amasa by the beard as he delivers a fatal blow.



“Here I am,” he replied. “I’m listening.”

She said, “Hear my words: Long ago, people used to say, ‘If you want good advice for ending disputes, go to the town of Abel.’ The answers they received were all that was needed to settle any problem. We are Israelites, and we want peace! Why are you trying to swallow up a town that’s like a mother in Israel? Why do you want to destroy the Eternal’s people?”

Joab answered, “I’m not trying to destroy you or swallow up your town! All I want is Sheba. He’s a troublemaker from the mountains of Ephraim, the leader of a rebellion against King David. Deliver him to me, and we will leave your town in peace.”

The woman said, “Watch, we will throw you his head.” And she went to the townspeople and talked them into cutting off Sheba’s head, which they then threw over the wall to Joab.

Satisfied with Sheba’s death, Joab blew the trumpet signal, and the soldiers withdrew, returning to their homes. And Joab went back to report to David in Jerusalem (II Samuel 20:14-22).

CHAPTER EIGHTY-SEVEN

LESSONS FROM THE PAST

Many years had passed since David became Israel's king. Now he was old and frail, and he knew that his physical life would soon come to an end. But David did not worry about death, for he knew about God's great purpose for mankind and his role in it. When Jesus Christ returns to establish the kingdom of God, David will be brought back to life as a spirit being. Christ will then use him to rule over the modern-day descendants of ancient Israel—the peoples of the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia and other nations.

David began to think about his life—about all the things he had seen, done and said, all the triumphs he had achieved, and the mistakes he had made.

Then he thought about the Gibeonites, who had cried out for revenge...

Avenging the Gibeonties

Several years earlier, the nation of Israel was in the midst of a famine. For three years, the people suffered because they could not grow enough food to eat. Many lives were at risk.

King David came to realize that Israel was being punished, so he turned to God to find out what His people had done wrong. God answered, "Israel is being punished because Saul and his family, a house of bloodshed, slew the Gibeonites."

Immediately, David knew what God had meant. Four hundred years earlier, Joshua and the Israelites, because they did not seek God's counsel, were deceived into making a peace covenant with the Gibeonites (also called Hivites). In their conquest of the Promised Land, Israel was supposed to drive out all the Canaanites and other pagan nations, but the Gibeonites were to be left untouched. In return for having their lives spared, the Gibeonites became Israel's servants (Joshua 9:3-27).

But Saul and his royal house, perhaps in a vain attempt to gain God's favor by slaying pagan peoples living in Israel, broke the peace covenant and slew the Gibeonites. Saul should have learned that God

always keeps His promises, and that He expects His servants to do the same. God does not take promises lightly.

David called for the survivors of Saul's attack to come before his throne. He said to them, "I know that your people suffered a great loss. What can I do to make up for what Saul did to you, so that you would ask God to remove this curse and pour His favor on Israel again?"

"Even gold or silver from Saul or his family cannot make up for the evil that was done to us," they replied. "And, because we are foreigners living in your land, we do not have the right to execute any of the Israelites."

"Then what do you want?" David said. "I'll do whatever you say."

The Gibeonites answered, "Saul tried to utterly destroy our people and remove us from Israel. He is no longer alive to answer for this evil, but his house still remains. Give us seven of Saul's descendants, and we will hang them before the Eternal, in Gibeah."

The king agreed. He ordered his men to round up two of Saul's sons and five of Saul's grandsons. However, because of the oath he had made with his best friend Jonathan, David spared Mephibosheth, Jonathan's son.

The Gibeonites quickly put the seven men to death and let their bodies hang. This disgraceful sight brought further shame on the house of Saul.

Rizpah, Saul's concubine and mother of the two sons that were hung, camped out near the bodies. Day and night, she scared away any birds and animals that came to eat the remains.

When the rains finally came down upon the land, David and all of Israel knew that the curse had been lifted. The famine was over.

David was so moved by Rizpah's devotion to her dead family members, he ordered his servants to take down the hanging bodies. The king also had the bones of Saul and Jonathan removed from their burial place in Jabesh Gilead. David's servants buried the bones, along with the bones of the seven descendants of Saul, in the grave of Saul's father, in Zelah (II Samuel 21:1-14).

Numbering Israel's Warriors

The incident with the Gibeonites reminded David that God expects His servants to be true to their word.

As the king continued to meditate upon his past and the lessons he had learned, he remembered the time Satan had tempted him into taking a nationwide census of Israel's military strength.

Numbering the people was not, of itself, a sin. However, the king did not ask God for His permission to do this—David decided for himself to number God’s people. This was exactly what Satan wanted David to do. The devil—who is always looking out for whomever he can tempt into sinning—plotted to get David to rely less on God and more on himself. Like most people God works with, David began to place his trust in the size of his army rather than in the God who had delivered him time and again.

Joab warned David not to go through with his plan, but the king’s mind was made up. He refused to listen. Reluctantly, Joab carried out the king’s command to number all the able-bodied fighting men in Israel. Joab and his assistants departed from Jerusalem and journeyed throughout Israel, from Beersheba in the south to Dan in the northern reaches of the country, counting how many fighting men were available for the king’s purposes. (The tribe of Levi was to be left out, since their men were not allowed to fight in battles.)

During the months that passed while Joab was away, David began to feel guilty. His conscience gnawed at him. He knew that numbering the people without God’s approval was wrong. Finally, after several months of justifying his actions, David repented. He prayed to God and acknowledged that he had greatly sinned against Him. “Please take this sin away from me. What I did was foolish” (I Chronicles 27:23-24; 21:7-8).

Almost ten months had passed by the time Joab returned to Judah. He was just about to number the tribe of Benjamin when he received word from the king to end the census. Joab was relieved, though he feared what God would do to Israel for David’s disobedience.

Returning to Jerusalem, Joab brought the census results before the king. “My lord,” he said, “Altogether—including both battle-seasoned warriors and those without military experience—the house of Israel has 1.1 million men ready to wage war at your command. And Judah has 470,000 men.”

David was amazed to hear this—and he was also afraid. He had sinned against God, and now he would have to face his Creator’s wrath. David did not have long to wait.

The prophet Gad came before the king, and said, “The Eternal God of Israel has a message for you: ‘Choose how you should be punished. You may suffer three years of famine, suffer three months of fleeing from the hand of your enemies, or suffer a three-day plague that will spread throughout the entire kingdom of Israel. The choice is yours, David—now choose!’”

The king thought carefully. When he made his choice, he said to Gad, “I’d rather fall into the hand of God and suffer a plague than to

fall into the hand of my enemies. God is merciful and forgiving; I cannot expect mercy from my foes.”

That morning, the Messenger of the Eternal followed God’s command and sent a deadly plague upon Israel. It spread across all the tribes, from Dan to Beersheba, killing 70,000 men.

David could not bear the sight of his people dying, especially when it was a direct result of his sin. Yet, just as the plague was about to strike Jerusalem, God chose to show mercy upon His people and end the plague.

David looked up and saw the Messenger of the Eternal by the threshing

floor of Ornan the Jebusite, wielding a sword that stretched out over the city. The king and the elders of Israel fell to the ground in fear.

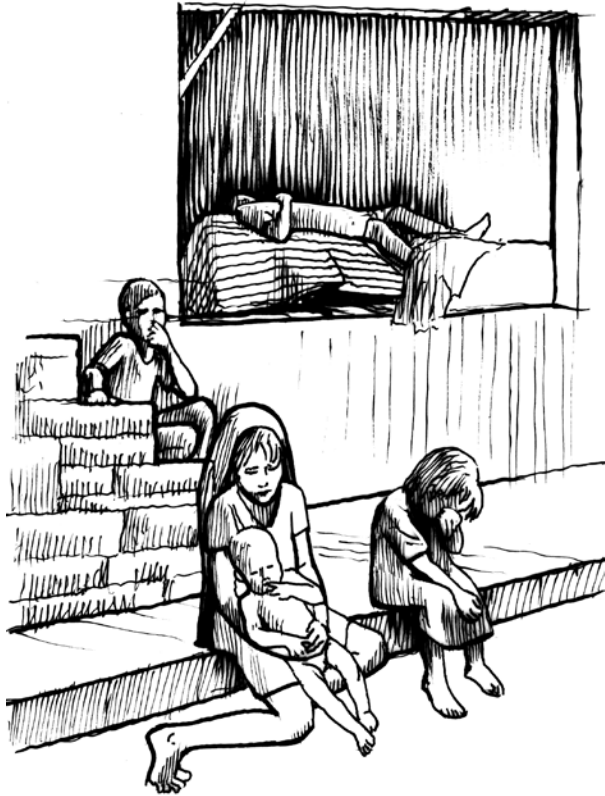
Then David prayed to God. “I’m the one who sinned against You by numbering Your people,” he cried. “I take responsibility for my wickedness. Please, God, be merciful to Israel. These are Your sheep. Let Your hand be against me and my father’s house—and not against Israel!”

Speaking for the Eternal, God told the king that he should build an altar at Ornan’s threshing floor. It would be a reminder of God’s punishment for David’s sin, and the great mercy He showed.

David immediately went out to talk with Ornan, and said to him, “Sell me your threshing floor so that I can use it to erect an altar for God, and the plague will be withdrawn.” David was worried that God could order His Messenger to resume the destruction.

Just like David, Ornan and his four sons had seen the Messenger of the Eternal stand by their threshing floor. The sons hid themselves, out of fear of seeing such a powerful sight. But Ornan kept right on with his work, removing chaff from wheat.

Due to the plague, many families throughout Israel suffered the deaths of husbands, fathers, brothers and other loved ones.



Oran said to David, “My lord, take my threshing floor—it’s yours. Do with it as you see fit. And you can take my oxen, too, for burnt offerings. Consider the wheat yours; use it for grain offerings. You can also have my wooden tools and things for wood.”

“No, I can’t let you give me these things. I have to give up what already belongs to me, else it will not be a true sacrifice. Sell me your threshing floor at the full price.”

Ornan agreed. David gave him 50 pieces of silver for the threshing floor and the oxen, and then later paid 600 pieces of gold for the entire property.

After the king had the altar built, he offered sacrifices upon it, and cried out to God. The Eternal answered him, sending fire down from the sky, which consumed the burnt offering. God was pleased with His servant David, and ordered His Messenger to put away the sword. The people no longer had to worry about the plague coming upon them (II Samuel 24 and I Chronicles 21).

David and His Mighty Men

The incident of the plague and the numbering of Israel taught David not to be self-willed—not to impose his will over God’s. It also reminded him that God punishes those who disobey Him, yet is willing to pour His mercy upon the guilty. God favors those who choose to repent—to change from their wicked ways.

The king thought about other lessons that helped to build godly character within him. Then David thought about the successful military exploits that God had blessed him with.

Besides his regular troops, David had under his command Israel’s bravest, finest warriors. The Bible calls them “mighty men,” and summarizes their amazing exploits (II Samuel 23:8-39 and I Chronicles 11:10-47).

Back when Israel and the Philistines were at war, David and his mighty men encountered the Philistines’ latest champion, a giant named Ishbi-Benob. He wielded a bronze spear that weighed seven and a half pounds, and was bent on David’s destruction.

The king was weary, tired from all the fighting and running. He lacked the energy to take on Ishbi-Benob. So Abishai came to David’s aid and killed the giant.

It was then that David’s mighty men insisted that their king no longer join them in battle. They could not bear the thought of David’s untimely death. Reluctantly, the king agreed.

The mighty men encountered other giants, including one that had

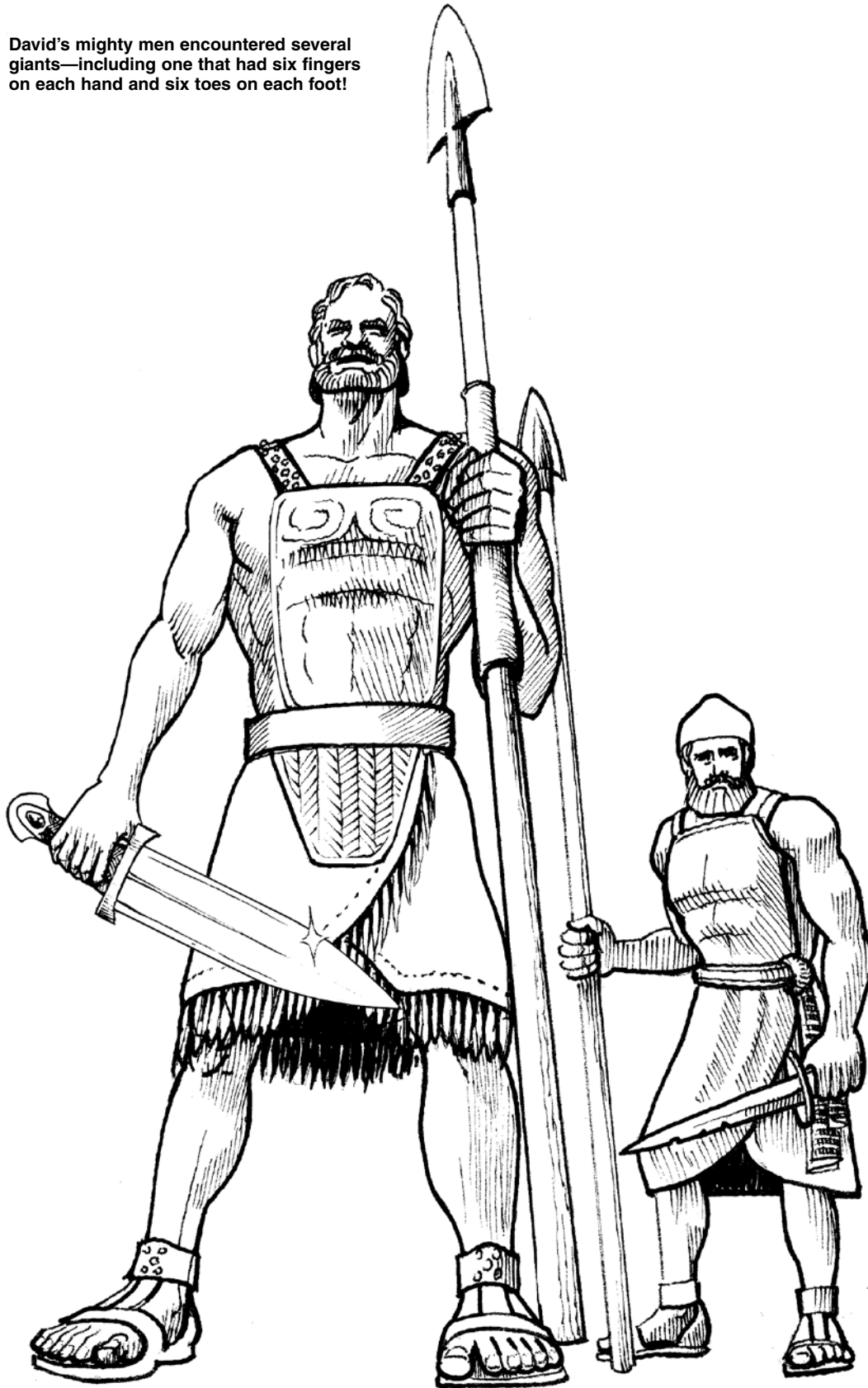
six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot. But these towering warriors all fell by the hand of Israel's finest warriors. In reality, the victory always came from God (II Samuel 21:15-22).

When Israel was finally at peace from all its enemies, David wrote a song that praised God. He wrote, "The Eternal is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; the God of my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation." You can read the song in Psalm 18 and II Samuel 22.



On a snowy day, Benaiah, one of David's mighty men, bravely climbed down into a pit and killed a lion.

David's mighty men encountered several giants—including one that had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot!



CHAPTER EIGHTY-EIGHT

THE PRINCE WHO WOULD BE KING

As he continued to dwell on his past, King David recalled the promises God had made to him some years earlier. God had blessed His servant David with peace from his enemies. The king appreciated this and the many other blessings he had received: rulership over Israel, riches, close allies such as King Hiram of Tyre, a royal palace in which to live, and so forth.

David was so moved by all that God had given him that he wanted to do something special for God. The king said to Nathan the prophet, “Here I am living in a fine palace made from the best cedar in the land. Yet the Ark of the Covenant, which represents God’s heavenly throne, continues to dwell in a tabernacle—a tent! The Eternal deserves better.

“I have a plan. I intend to build a temple to be used to serve God’s will and purpose. It will be constructed from the very best materials.”

“My lord, the Eternal is with you,” Nathan said, liking the idea. “Do all that is within your heart.”

Both men had good intentions, but they did not ask God what He thought about the plan.

That night, God spoke to Nathan and gave him a message to deliver to the king. David was anxious to hear what God thought about his plan, and so, when Nathan came before him to deliver the message, the king sat quietly and listened.

Speaking for God, Nathan said, “Would you build a house for Me to dwell in, David? Ever since I brought Israel out of Egypt and into the Promised Land, My presence has dwelt from tent to tent, from tabernacle to tabernacle. In all My moving about, did I ask any of the judges of Israel why they did not build Me a house of cedar?”

“David, I took you from out of My sheep and have turned you from being a follower to being a leader and ruler over My people Israel. Wherever you have gone, I have been with you, and have cut off your enemies from defeating you. I have given your name honor, like those considered great in the world. But because you have been a man of war and have shed much blood, you shall not build a house for Me.

“However, I will build a house for you—a royal dynasty of your descendants, who will rule from your throne. I will establish your

royal house through your son Solomon. I have chosen him to build My house and My courts. And I will be his Father, and he will be My son. If Solomon diligently observes My commandments and judgments, I will establish his kingdom forever. But if he sins, I will punish him as a father disciplines his son. Yet, I will not take My mercy away from him, as I had done with Saul.

“David, I will see to it that your house, your kingdom and your throne will be established forever.”

Feeling awed and overwhelmed by God’s decision, David expressed his devotion to his Creator (I Chronicles 17:1-27; 22:6-13; II Samuel 7:1-29).

Though he had been forbidden to build the temple, David still wanted to do something special for God. So he made extensive preparations for the temple’s construction. He gathered an abundance of gold, silver, bronze and iron. He assembled a massive team of wood workers, stonecutters and other skilled craftsmen.

For the site of the temple’s construction, David decided to use the property he had bought from Ornan the Jebusite. This came to be called Mount Moriah (II Samuel 24:18-25; I Chronicles 21:15-30; I Chronicles 22:1-19; II Chronicles 3:1).

The Prince Who Would Be King

David had a son named Adonijah. Like his older brother Absalom, Adonijah was quite handsome and thought well of himself. He was not content to accept God’s will for Solomon to become king, so Adonijah moved to take the throne for himself. The arrogant prince exalted himself and publicly boasted that he would be Israel’s next king. He even paraded around in a show of chariots, horses and bodyguards in order to get attention and favor from the people and to appear worthy of rulership—just as Absalom had done.

King David knew that this was taking place, but he did nothing. Once again, he failed to correct one of his sons before things got out of control. And, due to his father’s inaction, Adonijah felt empowered and was convinced that the kingdom was his for the taking.

He met with several of the king’s key advisors, officers and government leaders to gain their loyalty. He managed to convince Joab and Abiathar to help him form a new government. But Zadok, Nathan the prophet, Benaiah and David’s mighty men refused.

Adonijah was then ready to make his next big move. He invited his brothers (except for Solomon), and all of the men of Judah and the king’s servants to attend a feast held in his honor. But Adonijah did

not bother to invite any of the men who refused to help him in his plot to become king.

When Nathan heard that Adonijah was holding a feast for himself in En Rogel, the prophet immediately understood the political motives behind it. Nathan knew that God wanted Solomon to become Israel's next king, but instead of going to David about the matter, he went to Bathsheba, Solomon's mother. (Nathan may have done this because he feared that the king would not have acted soon enough to correct Adonijah, and thus would have drawn Israel into another civil war. Nathan may have believed that Bathsheba had a better chance of getting through to David.)

Nathan told Bathsheba that Adonijah was proclaiming himself king and that King David was unaware of this. "If Adonijah seizes the throne, you and Solomon are as good as dead."

At Nathan's request, Bathsheba came before King David and informed him that Adonijah was seizing rulership for himself. Then she reminded David of his promise to crown Solomon as king. Just as she was telling him that her life and the life of Solomon were in danger, Nathan "just happened" to arrive and confirmed that Adonijah was claiming to be the new king at the feast he was holding for himself (I Kings 1:5-27).

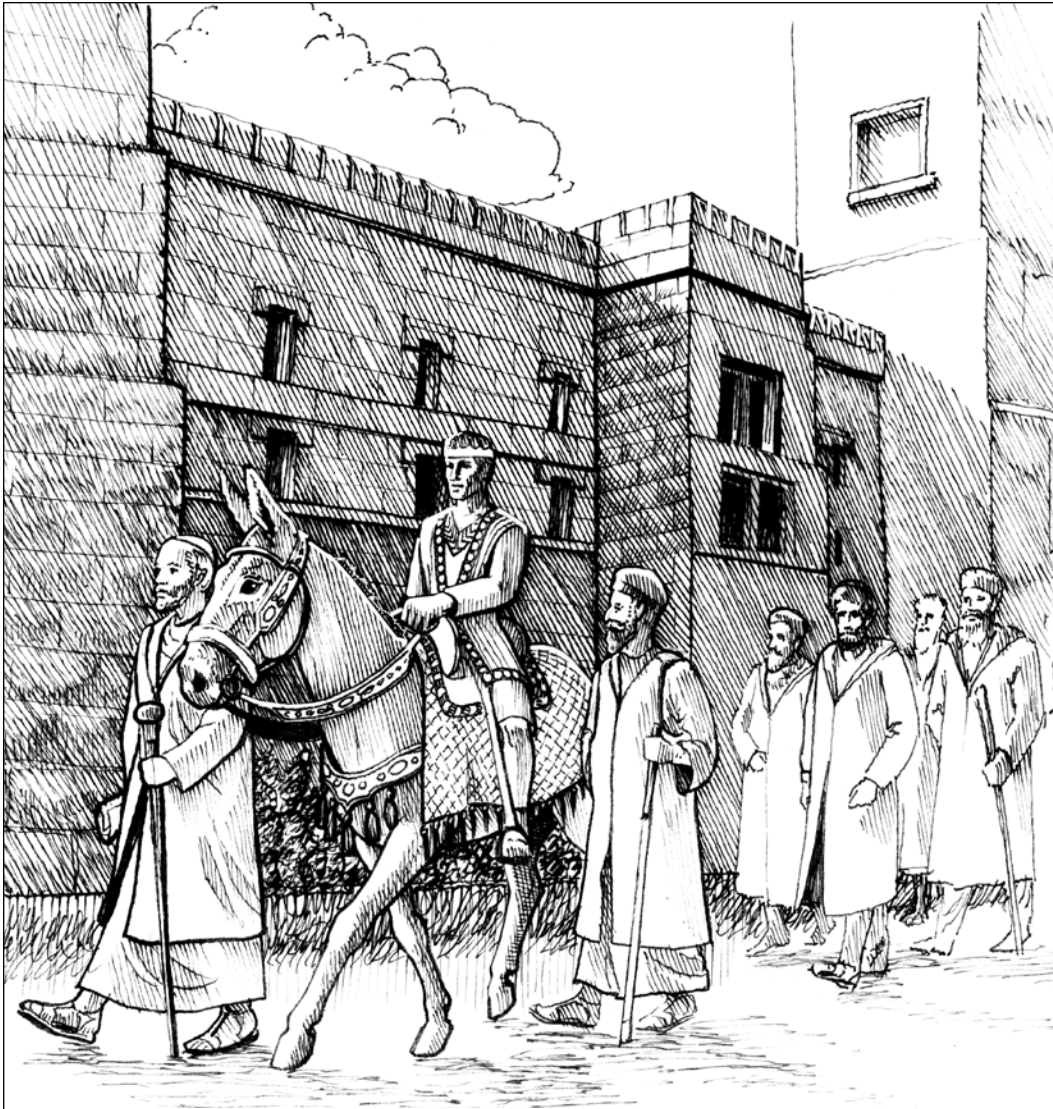
A New King Comes to Power

King David was not about to let another civil war erupt in Israel, so he quickly moved to make Solomon the new king. He ordered Nathan, Benaiah and two groups of the special bodyguards to have Solomon ride the king's royal mule to Gihon, a spring east of Jerusalem in the Kidron Valley, which served as the city's main water supply. There, Zadok the priest and Nathan the prophet anointed Solomon with oil, just as Samuel had done to David decades earlier. After this, a trumpet was blown and everyone shouted and cheered, "Long live King Solomon!"

Israel's new king and his entourage headed back to Jerusalem as the local citizenry watched in amazement. Through them, word spread that Solomon had been officially crowned king over all Israel.

Meanwhile, Adonijah and his feast guests, who were only about half a mile way, heard the commotion of a trumpet blast and the cheers of people just behind the hill. Joab said, "I wonder why the city is in such an uproar."

Just then, Jonathan, Abiathar's son, ran up and told Adonijah the news: "David has just made Solomon the new king!"



As a sign of transferring his kingly powers to Solomon, David has his son ride his royal mule, with Zadok, Nathan, Benaiah and two groups of special bodyguards escorting him.

All of Adonijah's guests shook with fear, and departed as fast as they could. And Adonijah was especially afraid, wondering what Solomon might do to him. He ran to God's tabernacle and grabbed the horns of the holy altar. He did this as a sign of putting himself under God's protection (Exodus 21:13-14).

Solomon heard about this, and of his brother's desire for the new king to promise not to execute him. Solomon sent a message back to Adonijah: "If you don't cause any more trouble, then no harm will come to you. However, if you do cause trouble, then I will have you put to death."

Adonijah agreed. He left the tabernacle and came before Solomon, bowing down out of respect. The prince probably wondered if his brother would suddenly change his mind and go back on his word. But King Solomon simply said to him, “Adonijah, go home” (I Kings 1:28-53).

From Father to Son

Knowing that his death was near, David decided to give young Solomon instructions and advice in ruling over Israel:

“Be brave and strong, Solomon, and be careful to follow God’s commandments and teachings. Obey everything written in the Law that God had Moses write for Israel. If you and your descendants faithfully obey God, then He will keep His promise to always have someone from our family line be king over Israel.

“Remember what Joab did to me by killing Abner and Amasa. He slew them as if they were his enemies of war—but the truth is, he murdered them. His guilt still remains; punish him as you think best. But whatever you do, don’t let Joab live long enough to die peacefully in old age. Deal with him as soon as possible.

“Remember the aid and support that Barzillai of Gilead gave me when I had to flee from your brother Absalom. Be kind to Barzillai’s sons. Let them be honored guests at your dinner table.

“And be sure to deal with Shimei, the Benjamite who cursed and insulted me and threw rocks at me and my men as we made our escape to Mahanaim. When God delivered Israel back into my hand, Shimei was among the first to greet me on my way home to Jerusalem. Since he pleaded for his life, I chose to show him mercy and promised not execute him. But you make sure that Shimei is punished. He may be an old man, but you’re wise enough to know that he must die” (I Kings 2:1-9).

A Great Freewill Offering

Before an assembly of Israel’s leaders, officers, captains and stewards, along with David’s valiant mighty men, the king told the people about his desire to build a temple for God, and that God had chosen Solomon to do this.

David turned to his son and said, “Serve God with a loyal heart and a willing mind. If you seek Him, He will be found by you—but if you forsake Him, He will cast you off forever. Consider this carefully, for the Eternal God has chosen you to build His house for the sanctuary. Be strong, and make it so.”

King David then gave Solomon detailed plans for building God's temple, along with instructions for the kinds of laborers to use.

Next, David explained to the assembly that the temple had to have the quality and excellence fitting for the Supreme God of the universe. Therefore, it had to reflect His majesty, power and greatness.

"I have already prepared with all my might the gold, silver and bronze that is to be used in the temple's construction and operation. I have also gathered iron, wood, precious stones, slabs of marble, and other items of worth. Above all this, I have contributed from my own special treasure: 112 tons of the finest, purest gold in the world, and 260 tons of silver. Who else is willing to join me in contributing to this awesome work?"

All the leaders, captains and officers willingly gave from their hearts. Their contributions came to about 187 tons of gold, 37,500 tons of silver, 675 tons of bronze and 3,750 tons of iron, along with precious stones!

And then, after addressing the assembly once more to praise God and to lead them in prayer, David had another coronation ceremony for Solomon, this time for all the leaders and representatives of Israel to see (I Chronicles 22:14; 23:1-2).

King David's Last Words

After 40 years of ruling over Israel—of waging war against his enemies, of expanding and securing the nation's boundaries, of amassing great national wealth, power and influence, of setting the example of serving God with all his heart and being—King David died. With his last breath, he said, "The man who would be king over God's people must be just, ruling in the fear of the Eternal. Like the morning light, he should always set the right example for his subjects to follow. Though my house has not always done this, God has made an everlasting covenant with me."

Then David spoke about a descendant of his family line, one who will some day rule as a righteous King, and remove all wicked enemies. His name is Jesus Christ.

David died at the age of 70, and was buried in Jerusalem (II Samuel 23:1-7; I Kings 2:10-12). One day soon, he will be resurrected and changed into a spirit-being and will rule over the twelve tribes of Israel during the coming Millennium (Ezekiel 37:24-25).

King Solomon Deals With His Enemies

One day, Adonijah made an unusual visit to Bathsheba and asked her for a favor: "I'm the oldest of David's living sons, and, as you know, by custom

the kingdom belongs to me. In fact, all of Israel expected me to become king, but God has determined that Solomon rule instead. Considering that I have lost so much, please do this one favor for me: Ask your son to let me marry Abishag. I know he will say yes to you.”

Abishag was a young and beautiful Shunammite woman who nursed David in his old age. Adonijah tried to take advantage of the fact that Solomon and Bathsheba were very close, and that the king trusted her. When Bathsheba asked her son to allow Adonijah to marry Abishag, Solomon instantly recognized his brother’s request as part of an evil plot.

In ancient tradition, possessing a royal harem was a sign of kingship, and, even though Abishag was never one of David’s wives or concubines, her physical closeness to the king would have, in the eyes of the people, made her seem as though she had been part of David’s harem. Adonijah wanted to marry Abishag in order to make it appear that he was the rightful heir to David’s throne. Solomon knew that his brother would then use this marriage to start a rebellion and seize the crown.

The king wasted no time and had his loyal servant Benaiah execute Adonijah.

Then Solomon had Abiathar the priest come before him. “Adonijah, your would-be king, is dead. And you deserve to be slain with him for trying to help him seize the throne. However, you were responsible for the Ark of the Covenant during my father’s reign, and you also afflicted yourself every time my father was afflicted. Therefore, I will allow you to live. However, I’m removing you from being a priest. Now get out of my sight!”

This event fulfilled God’s promise to remove Eli’s family line from the priesthood (I Samuel 2:30-35), while establishing Phinehas’ descendants in its place (Numbers 25:10-13).

When Joab heard about Adonijah’s execution, he ran to God’s tabernacle and grabbed hold of the altar for protection. He was not surprised when Benaiah came for him.

“King Solomon orders you to come out, Joab!”

But Joab refused, saying, “No, I’ll die right here!”

Benaiah told Solomon what his cousin Joab had said, and the king replied, “Very well, do what Joab said. Strike him down and then bury him. He’s guilty of murdering Abner and Amasa. Without my father’s knowledge and consent, he cut down those innocent men. Let their blood stain Joab and his descendants, and no longer be on my father’s house.”

Benaiah obeyed the king’s commands and killed Joab on the spot, later burying his body. Joab was a great warrior and military leader—but

Abishag was a young and beautiful Shunammite woman who took care of King David in his old age.



he was also carnal-minded. His lust for power and his habit of relying on human reasoning, instead of trusting in God as his uncle David had done, led to his downfall.

With Joab no longer around to cause trouble, Solomon made Benaiah the commander of Israel's army. He also installed Zadok as chief priest in place of Abiathar (I Kings 2:13-35).

Shimei Learns the Hard Way

Next, King Solomon ordered Shimei the Benjamite to build himself a home in Jerusalem and live there. Solomon wanted to keep the old man under close watch.

He then forbade Shimei from ever leaving the city, saying, “Else I will slay you. Then your blood will be on your own head.”

Shimei took this threat seriously, promising to never leave the city.

Three years later, two of Shimei’s slaves ran away. The old man learned that they had escaped to Gath, a major Philistine city about 30 miles from Jerusalem. Instead of dropping the matter, Shimei saddled his donkeys and journeyed to Gath to bring back his slaves.

When Solomon heard that Shimei had left the city, the king had the old man brought before him.

“Didn’t you promise in the name of the Eternal God that you would never leave Jerusalem? I warned you what would happen if you broke your word—that you would die! Yet you agreed that this was fair, didn’t you? So why have you disobeyed me and not kept your word?”

Shimei trembled, not quite sure what to say.

Solomon continued: “Do you remember all the wicked and cruel things you did and said to my father David? Now God will return your wickedness and cruelty upon your own head. But God will bless me, and establish the throne of David forever.”

Following his king’s orders, Benaiah executed Shimei, removing another troublemaker from Solomon’s kingdom (I Kings 2:36-46).

CHAPTER EIGHTY-NINE

THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON

Though he was king, young Solomon recognized that he lacked the knowledge and understanding that come with time and experience. So he decided to follow his father's instruction to seek after God, hoping that the Eternal would direct his steps. Solomon even offered 1,000 burnt offerings on the altar at the holy tabernacle.

That night, God appeared to the young king in a dream. (Throughout history, many people have claimed that God spoke to them in their dreams. But very rarely did He do this. Today, if people truly want to know God's will, all they need to do is study the Bible. Like an instruction manual, God's Word tells us how to live in peace and harmony with others, and how to become successful, happy and productive people.)

In the dream, God said to Solomon, "Ask for whatever you desire, and I shall give it to you." God wanted to know what was in Solomon's heart. Most young people, if presented with such an opportunity, would ask for material possessions, fame, great wealth or power.

But not Solomon. He acknowledged that God had rewarded David's loyalty and wholeheartedness with great kindness. "And now You have made his son to be king over Your people," he said. "But who am I? I'm just a little child, who lacks the qualifications and experience to be a king. You have placed me over many millions and millions of people, yet I don't even know how to go out or come in. I need Your help. Please give me a heart of understanding, one that will listen to Your instruction. Grant me the ability to discern between good and evil—to know the difference between right and wrong—so that I can judge over Your people with wisdom and justice."

God was pleased with Solomon's request. In fact, He was so delighted, He answered, "You could have asked for a long life or for riches or for the destruction of your enemies. Instead, you asked for the wisdom to understand and make the right decisions. Therefore, I will give you what you have requested. You will have so much wisdom and understanding that there will be no human being like you—past, present or future. And I will also give you what you have not asked for: riches and honor, so much so that no other king in your lifetime

will be like you. Solomon, if you are careful to walk in all My ways and keep My laws as your father David did, I will also bless you with a long life.”

Solomon woke up from his dream feeling both grateful and overwhelmed, for he knew that when God said He would do something, it always came to pass.

The king headed back to Jerusalem and stood before the Ark of the Covenant and presented offerings to God. Then, wanting to share with others, he held a feast for his servants (I Kings 3:3-15).

Rendering a Wise Decision

As king, part of Solomon’s duties was to judge and decide legal matters for the people. Yet, because he was so young and inexperienced, many wondered if he could truly deliver just decisions.

One day, as he presided over court, a dispute was brought before him involving two women. Both were harlots, women who lived immoral lives.

The first woman said to the king, “My lord, this woman and I live in the same home, and both of us were pregnant. She gave birth to her son the third day after I had given birth to my son. We lived together in the same household. No other person came there.

“One night, this woman accidentally lay on her son, killing him. Then, in the middle of the night, she took my son while I was sleeping and placed her dead child against my chest. The next morning, as I tried to nurse the child, I discovered that he was dead. When I examined his lifeless body, I realized that this was not the son I had just given birth to. This woman has stolen my child and has tried to deceive me into believing that her dead son belongs to me!”

The king asked the second woman to reply. Holding the baby boy in her arms, she said, “None of what she says is true! This is my child! The dead one belongs to her!”

It was a difficult case to judge. There were no witnesses, no evidence from which to cast judgment—only statements from the two women, who argued back and forth, accusing each other of wrongdoing.

But King Solomon did come to a decision. Pointing to the baby, he said, “Both of you claim to be the mother of this child, but only one of you is telling the truth. Since there are no witnesses to back up your claims, there is only one way for the one who is telling the truth to get her child back.”

Then the king turned to his guards and said, “Bring me a sword.”

After the weapon was brought forward, Solomon said, “Guards,

take this sword and divide this child in two. Give one half to the first woman, and the other half to the second woman.”

The king’s guards and servants were taken aback at this decision. “Is he serious?” they wondered. Yet, no one dared to openly question the king’s judgment.

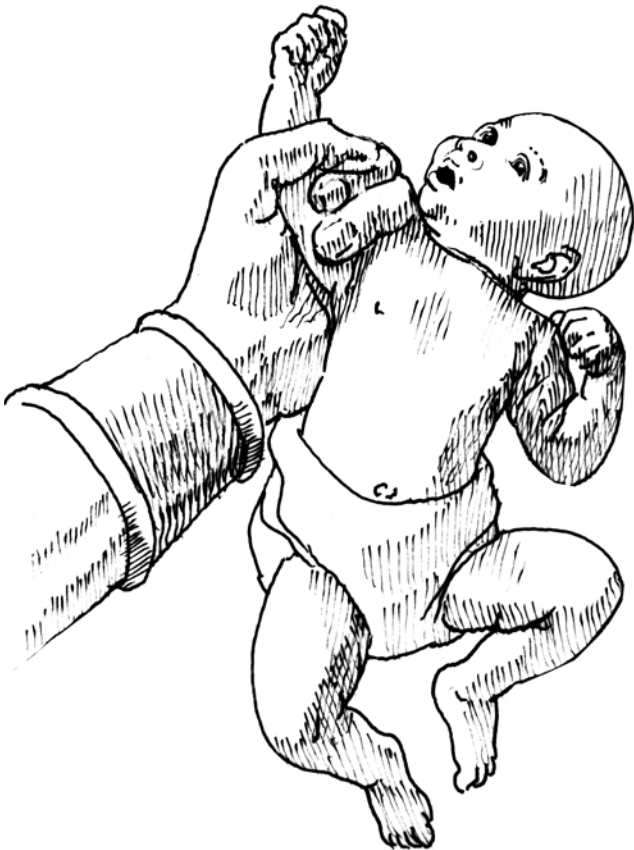
Then one of the women stepped forward and pleaded with Solomon, saying, “Please, my lord, don’t do this! Give the child to her! I’d rather have him alive and well as her son than to be cut in two and killed!”

But the other woman coldly said, “Go ahead and divide the baby. Then neither of us will have him.”

Solomon seized upon her cold and unfeeling statement and instantly knew who the true mother was. Only a mother, one who loved her child and would not let anything bad happen to him, would give anything to protect her little one from death—even allowing another woman to become his legal mother.

Before the whole court of onlookers, the king said, “Give the baby to the first woman, and don’t kill him. She is his true mother.”

Justice was served, and the whole nation of Israel heard about this wise and monumental decision. No longer did anyone see King



Solomon as merely a youth. These and other decisions that he rendered caused everyone to recognize that God had given their king a great wealth of wisdom and depth of understanding. The people of Israel came to respect Solomon and his growing reputation for administering godly justice for all (I Kings 3:16-28).

A Type of God’s Kingdom

Solomon set up his government, appointing certain men to key positions.

With a strong government in place, the house of Judah and the house of Israel prospered as one nation. The land was filled with a happy and rejoicing populous. Israel was at peace, food and drink were abundant, and the people had a wise and just king ruling over them. Under Solomon, the borders of Israel's territory expanded, stretching far north to the Euphrates River and reaching south to the Gulf of Aqaba. Solomon also dominated kingdoms that lay within Israel's borders. Even the Philistines paid tribute to him and served him.

The kingdom of Israel had become a physical type of the kingdom of God, and King Solomon was a type of the soon-coming ruler of God's government—Jesus Christ.

Abundant Riches

Solomon's great wealth surpassed that of other kings of his day. Every day, he and his royal court consumed tremendous amounts of the finest foods—150 bushels of fine flour, 300 bushels of meal, 10 fatted, grain-fed cattle, 20 pasture-fed cattle, 100 sheep, plus deer, gazelles and geese.

He assembled an army of 12,000 chariot soldiers and 1,400 chariots, which were stationed at Jerusalem and other cities throughout Israel.

The king gained riches by taxing traders who traveled through his kingdom, from the men he had appointed to be regional governors over the land, and from Arabian kings, who used caravan routes that were under Solomon's control. From these sources, Solomon gained 25 tons of gold year after year. He used the gold to make 200 large shields and 300 smaller shields for decoration.

All drinking and eating utensils were made of gold. The king even had a throne made from ivory and overlaid with pure gold. And every three years, Solomon's merchant ships brought back gold and silver, along with apes and other jungle animals.

Solomon committed himself to producing great projects that included building houses and water pools and planting vineyards, gardens and orchards. He also gathered for himself numerous servants, singers and musicians (I Kings 4:22-23, 26-28; 10:14-23, 26; Ecclesiastes 2:4-8).

Astounding Wisdom

King Solomon's abundant wealth also came from foreign rulers and ambassadors who regularly visited him to hear his wisdom. Year after year, these royal visitors showered him with articles of silver and gold,

clothing made from the finest fabrics, armor, exotic spices and many horses and mules (II Chronicles 9:22-24).

All across Israel and throughout neighboring kingdoms, Solomon became famous for his immense understanding and insight. His wisdom came to surpass the worldly wisdom of wise men from the East and from Egypt. Solomon composed 1,005 songs and spoke 3,000 proverbs. (The Book of Proverbs—which was inspired by God and is among the 66 books that make up the Holy Bible—is just a small portion of these.) A great student of nature, he learned many life lessons from studying trees, insects and animals (I Kings 4:29-34). From the ant, Solomon learned the value of hard work and the danger of laziness:

“Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise: Which having no guide, overseer, or ruler, provides her meat in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest. How long will you sleep, O sluggard? When will you arise out of your sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: So shall your poverty come as one that travels, and your want as an armed man” (Proverbs 6:6-11).

One day, the king received a visit from the Queen of Sheba, who had brought spices, gold and precious stones from her kingdom. She had traveled more than 1,000 miles to see if Solomon’s reputation of being the wisest man on earth was indeed true.

The queen peppered Solomon with many difficult questions and riddles—and was amazed at his ability to answer all of them. Finally, she was convinced that all she had heard about him was true. In fact, she said to him, “I have not heard even half of the greatness of your wisdom! Your servants and assistants are blessed to be in your company and hear your great understanding. Your God, the Eternal, must be delighted in you to be using you to execute justice and righteousness over His people Israel.”

Before her visit was over, the Queen of Sheba presented Solomon with about 4½ tons of gold, an abundance of silver and precious stones, and more spices than the king had ever received.

And King Solomon gave back to the queen all that she desired, even more than she had given to him. Then, she and her entourage returned to her kingdom (I Kings 10:1-13; II Chronicles 9:1-12).

Building God’s Temple

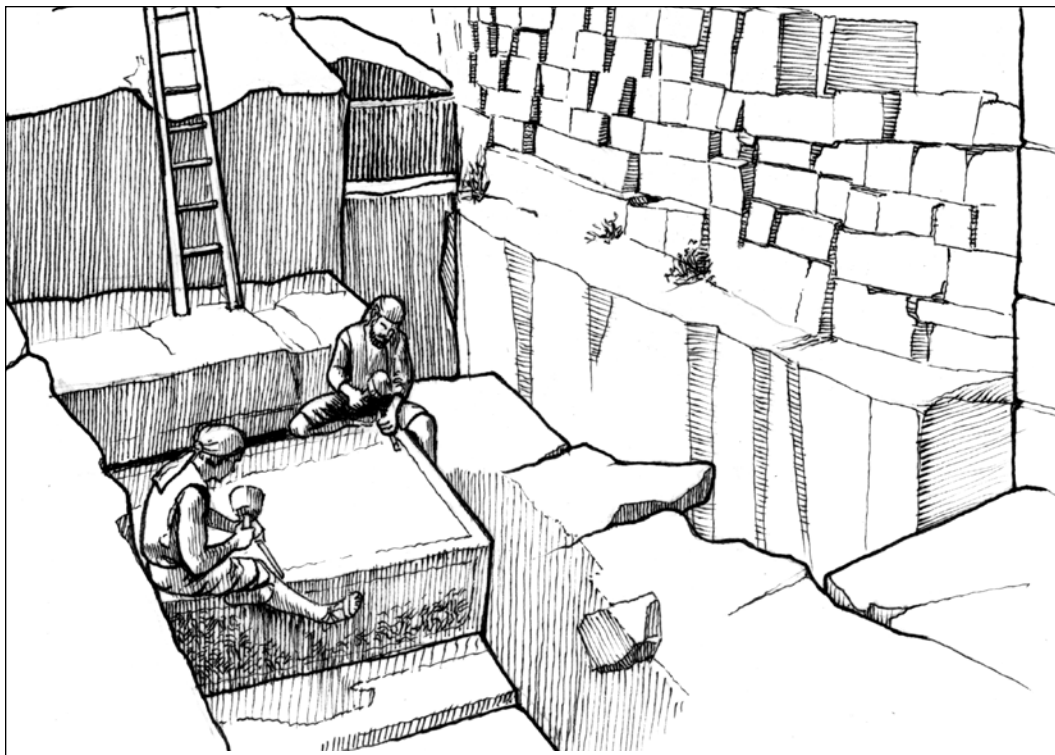
Years earlier, God told King David that he was not allowed to build a temple for Him. However, David was allowed to gather all the gold,

silver, bronze, timber, along with goods, supplies, and servants and workmen necessary for the construction.

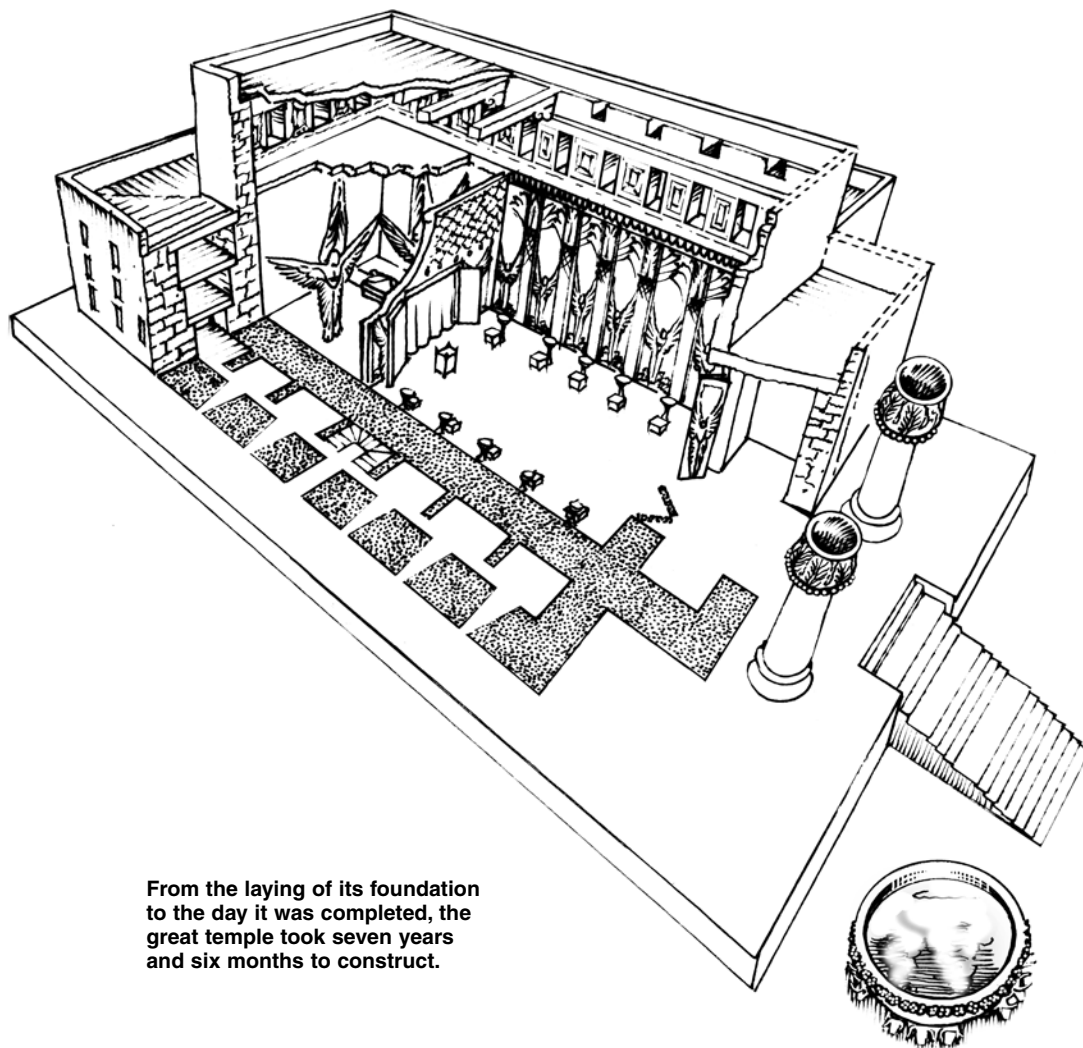
It was now up to Solomon to oversee the building of this massive project. King Hiram of Tyre, ruler over an important seaport city, was of great assistance. He had been a friend to David, and extended that friendship to David's son. In turn, Solomon sought Hiram's help in gathering timber from the legendary cedar forests of Lebanon.

Solomon assembled a workforce of 150,000 laborers and 3,600 overseers. Together, they transported huge quarry stones and laid the temple's foundation (II Chronicles 2:18).

The temple was patterned after God's tabernacle. Its stone walls were covered with cedar paneling and overlaid with gold. Just outside the temple's entrance were two giant pillars, named Boaz ("in it is strength") and Jachin ("He shall establish"). Inside the temple was a vestibule (or porch) at the front. Next was the sanctuary, or the Holy Place, which housed the altar of incense and 12 golden tables for the showbread, with ten golden lampstands. After this chamber came the inner sanctuary, or the Most Holy Place. This is where the Ark of the Covenant was to be stationed. Around the temple was an inner court used by priests. It had a round bronze basin called a Sea, and held about 12,000 gallons of water, which the priests used to wash themselves and their sacrifices. It also supplied water for the smaller basins that were



used. There was also an outer court used by the rest of the Israelites. From the laying of the foundation to its completion, the temple of God took seven years and six months to finish (I Kings 7:15-51).



From the laying of its foundation to the day it was completed, the great temple took seven years and six months to construct.

CHAPTER NINETY

SOLOMON'S LATTER YEARS

King Solomon called for a special ceremony to be held in order to dedicate the new temple to God. The elders of Israel and all the other leaders and officials assembled, as the Ark of the Covenant was delivered to its new home. The priests carried the ark (which still contained the two tablets with the Ten Commandments written on them) and placed it in the temple's innermost sanctuary—the Most Holy Place. Solomon also had the holy tabernacle (which the Israelites had originally brought with them when they entered the Promised Land) delivered to the temple, along with holy furnishings.

As the priests filed out of the temple, an assembly of Levites praised God with singing and with the playing of cymbals, harps, trumpets and other musical instruments.

Suddenly, everyone saw an amazing sight: A mysterious cloud appeared and entered the temple, filling every chamber. The cloud was so thick and massive that the priests could not continue their work. This same thing happened in Moses' day, when the holy tabernacle had been built (Exodus 40:34-35). The mysterious cloud was God's glory. It represented God's presence and showed that the Eternal was pleased with the special workmanship that had gone into the temple's construction.

The king reminded the assembly why God's temple was built. Then Solomon kneeled before the altar, spread his hands out toward heaven—as Moses had done when the Amalekites attacked Israel in the wilderness (Exodus 17:8-16)—and prayed to God.

In his prayer of dedication, the king said, "Eternal God of Israel, there is none like You in heaven or on the earth. You have kept Your promise to my father David in having his son build Your house. Now I ask that You keep Your promise to always have a descendant of David sitting on Israel's throne, as long as that man is careful to walk in all Your ways."

When he finished praying, Solomon stood up and blessed the assembly. Then, he and the people dedicated the temple to God's service, and offered burnt sacrifices—22,000 bulls and 120,000 sheep. The people had given so much in burnt offerings, grain offerings and peace offer-

ings that the bronze altar outside the temple was too small to handle such large contributions.

The ceremony was an especially awe-inspiring and festive occasion, because the latter half of the 14-day event took place during the Feast of Tabernacles, which pictures the future millennial rule of Jesus Christ.

When the celebration was finally over, Solomon sent the people home, full of joy and appreciative of all the good that God had done for them (I Kings 8 and II Chronicles 5, 6 and 7:1-10).

Other Building Projects

Now Solomon was ready to build a palace for himself, one that would be fashioned after his own design. Together, God's temple and Solomon's royal palace took twenty years to complete.

He also built a large complex called the House of the Forest of Lebanon, which had four rows of pillar columns and beams. These and the paneling and roof were made up of cedars from the rich forests of Lebanon.

Also, Solomon had built the Hall of Pillars, as well as the Hall of Judgment, which the king used for hearing public petitions and to render judgments for the people of Israel.

The king also took several cities and resettled them with Israelites. He made storage cities out of some, while fortifying others with walls, gates and bars. And other cities were dedicated to Solomon's many chariots and to his cavalry.

Much effort and expense was put into these projects. To assemble and maintain a large workforce, the king enslaved the surviving Canaanite peoples. The Israelites had failed to obey God's command to utterly destroy them (I Kings 7:1-11; II Chronicles 8:1-8).

God Appears to Solomon Again

God appeared to Solomon by night, and said to him, "I have heard your prayer, and have chosen this temple for My use.

"If I strike the land with famine or a plague so that My people Israel remember Me, and they humble themselves and seek after Me, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear them. I will forgive their sin and will heal their land.

"I have chosen this house, My temple, and have set it apart for holy use so that My name may be there forever.

"If you, Solomon, will obey Me as your father did, and will live according to all My commandments, statutes and judgments, then I

will make the throne of your kingdom sure. I will keep My covenant with David.

“However, if you turn away from Me and break My laws—and if you serve other gods and worship them—then I will pluck them up by the roots out of My land which I have given them. And I will cast this house, which I have sanctified for My name and use, out of My sight. I will make it a proverb of ridicule among all nations. Everyone who passes by it will shudder and say, ‘Why has God done this to this land and to this house?’ And someone will answer, ‘Because they forgot the Eternal, the God of their fathers, the One who delivered them from the land of Egypt. They sought after other gods and worshiped and served them. This is why God has brought all this trouble and disaster upon them’ (II Chronicles 7:12-22).

A Dangerous Weakness

For years, all went well for King Solomon. Yet, like David, Samson and all other servants of God before him, Solomon was only human—which meant that, along with his strengths, he also had weaknesses. One of Solomon’s glaring faults was his weakness for women. The king had followed in his father’s footsteps and gathered for himself many wives, instead of being married to just one wife, as God had planned for all men. In fact, King Solomon was married to 700 wives and had 300 concubines!

Early in his reign, before the temple had been built, Solomon had made a peace treaty with Pharaoh, the king of Egypt. Part of the agreement was that Solomon had to marry Pharaoh’s daughter, an Egyptian princess.

Many, if not most, of Solomon’s wives were foreigners: women of Moab, Ammon, Edom, Sidon, etc. They were from nations that God had warned the Israelites to never marry:

“When you enter the Promised Land and dwell in it, and decide for yourselves to have a king set over you, I will choose one for you. The king is to be an Israelite, not a foreigner. And he shall not collect a multitude of war horses for himself, as the pagan nations do. Nor shall the king collect a multitude of wives for himself, for they will surely turn his heart to seek after their false gods” (Deuteronomy 17:14-17).

Solomon did not heed this instruction. And, just as God had said would happen, he began to concern himself with pleasing his many wives and concubines than with pleasing and serving the Creator God.

This did not happen overnight, but gradually over time. Solomon had started off following God’s statutes, except when it came to mak-

ing sacrifices. Before the temple had been built, Solomon and the rest of Israel offered sacrifices at high places. These were open-air centers of worship, which the Canaanites had used to worship their false gods. Back in Moses' day, God ordered Israel to destroy these Canaanite high places (Deuteronomy 7:5; 12:3). He knew that, even if these were used to worship Him, Israel could be tempted to mix customs and rituals from the religions of this world with godly traditions and practices. Now that the temple had been constructed, people could no longer hide behind the excuse that they were only using the high places to worship God.

By the time Solomon was old and gray, he was no longer as loyal to God as he had been. He gave in to his many wives' constant demands for affection and attention, and, to appease them, worshipped their false gods and idols. Solomon sought after Ashtoreth, whom the people of Sidon worshipped. He also sought after Molech and Chemosh, false gods of the Ammonites. To appease these gods, worshippers offered human sacrifices, cutting short the lives of their children!

Imagine—King Solomon had given up the wonderful truths of God, turned his back on all the blessings and promises God had showered upon him, in order to serve deities that did not really exist! The king had even built a high place for these false gods on a hill east of Jerusalem, burning incense to them and offering sacrifices.

God was angry with Solomon. Rarely did God ever appear to a human being, but He had appeared to Solomon twice! The Bible states that “Solomon did evil in the sight of the Eternal, and did not fully follow the Eternal, as did his father David” (I Kings 11:6). The king had no excuse for his backsliding behavior.

God spoke to Solomon yet again—but this time, He brought bad news: “Since you turned your back on Me and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, I will tear the kingdom of Israel from out of your hand and will give it to one of your servants.

“However, for your father David's sake, whom I greatly loved, I will not do this while you are still alive; I will do this during your son's reign. Yet I will not tear away all of the tribes of Israel. I will give one tribe to your son, for David's sake, and for Jerusalem's sake” (I Kings 11:1-13).

God Raises Up Adversaries

Years ago, when King David ruled Israel, he conquered neighboring kingdoms, strengthening his country's military might. One of these kingdoms was Edom. With Joab as the chief army commander over



Israel's forces, every male Edomite was slain. But some few managed to escape. Among them was Hadad, a child who descended from the king of Edom. He and his band of refugees found a safe haven in Egypt, where they were protected for many years. Pharaoh greatly favored Hadad, and even gave his sister-in-law for Hadad to marry. She bore a son to Hadad, who was reared as a prince of Egypt.

When Hadad learned that both David and Joab were dead, he sought Pharaoh's permission to leave Egypt to establish his own country back in Edom. Though at first reluctant, Pharaoh agreed.

Little did anyone know that God had raised up Hadad to become a thorn in Solomon's side. The Eternal removed the peace and security Israel had known for decades, and replaced it with constant trouble from Hadad and his men (I Kings 11:14-22).

God also sent another adversary to hound Solomon. His name was Rezon. He and his men had escaped from Zobah, which David had conquered early in his reign (II Samuel 8:3-8). Rezon settled in Damascus and, after David's death, became ruler over the kingdom of Syria.

While Solomon was continually troubled by the rebellious attacks of Hadad and Rezon, God raised another adversary to trouble the king. He commanded the prophet Ahijah to anoint a new king over Israel.

Ahijah was from the town of Shiloh, which was in Ephraim, the leading tribe of the house of Israel. Following God's commands, the prophet came to a man named Jeroboam, the son of Nebat. He was a talented young man whom Solomon had made leader over a works project around Jerusalem.

After making sure that no one was around, Ahijah took a new garment and tore it into twelve pieces. Jeroboam must have thought that this was a strange sight, but he did not say anything. Then the prophet said to him, "Take ten of these pieces for yourself. They symbolize the ten tribes of the house of Israel, which the Eternal has given to you. God says, 'Behold, I will tear the kingdom out from Solomon's hand, because he has forsaken Me for false gods, and has not followed after Me as David had done. I give ten tribes to you, but, for David's sake, will leave the house of Judah to Solomon's son. I will make you king over Israel, Jeroboam. And if you heed My instructions and keep My commandments, I will build for you an enduring house, like David's'" (I Kings 11:23-38).

Jeroboam was surprised by such a great blessing. But he soon learned that he had to run for his life, for Solomon discovered what had happened and wanted to kill him. Jeroboam managed to escape to Egypt and was offered protection by Shishak, the Pharaoh (I Kings 11:40).

Learning From His Mistakes

Like Saul and David before him, King Solomon's reign lasted forty years, from about 971 to 931 B.C. (I Kings 11:41-43; II Chronicles 9:29-30).



Jeroboam looks on as the prophet Ahijah tears the new garment into pieces.

Because the Bible does not openly say so, most people believe that Solomon did not repent before he died. Yet, the book of Ecclesiastes, which he wrote, reveals a man nearing the end of his life, one who realizes that seeking after the material things of this world is useless. The book teaches that true happiness, peace and fulfillment come from putting God's Way first—rejecting foolish ways for godly wisdom.

CHAPTER NINETY-ONE

JUDAH AND ISRAEL SPLIT

Over the years, the unity and bond between the house of Israel and the house of Judah slowly gave way to hostility and division.

After King Solomon died, leaders and representatives of the ten northern tribes assembled at Shechem, an Ephraimite city about 30 miles north of Jerusalem. The assembly's purpose was to officially accept Rehoboam, Solomon's son, as king over all Israel. When Rehoboam came before them, he probably thought that his coronation was certain. As he scanned the crowd of somber faces, he was surprised to see a certain familiar face grinning back at him—it belonged to Jeroboam!

Rehoboam turned to an Israelite official and said, "What is this rebel doing here? Why isn't he cowering for his life in Egypt?"

"Because Jeroboam is our representative," the official said. "We sent word to him in Egypt, asking him to represent the house of Israel's interests."

"What interests?"

"You shall soon see."

Jeroboam, trading his grin for a serious look, stepped forward and pointed at Solomon's son. "For many years, your father created massive work projects all throughout Israel," he said. "These grand works were done on the backs of the people. King Solomon made our yoke heavy, overburdening us with heavy taxes. Rehoboam, if you want to be our king, lighten our load—then we will serve you."

The people surrounding Jeroboam nodded. Some murmured, "Yes" and "That's right."

Rehoboam and his men did not know what to say or do. A careless answer would have meant a very short reign. Finally, Rehoboam said, "I need some time to think about this. Come back in three days and I will give you my answer."

Everyone agreed and then departed, leaving Rehoboam to consider how he should answer them. He turned to his advisors, aged and experienced men who, for years, had given wise counsel to Solomon.

"What should I do?" Rehoboam asked. "How shall I answer these people?"

The advisors said, “If you want to be a servant to these Israelites, then speak good words to them and do as they request. Tell them that you will serve them and look out for their best interests. Then they will be your servants forever.”

Since he did not inherit Solomon’s wisdom or seek God for His insight and depth of understanding, Rehoboam did not value this sound advice. So he rejected it.

Rehoboam turned to his peers—the young princes, officials and assistants he had grown up with, who were his own age and shared the same mindset. “What do you think I should do?” he asked them. “Should I lighten Israel’s tax burden?”

The young men replied, “We know exactly what you should do,” and then they told him their plan. Rehoboam listened to their counsel and liked what he heard (I Kings 12:1-9).

Avoiding Civil War

When Jeroboam and the assembly returned to Shechem, Rehoboam followed the advice of his peers. In a cold, harsh voice, he answered, “You have said that my father Solomon made your yoke heavy—but I will make it even heavier. My father chastised you with whips—but I will chastise you with knotted whips reserved for slaves!”

The leaders of the ten northern tribes were furious!

“This man doesn’t care about us,” one man said.

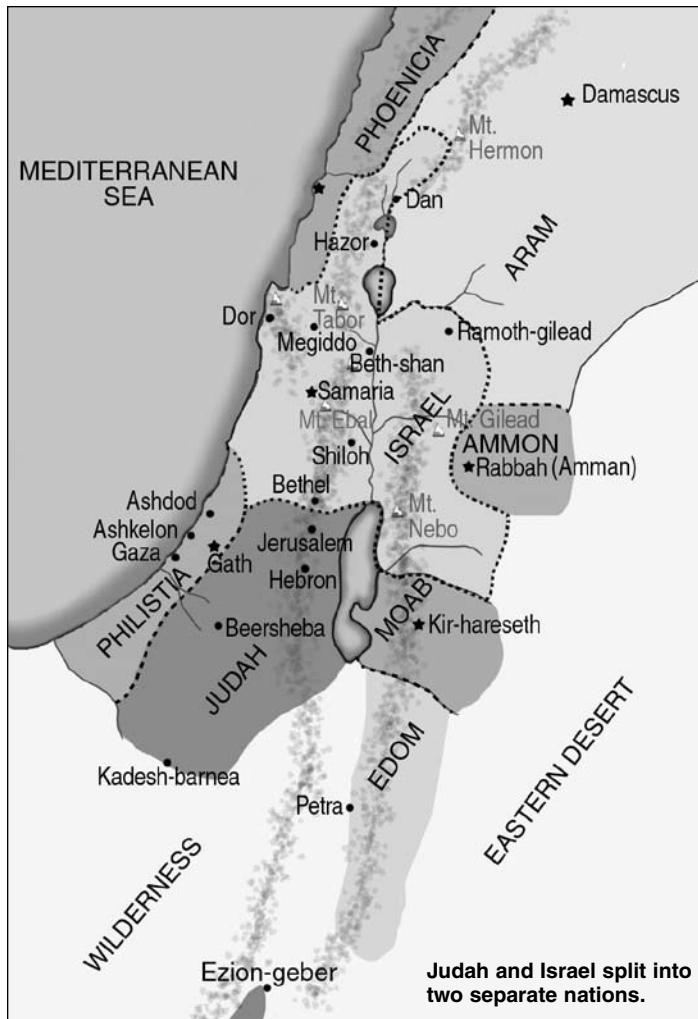
“You’re right,” another said. “All he cares about is himself and the tribe he comes from!”

The Israelites had had enough. They were not about to let Rehoboam rule over their lives. Their anger and outrage intensified, the crowd of angry men was in danger of turning into a bitter and merciless mob. And then, to Rehoboam’s horror, the Israelites shouted the same rallying cry that Sheba, a dangerous rebel of King David’s day, issued years ago: “What share do our tribes have in the royal house of David? We have no inheritance in the son of Jesse’s family! Let’s all return home to our own house, and let the royal family of David see to its own house!”

With that, the ten tribes of the house of Israel rejected Rehoboam’s rulership, and decided to start their own kingdom. Meanwhile, Jeroboam was delighted that the prophet Ahijah’s message from God was coming to pass.

Rehoboam and his men tried not to panic as they raced to learn how many citizens remained loyal to the throne of David.

“What do we do now?” the king asked his men. “How many tribes are left under my rule?”



One of his assistants answered, “My lord, the whole tribe of Judah has chosen to stay loyal to you. And so have certain Israelites who, though they originally came from the northern tribes, now live throughout Judah.”

“And what about Benjamin? My grandfather David was very good to that tribe.”

“Most people in Benjamin recognize this, my lord, and have chosen to submit to your leadership. However, Bethel and several other northern Benjamite towns have sided with the house of Israel.”

King Rehoboam agonized over Israel

rejecting his rule. He simply couldn’t accept it. So he appointed one of his trusted officials to meet with the elders of Israel and try to talk sense into them. Rehoboam picked Adoram, the chief officer in charge of taxing the people, and who had also been in charge of the forced labor pool during Solomon’s reign (I Kings 4:6; 5:14).

A Deadly Reaction

The leaders of Israel were not surprised when a messenger delivered a message from Rehoboam announcing that he was sending a special representative to talk with them.

“Perhaps the son of Solomon has changed his mind and is now ready to cave in to our demands,” one man said. He was one of a handful of men who worried about what Judah and Israel’s separation meant for God’s people.

Another man replied, “I don’t care what Rehoboam’s representative has to say! Israel needs a new king—someone from among its own tribes!” Other leaders nodded and murmured in agreement. The rift between Israel and Judah had been growing for so many years that they and the rest of Israel were determined to start their own kingdom—no matter what.

When Adoram finally arrived, the Israelites were furious!

“What is this man doing here? Of all the men in Rehoboam’s government, why was Adoram selected? He is the one in charge of collecting taxes! And he is the same man Solomon used to force our citizens into labor!”

It was very foolish for the king to send a man who symbolized the two things that Israel hated—heavy taxes and forced labor. Adoram’s presence signaled to the Israelites that Rehoboam intended his rulership to be even stricter than Solomon’s. The sight of Adoram angered the people so much that they picked up rocks and stoned him to death!

“We’re free from Judah’s tyranny!” the people shouted. “It’s time to select our own king.” They did not concern themselves with seeking God’s will in the matter. Their minds were made up.

And when the Israelites asked themselves who should become their new king, again, they did not ask God to guide them, to choose a man after His own heart, as He did when He selected David years earlier. Just like people of the world today, Israel thought it could set its own path through life without any help and direction from God.

The Israelites were impressed with Jeroboam and how he had handled representing their interests to Judah’s king. They were also impressed with his leadership skills. Focusing on his talents while failing to examine his character, the ten tribes of Israel chose Jeroboam to be their new ruler.

Meanwhile, when King Rehoboam heard about Adoram’s murder, he mounted his chariot and raced back to Jerusalem in fear of his own life. Then, angered by the Israelites’ bloody response and the fact that they made Jeroboam their king, Rehoboam assembled an army of 180,000 soldiers from Judah and Benjamin, and prepared to invade Israel. “Judah and Israel will be one nation again,” he said, “whether the Israelites like it or not!”

But he soon found out that this was not God’s will. The Eternal sent His servant Shemaiah to deliver a message to the king. “Hear what God has to say to you, Rehoboam, and to the whole house of Judah, Benjamin and all who follow you: ‘You shall not go up and fight against your brother Israelites. Let every man return home, for this split is of My doing, according to My will and purpose.’”

No one dared to question or openly defy God's will, for everyone knew that invading Israel would be like opposing God Himself! The invasion army was dismantled and every man went home, accepting God's answer (I Kings 12:12-24; II Chronicles 10:13-19; 11:1-4).

Removing God From Israel

Now that his kingdom was much smaller, King Rehoboam feared that other kingdoms might be tempted to attack. So he turned his attention to building fortified cities and military strongholds throughout Judah.

Meanwhile, King Jeroboam built up Shechem's defenses, and decided to live there. He also fortified Penuel, a city on the other side of the Jordan River. He did this to affirm his royal authority over the Israelites there.

Like David, Jeroboam's kingdom and rulership came from God. But unlike David, Jeroboam did not set his heart to seek God and obey His laws. Jeroboam was more like Joab, in that he relied on human reasoning to make decisions, rather than on God's strength and guidance.

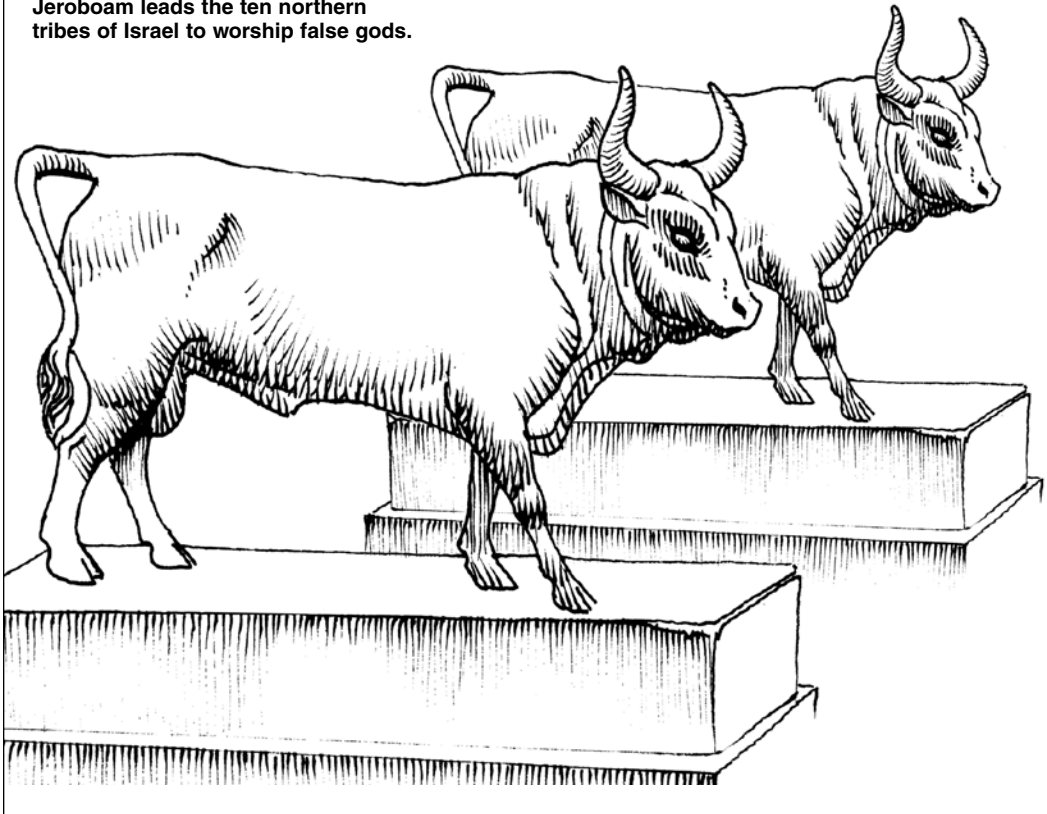
God had promised Jeroboam that Israel's ten tribes would be under his rulership. Despite this, Jeroboam still worried, for he knew that God expected His people to worship Him with sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem. "If they travel there often enough, they might change their minds and submit to Rehoboam's rule. And if that happens, they will certainly kill me."

Jeroboam did not see the wisdom in following David's example of putting his trust in God, relying upon Him as his "rock" and "shield" and "high tower of strength."

So the carnal-minded king came up with a wicked plan. He had his men create two golden idols made in the image of calves. Before an assembly, he said to his subjects, "Why travel all the way to Jerusalem to worship? Here are your gods who brought you up out of Egypt," he said, pointing to the golden calves. "There's no longer any need for you to travel. You can worship your gods in your own land."

He set up one idol in Dan, at the northern end of Israel, and he set up the other idol in Bethel, in the south. The vast majority of the Israelites accepted Jeroboam's new system of idolatry, and worshipped at the high places he had built throughout the nation. Rejecting the priestly services of the many Levites who lived in Israel, Jeroboam appointed his own priests to serve in these pagan sanctuaries. Next, to keep the people from traveling to Jerusalem to celebrate the Feast of

Jeroboam leads the ten northern tribes of Israel to worship false gods.



Tabernacles—an eight-day fall festival that pictures worldwide peace, abundance and joy—the king set up his own pagan festival. Held a month after God’s Feast, it distracted the Israelites and kept their minds off the true God.

Jeroboam trusted in himself, not God. He tempted and deceived the people into disobeying God’s command to travel to His three annual Feasts (Deuteronomy 16:16). He created idols for the people, essentially removing God from Israel. He changed God’s annual Sabbaths and Feasts. In effect, Jeroboam changed Israel into just another nation of pagan idol worshippers (I Kings 12:25-33; II Chronicles 11:5-12).

CHAPTER NINETY-TWO

TWO KINGDOMS, TWO PATHS

In order to set up a new system of worship, Jeroboam reasoned that he had to replace the true God with false gods and replace God's Holy Days with counterfeit holidays. He had also made himself Israel's high priest, putting himself into an office that was not his to take. Now that he was the nation's king and high priest, Jeroboam also concluded that he had to supply Israel with a counterfeit priesthood. He stripped the priests and the Levites of their duties, and chose priests from all of the northern tribes.

The people of Levi decided to leave their cities and head for Judah so that they could serve God and offer sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem.

They willingly came under King Rehoboam's rulership, and their faithful obedience to God helped to strengthen the kingdom of Judah. For the first three years, Rehoboam's kingdom thrived, for the people set their hearts to seek the Eternal and live according to His commandments, judgments and statutes (II Chronicles 11:13-17).

Jeroboam and the Man of God

Meanwhile, Jeroboam continued to mislead and deceive the northern kingdom of Israel into worshipping lifeless idols and demons posing as deities.

One day, a man of God came from Judah with a message for Jeroboam, who was at Bethel conducting a pagan religious service. As Israel's new king stood by an altar to burn incense, the townspeople watched the man of God walk up to it and state, "O altar! The Eternal God says that one day a child named Josiah will be born to the royal house of David. God will use Josiah to sacrifice the false priests who burn incense on you today, and men's bones will be burned on you.

"Here is the sign proving that this message is from the almighty God: The altar shall split apart and the ashes on it shall be poured out!"

(The man that he prophesied about would become king of Judah about 300 years later.)

The crowd of onlookers did not know what to think. “Surely this man must be mad,” someone said.

In the Old Testament system of worship, the sacrificial ashes were supposed to be properly disposed of in a special “clean” place (Leviticus 4:12; 6:10-11). If the ashes had any contact with the ground, they would be considered “unclean.” Since Jeroboam had counterfeited God’s feasts, priesthood and system of worship, Israel’s new false religion also required that the ashes not spill to the ground.

King Jeroboam was furious! Instead of trembling in fear of God’s message, he said, “How dare this man interfere with our sacrifices!” Then he stretched out his hand, pointed at the man of God, and said, “Guards, seize this man at once!”

Just then, as the king’s guards moved to arrest the man of God, Jeroboam’s hand instantly withered into a feeble, useless stump of dried-out muscle and bone. Everyone was shocked and horrified at seeing how weak and pathetic their proud king had become. And they were even more astonished when the altar mysteriously split in two! As its ashes poured out onto the ground, defiling them, everyone knew that the message the man delivered had truly come from the Almighty!

Jeroboam was powerless. There was nothing he could do. His idols could not help him. And no one dared to lift a finger against God’s servant.

Reluctantly, the king said to the man, “Please...pray for me, and ask the Eternal your God to restore my hand back to health.”

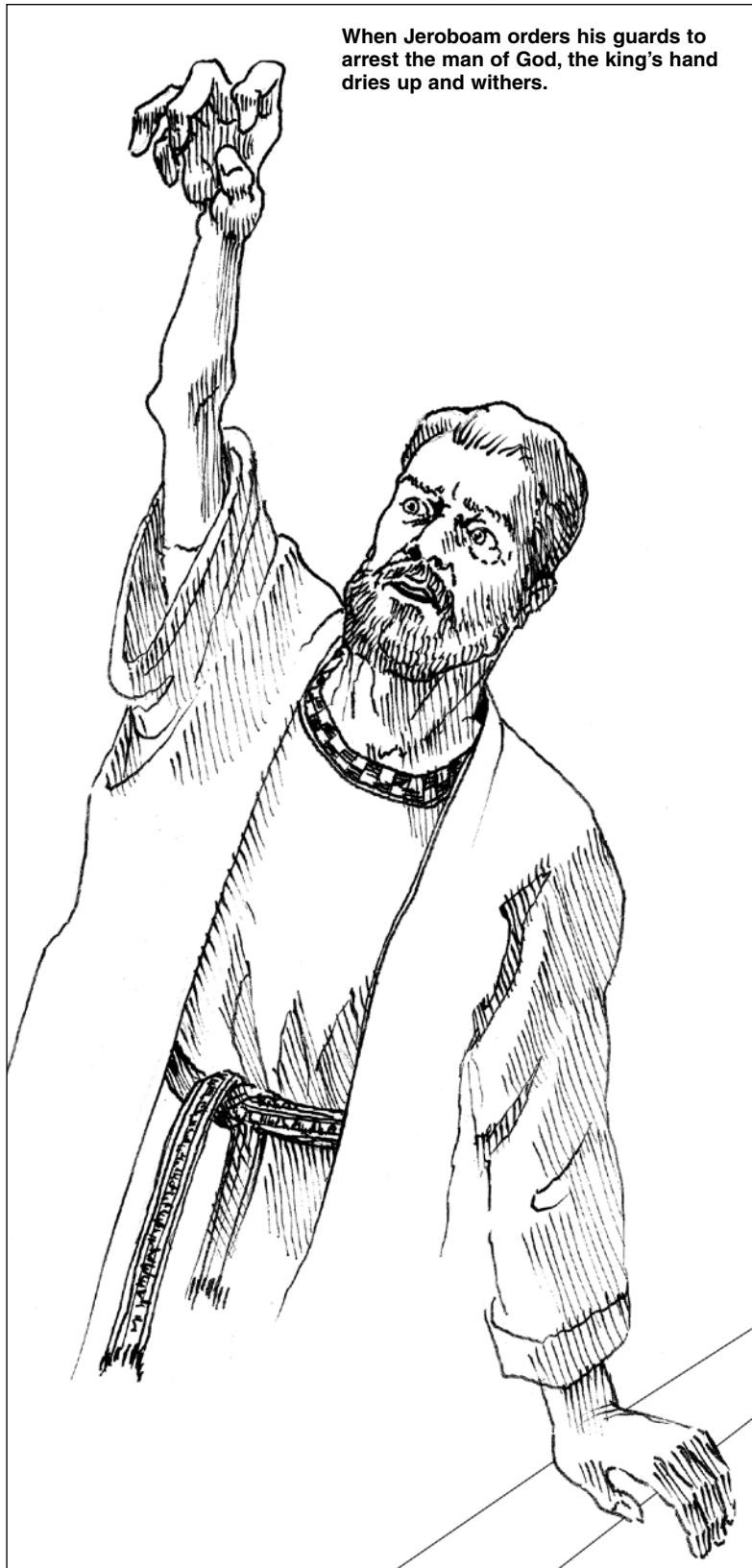
Though Jeroboam did not show any sign of repentance, the man of God had pity on him and prayed to God on his behalf. In an instant, Jeroboam’s hand was as healthy and strong as before.

A deep sense of joy filled him. Since it was the people’s custom to honor a prophet with a gift if the man performed what was requested of him, Jeroboam asked the man of God to come home with him and refresh himself. “Afterward, I will give you a gift,” the king said. Jeroboam may have done this to sway the man of God to favor him and to convince the onlookers that Israel’s king had everything in control.

But the man of God answered, “Jeroboam, even if you offered to give me half of your royal lodgings, I wouldn’t go with you. Nor would I eat or drink anything in this place. God has commanded me not to eat or drink, and that I must return home by a different route.”

Then the man departed as the wide-eyed Israelites continued to drink in the awesome miracles that had taken place before their eyes (I Kings 13:1-10).

When Jeroboam orders his guards to arrest the man of God, the king's hand dries up and withers.



The Price for Disobedience

There was an old prophet who lived in Bethel, a man who had once faithfully served God, but over the years had let his obedience slip. The old prophet had grown used to tolerating Bethel and its false system of worship. He compromised with God's laws and did not loudly speak out against the city. In effect, his presence and example taught the Israelites that it was okay to worship idols and to break God's Law and to compromise with His Way.

The old prophet's sons returned and told their father about the amazing miracles that the man of God had performed. "You should have been there, father! We've never seen anything like it! Truly, God was using this man!"

"Where is he?" the father asked.

"We don't know. The man of God departed just as abruptly as he had arrived. We know that he didn't take the same route back to Judah."

"Really? Why are you so sure?"

"Because he told King Jeroboam that God had commanded him to take a different route home."

The old prophet said, "Did you see which way he went?"

"Yes," they replied.

"Then saddle my donkey for me. I must catch up with this man."

The sons did as their father had said, and the old prophet was soon out in the countryside looking for the man of God. When he found him, the man of God was resting under an oak tree. Since he had been without food and drink for some time, the lonely, dusty journey back home caused the man of God to feel weak.

The old prophet rode up to him, and said, "Are you the man of God, sent from Judah?"

The man looked up, and said, "I am."

Pleased with his discovery, the old prophet said, "My sons have told me about your mission back at the altar in Bethel. Please, come home with me, and share my bread. Judah is still quite a distance from here."

"I can't do that. God wants me to go home—not to fellowship with the people here. In fact, He does not even want me to eat or drink in this place. The Eternal said to me, 'You shall not eat bread or drink water there, nor return the way you came.'"

The old man felt disappointed. He desperately wanted to fellowship with the man of God. Perhaps it was because he had been around

compromisers and lawbreakers for so long that he missed spending time with faithful servants of God.

Suddenly, an idea popped into the old man's head. Though he knew it was wrong, he devised a lie, thinking that it would be okay since his intentions were good. He looked the man of God in the eye, and said, "I'm a prophet like you, and an angel gave me this message from God: 'Bring My servant back to your home, and give him food and drink.'"

This appealed to the man of God, whose stomach growled and lips and mouth felt parched from hunger and thirst. He began to reason within himself: "Maybe I should go back with him. Surely this old man wouldn't dare lie about receiving a message from God—and he would know better than to try to deceive one of God's servants. Besides, I'm hungry and thirsty and tired. The journey back home sure would feel better if my belly was full."

By relying on human reasoning instead of walking by faith (II Corinthians 5:7), the man of God convinced himself that it was alright to ignore the Eternal's command. He followed the old prophet home, and broke his fast with bread and water.

As the two men enjoyed each other's company, the old prophet was startled to hear the voice of God Almighty speaking to him. "What's this?" he thought within himself. "The Eternal is actually speaking to me!"

The man of God stared at the old man and wondered why he was trembling with fear. He soon found out. The aged and weathered prophet said to him, "Hear the word of the Eternal: 'Because you have disobeyed Me and have not followed My command, your dead body will not be buried in the tomb of your fathers.'"

It was the Israelites' custom to bury their dead with the bones of their ancestors (Judges 8:32; II Samuel 2:32). The lack of such a burial was considered to be a severe punishment and disgrace. And to die without mourners or honors, even if one had many children and had lived a full life, was considered worse than being born dead (Ecclesiastes 6:3-6).

The old prophet and the man of God were silent—stunned by what had just happened. Realizing that God intended to take His servant's life, both men wondered and feared what would happen next.

With nothing more to say to each other, the old prophet saddled a donkey for his doomed guest and sent him on his way.

God did not delay His punishment for long. As the man rode along the well-traveled path, a ferocious lion sprang seemingly out of nowhere and leapt upon the man, ending his life in a flash. But the donkey did not run away, nor did the lion attack it. In fact, the lion

did not even eat the man's corpse, as lions normally would do with their dead prey.

Eventually, some travelers came along and were amazed by the unnatural scene of a lion and a donkey calmly standing by a man lying dead on the ground. They concluded that God's hand was in this and rushed to Bethel to tell the townspeople what they had witnessed.

When the old prophet heard the news, he said, "The one you saw was the man of God. He was punished for disobeying God's instruction, just as He said He would.

After having his sons saddle his donkey, the old prophet mounted it and rode off to where the corpse lay. He saw that the lion and the donkey were still calmly standing by the dead man's uneaten body. The old prophet took the corpse and brought it back to town, where he mourned over the man of God, calling him his "brother." His deception had led to the man of God's death.

After he had the body buried, the old prophet turned to his sons and said, "When I die, bury me in the same tomb where the man of God is buried, and lay my bones beside his. He deserves to be honored for preaching against all the altars of Bethel and against all the pagan high places throughout the cities of the kingdom of Israel. God's word will come to pass" (I Kings 13:11-32).

Sin is the breaking of God's Law (I John 3:4), and those who sin earn the penalty of death (Romans 6:23). God's punishment on the man from Judah was swift because the Eternal had to teach Israel that He does not tolerate sin.

Jeroboam Continues His Evil Ways

Jeroboam was still trembling in fear when one of his servants came to him with an urgent message.

"You better have good news for me," the king growled. "I don't think I can bear anything else going wrong."

The servant bowed low and said, "This is good news, my lord. Your enemy is dead."

"Who? What enemy?"

"The man of God, the one who caused your hand to dry up and the altar to split."

"The man of God is dead? How can this be?"

The servant told Jeroboam everything that had happened regarding the man of God's fate. The king sat forward on his throne, carefully listening to every word. When the servant finished his account, a smug, self-satisfied grin appeared on Jeroboam's face.



God's punishment for the man of God was swift.

He said, “Well, well, well. It looks like the Eternal rejected this so-called man of God. Or maybe his God was too weak to protect him from that lion. Either way, I don’t have to worry about him coming back to Bethel and bothering me again.”

Feeling vindicated by the tragic death of the man of God, Jeroboam did not feel the need to repent from leading Israel down the treacherous path of evil. He continued to select men from all the northern tribes to be his priests—men who lacked character and who did not think twice about abandoning the God of Israel for false gods. Jeroboam would ordain just about anyone who wanted to be a priest. The kingdom of Israel was heading for certain doom (I Kings 13:33-34).

CHAPTER NINETY-THREE

OUTNUMBERED AND OUTMANEUVERED

For Jeroboam, all was going well in life...that is, until his son Abijah became deathly ill. The king knew that the false gods he had set up for Israel to worship could not heal. Reluctantly, he decided to turn to the one true source of all healing—the almighty Eternal God.

But instead of repenting of his evil ways, and turning to his Creator with his whole heart, as David did, Jeroboam planned on using trickery and deception. He asked his wife to disguise herself and go to Shiloh, the home of Ahijah. He was the prophet who had told Jeroboam that God would give the northern kingdom of Israel into his hand.

“Don’t worry about Ahijah recognizing you,” he said to her. “Old age has weakened his eyesight. Just remember to stay in your disguise and pretend to be someone else. Don’t let him know that you are the queen. Now go to Ahijah and ask him about the fate of our son. Perhaps you can get him to pray for him.”

Jeroboam’s wife departed, obeying her husband and going to Ahijah’s home.

But before she arrived, God spoke to His prophet, telling him that Jeroboam’s wife would pay him a visit pretending to be another woman. When she approached his home, she was startled to hear the old man say, “Come right in. There’s no need for you to try to deceive me with your disguise—I know exactly who you are!”

“Who do you think I am?” she stammered.

“Jeroboam’s wife.”

The woman uttered a gasp.

“That’s right, and I know why you are here!”

She was too afraid to ask, but Ahijah did not wait for her to respond.

He said, “Go tell your husband that God has bad news for him. The Eternal has said, ‘Jeroboam, I exalted you from among the people, made you their ruler, tore the kingdom away from the house of David, and gave it you. Yet, you have not kept My commandments, nor followed Me with all your heart, nor set yourself to do



Jeroboam's wife tries to fool the prophet Ahijah with her disguise.

only what is right in My eyes, as My servant David did. Instead, you have done more evil than all who lived before you. You have made other gods, with false idols and images, to provoke Me to anger. And you have cast Me behind your back. Therefore, I will bring evil upon your royal house. I will cut off your seed so that your dynasty will die out. Dogs and birds shall feast on the dead bodies of your descendants.’”

Fear gripped the heart of Jeroboam's wife, for she knew God never spoke idle words. When He said He would do something, it was guaranteed to come true.

Ahijah told her, “Go home. The moment your feet enter the city, your child shall die. Because your husband has led Israel to com-

mit such evil, God shall raise a king over Israel who will cut off Jeroboam's house. Also, the Eternal shall strike Israel, as a reed shakes in the water, and will uproot Israel from the Promised Land, scattering the Israelites beyond the Euphrates River. Why?—because Israel has made false gods and idols, provoking God to anger. Now go.”

The woman returned home as quickly as she could, hoping that her son would still cling to life. But, just as the prophet had said, she discovered that Abijah was dead (I Kings 14:1-18).

Rehoboam's Reign in Judah

For the first few years of Rehoboam's reign in Judah, the king, for the most part, was faithful in keeping God's laws—especially since the priests, Levites and other disgruntled Israelites continued to migrate to Judah. In any event, the small kingdom prospered.

Of his 18 wives and 60 concubines, he loved Maachah the most. Her father was Absalom. And from his 28 sons and 60 daughters, Rehoboam selected Maachah's son Abijah to be the chief prince. This made it clear to everyone that Rehoboam intended Abijah to eventually become Judah's next king.

Rehoboam was wise enough to understand that his other sons would become jealous. He recognized that if this led to being bitter and resentful, the princes might plot against Abijah and seize the throne. To prevent this, Rehoboam dispersed his sons throughout Judah and Benjamin, assigning each prince his own territory to administer over. To further keep them content, the king supplied his sons with abundant provisions and many wives.

With his cities fortified and his kingdom at peace, Rehoboam felt secure and satisfied. He no longer saw the need to worship the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The king drifted back into foolish ways, deciding to live his own way, rather than seeking after God the way his grandfather David had done. Perhaps this was because of his mother Naamah, an Ammonite princess. Since she was a foreigner who had grown up serving false gods, it is doubtful that she would have taught her son to worship the one true God.

Following Rehoboam's lead, Judah fell into idol worship. Pagan high places and “sacred” pillars and false images flourished throughout the land. Integrity and family values all but disappeared, replaced with perverted lifestyles. The people were beginning to turn their backs on God, which provoked Him to anger. Following Israel's footsteps, Judah was on the path to utter destruction (I Kings 14:21-24; II Chronicles 11:18-23; 12:13-14).

Egypt Invades!

One day, the security and self-satisfaction that Rehoboam felt was replaced with sudden fear. A messenger had come before the king and told him bad news: “My lord, Egypt has invaded our land!”

“What?” Rehoboam gasped. “Are you certain?”

The messenger nodded. “Yes, my lord. Our border scouts have determined that Shishak, Egypt’s king, has sent an invasion force of 1,200 chariots, 60,000 horsemen, and far too many soldiers to count.”

Soon, Judah’s fortified cities fell into Shishak’s hand. Rehoboam was powerless to stop the invasion. The king grew desperate. He knew that Jerusalem would be next.

As the king met with the elders of Judah to discuss what to do, one of the guards escorted Shemaiah the prophet into their presence. Shemaiah said to them, “Hear the Eternal’s message: ‘Since you have forsaken Me, I have forsaken you, and have left you in the hand of the king of Egypt.’”

Rehoboam and the leaders could offer no excuse for the way they had abandoned God and His laws. They knew that they had not devoted themselves to putting Him first. So the men wasted no time and humbled themselves, acknowledging that God’s judgment was correct.

When God saw that these proud, arrogant men had changed their rotten attitudes, He had mercy on them. He had His servant Shemaiah deliver another message: “Because you have chosen to humble yourselves, I will not destroy you. I will grant you some deliverance; I will not use Shishak to pour out My wrath upon Jerusalem. However, the kingdom of Judah will serve Egypt. In this way, you will recognize—and perhaps appreciate—the difference between serving Me and serving the nation from which I had delivered you from slavery hundreds of years ago.”

Before Shishak’s invasion was finished, the Egyptian king had pillaged God’s temple and Rehoboam’s palace, taking away all the treasures he could find. He even took away the gold shields that Solomon had made. To replace them, Rehoboam had bronze shields made, which were of a lesser quality.

Jerusalem and Judah were safe once again, but at a steep price (I Kings 14:25-28; II Chronicles 12:1-12).

Outnumbered Two to One

The Bible records very little about the other events that took place during Rehoboam’s 17-year reign. However, it does reveal that over



The army of Shishak, king of Egypt, invades Judah, looting God's temple and King Rehoboam's palace before returning home.

the years Israel and Judah engaged in border skirmishes, with each kingdom competing for regional dominance.

King Rehoboam died at the age of 58, leaving behind a legacy of having caused Israel and Judah to split (I Kings 14:29-30; II Chronicles 12:15-16).

He was replaced by his son Abijah, who continued engaging in military conflicts with King Jeroboam. Abijah commanded an army of 400,000 warriors—but they were outnumbered by Jeroboam’s 800,000 warriors. The odds were not in Judah’s favor.

In spite of this, Abijah boldly stood on Mount Zemaraim, in the mountains of Ephraim, and shouted down to opposing forces on the battlefield.

He said, “Hear me this day, Jeroboam! God gave Israel to David and his house to rule, by a covenant of salt—symbolizing that this would last forever. Yet you, who once served Solomon, arose and rebelled against his master. You have gathered for yourself vain men, children of Belial, who opposed my father Rehoboam when he was young and inexperienced. And now you think to conquer the kingdom that the Eternal gave to David’s sons.

“You might outnumber us two to one, but you have false gods on your side, and you have cast out God’s priests to make room for your own priests! But we have the Eternal God on our side. He knows that we have not forsaken Him. His true priesthood is also with us, serving the Almighty. Every morning and every evening they burn sacrifices and sweet incense to God.

“Behold, God is our captain, and His priests are blowing the trumpets of war to cry alarm against you. Children of Israel, do not fight against the Eternal God of your fathers—for you shall not prosper!”

Despite Abijah’s ominous warning, Jeroboam would not listen. The king of Israel launched an ambush attack. He sent a division of his troops to maneuver around Abijah’s soldiers and attack from behind. The army of Judah was sandwiched between enemies in the front and enemies in the back. Judah was trapped!

Realizing that they could not rely upon their own strength and survive, the soldiers of Judah cried out to God with all their might, as the priests blew on the trumpets. Then, every man gave out a horrifying shout as they faced their enemies.

Meanwhile, King Jeroboam was smug, confident that his superior numbers would defeat Judah’s smaller army. But his smugness quickly turned to fear and shame when God Almighty intervened on the battlefield. The Bible does not say how, but God struck the army of Israel, causing the survivors to run for their lives! Then King Abijah and his

men chased after them. Jeroboam had started with 800,000 soldiers, but when the battle had ended, 500,000 of his warriors were slain.

The king of Judah chased the king of Israel and his frightened army, seizing Israelite cities such as Bethel, Jeshanah and Ephron and their surrounding villages.

This biblical account is only one of many showing that God rescues those who put their trust in Him.

Jeroboam thought he was finally safe when he managed to escape. Little did he know that God would take his life a few years later (I Kings 14:19-20).

You might think that Abijah, because he had witnessed God rescue him and Judah from certain defeat, lived the rest of his life serving and obeying the Eternal. Sadly, this is not the case. Like most people, Abijah forgot what God had done for him, and devoted his life to pleasing himself.

Ignoring God's command to be married to only one wife, he married 14 wives, and had 22 sons and 16 daughters. During his three short years of reigning over Judah, Abijah followed in his father's footsteps and did evil. Yet, God remembered His covenant with David (just as David had remembered his with Jonathan) and did not remove David's dynasty from the throne.

Abijah died in his evil state, making room for his son Asa to rule in his place (I Kings 15:1-8; II Chronicles 13:1-21).

CHAPTER NINETY-FOUR

LIKE FATHER, LIKE SON

Upon Jeroboam's death, his son Nadab became king of Israel. He should have learned from his father's horrible example and turned to God for guidance. Yet, sadly, Nadab's reign was just as evil as Jeroboam's. He continued the worship of idols and forbade the Israelites from going to Jerusalem, where the priests and Levites would have taught them the ways of God.

As soon as he was made king, Nadab set out to strengthen Israel. He gathered his troops and led them to attack Gibbethon, a town in the territory of Dan, which God had given to the Levites in Joshua's day (Joshua 19:44). Gibbethon had been taken by the Philistines—and Nadab wanted it back.

As the army of Israel fought to retake the city, Baasha, a man from the tribe of Issachar, plotted against the king. He made his plans known to a handful of men he felt he could trust, men who shared his lust for power and position. With their help, Baasha killed King Nadab and seized the throne. Nadab's reign only lasted about two years.

God, through the prophet Ahijah, had proclaimed that every male descendant of Jeroboam's royal family would be destroyed (I Kings 14:10). Baasha fulfilled this judgment—but he went even further, killing every man, woman and child who was kin to Jeroboam. Baasha did not want to give any of them a chance to seek revenge and retake the throne (I Kings 15:25-31).

Wasting 24 Years

King Baasha ruled Israel from the city of Tizrah. Rather than learning from the wicked examples of Jeroboam and Nadab, which led to God's judgment against them, he followed their example. He worshipped idols and gave himself to the sins that flow from idolatry (I Kings 15:33-34). He even led Israel to do the same.

God was angry with Baasha. He sent the prophet Jehu to tell the king that He would cut off his royal house, just as Jeroboam's had been cut off.

If Baasha had repented, God would have shown him mercy. But King Baasha squandered his 24-year reign, worshipping gods that did not exist, while ignoring the one true God, who would have gladly blessed him with happiness, prosperity and success (I Kings 16:1-6).

Two Short-Lived Reigns

After Baasha died, his son Elah replaced him as king—but his reign was short-lived. Elah was wicked like his father.

And just as his father had conspired against Nadab, someone plotted against Elah. Zimri, commander of half the king's chariots, thought he was worthy to rule over Israel—and was ready to shed blood to fulfill his lust for power. He looked for every opportunity to seize the throne.

He saw his chance when Elah had foolishly made himself drunk. Seeing that the king was too weak to defend himself, Zimri took advantage of this and slew him. Then Zimri made himself king.

To make sure that there would be no one left to seek revenge, he set out to destroy Baasha's royal house, even killing extended family members, friends—anyone who appeared to be loyal to Baasha and Elah. God's judgment against the royal family of Baasha was carried out.

When the soldiers of Israel learned that Zimri had murdered Elah and made himself king, they were outraged. They took Omri, the commander of the army, and made him king. The first thing Omri did was march his troops to Tizrah to capture the city and deal with Zimri.

Tizrah was surrounded—all routes of escape were cut off. Since the city was not heavily fortified, Omri's troops quickly captured it. Zimri knew that it was only a matter of time before he would be captured. Unable to mount a strong defense, and unwilling to surrender, he ran into the citadel of the king's house and set it ablaze. He chose to perish in the fire rather than to be executed by his enemy. His brief reign as king over Israel lasted only seven days (I Kings 16:7-20).

Samaria, Israel's New Capital

Though Omri had been made king, another man opposed him for the throne. For the next four years, the kingdom of Israel was divided. Half the people, including the army, followed Omri, while the other half followed a man named Tibni. Eventually, Omri and his forces prevailed, which resulted in Tibni losing his life.



Tizrah's quick capture and Tibni's opposition convinced the king that Israel needed a new capital, one that could be heavily fortified, and yet was in a picturesque setting.

He bought a piece of hill property in the midst of Ephraim, which was 300 feet tall and was nestled at the bottom of a beautiful mountain range. With its steep incline, making it hard for enemy soldiers to mount

an attack, and natural springs that provided much water, the property had military value. He decided to build a capital city there, one that would be centrally located in the kingdom—not too far from the Mediterranean Sea, and sitting about halfway between Dan and Beersheba. Omri called the city Samaria, named after Shemer, the former property owner. Samaria would continue to be Israel’s capital for many years.

As for the rest of Omri’s 12-year reign, he continued in the ways of Jeroboam until the day he died, committing more sins than any king before him. He was replaced by his son Ahab, who would turn out to be the worst of all the kings of Israel to that point (I Kings 16:21-28).

A Righteous King in Judah

For 41 years—from the end of Jeroboam’s reign, to the reign of Nadab, Baasha, Elah, Zimri, Omri, and the beginning of Ahab’s reign—Judah had just one king: Asa, son of Abijah. For the first ten years of his rulership, his kingdom was blessed with peace.

Here is why. Asa did what was good and right in God’s eyes. He removed the altars of false gods, destroyed the idols, and cut down the pagan groves throughout the land. Then, King Asa ordered everyone in Judah to seek the Eternal and to keep His laws and commandments. Because Asa chose to be loyal to God, the Eternal was loyal to him, rewarding his wholehearted obedience with peace. The king knew that as long as he and the rest of Judah relied on God, everyone would prosper.

During this time of peace, Asa built fortified cities in the kingdom, protecting them with walls, watchtowers, gates and bars. He also commanded an army of 300,000 valiant warriors from Judah and 280,000 from the tribe of Benjamin (II Chronicles 14:1-8).

Facing a Million-Man Army

One day, an enemy named Zerah led his vast army of Ethiopian warriors on a mission to invade Judah. Zerah commanded one million soldiers, plus 300,000 chariots. This great fighting force outnumbered Asa’s troops. Humanly, there was no way that Asa and his men could stand up to this invasion and be victorious. So the king turned to the only true source of ultimate strength and power: the almighty supreme God of the universe!

Asa bravely led his troops to Mareshah to face the invading force. There, in the valley of Zephathah, the opposing sides gathered on the battlefield.

Knowing that the odds were greatly against him, King Asa prayed to God with all his heart, saying, “Great and mighty Eternal One, no matter how large and powerful they are, it is nothing for You to help us against our enemies. Please help us, God! We put our trust in You, laying aside all our doubts and worries. The army of Judah will march out into battle against this vast army, bearing Your great name. You, alone, are our God—do not let any man prevail against You!”

Then Asa walked out in faith, trusting that God would quickly intervene—which He did. The Bible does not say how, but God struck the Ethiopians and caused them to panic and flee! Asa and his soldiers chased after them to Gerar. When the onslaught was finished, the Ethiopian army was no more. The army of Judah carried away many spoils of war, as they attacked all the cities near Gerar. An abundance of cattle, sheep and camels were taken and returned to Jerusalem (II Chronicles 14:9-15).

Restoring the Way of God

God inspired Azariah the prophet to meet with Asa and give him a message:

“Hear me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin! The Eternal is with you, as long as you are with him. If you seek God, you will find Him—but if you forsake God, then He will forsake you!

“For a long time now the Israelites have been without the true God, and without a teaching priest, and without law. But whenever they found themselves in trouble, they turned to God wholeheartedly—and God came to their rescue.

“Nations have destroyed other nations, and cities have devastated other cities, for God has troubled them with adversity and distress.

“Therefore, be strong, and do not let your hands become weak, for you shall be rewarded for your work!”

The prophet’s words encouraged Asa, inspiring him to put away even more of the pagan idols out of Judah and Benjamin. He also removed them from the cities he had taken from the mountains of Ephraim. And he restored the holy altar that was before the temple porch.

Then, the king gathered all the citizens of Judah and Benjamin, along with a great number of Israelites who, upon recognizing that God was working with Asa, had left the tribes of Ephraim, Manasseh and Simeon to live in his kingdom. Everyone gathered together at Jerusalem and offered to God the spoils of war they had plundered: 700 oxen and 7,000 sheep.

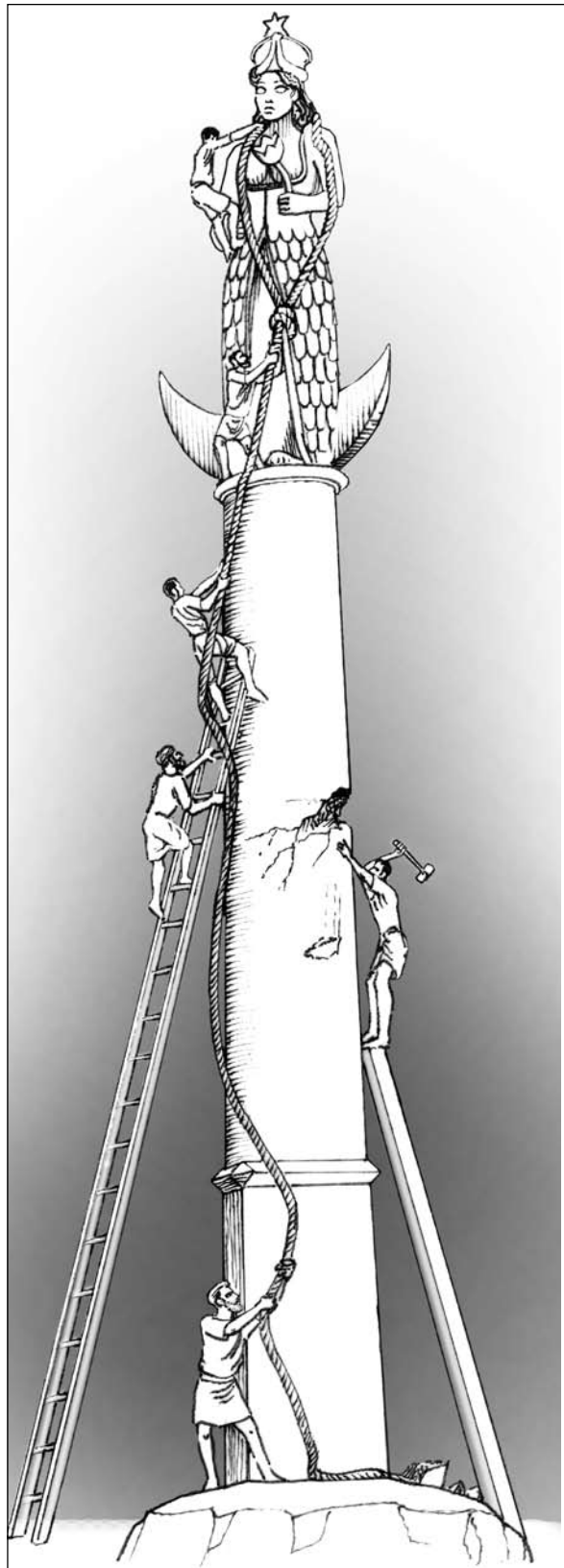
The people entered into a covenant to seek after God with all their heart and being. They decided that if anyone among them—male or female, small or great—refused to seek out the Eternal, that person should be put to death. In a loud voice, they made their promise to God, accompanied with cheerful shouts and the blasts of trumpets and cornets. Everyone in Judah rejoiced at the oath they had made, for the people wholeheartedly desired to restore God’s Way into their lives.

King Asa continued to remove the symbols of sin from the kingdom of Judah. He even removed Maachah, his grandmother, from her lofty position as queen mother. He did this because of the obscene image she had made of Asherah, a false goddess of the Canaanites. Asa cut down his grandmother’s idol, crushed it, and then burned it at the Brook Kidron.

Asa also brought back to God’s temple the holy things that had been dedicated to God’s service: silver, gold and certain utensils.

And he removed his father’s idols and banished from his kingdom certain perverted people, who did unspeakable evil deeds in the name of their pagan religion.

Despite not removing all of the pagan high places, King



Asa continued to follow his ancestor David's example, putting God's will ahead of his own. With the exception of the Ethiopian invasion, the kingdom of Judah did not know war for the first 35 years of Asa's reign (II Chronicles 15:1-19; I Kings 15:9-15).

The King Panics

Then, one day, King Baasha of Israel decided to wage war against Judah. He started to build and fortify the city of Ramah, about five or six miles north of Jerusalem, on the north-south highway. Ramah's location was crucial to blocking the flow of traffic that went to and from Judah's capital.

Instead of trusting in God, as he had done in the past, King Asa panicked and decided to rely upon himself. He took all the silver and gold from the treasures of God's temple, and from his palace, and sent them as gifts to Ben-Hadad, king of Syria, who lived in Damascus. He tried to buy the friendship and protection of someone who did not fear God.

With the gifts, Asa sent a message, asking Ben-Hadad to enter into a peace treaty with him, just as there had been between their fathers, Abijah and Tabrimmon. Asa also asked Ben-Hadad to break his treaty with Baasha. Asa put his trust in the army of pagan idol worshippers than in the supreme power of Almighty God.

The king was pleased to learn that Ben-Hadad agreed to his request. The king of Syria sent his troops to attack the cities of Israel, striking the towns of Ijon, Dan, Abelmaim and all the storehouse cities of Naphtali. Seizing them gave Ben-Hadad control of the trade routes that led to the Mediterranean coast and to the fertile Jezreel Valley.

When Baasha heard the bad news, he departed from Ramah, which was not yet complete, and rushed off to defend his kingdom.

Afterward, Asa drafted everyone in Judah to go to Ramah and carry away the stones, timber and other building materials, and used them to build Geba and Mizpah. Strategically situated two miles from Ramah's site, these fortified towns were used to guard against Baasha's possible return.

Asa thought that his troubles were over—but they were just beginning (II Chronicles 16:1-6; I Kings 15:16-22).

Anger and Wrath

God sent Hanani the prophet to deliver a message to Asa:

“Because you have relied on the king of Syria, and did not rely upon God, the army of Syria has escaped out of your hand. Were not

the Ethiopians a much larger army, with very many chariots and horsemen? Yet, because you relied upon God's strength, the Eternal delivered your enemies into your hand. The eyes of God search throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is perfectly loyal toward Him. But you have done foolishly. Therefore, from this moment on, you shall have wars."

Asa should have trembled in fear and asked God for forgiveness. Instead, he became angry! He was so mad at the prophet, he threw him in prison. The king even oppressed some of the citizens.

In the 39th year of his reign, Asa's feet became diseased. Again, instead of looking to God—who heals all diseases and sicknesses—the king turned his back on his Creator and sought the help of doctors. Going to doctors, in and by itself, is not necessarily wrong—but rejecting God as one's Healer is.

Asa died after about 41 years of rulership. His son Jehoshaphat took his place as king. Despite his bad attitude and conduct during the last six years of his life, Asa had done much to restore the worship of the one true God to the people of Judah. The Bible records that "Asa's heart was perfect with the LORD all his days" (I Kings 15:14; also see II Chronicles 16:7-14 and I Kings 15:23-24).

CHAPTER NINETY-FIVE

EFFECTUAL, FERVENT PRAYER

Just a few years before King Asa died, Ahab, the son of Omri, became king over Israel. Ahab did more evil than all the kings who had ruled before him. In his mind, there was nothing wrong with following the same sinful path of idolatry that his ancestor Jeroboam had done. Ahab married a worldly and rebellious woman named Jezebel, the daughter of Eth-baal, king of the Sidonians. Because of her wicked influence, Ahab served the false god Baal. He created an altar and a temple in Israel's capital, so that the Israelites could also worship Baal.

Ahab also had an obscene image made in honor of the false goddess Asherah. Ahab did more to provoke God to anger than all the Israelite kings before him (I Kings 16:29-33).

The Cost of Ignoring God's Curse

Ahab's rulership was thoroughly corrupt, as he led the people of Israel to defy God worse than before.

For example, a man named Hiel, who came from Bethel, did not fear or obey God. He foolishly ignored the curse that God had pronounced against the city of Jericho many generations ago. Through His servant Joshua, God had proclaimed that if any man dared to make Jericho into a fortified city again, it would be done at the cost of that man's oldest and youngest son. Hiel did not believe this, so he set off to build up Jericho into a mighty city again. When Hiel laid the foundation of the city, Abiram, his firstborn son, died. And when Hiel set up the gates of the city, Segub, his youngest son, also died. God's Word came true, as it always does (I Kings 16:34).

A Righteous Ruler in Judah

Early in Ahab's reign, King Jehoshaphat came into power over Judah after his father Asa had died. Jehoshaphat was 35 years old when his reign began. He followed his father's righteous example and turned to God with all his might. Like his ancestor David, he kept God's com-

mandments and did not seek Baal. He centered his life on making decisions that were right in the Eternal's eyes.

Jehoshaphat removed the rest of the perverted religious people who had escaped Asa's hand. He took away the pagan high places in Judah and got rid of the many images honoring Asherah.

To make sure that God's ways were known and practiced throughout the kingdom, Jehoshaphat sent teachers—royal leaders, Levites and priests—to the cities of Judah. They taught the people about God's laws and statutes, which ensure true happiness and prosperity.

Jehoshaphat also set out to make his kingdom strong against Israel, who posed a continual threat. He built fortresses and storehouse cities. Then he placed troops in all the fortified cities of Judah, as well as in the cities that Asa had captured from Ephraim.

Like David, Jehoshaphat also had mighty men of valor under his command, stationed in Jerusalem.

The surrounding kingdoms took note of King Jehoshaphat's great military strength, and the fear of God fell upon them. None dared to make war against this tiny nation. The Philistines were moved to honor Jehoshaphat with presents, and paid tribute to him in silver. The Arabians gave him 7,700 rams and 7,700 goats.

All the people of Judah also brought presents to their king. Jehoshaphat grew in great riches and honor, and also prospered from the commerce that took place in Judah's cities.

Despite not getting rid of all the high places, which some people stubbornly clung to, Jehoshaphat was loyal to God. And the Eternal brought peace, security, power and great wealth to Jehoshaphat and his kingdom (II Chronicles 17; I Kings 22:41-43, 46).

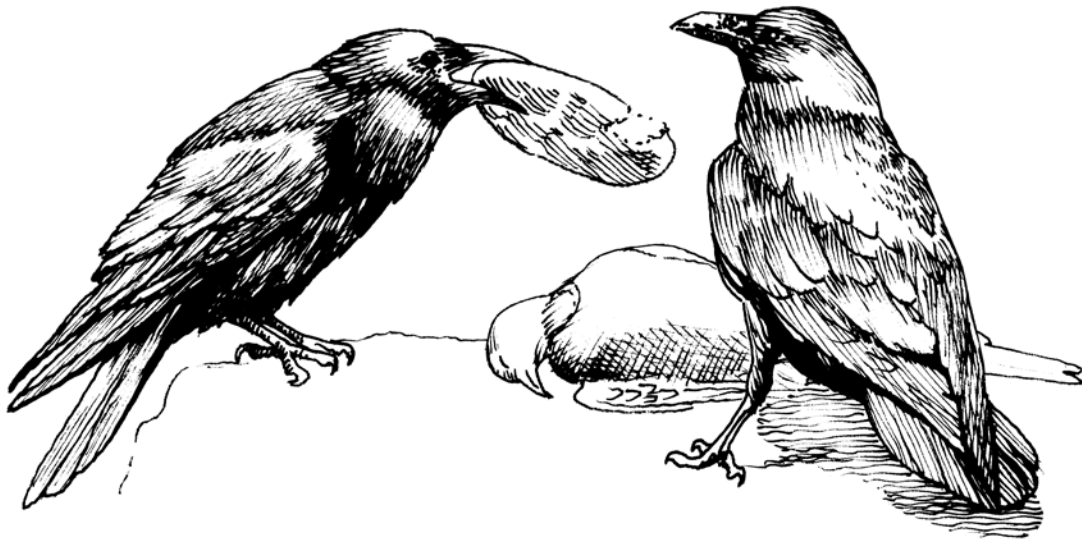
Elijah and the Widow

Meanwhile, back in the land of Israel, God sent Elijah the prophet, a man from Gilead, to deliver a warning to wicked King Ahab.

Elijah boldly declared, "As surely as God lives, who I represent, a drought shall strike the land. Neither rain nor dew shall fall upon Israel."

Then God had Elijah to depart, turn east, and hide by the brook Cherith, which was before Jordan. God planned to keep His servant alive by giving him plenty of fresh water to drink from the brook. He also commanded ravens to bring His servant bread and meat every morning and evening.

Eventually, due to the lack of rain in the land, the brook dried up. But



Elijah did not worry. He knew that God always provides for those who put His will first.

God spoke to him again, telling the prophet to leave for Zarephath which belonged to the kingdom of Sidon. “There you shall live. I have commanded a widow to care of your needs.”

Elijah faithfully obeyed God, and departed. As soon as he entered the city, he saw a widow who was gathering sticks. The prophet called out to her and said, “Please bring me a little water so that I may drink.”

As she was about to bring him a drink, he asked her to bring him a piece of bread to eat. But the widow said, “As the Eternal your God lives, I don’t have even a cake of bread to give to you. All I have is a handful of meal in a pitcher and a little oil in a jar. I’ve been gathering sticks so that I may go home, build a fire and make a small meal for me and my son. This is all we have to live on. Afterwards, we will die.”

Elijah said to the woman, “Don’t fear. Go ahead and do as you have planned. But first, make me a little cake of bread, and bring it to me, and then make some for you and for your son. Listen to what the God of Israel had said: ‘The pitcher of meal and the jar of oil shall not be emptied, until I send rain upon the earth.’”

The widow did as Elijah had instructed, and God kept His word, making sure that the pitcher of meal and the jar of oil did not become empty. Every day, God provided enough food for Elijah, the widow and her son (I Kings 17:1-16).



Back From the Dead

One day, the widow's son became so ill that he died. The woman grieved as she held the boy against her bosom. She blamed Elijah for her loss, saying, "What do I have to do with you, man of God? Have you come to me to remind me of my sin and to kill my son?"

Elijah calmly told her, "Give me your son," and then carried his lifeless body up into a loft, and laid him on his bed. Then, in deep, heartfelt prayer, the prophet cried out to God. Three times, he stretched

himself over the boy's body, praying to God with all his being, asking Him to bring the widow's son back to life.

God heard Elijah's prayer and brought the boy back from the dead. Elijah took him and brought him down to his mother.

"See!" he said. "Your son lives!"

The widow hugged her son and kissed him. Through tears of joy, she said to the prophet, "Now I know that you are truly a man of God, and that His word of truth is in your mouth!" (I Kings 17:17-24).

Obadiah and the Prophet

After three years of drought and famine, God commanded Elijah to appear before King Ahab, saying, "I will send rain on the earth." Elijah went to Samaria, where he saw that the famine was great.

Meanwhile, Ahab called for Obadiah, who ruled over his palace, and ordered him to go to all fountains and brooks in the land. "Perhaps we may find grass to keep the horses and mules from dying, so that we do not lose all the animals," he said.

Ahab divided the mission between himself and Obadiah. The king went one way, while his servant went the other way.

As Obadiah went on his journey, he was surprised to see Elijah the prophet coming toward him. He bowed low to the ground, and said to him, “Are you my lord Elijah?” (Unlike his master Ahab, Obadiah feared the Eternal. When Jezebel was determined to kill God’s prophets, Obadiah risked his life and hid 100 of these faithful servants in a cave. He even provided them with bread and water.)

Elijah answered, “I am he. Go tell your king that I am here.”

Obadiah said, “How have I sinned that you would deliver your servant into the hand of Ahab to kill me? As your God lives, there is no nation nor kingdom where my lord Ahab hasn’t searched for you. When they said, ‘Elijah is not there,’ King Ahab made the kingdom and nation swear that they could not find you. And now you say, ‘Go tell your lord that I am here.’ As soon as I leave you, the Spirit of God will carry you away. If I tell Ahab that you are here and he does not find you, he will kill me!

“Why are you doing this to me? I have fearfully obeyed the Eternal from my youth. Haven’t you heard what I did for God’s prophets when Jezebel set out to kill all of them—how I hid them in a cave and fed them with bread and water?”

Elijah admired Obadiah’s courage, and promised him that he would not disappear. Obadiah took the prophet at his word, and went away to seek Ahab (I Kings 18:1-16).

Elijah Versus the Prophets of Baal

Meeting up with Elijah the prophet, the king said to him, “Are you the one that troubles Israel?”

“No! I have not troubled Israel” Elijah answered. “But you and your father’s royal house have! You have forsaken God’s commandments, and have pursued the wicked ways of Baal. Now go assemble the people of Israel at Mount Carmel. And have 450 of the prophets of Baal and 400 of the prophets of Asherah gathered there too.”

Ahab did as instructed, perhaps worrying that something bad would happen if he refused.

At Mount Carmel, Elijah addressed the massive throngs of Israelites, who wondered what God’s prophet had to say to them.

Elijah said, “How long will you halt between two opinions, O Israel? If the Eternal is God, then follow Him! But if Baal is the one true God, follow him.”

But the people would not answer Elijah. They were unwilling to make a commitment and decide whom to serve. They did not realize that, in God’s eyes, not making a choice was the same as rejecting Him.

Elijah said to the people, “Since you will not choose, then let us have a test. I am but one man, a true prophet of God. But here are 450 of Baal’s prophets. Give us two bulls, and let the prophets of Baal choose one bull for themselves and cut it in pieces and lay it on wood. But they are not to make a fire. And I will dress the other bull and lay it on wood, but will not make a fire. Let the prophets of Baal call on their gods, and I will call on the Eternal. The god who answers by fire and consumes the sacrifice is the one true God!”

The people agreed to the test. “Very well,” they said. “This sounds good to us.”

Elijah told the false prophets of Baal what to do (but the false prophets of Asherah had failed to attend the event). Baal’s prophets took a bull and dressed it as a sacrifice. Then they called on the name of their god. From morning until noon, they cried out to Baal, repeating the same words and phrases over and over again.

But Baal did not answer.

So the false prophets leaped on the altar to show their enthusiasm for their god—but Baal still gave no response.

Elijah shook his head, amazed by the silly sight of these pagan men foolishly leaping about as they prayed to a god that did not exist. Elijah mocked them, saying, “Perhaps you should cry out much louder. After all, Baal is a god; he is either meditating, on a pursuit, or away on a journey. Or maybe he’s fast asleep and needs you to wake him up!”

Perhaps not realizing that they were being mocked, the prophets of Baal cried out even louder. They also took their knives and spears and lashed themselves until blood gushed out of them. This was one of the many pagan rituals they used to worship their false god. Thankfully, the Eternal does not require such foolish and dangerous behavior from His servants!

The false prophets prayed to their god all that day, until evening came—yet the only response they received was silence. Baal did not set their sacrifice on fire.

It was now Elijah’s turn. The prophet called for all the people to draw near, then he repaired God’s altar, which had been broken down, due to being abandoned from use. Next, Elijah took twelve stones, which represented the 12 tribes of Israel (including the kingdom of Judah), and used them to build an altar in God’s name. Then Elijah made a trench around the altar, big enough to contain two measures of seed. He arranged the wood, cut a bull into pieces, and placed it on top of the woodpile.

Elijah commanded people nearby to fill four large jars with water. “Now pour all the water on the sacrifice and on the wood.” They did as he said.

It was now physically impossible for the sacrifice to burn—yet Elijah commanded that water be poured on it two more times! The water ran all around the altar and filled the trench.

When the time of the evening sacrifice drew near, Elijah prayed to God. However, unlike the false prophets of Baal, his prayer was simple and to the point, yet from the heart:

“Eternal God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, let it be known this day that You are God in Israel, and that I am Your servant, and that I have done all these things at Your Word. Hear me, O God, so that this people may know that You are the Eternal, and that You have turned their heart back again.”

Suddenly, God sent fire down upon the sacrifice, burning it and the wood, stones and dust! It even dried up the water that had filled the trench!

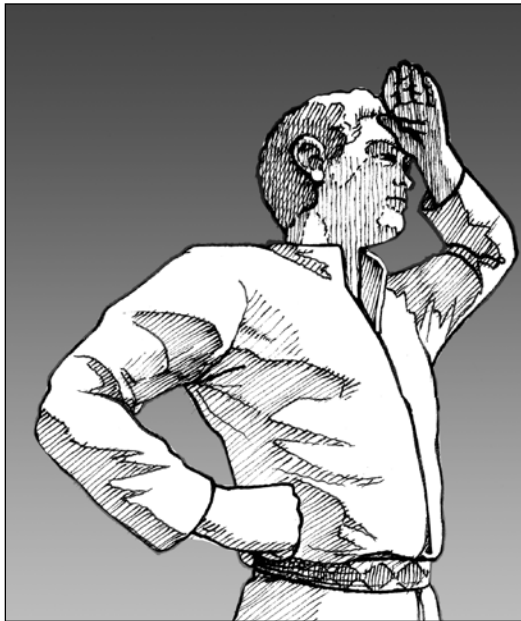
Witnessing this great miracle caused the Israelites to fall to their faces and tremble with fear. They said, “The Eternal, He is the God!”

Elijah ordered the people to seize the false prophets. “Do not let any of them escape,” he said. Elijah brought these wicked men down to the Brook Kishon, where he took their lives (I Kings 18:17-40).

“The Effectual, Fervent Prayer”

Elijah turned to Ahab and said, “Go up, eat and drink, for the famine is over.” Ahab followed his instructions.

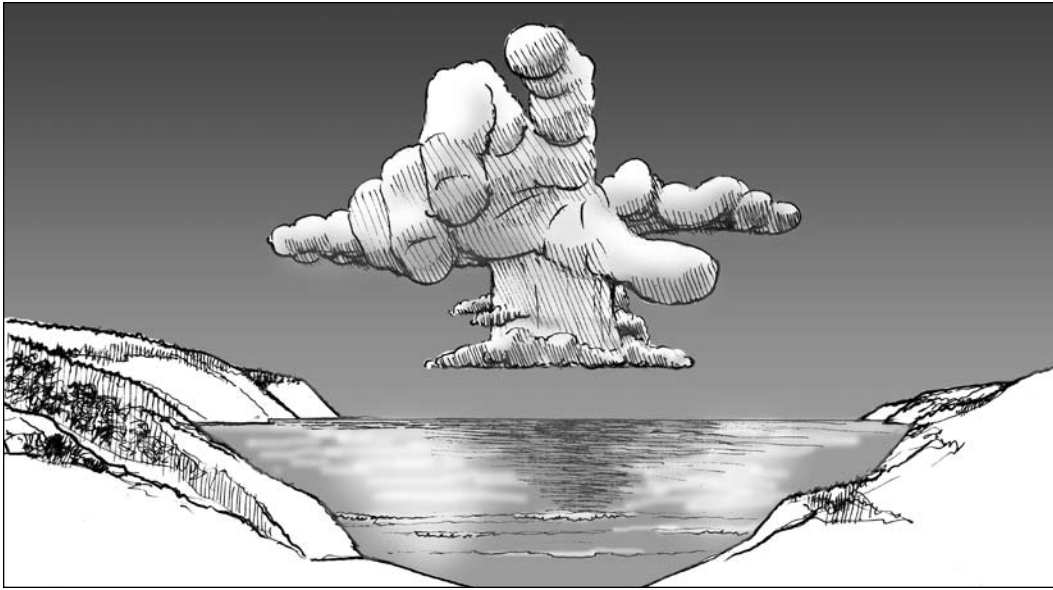
Then Elijah went up to the top of Mount Carmel, where he bowed down to the earth and put his face between his knees to pray.



He told his servant, “Go and look toward the sea, and tell me if rain clouds have come yet.” The servant went up, looked, and said, “Nothing yet.” Seven times, Elijah prayed and then had his servant go and report back about the weather.

At the seventh time, the servant said, “Look! I see a little cloud out at sea, shaped like a man’s hand.” Elijah knew that God was bringing rain to Israel.

Centuries later, God inspired the apostle James to write about this account: “The effectual fer-



vent prayer of a righteous man avails much. Elijah was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months. And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.” (James 5:16-18).

(Sometimes, God has His servants pray to Him about a matter many, many times before He will act. God knows that if He automatically answers them the first time they ask for something, they will eventually take Him for granted. His servants will forget all the wonderful things He has done for them. They will begin to rely upon themselves instead of looking to God and His awesome power.)

Elijah ordered his servant to go to Ahab and tell the king to prepare his chariot and leave before the rain stopped his journey.

Meanwhile, the sky grew black with clouds and wind, and a thunderous rain shower came down, pounding the earth. Seeing this, Ahab departed for Jezreel. Then, the hand of God came upon Elijah, giving him the power to run ahead of Ahab as the king entered the city (I Kings 18:41-46).

CHAPTER NINETY-SIX

JEZEBEL SEEKS REVENGE

Ahab told Jezebel everything that Elijah had done, including how he had slain all the prophets. Seething with anger, Jezebel had a messenger deliver Elijah a message: “May the gods do the same to me—and even more—if I do not take your life by this time tomorrow.”

Like all Spirit-led servants of God, Elijah was still only human, and Jezebel’s venomous message caused him to fear for his life. Elijah rushed to get away, leaving his servant in Beersheba.

From there, the prophet went on a day’s journey into the wilderness, until he came to a juniper tree. He sat down under the desert bush, and cried out to God.

“Take away my life now, God!” he prayed. “Don’t let me die at the hands of this evil woman!”

He had grown weary from his journey and from the anxiety that filled his mind, and so he lay down and slept under the juniper tree.

Suddenly, the Messenger of the Eternal appeared. He touched Elijah, and said to him, “Arise, and eat.”

Waking up, the prophet looked around and saw a cake of bread baking on hot coals. He also noticed a jug of water at his head. Elijah got up, ate and drank, and lay down again.

The Messenger of the Eternal visited Elijah again, touching him, and saying to the prophet, “Arise, and eat. The journey ahead is great.”

Elijah did as ordered, eating and drinking. This would be all the nourishment he would receive before embarking on a forty-day journey to Mount Horeb (also called Mount Sinai, where God gave His commandments to Israel in Moses’ day). There, Elijah came to a cave and used it as shelter (I Kings 19:1-9).

“A Still, Small Voice”

Then God spoke to him: “What are you doing here, Elijah?”

The prophet answered, “I have been zealous for the Eternal Almighty. For the people of Israel have forsaken Your covenant, thrown down Your altars, and have slain Your prophets. I’m the only one left. And now these same rebels seek to take my life.”

God told him to go out and stand before Him on the mountain. As the Eternal passed by, a great strong wind tore into the mountains and broke the rocks in pieces—but God was not in the wind. Then there was an earthquake—but God was not in it. After the earthquake, there was a fire—but God was not in it, either. Then, to Elijah’s surprise, he heard a still, small voice.

Upon hearing it, he wrapped his face in his mantle and went out and stood at the cave entrance, where God spoke to him again.

“What are you doing here, Elijah?”

Again, the prophet answered, “I have been very zealous for the Eternal, because the rebellious Israelites have forsaken Your covenant, and have thrown down Your altars, and have slain Your prophets. I am the only one left—and they seek to take my life away.”

God said, “Go to the Wilderness of Damascus, and anoint Hazael as king over Syria. Also, you shall anoint Jehu the son of Nimshi to be Israel’s next king. And you shall anoint Elisha the son of Shaphat to be prophet in your place.

“Whoever escapes the sword of Hazael shall be slain by Jehu. And whoever escapes from the sword of Jehu shall be slain by Elisha.

“As for you, Elijah, you are not alone. I have reserved in Israel 7,000 servants—those whose knees have not bowed to Baal, nor have they kissed his image in godly fear and affection” (I Kings 19: 9-18).

The Call of Elisha

After Elijah had departed, he soon found Elisha, his successor, who was plowing in the ground with 12 pairs of oxen. Elijah came up and threw his mantle upon him.

Elisha realized that God had called him to serve in a great office. He left the oxen and ran after Elijah, saying, “Please, let me kiss my father and my mother goodbye, and I will follow you.”

Elijah agreed, but reminded Elisha not to allow his affection for family to stand in the way of God’s calling.

Elisha returned home. Killing a yoke of oxen and boiling the flesh, he made a farewell feast for his family and friends.

Then he arose and went after Elijah, becoming his personal assistant (I Kings 19:19-21).

“He Wants Too Much!”

Ben-Hadad, the king of Syria, gathered all his troops and, with an alliance of 32 kings, with many horses and chariots, besieged Samaria.

He sent servants into the city to deliver a message to King Ahab: “Your silver and gold are now mine, and your wives and children also belong to me.”

Ahab was trapped. He could see no escape from Ben-Hadad’s clutches. Reluctantly, he sent back a message: “My lord, according to what you have said, I and all that I possess belong to you.”

Ben-Hadad’s messengers returned with another message from their king: “Around this time tomorrow, I will send my servants to you. They shall search your royal house, and the houses of your servants. If they find anything that would please me, they shall take it away.”

Ahab called for all the elders of Israel to assemble. He said to them, “Take note of how Ben-Hadad seeks trouble. When he laid claim to my wives, my children, my silver and my gold, I did not deny him. But now he has gone too far—he wants too much!”

The elders and all the people replied, “Don’t give in to his demands!”

Encouraged, Ahab said to Ben-Hadad’s messengers, “Tell my lord the king that I will consent to all he had originally sent for—but I will not allow him to simply take everything that catches his eye.”

The messengers delivered Ahab’s message, and they soon returned with their master’s reply: “May the gods do to me, if not more, if I do not level the hill of Samaria to dust!”

Ben-Hadad’s messenger’s returned to their master with Ahab’s answer: “Do not boast of the outcome of a battle that has not yet taken place.”

Ben-Hadad and the other kings were indulging themselves with too much alcohol when they heard this message. In a drunken rage, he ordered his troops to attack Samaria (I Kings 20:1-12).

Syria Attacks Israel

A prophet came to Ahab and told him that God would deliver the great multitude of enemy troops into his hand. “And then you shall know that the Eternal is God.”

Ahab said, “But how will this be done?”

“Thus says the Eternal: ‘Send out the young leaders of the provinces. They will creep toward the Syrian troops, and then suddenly charge them.’”

Ahab asked, “Who will set the battle in order?”

“You will.” God knew that Ahab’s division of troops would catch the drunken Syrian soldiers by surprise and throw them into confusion.

Still walking by sight instead of by faith (II Corinthians 5:7), Ahab numbered the young leaders and found that he had 232 under his command. Then he numbered his troops, and discovered that there were 7,000 in the city.

That noon, as Ben-Hadad and the 32 kings continued to get drunk, the young leaders of the provinces went out of the city.

Scouts told Ben-Hadad about this, and he said, “Whether they come out for peace or war, take them alive.”

Ahab’s young leaders and their troops came out and slew every man they could lay hold on. The Syrians fled for their lives, with the Israelites in hot pursuit. Ben-Hadad managed to escape on a horse, with his horsemen. King Ahab went out with his troops, and struck the horses and chariots, slaughtering the Syrian army.

The prophet who had spoken to Ahab came to him again, and said, Go strengthen yourself—but mark this well: In the spring, Ben-Hadad will return with fresh troops” (I Kings 20:13-22).

Seeking a Rematch

Ben-Hadad’s servants convinced their master to attack Ahab again. “Their gods are the gods of the hills,” they reasoned. “Therefore they were stronger than us. But if we fight against them in the plain, surely we will defeat them.”

Ben-Hadad agreed. Following their counsel, he dismissed the other kings who had joined forces with him, and replaced them with captains over the troops. Next, Ben-Hadad gathered together an army to replace the one he had just lost in battle.

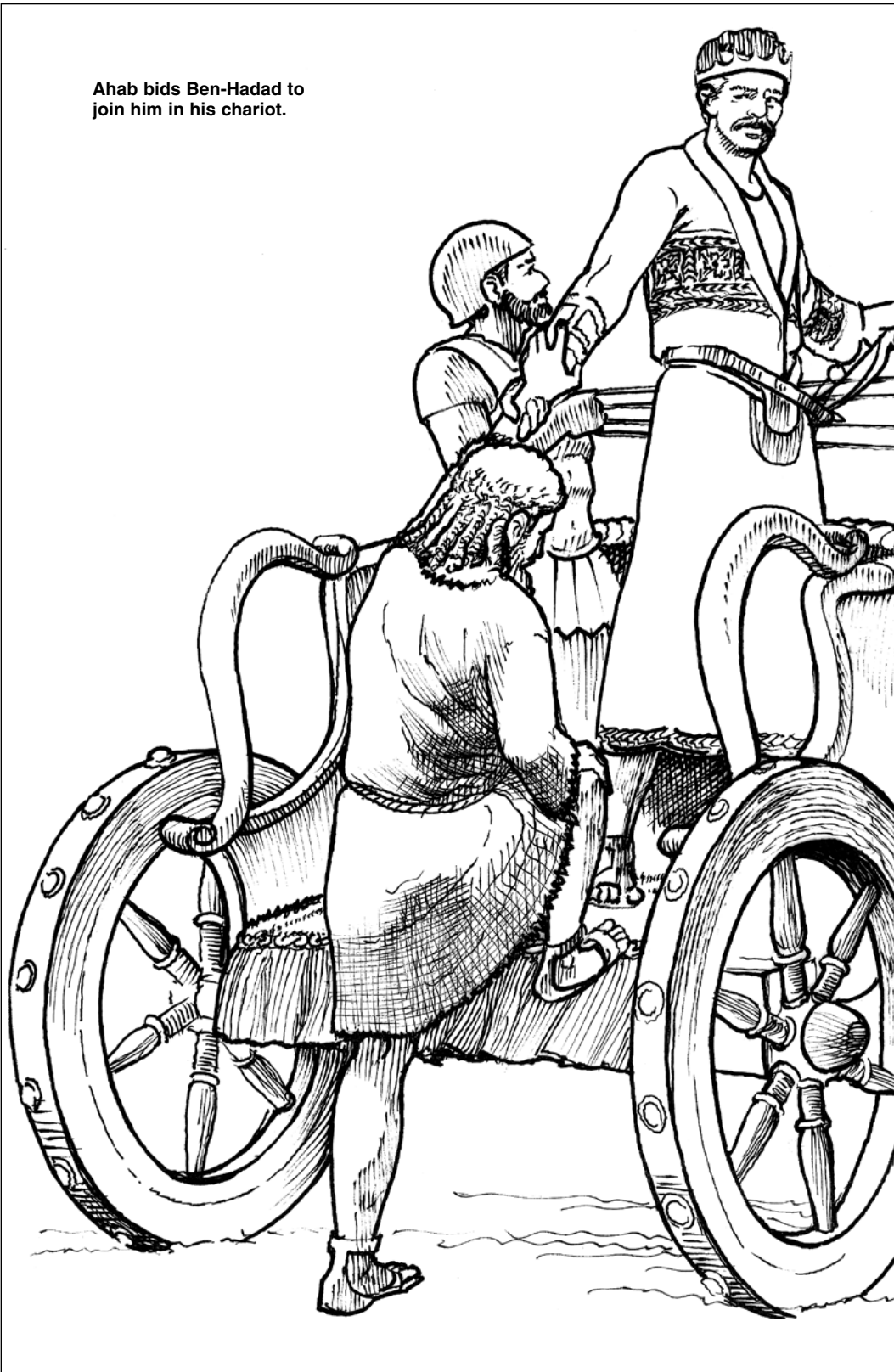
When spring came, Ben-Hadad and his soldiers marched to Aphek to fight against Israel. And the army of Israel was waiting for them. Again, the Syrian army vastly outnumbered Ahab’s troops. Victory by human strength alone did not favor the Israelites (I Kings 20:23-27).

The Peace Treaty

A man of God delivered a message to King Ahab: “Thus says the Eternal: ‘Because the Syrians have said, “The Eternal is God of the hills, but not God of the valleys,” will I deliver all their vast army into your hand. Then you shall know that I am the Eternal.’”

The opposing armies were encamped for several days. Tensions grew high. In the seventh day, they met in battle—and Israel slaughtered the Syrians, killing 100,000 foot-soldiers in a single day.

Ahab bids Ben-Hadad to
join him in his chariot.



The survivors fled to Aphek and escaped into the city—but a wall fell upon them, killing 27,000 Syrian soldiers.

Meanwhile, Ben-Hadad and his servants also fled for their lives. They entered Aphek and hid themselves in a secret chamber.

The servants said, “My lord, we have heard that the kings of the house of Israel are merciful. If we put on symbols of humility and surrender—sackcloth around our waists and ropes around our heads—and then go to King Ahab, perhaps he will spare your life.”

Ben-Hadad reluctantly agreed. His servants went to see the king of Israel, wearing sackcloth and ropes, and said to him, “Your servant Ben-Hadad says, ‘Please, let me live.’”

“What?” Ahab said. “He is still alive?”

“Yes, our master lives.”

Ahab thought about this, and then said, “Tell him that he is my brother, and that I will treat him as such.”

“Yes,” they replied. “Ben-Hadad is your brother. Let there be peace between you.”

Ahab told them to bring Ben-Hadad to him, which they did. Ahab stood in his chariot and looked down upon Ben-Hadad, who still did not know if he would be allowed to live. Then Ahab had Ben-Hadad join him in his chariot.

Ben-Hadad said to him, “I will restore the cities that my father took from your father, and you may set up marketplaces for yourself in Damascus, as my father did in Samaria.”

Ahab agreed, and made a peace treaty with him. Despite the fact that the Eternal had delivered his enemy into his hand, the king of Israel did not seek God’s counsel in what to do (I Kings 20:28-34).

A Message From God

God gave one of His prophets a special mission. In order for the mission to be successful, the prophet needed someone to wound him. So, speaking with the authority of God, the prophet told his neighbor to strike him. But the neighbor, not knowing why he should do this, refused.

The prophet said to him, “Because you have not obeyed the voice of God, as soon as you depart from me, a lion will take your life.” And that is exactly what happened. The doomed man found out the hard way that, though God often explains why He does certain things, He expects His people to obey Him without question.

The prophet did find a man to strike him, which resulted in a wound. Then, the prophet, disguising himself by wearing a bandage over his face, waited by the road, knowing that King Ahab would soon come by.

When the king came and passed by, the prophet cried out to him: “Your servant went out into the thick of the battle; and there, someone brought a man to me, and said, ‘Guard this man with your life. If you let him get away, your life will be taken for his life, or else you shall pay a talent of silver.’ But while your servant was busy, the man escaped.”

Ahab said to him, “You will have to pay for your failure. Your inaction has decided it.”

The man of God removed the bandages from his face, and immediately the king recognized him as one of the prophets.

The prophet proclaimed, “Thus says the Eternal: ‘Because you have let go of the man I had delivered into your hand—a man whom I appointed to utter destruction—your life shall be taken for his life, and your people for his people.’”

Instead of trembling with fear and seeking mercy, Ahab became bitter and resentful. He returned home to Samaria angry and displeased (I Kings 20:35-43).

Condemning an Innocent Man to Death

There was a man named Naboth who had a vineyard next to Ahab’s palace in Jezreel. Since the king admired the vineyard, he said to Naboth, “Give me your vineyard. I could use it as my personal vegetable garden. If you do this, I will give you an even better vineyard, or, if it seems good to you, I will pay you good money for it.”

But Naboth replied, “No, I cannot. This property was handed down to me from generation to generation. It is against God’s law to sell my inheritance.” (Lev. 25:23-28; Num. 36:7-9).

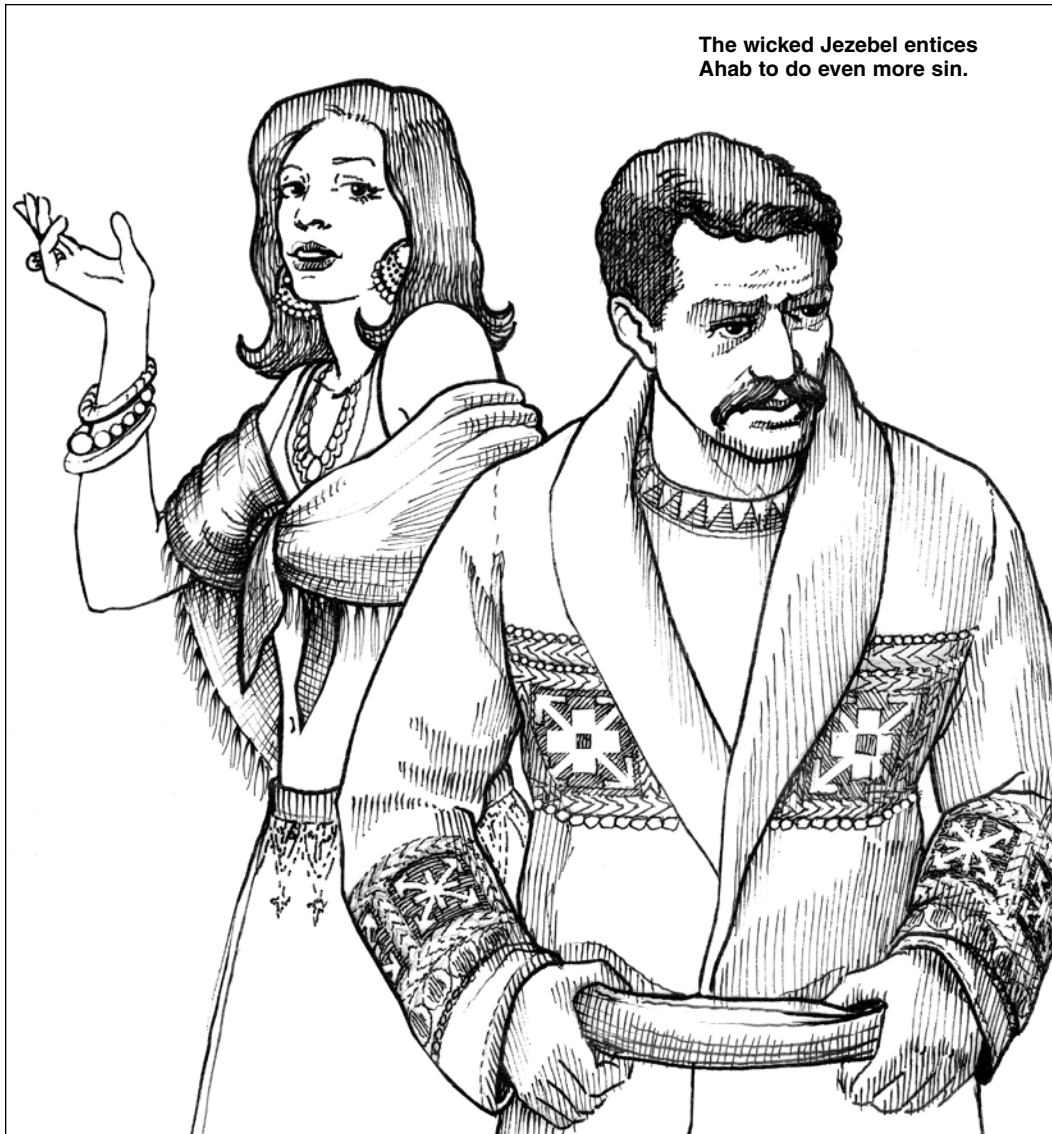
Ahab returned to his palace sullen and displeased because he could not get his way. Like a little brat, went to bed and pouted, turning his face to the wall. He also refused to eat.

His wife Jezebel asked him why he was so sad and would not eat. Ahab told her of how Naboth refused to sell his property to him.

Jezebel said, “Are you not the king of Israel? Now get up, eat and be happy. I will get Naboth’s vineyard for you.”

Jezebel wrote letters in Ahab’s name, sealed them with the king’s seal, and sent the letters to the elders and royal leaders in Jezreel. In the letters, she had written, “Proclaim a fast, and set Naboth with high honor among the people. But have two scoundrels sit before him. They will claim that Naboth blasphemed against God and the king. After this, have Naboth carried out, and stone him to death.”

The elders and royal leaders, thinking that they were following Ahab’s orders, followed Jezebel’s orders. They proclaimed a fast,



seated Naboth with high honor, allowed two scoundrels to bear false witness against him, and then carried Naboth out of the city and had him stoned. Naboth died for a sin he did not commit.

When Jezebel heard that Naboth was dead, she told her husband to take the vineyard for himself. Ahab wasted no time in seizing what did not rightfully belong to him (I Kings 21:1-16).

A Wicked Man Humbles Himself

God was not pleased. He sent His prophet Elijah to go to Naboth's vineyard and face King Ahab. When he arrived, Ahab said to Elijah, "I see that my enemy has found me."

“No,” Elijah said. “I have found you. You have sold yourself to do evil before God. Now hear God’s message: ‘I will bring calamity upon you, and will take away your posterity. And I will make your royal house like the house of Jeroboam and the house of Baasha—I will cut off every one of your male descendants. Because you have provoked Me to anger and have caused Israel to sin. And as for your wicked wife Jezebel, dogs shall eat her body by the wall of Jezreel. Whoever belongs to you, dogs shall feast off their dead bodies in the city, and birds shall eat the bodies of those who die in the field.’”

There had been no other king in Israel like Ahab, who sold himself to do wickedness in God’s sight and had allowed his pagan wife to stir him up. Following her lead, he had perverted his life with idols and lived the way of the Amorites, whom God had cast out of the Promised Land long ago. Never in his life did carnal-minded Ahab seek God and His ways first.

Yet, when this wicked ruler heard God’s judgment, he did an amazing thing: He tore his clothes, put on sackcloth, and fasted and mourned. For the first time in his carnal life, Ahab humbled himself and lay in sackcloth.

God took note of this and said to Elijah, “Do you see how Ahab humbles himself before Me? Because he has chosen to do this, I will have mercy on him. I will not bring calamity while he is alive. However, I will bring calamity upon his royal family after he is dead” (I Kings 21:17-29).

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